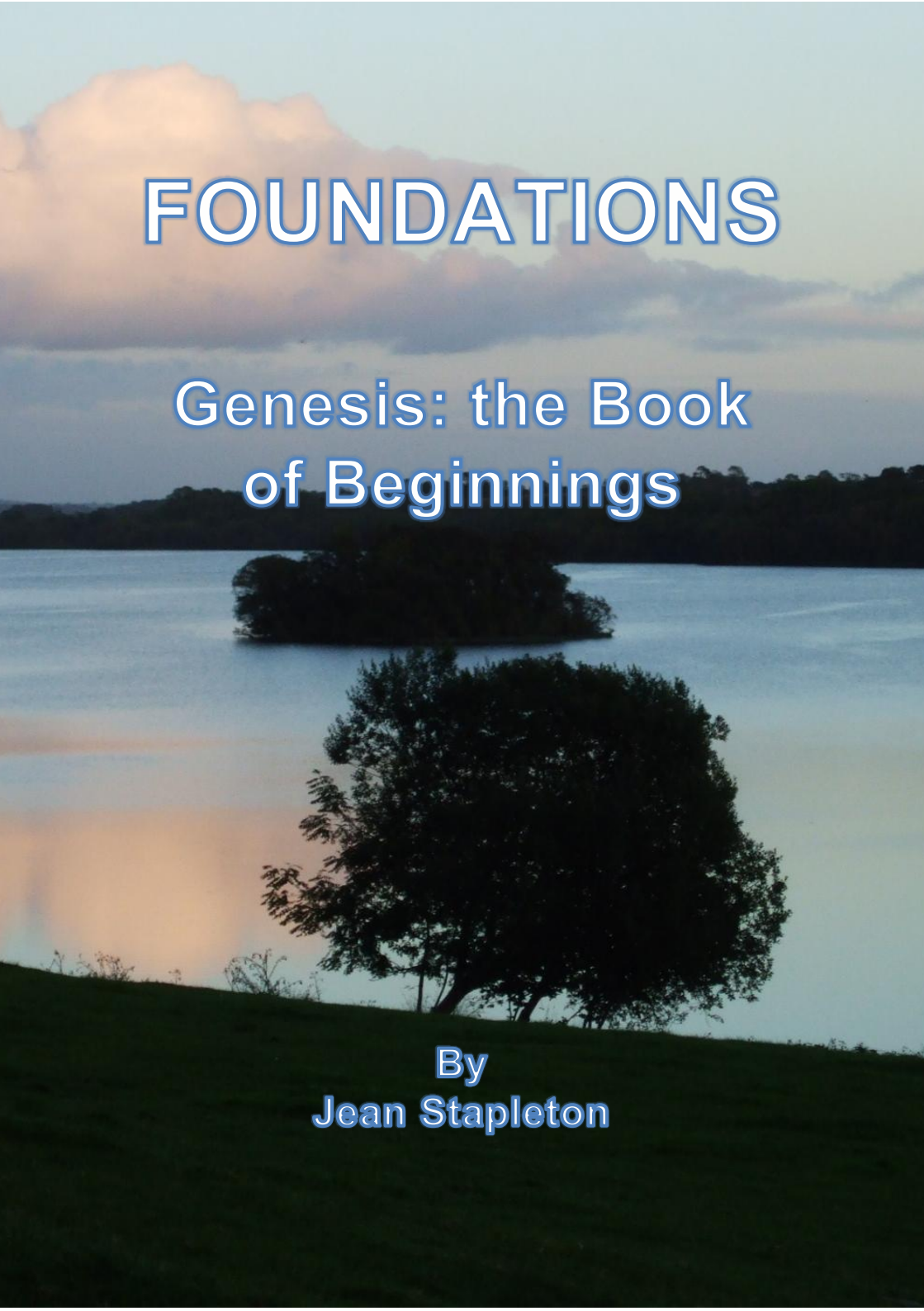


The background of the entire page is a landscape photograph. It shows a calm body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, under a sky with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. In the middle ground, there is a small, dark, tree-covered island. In the foreground, a large, dark, leafy tree stands on a grassy bank. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

FOUNDATIONS

Genesis: the Book of Beginnings

By
Jean Stapleton

FOUNDATIONS

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By
Jean Stapleton
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INTRODUCTION

Before a building goes up, the foundations must be laid. In the Book of Genesis God has given us the foundation of all that the Bible teaches. In this book we learn about God, about ourselves and about the sin that separates us from God who is holy. We also learn about God's promise of a Saviour, the main theme of the Bible, fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Genesis also gives us understanding of why the world is as it is now. This is not a book of stories or myths; it is a true account of earth's earliest days and of the founding of the nation from which the Saviour would come.

GENESIS: The Foundation Book

Chapter 1: In the beginning

Read: Genesis chapter 1

Genesis is the first of five books, called the Pentateuch, written by Moses. It is one of the Bible's historical books: it deals with facts, not made up stories.

No-one was there to see the events described in the first chapter except for God Himself. How did Moses know how the creation took place? The answer is given to us in the New Testament: 2 Timothy 3: 16 and 2 Peter 1: 21.

The Book of Genesis, especially the first 11 chapters, gives the foundation of all the main doctrines (teaching) of the Bible. Some of the foundations laid in this first chapter are:

1. That God was there in the beginning.
2. That God created all things: the materials He used did not exist before He brought them into being.
3. That God created matter, space and light and that He then prepared the earth for mankind.
4. Man is not another animal, but was a special creation, given dominion (authority) over all other living things on the earth.
5. At the time of creation, everything that God made was perfect.

Thinking it Through

1. How do the New Testament books of 2 Timothy and 2 Peter explain how the Old Testament writers were able to write as they did?
2. Why do many people refuse to believe the account of the creation in Genesis chapter 1? (See Romans 1: 18-22.) Do these verses say that people do not know the truth, or that they do not want the truth?

Chapter 2: Adam's home, his work, and his wife

Read: Genesis chapter 2

This chapter complements the account of the creation in chapter 1: it gives us more details about how God dealt with man. We see God's care in preparing a place for the man to live and in providing him with a wife.

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

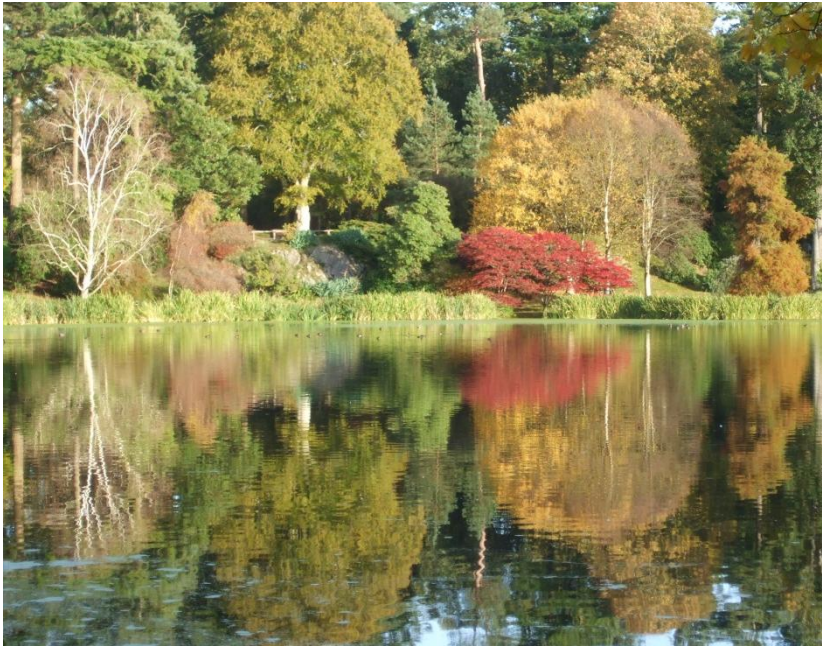
1. The seven-day week, with one day set apart for rest. (The word 'sanctified' in verse 3 means 'set apart'. Also see Exodus 20: 8-11.)
2. The law of God: as our Creator, God tells us how we should live. In this chapter, we learn that one simple command would test man's obedience to his Creator (verses 16-17).
3. Marriage between a man and a woman. The Lord Jesus quoted verses from this chapter when he was asked a question about marriage (Matthew 19: 4-6).

Thinking it Through

1. There are ten commandments in Exodus chapter 20. Why does only the fourth commandment begin with the word "Remember"? (Exodus 20: 8.)
2. Since the time of Jesus' resurrection, Christians have observed the first day of the week as the 'Christian Sabbath'. Why did God say that one day in seven should

be different from the other six? (Genesis 2: 2 and Mark 2: 27)

3. We read in Genesis 1: 31 that everything God had made was 'very good'. What one thing do we read about in Genesis 2: 18 that God said was not good. How did God deal with this?



Chapter 3: Disobedience

Read: Genesis chapter 3

This chapter tells us how sin came into the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They knew that God had given them life and everything that they needed and yet, when they were tempted, they did the one thing that God had told them not to do.

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

1. There is an evil being (called the devil or satan) who hates God and tempts man to sin. (Genesis 3: 1; Revelation 12: 9)
2. When Adam sinned, he was the representative of the human race, and all Adam's descendants are sinful (we call this the doctrine of original sin). The only person born into this world without sin is the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Life on earth changed because sin had come into the world. (Genesis 3:17-19).
4. The promise of a Saviour who would overcome the devil (Genesis 3: 15. In picture language, this verse means that a descendant of Eve would suffer ('bruised heel') but the serpent would be crushed ['bruised head'] by Him).
5. The Saviour would die instead of the sinner: pictured in the death of an animal to provide the skin that covered Adam and Eve's shame (Genesis 3: 21).

Thinking it Through

1. What were the two parts of the serpent's temptation? Can you find one in verse 4 and one in verse 5. What had the serpent already said that would make Eve more likely to listen to him? (verse1)
2. Instead of confessing their sin, what did Adam and Eve do? (verses 12-13)
3. Why did Adam and Eve have to leave the garden? (verses 22-24)

Chapter 4: The Two brothers

Read: Genesis 4: 1-16

In Genesis chapter 3 we found the beginning of the Bible's teaching about substitution: that God accepts a substitute to die in the sinner's place. The death of an animal to provide the skin that clothed Adam and Eve is the first of many Old Testament "pictures" of what the promised Saviour would do.

In Genesis chapter 4 we learn that the sons of Adam and Eve knew about this teaching. Abel brought a lamb to offer as a sacrifice. In doing this he showed that he had faith in the way of forgiveness God had provided. Cain offered to God the results of his own work. This was not accepted by God, but Cain could still have approached God in the way He required. He did not do this, choosing to go his own way.

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

1. The way of forgiveness through the death of another in the sinner's place (substitution).
2. The individual's approach to God through sacrifice.

The division between those who come to God in the way God requires and those who try to approach God by their own merits.

Thinking it through:

1. Use Isaiah 53: 4-6 (also 1 Corinthians 15: 3; 1 Peter 2: 24) to help.
2. Who do the verses in Isaiah speak about? (Matthew 1: 21)

3. What was Cain's response when God did not accept him? What should he have done? (verses 6-7)

Chapter 5: Judgement and grace

Read: Genesis chapter 6

The story of the great flood has often been trivialised as a children's story, with smiling animals on an unlikely looking ark. This has led to a failure to recognise it as the solemn event described in Genesis chapters.6-8.

Two things stand out in chapter 6: God's judgement upon a sinful world and God's grace to Noah and his family. (The word 'grace' means undeserved favour, or kindness.) From verse 9 we learn that amid widespread evil, Noah stood out as a man who lived in fellowship with God. Yet even Noah needed God's grace – His undeserved favour. Noah was not an exception to the universal sinfulness of mankind. He was saved from the wickedness around him and from the destruction of the flood, by the grace of God (verse 8).

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

1. God is patient in His dealings with mankind (Genesis 6: 3 tells us the time God gave the people to change their ways, before He sent the flood). But He does bring judgement on those who refuse to repent and continue in their sinful behaviour (see 1 Peter 3: 20 and 2 Peter 3: 9.)

2. God provides a way of salvation for those who trust in Him. This is according to His grace and cannot be earned.

God enters into a covenant relationship with His people. A covenant is an agreement, but unlike human covenants where the parties agree terms, God Himself sets out the

terms of the covenant. God's covenant with Noah is set out fully in Genesis chapters 8 and 9.

Thinking it through:

1. How did mankind's behaviour appear to God in the time of Noah? Find four descriptions in Genesis 6: 5 & 11.
2. Was Noah the designer of the ark? Give one word that describes Noah's response to God's instructions (verse 22).
3. The account of the flood in the Book of Genesis is not a myth, but a factual account of what happened. How does the New Testament help us to know this? (Use Matthew 24: 37-39 – words spoken by the Lord Jesus, and Hebrews 11: 7 to answer this.)

Chapter 6: The world-wide flood

Read: Genesis chapter 7

From the New Testament we learn that Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). Obviously, he warned people of the coming flood, but no-one outside his own family, took notice of his words. Of the large population living at that time, only eight people were saved. It is important to notice that it was God who closed the door of the ark (v.16).

Scale models of the ark have been built and tested in all sorts of conditions. The design of the ark has been found to be the most stable possible – we see the importance of Noah’s obedience. The flood was something quite outside Noah’s experience, but God knew exactly what was needed to keep the occupants of the ark completely safe.

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

1. The theme of judgement continues from the previous chapter. Many years were given for mankind to repent and seek God’s forgiveness (chapter 6 v.3). God’s patience with sinful people should not lead us to think that God will somehow “change His mind” and “let us off” (2 Peter 3: 9). God is holy and makes no terms with sin, but He is also merciful and provides a way for sinful people to be saved.

2. God alone controls the time for repentance. God closed the door of the ark (verse 16), not only ensuring Noah’s safety, but also ending the time when men and women could have repented of their sinful ways.

Thinking it through:

1. What lesson did the Lord Jesus teach from what happened in Noah's day? (See Matthew 24: 30 & 36-44.)
2. Who decided when the opportunity to escape the flood should be ended? (verse 16).
3. Who ensured that Noah and those with him were safe? (verse 16).



Chapter 7: Promises

Read: Genesis 8 and 9: 1-19

By following the details of the account of the flood, we learn that Noah and his family were in the ark for just over a year.

The Bible emphasises that this was a universal flood: all the mountains were covered, all land animals not in the ark were destroyed. All people living at that time, apart from the eight people in the ark, were destroyed. God's promise in Genesis 9: 9-17 clearly states that no such event would happen again. If, as some people argue, this was a local flood, then God's promise loses its meaning as many local floods have occurred since that time. The words of the Lord Jesus recorded in Matthew 24: 37-39 confirm the uniqueness of the event.

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter are:

1. God's promise of regular seasons on which we can depend (Genesis 8: 22). This is obviously very important for the provision of sufficient food.
2. Permission is given to use animals as food: before the flood, the diet was vegetarian. This certainly emphasises the Bible's teaching that man is not "another animal" but a distinct creation (Genesis 9: 3).
3. The need for justice to be upheld: the punishment for taking human life is to be the life of the murderer (Genesis 9: 5-6). The reason given is that man is a special creation "in the image of God".

4. The covenant promise: there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth. This confirms the fact that the flood in the time of Noah was unique (Genesis 9:11 and 15).

Thinking it through:

1. Give reasons why we know that the flood in Noah's time covered the whole earth. (Use Genesis 7: 19-20; 9: 11; Matthew 24: 38-39; 2 Peter 3: 6.)
2. What was Noah's first recorded action when he left the ark? (Genesis 8: 20)
3. What is promised to us by God in Genesis 18:18-20?

Chapter 8: Confusion

Read: Genesis 11: 1-9

Evolutionists cannot explain why language developed in human beings. The Bible teaches that the first man and woman were created with the ability to speak and to understand speech. However, this leaves the question of how so many different languages arose. This is explained in Genesis 11.

To understand this chapter, we have to realise that people at that time were in rebellion against God. They were not willing to “fill the earth” (Genesis 9: 1 and 7) as God intended, by separating into different nations throughout the world. Their plan was to set up one centralised, powerful, godless government. God’s judgement on the rebellion at Babel was to “confuse their language”. This would have meant that groups of people (maybe families) would have understood one another but no-one else. These groups then separated, becoming the nations that populated all parts of the world (we read more about this in Genesis chapter10).

Some of the foundations laid in this chapter:

1. God’s sovereignty: this means that God is in control of all that He has created. God carries out His purposes in spite of the sinful rebellion of mankind. It was God’s intention from the creation of Adam and Eve that mankind would fill the whole of the earth (Genesis 1: 27-28).

2. God’s power to intervene in human affairs. How could God change language in this way? The only answer

is that the God who created man's brain was well able to bring about the necessary changes.

Thinking it through:

1. What was the aim of the people living at the time described in Genesis 11: 4?
2. In what way was God's purpose fulfilled? (Genesis 9:1 & 11: 8-9)

Chapter 9: The Beginning of a nation

Read: Genesis 11: 27-32 & 12: 1-7

The Bible teaches us that after the flood the earth was populated by the descendants of Noah's three sons. These are listed in Genesis chapter 10, and in chapter 11: 10-32 we are given more details about Shem's descendants. In this way we are introduced to Abram (later renamed Abraham, see Genesis chapter 17: 5) whose descendants became the nation of Israel.

The first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis cover the important events that help us to understand why the world is as it is today. We have learned about the creation of a perfect world, man's fall into sin, God's promise of a Saviour, the universal flood and the forming of the nations.

The remainder of the book tells us about the lives of Abraham and three generations of his descendants. The families of Abraham's twelve great grandsons became the twelve tribes of Israel.

The great theme of the Bible is God's way of reconciling sinful manhood with a God who is holy (Perfectly pure and good). God promised that He would send a Saviour who would suffer the punishment our sin deserves. This Saviour would be a Descendant of Abraham. This is why the focus of Genesis chapters 12-50 is on the nation that came from Abraham's family.

Foundations laid in this chapter include:

1) The beginning of the nation of Israel through Abraham's descendants. To Israel God gave His law and sent His prophets. Israel's meticulously copied scriptures form our Old Testament.

2) The promise of a Saviour (Genesis 3: 15) is now shown to be One who would come into the world as a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12: 3; see also Matthew 1: 1-2 and 16).

Thinking it through:

1. Where was Abraham living when he first received God's call to leave his home? (Genesis 11: 27-28; 12: 1; Acts 7: 2-4.)

2. Who was the fulfilment of the promise in Genesis 12: 3 that "in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"?

Chapter 10: Lot

Read: Genesis 13; 14: 1-2 & 11-24

Abraham lived about 2000 B.C. At that time wealth was counted in the size of flocks and herds. Abraham and Lot both owned many animals. Rather than have trouble between them because of strife between their servants over the best pasture, Abraham saw that he and Lot must separate. He gave his nephew the choice of where to settle, and Lot chose what seemed to be the best and most suitable land for his animals. He did not take into account how close this would bring him to the sinful city of Sodom.

As the head of the family, Abraham had the right to make the choice for himself, but he generously gave the choice to Lot. However, after they had separated, God confirmed His promises to Abraham (Genesis 13: 14-17).

An unforeseen result of Lot's choice was that he became involved in a war between the local kings and he was taken captive. It was Abraham who rescued him and the other captives and restored them to their homes.

At this point we are introduced to the priest-king Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham. We read more about Melchizedek in the New Testament (Hebrews chapter 7). We note that Abraham would not receive anything from the King of Sodom, showing that he depended solely upon God.

Learning from this chapter:

1. Abraham's concern to have peace within the family especially in the presence of other nationalities. We learn

from this the importance of maintaining peace within the local church (Ephesians 4: 3) especially to be an example before unbelievers.

2. The importance of seeking God's help in making decisions, and of taking into account the effect the decision will have on the Christian's life and witness.

3. Lot was unable to help himself, caught up as he was with the life of the city of Sodom (Genesis 14: 11-12). It was Abraham, separate from Sodom, who knew what to do and was able to act.

4. Abraham's dependence on God and refusal to be enriched by a sinful king. There are some ways of increasing wealth which would not be wise for a Christian. Anything dishonest is obviously wrong, but anything involving gambling shows a willingness to depend on "luck" rather than on God.

Thinking it through:

1. In what ways did Abraham show a gracious attitude in dealing with his nephew? (Genesis 13: 8-9).

2. What do we not find Lot doing which we should always do when a decision has to be made? (Genesis 13: 11; Proverbs 3: 5-6)).

3. Why would Abraham not accept anything for himself from the King of Sodom? (Genesis 14: 22-23).

Chapter 11: Covenant

Read: Genesis chapter 15

In this chapter we learn of Abraham's concern that he and Sarah still had no children. How could God's promise that a nation would come from his descendants be fulfilled? This was not unbelief on Abraham's part, but a desire for reassurance and explanation of the long delay. God assured Abraham that he would have a son and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Abraham believed God.

The remainder of the chapter deals with God's covenant with Abraham. When men and women enter into a covenant, they agree the terms that they will be bound by. When God makes a covenant, He sets the terms and He promises to do all that is necessary. Before the Lord Jesus came, the way to approach God was always through sacrifice. So here, sacrificial animals are needed as Abraham waits to hear what God will say to him. In the event, God tells Abraham about the future of his descendants. For four hundred years they will live in a land that is not their own. This has been taken to mean the time they would live in Egypt. However, Galatian 3: 16 & 17 states that there were four hundred and thirty years between God's promise to Abraham and the giving of the law to the Israelites after they left Egypt. This would mean that the time Abraham's descendants lived in Canaan and Egypt would be four hundred and thirty years altogether. God assured Abraham that he would live to a good old age, and God would give the land of Canaan to his descendants at a future date. Why the delay of four centuries? The

answer is found in Genesis 15: 16. The inhabitants of Canaan at that time were very wicked people but they would be given time to repent of their sinful ways, just as God had given people time to repent before the flood.

Learning from this chapter:

1. Genesis 15: 6 is quoted three times in the New Testament: Romans 4: 3; Galatians 3: 6; James 2: 23. We understand from this use of the verse that it has something very important to teach us. Paul explains it in his letters to the Romans and Galatians. No-one can put himself right with God by doing good works. God counts as righteous those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. God is patient, allowing men and women time to repent (Genesis 15: 16). (See also: Romans 2: 4 & 2 Peter 3: 9.)

Thinking it through:

1. What made it difficult for Abraham to believe that he would have many descendants? (Genesis 15: 2-3).

2. What two specific promises do we find in this chapter? (Genesis 15: 5 & 18).

3. How can sinful people be “right with God”? See Genesis 15: 6; Romans 4: 3-8. (If your Bible uses the word ‘impute’, this means to give to a person something that someone else has achieved for them. The righteousness that we cannot achieve is given to us when we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.)

See Romans 5: 1; (The word ‘justified’ means found ‘not guilty’. This is possible for us in spite of our sinful ways,

because the Lord Jesus took our punishment when He died on the cross - Acts 16: 30-31.)



Chapter 12: Ishmael

Read: Genesis chapter 16

Ten years had passed since Abraham obeyed God, leaving his home in Haran (see Genesis 12: 4 and 16: 16) and settling in Canaan. Ten years since God promised that a great nation would come from Abraham's descendants, and yet he and Sarah still had no child.

Sarah made a suggestion which may seem strange to us, but was not unusual in that culture. Abraham agreed to Sarah's suggestion and a son was born having Abraham as his father and Sarah's maid Hagar as his mother. It must have seemed to Sarah that some action had to be taken by them, for God's promise to be fulfilled. However, this led to an unhappy situation in the home, with Hagar running away from Sarah's harsh treatment.

The Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar, convincing her that God saw her and therefore knew all about her. She obeyed the words of the Angel and returned to Sarah. Her son was named Ishmael, the name given by the Angel of the Lord. Ishmael means "God hears."

Learning from this chapter:

1. Abraham was a man of faith (see Hebrews 11: 8-19) and yet he agreed to Sarah's suggestion, as if God needed help to fulfil His promise. Even Abraham had to learn that God always does what He says He will do.
2. God's knowledge of individuals. God addresses Hagar by name, tells her what she must do and gives promises for the future.

3. The Angel of the Lord. This is the first mention of an angel in the Bible. We know that angels live in the presence of God and are sent by Him with messages for particular individuals. When the title “Angel of the Lord” is used, the Angel speaks for God Himself and Hagar certainly speaks of having seen God (There is another example of this in Judges 13: 19-22.). Because of this, many people believe that this title means more than an angel and indicates that it was the Lord Jesus Christ sometimes appearing in Old Testament days.

Thinking it through:

1. Describe the unhappy situation that arose when Hagar was expecting Abraham’s child (see Genesis 16: 5-6).
2. What was Hagar told that she must do? (Genesis 16: 9).
3. What promise was given to Hagar and what sort of person would her son be? (see Genesis 16: 10-12).

Chapter 13: Promise confirmed

Read: Genesis 17: 1-9; 18: 1-15

Thirteen years passed after Ishmael's birth: Abraham was now ninety-nine years old and Sarah was ten years younger. There is no record of God speaking to Abraham during those thirteen years. Then God spoke, renewing His promises and giving to Abram the name Abraham (father of a multitude) and to Sarai the name Sarah (princess).

In Genesis chapter 18 we read of three men who visited Abraham. As the account of the visit proceeds, it is clear that two of the visitors were actually angels, whilst the third was the Lord Jesus Christ, here appearing as a man. Abraham showed generous hospitality to the three "strangers" and Sarah helped him to prepare a meal for them.

A definite promise was given to Abraham that his wife would have a son. When she heard this, Sarah laughed, knowing that she had passed the age of having children. When questioned, Sarah would not admit to laughing, but the promise was repeated to her.

Learning (cont'd):

1. Although many years had passed since God first promised Abraham many descendants who would possess the land of Canaan, God once again confirmed His promise. God expressed His promise as a covenant, in this way binding Himself to carry out His promises. The promises we make can fail because of circumstances beyond our control. God's covenant is unchangeable and does not

depend on unforeseen circumstances as God has perfect knowledge of the past, the present, and the future.

2. God is a Spirit and therefore when God appeared in human form in Old Testament days, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, who came and spoke with certain people. We cannot explain this, that Christ appeared as a man before His birth in Bethlehem, but it was clearly so.

3. God's perfect knowledge: Sarah is described as laughing "within herself" and yet God knew exactly what was passing in her mind. We read in Psalm 139 that God knows our thoughts.

Thinking it through:

1. How did Abraham respond to God? (see Genesis 17: 3). What does this tell us about being in God's presence?

2. What can we learn from the way Abraham treated his visitors? (Genesis 18: 2-8; Matthew 19: 26; Hebrews 13: 2)

3. What is the expected answer to the question in Genesis 18: 14?

Chapter 14: The Promised Son

Readings: Genesis 22: 1-19; Hebrews 11: 17-19; John 3: 16

When Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety years old, the son God had promised them was born. He was named Isaac, the name given by God a year before when He renewed His promise to Abraham (Genesis 17: 21). Isaac's birth was twenty-five years after Abraham had obeyed God's call to leave Haran and enter Canaan.

When Ishmael was a teenager he and his mother Hagar were sent away. God promised that Ishmael would also have many descendants, but the focus of God's purposes was on the child of promise, Isaac. There are two events that stand out in Isaac's life with his father. The first is in Genesis chapter 22, where we read of God testing Abraham's faith.

This was a very severe test for Abraham. God knew that He would not allow Abraham to kill his son, but Abraham did not know that. In doing what God told him to do, believing that this would result in the death of his much-loved son, Abraham showed a complete trust in God.

Learning from this chapter

1. Faith is tested. The test of Abraham's faith that we read about in this chapter was especially difficult, as Isaac was the promised son from whom many descendants were to come, especially the promised Saviour.

2. Abraham obeyed without delay. True faith is shown by obedience.
3. Here we have an Old Testament 'picture' of what God would actually do (see John 3: 16).

Thinking it through

1. How do we know that Abraham obeyed God without delay? (Genesis 22: 3)
2. What did Abraham believe that God was able to do? (Hebrews 11: 17-19)
3. What did the offering of Isaac 'picture'? (John 3: 16)

Chapter 15: A wife for Isaac

Read: Genesis 24: 1-28 and 55-66

In this chapter we read about the second important event in Isaac's life. Isaac was forty years old and his father was concerned that he should marry the right person. He wanted to prevent Isaac marrying a woman who worshipped idols, as the people living in Canaan did at that time. Abraham was a very old man. He could not make the long journey to his relatives in Haran. He gave to his most trusted servant the important task of bringing a bride for his son.

Genesis chapter 24 is a wonderful account of God's guidance. The servant was obviously devoted to his master and determined to carry out what seemed a very difficult task. His prayer as he waited by the well showed his confidence in his master's God. The fact that Rebekah did exactly what the servant had prayed for, showed her to be both kind and strong: 10 camels would need a lot of water.

We again see the faithfulness of this servant when he would not even eat until he had explained why he had come. He was also very concerned to return to Abraham as soon as possible. Rebekah's character is again shown as she is prepared to make the long journey without delay.

Marriage arranged by parents may seem strange to us, but would not have been unusual at that time. The chapter ends on the happy note that Isaac loved Rebekah.

Learning from this chapter

1. Abraham understood the importance of the promise God had given him about his descendants. He knew that his family must be separate from the idolatry around him (verse 3).
2. God does guide those who trust in Him. Abraham was certain that God would guide his servant (verse 2 and verse 26-27).
3. God does hear prayer and He does answer prayer (verses 12-14 and 17-19).

Thinking it through

1. Why did Abraham say that Isaac must not go to Haran? (Genesis 12: 1 and 7; 24: 5-8)
2. What was the servant's response when he learned that Rebekah belonged to Abraham's family? (verses 24-27)
3. How did Rebekah's brother Laban and her father Bethuel respond when the servant told them about his prayer and God's answer? (verses 50-51)

Chapter 16: Abrahams Grandsons

Read: Genesis 25: 19-34; Hebrews 12: 16

Just as Abraham and Sarah had waited many years for Isaac's birth, so Isaac and Rebekah also waited for children to be born. Isaac prayed about this and after twenty years of marriage, at last Rebekah knew that she was expecting a baby. Rebekah was troubled by the amount of movement of her unborn baby. She asked God to explain this to her and He did.

God did not speak to Rebekah about two children, but about two nations who would come from them. Although twins are the same age, in days when it was important to know who would be the next head of the family, the twin born first would be counted as the older one: the first-born. However, in this family God said that the older one would serve the younger one. Rebekah understood that this meant that the second twin would be head of this family and inherit God's promises to Abraham and to Isaac.

The twins were very different right from the start. Esau was born first and he was very hairy, in fact the name 'Esau' actually means 'hairy'. Jacob was a smoot-skinned baby and his name means 'supplanter': one who takes someone else's place. As the twins grew up to adulthood, not only their appearance, but their characters were very different.

Esau loved to be out hunting, Jacob was more concerned for the life of the family and about God's promises to his family. Isaac was fond of the tasty meals that were prepared for him as the result of Esau's hunting.. Rebekah was steady in her love for Jacob: sadly the

differences in their sons became a difference between Isaac and Rebekah.

In Genesis 25: 29-34, we read of how Jacob bought Esau's birthright. The birthright meant becoming head of the family and inheriting twice as much as others. Some people accuse Jacob of having 'stolen' Esau's birthright, but that is not what the Bible says. The Bible tells us that this incident shows how little Esau thought of his birthright (verse 34)

Learning from this chapter

1. God is in control of all that happens: we call this God's sovereignty. Jacob and Esau were responsible for their actions just as we are, but God knew which of Isaac's two sons should inherit the promises He had given to Abraham.
2. We all need to work out where are the most important things in life (Matthew 16: 26). Jacob recognised the importance of God's promises to his family. We need to be sure that the things we value in life are lasting things (Matthew 6: 19-21).

Thinking it through

1. How did Isaac deal with the problem of having no children, when God had promised his father many descendants? (verse 21)
2. We know that Isaac loved his wife, but what difference grew between them? (verse 28)

3. Do you think Esau would really have died just because he came home hungry after his hunting?
(verse 32)



Chapter 17: The Blessing

Read: Genesis chapter 27 and Genesis 28: 1-5

Isaac was growing old and his eyesight was failing. He decided that the time had come for him to give his blessing to the son who would be the head of the family after him (in fact Isaac actually lived for many more years). Rebekah overheard Isaac speaking to Esau. She heard him tell Esau to go hunting and make him a meal from what he brought home. Then Isaac said, he would give his blessing to Esau.

Rebekah believed she must stop Isaac blessing Esau and she quickly made her plan. She would make a tasty meal and Jacob must take it to his father. Genesis chapter 27 tells us how Jacob did as his mother asked and how Isaac was deceived into thinking that it was Esau who was with him.

Rebekah and Jacob really wanted to do right and to prevent Isaac going against what God had said. Esau had shown that he did not value God's promises to his family. He had exchanged his birthright for a meal. He had married women from the idol-worshipping people around him.

Rebekah and Jacob were obviously very troubled. They could have prayed and then reasoned with Isaac about what he intended to do. So easy for us to think of these things now: not so easy for those involved at the time. Someone has described this chapter as 'doing the right thing the wrong way'.

The result of what happened that day was that Esau hated Jacob so much that he threatened to kill him. Jacob was then sent away to the relatives at Haran, as Rebekah

said 'for a few days'. In fact Jacob remained at Haran for twenty years and as far as we know, Rebekah never saw him again.

Learning from this chapter

1. God had chosen Jacob, not Esau, to inherit His promises to Abraham. Esau's life showed the wisdom of God's choice.
2. We can be sure that God will always do what He has said He will do.

Thinking it through

1. What was Rebekah's motive for her plan? (Genesis 25: 22-23)
2. Apart from Esau's anger, why did Isaac tell Jacob to go to Haran? (Genesis 28: 1-2)
3. What did Isaac now make clear to Jacob? (Genesis 28: 4)

Chapter 18: To Haran and Back

Read: Genesis 28, 31: 1-7+ 17-18, 32: 9-12 + 27-28

Looking back many years later, Jacob said that he set out on the long journey to Haran with just his staff in his hand. Early in his journey he had the wonderful experience at Bethel (the name Jacob gave to the place means 'house of God'). He had God's promises confirmed to him and the promise that God would in due time bring him back to Canaan.

Just as Abraham's servant had met Rebekah at the well, so now when Jacob arrived at Haran, he met his cousin Rachel bringing her father Laban's sheep. When Laban heard that his sister Rebekah's son had arrived, he ran to welcome him and Jacob stayed with the family.

Jacob evidently was very skilled at managing animals and he made himself so useful to Laban with his flocks and herds, that Laban offered him wages. Jacob had fallen in love with his cousin Rachel and he said that he would work seven years for her to become his wife. However, at the end of the seven years he was told that the older daughter must be married first and so he became married to Leah, the older of his two cousins. He was then permitted to marry Rachel and worked a further seven years for Laban.

Leah and Rachel each gave their maids, Zilpah and Bilhah, to Jacob, just as Sarah had given her maid Hagar to Abraham years before. During that fourteen years in Haran, Jacob had eleven sons and one daughter. The last

of his sons to be born in Haran was Rachel's son Joseph who was her only son at that time.

Jacob thought it was time to return to Canaan, but Laban persuaded him to stay longer. This time his wages would be certain animals that would become his possession. Six years passed. At the end of that time Laban evidently felt that Jacob was gaining too much and becoming wealthy in flocks and herds at his expense. It was then that God spoke to Jacob, telling him to make the long journey home.

The nearer he came to Canaan, the more Jacob feared meeting his brother Esau. Hearing that Esau was coming to meet him and had four hundred men with him, made Jacob even more afraid. We read Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32: 9-12. God answered that prayer and the brothers had a peaceful re-union. It was just before his meeting with Esau that God gave to Jacob the new name 'Israel'.

Rachel's second son, Benjamin, was born in the land of Canaan near to Bethlehem. The families of Jacob's twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham's descendants would become a nation, as God had promised (Genesis 12: 2).

Learning from these chapters

1. When God spoke to Jacob at Bethel He said He was the God of Jacob's grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. When he confirmed His promises to Jacob, then Jacob responded that this God (Jehovah) would be his God. It is good to have Christian parents and grandparents, but this does not make us Christians. Each one of us needs to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves.

2. When we are troubled or afraid we should pray as Jacob did, remembering that we are praying to a great God who always does what He says He will do. We should be honest and tell Him our fears as Jacob did.
3. God's promises to Jacob when he began his journey to Haran were fulfilled in all that happened to him, including his safe return to Canaan (Genesis 28: 15).

Thinking it through

1. Find the promise of a Saviour in Genesis 28: 14 and 12: 3.
2. Did Jacob's relations at Haran make him welcome? (Genesis 29: 13)
3. Was Laban's feeling for Jacob unchanged after twenty years? (Genesis 31: 1-2)
4. What name did God give to Jacob as he journeyed to Canaan? (Genesis 32: 28)
5. In what way was Jacob's prayer answered? (Genesis 33: 4)

Chapter 19: From Canaan to a prison in Egypt

Read: Genesis chapters 37 & 39-40

God had told Abraham that his descendants would for some years be oppressed in another land (Genesis 15: 13-16). Genesis chapters 37 and 39-46 tells us how this came about and how it was connected to the wonderful life of Jacob's son Joseph.

Jacob had a special love for Joseph and Joseph seems to have been the most trustworthy of the brothers. His brothers hated him and even plotted to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest of Jacob's sons, persuaded them not to kill him. In fact, Joseph was sold to some traders, who would take him to Egypt to sell him as a slave. Jacob was shown some blood-stained clothing and concluded that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Taken so suddenly from his home and from the father he so truly loved, Joseph was sold to an officer of the Pharaoh called Potiphar. God was with Joseph and soon Potiphar found he could trust Joseph with the running of his household. Even in a strange land, things were going well for Joseph until his master's wife told lies about him and he was put into prison even though he had done nothing wrong.

The keeper of the prison soon found that he could leave the care of some of the prisoners to Joseph. Two of those prisoners had dreams that they were very anxious about. God gave Joseph wisdom to explain the meaning of those

dreams. This would prove to be very important after some years of Joseph's imprisonment had passed.

Learning from these chapters

1. God has perfect knowledge of the future (Genesis 15: 13-14). As we read the account of Joseph's life, we see God's words being fulfilled.
2. Having difficulties in our lives does not mean that God has left us 'on our own'. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ have His promise – 'I will never leave you or forsake you' (Hebrews 13: 5). When things seemed to be going very wrong in Joseph's life, we read that God was with him (Genesis 39: 2-3 and 21).

Thinking it through

1. What did Reuben hope to do to save Joseph's life? (37: 20-22 and 29-30).
2. How did the brothers deceive Jacob? (37: 31-33).
3. What did Joseph's master, Potipher, think of Joseph? (39: 2-6).
4. Potipher's wife wanted Joseph to do wrong. What two reasons did Joseph give for not doing as she said? (39: 8-9).
5. Who did Joseph find were very anxious about their dreams? (40: 1-8).

Chapter 20: From Prison to power

Read: Genesis chapters 41-46

For two years Pharaoh's butler forgot about Joseph, but then something happened that reminded him of how Joseph had told him and Pharaoh's baker what their dreams meant. Pharaoh was anxious about the dreams he had one night. None of his magicians or wise men could tell him what his dreams meant. The butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh all about him.

Joseph was sent for: he had to be well tidied up and made ready to meet the Pharaoh. Joseph was careful to say that it was God, not him, who could interpret the dreams that were troubling Pharaoh. Genesis 41 tells us in detail about the seven fat cows and the seven thin cows and the seven good heads of grain and the seven thin heads. Again, Joseph was careful to say that it was God who was warning Pharaoh that seven good years would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph's advice to appoint someone to take charge of the food supply resulted in Pharaoh appointing him.

In all the events of Joseph's life, was there ever a day like that one. He began the day in prison and ended the day as the second most important man in the whole of Egypt (Genesis 41: 38-41).

Through the seven years of good harvests, Joseph made sure that grain was stored for the coming famine. The famine did come and it did not only affect Egypt; Canaan also had famine and Jacob heard that there was corn in

Egypt. So Jacob sent ten of his sons to buy corn, keeping only Benjamin at home.

In Genesis chapters 42-44 we read of how Joseph dealt with his brothers. He recognised them but they did not recognise him as he would have appeared as a very important Egyptian. Joseph did not make himself known to his brothers until he was sure that they had changed. It was Judah's words (Genesis 44: 16-34) that convinced him that they would never again act as cruelly as they had done to him.

When Joseph did tell them who he was, his brothers were afraid. Surely he would have revenge: in such a powerful position, he could have chosen any punishment he wanted for them. Instead, he re-assured them (Genesis 45: 4-11) also showing how he had learned to trust in God.

Joseph organised provision for Jacob and all his family to come to Egypt where he could provide for them. Jacob's reaction to the news his sons brought is found in Genesis 45: 25-28.

Jacob's entire family, his sons and their wives and children all moved to the land of Egypt where they were well provided for. The Book of Exodus tells us what happened when there was a Pharaoh who did not remember how Joseph had saved Egypt at a time of famine. We also read of how after many years, Joseph's descendants returned to Canaan.

Learning from these chapters

1. God is in control of events even when everything in Joseph's life seemed to be going wrong. Joseph himself

learned this (Genesis 45: 4-8). The same truth is found in the New Testament (Romans 8: 28).

2. God gave Joseph wisdom in dealing with his brothers. This gave Judah that opportunity to shew that a real change had taken place since the time when he and his brothers had treated Joseph so cruelly (Geneses 44: 18-34).

Repentance does not only mean being sorry for our sin: there must be a change in how we live that shows repentance is genuine.

Note: The Dreams

These chapters in Genesis are not the only place in the Bible where we read about God speaking to people in dreams. You might wonder whether God still speaks in this way. We have something that the people we have been reading about did not have: the Bible. The Bible is sometimes called 'The Word of God' because God speaks to us from it. The Bible tells us what we need to know about God, and about ourselves, about the Promised Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ and about how our sin can be forgiven so that it no longer separates us from God. God helped those who wrote the Books of the Bible to write the words that speak to us as we read (2 Timothy 3: 14-17).

Thinking it through

1. What did Joseph say that God had shown to Pharaoh through his dreams (Genesis 41: 25-32)
2. What advice did Joseph give to Pharaoh? (Genesis 41: 33-36)

3. What was the result of Joseph's advice? (Genesis 41: 37-41)
4. What did Joseph say his brothers must do prove they were speaking the truth? (Genesis 42: 18-20)
5. Who said he would take responsibility for Benjamin's safety? (Genesis 43: 8-9)
6. How was this promise kept when it seemed that Benjamin had stolen Joseph's silver cup? (Genesis 44: 17 and 32-33)
7. What had Joseph learned that stopped him having any thoughts of revenge for his brother's cruelty? (Genesis 45: 4-8)



END NOTES

We have seen that the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis are the foundations of our understanding of why the world is as it is.

1. God created all things (chapters 1-2).
2. The seven-day week with one day set apart for rest (chapter 2).
3. Marriage between a man and a woman (chapter 2).
4. The entrance of sin into the world, usually called 'The Fall of Man' (chapter 3).
5. The way of forgiveness through the death of an animal in the sinners' place (chapter 4).
6. God is patient but does bring judgement on those who refuse to repent (chapter 6).
7. God provides a way of salvation for those who trust in Him (chapter 6).
8. God entered into a covenant after the great flood (chapter 9).
9. God's sovereignty: His control of events in spite of man's rebellion (chapter 11).

From Genesis chapters 12 – 50, the focus is on Abraham and his descendants who became the nation of Israel. This is because the promised Saviour would be a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12: 3 and Matthew 1: 1 and 16). The coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the main theme of the whole of the Bible. Sinful people cannot put themselves right with a God who is holy (perfectly pure and good). Only God could make a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him. In His great love, God gave His sinless

Son to take the punishment for the sin of everyone who trusts in Him (John 3: 16).

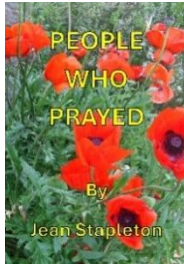


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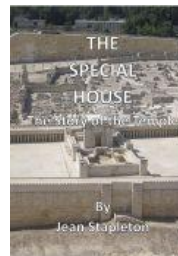
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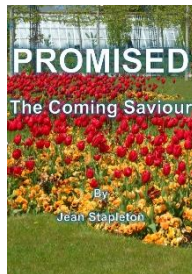
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