

In the Beginning *Perspectives on Genesis*

2006–2007 *Horizons* Bible Study Workshop for Leaders

By Joyce MacKichan Walker

What is this?

A lesson plan for introducing *In the Beginning: Perspectives on Genesis* to Presbyterian Women or any group who plans to use this study

Who is this for and why?

- A gathering of Presbyterian Women in the congregation, to introduce the new study and generate interest and enthusiasm for upcoming circle meetings
- A gathering of Presbyterian Women in the presbytery, to introduce the study to leaders at the congregational level

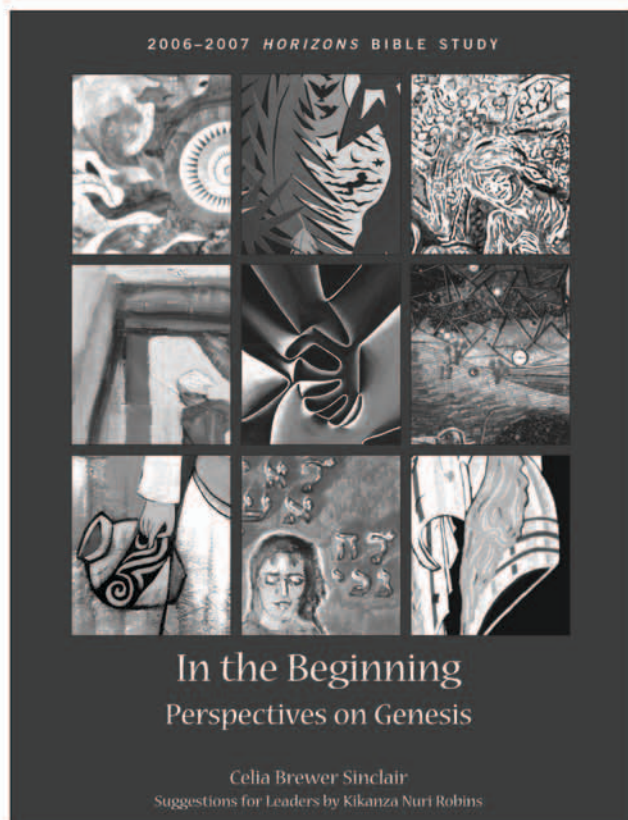
What will participants learn during this workshop?

Participants will:

- explore the context for stories in *Genesis*, setting the stage for meeting these characters while using the 2006–2007 *Horizons* Bible study;
- learn more about the concept of God's providence, a primary theme in *Genesis* and this Bible study;
- examine some of the artwork used in this Bible study and how it relates to the story it illustrates.

☆ *Want More?* ☆

Do you have additional time or want to dig a little deeper? Look for the words “Want More?” in this resource. These are simple suggestions for extending this workshop.



Lesson Plan

Invite

Welcome participants and tell them they are about to explore the 2006–2007 *Horizons* Bible study, published by and for Presbyterian Women. As a part of the discovery process, participants will use this time to discern how this study can be used to learn more about one's relationship with God.

Invite participants to brainstorm the names of characters they expect to encounter in *Genesis*. Accept all answers and list them on newsprint as they are offered. Tell participants that *Genesis* is one of the more well-known books of the Bible and that it contains stories with which many of us are familiar. In this year's study we will encounter some of these well-known figures and stories, and some that are less well-known.

Materials needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Pens or pencils (enough for each participant)
- Handout: *Genesis* Family Tree
- Handout: Instructions for Small Groups
- Bibles

Distribute copies of the handout “*Genesis* Family Tree.” Ask participants to circle the following names on the family tree as you read them aloud: Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Judah, Tamar and Joseph. As they circle the names on their handouts, circle the ones that also appear on the newsprint (the list you brainstormed earlier). If you come to a name that is not listed on the newsprint, add it (using a different-colored marker for emphasis). Tell participants that the circled names are the characters who are featured in the lessons in this study. Wonder aloud why the group might have missed some during your brainstorming session, but do not offer any reasons or any more information about them. Simply tell participants they can look forward to learning more about some of these less well-known characters as they use the study.

Using the family tree for reference, note the family connections between the circled names. Suggest to participants that they keep this handout with their study guide and use it as a reference point for the stories as they encounter them. Point out that from among the 50 chapters in *Genesis*, the study only takes them through parts of 26 of them. Suggest that reading the entire book would be a good challenge and point out the chart of readings on the bottom of the family tree handout.

Inform

Tell participants that this year’s study intentionally invites us to examine:

- Relationships between God and the people of *Genesis*, and among the people of *Genesis*
- Our own viewpoints and how they affect our understandings of the people we meet in these stories
- Interpretations of the stories explored in this Bible study, and the actions within the stories
- Ways to interpret gaps in the stories as invitations to see the stories in new ways (and then see our own lives in new ways)
- How society’s roles shaped what women and men did in biblical times, and how we might be shaped today by society’s expectations of us

Conclude this section by telling participants we are invited to look for surprises in *Genesis* and to expect the unexpected. We will begin today!

☆ Want More? ☆

Simply covering the list of things to watch for in the lesson plan is enough. But if you have time and want to say more, paraphrase or read aloud from the introduction to this study (pp. 2–3), from which the list was developed.

Investigate

Presbyterians cherish the doctrine of God’s providence. “[The doctrine of providence] says that the loving, just, and powerful God who first made heaven and earth continues to uphold, protect, rule over, take care of—provide for—God’s good creation and each one of us” (Shirley Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994, p. 166). One way to prepare to participate in this study of *Genesis* is to look at each of these nine lessons through the lens of the doctrine of providence—what can we see, in retrospect, of God’s hand providing for God’s good creation and for humanity? This will help us explore what the people of *Genesis* could see, in part or in whole, as their relationship with God matured over time.

Divide the group into nine smaller groups (groups of three or four people each are ideal). Give each group a copy of the handout “Instructions for Small Groups.” If you have a very large group, any number of small groups will work—simply assign the same lesson to more than one group. If you have a very small group, focus on just a few of the lessons. It’s more important to have three or more people in each group than it is to cover all nine lessons.

Ask, “What did you learn that helps you know these people probably saw and understood God’s intentions *in retrospect* more clearly than at the time of their actions?” Allow participants to include in their discussion things they already knew about these stories, since many are so familiar, but keep the discussion focused on the hindsight that is likely to have developed over time, and how insights about God and God’s plan might have changed over time.

★ *Want More?* ★

Invite each group to “report” to the larger group, sharing the names of the people they read about, what these people may have expected God was doing, and how their understanding of what God was doing may be different *in retrospect*.

Illustrate

Still working in small groups, ask participants to look at the art used for the lesson their group discussed earlier. Then ask, “What insight or new perspective does this art offer for this story in *Genesis*? What do you imagine this picture says about God and God’s actions in this situation?”

★ *Want More?* ★

Each of these stories has its own drama and intensity. Ask the small groups to look again at the lesson and chapter(s) from *Genesis* that they were assigned, this time choosing a song, poem, dance or other dramatic way to demonstrate its theme. Give each small group two minutes to perform for the entire group.

Inspire

Ask participants to work in pairs (a group of three will work if you have an odd number) and take turns telling about a time they were able to see God’s action more clearly *in retrospect* than in the middle of the situation they’re describing. Give groups 10 minutes to discuss, then bring the group back together as a whole.

Read aloud *Ephesians 1:3–14*. Invite participants to close their eyes while you read it and encourage them to imagine Jesus as the culmination of God’s providence and plan for humanity. Then ask them to look at the text in their Bibles and select one word or phrase that best represents a promise they hope God is fulfilling for their future. 💡

💡 *Idea!*

Consider printing the text from *Ephesians* onto newsprint, or handing out a photocopy of that text so participants don’t have to look it up and can focus more quickly on the task at hand.

Closing Prayer

Tell participants that you will offer the beginning and the ending of the closing prayer and they will provide the middle. Ask participants to consider what they hope might come out of their study of *Genesis* this year—hopes for themselves, for their group, for their community, for the world. Standing or seated in a circle, invite participants to hold hands and, after you’ve opened the prayer, to share their hopes, moving clockwise around the circle.

Be sure to tell participants that not everyone must pray aloud. If they choose to pray in silence or not contribute at all, they should simply squeeze the hand of the person to their left, indicating it’s her turn to pray (or not, as she chooses).

Here is a suggested opening and closing for your prayer (based on the closing prayer for Lesson 9, p. 68 in the study).

Opening words

Gracious God, we believe that you created us, called us by name, and made us your people. Hear us as we pray our hopes for your future—for us and for your world. (Squeeze the hand of the person to your left.)

Closing words

Lord, your never-failing providence sets all things in order. We ask for the wisdom to discern your provision for us in every way. We pray for vision to be part of your dream, for ourselves and for the whole world. Amen.

★ Want More? ★

Here's another idea for introducing the nine stories covered in this Bible study. Use this activity in addition to, or in place of, the small group activity (see section titled "Investigate").

Using a piece of poster board or similar-weight paper, create a nine-piece puzzle (or crazy quilt) and prepare the pieces as follows. (These are just suggestions—use your own ideas for pieces you think represent the story and theme focus of each lesson.)

- Lesson 1—A picture of the earth as it's seen from space
- Lesson 2—A picture of something that represents separation for your church
- Lesson 3—A contemporary representation of a crime committed out of anger
- Lesson 4—A picture of a young tree (representing the beginning of the *Genesis* family tree)
- Lesson 5—A picture of someone you think of as an "outsider"
- Lesson 6—A picture of a stop sign
- Lesson 7—A picture of mothers and children
- Lesson 8—A picture of a woman protesting (with a sign asking for justice, peace, etc.)
- Lesson 9—A picture of a light bulb (or a sign that says, "I get it!")

As you display each piece and build your "big picture," remind participants of the story each picture represents, each time ending with the question, "I wonder how God will use this person (these people) and this situation to accomplish God's promise and provide for God's people?"

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Additional Resources

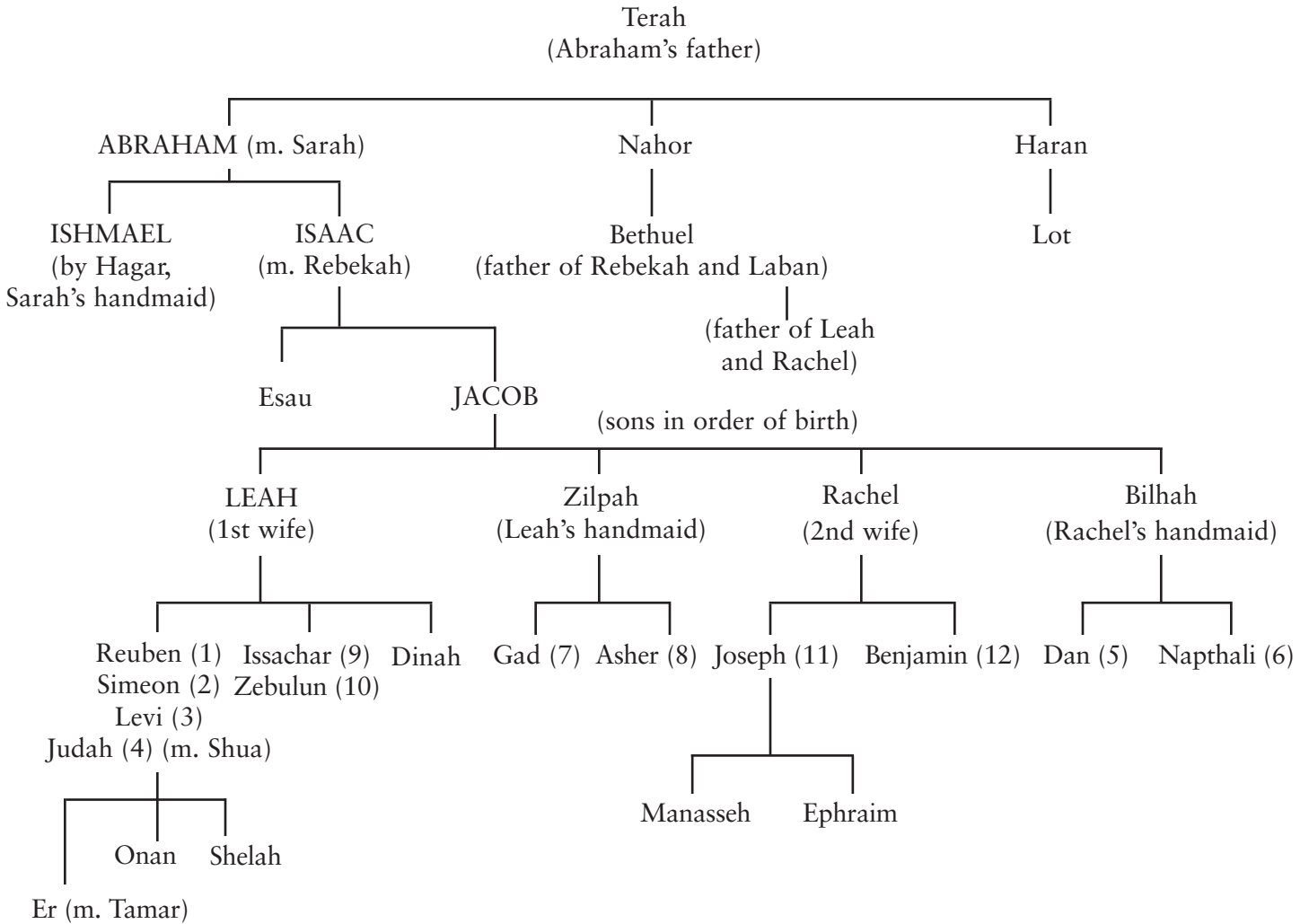
- Large-print version with Suggestions for Leaders, HZN-06-150, \$10*
- Audiocassette, HZN-06-170, \$10*
- Compact Disc, HZN-06-172, \$15* (slightly abridged study book and scriptures read aloud; no suggestions for leaders)
- Worship bulletins (blank inside) with *In the Beginning: Perspectives on Genesis* cover design, HZN-06-160, \$10 for a pack of 100*
- Spanish translation, HZN-06-110, \$6*
- Korean translation, HZN-06-120, \$6*
- *More Suggestions for Leaders*
A Companion to
the 2006–2007
Horizons Bible study.
HZN-06-102, \$5*
- *Horizons* magazine with a Bible study resource in each issue, \$18 for one year, \$34 for two years, \$50 for three years (shipping and handling included)



**Plus shipping and handling, 10% of order total, \$4.50 minimum, \$60 maximum*

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Genesis Family Tree



Read the entire book of *Genesis*.

- For Lesson 1, read *Genesis* 1 and 2.
- For Lesson 2, read *Genesis* 3.
- For Lesson 3, read *Genesis* 4:1–16.
- Between Lessons 3 and 4, read *Genesis* 4:17–26 and *chapters* 5– 11.
- For Lesson 4, read *Genesis* 12, 18:1–15, and 20.
- Between Lessons 4 and 5, read *Genesis* 13–15, 17, 18:16–33, and 19.
- For Lesson 5, read *Genesis* 16 and 21:1–21.
- Between Lessons 5 and 6, read *Genesis* 21:22–34.
- For Lesson 6, read *Genesis* 22.
- Between Lessons 6 and 7, read *Genesis* 23.
- For Lesson 7, read *Genesis* 24–25, 27, and 29–32.
- Between Lessons 7 and 8, read *Genesis* 26, 28, and 33–36.
- For Lesson 8, read *Genesis* 38.
- Between Lessons 8 and 9, read *Genesis* 46–49.
- For Lesson 9, read *Genesis* 37, 39–45, and 50.

Instructions for Small Groups

Group 1: Lesson 1 (*Genesis 1:26–2:25*)—Focus on the people God created.

Group 2: Lesson 2 (*Genesis 3*)—Focus on Eve.

Group 3: Lesson 3 (*Genesis 4:1–16*)—Focus on Cain.

Group 4: Lesson 4 (*Genesis 12:1–20; 18:1–15*)—Focus on Sarah.

Group 5: Lesson 5 (*Genesis 16; 21:1–21*)—Focus on Hagar.

Group 6: Lesson 6 (*Genesis 22:1–24*)—Focus on Abraham.

Group 7: Lesson 7 (*Genesis 25:19–27; 27:1–29, 41–45*)—Focus on Rebekah.

Group 8: Lesson 8 (*Genesis 38*)—Focus on Tamar.

Group 9: Lesson 9 (*Genesis 37:2–8, 12–28, 36; 41:38–45; 42:1–3; 45:4–11; 50:15–21*)

—Focus on Joseph.

[“The doctrine of providence] says that the loving, just, and powerful God who first made heaven and earth continues to uphold, protect, rule over, take care of—provide for—God’s good creation and each one of us” (Shirley Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994, p. 166).

In your group, read your assigned passage(s) silently or aloud. Groups with long passages or multiple passages should divide readings among group members and ask each group member to summarize what she read for the benefit of the entire small group.

Discuss the following questions. Make sure you allow adequate time for responding to each question.

1. According to your passage, what do you think was God’s ultimate intent for this person?
2. What unfolds for this person as the story develops?
3. Do you think this person sees that part of God’s plan is accomplished or fulfilled through her or him? If yes, at what point do you think she or he realizes this?