

GENESIS 12-50

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SALVATION REVEALED



10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES

SALVATION REVEALED



Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Joseph... names that echo down through the ages and are still of interest to billions of people in our world. But why? Are these people—and their compelling stories—really relevant to us today?

In these 10 studies from chapters 12–50 of the Old Testament book of Genesis, you'll see just why these ancient lives continue to be vitally important for our modern world. You'll discover how the tumultuous life and times of this ancient family reveal the character of our Creator and the life-changing plans he has for us. The timeless story of Genesis shows that the God who made the heavens and the earth also planned and revealed salvation—a salvation that would eventually reach to the very ends of the earth.

An ideal study book for small groups and individuals.

ISBN 978-1-925424-39-3



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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Salvation Revealed

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(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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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 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 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, 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 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 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. (Nevertheless, it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion.)

» STUDY 1

THE PROMISE OF BLESSING FOR THE EARTH

[GENESIS 12-14]

God's unfinished business in Genesis

GENESIS 1-11 ESTABLISHES THE foundation of God's relationship with his world. From the beginning, God is the loving creator and ruler of a good world. He revealed his plan to redeem humanity from sin and from the serpent through the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).

In Genesis 3 to 11, God engaged in 'containment' operations to limit the spread of sin. Human death, which God brought into his world as punishment for sin, is one such restraint. God also marked the murderer, Cain, to limit further bloodshed. More drastically, God sent the catastrophe of the flood to hold back the spread of sin, wiping out all people except the eight on the ark. When Noah, the man of 'rest' (5:29), provided a rest-giving sacrifice to

appease God's deep-seated indignation at human sin, we see that the people saved in the ark had the same problem as the people that died outside of it: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21; cf. 6:5). Again, in response to the rebellion at Babel, God sent different languages to confuse human communication and prevent us from sinfully uniting in our anti-God agenda.

But God's plan was always to move beyond mere 'containment' and to redeem humanity in his chosen way. Genesis 12-50 tells us that God worked through one man, Abram the Hebrew, and his offspring, to bless the whole world.

These ten studies will trace the God-breathed history of Abram and his descendants—the origins of the nation

of Israel. And we will look at everything in the light of Jesus Christ—the offspring of Abram who would crush the

serpent's head (3:15; cf. Gal 3:16), redeem humanity, and prove to be the fulfilment of all God's promises.

Read Genesis 11:27–12:4.

1. Look at what we're told about this family in 11:27-31. What, if anything, seems to undermine the idea that the 'seed of the woman' could come through them?
2. What did God call Abram to do (v. 1)?
3. What did God promise he would do for and through Abram (vv. 2-3; see also Gal 3:7-9)?¹

4. Look back at Genesis 11:4. What is the difference between God's promise to Abram and the desire of the builders of the tower of Babel?

5. What do we learn from Abram's response to God here (v. 4; see also Heb 11:8-10)?

Abram's great commission

A CAREFUL READING OF GENESIS 12:1-3 reveals that God gave Abram a command to go to the land he would show him, but that God didn't make him a promise of land there and then while Abram was in Haran. It was only when Abram and his household actually arrived in that land that Yahweh appeared to him and made an additional promise: "To your offspring I will give *this land*" (Gen 12:7, emphasis added). From this point, God would repeat the promise of both land and offspring again and again (13:15-16; 15:4-5, 18; 17:8; 18:18; 22:17).

Later, in the New Testament, Stephen would add that God had originally appeared to Abram prior to him living in Haran. This earlier 'call' occurred while Abram was in Mesopotamia

(in Ur of the Chaldeans, beyond the Euphrates), indicated at point **1** on the map 'Abraham's key journeys' (over the page). It was while Abram was at Ur that God told him to go to Canaan (Acts 7:2-4; cf. Gen 11:31; Josh 24:2). And Joshua observed that Abram and his family worshipped other gods in Mesopotamia prior to this first call (Josh 24:2-3, 14). The pilgrim family had prematurely settled in Haran (Gen 11:31) as indicated at point **2**, where Terah, Abram's father, died (11:32; Acts 7:4). The call narrated in Genesis 12:1-3 occurred during Abram's stay in Haran.

At this stage, Sarai—Abram's wife and also his half-sister (Gen 20:12)—had been unable to conceive. By the time they left Haran, she was 65 years old and barren, and Abram was 75. Yet God

promised them the joy of parenthood—for the promise to have many descendants must start with at least one!

Moreover, when Abram and his family arrived in the land God showed him, they “passed through the land”, for the land was already occupied by the Canaanites (12:6), and they travelled further south. In the space of verses 4-9, Abram moved from the northern boundary to the southern edge of the land God had promised to his descendants.

But there was no real settling into the land. The travellers pitched their tents, but they found themselves at the Negeb, the southern border of the Promised Land. So while Abram had come to the land in obedience to God’s command and he worshipped Yahweh there, the only permanent marks of Abram’s arrival were two stone altars (❸, ❹). By verse 10, Abram’s family was once again outside the Promised Land (❺).

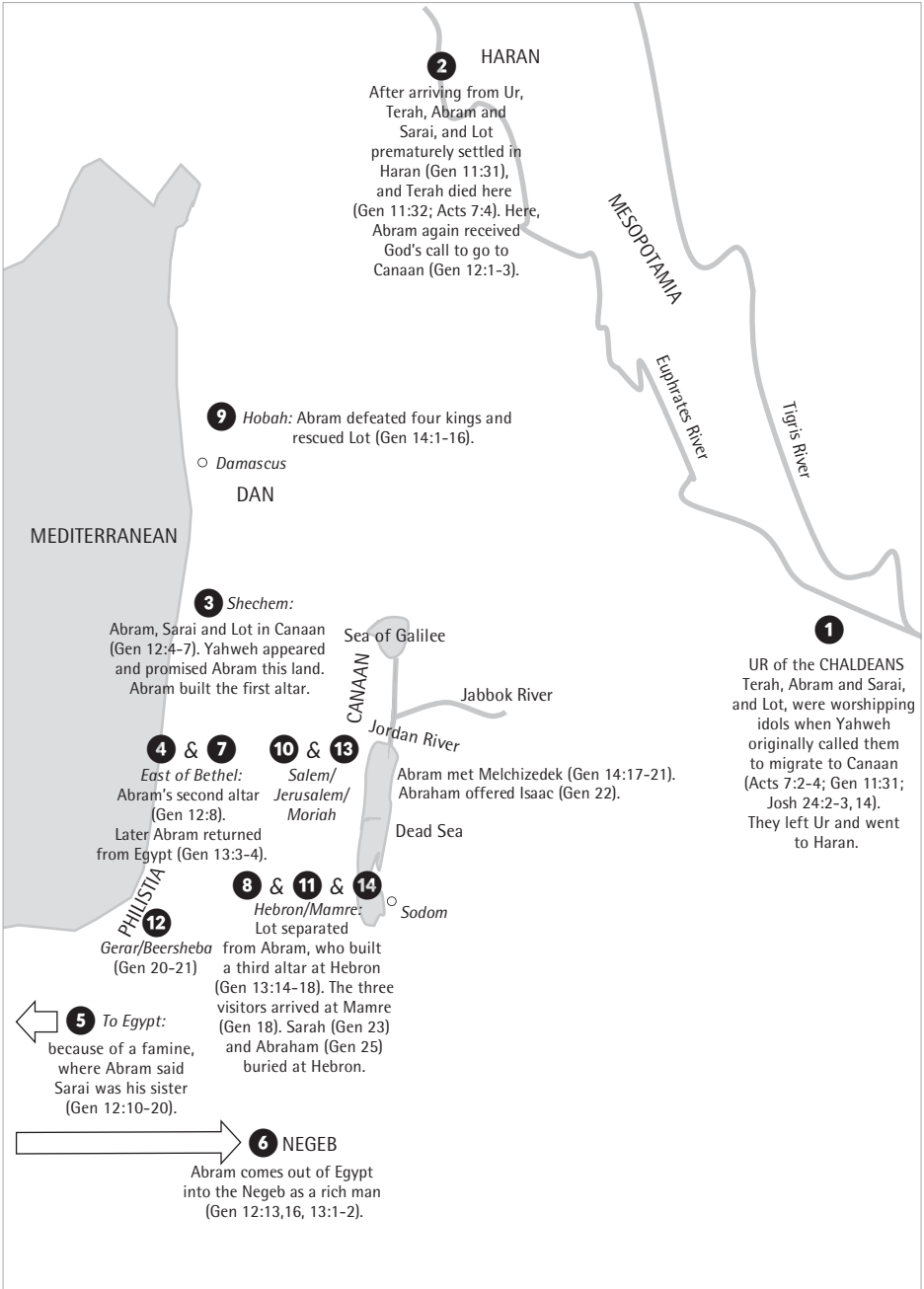
Read Genesis 12:10–20.

6. Why did Abram leave the Promised Land (v. 10)?

7. What does this say about the reality of life in the Promised Land?

8. Why did Abram tell Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister (vv. 11–16; cf. 6:1–2)?

Abraham's key journeys



9. What do we learn about Abram in this passage?

Protecting Sarai

Pharaoh's statement "I took [Sarai] for my wife" (12:19) in other places means all that taking a wife entails. However, it is probable that Sarah was spared from having sex with Pharaoh. In 12:17, the suffering inflicted upon Pharaoh's household occurred literally "upon the word of Sarai, Abram's wife". This suggests that Sarai was calling the plagues upon Pharaoh. The situation would then be similar to that of Abimelech in Genesis 20:6.

The promise protected

WE COULD BE FORGIVEN for thinking that Abram's morally repugnant treatment of Sarai had jeopardised God's promise of 'offspring'. But, mercifully, that was not the case. God had, it seems, **protected Sarai** from the worst of the potential harm by inflicting serious punishments upon Pharaoh's household (Gen 12:17, 20) —no thanks to Abram. Indeed, Abram had profited from his own appalling behaviour (12:16), as he seems to have intended (12:13; see point 6 on the map). On top of everything, Abram's deception of Pharaoh can hardly be thought of as a blessing to the families of the world (12:2-3).

Sadly, Abram would again put his wife in great danger of sexual assault by deceiving another king (Genesis 20, at point 12) while once again benefitting financially (20:16). We will also see this sin continuing down to the next generation, when Isaac makes the same misrepresentation about Rebekah (26:6-11).

In Genesis 13, Abram returned from Egypt to the place where God first appeared to him (point 7). God's blessings had become a source of conflict and family division for Abram. Lot, Abram's nephew who had thus far accompanied Abram on all his journeys, had also

accumulated flocks and herds (cf. Gen 13:5). Abram and Lot's servants had quarrelled, but Abram had graciously given Lot the first choice of the best land (13:9, at point 8). Appearances, however, can be deceiving outside the Garden—even in the Promised Land. For though the land looked like the garden of the Lord (13:10), there is no such place anymore: the way back to Eden has been shut (3:23-24). Even the Promised Land suffered severe famine (12:10). The closest Lot would ever get to Eden was found in his connection to Abram himself—what he already had by kinship and grace—and the blessing God promised to those who bless Abram (12:3). Eventually, Lot's decision would leave him widowed, penniless, homeless, living in a cave with his traumatized daughters, escaping fire and brimstone by the skin of their teeth (19:12-30). Lot's woes came from not

cleaving to Abram—his blessings and rescues were all on account of Abram (cf. 14:14-16, 18:22-33). But for Abram, God repeated the promises of land and offspring. God told Abram to survey the entire land that God was giving him, and Abram built a third altar (13:14-18, at point 8).

Abram had graciously sought peace with Lot (13:8-9). He had considered Lot's needs above his own. This would not threaten the promise, either. The reduction in the strength of Abram's household was an irrelevance, for it was his relationship with Yahweh his God that had always been his strength. This would be shown in his successful campaign against four kings and their armies, winning a victory that five kings had been unable to win (14:1-16, at point 9). Abram would continue to be a blessing to, and receive blessing from, those around him.

Read Genesis 14:17-24 and Hebrews 7.

10. How did Abram's acts and attitudes toward the king of Sodom differ from those concerning the king of Salem, and why (Gen 14:20-24; cf. 12:2-3, 13:13)?²

-
11. According to Hebrews 7, why is Melchizedek important? (If you have time, you might like to read Psalm 110, quoted in Hebrews 7, and consider what it says about the importance of Melchizedek.)

Melchizedek, the shadowy king-priest

MELCHIZEDEK, THE KING OF Jerusalem at the time of Abram, was also a priest of God Most High—the very God who had called Abram (14:18; Ps 110:4). When they met around 2000 BC, Abram acknowledged Melchizedek with a title of the booty from his military victory (point 10).

In around 1000 BC, David, then king over Jerusalem, prophetically spoke of his descendant, a greater Son who is David's "LORD" (Psalm 110). This coming one to whom David would submit would likewise be a king-priest over Jerusalem just as Melchizedek was.

A thousand years after David, Jesus cited this very psalm as he taught in the temple courts (Mark 12:35-37). He saw it as a prophecy to, and about, him (cf. Acts 2:33-35; Heb 1:13, 10:11-13).

Later, the author of Hebrews pointed to the silence of the Genesis text concerning Melchizedek's genealogy. Like Abram, Melchizedek was a worshipper of the one true God. However, unlike Abram, neither Melchizedek's ancestors nor his descendants are mentioned in Genesis. Neither does Genesis say that

Melchizedek 'died', as it does for Abram. Melchizedek was a mystery man who came into the Bible without genealogy and disappeared without dying. Though it is certain that Melchizedek had parents and died, the author of Hebrews focuses on what Genesis explicitly says. Melchizedek's lack of genealogy was also very different from what would later be required of priests in the line of Aaron.

The key similarity between Jesus and Melchizedek is that, for as long as Melchizedek occupied centre stage in the narrative of Genesis, he was presented as having no beginning or end. The fact that Melchizedek's death is not recorded in Genesis suggests to the author of Hebrews that Melchizedek was a 'type' of Jesus. The author of Hebrews sees Jesus' indestructible life as the basis of his priesthood in the line of Melchizedek. The shadowy figure of Melchizedek—greater even than Abram—was himself a signpost pointing to someone far greater, the eternal priest-king over Jerusalem whose kingdom will never end.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- In Genesis 12:2, God commissions Abram to be a blessing to the earth. Read Matthew 28:16-20 and think through how you likewise can play your part to bring lasting blessings to the nations of the earth. How is your commission related to that of Abram?

- Is there a time when God preserved and protected you despite your own or others' foolish, stupid, fearful or dishonest behaviour?

-
- Abram's response to God involved both believing God's promises and obeying God's commands. What promises do you need to hold onto as you seek to obey God's commands?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his faithfulness to his promises to save the people of the earth from sin, death and judgement.
- Thank God for the times he has preserved and protected you despite your own and other people's sin.
- Ask God for the strength and faith to obey God's commission for the salvation of the world.

Endnotes

1. In Genesis 12:2, the phrase "so that you will be a blessing" (ESV) could either be God's declaration and prediction that Abram would indeed be a blessing to the nations (e.g. NIV), or alternatively that God was commanding and commissioning Abram to "be a blessing" to the nations (e.g. RV).
2. 'Salem' has traditionally been considered to be another name for Jerusalem, as illustrated by its use in Psalm 76:2.