

# biblestudy: march 2018

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*Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series*

## March 4, 2018 Text: 1 Genesis 22:1-3, 6-14 “The Lord Will Provide”

One of the things that make the Bible believable is that it has some stories that make God seem very strange or even quite bad. It's not all rosy neat. (If you would like to elect me God, I promise I won't do strange and bad things. Hmmm.) What can I learn here in Genesis 22:1-3, 6-14 that will reach my everyday life?

(1) God sometimes uses people who don't have a clue that they are part of God's work. Here is Isaac, who even just before he is being bound up as the sacrificial offering still wonders “Where's the lamb?” (Genesis 22:7) Isaac does not sense that he is part of God's larger picture. Most of us hesitate to think that God can use the likes of us to accomplish God's purposes. Here I learn that God can!

(2) When God does not reveal the whole picture, faithful people will still take the next step even before they know where it will lead. Surely Abraham wonders what is afoot and how all this will end, but as soon as he hears God's command, he saddles up a donkey and heads off (Genesis 22:3). Even if I do not grasp what God ultimately has in mind for me, I am called to be obedient for the next step that I do see.

(3) God's faithful go with what they know, even if it doesn't make sense. Abraham tells the two young men who came with him and Isaac to wait for them to come back for worshipping (Genesis 22:5). Abraham

must have wondered about that; if he sacrificed Isaac how could it be true that we shall come back? Did he say “we” in order not to concern Isaac? Did he say “we” because he felt God would not have him kill Isaac? Did he say “we” in order not to get the ire of the two young men who came with Abraham and Isaac? I don't know. God calls me to keep on trucking even when it does not make sense.

(4) God indeed does provide a sheep to be sacrificed (Genesis 22:13) instead of Isaac. And God makes a promise to provide a people who will be blessed because of Abraham's tenacious faith (Genesis 22:18). Who knows what surprise God has in store? It will be good. Thanks be to God.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Origen—3rd century—wrote (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* OT II, Intervarsity) “For when you have approached God joyfully, he again gives back to you what you have offered and says to you, ‘You will see me again, and your heart shall rejoice, and no man shall take your joy from you.’”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “What should I bring to sacrifice?...”

## March 11, 2018 Text: 2 Chronicles 6:12-21 “There is No God Like You”

My paternal grandfather kept a daily journal. For this date one hundred years ago (March 11, 1918), he wrote: “At home. Fair and cold. I traveled nearly half of day in interest of Raleigh Christian Advocate.” (I suppose that in some way the sheet you hold in your hand is a successor to that publication.)

My father died when I was in the eighth grade. One hundred years ago, he was fifteen years old. As I write this, my youngest grandson is fifteen years old. What will his world be like in one hundred years?

In this week's study verses, Solomon is remembering both the heritage he has from his father, King David (2 Chronicles 6:16) and the future for the temple he was dedicating: “Even heaven and highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built” (2 Chronicles 6:18). Much as I do today, he both held hands with a past and offered an open hand to the future.

It's hard to drive with constant looks into the rear view mirror while dutifully looking out the front windshield to see what is ahead. Both are important, but it's not easy. Solomon brings it off because he finds a constant that dwells in the past and in the present and in the future. It is God who has made promises in the past (v. 20). It is God who is present in this grand moment (v. 15). It is God who will answer the prayers

even yet to come (v. 30). I hear an echo in Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

The closing word in this study text (and the theme of the next twenty verses of Solomon's prayer) is “forgive.” Much of the remainder of Solomon's plea is a prayer of confession (vv. 22-42). To ask for forgiveness more than once does not mean that we did not experience that grace already. We might call it an “in spite of” prayer: in spite of having already been forgiven, I need that pardon again.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In Cynthia Keller's novel *An Amish Christmas* (Ballantine Books), there is this exchange: “Oh, but it's important,” Meg cried. “There's Amanda and the wedding and the damage to the buggy—how can you ever forgive us?” Catherine stopped what she was doing and turned to look directly at Meg. “It is already forgiven. We believe in this very, very strongly. If we ourselves are to be forgiven, how could we not forgive someone else?”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, both in what I have done and in what I have not done, I have turned away from your command to love. Show Your love to me again that I might have a new supply to restore me and to share with others...”

## March 18, 2018 Text: 2 Chronicles 7:1-11 “The People Gave Thanks to God”

I have had several false starts as I tried to prepare a commentary on this text. Maybe I ought to write about “giving thanks,” noting that the Hebrew word translated “thanks” (2 Chronicles 7:6) literally means “to use the hand.” (Lift our hands in praise?)

Or maybe we should focus on the dramatic fire that came down and consumed the burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 7:1). Is that a precursor of the flames of the Holy Spirit that descended at Pentecost (Acts 2:3)?

What about the way all the people stood (2 Chronicles 7:6) when the moments of praise came? I am recalling how United Methodist liturgy calls for the people to stand for the Great Thanksgiving in the service for Holy Communion.

Or God's holiness (2 Chronicles 7:2). Or recognizing the goodness of God (2 Chronicles 7:3). Or the sacredness even of the site outside the temple (2 Chronicles 7:7). Or offerings so generous that the altar could not hold all of them (2 Chronicles 7:7).

But what I ended up with is 2 Chronicles 7:5---“...a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.” Here's what grabbed me: how scholars battle about whether these are literal numbers or symbolic numbers. On the one hand, precise, even numbers like that are obviously intended just to show the enormity of the sacrifice. Charles Boatman figured out that it would mean 20 sacrifices per minute for ten hours a day for 12 straight days, most unlikely. Those who take the Bible literally countered by saying “Yes, but, the ceremony lasted two weeks (vv. 9-10) and not only that, but Solomon built more than one altar (v. 7), so those numbers are really true.”

Maybe the bookkeeper miscounted and there were only 21,928 oxen and 119,917 sheep sacrificed. Does it matter? This may be a case of our so wanting to prove our pre-conceived point that we miss the impact of what the text says: God is worthy of everything we can bring, even more than we can count (2 Chronicles 5:6). Maybe it is a good time to remember how the EUB Confession of Faith puts it: “We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation.”

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What Someone Else Has Said:

In *A Journey of Love and Miracles* (iUniverse), Ken and Pat Birt wrote: “Coincidence? Luck? Fate? Miracle? When good comes your way, regardless of what you call it, stop and thank your God for His blessings. He opens doors for you over and over again if you are just open to his urgings.”

March 25, 2018 Text: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22 “Keep my Statutes and Ordinances”

Is it Palm Sunday already? It seems like just yesterday was Labor Day! (The truth is that I am writing this a few days before Labor Day 2017!) Time does fly, but there are a few things that don’t change. Consider this week’s text.

There are three “if” statements in these verses and each one represents a promise of God that remains true throughout time. The words are directed to King Solomon, but they make good sense for us too.

The first one (2 Chronicles 7:14) asserts that *if* we repent, God will forgive us. But take note: repentance is more than sorrow for what we have done. Repentance includes “turn from their wicked ways,” that is, moving in a new direction. We might say that repentance is “regret and re-direct.”

The second “if” phrase is in 2 Chronicles 7:17, promising that *if* we walk as King David did and keep God’s life boundaries, God will keep God’s presence in charge of our life journey. King David hardly seems to be a candidate for a good example; he was not unblemished, but when confronted with his sin, he confessed and moved on.

The third time “if” appears is 2 Chronicles 7:19 in which God says what will happen *if* we forsake God’s ways. The Common English

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Lord Jesus, for...”

Bible says that it will be so bad that everyone will think our lives have become a big joke (v. 20).

Perhaps the operative word in each of these situations is the “if.” It suggests that we have free will with choices to make. In Christ Jesus we have learned that the heart of God’s “statutes and ordinances” is “love God and love neighbor” (Matthew 22:36-40).

Before our Lord completes this week in Jerusalem, he will have been welcomed, will have had table fellowship with disciples, will have been betrayed, will have been tried and crucified. Thank Goodness there is another week to come.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Writing in *Memory and Mission* (Abingdon Press), David Steinmetz said: “(Repentance) is a response to the message of God’s judgment and grace, a message proclaimed by the Church, the community established by God in which faith is formed.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have given me the call to love and sometimes I have missed the mark. Grant me a new beginning...”

Bible Crossword Puzzle
Sermon on the Mount

Across

- 1 Not to be put under a bushel. (6)  
3 Let yours shine before men! (5)  
7 Moth and rust will do this to your earthly store. (7)  
8 If you do this, you will find. (4)  
10 These should not be done in view of men. (4)  
13 The eight sayings by Christ at the beginning of his sermon. (10)  
15 They sound trumpets in the streets when they are being charitable. (10)  
18 The peacemakers will be called this. (8,2,3)  
20 They were with Jesus when he gave the sermon. (9)  
22 You can’t serve God and this. (6)

Down

- 2 Jesus gave this as example of how to communicate with God. (5,6)

- 4 Don’t lay these upon the earth. (9)  
5 Whoever says this to his brother shall be in danger of the council. (4)  
6 Those who are given happiness and good fortune. (7)

- 9 When engaging in this, you should enter into your closet and shut the door. (6)  
11 Where the sermon was given. (8)

- 12 You should search for this first, before worrying about food and clothing. (13)  
14 What you should do to your eye if it offends. (5)  
16 They which do this shall be filled. (6)

- 17 The hypocrites disfigured their faces while doing this. (7)  
19 If you are forced to go a mile with someone, this is how far you should go. (5)  
21 The foolish man built his house on this. (4)

