



BIG PICTURE

Lenten Guide

Day 15 - Sunday, March 8, 2026

Background:

We have jumped ahead from Moses' birth to the point at which God calls him. In the meantime, Moses has grown up in Pharaoh's household, but still knows that he is an Israelite. He sees an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite and kills the Egyptian. Once this becomes known, Moses fears Pharaoh's punishment, so he flees to Midian (located on the Eastern side of the Sinai peninsula), where he stays with a family in Midian, and marries. Our story picks up with Moses now tending the flock of his father-in-law at Mt. Horeb. We are now around 1400 BC.

Read:

The Burning Bush: God Hears the Cry of his People — *Exodus 3*

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/exodus/3>

Notice:

God identifies himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” and when later asked for his name, replies “I am who I am”. For Moses, encountering God in this episode invokes respect (removing sandals because the ground itself is holy), humility (“who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...”), and fear (he hid his face because no one has ever seen the face of God and lived).

God's statement, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering” tells us much about God, and is consistent with what we have seen about God's concern for Hagar and Ishmael, for the Israelites when they were starving from famine – God hears and responds. After further details are exchanged to assure Moses, God then extends the promise first offered to Abraham to Moses and the Israelite slaves - they will be given the promised land - a land flowing with milk and honey.

Reflect:

Imagine you were Moses in this story - how would you have felt to be in the presence of God?

There is so much power in being listened to. Consider how you have experienced God listening to you and hearing your cries or concerns. Perhaps it was just someone you knew who was able to validate a really hard or heartbreaking experience. Were you able to see God at work in that person's comment? Do you know anyone who is struggling that could benefit from your listening to them or validating their struggles? How can you reach out to them today?

Day 16 - Monday, March 9, 2026

Background:

Today we jump ahead to the story of the passover. We have skipped Moses and Aarons' initial conversations with Pharaoh, who responded with increasing and unreasonable demands on the Israelites. The Israelite people began to doubt this rescue plan, as things got worse before they got better. To persuade Pharaoh, God sent the 10 plagues upon the Egyptian people to change the mind of Pharaoh. The last of the plagues is the death of the firstborn. In the story, the angel of death skips or passes over the houses of the Israelites, saving their firstborn while striking down the firstborn of the Egyptians.

Read:

The Passover — *Exodus 12:1–40*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2012%3A1-40&version=NABRE>

Notice:

This is one of the most dramatic stories of the Old Testament. Although the Israelites have been in slavery for over 400 years, the time immediately before it intensifies everything - the workload of the slaves has increased, as has the cruelty of their task masters. The plagues have made life miserable for everyone, and up to this point, Pharaoh has only grown harder of heart. The death of the first born is the classic last straw - when all of that tension breaks - not only does Pharaoh let them go, he wants them to go quickly, with their flocks and herds, and he even asks for their blessing. The Israelite people, who have wavered in their commitment to Moses and God's plan, also now want to go. Lastly, the people of Egypt who had been their taskmasters, fearing more death, give the Israelites silver, gold and clothing. The added tension feels like it might ensure that no one will change their mind, yet hours later, Pharaoh will send his army to bring them back, and later during their time in the desert, the Israelites will long for their days of slavery in Egypt. Note also the many parallels between the unblemished lambs being sacrificed in this story and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Reflect:

How often are you like Pharaoh, with a hard heart - clinging to your preferred way of doing something regardless of the negative consequences to others? Has God ever used dramatic consequences to help you realize that you might need to change your ways? How often are you

like the Israelites - wavering in your willingness to put your trust in God? How often are you like the Egyptians, just wishing a problem would go away?

Day 17 - Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Background:

Our story today continues with the Israelites' departure from Egypt through the parting of the Red Sea. Very quickly, Pharaoh changes his mind about letting the Israelites leave and sends his troops after them. Notably, although the shortest route to the Promised Land would have been to follow the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the Israelites would have most likely been captured by the Philistines living there and sent back to Pharaoh or returned voluntarily rather than fight. Instead, God routes them so they will cross the Red Sea, where he will very clearly save them.

Read:

Crossing the Red Sea — *Exodus 14:5–14:31*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ex%2014%3A5-14%3A31&version=NABRE>

Notice:

As we left yesterday's story, everyone was immediately in agreement that the Israelites leaving was a good idea, and in today's story everyone has second guessed that conviction. Pharaoh understands the economic loss of his slave workforce. When the Israelites realize they are being chased by the Egyptian army, they are terrified, immediately regret attempting escape, and doubt God's concern for them. The imagery of God's absolute control of the whole situation speaks to his power: from the cloud that guides them, to the walls of water to their left and right as they cross, to the Egyptian's chariot wheels getting stuck in the mud, and then the return of the water, washing them all away so not a single Egyptian survives. The message is clear, God is in control and God is on the side of the Israelites. We might think such a clear demonstration of God's care and concern for them would eliminate any lingering doubt in his providence, but we will see in future days that the same doubt will rise up every time they encounter adversity in the desert.

Reflect:

Are there any big moments where God has acted in your life that help anchor your trust in God's love and concern for you? Do you ever second guess God's concern for you - sure of it one day, not then next? What causes you to doubt God's love and concern? Pray for the grace to choose trust in God over doubt today and always.

Day 18 - Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead to God giving Moses the 10 commandments. We have missed the Israelites complaining in the desert, and God then providing water, manna, and quail. God has assisted them in battle with Amalek, and Moses has appointed judges (civic leaders who helped keep order and resolve disputes. In their travels, they have now returned to Mount Sinai (known as Mount Horeb in Deuteronomy) near where Moses was first called by God.

Read:

God gives the 10 Commandments — *Exodus 19:1–6; 20:1–17*

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ex%2019%3A1-6%3B%20Ex%2020%3A1-17%20&version=NABRE>

Notice:

God begins by recounting what he has done for the Israelites, then in Ex 19: 5-6 lays out the expectation God has for this people, echoing what we first heard at the Call of Abram. They are to live differently, obeying God completely. This will make them a holy nation, and allow them to be a blessing to others. God then lays out very clear expectations in the commandments for their behavior. Note that the first three commandments shape their relationship with God, demanding loyalty to him, and ensuring that they schedule time (Sabbath rest) to maintain a healthy pattern of remembering all he has done for them. The last seven shape their relationship with other people. When followed, the ten commandments teach them how to live in the “right relationship” with God and other humans as God originally envisioned for Eden. Essentially, if they live within these guidelines, the chosen people will become a “reset button” for the human race.

Reflect:

Do you see the commandments as limiting your freedom or teaching you how to live well? How can the commandments, set by God centuries ago (like not coveting other people's possessions or taking time for sabbath rest), help you deal with the challenges and pace of modern life? Is there a commandment you need to take more seriously this week?

Day 19 - Thursday, March 12, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead to a memorable incident of the Israelite's infidelity to God - the golden calf. In the meantime, God gave Moses much more detailed instructions about the Ten

commandments. Then Moses returned from the mountain, relayed what he had been told by God. The Israelites eagerly agreed to do all that God had told them through Moses. Moses then sprinkled the people with blood to ratify the covenant between God and the people (Ch 24:3-8). After this, God calls Moses back up the mountain for 40 days during which he gives instructions for building the tabernacle (the meeting tent where God will talk to Moses) and the ark of the covenant (the box in which the tablets with the 10 commandments will be kept). He also gives Moses the stone tablets with the 10 commandments inscribed on them. However, during this delay, the Israelites begin to feel abandoned and doubt God again. They are not allowed to go up the mountain themselves, to look for Moses, so the delay requires trust. Instead, they ask Moses' brother Aaron to make them a new God to worship in the form of the molten calf.

Read:

The Golden Calf — *Exodus 32*

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/exodus/32>

Notice:

There is not a lot of explanation given in the passage for their quick movement from complete allegiance to God to them asking Aaron for a new God. They simply seem fickle, victims of the same sort of doubt that caused Adam and Eve's disobedience. Perhaps more surprising is that Aaron seems to go along with them. He creates the Golden calf and leads them in worship and revelry. A fascinating conversation then follows between Moses and God, where Moses again appears to successfully talk God out of his anger, by reminding God of the promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel). However, when Moses returns from the top of the mountain and sees the infidelity with his own eyes, he gets so angry with his people that he smashes the very tablets God himself had made with the Commandments. When Moses questions Aaron, he blames the people (just as Adam and Eve blamed the serpent). Moses returns to the mountain, to offer atonement to God, pleading on their behalf, and offering his own life in exchange. Note that Moses acts differently, rather than passing the blame, attempts to take responsibility for his people and pay the price on their behalf, just as Jesus would later do.

Reflect:

It is amazing how quickly things went from fidelity to infidelity, simply because the people gave into the same sorts of everyday temptations we all face regularly - impatience, doubt, and the desire to save face by passing blame. Of these, which do you struggle with the most? It's even tempting for us to read this story and think, "well if I had been there, I would have acted differently." But how frequently do you actually speak up about something unjust or refuse to go along with the crowd? Spend some time in prayer today thanking God for his mercy for all the times you could have done better, but gave into these everyday temptations.

Day 20 - Friday, March 13, 2026

Background:

The Book of Deuteronomy retells the story of the giving of the 10 commandments, and includes a passage known as the Shema. The Shema was a short encapsulation of the law that came to be repeated by every devout Jew (to modern times) twice daily. It was also to be taught to your children and grandchildren. There are instructions to write out the Shema and wear it on the body and post it on the doorposts of houses. The passage sounds familiar because Jesus quotes this passage as part of his answer to the question “what is the greatest commandment?” in Mark 12: 28-31.

Read:

The Shema - Deuteronomy 6:4-9

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Dt%206%3A4-9&version=NABRE>

Notice:

Consider this passage in light of the Israelites continuing struggle to trust God completely. What does it mean, for a recently freed Israelite slave, who is struggling with lack of food and water, who is unsure of where they are going and when they will get there, whose leader disappears for weeks at a time, and who can only imagine and worry about what other obstacles they might encounter along the way, to actually love God with their whole heart, their whole being, and their whole strength? The command to teach this passage to your children alludes to its importance and clarity - it boils down everything they need to know into a short easily memorized passage. It effectively tells them to choose trust over doubt - that is, to meet a felt emotion with a chosen pattern of thought.

Reflect:

Experiment with this passage today. Find a pen and paper and write out this passage. Carry it with you today (in your pocket) or post it where you spend a lot of time (next to your computer, or on the fridge, or on the dashboard or your car.) Any time you find yourself struggling with doubt, impatience, or a challenging situation you don't know how to deal with, take it out and recite it (if you can) or simply touch the piece of paper as a reminder. If you can, memorize it.

Day 21 - Saturday, March 14, 2026

Background:

We jump ahead to about the end of the first year in the desert - God made another set of tablets with the ten Commandments, and the Israelites have had time to prepare the Tabernacle

(meeting tent) and Ark (to hold the tablets) and they began traveling (and grumbling) in the desert. They arrive at the promised land (i.e., the land of Canaan) and send scouts in to survey it, before they are to take possession of it. After 40 days the scouts return, and give mixed reports, both indicating it is good land (it indeed flows with milk and honey), but suggesting it is not worth fighting for because those who already live there will overpower them. Understanding the desert is a hard place to survive in, and not wanting to be slaughtered by the residents of the promised land, the Israelites oddly conclude it would be better to go back to being slaves in Egypt. This latest episode of infidelity makes God want to disown them and abandon his plan to save them.

Read:

Rebellion in the Wilderness: Numbers 13:25-14:24

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers%2013%3A25-14%3A24&version=NABRE>

Notice:

The Israelites sit on the edge of something great, but cannot see it. God was prepared to give them the promised Land, and help them take control of it. But the scouts forget this, seeing only that they will be out numbered. Among the scouts, only Caleb believes that with God's help, they can certainly take possession of the land. The main reason for the Israelite's infidelity this time seems to be fear for their own safety, and particularly for their wives and children, who they don't want to see taken as the spoil of war. While this is a reasonable concern, it again shows lack of trust in God. Of the adult generation that left Egypt, the only ones who seem to take God at his word are Moses, Aaron, Joshua (Moses' assistant) and Caleb. Although God originally plans to slaughter the rest for their infidelity, Moses again argues on their behalf, reminding God that killing his own people will just make him seem weak in the eyes of their enemies. He also reminds God of his innate kindness and fidelity. Persuaded, God finds middle ground, sparing the Israelite's lives, but punishing them by sending them into the wilderness to wander until the older generation dies off. Only those born in the desert will actually enter the promised land (along with Joshua and Caleb). God's solution finds a balance of mercy and justice for their repeated doubt and infidelity. It appears that what God wants most from his people is trust, and he will use the time in the desert to form the next generation into a people after his own heart.

Reflect:

How is God calling you to trust him today? Where is doubt creeping in? Where in your life do you find yourself needing to decide between mercy and justice? Ask God for the grace to balance mercy and justice in all of your interactions today.
