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JUDGE  
AND KING

**A GUIDE TO STUDYING  
LUKE'S GOSPEL**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this Guide to studying Luke's gospel! Studying the Bible can be very exciting, and I hope you will find this is so as you work through Luke. But studying the Bible is also a very serious business, since it is about discovering what the living God has to say to us.

## THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

All Bible study is valuable, but there are three major reasons why studying a gospel, and Luke's in particular, is specially important:

1. **The gospels are the place where we come face-to-face with Jesus of Nazareth.** Jesus Christ is the person on whom Christianity centres and the person whom Christians love and worship, so he is the person we want to get to know better. But the place where we discover the real Jesus is the gospels.
2. **The gospels are the climax to the whole Bible story.** The Bible is the account of God's plan of salvation, and the highlight and key to everything that God is doing is recorded in the gospels. All the threads of God's plan come together in Jesus. So getting to know one of the gospels is an excellent way to see how all the parts of the Bible fit together, and so begin to understand the message of the whole Bible.
3. **Luke's gospel will help us become more certain of the truth of the Christian message.** In his preface (1:1-4) Luke tells us that he has carefully researched everything to do with Jesus, and that he has set out to write a carefully structured account of how God has fulfilled His purposes. His intention is to help Theophilus, his original reader, to become more certain of the truths of Christianity. By studying Luke, we too can benefit from his work and grow in our confidence of what God has done through Jesus.

Rather than examining Luke's themes, structure and style now, we'll work at discovering them for ourselves in the course of these studies. We have a thrilling task ahead of us!

## AIM OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

This Guide has two main aims:

- **The particular aim of this Guide is to help us discover Luke's *overall message*.** Luke explicitly said (1:3) that he was writing an orderly (i.e. well-structured) account of Jesus, so we must try to discover what his overall message is. If we look at the individual parts of Luke but do not discover how they all fit together, then we may have learnt a lot, but we'll have missed the heart of Luke's gospel. In fact, part of the adventure of studying Luke is seeing Luke's main interests emerging and discovering why they are so important.
- **The aim of all Bible study is that our lives should be transformed by what God is saying through His Word.** We are not just engaged in an academic exercise. However, *we need to apply the book's main message*, since this is what Luke was aiming to communicate. It will take us a few studies to discover what this is, so the practical implications of our studies will build up gradually, but this is no bad thing. Realistically, we cannot absorb genuine applications frequently. If the whole of Luke leads to two or three genuine, long-lasting changes in our lives, this is far better than one application a week that is forgotten by the next week.

## WHAT IS IN THIS STUDY GUIDE

This Guide divides the gospel of Luke up into nineteen studies. Because Luke is a long book, some of the studies are quite long, but don't be put off. You'll soon learn to tackle longer passages than you might have been used to, and it's exciting to work through a book relatively fast, getting a grasp of the author's overall argument. If possible, resist the temptation to study only a part of the passage, or to divide each study up further. It makes it hard to pick up Luke's main message if we leave out large portions of what he is saying or go through it too slowly.

Each of the studies in this Guide has various elements, designed to help us with different aspects of studying a great book like Luke. These include:

- **Summaries, Introductions and Conclusions.** These play an important part in helping us to understand Luke's overall message (i.e. his 'Big Picture'), by highlighting the main points in the passage we are studying and showing how they fit in with the rest of the gospel.
- **Questions.** These are the heart of the study, and they should give us a good grasp of the passage. Most of the questions have two or three closely related parts. As a general rule the first one or two parts help us discover what the passage says, and the following one or two parts are designed to help us think through what we have discovered, so that we see the significance of what is being said. There are also a few questions marked *optional*. These are usually somewhat harder and not absolutely essential, but answering them will give us deeper insight into what God is saying in the passage.
- **Notes, Tips and Articles.** These offer explanations of difficult points, help us with handling the Bible correctly, and examine various issues in more depth than is possible during the course of the study.

## USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

This Guide is intended to be used both in group studies and by individuals, but whichever of these you are planning on, the key to studying the Bible is *individual study*. The best way to have really good group Bible studies is for every member of the group to have worked through the passage beforehand. Group sessions can then be times when you discuss the passage at a deeper level.

Individual Bible study does involve work, but it is the most effective way to hear the living God speak through His Word, and discovering what God is saying is worth a bit of effort! This Guide has been designed to help you make the most of your individual study of Luke's gospel. Here are two suggestions for when to do this study:

- Some people find it best to set aside an hour or so, once a week, to work through the entire study. If this is for you, try to do it a couple of days before your group study, if you have one, so that you have a chance to digest what you have discovered.
- Other people find that they prefer fifteen minutes each day in their personal 'quiet' times with God. If this is what suits you best, then a good way to study Luke is to do two or three questions from this Guide each day of the week. This will help you keep the sweep of Luke's message in mind, and so is probably better than breaking up each passage into smaller sections.

Study the Bible whichever way suits you best, but remember: Satan will try his hardest to distract you so that you don't feel like studying what God has said. You will just have to decide on a time and then get down to it, whatever you feel like doing instead!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

The Bible is God's Word, and therefore it deserves to be studied conscientiously and with all the intellectual ability we have. Here are some suggestions to help us do this.

- **Pray that God will help you understand the passage.** God wrote it and He will help us understand it if we ask.
- **Read the passage through several times** before you begin to look at any part of it. Use a good modern translation, like the New International Version (NIV) or the Revised Standard Version (RSV). Older

versions like the Authorised Version (King James Version) can make Bible study more difficult than it need be, while paraphrases like the Living Bible are not really accurate enough for serious study. This Guide is based on the NIV, so you may find it more convenient to use this yourself.

- **Answer the questions in the Guide *thoughtfully*.** Good Bible study is not easy, but it can be quite electrifying when we discover what the living God is saying. This Guide aims to help us do the sort of serious study we need to do in order to get to the heart of Luke, but there is no substitute for *thinking*. With many of the questions in this Guide you'll find that thinking about what they are driving at will show you that there is more to the passage than you first thought. Do resist the temptation to stop working on a question as soon as you have *an* answer: the aim is to discover *all* that the passage has to say about the subject. The object of these studies is not to answer the questions in the Guide, but to understand the Bible!
- **Keep looking at the text of the passage.** It is the *Bible* that is God's Word, and this Guide is designed to be a help in understanding what the *Bible* is saying. So use the questions and notes to help you get into the Bible, rather than trying to answer them from what you already know.
- **Write down your answers.** This is an excellent way to help us think clearly and accurately about the issue we are examining. We're all tempted to stop when we've got a vague idea of the answer, but we miss out on a lot that the Bible is saying if we do this.
- **Obey what God is saying.** When we have discovered what God is saying in His Word we must change our thoughts and lives in response. If God has said something we cannot ignore it!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS

Leading a group Bible study is an important responsibility; here are some thoughts to help you as you try to honour God by doing a good job. A good Bible study consists of:

1. **The leader understanding the Bible passage well.**
2. **The leader helping the other members understand the passage well.**
3. **Everyone responding obediently to what God is saying in His Word.**

Your work as leader is done in two parts:

### ***Before the Study***

There are four things you can do before the study to help it go well:

1. **Pray.** Pray that God will help you understand the passage, that He will help others to understand it as well, that the discussion will be constructive and that people's lives will be changed as a result of their study.
2. **Understand the passage yourself.** The better you grasp what Luke is saying the better you will be able to help others grasp it. But understanding the passage is not the same as having a lot of information about it. This Guide is designed to help you understand the passage, so use it by working through it fairly thoroughly. But you will need to *think* about the passage; this is the only way to discover what the Bible is saying. It will be a help if you can do your study a few days before the group meets, so that you have time to 'digest' your ideas.
3. **Prepare the questions you are going to use to lead the discussion.** The questions in this Guide are designed to be used as they stand, but you may wish to 'fine-tune' them to suit your group. You will need to decide how long to spend on each topic. You may also find it useful to prepare supplementary questions to help the members of the group see what lies behind the questions in this Guide, or to lead up to the questions in this Guide. Sometimes you may find it a help to select some parts of the study to focus on particularly, rather than doing the whole study in the same depth, but it is probably worth covering everything that this Guide does, even if some parts are done relatively quickly.
4. **Encourage others to prepare the passage.** One of the most important keys to making a group Bible study go well is for everybody to have thought about the passage before they come. If they do this it will revolutionise your group Bible studies by making the discussions Bible-centred and lively. This also makes your job as leader much easier, since all you have to do is chair a discussion of informed people. So anything you can do to encourage the other members to prepare will be very worthwhile.

## ***During the Study***

Every Bible study group is different, but here are a few thoughts which might help yours:

- **Pray before you start studying**, ask God to help you understand what He wrote.
- **Read the passage**. This is essential if the members of your group have not prepared their study. However, even if they have prepared you may still wish to read the passage, to refresh everybody's memory of what is in it.
- **Encourage discussion**. This is the *key* part of your job in the study. Very often, the first answer given to a question will not fully bring out all the issues, and it may even be wrong. Also, just because one person has the right answer doesn't mean that everyone else sees it. Even the person who produced the right answer may not understand why it is right – it may just have been a good guess. Your job is to encourage discussion:
  - in order to help everyone get to grips with the text in all its profoundness,
  - in order to help everyone see *what* the right interpretation of it is, and
  - in order to help everyone see *why* this interpretation is right.

Questions that may help with this include: 'what does everyone else think?', 'where in the passage do you get that from?', 'X, explain how you got to that' and 'do the rest of you agree with X?'

- **Ask questions, don't give answers**. The art of leading a good study is to get others to see the answer for themselves from the passage, rather than telling them the answer. After you ask a question, don't worry if there is silence; people need to think about how to answer. If the silence goes on for too long, don't answer your own question, rephrase your question or ask a 'supplementary' question to give people a hint.
- **Avoid red herrings**. It is *very* easy to get distracted from the main study. At the time, 'red herrings' can appear interesting or valuable, but they almost always lead you away from examining what God has said in the passage you are studying. Stick to the passage you are studying unless the Guide gives a cross-reference, and even then remember that you are studying Luke, not the cross-reference! Suggest that discussions that are 'interesting', but not about the passage, be continued *after* the study is over.
- **Respond to what God is saying in His Word by praying about what it says**. If we have discovered more about what God has revealed, then we should thank Him for speaking to us, thank Him for what we have discovered and pray through the implications it will have for us. Some groups combine their Bible studies with times of prayer for more general issues and with times of singing. If your group is one of these, then the best time to do these is *after* the study, since all prayer and worship should be a *response* to God and what He has revealed of Himself.