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Discover Your Bible Series

Revised Edition

LEADER GUIDE

Discover GENESIS

FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Part Two of a Two-Part Study

LEADER GUIDE

Discover GENESIS

FOR ALL GENERATIONS

FAITH ALIVE® Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

We thank Edith Bajema for writing the original lesson material (1991) on which Part Two of this revised study is based. We also thank Deb Fennema for her contributions to an earlier revision (2001). This latest revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org/DYB (for training advice and general information)

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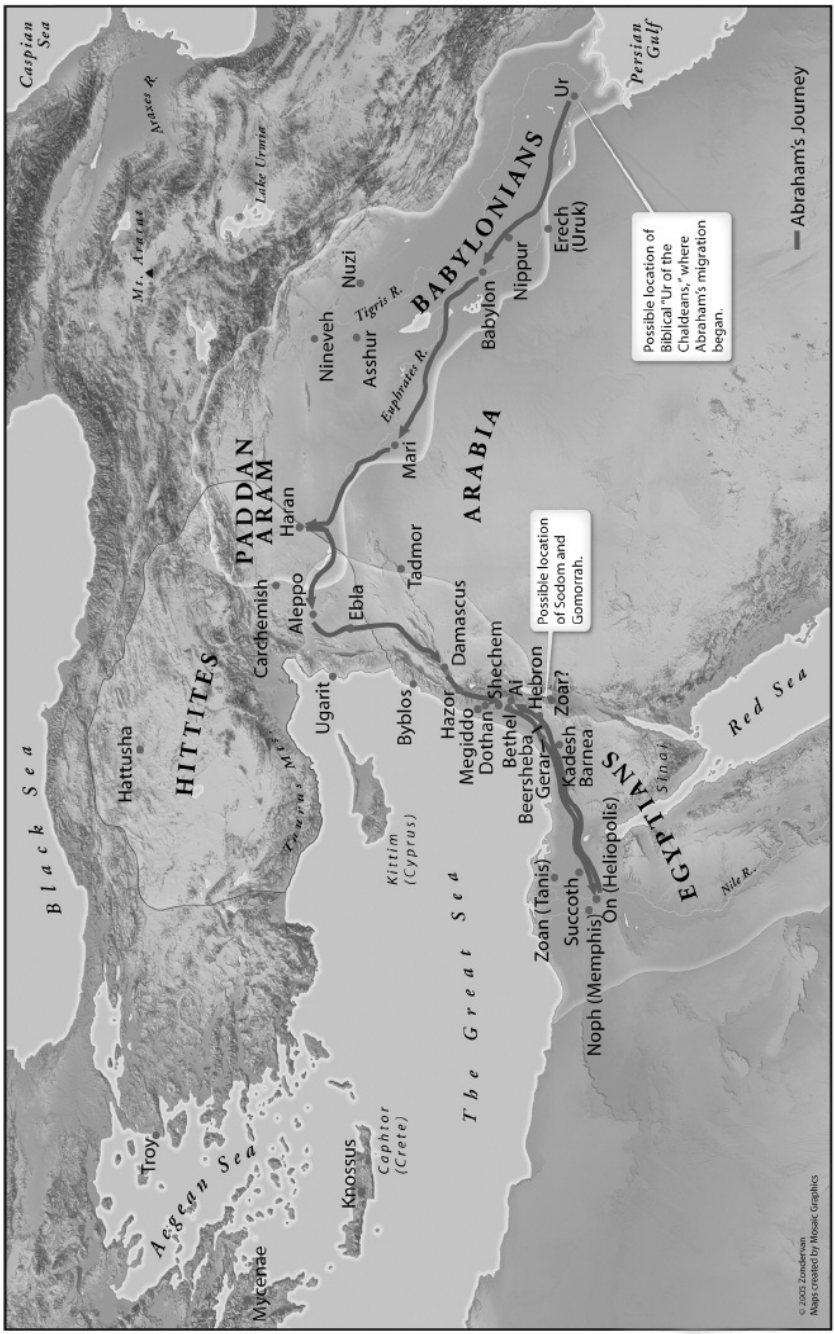
Map of the World of the Patriarchs



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Introduction

Genesis means "origin" or "beginning." As we discovered in Part One of this study, the book of Genesis tells of the beginning of the universe, of humanity, of human sin, of salvation, of civilization, and of a people through whom God would bless "all [other] peoples on earth" (Gen. 12:3; see 26:4).

In Part Two of this study we continue with the story of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, whom God called in order to make a new nation. We learn more about Isaac and Rebekah, and we become acquainted with their twins, Jacob and Esau, as well as the sons of Jacob, whose descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel. Again, as in some earlier parts of Genesis, many passages in this study read like a page-turning novel. We find stories of deceit, favoritism, violence, jealousy, revenge, and political intrigue—yet through it all we also meet the God who cares for and guides his people despite their weaknesses and disobedience. God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants throughout all generations, and God remains faithful.

The promises in Genesis are ultimately fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of the Israelite tribe of Judah (see Gen. 49:10; Matt. 1:1-3). Jesus, the Son of God, became a human being so that he could die for human sin and make it possible for people of all nations to be saved and live with God (John 1:1-2,14; 3:16), as it was in the beginning (see Gen. 2; 3:8).

Glossary of Terms

altar—a stone or heap of stones on which people laid animals or grain as sacrifices to God.

anoint—to pour oil over something or someone as a sign that the person or place is sacred or holy, set apart to God.

birthright—the right of the firstborn son to receive the greatest share of his father's inheritance.

bless—to show favor and kindness.

circumcision—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.

curse—to pronounce judgment on someone or something.

defile—to make impure, to violate; often used to describe sexual impurity, which remained like a stain on one's life in the ancient Middle East.

divination—a superstitious practice in ancient religions by which people tried to foresee or tell the future or discover hidden knowledge.

faith—taking God at his word and acting on it.

favor—graciousness, kindness.

the Fear (of Isaac)—another name for God (see Gen. 31:42, 53). This name suggests the awe and obedience that God inspired in his covenant people.

household gods—a collection of small idols that represented the gods of family prosperity, fertility, happiness, and so on in Canaanite culture.

mercy—free and undeserved compassion.

prophecy—a message from God or from someone who speaks for God.

righteous—free from guilt or sin; conformed to God's will and moral standards; declared or made right with God.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

sin—going against God's will; disobeying God's command.

Lesson 1

Genesis 25:19-26:35

The Next Generation

Introductory Notes

This second part of our study of Genesis focuses on the main generations that follow Abraham in receiving God's blessing and promise. The main figures are Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and his wives, and Joseph—though other members of the family play important roles as well.

If you have already studied the previous chapters of Genesis, you will be familiar with the story of God's creation and humanity's fall into sin, the stories about Noah and Abraham, and God's choosing of one family line through which to work out salvation for people of all nations. You may want to review some of the main themes and teachings from Part One of this study (covering Genesis 1:1-25:18) before beginning this lesson together.

In this study you will also notice, as in Part One, that some of the lessons cover large portions of Scripture. Because much of Genesis is narrative, you will often not need to go over it verse by verse but will be able to dig out the main content by summarization. Be sure you gauge your time carefully, because the narrative will sometimes take a while to read. In some cases you may want to read the narrative before your meeting time so that you can devote most of your time together to group discussion.

As leader, be sure to point out the glossary and map and the description on how to study—available in each study guide. Read the introduction together and point out that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for further growth and learning. Invite everyone also to pray with you throughout the course of this study, asking God to help each of you see it as a personal journey in which you can grow to know the Lord in new ways.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

Think of an example or two of sibling rivalry that you may have experienced. What did you learn from it? Did you see God working in it or in spite of it in any way? Explain.

1. *Genesis 25:19-26*

   a. *What did Isaac ask of God? What happened as a result?*

   b. *What does the account of Rebekah's pregnancy and delivery tell us about the future of these twins?*

   - **How do verses 19-20 prepare us for the shift in focus from Abraham to his son, Isaac?**

Remind your group that each time the phrase "this is the account of" occurs in Genesis, it signals the beginning of a new section, the account of a new generation or major event (see Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). The summary of Isaac's life and his marriage to Rebekah marks the beginning of a new generation.

But the family line set apart by God seemed again doomed to die out: Rebekah remained childless for about twenty years (see 25:20, 26).

- **What does Isaac's request tell us about his faith in God?**

Isaac had surely heard stories about his own improbable birth and about the great promises of God. So he knew where to turn when it became obvious that Rebekah could not have children.

- **What does God's answer tell us about his power?**

- **Why might God have allowed Rebekah's barrenness?**

Instead of only hearing about God's power in the life of his father, Abraham, Isaac now could experience God's power and faithfulness firsthand.

- **Why did Rebekah seek a word from the Lord? What did God say to her?**

Rebekah's pregnancy brought severe discomfort. The twins "jostled within her." That was the stormy beginning of a rivalry between her two sons that would last for many years, as God revealed.

- **What was remarkable about the prophecy Rebekah received?**

At least two things about the prophecy were significant: each child would become the father of a people, and the descendants of the younger one would be stronger than those of the older one. God would choose the younger son, something highly unusual in that culture.

- **Where have we seen this before in Genesis?**

Remind group members of the history of Adam's sons, Noah's sons, and Abraham's sons. The line of Seth found favor with God in comparison to the line of Cain (Gen. 4-5). Shem, the second son of Noah, received more blessing and favor than Japheth (9:26-27; 10:21). And Isaac, the son of promise, became the heir of God's covenant in comparison with Ishmael (17:19-21).

The account of the twins' birth is more detailed than any other in Genesis.

- **How does this birth reveal a competition between the sons?**

The hand of Jacob grasping the heel of Esau is an apt image for the relationship that would develop between these brothers. Note together the meanings of the sons' names: *Esau* means "hairy," while *Jacob* means "he grasps the heel" or "he deceives." Jacob's name anticipated the turmoil that lay ahead for the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah.

2. Genesis 25:27-34

a. What does the incident here tell us about the brothers' personalities?

b. What did Esau lose? What connection might we make between this and the prophecy in verse 23?

Though the boys were twins, they could hardly have been more different. Jacob was quiet and preferred the shelter and comforts of living in tents. Esau was a rough man of the outdoors and a vigorous hunter.

- **How did Isaac and Rebekah respond to these differences?**

- **What does this suggest about the measure of harmony within the family?**

Each parent had a favorite son, and this likely fueled the rivalry between the twins. You may want to encourage group members to share any experiences they've had with favoritism in their own families.

- **What feelings does favoritism create within a family? In what ways can this be destructive?**

In the culture of Isaac's day, the firstborn son was given certain rights and privileges simply because he was eldest. This birthright included the right to inherit at least a double share of his father's property.

- **How does the story of the stew bear out the description of the brothers in verse 27?**

- **What were Jacob's priorities? What were Esau's?**

Jacob was evidently a schemer; he seemed eager for a chance to gain advantage over Esau. At home, Jacob was tending to domestic chores. Esau, the "skillful hunter," came in "from the open country, famished." (Note an irony here that the skilled hunter apparently came back without food.) Esau's main concern was his physical needs; his thinking evidently did not extend beyond his immediate hunger and fatigue. So "he despised his birthright" for some red stew Jacob had made. (The Bible adds that this is why Esau was also called *Edom*, which means "red.") Note that Esau's carelessness here foreshadows a later event that pits one brother against the other (see Gen. 27)—but let your group discover the details for themselves in the Scriptures for the next lesson.

3. Genesis 26:1-6

a. What situation made Isaac concerned?

b. What did God say to Isaac, and how did Isaac respond?

Isaac found himself in a situation similar to that of his father, Abraham: there was famine in the land of Canaan. Isaac had to find good grazing land for his herds and flocks, or his wealth would soon disappear.

- **What had Abraham done in the time of famine (Gen. 12:10-20)? What had happened to him and Sarah?**

Many years earlier, Abraham and Sarah had left Canaan to go to Egypt for a while, where the famine had not hit as hard. But they had had a misunderstanding with the Egyptian Pharaoh, who had sent them away.

Like his father, Isaac was apparently intending to go to Egypt for a while. But God knew Isaac's plans and told him to remain in Canaan.

- **Why might God have wanted Isaac to stay in Canaan? What might God have wanted to teach Isaac?**

Egypt was a powerful nation with a well-established culture and good farmland along the Nile River. But God likely wanted Isaac to learn to trust fully in God's ability to provide.

- **What promises did God give to Isaac? Where have we heard these before?**

Look with your group at Genesis 12:1-7; God was reaffirming his promises given to Abraham, thus making Isaac the "son of promise" in more ways than one.

So Isaac, who had already moved as far as Gerar, stayed there (see map).

4. Genesis 26:7-11

a. What lie did Isaac tell? What prompted him to do this?

b. In view of God's promises (Gen. 26:3-5), how is Isaac's behavior surprising?

This incident is eerily similar to the two situations in which Abraham also lied about his wife—once to the Egyptian Pharaoh (Gen. 12:10-20) and once to another King Abimelech of Gerar (Gen. 20). Note that the Abimelech here is probably a son or grandson of the one in Abraham's day.

- **In what ways was Isaac's situation similar to those of Abraham in Egypt and Gerar? How did father and son think alike?**

Both Abraham and Isaac mixed faith with fear—a weakness that plagues many believers still today. Group members may want to discuss how fear has prompted them at times to react in ways that go against God.

It seems, however, that Isaac's fears were less defensible than those of his father. Sarah had been taken twice into the rulers' palaces; Rebekah was not taken from Isaac.

- **What does verse 8 tell us about the length of time that Isaac kept up this pretense? What does this show about his trust in God?**

Isaac, who had probably heard what had happened to his mother in Egypt and in Gerar, seems to have forgotten something just as important: God's promise. "Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you," God had said (26:3).

c. How was the lie exposed? What was the outcome?

Abimelech discovered the truth one day as he was looking out of his palace window.

- **What was Abimelech's response to Isaac?**

- **How did Isaac try to explain his actions?**

It's possible that Abimelech had heard of the story of Isaac's parents living there earlier and causing trouble for the king's household (see 20:17-18), but the text doesn't mention it. Nonetheless, Abimelech knew who Isaac was and that he had said Rebekah was his sister (26:8-9), so he called Isaac to account for his actions. When Isaac explained that he thought he might be killed on account of his wife, Abimelech ordered that anyone who violated them would be put to death (26:11).

5. Genesis 26:12-22

a. How did God keep his promises to Isaac?

Despite the famine, God blessed Isaac with an abundance of crops, herds, flocks, and servants.

- **Considering Isaac's wavering faith, what does this tell us about God?**

Discuss with your group the unwavering faithfulness of God in spite of the wavering faith of the people God had chosen to bless.

b. What conflict happened as a result?

As far as the Philistines were concerned, Isaac had received too many blessings.

- **Why would Isaac's wealth pose a threat to the Philistines?**

Envy was not the Philistines' only response to Isaac's wealth; he could now easily become a powerful enemy as the number of his servants grew and his flocks needed more land.

How did the Philistines show hostility to Isaac?

Wells were extremely important to nomadic herders, since their flocks needed water daily. Isaac could not remain in a land where he was denied access to wells. Abimelech confirmed this by asking him to move on. However, the problem did not go away. The Philistines still argued over the wells that Isaac reopened, wells dug by Abraham, and they quarreled over new wells that Isaac dug. So, as God may have intended, Isaac moved further and further away from the Philistines.

- **Where did Isaac finally find room? What was his response?**

Isaac saw the Lord's hand in providing a well that no one quarreled over, so he named the place Rehoboth, saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land" (26:22). Note together that *Rehoboth* means "room."

6. Genesis 26:23-33

a. How did the Lord reassure Isaac at Beersheba?

b. Why did Abimelech approach Isaac? What was Isaac's response?

Apparently Isaac did not remain long at Rehoboth. Perhaps he was still afraid of being threatened by the Philistines. So he moved to Beersheba, where Abraham had made a treaty with the earlier King Abimelech over a well and had stayed "for a long time" (21:34).

- **What was the first thing God said to Isaac after identifying himself as the God of Abraham?**

"Do not be afraid"—a reassurance that Isaac still seemed to need. God then repeated the promises of his presence and blessing.

- **For whose sake was God going to bless Isaac? How might this have been reassuring?**

- **How might this reassure us too in the face of our weaknesses and fears?**

God said he would bless Isaac for the sake of his father, Abraham. Group members may want to discuss the reassurance of all God's children being blessed for the sake of their Savior, Jesus, on the basis of God's promises to Abraham and Isaac many years ago. If group members are not familiar with the New Testament, point out that God's Word says we are all children of the promise to Abraham through the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:9-17; Gal. 3:29).

- **What did Isaac do in response?**

Isaac responded as Abraham had done—by building an altar and worshiping the God who had chosen and blessed him.

In the meantime, Abimelech had appeared on the scene again.

- **How might this visit also have been part of God's reassurance to Isaac? What was the outcome of this meeting?**

Apparently Abimelech had second thoughts about sending Isaac away and thus possibly offending him. Isaac, like Abraham before him, evidently served a very powerful God.

- **How do Abimelech's words bear out the truth of God's promises to Isaac?**

- **What did Abimelech stand to gain from a treaty with Isaac?**

Both Isaac and Abimelech could rest more peacefully knowing that each had pledged not to harm the other. Abimelech's fear is a testimony to the powerful position that Isaac had gained through God's blessing.

- **What did Isaac's servants announce, and what did Isaac call the place?**

Isaac's servants had been digging a well (26:25), and when they found water, they announced it to Isaac, who called the well *Shibah,* which can mean "oath" or "seven," as we learned when we discussed the story of Abraham at Beersheba in Genesis 21.

Note: The well that Abraham had dug (probably about eighty years earlier) at Beersheba may have dried up or simply been abandoned after Abraham's time there (Gen. 21:22-34). The *New Bible Commentary* notes that in this way "Isaac confirmed the name [Beersheba] given by Abraham."

7. Genesis 26:34-35

What do we learn here about Esau?

The chapter ends on a sour note. Esau had chosen two wives from among the Hittites, the people who occupied the land around Bethel, Shechem, and Hebron. And these women "were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah" (26:35). In the next chapter we learn a bit more about Rebekah's dislike for Esau's wives; perhaps these Hittite women were difficult to get along with (see 27:46).

Question for Reflection

What do these stories tell us about the character of Isaac? Of Rebekah? Of Esau and Jacob? Of God?

Use this question to summarize all you've learned about the strengths and weaknesses of Abraham's descendants so far: their faith in God, their

willingness or unwillingness to obey, their deceit and fearful nature, their judgment in family matters, and so on. Be sure also to focus on God's qualities that offset human weakness: love, faithfulness, truth, unlimited power.

- **In what ways do these characters show some of these godly qualities despite their own weaknesses?**

- **How do we show such qualities in our own lives?**

Pray that your group members may experience these godly qualities more and more in their lives as God works in their hearts through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions.

If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or would like information on training to start a small group Bible study,

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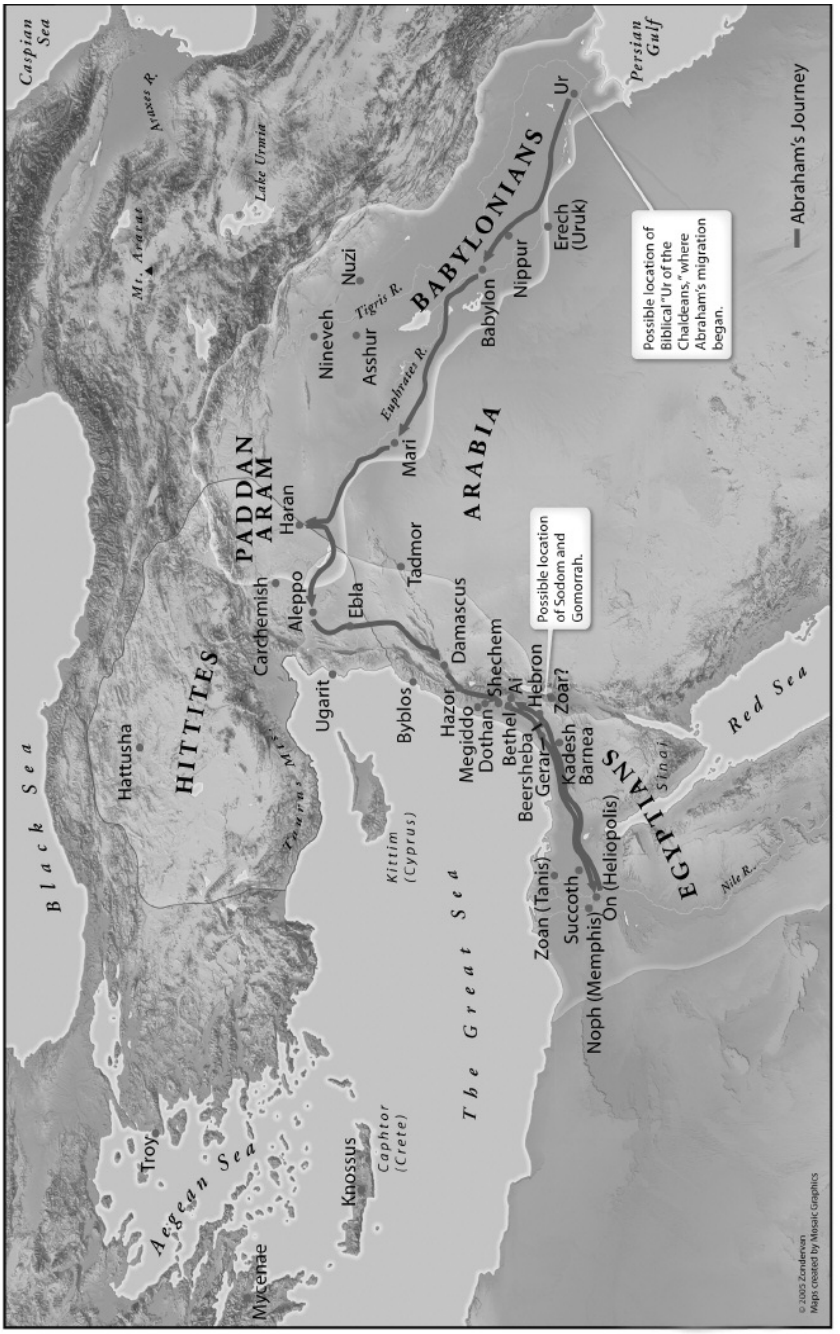
Map of the World of the Patriarchs



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prophecy—a message from God or from someone who speaks for God.

righteous—free from guilt or sin; conformed to God's will and moral standards; declared or made right with God.

sacrifice—the act of offering something precious to God. In the Old Testament this was usually an animal (the best of the flock) or the firstfruits of a harvest.

sin—going against God's will; disobeying God's command.

Lesson 1

Genesis 25:19-26:35

The Next Generation

Introductory Notes

This second part of our study of Genesis focuses on the main generations that follow Abraham in receiving God's blessing and promise. The main figures are Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and his wives, and Joseph—though other members of the family play important roles as well.

If you have already studied the previous chapters of Genesis, you will be familiar with the story of God's creation and humanity's fall into sin, the stories about Noah and Abraham, and God's choosing of one family line through which to work out salvation for people of all nations. You may want to review some of the main themes and teachings from Part One of this study (covering Genesis 1:1-25:18) before beginning this lesson together.

In this study you will also notice, as in Part One, that some of the lessons cover large portions of Scripture. Because much of Genesis is narrative, you will often not need to go over it verse by verse but will be able to dig out the main content by summarization. Be sure you gauge your time carefully, because the narrative will sometimes take a while to read. In some cases you may want to read the narrative before your meeting time so that you can devote most of your time together to group discussion.

1. Genesis 25:19-26

a. What did Isaac ask of God? What happened as a result?

b. What does the account of Rebekah's pregnancy and delivery tell us about the future of these twins?

2. ***Genesis 25:27-34***

   a. What does the incident here tell us about the brothers' personalities?

   b. What did Esau lose? What connection might we make between this and the prophecy in verse 23?

3. ***Genesis 26:1-6***

   a. What situation made Isaac concerned?

   b. What did God say to Isaac, and how did Isaac respond?

4. ***Genesis 26:7-11***

   a. What lie did Isaac tell? What prompted him to do this?

   b. In view of God's promises (Gen. 26:3-5), how is Isaac's behavior surprising?

   c. How was the lie exposed? What was the outcome?

5. ***Genesis 26:12-22***

   a. How did God keep his promises to Isaac?

   b. What conflict happened as a result?

6. ***Genesis 26:23-33***

   a. How did the Lord reassure Isaac at Beersheba?

   b. Why did Abimelech approach Isaac? What was Isaac's response?

7. ***Genesis 26:34-35***

   What do we learn here about Esau?

Question for Reflection

What do these stories tell us about the character of Isaac? Of Rebekah? Of Esau and Jacob? Of God?