



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Luke

Theme: The Messiah Comes

Overview: In the play "Fiddler on the Roof," a villager asks the rabbi whether now would be a good time for the Messiah to come. Luke essentially said, "The wait is over. The Messiah has come." Students will learn that Jesus comes with distinction as prophesied, he comes in amazement with his understanding and miraculous power, he comes as the divine Son of God, he comes with all the glory of heaven, and he comes to accomplish the Father's purpose in the world.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

The Gospel was written by Luke, “the doctor” and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry, but he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” and wrote “an orderly account” based on what eyewitnesses handed down (Luke 1:1-4). He later wrote the book of Acts as a second volume (Acts 1:1).

Audience

Luke addressed his Gospel to “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3), possibly a Roman official or patron, so that he might “know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (1:4). Luke’s attention to Gentiles, women, the poor, and outsiders made his account especially meaningful to a wide, largely Gentile audience.

Date

Luke’s Gospel was written before Acts, which ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome (about AD 62). The Gospel was likely completed around AD 60. The events in this study span from the announcement of Jesus’ birth, about 5 BC, to his ascension, about AD 30.

Setting

The lessons begin in Nazareth with Gabriel’s visit to Mary and in Bethlehem with the shepherds, move to the temple courts in Jerusalem and the stormy Sea of Galilee, and close in Jerusalem and nearby Bethany, where the risen Jesus opened his disciples’ minds to the Scriptures and was taken up into heaven.

Theme

Luke presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. He came with distinction, just as the prophets foretold; he amazed people with his understanding and his power over nature; he was declared the Son of God from heaven, by Peter, and by his own testimony; he came wrapped in the glory of God; and he came with a purpose—“repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

Why Study Luke?

Christmas can become so familiar that we lose our wonder at the coming of Christ. This study calls believers to marvel again at who Jesus is, to confess him boldly as the Son of God, to give God glory for his coming, and to join him in the purpose for which he came.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Luke 1:26-38

WEEK 2: Luke 2:41-50; 8:22-25

WEEK 3: Luke 3:21-22; 9:18-21; 22:63-71

WEEK 4: Luke 2:1-20

WEEK 5: Luke 24:36-53

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Rejoice that Jesus came
just as God promised.**

STUDY: Luke

THEME: The Messiah Comes

LESSON TEXT: Luke 1:26-38

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-25

HE COMES WITH DISTINCTION

BY MARK SCOTT

The coming of the Messiah was no afterthought. It took extensive planning in eternity past. When Christ's coming was actually executed, it was done with the greatest of distinction. It was so distinct that the whole earth would be filled with his glory (Psalm 72:19). It was so distinct that God's steadfast love would be evident in it (Psalm 89:2). It was so distinct that the government would be on the Messiah's shoulders (Isaiah 9:6-7). It was so distinct that all peoples, nations, and languages would serve this Son of Man (Daniel 7:14). It was so distinct that the kingdom of this world will become his (Revelation 11:15).

Luke began his Gospel with a formal prologue—introduction (1:1-4). Then he gave the first annunciation story (1:5-25). This one concerned the angel Gabriel's announcement about John the Baptist to his father Zechariah. The second annunciation story is our present text and concerns Gabriel's announcement to Mary (1:26-38).

Distinct in Annunciation

Luke 1:26-29

Two spots in Nazareth have been identified as the place of Gabriel's annunciation about Jesus' birth to Mary—one by the Western Church and another by the Eastern Church. The place does not matter as much as the proclamation. When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, Gabriel (meaning "Man of God") appeared to Mary in Nazareth. Today the city of Nazareth spreads out over a series of hills, but in Mary's day it was a "one-horse town" (John 1:46).

Mary was a virgin (this word in the New Testament always referred to a woman/young girl who had not married). She was pledged (literally "wooed") or engaged (though biblical betrothal was even more serious than modern-day engagement) to be married to a man named Joseph. Joseph, who has no speaking lines in the Bible, was from the family of King David. Gabriel greeted Mary (Miriam was her formal Hebrew name) with this line, "Greetings (joy to you), you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

This greeting had to be stunning to Mary, though her strong knowledge of Scripture (evident in her Magnificat of Luke 1:46-55) might have made her think of angelic announcements to Gideon and to Manoah's wife (Judges 6:1-27; 13:1-24). Mary was greatly troubled (stirred up, agitated, or disturbed) about such a greeting. How many other women have annunciations like this? Answer: Hardly any; it is distinct.

Distinct in Conception

Luke 1:29-35

In this paragraph we move from monologue to dialogue. It is not just Gabriel announcing; it is Gabriel and Mary

conversing—even though Gabriel carried most of the conversation. As angelic beings are wont to do, Gabriel told Mary not to fear. He reminded her of God's favor (grace) on her life. Then Gabriel mentioned some particulars. Mary would conceive, give birth, and call the baby Jesus. Gabriel also announced Jesus' power (called great), title (Son of the Most High), heritage (Davidic line), and kingly reign (Jacob's descendants and his never-ending kingdom).

Mary must have had a thousand questions washing over her mind, but she asked just one, "How?" She acknowledged her virginity. There seems to be a "faithful how" and a "doubting how" (Luke 1:18). Mary asked the former, and Zechariah asked the latter. Zechariah was silenced, but Mary was given even more revelation. Gabriel's answer was, "The Holy Spirit." This kind of power (to impregnate a young girl of marital age) could only come from heaven. The Holy Spirit would come on her (as in some dramatic and powerful way) and God's power would overshadow (to cast a shadow or rest upon). Therefore, the distinction for this child would be the Son of God.

Distinct in Subjection

Luke 1:36-38

The Messiah's coming was marked by two women yielding to the way of God. Gabriel brought Mary into the loop by informing her that her relative Elizabeth (My God is an oath) was going to have a child even though she was old and barren. In fact, she was already toward the end of her second trimester.

One of the more engaging statements in this annunciation is verse 37, "For no word from God will ever fail" (i.e., "For no spoken word will be impossible with God"). God would not fail his promise. God would not fail these two women who submitted to him. God would not fail his Son, and God would not fail the world.

This would no doubt have been much to receive. But Mary showed great humility by saying, "I am the Lord's servant... may your word to me be fulfilled." What subjection! Some might take the veneration of Mary too far, but we know where the distinct Son of God learned subjection.

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WAS MARY MERRY?

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus' mother is an intriguing character. Her name reminds us of Miriam in the Old Testament. Her story has moved musicians to write classic songs like "Ave Maria" and contemporary tunes like "Mary, Did You Know?" Painters and sculptors have tried to capture her image in paint and stone. In Islam, the Quran mentions her 70 times and affirms she was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

For some, Mary has become an object of religious superstition, exalted to a place of honor no human deserves. We shouldn't idolize and worship Mary, but we can learn a lot from this faithful servant of God.

A Difficult Assignment

Dr. Luke asserts that Mary was a virgin pledged to marry Joseph when the angel Gabriel visited her in Nazareth, announcing she would give birth to a baby who "will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). How did she react to Gabriel's message? How would you have reacted?

At first, Mary was surprised and hesitant, "greatly troubled at his words" (v. 29), and she asked a reasonable question: "How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?" (v. 34). Eventually, though, she responded with faithful surrender and said, "I am the Lord's servant . . . May your word to me be fulfilled" (v. 38).

What Mary Can Teach Us

Young people can learn from her example. The Bible doesn't specify Mary's age, but it's clear she was a young woman—perhaps still in her teens—when she heard and obeyed God's call to serve.

Worshippers can learn from her example. Mary praised God cheerfully and said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). The last time Mary's name appears in Scripture, no one was praying to her; she was praying to God along with the rest of Jesus' disciples (Acts 1:14).

Parents can learn from her example. Motherhood brings many rewards and challenges. Can you imagine what it was like to be the mother of Jesus? After hearing what the shepherds said about her baby, "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She heard the faithful old man Simeon prophesy, "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (v. 35). She watched Jesus become strong and wise as he progressed through childhood (v. 40), and she worried when at age 12 he was separated from the family and stayed behind in Jerusalem for several days. As Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and

man," again she "treasured all these things in her heart" (vv. 51-52).

Older believers can learn from her example. Mary wasn't merry when her other children worried about Jesus' mental health (Mark 3:21) and her hometown neighbors took offense at him (Mark 6:1-3). It must have been agonizing to watch him die on the cross, but Jesus compassionately entrusted her to the care of his friend, the beloved disciple (John 19:25-27).

Was Mary's life always merry? No, but it was meaningful.

Do you remember what Mary told the servants at the wedding when they ran out of wine? She referred them to Jesus and told them, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). That's good advice for all of us.

Personal Challenge: What impresses you most about Mary, the mother of Jesus? Has God ever given you a difficult assignment? If so, how did you respond?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What do you think it would be like to be in the presence of the angel Gabriel? How do you think Mary knew this was actually an angel with God's message?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 1:26-38**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Gabriel told Mary she was "highly favored" and that the "Lord is with" her (1:28), but Mary was "greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be" (1:29).
 - Why do you think Mary would be troubled by the angel's words and greeting?
 - Do you think the appearance of the angel may have caused Mary to suspect that God had a task for her to complete? Explain.
3. Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid because she had "found favor with God" (1:30).
 - What do you think the angel meant when he said Mary had "found favor with God"? How do you think Mary "found favor with God"?
 - How do you think we find favor with God today?
4. After announcing that Mary would have a child, he described the importance of the child that would be born (1:32-33).
 - How do you think Mary understood the angel's statements about the child she would be having?
 - Do you think Mary recalled the angel's remarks about Jesus years later when he was being crucified? What do you think Mary thought about the angel's words at the crucifixion?
5. When Mary questioned the possibility of giving birth as a virgin (1:34), the angel told her that a barren relative, Elizabeth, was now pregnant (1:36). Luke 1:39-41 tells us that Mary left Nazareth to visit Elizabeth.
 - Why did the angel tell Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy? Was it important for Mary to know that Elizabeth was pregnant?
 - Why did Mary rush off into the "hill country of Judea" to visit Elizabeth?
6. Read Luke 1:38. What does Mary's response to the angel tell us about Mary? How should the example of Mary's response be reflected within us?
7. Some people have denied the virgin birth of Jesus as recorded in Scripture. What is the importance of the virgin birth to Christianity?
 - What does the virgin birth tell us about Jesus?
 - Would it matter if Jesus were not born of a virgin?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 2:41-50; 8:22-25**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Never lose your wonder
at who Jesus is and
what he can do.**

STUDY: Luke

THEME: The Messiah Comes

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2:41-50; 8:22-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Mark 4:35-41; Psalm 107:23-32

HE COMES IN AMAZEMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

When describing the Messiah we find ourselves in adjectival overload. Words like powerful, compassionate, brilliant, kind, stern, and maybe even groovy hardly cut it. Jesus is all of these things and even more. The Gospel writers recorded reactions to Jesus with words like trembling, astonished, afraid, alarmed, bewildered, marveled, and amazed. We sing songs like “Amazing Grace” and lyrics like, “No other word for grace than amazing.” David Fleeer and Dave Bland even wrote a book entitled *Preaching Mark’s “Unsettling” Messiah*. Sometimes the adjective describing Jesus is unsettling.

This lesson extrapolates two narratives from the Gospel of Luke that highlight Jesus’ amazing person and work. The first is a childhood narrative and the second is a ministry narrative. The first one underscored Jesus’ knowledge and the second one underscored Jesus’ power.

Amazing Knowledge*Luke 2:41-50*

This is the only boyhood story from Jesus’ life that we have in the canonical Gospels. Other stories exist, but only in Apocryphal works. Following Jesus’ presentation in the temple by his parents (2:22-24), the holy family’s encounter with Simeon and Anna (2:25-38), and the settling in Nazareth (2:39-40), Jesus grew up in his boyhood home.

Mary and Joseph were already building habits into their son. The ritual of attending Passover in Jerusalem was yearly. It was not uncommon for pilgrims to stay through to Pentecost before returning home. So on the occasion of Jesus’ Bar-Mitzvah (son of the law), when Jewish boys were to have the book of Leviticus memorized, Jesus went with his parents to the Passover festival in Jerusalem according to the custom. Jesus also went to synagogue services according to custom (Luke 4:16). This time it would seem that the holy family returned to Nazareth following Passover.

It seems so odd to us that Mary and Joseph would have started their journey to Galilee without taking better notice of Jesus (or his absence). Today this would be termed child neglect and maybe even abandonment. But in that day it was not so odd. Families took care of families. Perhaps even blood relatives of Mary and Joseph were on this journey. They might have thought, “He is with his cousins (relatives is the word for “of the same genes”). At day’s end they must have started yelling, “Jesus!”

No doubt panic set in next. Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem. It took them some time to find him (three

days). So this historical narrative becomes one of the famous “three-day stories” in the Bible. Since the Jews might have called each part of a day as the whole day, this might be an idiom for only a day and a half. But, think—a day and half! Talk about worried. They found Jesus in the temple (which is a major focal point for Luke in his Gospel). Jesus was sitting, listening, and asking questions (of which he asked many in the Gospels). Mary and Joseph were no doubt undone. The scholars were amazed (to stand outside of oneself) and Mary and Joseph were astonished (to be struck out of their senses). Their question was a mild rebuke. They registered their anxiety (pain or sorrow).

Jesus acted surprised at their amazement. He knew the source of his wisdom (John 7:14-16). The Father’s house was the temple. Already at age 12 Jesus was cognizant of being in the presence of God on earth. He was in the temple and was the temple (Matthew 12:6). Mary and Joseph did not understand. They would be left with pondering, but Jesus would be submissive and head home with them. Amazing!

Amazing Power*Luke 8:22-25*

The miracles gave evidence of Jesus’ power. He could raise the lame, unstop the ears of the deaf, cleanse lepers, open the eyes of the blind, resurrect the dead, cast out demons, and yes, tame creation (i.e. calm storms). At any given moment there are over 200 storms across the globe. Fallen creation groans.

In his early Galilean ministry days Jesus had spent himself in his teaching (8:4-18). He was bone tired. Jesus and the disciples climbed into the boat and headed across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side. Jesus fell asleep while the disciples battled the squall (whirlwind, hurricane, or tempest). The severity is underlined by the phrase, “the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.”

The disciples awakened Jesus and quickly explained their dilemma. Much like Mark’s account (4:35-41), Jesus rebuked (commanded; the same word used for exorcising demons) the wind and waters. The storm immediately responded to the Creator’s voice. Then Jesus taught a lesson to his disciples about faith. The disciples were utterly amazed. They were amazed because they knew that only God could ride on the waters and calm them.

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DON'T LOSE THE WONDER

BY DAVID FAUST

In the summer of 1933 during the depth of the Great Depression, John Jacob Niles

attended an outdoor church meeting in a small town in North Carolina. Niles was a singer

and a collector of folklore. A group known as the Morgan family had been leading a revival, but after they camped in the town square and hung their clothes to dry on a Confederate monument, the police declared them a public nuisance and ordered them to leave. The family held one more meeting, hoping to raise enough money to buy gas so they could get out of town.

A girl with tousled blond hair stepped onto a little platform and began to sing. Annie Morgan wore dirty, ragged clothes, but Niles later recalled, "She was beautiful, and in her untutored way, she could sing. She smiled as she sang, smiled rather sadly, and sang only a single line of a song."

The song's haunting melody stuck in Niles' mind. He paid the girl 25 cents to sing it again, and she repeated it eight times altogether, earning a quarter each time. Niles wrote a few notes and left with what he called "three lines of verse, a garbled fragment of melodic material—and a magnificent idea." Later he composed more lyrics to go with the song's melody, and that is how the Christmas carol "I Wonder as I Wander" came to be.

When Wonder Wanes

The Creator gave us the capacity for wonder. Albert Einstein wrote, "The most beautiful

thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He . . . who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead—his eyes are closed."

Did you ever take a child to the zoo? Kids are fascinated with animals. They look forward to Christmas. They open gifts with wide-eyed excitement. But wonder tends to dissipate with time. Adults don't listen for sleighbells in the snow. We gripe about inflation and traffic congestion at the mall.

As time passes, followers of Christ sometimes become so familiar with God's gifts that we take them for granted. Our appreciation for his grace wanes. Does your heart still rejoice when a new believer is baptized? When you partake of the Lord's Supper, are you still astonished to realize "How Jesus, the Savior, did come for to die, For poor on'ry people, like you and like I"?

When is the last time you went outside on a clear night, stared in awe at the moon and stars, and asked, "Lord, since the heavens are the work of your fingers, who am I that you care for me?" (See Psalm 8:3-4.) Are you "filled with awe" like the first-century believers who saw the Lord at work in their midst (Acts 2:43)?

Our Amazing Savior

When Jesus was 12 years old, people already were "amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). When he calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee, his flabbergasted disciples asked, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him" (Luke 8:25).

Who is this? He is the "Wonderful Counselor" (Isaiah 9:6). He is wonderfully wise, powerful, and trustworthy. No matter where we wander in life, let's keep the wonder alive.

Personal Challenge: What stirs wonder in your heart? What astonishing facts in nature (or in the Bible, your children or grandchildren, or great music and art) remind you to stand in awe of the Lord?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify something that has “amazed” you or made you “marvel.” Describe the feeling of being amazed at something or marveling at something. What do these words mean?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 2:41-50; 8:22-25**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Luke tells us that Jesus’ parents “went a day’s journey” before they began to search for him (2:44).
 - If they were comfortable with Jesus being “in the group” for the first day of their journey from Jerusalem, why do you think they started searching for him after the first day’s journey?
 - What do you think Joseph and Mary felt like after discovering that their 12-year-old son was not with them?
3. Jesus was away from his parents for at least three days when he was found in the temple “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (2:46).
 - How do you think Jesus survived on his own for at least three days?
 - Why do you think “all who heard” Jesus “were amazed at his understanding and his answers”?
4. When Jesus explained his absence from the family (2:49), Luke notes that his parents “did not understand” what he said to them (2:50).
 - What do you think his parents thought Jesus was saying and how do you suppose they responded to his statement?
 - Why do you think Luke included verse 52 at the close of this narrative? What does this suggest to us as believers today?
5. Twice in this text (Luke 2:48, 51), Luke makes a reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus. What do these two brief references tell us about Mary?
 - Do these passages provide us with insights into Luke’s research as he wrote his gospel many years later?
6. As the storm raged and the disciples were in danger, they awakened Jesus, who rebuked the storm (Luke 8:23-24).
 - What did Jesus mean when he asked the disciples “Where is your faith?” (8:25) after rebuking the storm?
 - Why do you suppose the disciples were “afraid” and “marveled” after Jesus calmed the sea?
7. As both a child and an adult, Jesus both “amazed” and “marveled” those who met him. What does this tell us and what does it mean to our faith today?
 - What “amazes” you about Jesus or makes you “marvel” at him?
 - Has it become too easy to look at Jesus with little or no amazement or marvel? Explain.
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 3:21-22; 9:18-21; 22:63-71**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Confess with confidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.**

STUDY: Luke

THEME: The Messiah Comes

LESSON TEXT: Luke 3:21-22; 9:18-21; 22:63-71

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 16:13-20; Psalm 2:7; Romans 10:9-10

HE COMES AS THE SON OF GOD

BY MARK SCOTT

When someone receives Jesus as the Lord of their lives (1 Corinthians 12:3) and follows that reception with baptism, we ask them what they have to say about Jesus. We often refer to that as the good confession (although it has a little different nuance than what Jesus gave to Pilate (1 Timothy 6:13). Who Jesus of Nazareth makes what he said and did the most important words and deeds in the history of the universe.

The wording of that good confession usually assumes the language of Matthew 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In Jesus’ Jewish and Greco-Roman world, the effect of saying that he was the Son of God amounted to saying he—not Caesar—was the king.

From Heaven

Luke 3:21-22

Luke 1-2 contains the birth and early boyhood narratives of Jesus. Luke 3 contains the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist and the very earliest days of Jesus’ ministry. Sandwiched between Jesus’ baptism and his temptation experience in the wilderness of Judea is the universal genealogy of Jesus. Maybe Luke was trying to convey that Jesus was the Son of God as declared from heaven (3:21-22) and affirmed by his earthly family (3:23-38). Then he would be tested to see what kind of Son of God he would be (4:1-13).

John the Baptist was baptizing people in the Jordan River with his baptism of repentance. Jesus presented himself for baptism partly to show his solidarity with the people. Luke uniquely mentioned that in the context of his baptism he was praying. At that moment heaven was opened (a sign of divine revelation), and a voice—obviously God’s—said, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.” The Father was recognizing Jesus’ divine nature (Psalm 2, 110) as well as the Father’s endearment and affirmation of Jesus’ ministry. If the Father affirmed Jesus’ sonship, who are we to deny it?

By Peter

Luke 9:18-21

Matthew has the fullest account of this narrative (Matthew 16:13-20), but Mark and Luke also include this narrative. It is a scriptural high-water mark. Jesus is months away from the cross experience, and once again, in the context of prayer, Jesus initiated the question concerning his identity. “Who do the crowds say I am?” Jesus did not have amnesia. He knew who he was. But in this crucial moment, before heading south to

Jerusalem, and standing before the huge rock formation at Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus popped the question.

The disciples gave him all the popular answers—i.e., John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (Matthew adds Jeremiah to the list). There were good reasons why people thought such things. But Jesus narrowed the question and asked, “But what about you . . . Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.” Messiah means “the rubbed off one,” or “the anointed one” (i.e. the Christ). Peter did not always say the right thing as Matthew went on to tell us (Matthew 16:22-23), but he could have done no better in the moment. He affirmed Jesus’ identity.

Before the Sanhedrin

Luke 22:63-71

Jesus’ identity as Son of God was affirmed early in his ministry (baptism), in the thick of his ministry (Caesarea-Philippi), and in his trials (of which there were six) before his crucifixion at the end of his ministry. Before Jesus was carted off to Pilate the temple police took the liberty to mistreat Jesus. They mocked him and beat him. They blindfolded him and then asked who hit him, all the while insulting (blaspheming) him. But no amount of torture would cause Jesus to forget who he was.

The encounter that Jesus had with the elders, the chief priests, and teachers of the law at Caiaphas’ residence was ugly and evident of the logical fallacy known as “question-framing.” They asked Jesus to admit that he was the Messiah, but of course they were trying to force Jesus into a corner concerning his identity. Jesus affirmed that even if he told them they would refuse to believe.

Then Jesus took the verbal battle to them. He took the offensive. He affirmed that as Messiah they would witness the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the mighty God. Then they asked him point blank, “Are you then the Son of God?” Jesus’ reply sounded strange at first, “You say that I am.” There is no denial here or dodging the question. But essentially he is affirming their question. In other words, “Yes.” They needed no further testimony nor do we. Jesus is the Son of God—and that truth still saves people (Romans 10:9-10).

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WHO IS TALKING ABOUT JESUS?

BY DAVID FAUST

An old copy of Life magazine featured an artist's rendition of Jesus' face on the cover along with this question in all caps: WHO WAS HE? The subtitle said, "Solving the Mystery of Jesus and Why It Matters Today."

The magazine seemed like an appropriate illustration for my sermon on the Sunday before Christmas, so I showed it to the congregation as I began my message.

What Others Say About Him

Why does a Jewish carpenter who walked the earth 2,000 years ago continue to stir so much conversation? Even unbelievers find Jesus difficult to ignore.

The Life magazine article quoted a variety of scholars and theologians, some of whom made odd, misinformed assertions about Jesus. Despite indisputable evidence, atheist Jon Murray acidly stated, "There was no such person in the history of the world as Jesus Christ. There was no historical, living, breathing, sentient human being by that name. Ever. [The Bible] is a fictional, nonhistorical narrative. The myth is good for business." An English professor from Dartmouth claimed, "I don't think we know who Jesus was," and dismissed the four Gospels, insisting they "were written for political purposes—to convert people."

By contrast, I believe the testimony of a first-century physician with a strong track record of historical accuracy. According to Dr. Luke, when Jesus asked what others thought about him, the disciples answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life" (Luke 9:18-19). Unsatisfied with the crowd's opinions, Jesus sought his friends' point-of-view. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" (v. 20). Our answer to that question not only says something about Jesus; it shapes our own identity and destiny.

What He Says About Us

Encounters with Jesus change people. He turns guilty sinners into growing saints. He calls former enemies to be his friends, apprentices, and coworkers. He invites us to be brothers and sisters—coheirs in God's household.

The devil changes people, too—but for the worse. Satan fans the flames of division, trying to convince people that the Bible can't be trusted, creation and salvation are myths, and ethical principles are constantly shifting and relative.

In the first century, uncrossable social barriers and longstanding bitterness separated Jews from Gentiles, uncivilized barbarians from cultured philosophers. Christ stepped into this torn-apart world and tore down "the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14-18). We find our true identity—and our unity—in him (see Galatians 3:26-28).

What Will We Say About Him?

We must keep talking about Jesus because the world still desperately needs him.

Isaiah called Jesus Christ the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). God the Father proclaimed at Jesus' baptism, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Simon Peter confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The apostle Paul's skepticism and antipathy melted away once he was convinced Jesus "was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Walking onstage to begin my Christmas sermon, I realized the copy of Life magazine I held in my hand answered its own question. The cover asked, "Who Was He?" The answer will always be, "He is the way, the truth, and the LIFE!"

Personal Challenge: Discuss the following questions with a trusted friend or with your small group: What do we really believe about Jesus Christ? How can we keep Christ central in our minds—not only during the Christmas season, but all year round?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When people look at you, what perceptions (good or bad) do they develop about you? How do incorrect assumptions about you make you feel?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 3:21-22; 9:18-21; 22:63-71**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. In Luke 3:21-22, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and the spirit descended upon him like a dove and the Father said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
 - Why do you think Jesus presented himself to be baptized by John the Baptist? He had no sin, so why be baptized?
 - What is the significance of Luke noting that Jesus was praying as this happened?
3. The "Great Confession" is recorded in Luke 9:18-21, Mark 8:27-30, Matthew 16:13-20. Compare and contrast the three Gospel accounts of this event.
 - Why do you think Jesus asked this question of the disciples at this time?
 - What do we learn from the initial responses to Jesus' question?
 - How important to Christianity is Peter's response? See Matt. 16:17-20 and note that Jesus isn't calling Peter the rock, but he's referring to Peter's statement as the "rock" upon which the church is built.
 - Why do you suppose Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone who he is (Luke 9:21; Mark 8:30)?
 - As you read Luke 22:61-63, how does it make you feel? What are your thoughts about Jesus? Why do you think Jesus responded as he did to those he faced?
 - When comparing all three of the passages from Luke's Gospel and Jesus' consistent identification of himself, what do we learn about Jesus? What does it mean to us as Jesus followers today?
4. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will ..."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 2:1-20**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Give glory to God for
the glorious coming of
his Son.**

STUDY: Luke

THEME: The Messiah Comes

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2:1-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Micah 5:2; Isaiah 9:2-7; John 1:14

HE COMES IN GLORY

BY MARK SCOTT

Christmas is glorious. Despite its commercial distractions we speak of the “glory of Christmas.” It is more than a magical season. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is covered in glory—which matches other moments and aspects of our Savior’s life.

Scripture teaches that when Jesus came, we beheld his glory (John 1:14). It also teaches us that Jesus desired to experience the glory of his Father again (John 17:1-5). It also teaches us even while on earth Jesus appeared in glory (Luke 9:28-36). It also teaches us that Jesus exists in glory even now (Revelation 1:12-18). Finally, Jesus will come in glory when he returns (Luke 21:25-28).

Messianic Glory

Luke 2:1-7

The humble and historical beginnings of Jesus’ earthly life at first pass hardly seem glorious. But if we looked between the lines, the glory of God was breaking out. The Christmas narrative does not begin, “Once upon a time” because this is no fairy tale. The glory of God happens in history. Caesar Augustus was in power. One of the local governors (to the north) was Quirinius. Some scholars debate Luke’s historical accuracy concerning this remark. But the meaning of the term governor and the two “reigns” of Quirinius affirm Luke’s accuracy. A census means taxes, so Joseph and Mary had to make a trip to the south.

This messianic glory was in perfect accord with the prophecies made that the Messiah would come through the line of King David. Joseph, Jesus’ legal and earthly father, was of that line. Bethlehem, the city of the singer of Israel, was the town where God’s glory would be displayed (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6). Mary was pledged to Joseph and pregnant by the Holy Spirit. The marriage had not been consummated yet, which gave a suspicion of immorality.

Given Mary’s advanced pregnancy, the journey to Bethlehem would not have been easy. In God’s perfect timing (Galatians 4:4), Jesus was born. Jesus was the firstborn which gave him all the privileges attached to that rank (Colossian 1:15). Mary wrapped him in cloths (not unusual) and laid him in a manger (very unusual). Imagine—the glory of God in a cattle trough. The reason? No room available in the “inn.” But what the universe cannot contain the guest room could not hold (1 Kings 8:27).

Angelic Glory

Luke 2:8-14

Shepherds rarely saw much glory. Their lives consisted of sleepless and cold nights, working with less-than-bright

animals, and manure. These shepherds were doing what shepherds did—watching their flocks by night. But suddenly the sky lit up and changed the trajectory of their lives forever. Think of it. Heaven is so glorious that when only one angel showed up the sky lit up like fireworks on July 4th. No wonder they were terrified.

But the angel said what angels always say when they come in contact with humans, “Do not be afraid.” The good news of the angel would cause great joy for people. Lowly (and despised) shepherds received the angel’s announcement. In the town of David (Bethlehem) a Savior had been born, and he was the long-awaited Messiah, the one who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). The sign was not the birth of a baby. The sign was not a baby wrapped in cloths. The sign was that the glory of God would be displayed in a manger.

Then the angel was joined by an army of angels. If one angel from heaven could scare the shepherds, imagine what a heavenly host of angels could do. It looked like the angels were saying (singing?) number 148 from the hymnal, “Glory to God in the highest.” The result of this glory coming to earth? Peace!

Evangelistic Glory

Luke 2:15-20

It must have taken several minutes for the shepherds to collect themselves when the angels left them. Probably still catching their collective breath they said, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” So they made their journey from “Shepherds Field” to town. Somehow they found the holy family. The sign was confirmed when they saw Jesus in the manger (the third time now that this term has been mentioned).

How long they stayed staring at Jesus we are not told. But evidently it was long enough for their evangelistic juices to get flowing. They left and spread the word (spoken word by the angels) concerning this amazing child. Everyone was amazed. Mary must have sat back and said to herself, “Glory, where will all of this end?” But the shepherds headed back to Shepherd’s Field giving glory to God and praising him for what they had been privileged to see and hear. Glory!

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IF THE MANGER IS EMPTY

BY DAVID FAUST

"It's one of the best Christmas lightshows you'll ever see," friends said, describing an art museum's annual holiday display. "The highlight," they continued, "is the nativity scene at the end." So last December, my wife Candy and I went with another couple to see the lightshow.

It took about 90 minutes to walk the museum's park-like grounds where over one-and-a-half million lights glowed from trees, lampposts, bridges, and walkways. While we strolled along, holiday music filled the air, perfectly synchronized with the flashing lights.

Approaching the tour's end, we saw up ahead a small rectangular building that obviously was designed to house a nativity scene; but to our surprise, the building was empty. For some reason (presumably deferring to public concerns about religious diversity), the show's producers decided not to include Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

We stared in disappointment at the vacant little building with a few colored lightbulbs strung around it—an anticlimactic ending to a spectacular holiday show. I don't expect a secular museum to boldly preach the gospel, but I blurted out to my wife, "So, this is the lightshow's big conclusion? An empty box?" The Bible doesn't mandate observing Christmas as a winter festival, but what are all the lights, decorations, and music meant to celebrate, if not the incarnation of Christ?

The Worst Noel

Proverbs 14:4 says, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox come abundant harvests." In ancient Israel's agricultural society, people understood that proverb. A clean, empty manger meant there were no oxen to help plow the fields and harvest grain to feed the family. By contrast, a dirty manger looked untidy, but it meant important work was being done. Animals are messy, but they make a farm more productive. No manure, no money.

A similar principle applies to God's spiritual flock. Ministry is messy because people have messy lives. The road to redemption passed through a dirty manger, not a cute decoration filled with soft, clean hay. Things aren't neat and tidy when you are knee-deep in God's redemptive work. No mess, no mission.

If the manger is empty, so is the holiday—and so are our hearts. If the manger is empty, bright lights, inspiring music, festive clothes, warm candles, tasty meals, and expensive gifts could never satisfy our souls and fill us

with eternal hope. We wouldn't sing "Joy to the World" if God didn't come as a boy to the world.

The worst Noel would be a holiday filled with activities and festivities but devoid of faith.

Manger-Born Risen Lord

There is a miracle at each end of Christ's life on earth, with the virgin birth and the resurrection forming glorious quotation marks around his incarnation. Scripture testifies, "He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

That's why "Away in a Manger" is more than just a cute song for kids. In Bethlehem the virgin mother took the infant Jesus, "wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). That manger-born Messiah died for our sins and rose from the dead, and from his empty tomb shines a glorious light that will never go out.

Personal Challenge: During the Christmas holiday, take a few quiet moments to reflect devotionally on Luke chapter 2. Don't let the season's activities and festivities divert your attention from Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church, the Lord of our lives, and the source of our hope.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What do you think the world would look like today if Jesus had never been born? How would our world be different had God not sent Jesus into it?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 2:1-20**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Our lesson writer, Mark Scott, examines the Christmas story from the perspective of the glory of Jesus' coming.
 - What can you see in Luke 2:1-7 that is not so glorious?
 - What can you see in Luke 2:1-7 that reveals the glory of Jesus?
3. Luke 2:8-9 tells us that the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks when an angel appeared to them and "the glory of the Lord shone around them."
4. Mark Scott says "the sky lit up like fireworks on July 4th." Do you think "the glory of the Lord" was something more than just brightness? What else could it have been?
 - How would the sudden appearance of "the glory of the Lord" make you react? Would you be terrified like the shepherds?
5. What do you think the shepherds thought it meant when the angel told them ...
 - "A Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord"?
 - "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"?
 - Why do you suppose God chose to reveal the Messiah's birth in such an amazing way to a lowly group of shepherds? What can we take away from this?
6. After the heavenly host of angels had departed, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see what they had just heard about.
 - After such a glorious angelic announcement, do you think they expected to find more than a baby in an animal trough?
 - How do you think they were received by Joseph and Mary? What do you think Joseph and Mary would have thought about their story of the angelic announcement?
7. As the shepherds went on to "spread the word" about the child, Luke tells us "all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them" (Luke 2:18). Why do you suppose people didn't simply think they were crazy or untruthful?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 24:36-53**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

LESSON AIM: **Join Jesus in the purpose for which he came.**

STUDY: Luke

THEME: The Messiah Comes

LESSON TEXT: Luke 24:36-53

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 1:1-11; Matthew 28:16-20

HE COMES WITH PURPOSE

BY MARK SCOTT

Will you “thrive” in ‘25 or “strive” in ‘25? Perhaps that depends on your purpose in this New Year. One thing about the Messiah who came is that his life was filled to overflowing with purpose. In Jesus’ message to his largest crowd ever he said, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished” (Luke 12:49-50). Jesus was so constrained to accomplish the mission his Father had given him that he described it in terms of the destructive power of fire and the violence of baptism. You could never fault Jesus for not living with purpose.

Luke’s account of the resurrection indicated that the first day of the week was very full. The women came to the tomb only to find angels (1-12). Cleopas and his traveling companion were en route to Emmaus and encountered the resurrected Christ. Jesus interpreted Moses and the Prophets to them and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread (13-32). These two ran back and told the disciples what they had seen and heard (33-35). While they were giving their testimony, Jesus suddenly appeared.

Addressing Our Doubts

Luke 24:36-43

Evidently resurrected bodies are not constrained by the physical limitations of bodies in this world. The disciples were talking and Jesus just suddenly appeared. The text said that the disciples were startled and frightened. No wonder Jesus said, “Peace be with you,” which is what he said more than once during his Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16). That helped. The disciples thought they had seen a ghost (spirit).

The resurrection addresses our doubts about Jesus. He asked his disciples why they were troubled (torn about) and why they had doubt (disputations of the mind). He then proceeded to give evidence to three of their five senses that he was really alive (i.e., sight, touch, and taste). He challenged them to look at his hands and feet, which must mean that even though he was resurrected, his hands and feet still bore the scars from the nails. He challenged them to touch him to know he was not a ghost. He even asked them if they had any food. They gave him a piece of broiled fish. He ate it slowly in front of them as if to say, “Ta Da!” When doubts are overcome there is joy and amazement.

Opening Our Minds

Luke 24:44-49

Faith goes beyond reason and understanding, but genuine biblical faith should always be an informed faith. The book by John R.W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, gets at this. Jesus spoke to the Emmaus travelers and disciples (minus Judas) from all three parts of the Old Testament (The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms). Seeing Jesus in all of the Scriptures is evidently the proper way to read the Bible. Christ is the interpretative key to Scripture.

In a fallen world a veil often hinders good spiritual eyesight. Therefore, Jesus had to open their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Hardest to understand was that the Messiah would have to suffer as he did. And they had very little context to understand resurrection. What they did have to embrace was that since Jesus was alive, they had a mission to accomplish. It was preaching to all the nations (a theme that lived large in Luke). The content of this preaching consisted of urging people to repent and experience the forgiveness of sins. This would start in Jerusalem and spread out like the ripple effect in water. They would not have to do this in their own power. They would have the Holy Spirit’s help. They just had to hunker down and wait for that empowerment.

Worshipping Our King

Luke 24:50-53

The book of Luke ends where volume two (Acts) begins—with the ascension of Jesus. His ascension is a very significant doctrine in the New Testament. Jesus cannot reign with the Father at his right hand or intercede for the saints if he is on earth. In the ancient world when you sat down, it meant your work was done. The ascension meant Jesus had accomplished the work of redemption.

So, Luke ends his Gospel with the disciples worshipping Jesus as he ascended back to God. Bethany was just south and east of the Mount of Olives. From here Jesus would give the disciples their final charge. Jesus went up, and the disciples went back to the city to wait for the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ purpose was to fill the earth with his glory as the waters cover the sea. Not a bad goal for all of us in this New Year.

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THE BEST BIBLE STUDY EVER

BY DAVID FAUST

Some Bible classes and small groups are better than others. Have you ever attended a Bible class where the teacher was unprepared, or the lesson seemed boring and irrelevant? Did a talkative participant dominate the discussion and prevent others from sharing their ideas and questions?

On the other hand, has God ever used a dynamic Bible lesson to deepen your faith and stir you to action? The last chapter of Luke's Gospel tells about a small group gathering that could be considered the best Bible study ever.

The Best Teacher

Jesus taught the class that day. During the prior three years, Jesus' disciples heard his Sermon on the Mount, his Sermon on the Bread of Life, and his other memorable lessons and parables. They saw how he responded to questions, criticisms, and interruptions.

And the Master Teacher's course of study didn't finish when he died. His students despaired when they saw Jesus nailed to a cross; but after he rose from the dead, he rejoined them for 40 more days of follow-up teaching sessions (see Acts 1:3).

What an effective instructor Jesus was! "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Every Bible teacher's goal should be the same. Whenever we teach or preach, we should ask the Lord to open the minds of our listeners so they can understand and apply the Scriptures.

The Best Subject

In this unique Bible lesson, Jesus gave his disciples a comprehensive overview of the Old Testament. The Scriptures, he explained, point to Christ himself. "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms'" (v. 44). This class session must have been lengthy, but it certainly wasn't boring.

Can you imagine hearing Jesus explain how the creation in Genesis, the Passover in Exodus, and the priesthood and sacrifices in Leviticus all pointed to him? Wouldn't you love to hear Jesus explain how he fulfilled the prophecies written by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest of the prophets? "This is what is written," Jesus told them, summing up the gospel much like the apostle Paul did in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. "The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day" (Luke 24:46).

Today's Bible teachers should pursue the same goal: To help our students discover how the Scriptures' sacred pages point to Christ and his saving work.

The Best Outcome

The measure of a great Bible class is not merely what happens when students gather, but what happens afterward. Will the lessons they learned change their behavior? Will they apply God's Word and share it with others?

Jesus' lesson culminated with a personal challenge. He called the disciples to action by saying, "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (vv. 47-48).

His followers left that incredible Bible class with a renewed sense of purpose, a life-changing message to preach, and hearts overflowing with fearless, sacrificial love. In the book of Acts, Jesus' students became teachers themselves. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they turned the world upside down.

May God use our own Bible studies to produce the same kind of results!

Personal Challenge: Do you currently lead or participate in a Bible class or small group? If not, why not? If so, ask the Lord to infuse the group with purpose and power as you study together and apply his Word in your lives.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The disciples were surprised when Jesus suddenly and unexpectedly appeared among them. Have you ever had a surprise visit from someone that was totally unexpected?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 24:36-53**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Luke says the disciples were “startled and frightened” (24:37) when Jesus suddenly appeared before them.
 - Why do you suppose they were so startled and thought they saw a ghost?
3. Upon appearing to the disciples, Jesus asked, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?” (24:38)
 - Why are many people today “troubled” and beset with “doubts” about Jesus?
 - How would you respond to someone with troubles and doubts about Jesus?
4. Jesus had to prove to the disciples (24:39-41) that he had risen from the dead, though he had told them he would rise again (see Matt. 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, 26:31-32).
 - In the timeline of Jesus’ life, when did he tell them he would rise again?
 - Why do you think the disciples so quickly and easily forgot about Jesus’ words?
 - What did Luke mean when he wrote, “they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement” (24:41)?
5. To thoroughly convince the disciples of his resurrection, Jesus “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” and taught them from “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (24:44-46).
 - What does this tell us about the nature and purpose of Scripture?
 - What does this tell us about our need to study all of the Bible?
6. As Jesus prepared to depart from the disciples, he promised them the Holy Spirit, said “You are witnesses of these things,” then sent them out to the world (see Acts 1:8).
 - What does the Holy Spirit mean for our lives today?
 - What is our obligation as Jesus’ disciples?
 - Why do you think the disciples experienced “great joy” and continued “praising God” (24:51-53) after Jesus’ departure into heaven? What did Jesus’ departure mean for them?
7. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”

For Next Week: This week’s lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional “1717: Your Word Is Truth” studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.