

LUKE 19-24

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THE END OF THE BEGINNING



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES

THE END OF THE BEGINNING



If you want to know and appreciate Jesus more—both who he is and what he has accomplished—Luke is the Gospel author for you. He has done the hard work of researching the history and compiling it into an “orderly account”, structuring the narrative to give us clear access to the truth of Jesus and insights into its profound significance.

In this final of four volumes, which together cover the whole of Luke, pastor and teacher Des Smith walks us through chapters 19 to 24. In the dramatic conclusion to the greatest story ever told, the king of God’s kingdom arrives in Jerusalem to great fanfare—only to be arrested, tried and executed. But this is not the end of the story ...

This is an ideal guide for individual Bible study or for use in small groups.

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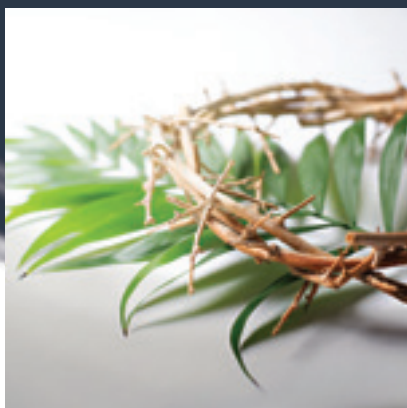
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DES SMITH

 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

The End of the Beginning

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain four main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text and answering the questions about the Bible passage.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learned.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.
- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place

comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.

- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

We quote from and refer to the English Standard Version, which we recommend. There should not generally be any problems, however, if you are using a different translation (though it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion).

» STUDY 1

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (PART 1)

[LUKE 19:45–20:19]

Corruption in the temple

SINCE LUKE 9:51, JESUS HAS BEEN on a mission-defining journey: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem”. As he has headed there, it’s become clear he won’t be welcomed when he arrives. Israel’s leaders have become hostile to him, and Jesus has predicted they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be killed (18:31–33).

Jerusalem, the centre of Israel’s life, has become corrupt. So when Jesus finally arrives in the city, where does he go first? The temple, the core of Jerusalem. If this were a movie about a disaster at a nuclear reactor, this is the moment where, right at the end, the hero enters its core. And what does he find? It’s in meltdown. So, what will the hero do? Shut it down.

Read Luke 19:45–48.

1. What are people doing in the temple courts?

2. How does Jesus react? Why do you think he reacts this way (see Isa 56:6–8; Jer 7:9–11)?

3. From then on, what does Jesus do every day in the temple? How do Israel's leaders react? How do the people react?

From house of prayer to den of robbers

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE ON TWO separate occasions. The first, recorded in John 2, occurs early in his public ministry. But it seems not to have had a lasting effect, and he returns to the temple some years later to find that it has once again become “a den of robbers”.

People are trading in the temple courts, and Jesus condemns them. Visitors to the temple—many of whom

would have travelled long distances to be in the city for Passover—were required to offer animals and other items for sacrifices and to pay a tribute in the currency used in the temple (though most would have travelled with Roman coins). With so many visiting Jerusalem for Passover, the temple was a lucrative place to establish a profitable business—which may well have been a way of defrauding

wearily or poor pilgrims. The place that is meant to be “a house of prayer” has become a place of commerce. It has become corrupt.

What’s more, it seems likely that these corrupt business practices were excluding Gentiles from the temple. Isaiah 56, quoted here by Jesus, speaks of “foreigners who join themselves to the LORD”. God will bring these Gentiles to his “holy mountain”, where he will “make them joyful in my house of prayer”. The Lord declares: “their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7). In Jesus’ day, the

outer court of the temple was the only part that Gentiles were permitted to enter. This is most likely where the selling was taking place. Jesus’ objection, therefore, is not just that the temple has been corrupted by commerce; it’s also that this practice is happening in a way that excludes “foreigners”, non-Jews, from their one opportunity to enter the temple of the Lord.

So, from then on Jesus spends every day teaching in the temple. The people hang on his words. But the Jewish leaders, fearful of Jesus’ popularity and authority, plot to kill him. Luke 20 is all about their attempts to trap Jesus so they can do this.

Read Luke 20:1–8.

4. What do Israel’s leaders ask Jesus (vv 1–2)?

5. How does Jesus respond (vv 3–8)?

6. How does Jesus' response neutralize the leaders' attack?

7. What does Jesus' response teach us about how we may sometimes respond to questions which are not asked in good faith?

Questioning Jesus' authority

THE FIRST ATTACK ISRAEL'S LEADERS make against Jesus is about authority: by what right does he teach in the temple—not to mention everything else he's been doing, including cleansing it (vv 1–2)? But Jesus refuses to answer the question. Instead, he asks them a question of his own: by what authority did John the Baptist do his ministry (vv 3–4)? This is not just Jesus dodging the issue; it's a legitimate question. If Israel's leaders can't answer a question about John's authority—if they can't recognize authority when they see it—then why should Jesus answer their questions about *his* authority? More

than that: if they had recognized John's authority when he came—that he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (1:15)—then they would have known exactly where Jesus, the one John came to prepare the way for, also got his authority. But the leaders refuse to reply: they calculate that, no matter how they respond, their answer will hurt them (vv 5–7). So Jesus refuses to reply too (v8). He has repelled their first attack.

Jesus' response to his opponents shows that there is sometimes a place for declining to directly answer those who ask us tough questions about our faith. If in doubt, we should assume

9. How does the parable end (vv 17–18)?

10. What do you think the parable is saying?

11. What do the leaders seem to think the parable is saying, and how do they respond?

A parable against the leaders

IN JESUS' PARABLE, THE MAN WHO planted the vineyard is God. The vineyard is Israel ('vineyard' is a common Old Testament image for Israel—see, for example, Ps 80:8–11; Isa 5:1–4), while the tenants are Israel's leaders and the servants are the Old Testament prophets God has sent to them for hundreds of years to tell them how to live and to warn them not to disobey God. But the tenants, far from welcoming the servants, beat them and drive them off (see Luke 13:34). So the owner—God—finally sends his son—Jesus—to see if Israel's leaders will

listen to him. They don't. Instead, they plot to kill him and steal the vineyard: once the owner's heir is gone, no-one else will be left to own it. But Israel's leaders won't get away with this. The owner himself will come, kill the tenants, and give their jobs to other people.

Jesus knows the leaders are trying to kill him, but they won't get away with it. They wanted to know by what authority Jesus was operating, and here is the answer: he is God's own son. They are just rebel tenants. And God will punish them for killing him.

-
- What are some ways churches can protect themselves from disobedience, from rejecting the word of God (as the “tenants” did), and from bad leadership?

- What hope is there here for people who have been mistreated by bad leaders?

» **Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God for Jesus, the best leader we could ever have, who laid down his life for us and gave us new life.
- Pray for Christian leaders in your context that they won't try to lead independently of God's authority, but that they will lead under God's authority, humbly obeying him and serving those under their care.