

BURNING DESIRE



6 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



OBADIAH/MALACHI

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SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

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Burning Desire

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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 five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what this 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, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- 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 learnt.

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 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.

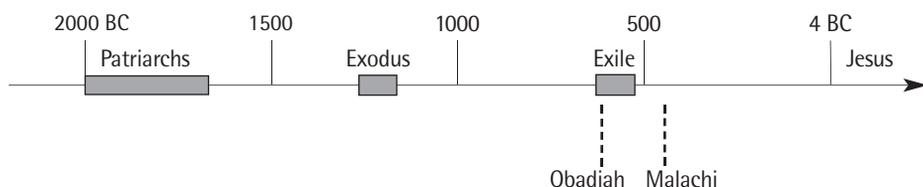
5. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Burning Desire*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

BROTHERS DIVIDED

[OBADIAH]



Success and failure

A FEW YEARS AFTER A WAR has ended, it becomes pretty obvious who won. The victors build great monuments to their achievements to show off their power to all around them. Those who were defeated bear the scars of their ruin, and anyone with their eyes open can observe their failure.

Such was the condition of Jerusalem in the 6th century BC. After 500 years in the land that God had promised to Jacob's descendants, **Israel** was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, and Jerusalem's inhabitants were carried away in chains. In contrast, Babylon was a great city, proud of its Hanging Gardens—one of the seven

Who is Israel?

The united nation of Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon died. The northern kingdom was made up of the majority of the Israelite tribes, and it retained the name 'Israel'. It set up a new capital for itself in Samaria and was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, remained in Jerusalem and was ►

known as Judah. By the time of Obadiah, the northern kingdom no longer existed, and the term 'Israel' now generally referred to the southern kingdom, Judah.

wonders of the ancient world, and symbolic of Babylon's wealth, significance and power. The city reeked of success, just as Jerusalem reeked of failure.

Obadiah has his vision not long after Judah has been taken into exile. God's people are friendless and desperate. By the rivers of Babylon, they weep. But not everyone is sorry to see the descendants of Jacob weeping in exile: the Edomites, who live in the mountainous countryside to the southeast of Judah, take some pleasure in their downfall.

To find out why, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible and the early promises of God to Abraham and his children.

Work quickly through the following passages and questions. Try not to get distracted by details. If you are in a group, it might be best to split the passages among group members, to save time.

Read Genesis 15.

1. What promises does God give to Abram (Abraham)? When will these promises come to fruition?

Read Genesis 25:19–34.

2. The firstborn son would inherit the largest portion of his father's estate. Given God's promises to Abraham, what does Esau stand to inherit?

3. How does Esau despise his birthright?

Read Numbers 20:14–21.

Having been led out of captivity in Egypt, the Israelites are wandering in the wilderness. This passage provides some background to the kind of relationship that developed between Edom (Esau's descendants) and Israel (Jacob's descendants).

4. How would you describe Israel's request to Edom?

5. How would you describe Edom's reply?

A future inheritance

A BREAKDOWN OF FRIENDSHIP between two brothers over an inheritance had, over time, developed into a stand-off between two nations. By satisfying himself in the here and now, Esau had given up the great promises that God had made to his grandfather, Abraham. As we saw, these promises extended far into the future—he would be given numerous descendants, a land of his own and victory over his enemies. Esau gave up all of this for a bowl of stew

and a hunk of bread. (In Genesis 27, the dying Isaac formally transferred his blessing to Jacob.)

The Edomites proved to have long memories and remained bitter towards the descendants of Jacob, right up to the time they were invaded by Nebuchadnezzar. Unfortunately for Edom, God also remembered the bitter treatment they had given his people, Israel. Obadiah's words of prophecy are directed against this wayward nation.

Read Obadiah.

6. The Edomites seem proud and confident. From verses 1-9, why might they have such confidence?

7. How does Obadiah describe the way the Edomites treated the Israelites when Israel was invaded by the Babylonians (vv. 10-14)?

8. What is to be the fate of Edom?

The sin of Edom

THE EDMITES THOUGHT their city was secure and unconquerable, and that they had powerful allies. On the contrary, their pride was part of their sin, and their ‘wisdom’ was of no consequence. Their pride would deceive them and their allies would be revealed as their enemies.

However, God was primarily judging not their pride, but their brotherly violence. Even back in the days of Moses, as we read in Numbers 20, the Edomites did nothing to help their relatives in their hour of need. They sent an army to chase them away. In the times of Obadiah, they did even worse. ‘Blood is thicker than water’, but the Edomites spilt that blood. They sided with the pagans against their own brothers, seizing their wealth and cutting down those fleeing the destruction. Edom’s great sin was ignoring his brotherly obligations.

Obadiah’s vision saw Edom’s sin and Edom’s judgement. Yes, it would come, and it would be so terrible that nothing would be left of Edom. God would have his retribution for what had been done to Israel.

The clefts of the rock

Obadiah 3 refers to those who live in “the clefts of the rock”. Many Bibles include a footnote suggesting that this may refer to the city of Sela (known to us today as Petra), which was probably typical of Edomite cities. It was carved into the rock of a cliff face, up in the mountainous areas of Edom. What better place to put a city! How do you lay siege to a city that you can't easily surround or access?

Read Obadiah 15-21.

9. In the judgement of Edom, Obadiah sees a greater judgement. Who is this judgement for, and what will it be like?

10. What future does Obadiah see for Israel?

11. What do these passages tell us about how this future eventuates?

- Luke 2:25, 28-32

- Mark 1:15

- Revelation 11:15-18

The kingdom of God

IN THE JUDGEMENT OF EDOM, Obadiah sees the judgement of all the nations of the world who rise up against God. At the same time, we see God's burning desire for the people of his inheritance. God's holy city will be delivered, and his people will reclaim the Promised Land (the lands of the Philistines, Zarephath, Gilead and the Negeb are found west, north, east and south of the Promised Land, hence they represent the entire land).

Obadiah's message is consistent with the rest of the prophets. The day of the Lord is coming, when God's people will be saved and God's enemies destroyed. When Jesus came to earth, he

announced the coming of the kingdom of God—the same kingdom that Obadiah foresaw. Yet this kingdom was even greater than that which Obadiah prophesied. This kingdom extends beyond any physical borders into the very presence of God. Those who are in Christ inherit the promises of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We inherit eternal life in the presence of God!

However, there are some who say that this future inheritance is of no use to them. Instead of living by faith, they live like Esau, grabbing what they can now—and in the process surrendering their inheritance. What use are such things if their cost is eternal life?

» Implications

- Is there anything you desire so much that you would be tempted to give up your spiritual inheritance to have it now? How can you avoid falling into the trap of Esau?

- Jesus tells us not to worry about what we will eat or wear, but to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. What practical changes do you need to make in your life to do this?

- What message does Obadiah have for those who mock and oppose God's people today?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he will one day bring justice to all the nations by taking his great power and reigning over the world, and destroying those who destroy.
- Pray that you would fear the name of the Lord God Almighty, repenting and believing in the gospel of his Son.

BURNING DESIRE



The smallest charges can be the most explosive. The books of Obadiah and Malachi are among the briefest in the Bible, but their contents are pure dynamite. Both prophets provide us with portraits of a God who can be passionate, weary with displeasure, possessive and angry; a God who can even hate. And yet this same God keeps his promises, does not change, and throws open the windows of heaven to those who turn to him.

In the light of the gospel, **Burning Desire** explores the different fates of the descendants of Jacob and Esau—one of whom will be a Saviour who will rise from the ashes of judgement with 'healing in his wings'.

Burning Desire is an ideal study book for individuals and small groups who want to explore these two marvellous prophetic books.

