

The Book of Luke

“Good Word” Study Guide

April - June, 2015

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Introduction

Before using this discussion guide, the reader should be aware of several assumptions made by the author. First, I assume this study guide will be used in close connection with the *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* prepared by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This quarter, the adult Sabbath School lessons were written by John M. Fowler. Sabbath School teachers should take note of what he has written and use his material to provide background information and to flesh out what is missing in this “Good Word” guide. I have borrowed freely from Fowler’s material, and readers of this discussion guide will notice those parallels. At the same time, I will not merely reformat and rehash what is available in Fowler’s source. Careful readers will note these distinct differences as well. Finally, I assume that those using this guide will carefully read the applicable Biblical material. Questions posed in this study guide may not make sense unless one has already grappled with the Biblical passages. Hopefully, readers will also have access to one or two Bible commentaries dealing with the relevant Biblical material.

My Goal

In writing a study guide such as this, I will attempt to emulate the Jesus of Mark 8. In this crucial passage in Mark, Jesus does very little explaining. Instead, he asks questions. In fact, in Mark 8:17-29 (NIV), Jesus asks nine consecutive questions. So, readers will quickly see that this study guide is primarily a collection of questions. Some may seem simplistic, some tangential, and some even dangerous. As best you can, however, look carefully at the Biblical material and reflect on the questions provided. Then, ask your own questions. Be wary of pat answers that come too easily and seem too obvious. At the same time, avoid thinking that nothing is certain. Ultimately, I hope that honest, prayerful questions will lead us to insight, to truth, and to a renewed commitment to Jesus and to our mission to share the good news with every kindred, nation, tongue and people. May God guide us in this sacred task.

Lesson One: “The Coming of Jesus” (for Sabbath, April 4)

Luke 1

These opening verses tell us much about the Gospel of Luke. We discover the sources Luke consulted, the purpose of his writing, and the individual to whom the book was addressed. Then, Luke records the events surrounding the birth of John and Jesus.

1. What is your “mental picture” of how Biblical inspiration works? How does Luke’s description (1:2-4) compare with that mental picture of yours?
2. As Luke describes his writing process, he does not specifically mention the Holy Spirit. In what way, then, do you suppose the Holy Spirit inspired Luke as he wrote? What might we learn about the process of Biblical inspiration based on this?
3. When Gabriel tells Zechariah that Elizabeth will have a son, Zechariah asks a question (“By what shall I know this” in Greek), prompted by disbelief. When Gabriel promised a son to Mary, she also asked a question (“How will this be”). Compare these two questions. In what way are they the same? How are they different?
4. Is Zechariah’s inability to speak until the baby is born a punishment or a promise?
5. What does becoming pregnant mean for Elizabeth? What does it mean for Mary?
6. In the Qur’an, Jesus is said to speak from the cradle. In Buddhist tradition, the Buddha also spoke immediately after his birth. In Luke, the baby Jesus does not speak. He is swaddled as babies typically were, circumcised on the 8th day, and described as being obedient to his parents when he was 12. In short, Jesus seems to be very human. Which is the greater struggle for us today: to think of Jesus as fully human, or to think of him as fully divine? What was the struggle for those that he grew up with?
7. What elements in the story of Jesus’ birth are especially significant for you?
8. What would you say is the most important lesson we should learn from the birth narratives of John and Jesus? In other words, what did Luke most want us to realize after reading this first chapter?

Lesson Two: “Baptism and the Temptations” (for Sabbath, April 11)

Luke 3 – 4:13

When he was about 30, Jesus began his public ministry. This was inaugurated by his baptism and 40 days of solitude in the wilderness, during which he was tempted by Satan. Only after this did he return home and begin to preach.

1. Why do you suppose so little is said about the first 30 years of Jesus’ life? Were these years unimportant? Does it seem a waste of time for Jesus (Immanuel, “God With Us”) to spend the vast majority of his life as a carpenter in an otherwise obscure town in Galilee?
2. John was preaching a baptism of repentance. If Jesus was without sin, why would he come to John to be baptized?
3. Jesus (the Greek form of the name Joshua) was baptized in the Jordan, after which he spent a period of 40 days in the wilderness. Why do you suppose Luke highlights these parallels with the Old Testament story of Joshua, Israel, the Jordan river and the 40 years in the wilderness?
4. Of all the animals that could have been used, why did the Holy Spirit descend in bodily form as a dove? In my culture, a dove symbolizes peace. Think Biblically, however. What was the significance of a dove in Jewish culture at the time of Jesus? How does this enrich the story?
5. During the ministry of Jesus on earth, what were the occasions when God the Father spoke from heaven? How do you think Jesus felt when he heard the Father speak? If God were to speak from heaven to us today, what do you think he would say to us?
6. John preached a stern message of repentance and even rebuke. How is it that he was able to attract a crowd? How does one name sin so directly and yet not drive people away?
7. What seems to be the issue that Satan is most interested in when he tempts Jesus? How were Jesus’ temptations different from our temptations? How were they similar? Do you think Jesus was at all tempted by the common vices that seem to plague so many of us today?
8. I have frequently heard people stress the fact that Jesus quoted scripture as he resisted Satan’s temptations. Less frequently mentioned is the fact that Jesus was also fasting! Why do we talk so little of fasting, given that it is so frequently modeled in the Bible? Does fasting from food help us to resist temptation? If not, why did Moses, David, Jesus, Paul, and so many others in the Bible fast?
8. What is the main lesson we ought to learn from the story of Jesus’ temptations?

Lesson Three: “Who is Jesus Christ?” (for Sabbath, April 18)

Luke 4:16-30; 6:5; Luke 9:18-36

The lesson this week focuses on the identity of Jesus. Was he merely a good man? Was he God? Throughout Christian history, questions regarding the nature of Jesus have led to bitter conflicts between those who call themselves Christians.

1. One way to arrive at an answer as to who Jesus is involves reviewing some of the names and titles he is given in the New Testament. What do each of these names mean?

Jesus = a common name, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Joshua”; means “The Lord Saves”
Christ (Greek) or **Messiah** (Hebrew) = Anointed One (carrying the idea of a deliverer who was chosen and empowered by God)

2. There are two other titles that are frequently used to refer to Jesus. He is both the **Son of God** and the **Son of Man**. Typically, we think of Son of God as a description of his divinity and the Son of Man as a statement of his humanity. But it isn’t quite that simple. Throughout the Bible, “son” (or “sons”) of God can refer to human beings. In Luke, Adam is called the son of God, for example. Then, we should also note that “Son of Man” in the gospels appears with a definite article. Jesus is *The* Son of Man, a phrase that isn’t found elsewhere in Greek literature from antiquity.

Exactly what Jesus meant by using this title is the subject of scholarly debate. Personally, I agree with those who believe this designation was drawn from Daniel 7:13. If so, then when Jesus refers to himself (as he did 25 times in Luke) as The Son of Man, he isn’t stressing his humanity, but is claiming his identity as the one who will come on the clouds of heaven and who will be given “authority, glory, and sovereign power; all people, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14). Paradoxically, then, the title, The Son of Man may be emphasizing Jesus’ glory and power, not his humble, human status.

3. Throughout his ministry, people struggled with understanding Jesus. Even John the Baptist wasn’t sure if Jesus was “the One who is to come” (Luke 7:19). Why was it such a struggle for them? How important was it for Jesus to be sure that everyone had the correct theological understanding of who he was? Could he have made it clearer? Does the Devil know who Jesus is? What good does it do him?

4. If we use Jesus’ response to John’s question in Luke 7:19 as a model, what is the best way to respond to those who are struggling with questions about who Jesus is?

5. In Luke 9, Jesus takes his closest disciples up onto a mountain to pray. While there, God speaks from heaven, Jesus is transfigured and spends time talking with Moses and Elijah about his “departure” (“exodus” in the Greek) which is to take place from Jerusalem. According to Ellen White, Jesus needed comfort and encouragement. Why doesn’t God send Gabriel to talk with Jesus? Why send Moses and Elijah? What do you imagine the three of them talked about? What language did they speak? Who spoke the most? What lessons might we learn from all this?

Lesson Four: “The Call to Discipleship” (For Sabbath, April 25)

Luke 5:1-11; 6:12-16; 9:1-6, 23-25; 10:1-24

The word “disciple” means a student, or perhaps more importantly, a follower. In the North American context, a mentee might be the best way to describe what it means to be a disciple. Disciples of Jesus follow him and look to him as their teacher and mentor.

1. Luke 5:1-11 tells of Jesus calling his first disciples, who were fishermen. Why would these fishermen be willing to leave “everything” and follow Jesus? Did they have some prior knowledge of Jesus? Why would Jesus call fishermen?
2. Were the disciples that Jesus called somehow better, more holy, or more moral than any others? Perhaps we should notice what Peter says about himself in 5:8. He tells Jesus, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” How does Jesus respond to Simon Peter’s request? What might we learn about Jesus (and about discipleship) from this?
3. There were twelve disciples that traveled with Jesus from place to place during his public ministry. Were some of them married? How old were they? In what ways were they a diverse group? In what ways were they similar? Once again, are there lessons we ought to learn from this?
4. Why would Jesus even bother to call together a “team” of disciples? Was it for their sake or for his sake? In other words, did they help him, or slow him down?
5. What is the one necessary quality that is required of someone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus?
6. Jesus doesn’t just call his twelve disciples to follow him. He also commissions them for ministry as apostles. What does the word “apostle” mean? According to Luke 9:1-6, what are the primary tasks of an apostle? Why is an apostle not to take anything for the journey? How would this benefit the work of Jesus?
7. According to Luke 9:23, following Jesus requires denying self, even to the point of giving up family and life itself. How do we balance this with the notion that following Jesus brings joy and an abundant life?
8. What is the difference between being a “Christian” and being a “disciple of Jesus”?
9. What encouragement could you give to someone who has heard the call of Jesus to follow, but is struggling to obey?

Lesson Five: “Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath” (for Sabbath, May 2)

Luke 4:17-19, 31-37; 6:1-11; 13:10-16

The Sabbath is mentioned 17 times in Luke, more than in any other gospel. What is it that Luke—and Jesus!—would want us to learn about the Sabbath from these references?

1. In Luke 4, Luke tells us that Jesus attends the synagogue service in Nazareth “as was his custom.” At this service, he read from the book of Isaiah. What do we learn about Jesus and the Sabbath from this passage?
2. In the Jewish calendar, the concept of “Sabbath” extended beyond the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath. Every 7th year was to be a sabbatical year, and after seven sabbatical years, the 50th year was to be a year of “Jubilee.” On that year, farm land was to be given rest (no sowing or harvesting), slaves were freed, debts were cancelled, and land was returned to its original owners. Some who work with ancient Jewish chronologies have argued that the year Jesus began his public ministry was, quite literally, this year of Jubilee. Why was the year of Jubilee never fully practiced? Is Jubilee a good summary of what Jesus ministry was all about?
3. Jesus placed special emphasis on healing on the Sabbath. This caused problems because of how the religious authorities of Jesus’ day viewed healing and the Sabbath. For them, Sabbath was not a day to seek physical healing unless the condition was life-threatening. Taking medicine or using medical interventions on the Sabbath was breaking God’s law, in their view. Review the Sabbath healing recorded in Luke 6:6-11. In light of this story, how would you say Jesus responds to the “no healing on Sabbath” view of the religious leaders?
4. Earlier in this same chapter (Luke 6:1-5), Jesus and his disciples are criticized for picking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. What point is Jesus trying to make when he reminds his critics of an Old Testament story about David? Then, Jesus declares himself to be “Lord of the Sabbath.” What does this mean?
5. It is sometimes assumed that Jesus did away with the Sabbath. How would you respond to this? How does Luke 23:53 - 24:3 speak to this issue? Would Jesus’ closest followers still rest on Sabbath “in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:56) if Jesus had taught that the Sabbath was no longer important?
6. Seventh-day Adventists are especially concerned about Sabbath-keeping. Based on your experience, what are the dangers that come from this focus? What are the blessings? At the very core, what does it mean to be someone who keeps the Sabbath?

Lesson Six: “Women in the Ministry of Jesus” (for Sabbath, May 9)
Luke 1:39-55; 2:36-38; 7:11-17, 36-50, 8:1-3; 18:1-8

While Jesus experienced opposition from a variety of sources, nowhere in the synoptic gospels are women hostile to Jesus. Not only that, but women are often held up in Luke as positive examples (Luke 18:1-8; 21:1-4 are just two examples). Why? Are women morally superior to men?

1. Luke emphasized the role and importance of women more than any of the other synoptic gospels. The very first chapter of Luke illustrates this emphasis. There, baby Jesus is welcomed by three women. Who are some of the other prominent women who are named? What role do they play in the story?
2. Throughout his gospel, Luke will often pair two stories. One will feature a male character, the second, a female character. When these paired stories are considered side-by-side, interesting insights can be gained. Earlier in this discussion guide, we looked at the first such pairing which involved Gabriel’s visit to Zechariah and then Mary. Both ask a question. Zechariah’s asks, “By what shall I know this?” Mary asks, “How will this be?” Why would Luke contrast these two responses? What might Luke be signaling right at the very start of his book?
3. In Luke 1:43, Elizabeth refers to the pregnant Mary as the “mother of my Lord.” Why would she say this? How did she arrive at this conclusion? What does she believe about Jesus? Why was it so hard for others to come to a similar conclusion about Jesus?
4. The gospel of Luke reminds us on several occasions that it wasn’t just men who traveled with Jesus. As Jesus traveled about “from one town and village to another,” Luke tells us, “The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases” (Luke 8:1-2). Luke continues, “These women were helping to support them out of their own means” (8:3). Near the end of the gospel, Luke reminds us, twice (23:49, 55), that there were women in Jerusalem who had followed Jesus from Galilee, a journey that Jesus begins in Luke 9:51. In what way does the story change for us if we remember that Jesus had men and women who followed him from place to place, and that women provided the financial support for his ministry? Are there lessons we ought to learn from it?
5. Jesus could sometimes be found in the company of women with questionable sexual ethics (Luke 7:36-50 is an example of this). Why would he do this? Shouldn’t he have avoided the appearance of evil? What would we think of an itinerant evangelist who allowed “sinful women” to touch him, kiss him, and pour perfume on him? What was it about Jesus that made women feel comfortable around him?
6. When Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, he commends Mary for doing a very “unladylike” thing in her culture. The expectation was that the men would listen to the teacher, while the women would tend to those men. Jesus, however, tells Martha, “Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:42). What does this mean?
7. I know someone who says, “God has always been more accepting of women than human culture has been.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Lesson Seven: “Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Prayer” (for Sabbath, May 16)

Luke 2:25-32; 11:1-4; 23:46

Luke places a greater emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer than any of the other synoptic gospels. Given his background and life story, why do you think Luke may have been especially interested in these two subjects?

1. Many of us have a mental picture of Jesus. Do we also have a mental of what God the Father looks like? How about the Holy Spirit? Is it a help or a hindrance to have such a mental picture?
2. John the Baptist announced Jesus, saying, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? In my faith community, I hear much more about being baptized with water and less about baptism of the Holy Spirit. Why might that be the case?
3. After Jesus was baptized, he returned from the Jordan “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1). What does this mean? How does one become full of the Spirit? We should notice in Luke 11 that Jesus promises that our Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Is it really that simple? Do we just say, “Father, I’d like the Holy Spirit,” and that’s it? We have the Holy Spirit? And if so, how should we expect our lives to change once this happens?
4. In Luke 4, Jesus begins his public ministry by quoting, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Did Jesus need the Holy Spirit? Was he dependent on the Spirit, or did his power over demons, over sickness, and over death come from within his own being?
5. According to Luke 12, “anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” What does Jesus mean?
6. Luke records Jesus as praying at many of the key points in his ministry. He prays at his baptism, before choosing his 12 disciples, before his transfiguration, and in Gethsemane. He prayed for himself and for his disciples. Why did Jesus pray? What was accomplished through these prayers? Did Jesus need help? Did he need guidance? Did he need companionship with his Father? Did Jesus need to pray more or less than the average person?
7. In Luke 11:1-4, Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus responded with a model prayer. Reflect on his words. What part of this prayer seems especially significant to you? Are there elements of this prayer that seem to be neglected in Christianity today?
8. After giving this model prayer, Jesus emphasizes the need to be persistent and bold in prayer. Why is this necessary? Does a nagging God eventually encourage him to grant us our requests? And why did Jesus say, “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you . . .” All of us have asked for things from God but not received them. Doesn’t this statement from Jesus set us up for disappointment?
9. Imagine someone who asks, “Why do you pray?” How would you respond?

Lesson Eight: “The Mission of Jesus” (for Sabbath, May 23)
Luke 15:4-7, 11-32; 16:19-31; 18:35-43; 19:1-10

The lesson this week explores several well-known parables of Jesus in Luke 15 and 16, as well as Jesus’ interactions with a blind man and a rich tax collector. Each one of these deserves a full lesson. Unfortunately, we will have to skim over much!

The Lost Sheep, Coin and Son of Luke 15

1. To whom are these three parables addressed? What difference does this audience make?
2. In Luke 15:4, who does Jesus suggest is the shepherd? Whose fault is it that there is a lost sheep? Is this even important to note?
3. What are the ways in which these three parables are similar? In what ways are they different?
4. The parable of the lost (or “prodigal”) son has been called the “gospel in story.” What are the key truths that are taught by this amazing parable? Where should our focus lie? On the wayward son? The elder brother? The waiting father?

The Rich Man and Lazarus of Luke 16

1. This parable is sometimes understood to be a description of what happens when someone dies. Do you agree with this approach? Why or why not?
2. Why would Jesus use a story that isn’t literally true? Can a truth be taught from a fable?
3. What is the main lesson Jesus is trying to communicate through this parable?

Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar in Luke 18

1. When the blind beggar calls out to him for mercy, Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” Why would Jesus ask this question? Wasn’t the answer obvious? Are there some blind and sick people who do not want to be healed?
2. Luke tells us that the healed man “followed Jesus” (18:43). Where was Jesus going at the time (vs 31-33 of this same chapter)? What would the man soon see?

Jesus Meets with Zacchaeus in Luke 19

1. I believe this story is commonly misunderstood as a time when Zacchaeus repents. Instead, I believe the text paints Zacchaeus as an already reformed man who is still labeled as a sinner by his community. Look again at the account and see if you see any merit in this view!
2. Jesus describes his mission in Luke 19:10. Many religions speak of the human search for the divine. Here, Jesus speaks of his initiative in saving the lost. Share the ways in which God has reached out to find you.

Lesson Nine: “Jesus, the Master Teacher” (for Sabbath, May 30)

Luke 4:31-37; 6:20-49; 8:19-25; 10:25-37

Jesus is often referred to as the Master Teacher. Below are five observations about Jesus as teacher, along with related questions.

1. Jesus’ words had authority (Luke 4:32). He didn’t quote much from other rabbis, nor did he quote extensively from the Old Testament.

Q: What gave his words authority? Can we teach with similar authority? How?

2. Jesus taught through his actions. His life was intended to communicate lessons. Thus, his students followed him, literally, and watched how he lived life.

Q: If Jesus had been born mute, could his ministry on earth still have been successful? Could his most important teachings have been transmitted even without words? How about us? How well do our actions “teach” the world about who God is?

3. Jesus taught using questions. His first words recorded in Luke are a question, and that trend continues throughout the book. Even his “speeches” are full of questions (see Luke 7:24-26, 31, 42, 44, etc.) In Luke, Jesus is asked 32 questions, while he asks others a total of 92 questions.

Q: Doesn’t it seem like Jesus, with his wisdom, would *answer* rather than *ask* questions? Why did he ask questions? What does this accomplish?

4. Jesus seldom answered questions. When he did, he would often answer with a question or a riddle (17:37, 2:48-49).

Q: Once again, why would Jesus do this? Wouldn’t this have been frustrating?

5. Jesus taught by telling parables. These parables were often challenging to understand, even by his disciples.

Q: What is the benefit of teaching using a story?

Concluding Questions:

1. If Jesus is the Master Teacher, why don’t we follow his methods more closely? Why do we lecture, answer questions, and keep a professorial distance from our students?
2. What are some of the teachings of Jesus that you feel are neglected in contemporary society?
3. If we had to summarize the essential message Jesus taught, what would it be? Is this a message that is difficult to understand? Is it a message that is difficult to accept? Is it difficult to practice?

Lesson Ten: “Following Jesus in Everyday Life” (for Sabbath, June 6)

Luke 8:4-15; 11:37-54; 12:4-21, 35-53; 22:24-27

Jesus was a “friend of sinners,” but was also rather direct in his criticism of the Pharisees. At the time, the common people looked up to the Pharisees as examples of piety and goodness.

1. Notice how pointed Jesus was in Luke 11:37-12:1. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law felt insulted at what Jesus said (“Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also,” said the expert in the law in Luke 11:45).
 - A. Why was Jesus so critical of these spiritual leaders? What were his main complaints against them? (See Luke 11:37-12:1)
 - B. Is there a time when it is appropriate to say insulting things to other people?
 - C. It is easy to see Pharisees around us. It is more difficult to recognize a Pharisee when we see one in the mirror. If we were honest, what are the “Pharisee tendencies” we most struggle with?
 - D. Is it possible to be a popular and powerful spiritual leader without becoming a “Pharisee”?
2. In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus warns against “all kinds of greed” and tells the parable of the rich fool. What are the different “kinds of greed” that Jesus may have been referring to? What kind of greed is most dangerous? Was the farmer a fool for storing up grain and goods in his barns? Shouldn’t we save resources for the future?
3. A few verses later, in Luke 12:35-53, Jesus calls for watchfulness as one waits for the return of the master. This is typically (and I think correctly) understood as a parable dealing with the second coming of Jesus. What is the point of this parable? How much effort does the servant expend in trying to figure out the timing of the master’s return? What is the difference between waiting and watching?
4. Look again at Jesus’ parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-15. This parable is often used to encourage us to “be fruitful.” This is then understood to mean that we ought to be missionary-minded and share the gospel with the world. Is this the point of the parable? (See Luke 8:15 for a hint!) According to Jesus, how is a “crop” produced? Do we produce fruit by gritting our teeth and *trying* to produce fruit? What should we learn, then, from this parable?
5. In Luke 22:24-27, we discover that even after 3 ½ years of following Jesus, the disciples still fought for positions of power. They argued about who would be greatest in the kingdom.
 - A. According to Jesus, there ought to be a fundamental difference between “worldly” leadership and leadership among his followers. What was this fundamental difference?
 - B. Jesus used himself as an example. He said, “I am among you as one who serves.” The word for serve, here, is the same word that is translated as “minister” in other passages. The word is especially associated with service at a table—in other words, service provided by what we might call a waiter or waitress. If we took Jesus’ words seriously, how might this impact our view of the role of a pastor or minister? What sort of “authority” does a pastor or minister exert over their local church?

Lesson Eleven: “The Kingdom of God” (for Sabbath, June 13)
Luke 1:32-33; 9:59-62; 11:2; 13:29; 17:23-24; 18:16-30; 21:34-36

The phrase “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” occur more than 100 times in the synoptic gospels. Luke uses this term more than 30 times.

1. Jesus begins his ministry by saying, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns, also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43). Later, he sends his disciples out “to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). What are some of the common understandings of what is meant by the “kingdom of God”? Are these accurate understandings?
2. Some passages in Luke make it sound as if the kingdom of God is a present reality (see Luke 11:20; 16:16; 17:21). Other places, the kingdom of God sounds as if it is a future reality (see Luke 13:28-29; 14:15). How should we understand this term? Can the kingdom be both present and future?
3. We have already noted that Jesus speaks of the kingdom as something present, yet also future. In Luke 17:20-21, there is another surprise. “Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” What was Jesus’ point?
4. In Luke 13, Jesus describes the surprise of people who are thrown out of the kingdom of God (13:28). The picture he paints is of a great feast, with people from east and west, north and south, sharing a meal together. What did table fellowship mean in the ancient world? Why would Jesus speak of the kingdom in this way? Finally, what does a person do in order to be “thrown out” of the kingdom of God?
5. The kingdom of God sounds like something we would want to participate in. But how does one enter such a kingdom? Jesus provides us with some guidance.
 - A. Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).
 - B. Later, in Luke 18:24, Jesus remarks, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”
 - C. In Luke 18:16, Jesus says that “anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”Are these passages supposed to be spiritualized, or was Jesus literally talking about poor people and rich people? How do we “receive” the kingdom like a child? Based on these passages, would you say that it is easy or difficult to enter the kingdom of God? Finally, is entrance into the kingdom dependent upon membership in a particular religious group or organization?
6. In Luke’s recording of the Lord’s prayer, Christ teaches us to pray, “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2). What are we asking for when we pray this prayer? What is it that acts as a barrier to the coming of the kingdom?
7. Can you think of a time when you experienced “the kingdom of God” as being present in your life—a time when you thought, “This is what it’s like!” What can we learn about the “kingdom” from that moment?

Lesson Twelve: “Jesus in Jerusalem” (for Sabbath, June 20)

Luke 19:28-48 and Luke 20:9-26

Jesus spent most of his life working and ministering in the region of Galilee. The closing events of his life, however, take place in Jerusalem.

1. Luke foreshadows Jesus’ passion early in his book. In 9:51, Luke writes, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” What advantage is there to knowing the time and the place where we will die? What does the word “resolutely” (or, “steadfastly” in some versions) suggest about Jesus’ emotions as he journeys to Jerusalem?

2. Before entering Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead of him to find an unbroken colt. They knew the Old Testament prophecy which called Jerusalem to rejoice, for “your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). What must have been racing through their minds? Was this prophecy fulfilled in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem?

3. As Jesus entered the city, the crowd shouted joyfully and noisily. The Pharisees didn’t approve. When in our religious communities is it acceptable to shout—to cry out—in joyful praise?

4. In the midst of the celebration, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, “You did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (Luke 19:41-49). This would have been a strange sight; loud, praising crowds surrounding a man weeping on a donkey.

A. The Bible records Jesus crying a least twice, both in public settings. (Hebrews 5:7 suggests other occasions as well.) Do you suppose that he cried often? Was Jesus generally emotional? What do his tears tell us? Do you suppose he ever laughed?

B. How is it possible to miss God’s visit? Could God have made it more clear? Is God’s visit a one-time event, or does God still visit us today? Where do you most easily recognize God’s presence?

5. When he enters Jerusalem, Jesus goes to the temple and drives out those who were selling there. He declares the temple to be a “house of prayer” and not a “den of robbers” (Luke 19:45-46). Historically, what was the situation he was addressing? What might Jesus say to religious institutions today if he were to visit? Could it be said that our place of gathering is primarily a place of prayer? Should it be?

6. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took special care to keep the location of the last supper a secret (Luke 22:6-12). He clearly wanted to spend uninterrupted time with his disciples.

A. The Last Supper was actually a Passover meal. What event did this meal commemorate? What are the parallels between Jesus death and the Passover?

B. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper/communion together, is it primarily a time to look back, or a time to look forward?

C. Imagine you were facing arrest and death. Who would you gather around you for your last moments? What would you tell them?

D. What has been your most meaningful “Lord’s Supper” experience?

Lesson Thirteen: “Crucified and Risen” (for Sabbath, June 27)

Luke 22-24

For those who are long-time Christians, the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and death can almost become old news. We become calloused to the horror of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. There is value, however, in looking at the story again and again.

1. What might we learn from comparing the events which took place in the Garden of Eden with what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane? What are the similarities? What are the differences? How are these two garden stories connected?
2. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Father if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Does this request from Jesus leave you with any questions? What does it suggest about Jesus’ relationship with the Father?
3. How was it that Jesus ended up selecting Judas as a disciple? All through his ministry, Judas seemed able to do what the other disciples did, healing the sick and casting out demons. What is the lesson you take from his betrayal of the one who called him and equipped him for ministry?
4. Who in the passion narrative do you most identify with? Why?
 - A. Peter, who loves Jesus yet sleeps in the garden and then denies that he knows him?
 - B. Judas, who has seen Jesus at work, but disagrees with some of the fiscal and political strategies that he sees Jesus employing?
 - C. Pilate, who finds no fault in Jesus, but who didn’t want to jeopardize his position of influence and who wanted to keep the peace?
5. During his trial, Jesus is both quiet, and, some would argue, almost combative at times. For example, he responds to his questioner by saying, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of mighty God” [Luke 22:67-69]. What should we learn from Jesus demeanor at his trial?
6. As Luke records the death and resurrection of Jesus, he highlights the role of some surprising people. The disciples sleep in the garden, while one of their own betrays his master with a kiss. At the same time, a thief calls to Jesus for salvation. A Roman centurion declares Jesus to be a righteous man. Joseph, a member of the very body that condemned Jesus, provides a place of burial. Finally, women care for his body and are the first to witness to his resurrection. What lessons might we learn about people and about God from these surprises?
7. Why is the message of the resurrection of Jesus first entrusted to women?
8. What is your favorite part of the resurrection story?
9. If someone wants proof that Jesus was raised from the dead, what would we say to them? Why do you believe Jesus is alive? What difference does this belief make?