

VIDEO-BASED  
10-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

# GOD OF COVENANT

A STUDY OF GENESIS 12–50

JEN WILKIN



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JEN WILKIN

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Wilkin is a wife, mom to four, and an advocate for women to love God with their minds through the faithful study of His Word. She is a speaker, writer, and a teacher of the Bible. Jen lives in Flower Mound, Texas, and her family calls The Village Church home. Jen is the author of *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds*, *None Like Him: 10 Ways God Is Different From Us (and Why That's a Good Thing)*, *In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character*, *God of Creation Bible study*, *Sermon on the Mount Bible study*, and *1 Peter: A Living Hope in Christ Bible study*. You can also find her at [jenwilkin.net](http://jenwilkin.net).

# FOREWORD: HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD'S WORD?

## OUR PURPOSE

The Bible study you are about to begin will teach you an important passage of the Bible in a way that will stay with you for years to come. It will challenge you to move beyond loving God with just your heart to loving Him with your mind. It will focus on answering the question, “What does the Bible say about God?” It will aid you in the worthy task of God-discovery.

You see, the Bible is not a book about self-discovery; it is a book about God-discovery. The Bible is God's declared intent to make Himself known to us. In learning about the character of God in Scripture, we will experience self-discovery, but it must not be the object of our study. The object must be God Himself.

This focus changes the way we study. We look first for what a passage can teach us about the character of God, allowing self-discovery to be the by-product of God-discovery. This is a much better approach because there can be no true knowledge of self apart from knowledge of God. So when I read the account of Jonah, I see first that God is just and faithful to His Word—He is faithful to proclaim His message to Nineveh no matter what. I see second that I, by contrast (and much like Jonah), am unjust to my fellow man and unfaithful to God's Word. Thus, knowledge of God leads to true knowledge of self, which leads to repentance and transformation. So are confirmed Paul's words in Romans 12:2 that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Most of us are good at loving God with our hearts. We are good at employing our emotions in our pursuit of God. But the God who

commands us to love with the totality of our hearts, souls, and strength also commands us to love Him with all of our minds. Because He only commands what He also enables His children to do, it must be possible for us to love Him well with our minds or He would not command it. I know you will bring your emotions to your study of God’s Word, and that is good and right. But it is your mind that I am jealous for. God intends for you to be a good student, renewing your mind and thus transforming your heart.

## **OUR PROCESS**

Being a good student entails following good study habits. When we sit down to read, most of us like to read through a particular passage and then find a way to apply it to our everyday lives. We may read through an entire book of the Bible over a period of time, or we may jump around from place to place. I want to suggest a different approach, one that may not always yield immediate application, comfort, or peace, but one that builds over time a cumulative understanding of the message of Scripture.

## **READING IN CONTEXT AND REPETITIVELY**

Imagine yourself receiving a letter in the mail. The envelope is handwritten, but you don’t glance at the return address. Instead you tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside. Knowing that if someone bothered to send it to you, you should act on its contents in some way, you spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to respond to what the section you just read had to say. What are the odds you will be successful?

No one would read a letter this way. But this is precisely the way many of us read our Bibles. We skip past reading the “envelope”—Who wrote this? To whom is it written? When was it written? Where was it written?—and then try to determine the purpose of its contents from a portion of the whole. What if we took time to read the envelope? What if, after determining the context for its writing, we started at the beginning and read to the end? Wouldn’t that make infinitely more sense?



In our study, we will take this approach to Scripture. We will begin by placing our text in its historical and cultural context. We will “read the envelope.” Then we will read through the entire text multiple times, so that we can better determine what it wants to say to us. We will read repetitively so that we might move through three critical stages of understanding: comprehension, interpretation, and application.

### **STAGE 1: COMPREHENSION**

Remember the reading comprehension section on the SAT? Remember those long reading passages followed by questions to test your knowledge of what you had just read? The objective was to force you to read for detail. We are going to apply the same method to our study of God’s Word. When we read for comprehension we ask ourselves, “What does it say?” This is hard work. A person who *comprehends* the account of the six days of creation can tell you specifically what happened on each day. This is the first step toward being able to interpret and apply the story of creation to our lives.

### **STAGE 2: INTERPRETATION**

While comprehension asks, “What does it say?,” interpretation asks, “What does it mean?” Once we have read a passage enough times to know what it says, we are ready to look into its meaning. A person who *interprets* the creation story can tell you why God created in a particular order or way. She is able to imply things from the text beyond what it says.

### **STAGE 3: APPLICATION**

After doing the work to understand what the text says and what the text means, we are finally ready to ask, “How should it change me?” Here is where we draw on our God-centered perspective to ask three supporting questions:

- What does this passage teach me about God?
- How does this aspect of God’s character change my view of self?
- What should I do in response?

A person who *applies* the creation story can tell us that because God creates in an orderly fashion, we, too, should live well-ordered lives. Knowledge of God gleaned through comprehension of the text and interpretation of its meaning can now be applied to my life in a way that challenges me to be different.

## SOME GUIDELINES

It is vital to the learning process that you allow yourself to move through the three stages of understanding on your own, without the aid of commentaries or study notes. The first several times you read a passage, you will probably be confused. This is actually a good thing. Allow yourself to feel lost, to dwell in the “I don’t know.” It will make the moment of discovery stick.

Nobody likes to feel lost or confused, but it is an important step in the acquisition and retention of understanding. Because of this, I have a few guidelines to lay out for you as you go through this study:

1. **Avoid all commentaries** until *comprehension* and *interpretation* have been earnestly attempted on your own. In other words, wait to read commentaries until after you have done the homework or personal study, attended small-group time, and listened to the teaching. And then, consult commentaries you can trust. Ask a pastor or Bible teacher at your church for suggested authors. A list of commentaries used to create this study can be found on page 191.
2. For the purposes of this study, **get a Bible without study notes**. Come on, it’s just too easy to look at them. You know I’m right.

3. Though commentaries are initially off-limits, here are some **tools you should use**:

- **Cross-references.** These are the Scripture references in the margin or at the bottom of the page in your Bible. They point you to other passages that deal with the same topic or theme.
- **An English dictionary** to look up unfamiliar words.
- **Other translations of the Bible.** We will use the English Standard Version (ESV) as a starting point, but you can easily consult other versions online. I recommend the Christian Standard Version (CSB), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Version (NASB), or the New King James Version (NKJV). Reading more than one translation can expand your understanding of the meaning of a passage. Note: a paraphrase, such as The Message, can be useful but should be regarded as a commentary rather than a translation. They are best consulted after careful study of an actual translation.
- **A printed copy of the text**, double-spaced, so you can mark repeated words, phrases, or ideas.

## STORING UP TREASURE

Approaching God’s Word with a God-centered perspective, with context, and with care takes effort and commitment. It is study for the long-term. Some days your study may not move you emotionally or speak to an immediate need. You may not be able to apply a passage at all. But what if ten years from now, in a dark night of the soul, that passage suddenly opens up to you because of the work you have done today? Wouldn’t your long-term investment be worth it?

In Matthew 13, we see Jesus begin to teach in parables. He tells seven deceptively simple stories that leave His disciples struggling for understanding—dwelling in the “I don’t know,” if you will. After the last parable, He turns to them and asks, “Have you understood all these things?” (v. 51). Despite their apparent confusion, they answer out of their earnest desire with, “Yes” (v. 51). Jesus tells them that their newfound understanding makes them “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (13:52, NIV).

A storeroom, as Jesus indicates, is a place for keeping valuables over a long period of time for use when needed. Faithful study of God’s Word is a means for filling our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision. I pray that this study would be for you a source of much treasure and that you would labor well to obtain it.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jen Wilkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jen Wilkin

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study book is designed to be used in a specific way. The homework in the Bible study book will start you in the process of comprehension, interpretation, and application. However, it was designed to dovetail with small-group discussion time and the teaching sessions. You can use the Bible study book by itself, but you are likely to find yourself with some unresolved questions. The teaching sessions are intended to resolve most, if not all, of your unanswered questions from the homework and discussion time. With this in mind, consider using the materials as follows:

- If you are going through the study **on your own**, first work through the homework, and then watch or listen to the corresponding teaching for that week.
- If you are going through the study **in a group**, first do your homework, and then discuss the questions your group decides to cover. Then watch or listen to the teaching. Some groups watch or listen to the teaching before they meet, which can also work if that format fits best for everyone.

Note: For Week One, there is no homework. The study begins with an audio or video introduction. You will find a Viewer Guide on pages 14-15 that you can use as you watch or listen to the introductory material.

## HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

At the end of each week's personal study you will find a leader guide intended to help facilitate discussion in small groups. Each guide begins with an introductory question to help group members get to know each other and feel comfortable contributing their voices to the discussion.

These questions may prove to be most helpful during the early weeks of the study, but as the group grows more familiar with one another, group leaders may decide to skip them to allow more time for the questions covering the lesson.

The remainder of the leader guide includes questions to help group members compare what they have learned from their personal study on Days Two through Five. These questions are either pulled directly from the personal study, or they summarize a concept or theme that the personal study covered. Each two-part question covers content from a particular day of the personal study, first asking group members to reflect and then asking them to apply. The reflection questions typically ask group members to report a finding or flesh out an interpretation. The application questions challenge them to move beyond intellectual understanding and to identify ways to live differently in light of what they have learned.

As a small group leader, you will want to review these questions before you meet with your group, thinking through your own answers, marking where they occur in the personal study, and noting if there are any additional questions that you might want to reference to help the flow of the discussion. These questions are suggestions only, intended to help you cover as much ground as you can in a 45-minute discussion time. They should not be seen as requirements or limitations, but as guidelines to help you prepare your group for the teaching time by allowing them to process collectively what they have learned during their personal study.

As a facilitator of discussion rather than a teacher, you are allowed and encouraged to be a co-learner with your group members. This means you yourself may not always feel confident of your answer to a given question, and that is perfectly OK. Because we are studying for the long-term, we are allowed to leave some questions partially answered or unresolved, trusting for clarity at a later time. In most cases, the teaching time should address any lingering questions that are not resolved in the personal study or the small-group discussion time.

# WEEK ONE: GENESIS INTRODUCTION

Who wrote the Book of Genesis?

When was it written?

To whom was it written?

In what style was it written?

What is the central theme of the book?





WEEK TWO:  
**CALLING  
AND COVENANT**

In Genesis 12–50 we see God give and begin to fulfill the covenant promise that His people will be numerous, will have a land of their own, and will be a source of blessing to the whole world. Over the next ten weeks we will watch that promise begin to unfold through the lives of four generations of men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. If you have ever wondered about the origin of the twelve tribes of Israel or how they came to be enslaved in Egypt, Genesis 12–50 will help you (as it helped its original audience) trace the events and the family trees that shape the history recorded in Exodus and beyond. But it all starts with a man named Abram, a Mesopotamian city dweller whom God uproots for His sovereign purpose.

This week, we will meet Abram—a man of faith and a man of flaws—as he journeys from Ur to Canaan, to Egypt, and back to Canaan. We will be introduced to Sarai, Abram’s wife, who displays a willingness to help her husband hedge his bets, even at great personal cost. We also get a first glimpse into Lot’s willingness to place himself in close proximity to wickedness. And we meet Melchizedek: king of peace, priest of God Most High, bearer of bread and wine. We will watch as Abram learns about God’s plans for him and for his descendants. We’ll see the patience of God try the patience of man, and we’ll explore how to live in light of God’s unshakeable promises.

**Note:** Each week we will cover between three and six chapters of text. Because of this, at the beginning of each week’s lesson, you will be asked to summarize each chapter into one to two sentences. Though it may seem like a monotonous task, summarizing is a powerful skill for the earnest student of God’s Word. Don’t hurry past this opportunity to practice it. By the end of the study, you will have created a summary overview of Genesis 12–50 in your own words.

## DAY ONE

### READ THROUGH GENESIS 12–16 FROM START TO FINISH.

1. Summarize each chapter in one to two sentences. (You can copy your chapter summaries onto the summary sheets in the appendix of your Bible study book to build a complete overview of the text. See p. 184.)

#### CHAPTER 12

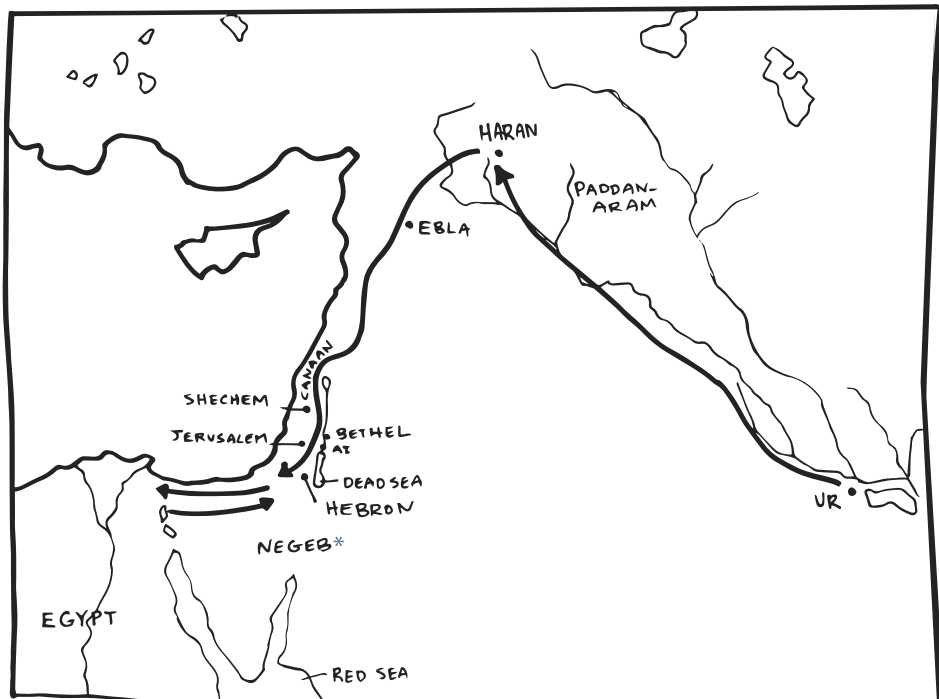
#### CHAPTER 13

#### CHAPTER 14

#### CHAPTER 15

#### CHAPTER 16

2. Below is a map of Abram's route. Read through 12:4-9, and note on the map each place Abram builds an altar. (Note: Bethel was located between Shechem and Jerusalem.)



## DAY TWO

### NOW LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT GENESIS 12–13.

3. In 12:1, what three things is Abram told to *go from*?

1.

2.

3.

What is Abram told to *go to*?

If you were Abram, how would you likely feel about this destination?

4. In 12:1-3, we have our first glimpse of the future God has planned for Abram. Notice the repetition of the words “I will.” Below, note each of the five things God tells Abram “[He] will” do in 12:1-3.

1. “I will ... \_\_\_\_\_”

2. “I will ... \_\_\_\_\_”

3. “I will ... \_\_\_\_\_”

4. “I will ... \_\_\_\_\_”

5. “I will ... \_\_\_\_\_”

5. What do we learn about Abram’s character in 12:4-9? Read through these six verses and note below what you find. (You may want to peek at Hebrews 11:8-10 to help you get started.)

CHARACTER TRAITS	HOW ABRAM DEMONSTRATES THEM

6. Now look at 12:10-20. Why does Abram take his family to Egypt?

Does Abram lie to Pharaoh about Sarai? Look ahead to Genesis 20:12 to help with your answer.

Though Sarai is silent during this part of the story, what might have been her thoughts and feelings about Abram’s survival plan?

7. Did Abram's actions in Egypt threaten God's plan to make him a great nation? Explain your answer.
  
8. On the map on page 18, note where Abram journeys in chapter 13.
  
9. What problem did Abram and Lot have (13:5-7)? How did Abram resolve the problem (13:8-9)?

Where did Lot choose to settle (13:12)? How does his choice contrast to Abram's choice of land?

10. Mark the city of Sodom on your map around the southernmost tip of the Dead Sea.
  
11. **APPLY:** In 13:14-18, God reiterates His promise to Abram.

What significant two words are repeated once again in this passage?

Why are those repeated words significant to Abram then?

To us, as the church, now?

## DAY THREE

### NOW LOOK AT GENESIS 14.

12. In Canaan, a king would have been the ruler of a walled city. He was also often the high priest of the god of that particular city. In the chart below, note the kings who battled against each other (14:1-2).

Amraphel, king of _____	Bera, king of _____

13. What tactic did Abram use to defeat Chedorlaomer's forces? What does that tell you about Abram?
14. Apparently what did a conquering king typically acquire when he defeated an enemy (14:16)?

15. Melchizedek is an intriguing figure in the Bible. The author of Hebrews tells us that he prefigures Christ, that he gives us a picture of what Christ would be like (Heb. 7). We will discuss him more in our time together, but for now, what details about Melchizedek in 14:17-24 seem to point to Christ?
  
16. What does Abram's response to the king of Sodom's offer of the spoils tell you about his character?
  
17. In these first three chapters of the story of Abram, how has God already demonstrated to Abram that, despite all obstacles (including Abram's unrighteousness), "He will" fulfill what He has promised?
  
18. **APPLY:** Think of a time you were offered something of value your conscience would not allow you to accept. What wrong thinking makes us hesitate before turning away when faced with an offer we know does not honor the Lord? What does Abram's example teach us about the value of a clean conscience?



## DAY FOUR

### NOW LOOK AT GENESIS 15.

19. Compare 15:1 in the ESV and the NIV. What understanding do you gain about Abram's reward?

How do God's words to Abram make sense within the context of what has just happened in the previous chapter? Specifically, why would God reassure Abram that *He Himself* was:

#### **ABRAM'S SHIELD**

#### **ABRAM'S GREAT REWARD**

20. What does Abram's reply in 15:2-3 indicate his greatest fear to be?

Is his fear unreasonable? See 11:30 and 12:4. (Note that some time has passed since 12:4.) What factors are contributing to his fear?

21. Genesis 15:6 is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament verses by New Testament authors. Write the verse below, using “God” and “Abram” in place of the personal pronouns:

Why do you think this verse is so often quoted? (You may want to find a few places it is used in the New Testament to help with your answer).

God formalizes His promises to Abram in a ceremony that would have been easily recognizable to the people of Moses’ time. It was a covenant, their version of signing legally-binding contracts at a time when those kinds of documents were not used. The concept of covenant is central to our understanding of God and of our salvation. In the Bible, God enters into a number of covenants with man. In Genesis 1–11, we have already seen an implied covenant between God and Adam (2:15-17) and a spoken covenant between God and Noah (8:21-22; 9:8-11). Now we come to the third covenant between God and man—the Abrahamic covenant.

22. Look back at 12:2-3,6-7. Then use the additional information you find in chapter 15 to answer the questions below.

	ABRAHAMIC COVENANT
Who initiates the covenant?	
What two parties are involved in the covenant?	
What does God promise? (12:1,6-7; 15:18-21)	1.
(12:2; 15:4-5)	2.
(12:3; 15:14-16)	3.
What is required of Abraham?	
What is the penalty for breach of the covenant?	

23. What do you think the smoking fire pot and flaming torch represent in 15:17?

24. **APPLY:** How have you known God to be your shield? Your great reward? Write a specific example of each below.

## DAY FIVE

### NOW LOOK AT GENESIS 16.

25. At this point in the story, Abram is eighty-five years old and Sarai is around seventy-five. Ten years have passed between the first promise of an heir and Sarai's scheme with Hagar.

When God promised an heir to Abram in 12:2, what key detail did He leave out? Why do you think this is the case?

26. What do Sarai's actions in chapter 16 reveal about what she believes about God? About herself?

27. In 16:4-6, who behaves badly? List your prime suspects and theories below.

28. In 16:7-16, what do you learn about the character of God from His treatment of Hagar? List some thoughts below.

29. Think of all the things God named in Genesis 1: day, night, earth, heaven, the seas, man. How is God's naming of Ishmael different from Hagar's naming of God?

30. **APPLY:** When have you behaved like Sarai, allowing fear or self-reliance to govern your actions? How did your plans turn out?

When have you behaved like Abram, deferring to human wisdom over God's will? What was the outcome?

## WRAP-UP

What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Genesis shown you more clearly?

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is \_\_\_\_\_ shows me that I am \_\_\_\_\_.

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?



## WEEK TWO | GROUP DISCUSSION

**INTRODUCTORY QUESTION:** When did you last move? How did you feel about the move before it took place? After?

**1. OBSERVE:** (question 7, p. 21) Did Abram's actions in Egypt threaten God's plan to make him a great nation? Explain your answer.

**APPLY:** (question 11, p. 21) In 13:14-18, God reiterates His promise to Abram. What significant two words are repeated once again in this passage?

Why are those repeated words significant to Abram then? To us, as the church, now?

**2. OBSERVE:** (question 16, p. 23) What does Abram's response to the king of Sodom's offer of the spoils tell you about his character?

**APPLY:** (question 18, p. 23) Think of a time you were offered something of value your conscience would not allow you to accept. What wrong thinking makes us hesitate before turning away when faced with an offer we know does not honor the Lord? What does Abram's example teach us about the value of a clean conscience?

**3. OBSERVE:** (question 19, p. 24) How do God's words to Abram make sense within the context of what has just happened in the previous chapter? Specifically, why would God reassure Abram that *He Himself* was:

**ABRAM'S SHIELD**

**ABRAM'S GREAT REWARD**

**APPLY:** (question 24, p. 26) How have you known God to be your shield? Your great reward?

**4. OBSERVE:** (question 27, p. 27) In 16:4-6, who behaves badly?

**APPLY:** (question 30, p. 28) When have you behaved like Sarai, allowing fear or self-reliance to govern your actions? How did your plans turn out?

When have you behaved like Abram, deferring to human wisdom over God's will? What was the outcome?

**5. WRAP-UP:** What aspect of God's character has this week's passage of Genesis shown you more clearly?

Fill in the following statement:

Knowing that God is \_\_\_\_\_ shows me that I am \_\_\_\_\_.

What one step can you take this week to better live in light of this truth?





Lined writing area for notes.