

The Empty Room Class

A new class in an empty room
that we hope won't be empty for long!
Sundays 9:50 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall
Featuring Coffee & Conversation
Downtown First UMC • Lexington, KY



Week 2

Are you new to Lexington?

To Christian faith?

To Downtown First UMC?

Do you want a safe place to explore
questions or doubts about Christianity?

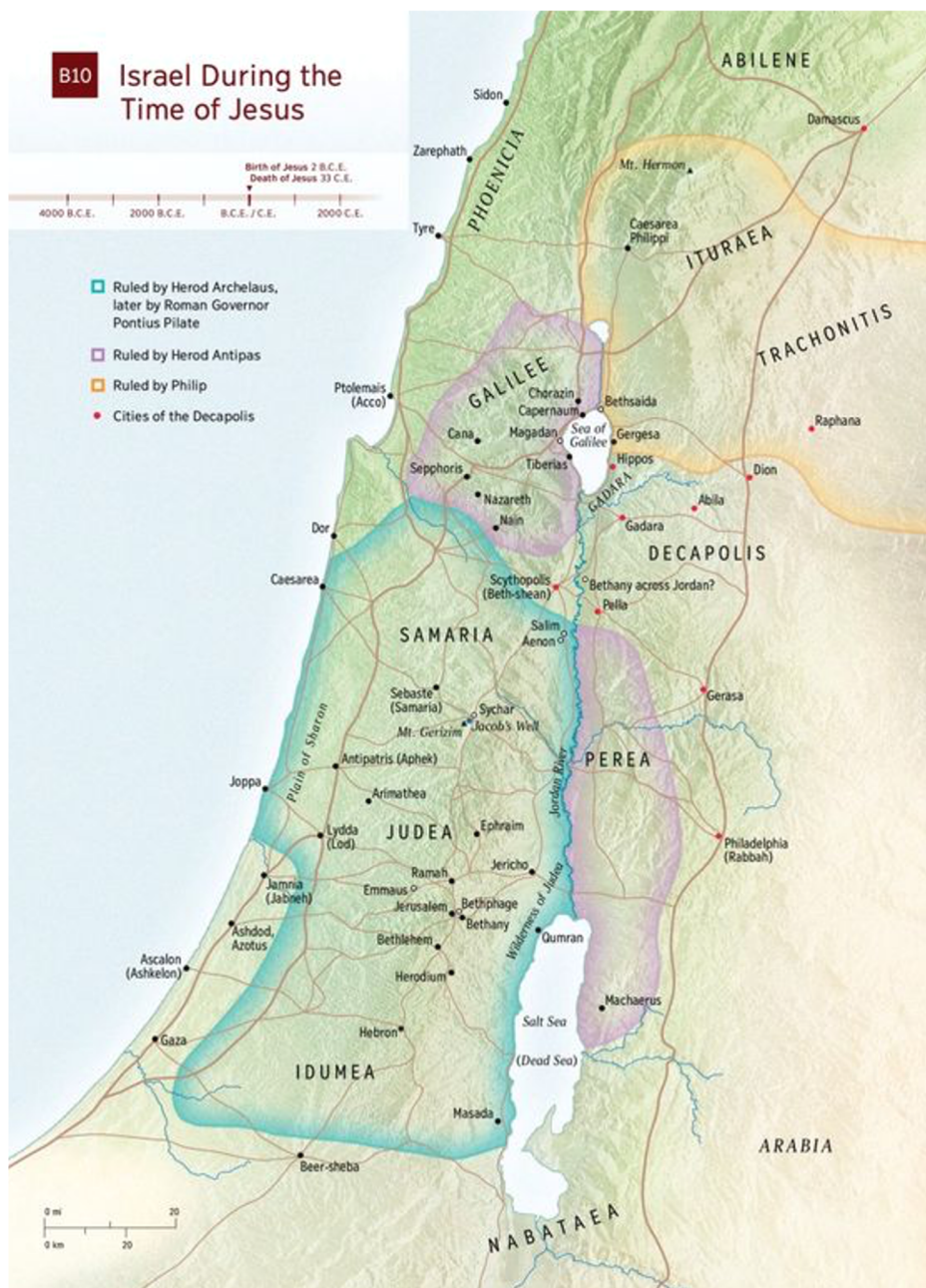
Do you want to grow in your faith and friendships?

Then **The Empty Room Class** is for YOU!

B10 Israel During the Time of Jesus



- Ruled by Herod Archelaus, later by Roman Governor Pontius Pilate
- Ruled by Herod Antipas
- Ruled by Philip
- Cities of the Decapolis



The Empty Room Class

Close Encounters of the Christ Kind in the Gospel of Luke - Part Two

*Share this booklet, or a link to it at www.doncummings.com,
with a friend and invite them to join us in The Empty Room!*

Class Leaders – Don & Bonnie Cummings
Study guides for this series are prepared by Don Cummings

Introduction to the Geography of the Gospel of Luke

The land of Israel is often called the Fifth Gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all unfold their story of Jesus on the canvas of the land of Israel, so understanding the Gospel story is helped when attention is given to the geography of where it took place.

The land is also a valuable part of understanding the Bible because it is the common ground where Old Testament and New Testament meet. The story of Jesus did not happen in a vacuum. Every aspect of what we know of Jesus' life and ministry is connected to events in the Old Testament that happened before he was born, and the location of the events in his life clearly connect him to God's past activity in Israel. Matthew and Luke give particular attention to these parallel connections, though each in a different way.

Once a person travels on a pilgrimage to Israel they frequently say, "I'll never read the Bible the same way again," or "It all seems so much more real now that I have seen where the story took place."

Place is important in Luke’s Gospel. The life of Jesus begins in Jerusalem with his birth in nearby Bethlehem and his dedication six weeks later in the temple in Jerusalem. His life ends in Jerusalem with the events of his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Between these beginning and ending points, Luke places the bulk of Jesus’ public ministry either in the northern region of Galilee, or on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem for the final week of his passion. Throughout Luke’s Gospel are reports of many conversations Jesus had, or that were had about him. This lesson provides an approach to studying these conversations from a kind of journalistic perspective using the 5 W’s and encourages their use not as a dispassionate reporter, but more as an engaged eyewitness to what Luke describes.



Galilean Ministry of Jesus

About Galilee

One of the three provinces of ancient Palestine, Galilee included the whole northern section of the country, the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee forming the Eastern border. Lower Galilee, with great plain and hill country running down into the Jordan, was “one of the richest and most beautiful sections of Palestine,” explains [Smith's Bible Dictionary](#) Upper Galilee, known biblically as “Galilee of the Gentiles,” was mountainous.

Galilee, where Jesus first called his disciples, is the location of many events recorded in the first three Gospels. “The apostles were all Galileans by either birth or residence,” records [Smith's Bible Dictionary](#). Much of Jesus’ public ministry occurred there, including nineteen of Jesus’ thirty-two parables, and twenty-five of Jesus’ thirty-three miracles, according to [Easton's Bible Dictionary](#). The first recorded miracle was when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana in [John 2:1-11](#). Biblical scenes such as the Sermon on the Mount and the Transfiguration also occurred there.

“The entire province is encircled with a halo of holy associations,” [wrote Carl Hoffman](#), “connected with the life, works and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.” [Matthew 4:23-25](#) reads, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing disease and sickness among the people ...Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.”

(The above material is from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-history-of-galilee-and-why-was-it-important-to-jesus.html>)

There was both a historical and a strategic reason for Jesus to begin his ministry in the Galilee. Historically, Jesus grew up in Nazareth, the second largest town in Galilee and a natural place to begin his public ministry. Strategically, two international trade routes passed through or by Galilee bringing many people to hear Jesus’ preaching. As they learned about him, they carried far and wide news of what he was doing and his popularity and following quickly grew. In his series *That the World May Know*, Ray Vander Laan underscores the importance of Jesus’ ministry at a time and place that was the crossroads of the ancient world, a geographic location that compounded the spread of communication.

The Panoramic View
An Outline of the Gospel of Luke
by Fred B. Craddock

Preface

Luke 1:1 - 4

Part One: Infancy and Childhood Narratives

Luke 1:5 – 2:52

Part Two: Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus

Luke 3:1 - 4:13

Part Three: The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee

Luke 4:14 – 9:50

Part Four: The Journey to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51 – 19:28

Part Five: The Ministry in Jerusalem

Luke 19:29 – 21:38

Part Six: The Passion Narrative

Luke 22:1 – 23:56

Part Seven: The Resurrection Narrative

Luke 24:1 – 53

The Closer View

Close Encounters of the Christ Kind
During Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

Luke 4:14 – 9:50

In Luke 4:14 – 9:50 Luke tells us about the public ministry of Jesus in the northern province of Galilee. During this

time Jesus used the city of Capernaum as a base of operations. Why do you think he began his ministry in Galilee and Capernaum instead of Judea and Jerusalem?

Luke presents seven kinds of stories about Jesus in this section of the gospel.

1) Healing Stories

- a) Jesus heals Peter's mother and many others (4:38-40)
- b) Jesus heals a man with leprosy (5:12-16)
- c) Jesus heals a paralyzed man (5:17-26)
- d) Jesus heals many people as his following grows (6:17-19)
- e) Jesus is amazed by the faith of a Roman centurion in Capernaum (7:1-10)
- f) Jesus raises the son of a widow in Nain (7:11-17)
- g) Jesus heals a dead girl and a sick woman (8:40-56)

2) Exorcism Stories

- h) Jesus casts out a demon at the synagogue in Capernaum (4:31-37)
- i) Jesus casts out many other demons who knew he was the Messiah (4:41)
- j) Jesus heals a demon-possessed man (8:26-39)
- k) Jesus heals a boy with an evil spirit (9:37-45)

3) Identity of Jesus Stories

- l) Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth (4:16-30)
- m) Jesus reveals why he was sent (4:42-44)
- n) John the Baptist wonders if Jesus is the Messiah (7:18-23)
- o) A sinful woman anoints Jesus in the home of Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50)
- p) Peter confesses faith in Jesus as the Christ (9:18-27)
- q) Jesus is transfigured (9:28-36)
- r) The metaphor of a lamp on a stand (8:16-18)

s) Jesus gives a new definition to family (8:19-21)

4) Calling Stories

t) Jesus calls the first disciples (5:1-11)

u) Jesus Calls Matthew (5:27-32)

v) Jesus chooses the twelve (6:12-16)

5) Teaching Stories

w) Jesus discusses fasting (5:33-39)

x) Jesus discusses the Sabbath (6:1-5)

y) Jesus gives the beatitudes (6:20-49)

6) Sending Stories

z) He sends out the twelve (9:1-9)

aa) The parable of the sower (8:1-15)

7) Miracle Stories

bb) Jesus calms the storm (8:22-25)

cc) He feeds five thousand (9:10-17)

A Close Encounter of the Christ Kind Peter confesses faith in Jesus as the Christ (Luke 9:18-27 NLT)

The church interprets Scripture by *listening to the texts*.

Read Scripture aloud to your own ear or listen to a free audio version of the Bible available at

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/?recording=niv-mclean>.

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹⁸ One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him, and he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

¹⁹ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.”

²⁰ Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah^[a] sent from God!”

Jesus Predicts His Death

²¹ Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was. ²² “The Son of Man^[b] must suffer many terrible things,” he said. “He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.”

²³ Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. ²⁵ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? ²⁶ If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. ²⁷ I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God.”

Questions to Ask of the Text

The church interprets Scripture by *seriously interrogating the texts.*

The Five W's of Bible Study

Luke 9:8-27 is an Identity of Jesus Story. Spend fifteen minutes learning as much about it as you can by answering the journalistic “Five W’s”.

1. **Who** are the persons in this story. Identify everyone.
2. **What** happened in this story? List all the significant events such as the sequence in which things happened, what was said by whom, what issue was being addressed, how did the main characters react to what happened, etc.
3. **Where** did this story or event take place? Note every detail Luke gives us about that place. Is the place significant to the event of the story?
4. **When** did this story take place? How does Luke relate its place in time historically or in relation to other things that were happening in Jesus’ public ministry or the territory he was in?
5. **Why** did this event happen? Why is this story important? Why did Luke include it in his account of Jesus’ ministry?

Application Question: What did you learn about the identity of Jesus from this story in Luke's Gospel? List every observation you made about who Jesus was. How do these insights affect what you think and how you feel about Jesus?

Insights from Commentaries

William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible: Luke*

THE GREAT DISCOVERY ([Luke 9:18-22](#))

This is one of the most crucial moments in the life of Jesus. He asked this question when he was already turning his face to go to Jerusalem ([Luke 9:51](#)). He well knew what awaited him there, and the answer to his question was of supreme importance. He knew that he was going to a Cross to die; he wanted to know before he went, if there was anyone who had really discovered who he was. . . . How Jesus' heart must have lifted when Peter's sudden discovery rushed to his lips-- "You are the anointed one of God!" When Jesus heard that, he knew he had not failed.

Not only had the Twelve to discover the fact; they had also to discover what the fact meant. They had grown up against a background of thought which expected from God a conquering king who would lead them to world dominion. Peter's eyes would blaze with excitement when he said this. But Jesus had to teach them that God's anointed one had come to die upon a Cross. He had to take their ideas of God and of God's purposes and turn them upside down; and from this time that is what he set himself to do. They had discovered who he was; now they had to learn what that discovery meant.

There are two great general truths in this passage.

(i) Jesus began by asking what men were saying about him; and then, suddenly, he flashes the question at the Twelve, "Who do you say that

I am?" It is never enough to know what other people have said about Jesus. . . . Jesus must always be our own personal discovery. Our religion can never be a carried tale. To every man Jesus comes asking, not, "Can you tell me what others have said and written about me?" but, "Who do you say that I am?" . . . **Christianity does not mean reciting a creed; it means knowing a person.**

(ii) c said, "I must go to Jerusalem and die." . . . Jesus knew he had a destiny to fulfil. God's will was his will. He had no other object but to do upon earth what God had sent him to do. The Christian, like his Lord, is a man under orders.

THE CONDITIONS OF SERVICE ([Luke 9:23-27](#))

Here Jesus lays down the conditions of service for those who would follow him.

- (i) A man must deny himself.
- (ii) A man must take up his cross.
- (iii) A man must spend his life, not hoard it.
- (iv) Loyalty to Jesus will have its reward, and disloyalty its punishment.
- (v) In the last verse of this passage Jesus says that some standing there will see the kingdom of God before they die.

Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*

When Jesus turns the question of who he is to the disciples, Peter's answer is, in effect, "You are not the forerunner of the Messiah; you *are* the Messiah [Christ]." The confession differs among the Evangelists. Luke's "The Christ of God" is more than a simple elaboration on Mark's "You are the Christ"; the Christ is from God, just as the Holy Spirit is from God. Luke reminds us often that from Adam to eschaton, the story is God's, the purpose is God's, the action is God's. Jesus is, therefore, the Christ of God (Lu. 2:26; 23:35; Acts 4:26) as the apostles were to preach after Pentecost, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36) (pp. 127-128).

A way of life that could be called cross bearing would have to involve denial of self in service to God. A cross is not sought or pursued, but it was and still is true that following Jesus in the service of God, which

translates into meeting human needs, is on a path along which there are crosses, prices to be paid, pain and hurt to be accepted. We are not speaking of death wish here but obedience to the reign of God. For a definition of the reign of God one looks to the ministry of Jesus.

. . . The major part of this unit consists of three parallel sayings, all beginning in the same way (vv. 24-26) and brought together here because they inform cross-bearing discipleship. Each of these sayings has a proverb quality about it and therefore contains a kind of truth drawn from experience and observation that can circulate in any culture as wisdom. Verse 24 carries a general truth: self-centeredness is finally counter-productive and destructive, severing one from the resources that give life. Verse 25 has been and is painfully confirmed in every tragic case of unrestrained greed, regardless of whether it burns in young ambition soon to discover the magnificence of life's promise lost in the poverty of its achievement or in splendid retirement going from resort to resort. Verse 26 reminds us of what we all know very well: the one of whom you are ashamed today may be your judge tomorrow. This is but a variation on the ancient proverb: Whatever you sow you will reap. Yet all these sayings in their present context must be interpreted under the pressure of Jesus' own passion and call to discipleship. (pp. 130-131)

C. S. Lewis

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let's not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (Quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Luke Vol I* pp. 338-339)

Sources:

(All web links are active in the online version of the study guides at www.doncummings.com)

Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible: Luke*, commentary on Luke 9:18-27: Westminster Press, 1956. Find the entire Daily Study Bible series here: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb.html>

Craddock, Fred B., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Luke*, John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990

Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Luke Volume One*, Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 1998

Also find William Barclay's complete set of *The Daily Study Bible* commentaries for free online reading at

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb.html>

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Ray Vander Laan video course *That the World May Know*
<https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/>

From Todd Nelson's blog at <https://jtoddnelson.com/2021/09/09/day-21-of-21/>

- [Vanderbilt](#) has a website devoted to the lectionary. It will give you the weekly readings and some other resources.
- The [Upper Room](#) is a daily devotional from the United Methodist Church and has been a regular read for many.
- [Text Week](#) is a great resource based on the lectionary with devotional guides, sermons, and other study resources.
- [Max Lucado](#) is one of my favorite authors and he does a good job with a daily devotional that can be sent directly to your email every morning.

See www.doncummings.com for copies of the weekly study guide for this class.

How to Contact Our Class Leader
Questions and suggestions are welcome

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Approaching the Bible as Story

There are many ways to approach the Bible: as devotional literature, as history, as a source of religious authority, as a book of answers for living, as the Word of God, etc. The approach we will take in this presentation is to view the Bible primarily as story. By this I mean that we will look at the Bible as a book that contains many individual stories that, taken together, tell us a larger story, a cohesive narrative. It is not just any story, but God's story about us. It explains who God made us to be, what happened to us, and what God has done to change what happened to us.

We begin by acknowledging that many people do not know what to do with the biblical story because they don't understand what the big story is about. The church is partly to blame for this lack of understanding because it teaches the Bible mostly in pieces and parts. This approach is simply the nature of the beast. We go to Sunday school, attend worship, and read our Bibles from time to time. Through this process of long-term exposure, we become familiar with certain biblical stories. Most people have at least a passing acquaintance with the stories about Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark, the Exodus, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, the Good Samaritan, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, among others.

In fact, we share a common memory of a lot of stories that come from the Bible, but for most people these appear to be a collection of random tales from an antiquated text. Many do not know if there is a relationship between the story of the Good Samaritan and the Divided Kingdom of Israel. Nor have many seen whether there is a cause and effect between Genesis 3 and the crucifixion of Jesus. Neither do they have a clear idea about where the biblical story begins and where it ends, much less of the significant events in between. While the church can be credited for its longstanding commitment to Christian education, it rarely offers people an opportunity in one setting to see how all the individual stories of the Bible fit together, or if they even do. The episodic presentation of the Bible as a collection of short stories often fails to impress upon

people whether there is a common thread that ties them all together as part of a whole.

Is there a common theme that carries through the stories of the Bible? Is it possible to step out of the trees and see the panoramic landscape of the forest—the whole picture of the biblical story? In the end, do all the pieces and parts make sense? Exploring these questions is the focus of this book. It will try to answer in a general sense the questions “What is the story of the Bible?” and “What does it mean?”

(From the Introduction to *The Whole Story of the Bible* by Don Cummings—a self-published book soon to be available at www.doncummings.com in a digital flip book version).

Some Ways to Study the Bible

Many people diligently follow the practice of reading the Bible every day. There are many plans to follow. Some lead the reader through a particular book within a specific time frame. Others provide a plan to read through the entire Bible in a year. Some may follow a particular theme through the Scripture.

The value of such a reading plan and discipline is that it keeps the reader in continuous connection with the alternate vision for humanity that God reveals through Scripture. That the world is in terrible disarray is undeniable. Scripture provides incomparable insights into how it got that way, what God is doing about it, and how we can join God in his ongoing work to redeem and reconcile the human family to himself and each other.

The wisdom of Israel realized centuries ago “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7), and “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). The more word of God we have in our hearts and minds, the stronger will be our defense against the world’s destructive systems, and the greater influence for good we can be through our daily lives and activities. For this reason, the world needs us to study the Bible!