

Before starting this lesson, read at least **Genesis chapters 12:1-9; 15:1-6; 21:1-7; 22:1-19; chapters 27, 37, 41:1 to 46:7; 50:15-26**. If possible read the whole book. You may find it helpful to read just the minimum chapters, go thru the lesson and then read the whole book. You will discover what works best for you.

The **THEME** of Genesis is *beginning*.

The **OUTLINE** **Chapters 1-11** tell about the beginning of the **world and humanity**.

I. Beginning of the world & humanity

Creation	1 - 2
Fall & Promise	3 - 5
Flood & Promise	6 - 9
Tower of Babel	10 - 11

This includes not only creation, but also the beginning of sin.

Adam and Eve had been created perfect and enjoyed a relationship with God. When they disobeyed His command, their relationship with Him was broken. From that point on, they had a continual conflict between listening to Satan or to God; between obeying Satan or obeying God. This not only was true for Adam and Eve, but for all of humanity that followed them.

Because God did not want to leave humanity in this condition, He makes a promise.

He will provide a way to undo what Adam has done. The power of Satan could be broken. A relationship with Him will once again be possible. God wanted everyone to know about this promise - this good news. So He created a special people to communicate His message.

Chapters 12 - 50 explain about the beginning of this people - the beginning of the **Jewish race**.

II. Beginning of the Jewish race

Abraham	12 - 23
Isaac	24 - 26
Jacob	27 - 36
Joseph	37 - 50

This is God's first declaration or Testament - that He will work thru the Jews...

- ...to give His written word, the Bible
- ...to send the Living Word, Jesus.
- ...to communicate His salvation message

In other words, they will be God's *chosen* people.

To us, the word *chosen* means when you pick **some**, others are left out. God's meaning is just the opposite. He wants to pick **some**, so thru them, **no one** is left out. Let me explain.

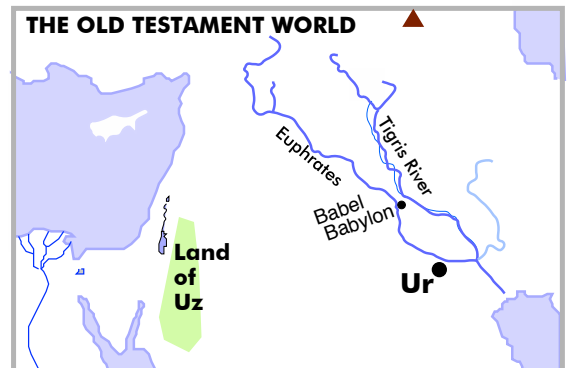
God chooses the Jewish people to...

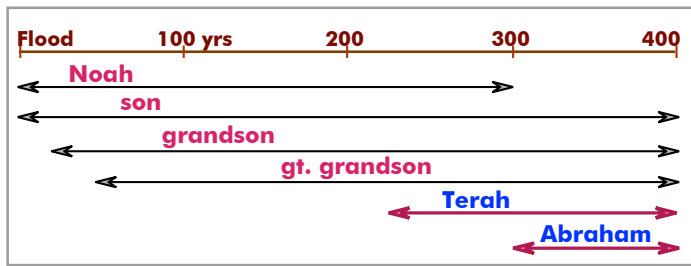
- Let others see the companionship the Jews have with Him.
- Let others know they also can have this companionship. It is for all, if they choose to accept it.

The **Jews** are chosen to reveal God - to be God's example and God's voice so all can be included and no one has to be left out.

God starts with a man living in the city of Ur, along the southern part of the Euphrates River. His name is Abraham. It is about 2000 BC, at least 300 years after the flood. Population has increased and scattered.

With 300 years gone by, how could people like Abraham in Ur or Job in the land of Uz, how could they have an accurate knowledge about God, about creation, or the flood? The answer comes from all those names and numbers in Genesis. They show that God extends the lives of 4 generations *after* the flood so the knowledge about Him is not lost

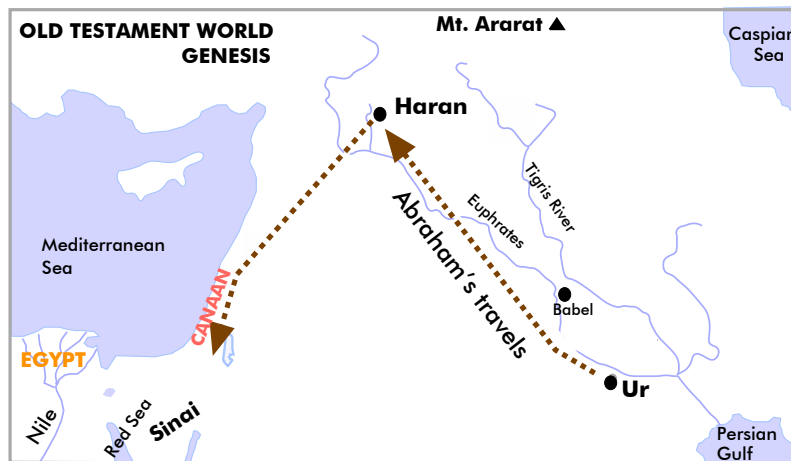




about God, but not everyone chooses to follow God.

Each new generation can still have eyewitness accounts. For example, Abraham's father is born some 200 years after the flood. Abraham is born 300 years after the flood. Noah, his sons, grandson and great grandson are still living to provide accurate information and have written down the facts for all to read. Everyone has opportunity to know

This has been the situation with Abraham & his family. Terah, Abraham's father, was born & lived in Haran, a city dedicated to the worship of the moon god. As a young man, Terah moved to Ur, on the Euphrates River. This city was also dedicated to worshipping the moon god. It is here that Abraham, his brothers and half-sister are born. Altho they knew about the true God, they choose to worship this moon god. But then God in His grace, reveals Himself to Abraham. As a result, the family repents. They change their minds about their idols and put their trust in God. After this, God tells Abraham to leave that environment.



Abraham convinces his family to also leave. According to 11:31, they move back to Haran, some 600 miles northwest of their home in Ur.

On the map, Ur is in the lower right hand corner, along the Euphrates River. This is where Abraham was born & raised. Following the Euphrates north is the city of Haran, the birthplace of Abraham's father. It is where the family clan is still living.

It is while Abraham is in Haran, that God makes a series of promises to him and his descendants. Gen. 12:2, 3, 7

They will be a great *nation*.

All nations of the earth will receive *blessing* thru him, (Abraham), his descendants and a special descendant, Jesus.

Abraham's descendants will receive a *land*.

When his father dies, Abraham goes with his wife and nephew Lot, to see the land God *promised* him. It becomes known as the *Promised Land*. Abraham is 75 years old. The land he is going to is called Canaan. It has the Mediterranean Sea on the west; the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River and the Dead Sea on the east.

The people who live there are descendants of Noah's grandson, Canaan. After the Tower of Babel, he and his family clan migrated west and settled in this land. His descendants have been there for more than 300 years, so the population has greatly increased. In fact they are now divided into 10 ethnic groups. Together they are known as the Canaanites. The entire area is called Canaan.

Abraham has been told he will be the father of a great nation; but as yet, he is not even the father of one son. The next year, when he is 76, God tells Abraham and Sarah they will *have* a son (15:3-5). They wait 10 years but Sarah does not get pregnant. So at 86, he and Sarah decide to use the culture of that day. He marries her servant and has a son thru her. He names the son, *Ishmael*.

But this is *not* what God intended. God had told them the son was to be born of Sarah. Both of them knew this. But since God took so long, they decided to get the answer on their own – to do it *their* way instead of God's way.

God was testing the faith of Abraham and Sarah as they waited those 10 years. Because they failed, God repeats the test and the promise. He once again tells them Sarah will have a son. This time they wait 12 years. But it is even harder because age spans have become shorter. Sometime during these 12 years Sarah loses her ability to have a baby. But they continue to wait for God to keep His promise. They pass the test. When Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 89, God tells them they will have a son in 9 months. At first they laugh because it is physically impossible. But they also know God can *do* the impossible, so they *believe* God.

Before their son's birth, when Abraham is still 99 years old, God makes a covenant, a declaration or agreement with him. From now on, he will not be from the race of his father and the people who lived in Haran. He is going to be the first of a brand new race - the Jewish race. Everyone connected with him will have special blessing. The physical sign of this agreement is circumcision.

9 months later Sarah gives birth to a son and they name him *Isaac*. The Hebrew name is Yitzhak. The name means *laughter*. They laughed when they were told he was going to be born and now they are laughing because of his birth. God's promises will develop thru him.

But there is a problem. Abraham has Ishmael, his firstborn who is supposed to have the inheritance. He is now a young boy of 13. Conflict arises between Isaac, the newborn and Ishmael, the first-born. After 3-4 years, the conflict is so bad that Hagar and her son Ishmael are told to leave Abraham's home. Since Hagar was an Egyptian, she would be expected to return to her family clan in Egypt. Instead, she and her son join others who live in the Sinai Peninsula. Ishmael is 17 years old.

Ishmael's descendants eventually become the Arabs; Isaac's descendants thru Jacob become the Jews. Abraham is the father of both.

As believers, we are not to despise the Jews and we are not to despise the Arabs. Because the Arabs are descendants of Abraham, God said they are entitled to blessings and to land. They would become a great people who develop into many nations. But, the land of Israel is promised specifically to the Jews. God says it is to be their land forever.

The Arab-Israeli conflict started when Isaac was born. It has continued over 4000 years. If Abraham had waited for God, there would have been no conflict. Getting God's answer in his own way, instead of God's way, brought consequences that have had long-lasting effects.

In the first test, Abraham failed and then passed. God is now going to give Abraham another test. He tells Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

But this does not fit with God's character. How could God ever command a person to kill their child as an offering to Him? To deal with this problem, we first need to understand **why** God is giving **this** test.

God said Abraham would be the first of a brand new race. They would develop into a great nation; they were to have a land; God would bring blessing to the world thru them.

When Abraham had no son, he knew these promises depended totally on God, because he (Abraham) had nothing. But now he *has* a son. And only **thru** this son can God's promises continue to develop. So at this point, does Abraham *still* believe these promises depend on God? Or does he think they now depend on the survival of Isaac? God knows the answer, but Abraham does not. Until he is faced with losing his son, he has no way of knowing if his trust is really in God or in Isaac.

God's tests are always within the culture of the day. At the time of Abraham, child sacrifice was common. So God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son. Once Abraham makes his choice and shows it by his actions, God will intervene. He would **never** allow him to literally kill his son.

Another important fact is that Isaac is not a helpless child. He is 25 years old. This means Isaac is in agreement.

To give even more clarity, God tells us what Abraham was thinking in Genesis 22:5.

*Abraham said to the servants, stay here with the donkeys while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then **we** will come back to you.* The Hebrew includes the word "we". But how can Abraham say that, when he believes he is going to kill his son?

The answer is in the New Testament Hebrews 11: 17

By faith, Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even tho God has said to him, It is thru Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Abraham is ready to offer his son and Isaac is willing to be a sacrifice because they believe God will raise him from the dead. This is tremendous faith when they have never seen a resurrection or even heard of one happening. But they know the God of Abraham can *do* the impossible. When Abraham's faith is put to the test, he learns his trust **is** in God alone.

God responds to this trust. Just as Abraham is ready to literally kill his son, God stops him. God provides an animal sacrifice in place of Isaac. There is a ram close to them, which is caught in the bushes.

All of this happens on the Moriah mountain range. On this same mountain range, some 2000 years later, God the Father offered His Son Jesus in sacrifice, but this time there was no substitute. Isaac as a grown man agreed with his father to be a sacrifice. Jesus agreed with His Father to be **our** sacrifice. He was our substitute.

The Jewish people thought and learned thru picture language. God arranged His test of Abraham, so eventually it could be a picture of Jesus. The Jews could never understand the picture until after Jesus' death and resurrection. But later, as they faced the question about belief in Jesus, they had the Old Testament picture of Abraham and Isaac to illustrate what Jesus and God the Father experienced. They could see that God the Father provided Jesus as the **Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world.

Isaac's part in the test raises a question. If Isaac was in agreement and already knew about it, why did he ask, *where is the lamb?*

The point of this story is that God will provide the sacrifice. In the Jewish style of writing, the way to emphasize and draw attention to it is to have Isaac ask the question, *where is the lamb for the burnt offering?* Isaac already knew, but it needed to be asked so Abraham could clearly say, *God Himself will provide the lamb.* This same emphasis and style is found in the New Testament when Jesus asked, *My God, why have You forsaken Me?*

Abraham and Isaac return home and fifteen years go by. When Isaac is 40 he marries a 2nd cousin named Rebekah.

In the early days, human life began with Adam and Eve. They had many sons and daughters. All that first generation married either siblings, cousins, nieces or nephews. When genes were still almost perfect, there was no command against marrying close relatives. Cain married, either a sister, cousin or niece. Abraham married a half sister; Isaac married a 2nd cousin; Jacob married a 1st cousin.

Later on, it was necessary to marry within the family clan because they were the only ones worshipping God. If they had married people who worshipped pagan gods, knowledge of the true God would have been lost in 1-2 generations. God told *His* people to marry only those who worshipped Him. It was not until the time of Moses that God said they could not marry members of their immediate family.

All the promises made to Abraham are given to Isaac. Isaac's faith is now tested because the promises can only be fulfilled if he and Rebekah have a son. They have to wait 20 years. Then they have twin boys, Jacob and Esau.

Esau is born first, which means he has the **birthright** - the rights of the first-born. There are 3 important rights.

1. A double portion of the inheritance, when the father dies.

This means if there are 2 children, the father divides the inheritance in 3 equal parts. The first-born gets 2 parts while the other gets one part. He gets a double portion of the inheritance.

2. Leadership over the family clan after the father dies. This means responsibility for their protection and provision.

3. Act as priest for the family - as we saw in the story of Job.

These rights belong to the first-born. But, if the first-born rejects God - if he is guilty of immorality or murder, he is disqualified and the father can give the birthright to any of his other sons.

The years go by and the twins become adults. Esau, the firstborn, is not interested in his birthright. The chance to have a double part of the inheritances is too far in the future. He has absolutely no interest in protecting or providing for the family clan. Since he has rejected God, he definitely does not want to represent the family before God.

These rights have no meaning for Esau, but Jacob **values** them. This is why he asks to buy the birthright from Esau. Almost everyone misunderstands the story, so let me put it in perspective.

Suppose you have not eaten in 4-5 hours. You are hungry, but not in any danger of starvation. Let's say you arrive home. A family member has made a big pot of stew. He says you can have a bowl of stew if you will give him your car. Would you accept the offer? Of course not. Your car is certainly worth more than a bowl of stew.

The fact that Esau sells his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew, reveals the value he places on it. This is why Scripture says, *he despised his birthright* (25:34). To him, it was only worth a plate of food.

Since Esau did not value the birthright, Jacob had every right to buy it. Buying or selling a birthright was common in their day. Archeologists have found a record of someone selling a birthright for 3 sheep. There is nothing wrong in how Jacob got the birthright. He did not *take* it; he *bought* it.

But the birthright was not usable unless the father added his blessing. This would not happen until the father was close to death. It was like a will that is spoken rather than written. To get this blessing, Jacob deceives his father by pretending to be Esau. In this, not only Jacob, but everyone is wrong.

Isaac knew before the twins were born, that *Jacob* was to get the birthright because God had told him. Ordinarily, Esau, the first-born, was entitled to it. The reason for the change was seen when Esau became an adult. He rejected God and this automatically disqualified him from the birthright. But now Isaac, at the end of his life, goes against what God told him. He plans to give his blessing to Esau, which would mean Esau gets the birthright. Isaac is wrong in his plan. He does it because *Esau* is his favorite.

Rebekah is wrong to suggest and plan the deceit for getting the blessing. She does it because *Jacob* is her favorite.

Jacob is wrong to obey his mother in the deceit.

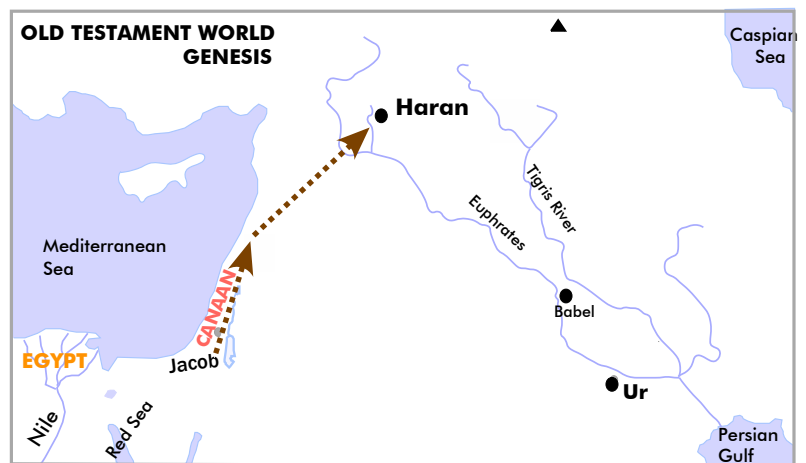
Esau is wrong to want the blessing. It could only go to the one who had the birthright. He should have told his father he sold the birthright to Jacob years ago.

Jacob the son, and Rebekah his mother, knew what God promised - the birthright was to go to Jacob. But they did not wait for God. They decided to get the answer on their own – to do it their way instead of God's way. It brought consequences that had lasting effects. Rebekah is punished for her part in the deception. The following month Jacob will leave home and she will never again see her favorite son, Jacob.

Esau, meanwhile, continues to reject God. He has despised his birthright. He has married 2 women from the area who worship pagan gods. And now he plans to kill Jacob.

Isaac and Rebekah decide Jacob needs to get out of town. They send him back to the family clan, where he can find a wife who follows God. Jacob goes from southern Canaan (Beersheba), 500 miles to Haran in the north. He moves in with his Uncle Laban.

While there, he finds the one he wants to marry. It is his younger cousin, Rachael. To pay the marriage price, Jacob has to work 7 years. When the time is up, he is ready to take his bride. But after the celebration and wedding night, he finds he is married to her older sister, Leah. To understand how this could happen, we have to know the culture.



They did not have wedding ceremonies. There was only a party in the evening. Men celebrated in 1 room; the women in another. Laban made sure Jacob had plenty to drink during the celebration. Late in the evening, Laban, the father, brings the bride to Jacob. Her face is covered with a heavy veil. The bride remains covered until they are in a dark bedroom. And since Leah wanted to deceive, she acted like her sister, Rachel. She did everything possible to imply she was Rachel. God brings justice. Jacob, a few years earlier had lied to his father; Jacob claimed to be his brother. Now Jacob is lied to by his uncle and Leah claims to be her sister. The deceiver has been deceived.

The stories in Genesis are interesting and well known. But they also raise questions.

First, the question of polygamy. Many of the men had several wives. Does that mean God approved of it? No. God allowed it in the Old Testament, but it was never what He intended. He tells us a lot of details about these marriages to show that polygamy brings heartache and trouble. God intends marriage to be one man and just **one** woman during the time they are together.

Another question involves the birth of children.

Genesis says that when God saw Jacob loved Rachel, but not Leah, He blessed Leah by **giving** her children. He punished Jacob by **withholding** children from Rachel.

It is important to know that God only did this in the Old Testament. Everything God did with the Jews under the Old Agreement was based on the physical. He gave them a physical land and a physical king. They were a physical nation. There were physical battles. His blessings and judgments were physical: rain or drought; abundant harvests or plagues; health or sickness. Having children was a sign of God's blessing. Not being able to have children was evidence of His discipline. This was **only** true for the Jews in the Old Testament.

We are the Church, the Body of Christ. God works with us on the basis of the spiritual. We have spiritual battles. God guarantees to bless us with spiritual blessings in Christ. When people do not have children today, it is **never** a sign of His discipline or judgment.

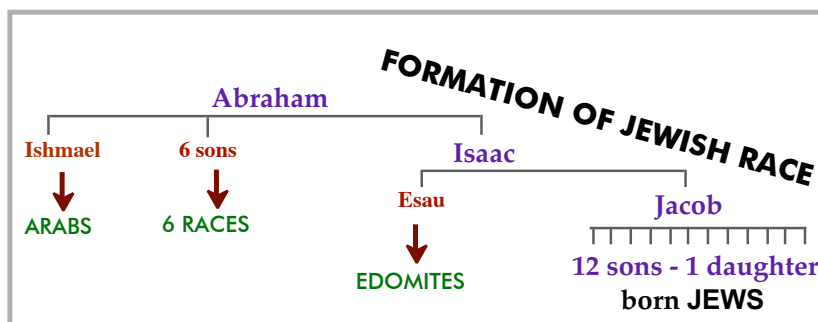
In the life of Jacob, he eventually has 4 wives: Leah, Rachel and each of their servants. Thru them, he has 12 sons and one daughter. After working 20 years for his uncle Laban, Jacob returns to the land of Canaan. On the way, God appears to him in the form of a man.

God brings Jacob face to face with his way of life. Will he continue to live by his own cleverness thru deceit; or will he trust God to work out the promises? Jacob cannot decide because his cleverness has always worked. He has to wrestle all night before he is willing to say, *God, I choose to trust You*. He literally and physically wrestles. In addition, it is a picture of his spiritual wrestling about trusting God.

Jacob occasionally goes back to his old ways, just like we do. But he really is a changed man. We know this because God changes his name - from *Jacob*, the deceiver, to *Israel*, meaning, prince with God. In order for someone to be a prince, there has to be a king. Jacob is a prince with God because he accepts God's authority. He allows God to be king in his life.

Jacob has 12 sons and one daughter and with them, the **Jewish race** is now formed.

Ordinarily it takes one man and one generation and then his descendants become a people, race or ethnic group. But God formed the Jewish race differently from all other races. It took 3 generations, a specific mother and a choice about God.



It started with Abraham. Ishmael his firstborn was the father of the Arabs. Six sons thru another wife become heads of other peoples and nations. One of those sons was Midian and he became the father of the Midianites. Only Isaac (out of 8 sons) became part of the Jewish race because only he was born to Sarah.

Isaac had twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Esau rejected God and became the father of the Edomite people. Jacob chose to follow God, so

he became part of the Jewish race. It is not until the 3rd generation, Jacob, that his children are all **born** Jewish. From then until now, a person needs the combined genes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in order to be Jewish.

All 13 children of Jacob are born as Jews – his 12 sons and one daughter. The 12 sons will eventually develop into the 12 tribes of Israel.

Since Jacob loves his wife Rachel more than the others, it is not surprising he loves her son more than the other sons. His name is Joseph. Jacob shows this greater love by giving Joseph a special tunic. Down thru the years it has been called a *coat of many colors*. This is totally wrong. The Hebrew means a tunic or outer robe with long, wide sleeves.

Back in those days, men worked in the fields taking care of crops or animals. Their tunic was sleeveless or with short sleeves to not interfere with their work. Anyone wearing a tunic with long, wide sleeves was the supervisor who did not have to work. It was usually worn by the first born, the one with the birthright.

Joseph's brothers are grown men. They certainly are not jealous because Joseph has a prettier coat with more colors in it. They are angry because thru this gift, Jacob has placed Joseph over them as boss. He is just a 17-year-old teenager. Joseph has been given the birthright, even tho he is 11th in birth order of the boys. Is it any wonder the brothers resent him?

The story of Joseph is thrilling, but it also raises questions about Joseph's actions.

When his brothers come to Egypt for food, he speaks to them roughly; he accuses them of being spies; he threatens them with imprisonment; he has his cup put in Benjamin's sack and then accuses them of theft. At the meal he gives Benjamin 5 times as many gifts as he gives his half brothers.

Some people think Joseph is taking revenge or getting even.

Joseph's actions are not revenge; they are evidence of his wisdom. It would be dangerous for Joseph to reveal himself if his brothers still have all their rivalry and jealousy. In the past they had not cared about Benjamin nor their father. Joseph's actions are to find out if their attitudes have changed.

Other people wonder why his brothers do not recognize him.

The first reason is that 21 years have gone by. When they last saw him he was a 17-year-old teenager. Now he is 38, an adult man.

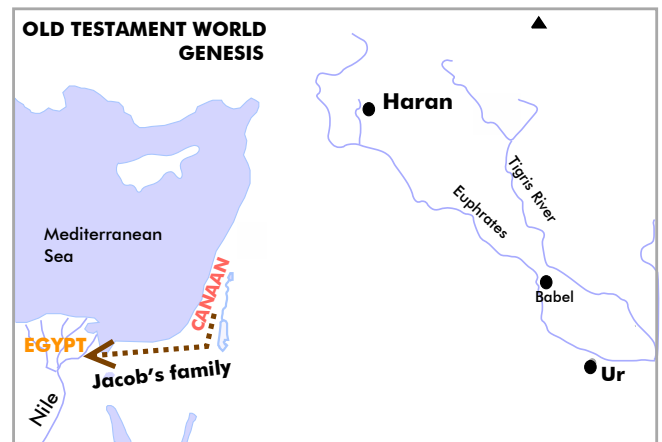
In addition, he is speaking another language; his clothes and accessories are that of an Egyptian ruler. They automatically assume he is Egyptian. Never in their wildest dreams would they think of seeing their brother in this situation. On the other hand, Joseph is able to recognize them because they were adults when he last saw them. They have not changed that much and they have come as a group.

By their responses, the brothers show they have truly repented. They have changed their attitudes towards their father, towards each other and even about what they had done to Joseph. Based on their change, Joseph tells his brothers who he is.

Because the famine will last 5 more years, he has the family clan - all 66 of them - move down to Egypt. They settle in the area called Goshen - just east of the Nile delta.. Jacob is able to spend 17 years with Joseph in Egypt.

When he dies, they take him back to Canaan. He is buried in the family tomb with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah.

After Jacob's death, 54 years go by. Just before Joseph dies, he makes the family promise that when they or their descendants leave Egypt, they will take his bones with them so eventually, he also can be buried in the land of promise. Joseph then dies and is embalmed.



The Jewish style of writing likes to use **circular writing**. It ends a chapter or book like it began. Jews also loved to use opposites to emphasize their point. Genesis is an example of both - circular and opposites. The book begins with a living God; it ends with a dead man. It begins with creation; it ends with a coffin in Egypt. Where God gave life, sin brought death.



There are so many lessons from this book. Let me mention 3 that are relevant for our lives and that tie together.

The first is waiting for God.

We may know God wants something for our lives. If He delays in bringing it about, are we willing to wait? Or do we decide to get the answer on our own - to do it our way instead of God's way. If we do, there can be consequences that have lasting effects.

The second lesson is from the experience of Joseph

In our lives, thru no fault of our own, we may face injustice, rejection, false accusations or misunderstandings. We can choose to become bitter or find ways to take revenge. Or we can be faithful wherever God puts us, doing whatever He gives us. And if there is nothing we can do, we wait for God to work on our behalf. When there seems to be no answers, it will take faith to believe God knows and still cares. Because God is God, He can take what others intend for evil and use it for our good.

A third lesson comes from the phrase that God uses for Himself, *I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*.

The GOD

...of Abraham - can do the impossible	He gave Sarah a son when it was physically impossible.
...of Isaac ----- provides	He provided a substitute animal, so Isaac did not have to die
...of Jacob ----- changes human nature	He changed him, from a cheater to a prince with God; from one who lived by deceit to one who lived by trust in God.

There are times we face what seems an **impossible** situation.

God says to us, *I am the God of Abraham. I can do the **impossible**. I can remove the problem.*

But some times, instead of removing the problem, God wants to take us thru the problem.

He becomes the *God of Isaac*. He **provides** what we need as we go thru the crisis.

Other times **we** are the cause of the problems and we are the ones who need to change.

God says to us, *I am the God of Jacob. I **have** the ability and power to **change** you if you will let Me.*

Whatever our situation, God says, ***I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I AM sufficient for your need***