

# biblestudy: march 2020

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

## March 1, 2020 Text: Genesis 3:8-24 “Expulsion from the Garden”

There are at least eighty-seven topics that emerge in this week’s study. (Okay. I didn’t count; I just made up that number.) It’s hard to know where to start, so I am going to back up one verse and spend these lines on Genesis 3:7, what happened just before God shows Adam and Eve the door.

The key point of Genesis 3:7 is that our relationship with God affects our relationship with others. Note that this couple had been blissfully unembarrassed in their naked state (Genesis 2:25). Note the joy that is represented in how these two become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Note the complete openness that exists between these two human beings. God has created us for relationship.

But look at what happens when Adam and Eve separate themselves from God’s will, when they violate God’s instruction. The very first thing they do is to make the fig leaves into clothes. Now they are embarrassed! Now they are broken in their relationship! Now they hide something of themselves from each other! As soon as their relationship with God is broken, their relationship with one another is broken.

I wish I could get along with God without having to get along with all those messy and disagreeable people in my life.

I wish I could keep my relationship with God off by itself, so it would

not interfere in how I want to treat others. I wish God and the rest of life were in separate places. But...”The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The writer of Genesis thinks this point is so important that it becomes a matter of life and death (Genesis 3:3, 22, 24). Humanity is sent outside the Garden of Eden and will be tending the very soil out of which humans were created (Genesis 3:23). Don’t we say at gravesides: “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust”?

Obedience to God shapes how we relate to one another. The story of Adam and Eve is indeed our story.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz (*The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*, Basic Books) put it this way: “Fire can warm or consume; water can quench or drown; wind can caress or cut. And so it is with human relationships: we can both create and destroy, nurture and terrorize, traumatize and heal each other.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, You teach me how to love by loving me...”

## March 8, 2020 Text: Matthew 26:36-46 “Jesus in Gethsemane”

One time I was taking part in a “get-acquainted” event. Each of us was invited to tell one thing about ourselves that was true and one thing that was not true. Our conversation partners had to guess which was the true statement. [My two statements were: (1) I was a NCAA Division I athlete in the Atlantic Coast Conference when I was in college or (2) My first sermon was in my home church and I was so nervous that when I stood up I couldn’t speak for two or three minutes. One of the saints of the church called out, “Belton, we’ll pray for you.” He did and while he was praying I memorized the first line of my sermon.] Which account do you think is true?

How can you tell if someone is telling the truth? One way to make that judgment is to decide if their actions match their words. Jesus was telling the truth in the garden of Gethsemane. He prayed that although He might not want to die, if that were the will of His Father, then He would go willingly (Matthew 26:42). And he did. His action matched his prayer.

Matthew 26:45-46 is Jesus’ forthright action. Our Lord saw His betrayer coming (v. 46), but Jesus does not run. You know the rest of the story. Judas came up and Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:48-50). And crucified.

Our promises probably don’t seem as traumatic as Jesus’ truth-telling.

Persons who become members of The United Methodist Church promise to support the Church with prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. As Dr. Phil says on TV: “How’s that working for you?”

Jesus can be trusted because He does what He says He is going to do. How easy it would have been for Him to change His mind! Three times (vv. 40, 43, 45) He came and found His closest disciples, His strongest human supporters, asleep. Jesus must have wondered, “Why go through with this if this is all they care? They had rather sleep than stand by for me!”

But He said “...then let it be what you want” and He accepted His Father’s will. He did what He said He would do. He went to the cross. Thanks be to God.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *God Made Known* (Abingdon Press), Thomas A. Langford wrote: “We can begin by saying that the foundation of truth in Christian understanding is relational. That is to say, it is based upon relationship with God. Truth is a person and is known in personal relationship.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, You told Truth, You lived Truth, You are Truth...”

## March 15, 2020 Text: Numbers 21:4-9 “The Israelites in the Wilderness”

When was the last time you were strolling through the Old Testament Book of Numbers in order to engage some spiritual truth? I checked my “sermons preached” file and discovered that the last time I preached from Numbers was October 7, 1984. You do the arithmetic.

The Israelites were getting bent out of shape because God’s time table was not the same as theirs. (Sound familiar? “Hurry up, Lord. I prayed about this last night!”) They even complained about the food they did have (Numbers 21:5). After all, who wouldn’t prefer strawberry cheesecake?

So, they argued that they wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt (Numbers 21:5). What is the old saying: “The devil you know is easier than the devil you don’t know.” Going back to this cruel slavery would be a way of disobeying God. I’m left to wonder: Has God ever tried to give me a gift that I did not want? What if God calls me to a place of

service and witness, but I prefer to linger where I have always been? When I teach in the Course of Study, many of our local pastors tell the story of how they kept saying “No” to God’s call.) Suddenly, “back to Egypt” does not look as risky as moving ahead with God’s plan.

There are consequences to disobeying God. (For example, consider what has happened in terms of environmental quality because we have failed to honor God’s command that we care for the created order.) In this study text, people actually die because they have not obeyed God’s intent (Numbers 21:6).

But, God provides the possibility of a new beginning. God instructs Moses to put up a bronze snake so everyone can see it (Numbers 21:8). To look at it was to re-gain life, because to look at it was to honor God’s plan (Numbers 21:9). This imagery is so strong that the gospel writer John compares the Christ to this strange scene: “And just as Moses

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lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (NRSV, John 3:14-15). Thanks be to God.

What Someone Else Has Said:

John H. Sammis has written a hymn about obedience (Hymn 467, *The*

*United Methodist Hymnal*): “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of the ages, move my eyes to see the lifted up Christ Who died for me...”

March 22, 2020 Text: Matthew 4:1-11 “Jesus in the Wilderness”

You’d expect Jesus to quote Scripture, but in this week’s study text, there is a surprise. Not only is our Lord remembering words from Deuteronomy, but the devil is also recalling words from the Psalms.

Sometimes in our theological debates, we throw out isolated verses from the Bible as if to say “It’s in the Bible so you have to agree with me.” This text about the temptation of Jesus is a good reminder: the devil can also find a few verses to quote!

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story in slightly different ways. (John does not mention it.) The differences have to do with the order in which the temptations occur and some difference on exactly when during the forty days (Matthew 4:2) the temptations are thrown at Jesus. (For me, these slight differences in memory make the account more believable than it would be if each writer told it in the same lockstep way.)

After reading about this experience of Jesus in the wilderness, it’s no wonder that our Lord suggests that we lesser folks pray “Lead us not into temptation/trial/tribulation/testing” (Matthew 6:13)! This struggle with temptation brought clarity to what it meant to be the Messiah. Jesus “passed the test” so the devil gave up (Matthew 4:11). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the devil decided to move

to a different venue. Even as Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He still faced the temptation not to go the full route to the cross (Matthew 26:39, 42).

Don’t you think a lot of people would have followed Jesus if He turned stones into bread (Matthew 4:3)? Don’t you think a lot of people would have followed Jesus if He landed safely after swooping off a tall building (Matthew 4:6)? Don’t you think a lot of people would have followed Jesus if He owned everything as far as the eye could see (Matthew 4:9)? When we are tempted, it is not hard to think of lots of reasons it might be okay to give in to the temptation. Ultimately, the values by which we must face temptation must be the values of Jesus Christ...and He has set a pretty high standard for that: Matthew 22:36-40. Go take a look.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Robert Morgan (*Lift High the Cross*, Abingdon Press) has written: “No one is exempt from temptation. When something is lacking, we feel sorry for ourselves and seek to satisfy ourselves in ways and means that may not be according to God’s highest will for our lives.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Walk with me in the wilderness, Lord, so I do not face temptations alone...”

March 29, 2020 Text: 2 Kings 25:8-21 “The People of Judah Are Exiled”

Let’s come at this week’s study text as if it were a story about a thirteen year-old boy who lived in Jerusalem about six hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Remember: I am just making up this story.

Young Josiah walked with special pride. Not so long ago he had become old enough to be declared a man: thirteen years old. Not only that, but his parents had named him after one of the great Jewish kings, Josiah. When he played with his younger brothers and sisters, he was always tempted to lord it over them a bit: “After all, I am a man.”

On this particular morning, he went walking by himself. He stretched his frame to make himself seem even taller. He tightened his arms, hoping his emerging muscles would expand even more. Although Josiah had grown up in the city occupied by foreign troops and although his aunts and uncles had all been hauled away, he still had a home with his parents. Food was scarce (2 Kings 25:3), but Josiah’s youthful optimism kept him enjoying life.

One of the enemy soldiers who were all over Jerusalem teased Josiah and called out to the youth: “Oh, sir! You look old enough to go over to help us in Babylon!” Josiah shuddered; he knew families who had all been taken off to exile in Babylon. All he knew about Babylon was that it was an evil place. He made like he did not hear the soldier.

The morning sun gave warmth to Josiah as he walked on. His mother had asked him to be on the lookout for extra food. Things were getting closer to desperate, but Josiah refused to believe things wouldn’t turn out okay. Something was different this day. There seemed to be more soldiers on the streets and off in the distance there was a lot of ear-rattling noise. Josiah looked in the direction of the large, billowing clouds of smoke. Curiosity overcame him and he headed in the direction of the excitement of a big fire.

He stopped dead in his tracks. His body slumped. The temple was burning. The temple built by Solomon was gone. A large wagon went by, filled with people he knew. “Shalom!” called out a familiar voice and Josiah saw his parents wave as the wagon carried them off to captivity.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Out of Babylon* (Abingdon), Walter Brueggemann says: “It became the tenacious work of the community of Jews in Babylon to maintain this distinct identity as Jews, to practice the kind of Torah obedience that had not been practiced in Jerusalem, and to keep hope alive...”

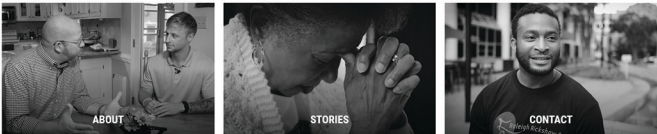
Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “These were real people, Lord...”



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