

# Burning Desire

**Obadiah and Malachi**



**6 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

# Burning Desire

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**Obadiah/Malachi**

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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?**

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you on a tour through Obadiah and Malachi, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot 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**

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read.

Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with its own symbol:



### **For starters**

Questions to break the ice and get you thinking.



### **Investigate**

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



### **Think it through**

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

## **3. Suggestions for individual study**

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Obadiah and Malachi and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

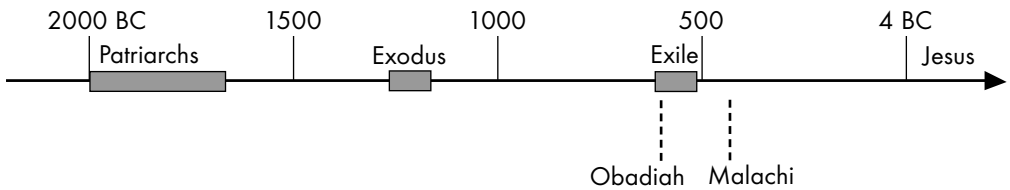
## 4. Suggestions for group study

- 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 threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members 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!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- 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 important sections of text to emphasize, 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.
- 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, 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.

# 1

**Obadiah**

## *Brothers divided*



### **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 B.C. After 500 years in the land that God had promised to Jacob's descendants, Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, and its inhabitants carried away in chains. In contrast, Babylon was a great city, proud of its Hanging Gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and symbolic of its wealth, significance and power. The city reeked of success, just as Jerusalem reeked of failure.

Obadiah has his vision not long after Jerusalem has been taken into exile. God's people were friendless and desperate. By the rivers of Babylon, they wept. But not everyone was sorry to see the descendants of Jacob weeping in exile: the Edomites, who lived in the mountainous countryside to the south-east of Judah, took 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.



### **Investigate**

Work quickly through these 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 Abraham (Abram)? When will these promises come to fruition?

Read Genesis 25:19-34.

2. The “first-born” would inherit the largest portion of his father’s estate. Given God’s promises to Abraham, what did Esau stand to inherit?
  
3. How did 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 triumph 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. We turn to these words now.



### **Investigate**

Read Obadiah.

1. The Edomites seem proud and confident. From verses 1-9, why might they have had such confidence?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does Obadiah describe the way the Edomites treated Israel when they were invaded by the Babylonians (vv. 10-14)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is to be the fate of Edom?

### **The sin of Edom**

The city of Petra was probably typical of Edomite cities. Known to us today, the city 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?

The Edomites thought their city was secure and unconquerable, and that they had powerful allies. On the contrary, Edom's 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 wasn't primarily judging their pride, but their brotherly violence. Even back in the days of Moses, as we read in Numbers 20, Edom 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. The saying is "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 its 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.



### **Investigate**

Read Obadiah 15-21.

1. In the judgement of Edom, Obadiah sees a greater judgement. Who is this judgement for, and what will it be like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What future does Obadiah see for Israel?

3. 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 Negev are found west, north, east and south of the promised land, hence representing 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. The 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?



### **Think it through**

1. Is there anything which you desire so much now that you would be tempted to give up your spiritual inheritance to have it?
2. How can you avoid falling into the trap of Esau?
3. 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?
4. What message does Obadiah have for those who mock and oppose God's people today?