

Full of Promise

The big picture of the Old Testament



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS

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The big picture of the
Old Testament

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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 through the Old Testament, 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 their 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 his Word 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; 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.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. These studies are a little longer than those in previous Interactive Bible Studies, which makes preparation all the more important.
- 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 of the Old Testament 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.

For more input:

- See 'Tips for Leaders' on page 83.

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Genesis 1 – 11

When good turns bad



For starters

Without looking at a Bible, draw a diagram or a time line containing what you see as the main events of the Old Testament.

The big picture

Jigsaw puzzles are great fun. At least that's what people keep telling me. Personally, I find them hard work. Sitting at a table surrounded by hundreds of little pieces of coloured cardboard only confuses and frustrates me.

The way I feel about jigsaw puzzles is the way many of us feel about the Old Testament. We may know lots of individual pieces of the Old Testament, like Daniel in the lion's den or David and Goliath, but we're not really sure how all these stories fit together. In fact some of us may not even know that they do fit together at all! The end result is that the Old Testament can be a confusing and frustrating part of the Bible which we either avoid altogether or dip into at random like a phone book or a dictionary.

The aim of this study book is to take some of the confusion out of the Old Testament by providing an overview of its main themes and events. The studies will be like taking a scenic flight over a spectacular but varied landscape. From the plane we'll be able to see the main points of interest—but naturally, we won't have the time to land and study many things in detail.

By the time our flight is over, however, we will hopefully have gained an appreciation of the overall landscape, and how it all fits together. That's a particularly important thing to do with the Old Testament, because the events of this part of the Bible prepare us for the greatest event in the history of this planet: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The big question is: where do we start? There are so many different people, and places and events. Which should we look at first? Well, believe it or not, when it comes to the Old Testament, the best place to start is at the beginning.



Investigate

1. Quickly read through Genesis 1:1-2:3. Do you notice any recurring words or phrases?
2. What do you think these patterns tell us about God and the world?
3. What things reflect the fact that humanity has a special place in God's plans?

A good creation

We have discovered that the Old Testament opens with God creating a good world. God is seen as a powerful and systematic creator. First God separates all the different compartments of creation, and then he methodically fills each compartment with appropriate things. For example, the land and water are first separated, and then the water is filled with sea-creatures and the land is filled with vegetation and animals.

Genesis reveals a creator who has a place for everything, and who puts everything in its place. This world has a design and purpose. We are not here by accident!

Within God's design for creation, humanity has a central role. Man is created to be God's representative on earth, placed here to enjoy fellowship with God and care for the creation. In this respect, God's creative work culminates in the 'rest' of the seventh day. The seventh day is a picture of God and humanity enjoying perfect rest together in an unspoiled world.



Investigate

1. Genesis 3 records the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God's rule. This is often called 'the Fall'. Read Genesis 3:1-7. How is the Fall typical of all sin?
2. Read Genesis 3:8-24. In these verses, God punishes Adam and Eve for their rebellion. But things have changed. How is the created order now different?

A bad decision

As the story of Genesis unfolds, God's good creation is tainted by sin. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve take life into their own hands, and instead of following God's good instructions they make up their own rules and decide to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This rebellious act immediately introduces tension, mistrust, and antagonism into all levels of what was a good creation.

Mankind is now engaged in a struggle with nature. Man and woman are now engaged in a struggle between each other. Even at one of humanity's most beautiful and treasured moments, the birth of a child, there is now pain and anguish! All because humanity thought it knew better than God.

And the bad news is only just beginning!



Investigate

1. Skim through Genesis 4-11 noting the main events. How do they show the spread of sin and the worsening of creation?

2. Despite all the bad things that happen in Genesis 4-11, is there any evidence that God is still actively blessing his creation?

The spread of sin

We're only 11 chapters into the Old Testament but already things seem to be going from bad to worse. Things started out so well, with God, mankind and nature in harmony within a good creation, but before long the whole world unravels into murder, incest, violence, deceit and corruption. Indeed, by the time you reach the end of chapter 11, you'd be excused for wondering why God bothers!

Despite this escalation of sin and evil in the world, there are still signs that God is at work blessing his creation and trying to rectify things. For example, even in the midst of judging sin by means of the flood, God graciously rescues one man and his family. God even blesses Noah with words very similar to those he spoke to Adam and Eve (Gen 9:1-3). What we are seeing is God's tenacious commitment to his creation. Even when mankind is repeatedly unfaithful, God keeps faithfully working to reverse the effects of the Fall.

This is an exciting discovery about God for, as we will see, it leads us straight to Jesus Christ!



Think it through

1. Genesis describes God as a powerful and loving Creator. Look up the following passages and consider how this truth should shape our lives.

Psalm 104

Luke 12:22-34

2. “I believe that God is nature. God is the living earth—that’s why we should look after our environment.” How would you respond to that comment?

3. In Romans 1:20 we are told that creation testifies certain things about God. What can we tell about God from creation? What areas of creation help you personally to appreciate the greatness of God?

4. Because of the Fall, life in the world is a mixture of good and bad, achievement and frustration. In what specific areas of life are you feeling this?

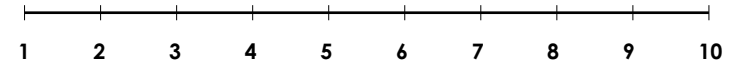
5. What was Jesus Christ’s role in creation? What do the following passages say about how this should affect the way we respond to Christ?

John 1:1-3

Colossians 1:15-17

Hebrews 1:3

6. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest) how would you rate God’s faithfulness to his creation?



7. From what you’ve seen so far, how would you rate mankind’s faithfulness to God? Mark your rating on the scale below.

