

LUKE 9-13

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THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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DES SMITH

 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

The Road to Jerusalem

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(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 925424 99 7

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

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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 com-

fortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked 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

ON MISSION WITH JESUS

[LUKE 9:51-10:24]

On the road

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST ROAD trips in the world? There's the iconic Route 66, which wends its way from Los Angeles to Chicago; the winding road around Italy's Amalfi Coast; or Australia's very own Great Ocean Road. There's nothing like a great road trip.

As we begin this set of studies in Luke¹, Jesus is about to begin his very own road trip: the trip from Galilee to Jerusalem. Up until now, Jesus has been working and travelling in Galilee, in the north of Israel, teaching about the kingdom of God and healing and driving out demons. But now, in a major turning point in the Gospel, Jesus turns south

and resolutely sets out for Jerusalem.

Why? Jesus is not going on holiday, or looking forward to a bit of sight-seeing and adventure—this will be no Route 66. Rather, Jesus goes to Jerusalem because he is on a mission: to save humanity from its sins.

In this study, we see Jesus at the start of his journey, explaining what his mission will be like. In short, it will be hard: hard for Jesus, hard for those he calls, and hard for those who join him in his mission. But it will also be worthwhile—because when you're on mission with Jesus, your eternal future is secure.

A hard mission for Jesus

JESUS' MISSION IS HARD FOR HIM. His mission is to go to the cross to die for human sin and be rejected by the very people he's trying to save. This is the journey that Jesus begins in 9:51. But if that mission weren't hard enough in itself, it's compounded by the reception Jesus receives along the way, even in the very first town he tries to visit. Jesus sends his disciples ahead to a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the Samaritans—historical enemies of the Jews—refuse to welcome him because of his destination: Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish society.

James and John are incensed by the Samaritans' reaction, and ask Jesus whether they should call on the Lord to rain down fire on the Samaritans

to destroy them. At face value, their request seems reasonable, or at least understandable: the Samaritans had opposed the Jews for centuries, and now that the Jewish king, Jesus, was finally here, it made sense for him to destroy his enemies (perhaps even using the means by which Elijah had destroyed some Samaritans back in 2 Kings 1—by calling down fire to consume them).

But Jesus refuses James and John's request. In fact, he rebukes them for it. This is not the time for fire to be called down on people, even Israel's historic enemies. In fact, Jesus will go on to be kind to Samaritans, both in parables (10:25-37) and in person (17:16). Rather, the time now is for the journey of salvation to continue, and Jesus will not be distracted from it.

Read Luke 9:57-62.

5. Jesus has three exchanges with three people about following him (vv 57-58, 59-60, 61-62). What does each person say to Jesus? How does Jesus respond to each of them?

6. What point(s) do you think Jesus is making in his responses? How do they make you feel?

A hard mission for those Jesus calls

HAVING BEEN REJECTED HIMSELF, Jesus returns to the theme of discipleship (see 6:17-49)—what it will mean to follow him. And the truth is, it will be hard. This is illustrated through three brief encounters with three people.

The first person offers to follow Jesus wherever he goes. But Jesus says, effectively, ‘Be careful what you offer’. Even animals have homes to go to, but the Son of Man, Jesus, has no home. Jesus is implying: ‘following me may lead to homelessness. Are you ready for that?’

The second person is someone Jesus approaches first. He simply asks the man to follow him. The man agrees, but on the condition that he be able to do something first: bury his father, who has presumably died recently. On the face of it, this seems like a very reasonable request. In fact, given that the fifth commandment has told the man to honour his father and mother, burying his father would seem like a non-negotiable. But Jesus’ answer is surprising, and seemingly harsh: “Leave

the dead to bury their own dead”. What does he mean? Clearly, he can’t mean letting the *literal* dead bury their own dead—that would make for a spooky funeral! Rather, what he presumably means is that the *spiritually* dead should be left to bury their own dead—that is, those who don’t yet have kingdom commitments. In short, there are others whom Jesus has not yet called to follow him: let them sort it out.

Now again, this sounds harsh. But all Jesus is saying, in the most vivid way possible, is that there’s nothing more important than following him. Even our ‘best excuses’—and they don’t come much better than burying your own father—are not enough to stop us from following Jesus.

Finally, Jesus meets another would-be disciple who says they will follow Jesus—just let them say goodbye to their family first. But again, Jesus is uncompromising. It’s good to love your family, but it’s bad if your love for them stops you following Jesus.

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10. How does Jesus respond to their joy? What does he say about what should be their real source of joy?
11. Jesus is also filled with joy (v 21). Why?
12. What does Jesus say about how people can know God (vv 21-24)? How should this have an impact on the way that we do mission (see v 2)?

A hard mission for those who join Jesus in it

JESUS' MISSION IS HARD FOR THOSE who join him in it. Jesus' message of total commitment to him and his kingdom is hard to hear, therefore people's reactions to it will differ. Some will be highly receptive, and the disciples are to spend time and effort with them (vv 8-9). But others will hate it, and so the disciples are to turn away from them (vv 10-11). But in all this, the disciples are to remember that, whether they're accepted or rejected,

it's not really them who are being accepted or rejected—it's Jesus, the one in whose name they're coming (v 16). As such, they are to persevere, and to know that despite their hardships their mission will be worthwhile. They know this because, whatever happens while on mission, they know their eternal destiny: they're still going to heaven (v 20). This is the ultimate reward: not 'ministry success', but eternal life with God.

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- Some people will accept our call to follow Jesus, but others will reject it. How long do you think we should persevere with people? When is it right to 'wipe the dust off our feet' with them?

- When you've experienced ministry success, have you been tempted to rejoice in this more than the fact that you're going to heaven? How might you fight this impulse? How might that help you when your ministries seem to fail?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that, whether you succeed or fail in your ministries, your name is written in heaven, and that nothing is more important.
- Pray for God to raise up more workers for his harvest field.

Endnote

- 1 The first part of Luke's Gospel is covered in *Good News of Great Joy*, the first volume in this series (containing nine studies).