



BIG PICTURE

Lenten Guide

Day 29 - Sunday, March 22, 2026

Background:

God is aware of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his ordering her husbands' death. He sends a prophet named Nathan to him. Nathan uses a story of a rich man with many sheep stealing the only sheep of a poor man to help David understand his own sin, and David repents. Even so, Nathan warns David that the child they have conceived will die, among other negative consequences for his family and his kingdom. Our scripture passage today is Psalm 51. David is the author of about half of the 150 psalms, and he wrote Psalm 51 after Nathan had pointed out his error.

Read:

The Miserere: Prayer of Repentance - Psalm 51 - <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/51>

Notice:

David's prayer of repentance is a model for us all. It is laden with beautiful imagery and has a universal appeal. In the prayer, David acknowledges his own sin (vv. 5-6), God's rightful place in judging him (v. 6), a desire with God's help to do better (vv. 12,15-17), a plea that this not impede his relationship with God (v. 13), and a sense of trust that God will hear his plea (vv. 3, 19). We see the same sincerity that David has shown before - There is no deal making, no pushing blame onto others - just a sinner recognizing his need for God's mercy.

Reflect:

When you come to realize you have sinned, are you able to approach God with the same sincerity of heart of expressing your sorrow and desire to truly do better? Do you trust that God will be merciful with you? As Lent winds down, many of us will participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (offered at SPX on Wed 3/25 at 7 PM and on Saturday 3/28 at 4:45 PM.) To prepare, pray with this psalm to increase your sense of sorrow and ownership for past mistakes, and trust that God will not abandon you.

Day 30 - Monday, March 23, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead a generation today. Although David and Bathsheba's first child died, they have another son, Solomon who grows up and takes over the throne of his father. It is now almost 500 years after God gave the tablets with the Ten Commandments to Moses in the desert, and they have been kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the meeting tent for five centuries. With this new peace, and the wealth that came from conquering many enemies over the years, Solomon spared no expense in building a proper temple in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant. 1 Kings 8 describes the dedication of the temple, where Solomon prays that the temple will help the Israelites to never forget God dwells in their midst and inspire all who see it to follow God. Our passage picks up with God's response in the next chapter, which contains both promise and warning.

Read:

Promise and Warning to Solomon — *1 Kings 9:1-19*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Kings%209%3A1-9&version=NABRE>

Notice:

God's response to Solomon's prayer has several elements we have seen before - God acknowledges hearing his prayer, and God promises that he will always be with his people in the temple. That's another way of God saying I will never fail to uphold my side of the covenant I made with your fathers. But the second part is a stern warning - the temple itself will not take the place of keeping their hearts set on God alone and living rightly by the Commandments. God demands loyalty and warns of punishment if the people begin to worship other Gods, as has happened so many times before. In that case, they will lose their land, the temple will be destroyed, and the line of kings will be broken. Effectively, the special favors they have been enjoying will be withdrawn.

Reflect:

Even today, people can fall into the trap of disconnecting their worship from their hearts and their lives. Today, the warning often comes from outsiders, who are quick to label as hypocrites anyone who worships at church on Sunday but acts without love during the rest of the week. Spend some time today asking God to show you any ways that your words and actions are inconsistent with following him wholeheartedly.

Day 31 - Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Background:

Known for his wisdom, and more of a diplomat than a warrior, Solomon established peace with neighboring countries with treaties and by marrying daughters of these foreign kings. He greatly expanded the territory Israel controlled. He used the former residents of those lands to build both the temple and his own palace, and highly taxed his own people. Over time, he acquired 700 wives and 300 concubines. Between the foreign workers and Solomon's own wives, both the people and Solomon began to worship the Gods of these foreign people. Solomon even allowed building altars to them. Per the warning we read yesterday, this is not the loyalty God demanded of Solomon or his people, and the consequences play out. His Kingdom will be divided, and most will not go to his son.

Read:

Kingdom Divided: Consequences of Unfaithfulness — *1 Kings 11:1–12, 26-39*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Kings%2011%3A1-12%3B%2026-39&version=NABRE>

Notice:

We see God explain to Solomon why his son Rehoboam will only inherit a small part of his kingdom. Although Solomon's behavior has been sinful and disappointing, God will not entirely let go of the promise made to David, and will thus give his son 2 tribes, which include Jerusalem (and thus the temple). Later, we see the prophet explain to Jeroboam why God is giving him the larger part, and offering him a legacy if only he remains faithful. Over our many weeks of readings and reflections, yet again, the idea of being faithful to God and not worshipping others God seems to be the most important condition to remaining in God's favor.

Reflect:

It seems to us in modern day that the Israelites and their leaders frequently struggle with an issue that rarely seems to be a temptation to us - that of worshiping other Gods. We are far more likely to simply forget about God or neglect God as we go about our busy lives. In many ways, our jobs, our family responsibilities (including all of our kids' activities), and our leisure pursuits are much bigger competition. What steps can you take to ensure that God remains a priority in your life?

Day 32 - Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Background:

Solomon's Kingdom was divided between 2 kings. Jeroboam was a servant of Solomon, who ruled the 10 northern tribes. His Kingdom was known as Israel and its capital was Samaria. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ruled the two southern tribes. His southern kingdom was known as Judah, and included Jerusalem and thus the temple. As God had warned, a number of unfaithful

kings had ruled both the northern and southern Kingdoms, but unfaithfulness was especially true in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, where none of the kings were faithful to God. Despite this, God sent several prophets to the kings and people of Israel and Judah to remind them of his love, expectations, and warn them of the consequences if they did not reform. Today we hear how the Prophet Elijah tried to convince one of the most unfaithful Northern Kings (Ahab) and his people, who were worshipping foreign God known as Baal, to return to worshipping only God. In our reading, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to demonstrate Baal's power.

Read:

Elijah vs the Prophets of Baal - 1 Kings 18:16-40

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20kings%2018%3A16-40&version=NABRE>

Notice:

Ahab was a notoriously unfaithful King, but God does not give up on him and sends Elijah to him. Elijah tries to convince the people and King Ahab to recommit to God by a show of God's power, much as Moses had used demonstrations of God's power to convince the Israelites that God was with them. Hundreds of prophets of Baal are assembled and challenged to call on Baal to light the sacrificial fire. Elijah gives them hours to do so, then taunts them and gives them additional time, but Baal never sends fire. Then calling on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Elijah asks that fire be sent down so all will know he is Lord of all. Immediately fire comes and burns the sacrificial offerings. The assembled people, including Ahab, proclaim that the Lord is God. Elijah then has the prophets of Baal rounded up and slaughtered to prevent them from turning the people back to Baal.

Reflect:

To speak with a prophetic voice is not so much to foretell the future, but to announce God's desires and to challenge people to reform their ways. This often means challenging authority. Has God ever called on you to speak with a prophetic voice? What message did he want you to share and with whom? Or has God ever sent someone to you to help you see the error of your ways and get back on track? Were you open to that person's message?

Day 33 - Thursday, March 26, 2026

Background:

Despite the presence of prophets like we saw yesterday, the Northern kingdom of Israel never was able to worship the Lord alone, and continued to worship pagan Gods. So in 722 BC, (about 200 years after the Kingdom split in two) God allowed the Northern Kingdom of Israel to fall to Assyria, which was then a world power. The people were captured and taken to Assyria, and Assyrians came and settled in their land and cities. Today's reading takes place about 150

years later, in 587 BC. Babylon has taken over as the world's major ruling power. God allows the southern Kingdom of Judah to fall to Babylon, because it also has been unfaithful, worshiping foreign Gods and violating the commandments given to Moses. The temple is destroyed by the Babylonian empire, and the people of Judah are forced into exile in Babylon.

Read:

Fall of Judah - 2 Kings 25:1-21

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Kings%2025%3A1-21&version=NABRE>

Notice:

God had warned his people many times of the danger of embracing pagan Gods and practices. God seems to have finally hit a limit. Once he withdraws his protection, the last of his people are sent out of the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God allows the temple where he dwelled with his people to be destroyed, with all of the metal and stone furnishings that survived the fire taken as plunder. Oddly, the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets with the Ten Commandments is not mentioned in the detailed list of what is taken back to Babylon, leading to speculation as to whether it had previously been hidden somewhere else or destroyed. As bad as the deportations are, the destruction of the temple where God dwelled with his people and that had served at the center of their worship must have been devastating to the few faithful members of Judah.

Reflect:

Imagine what it must have been like to see the temple destroyed and be sent away to Babylon. Should these people have hung onto hope that God had not abandoned them entirely, or given into despair? On a small scale, we also face this same choice when we hit devastating moments in life, caused by death, disease, war, or financial calamity. Have you ever felt like God has abandoned you? Did you maintain trust in God or give into despair?

Day 34 - Friday, March 27, 2026

Background:

We left yesterday with the people of both the northern and southern kingdoms living in exile. The people of the southern kingdom lived in exile for about 50 years. During this period, various prophets encourage the remnant of faithful followers that all is not lost, that God has not abandoned them. These prophets call the people back to living as God intended, by following the commandments and worshiping only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two important prophets of this period are Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Today we read from both - Jeremiah's sharing the promise of a New Covenant God will make with his people and Ezekiel promising that God will cleanse his people.

Read:

The Promise of a New Covenant — *Jeremiah 31:31–34*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=jeremiah%2031%3A31-34&version=NABRE>

Regeneration of the People - *Ezekiel 36:24-28*.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezek%2036%3A24-28&version=NABRE>

Notice:

These two short passages summarize much of the prophets writing during this period. A new beginning, complete with a covenant will be offered to them. Instead of writing the law on stone tablets, God will write directly on each person's heart. This will give each person knowledge of the Lord, so it will not need to be taught to each generation, and will be difficult to forget or ignore. Further they will be cleansed of their impurities, much as David asked for in Psalm 51. And they will be returned to their land. These passages offer hope, not just to the people in exile, but to us today, that what God has done for them, he will do for us.

Reflect:

How has God written on your heart? What core belief about God do you hold that could never change? Perhaps that he will always be with you? Or that he will always help you in times of crises? That he created you and will welcome you home someday? If possible, identify whatever core beliefs about God you hold in your heart and write them down on paper or in a journal.

Day 35 - Saturday, March 28, 2026

Background:

We jump forward to the end of the period of exile. Under the leadership of the prophets, the Judean exiles (who come to be called Jews for the first time) have repented of their sins and become serious about worshipping God and God alone. Their fortunes have changed as a result, with some prospering and finding high positions in Babylon. In the approximately 50 years that have passed, a new world power has emerged - Persia, who has defeated the Babylonians and taken control of the territory where the exiled Jews are living. King Cyrus of Persia believes that the God of Israel has helped him to gain power, and is thus friendly to the Jews. He tells them they are free to return home, and somewhat fearing the God of Israel, even decides to give them back many of the items taken from the temple by the Babylonians. However, many of the Jews have intermarried with the people of Babylon, and still others were born in Babylon and have no particular desire to return to the promised land. In our reading today, we hear Cyrus allow those who want to return to Jerusalem to do so and a small portion

of those exiled do so and begin to rebuild the temple. It will take about 20 years to completely rebuild, and additional exiled people will return later with both Ezra and Nehemiah.

Read:

King Cyrus Send the Exiles home to rebuild the temple - Ezra 1

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/ezra/1>

Notice:

Although all might seem to have been lost when the Judean people were taken into exile, God has used the time to remake them into his people, much as he used the time with Moses' people in the desert. They emerge from the time in exile with greater dedication to God and God alone, with a much keener sense of God guiding the process. After all, when has a foreign King acted kindly to God's chosen people, giving them back what was taken from them, rather than simply adding those riches to his own treasury? This new temple being built will last until AD 63, so it will be the one Jesus visits at important moments in his ministry. The hopeful texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that we read yesterday seem to be coming to fruition.

Reflect:

The Jewish people are enjoying the blessings of restoration. Today is a good day to review the many blessings you have received from God - big and small. Examine your day looking for all the little signs of blessings you have received from God. Then think back over the larger span of your life - looking for moments when all that seemed lost was somehow restored. Perhaps after facing a critical illness, you recovered. Maybe a relationship in a rough spot survived and thrived. Or a new job took you from a toxic work environment to a place where you were appreciated and respected. Or maybe you slowly found your way back to joy after a period of grief and mourning. For any and all of these blessings you've identified, thank God.
