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SOUTH AFRICA BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #1: The embarking on the journey of faith together.

Reading: Genesis 11:27-32

Well thank you, brother chairman, and my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ and my dear young people.

Well this morning then, we begin the study on the life of Abraham and Sarah. Our first study this morning, really by way of introduction is to set the scene, so that we get some of the background, some of the mood, of the circumstances of the story. Now, I think, it's a remarkable thing within Christadelphia, you see, if we were asked what is Genesis chapters 12 to 25 dealing with? What 's Genesis chapters 12 to chapter 25 dealing with? I think most of us would say, 'well, it's to do with the promises to Abraham'. That's what we've been taught you see, haven't we? we've been tutored in terms of the first principles of the faith, the basic doctrines, that those chapters are about the promise to Abraham, and not only the promise to Abraham, but if you were asked 'what is that promise?' we would probably say, well it's to do with an eternal inheritance in the Land that was promised to Abraham and ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ and through Him to others who are counted as Abraham's seed.

I think that would be true for a lot of us! Have another look at Genesis chapters 12 to 25, because it's not really just about Abraham at all, is it? It's actually the story of two people; it's the story of both Abraham and Sarah in these chapters. By the time we finish this study, b&s, you will be absolutely convinced of that, I assure you. They are inseparably bound together in the record; you can't read this story without realizing that this is the documented account of this couple, not just of Abraham. These chapters aren't just about Abraham, they're about two people, in fact, if you're to say what are they really about? what are these chapters really about? the answer is not so much the promise of the Land as the promise of a seed! A seed for which this couple longed for and prayed for, until the promised son came; that's what these chapters are all about. God willing, in the course of these studies, we hope we'll come to know this couple better, to come to know them as real people.

You know, I think one of the great problems with our studies in the scripture, is that we find it difficult to see the people of the bible as real people. Oh, these are real people these two, we're going to see them in all their triumphs and all their tragedies, and by

the time we walk away from them, we'll say we know them. We'll look forward to walking up in the kingdom and shaking their hand and saying, 'I know you, I know you very well, both of you; it's a joy and a pleasure to meet you'.

I want to say one thing before we start these studies. This is the study of Abraham and Sarah, heirs together of the grace of life, which we should say really to complete the quotation, shouldn't we? from 1 Peter. But you see, I want to just say this, that whatever principles we look at in these studies, are true principles for life in the truth for all people. You don't have to be married to both enjoy and benefit from this study. This is not just a study for married people: there are many people in the hall today that are not married, for whatever reason, that won't affect the value of these principles. These are vital principles for life in the truth for all of us, and for all of us who are preparing, of course, for that greater marriage yet to come!

So, here we are then, Abraham and Sarah, a bible romance, the most wonderful bible romance. This is a remarkable story for several different reasons, if we just look at those points at the bottom of the overhead, what we have here is the most intimately revealing diary of a marriage in scripture. There's no other diary that gives us the same degree of detail, you see, about anybody. In these chapters we have their moments of personal weakness, we have their times of failure. In these chapters we're going to have the story of the fear that happens within their marriage, of their moments of emotion, their times of anxiety. We're going to see the times of exaltation of spirit that they had, and also their deepest moments in the depths of despair and we're going to see their true feelings about one another. We're going to see exactly how this couple really thought about one another, and there's going to be some splendid exhortations in that! Yes, there's no diary of a marriage like this anywhere else in scripture, it's beyond compare, b&s. Not only that, it's really, you see, the most extensively documented account of a marriage in scripture; what we've got here is chapter after chapter after chapter of their life history. We've got 9 separate episodes in the story in Genesis here concerning their marriage. There is no other record that compares with this in the detail provided of their marriage. Oh, there's other marriages referred to in the bible and there are circumstances from time to time of the details of those marriages, but nothing like this one. This one stands out as special, you see, also as if the record has zoomed in and said, 'now, have a close look at this couple'. We've been given the opportunity to have a close look because of the tremendous degree of information. We're going to take 8 studies, God willing, to look at Abraham and Sarah. I assure you, there's no padding, all we're going to do is look at each incident once, but we're going to chew on it thoroughly; we're going to savour each mouthful, and even then, we'll probably go away and say that we've only really scratched the surface, we've only just begun to plum the depths of what's there in the story.

Do you know that this marriage is the most frequently referred to record of a marriage in scripture. You see, what I mean by that is that when we come to the New Testament record which, God willing, we'll do in our final study, we find that Abraham and Sarah are found there in the New Testament record, over and over and over again. In fact,

Abraham is mentioned over 70 times in the New Testament, but if you actually look at the episodes, the major New Testament episodes, you'll find that there are about 9 major New Testament references to Abraham. In 6 of those references, Sarah stands alongside him, they're matched together in the New Testament record, and on the other 3 occasions there's very good reasons why she ought not stand alongside of him (we'll have a look at that, God willing, in our last study). I think every occasion when she's not with Abraham in the New Testament there's a special reason why she isn't! which really is, I suppose, another way of saying that every time she possibly can be there with Abraham, she is!

Now, you might say, well, is that really special? Yes, I think it is, you see, because here we have in the New Testament this couple brought together over and over and over again. Now, let me ask you a question, where in the New Testament record then, is Isaac and Rebekah? where are Jacob and Leah? where's Joseph and Asenath? where are Moses and Zipporah? where are Boaz and Ruth? where are Elkanah and Hannah? where in the New Testament do we find David and Bath-sheba? where is Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter? where's Hezekiah and Hephzibah? where's Hosea and Gomer? Oh, there's a lot of other marriages, aren't there? but they're not to be found, you see, in the New Testament. But this one is! over and over again, it's a special, special story, this one, of an outstanding couple in the divine record.

They were outstanding, they were outstanding in all sorts of ways, and the interesting thing about this couple, as we go through this study, and I think this is one of the most encouraging aspects to this study, is that they really were, you see, in so many ways, the equal of one another! They matched one another, this couple, and we're going to find in one incident that Abraham will come to the fore and Sarah for a moment is lagging behind; and, then we'll find in the next study that Sarah shoots ahead and Abraham is struggling with his faith. It goes like this all the way through the story but at the end, they come to this wonderful climax of faith and confidence in God and they do it together, b&s, they were both outstanding individuals.

Let's have a look at Abraham first of all. Now just a few details then, concerning this wonderful man. You see, in chapter 14 of Genesis and in the 14th and 15th verses, we're told that here is a man who was sought after for his faithful valour. You'll remember the incident when Chedorlaomer and the other nations in chapter 14 of Genesis invaded the Land and they took Lot captive, didn't they? and others with them. It was Abraham who went to the rescue of his nephew. But you see, the interesting thing about that was, that Abraham was not by nature a courageous man, was he? Courage was not a natural thing to Abraham but faith was! FAITH was the great strength of Abraham and he went forth on that occasion and won a remarkable victory which sealed his notoriety for his faithful valour. Here was a man who was known for his deep integrity of purpose. He was a man who stood by his principles. In chapter 14 again in the 22nd and 23rd verses, we know that when Abraham returned with the spoils of victory and the king of Sodom offered that he might share in those spoils, Abraham said, 'I want no part in them. I have nothing to do, I wish to have nothing to do

with those things associated with Sodom; I'm a man of principle!' He was known, you see, even to the nations for his integrity of character; this was a deep man, he was a solid man. He was noted in chapter 18 verses 3 to 5 as we'll come to see, for his warm hospitality, and on that occasion we've got the wonderful story of an old man (because he was old at that stage) on a hot morning, gathering up his robes which flapped about his ankles and running forward enthusiastically to welcome some people that came into his camp. As an old man, oh, he was a hospitable man was Abraham, warm in his personality, and yet this same courageous, honest, hospitable man in chapter 12 verses 18 to 19, is admonished for his use of deceit. This is the man, b&s, as we shall come to see, who when he arrived in Egypt, as brother Harry Tennant says in a book that he wrote, 'his faith shrank into his sandals', and he passed off his wife as his sister. This is the same man! how could he do that? well, we're going to find out how he did; we're going to find that Abraham was a man of weakness, sometimes of desperate weakness and he took his wife into dangerous country and placed her in dangerous circumstances as a result of his own personal weakness. In chapter 21 verses 11 to 12, we're going to find that Abraham on that occasion, is corrected for his fleshly thinking. Attached as he was to the lad, Ishmael, he could not see the workings of the divine purpose and God had to correct him for his lack of understanding. So, you see, here's a man who has tremendous strengths, but he also carries with him the weakness and the frailty of human nature.

His wife, well his wife was just about the same! We're told in chapter 12 concerning Sarah that she was noted for her exceptional beauty, says verses 14 and 15. She was an exceptionally beautiful woman and, by the way, I think that her beauty was far more than simply skin deep: there was something special about Sarah. You see, it wasn't just her face, it wasn't just her appearance, it wasn't just her clothes, there was something that shone out of Sarah that made her an incredibly attractive person. I think it was the inner virtues that guided her life, you see, that made her especially attractive. There is something attractive about a woman whose serenity and tranquillity is based on a firm conviction in spiritual things. Now, this wasn't just skin deep beauty, this was a special woman in every respect; you know, in chapter 18 and verse 12, this was the woman who was commended for her genuine submissiveness to her husband. We're going to see that the spirit that she shows in terms of her attitude to Abraham in chapter 18, she's commended for that! This is the same woman who in chapter 21, is mentioned for her spiritual insight and perception: she saw with a clarity of mind certain principles that even Abraham didn't see on one occasion. He leads the way really in the family household on that occasion because he saw deeper and more clearly, the principles involved. Yet, this same woman, this same woman who was so strong on those principles, is also in chapter 18 verses 12 and 15, she is rebuked for her incredulity because for a moment she just couldn't except the divine promise; oh, she wanted to, but it was too much of a struggle, you see! In the end, the angel rebukes her because of her lack of faith on this most important occasion in her life. This is the woman who in chapter 16 and verses 5 and 6, with flashing eyes, turns to her husband and berates him for a problem in the household that she had begun. She is exposed for her extremity of passion! oh, these weren't bland people, these two! they had strong

feelings! They're both noted, you see, for wonderful strength and also for weakness; you see, there's something about the divine record, isn't there? the scriptures are unmerciful in this respect, that they emphasize both the strength and the weaknesses of such people. The bible record doesn't endeavour to gloss over the real weaknesses of people in the truth: we see them as they really are, we get to understand both their strength and their weaknesses, and so it should be! So, it was with this couple because what we're going to learn in the divine record of Genesis, is that what finally made them what they were, was God working in their lives! God at work in their lives to overcome their weaknesses.

You know, we took a reading in Genesis chapter 11, you might just have a look at that in Genesis 11 and verse 27; now, you see, in Genesis 11 verse 27 it says this, 'Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai'. Verse 31, 'And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife'. Do you know, b&s, that from the very first moment that Abram appears in the divine record, his wife's there with him! Did you notice that? the very first moment that Abram appears in the record, verse 29, 'the name of Abram's wife was Sarai'. There's something significant about that, you see, from the very moment that Abram appears in the record, his wife stands alongside him.

But, all is not well in the marriage, you see, at this stage! First of all, we're told that they live, verse 28, in Ur of the Chaldees. That's the land of the idolaters, remember the words of Joshua in Joshua 24, 'your fathers served other gods', so, you see, this was an idolatrous union, the union of Abram and Sarai was based on idolatry and paganism. Not only was it an idolatrous union but you'll notice that the 30th verse tells us that 'Sarai was barren', it was a fruitless union. There was no offspring brought forth in this marriage of pagans; but, nevertheless, they stand together as man and wife from the very beginning.

And how does the story finish? Genesis 25, the death of Abraham, we read these words from verses 8 to 10: 'Then Abraham gave up the spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife'. That's how the record closes. You see, when the record opens they're together as husband and wife, and when the curtain comes down upon Abraham, they're there as husband and wife.

But, you see, they're not pagans anymore, are they now? In chapter 25, they're now a faithful couple whose marriage is based on the principles of the truth and upon trust in their heavenly Father. It's now a fruitful union because you see what verse 9 says, it says, 'his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him'; so, they've got children, now, you see,

it's a fruitful union, so that which began in paganism and was fruitless, ends finally in the faithful principles of the truth, with the fruitfulness of their sons gathered about them. How significant that the record should close with this couple in this way!

You know that she's called 'his wife' 24 times, the doubling of Israel, the doubling of the number of Israel. Now, some of you may know this but, you know, they're buried together in a cave in Hebron (a very interesting place just at the moment in the Land). Does anyone know what Hebron means? Hebron means 'fellowship' (2275). Does anyone know what 'Machpelah' means? Well, Machpelah means (and watch this, b&s, how appropriate for this couple) 'folded together' (4375 + 3717) and when the divine record closes on this couple, they lie folded together in a place called 'fellowship'. Oh, that's significant, isn't it? there was Abraham buried and Sarah his wife! and, you see, between those two records, Genesis 11 on the one side and Genesis 25 on the other side, between those two records there stands the whole story of their development and romance as hand in hand they walked through the record together, and that's what we're going to do, God willing, in the course of these studies.

You might think we're making these titles up, but we're not you see, because every title that we have in the course of these studies makes allusion to some particular passage or idea in the divine record that we're considering together.

— So, in chapter 11, they enter the record of scripture together, as man and wife from the very beginning.

— In chapter 12, they embark on the journey of faith together as they make, as they make that fateful trip down south into the land of Egypt, the land of darkness and death, as we shall see, God willing, in our study this evening. There in that place, they were to encounter trouble and testing together as Abram's faith was tested and he was found wanting with regard to his marriage relationship and his attitude to his wife.

— In chapters 15 and 16 we're going to see how that they endured the distress of barrenness together, and that this was something that they had to fight through together; together, very much so! as they sought to try and deal with this great trial and problem in their life.

— In chapter 17, we're going to see how they embrace the covenant blessing together as God comes forth with wondrous promises to them both. They're thankful to their heavenly Father together.

— In chapter 18, we're going to see a marvellous story of how they entertained three angelic visitors together, and together they did ; the record stresses it, they did it together, says the record. Everything this couple did you'll find that they're inseparably bound together in the record.

— In chapter 20, in an absolutely momentous incident in the house of Abimelech, you'll

know there was another occasion, when Abraham says of Sarah, 'she is my sister'. We're going to marvel at that story and say 'how could this be after the incident of chapter 12?' Well, the incident of chapter 20 is quite different and we're going to see those differences in the story; but, what we're going to find is, that by the end of that chapter, they have now reached that moment where together, they had absolute and superb faith that God could deliver everything that He had promised unto them.

— As a result of that, in chapter 21, we'll consider that wonderful moment in their life when they finally enjoy the son of their love together.

— Then as we've seen in the 25th chapter, the curtain will come down and enfold each other in the fellowship of death, awaiting the resurrection.

You know, I have no doubt, no doubt whatsoever, that when the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 3 verse 7, when he talks about those who are heirs together of the grace of life, I'm absolutely convinced that he was thinking of this couple, but by the end of this study so will you be! because we're going to see how I think Peter's comments and Peter's thoughts are based very much on Abraham and Sarah, they are the prototype for the apostolic comment on marriage.

I want to show you something really interesting about the way in which the story of this couple is brought together in terms of the circumstances of their life, and in particular the focus on their life's story in terms of time. Now, what we've just looked at then, in terms of that last overhead, is effectively, well, we've effectively gone through these chapters, haven't we? You see, up on that side there we have in the top right hand corner coming down, the chapter numbers. Now, you see, this is what these chapters are about, aren't they? chapter 12 is about coming into the Land and encountering trouble together. Chapter 13 is really about separation from Lot and the renewal of the promise; chapter 14 is the battle of the kings and the meeting with Melchizedek; chapter 15 is the promise of a son and the making of a covenant; chapter 16 is the distress of barrenness that they endured together and the circumstances wherein they tried with their own hands, according to their own skill to resolve that situation, with disastrous consequences. Chapter 17 is about embracing the covenant of blessing together; chapter 18 is about entertaining strangers together; chapter 19 is about the destruction of Sodom; chapter 20 is about experiencing faith together; and chapter 21 as they rejoice now in the birth of the son in their love. Now, you see, we've stopped the record at chapter 21 for this reason, because from then on, we really don't have anything about Abraham and Sarah as a couple, do we? because chapter 22 is about the sacrifice of Isaac; chapter 23 is about the death of Sarah; chapter 24 is about the marriage of Isaac and chapter 25 is about the death of Abraham. So, really the story of Abraham and Sarah as a couple, begins in chapter 12 and ends in chapter 21.

Now, how old was Abraham when he died? He was a 175, so, here we have him on this yellow line here, he was born before Sarah and he outlived Sarah; Sarah, of course,

died at the age of 127. Abraham lived until year 175. Now, I'll show you what's really interesting about these chapters! Now you see, in Genesis 12 and verse 4, we're told that Abraham was 75 when he entered the Land, alright, Genesis 12 verse 4; by the time we come to Genesis 16 verse 16, we're told that he was 86. Now, if he was 86 in chapter 16 and 75 in chapter 12, there's only 11 years difference, isn't there? and therefore, in those 11 years everything concerning chapter 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, must be compressed into just 11 years of their life.

Then you see, in chapter 17, we're told that Abraham was 99, so from chapter 16 to chapter 17 we suddenly jump 13 years, and we go straight from 86 to 99 in the patriarch's life; and then you see, in chapter 21 we're told (well, we might just come and have a look at this in chapter 21), we're told this at the time of the story of the birth of Isaac, verse 5, we're told that 'Abraham was 100 years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him'. So, he was 99 in chapter 17 and 100 in chapter 21 so therefore, everything in chapter 17, 18, 19 and 20 must have all occurred in the space of 12 months. I can tell you it's less than that! it's considerably less than that because you see, chapter 21 says in the first verse, 'Yahweh visited Sarah' and verse 2 says, 'And Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which He had spoken to him'. But, back in chapter 17, which we won't turn to, but back there when Abraham was 99 he was told that this child will be born to you at this set time next year', alright! so, they're told in chapter 17 that the child will be born in one year's time; but, by the time we come to chapter 21, Sarah has only just conceived! So what does that tell us? it tells us that chapters 17, 18, 19, and chapter 20 all take place (not within the course of a year), but within just 3 months, because Sarah doesn't conceive until chapter 21 verse 2; by verse 5 when the child was born, Abraham is 100 and that 'set time' is now up that had been promised in chapter 17.

Now, when you stop and think about this, you see, what's fascinating about this is, here's a man who lived for 175 years. What do we know about Abraham's first 75 years? and the answer is basically 'nothing'. What do we know about Abraham's last 75 years? and the answer is essentially 'nothing'. The whole story of Abraham and Sarah focuses on just 25 years of their life, you see! isn't that interesting? You see, what I think is being told us here, is that these years and the events of these years are, therefore, charged with great significance, they are obviously representative incidents. The events of these chapters were obviously taken by the Spirit as typical of their marriage and of their character development as a whole. So, in other words, what we learn in this 25 years is typical of their whole life, their whole character, and the Spirit, therefore, graciously allows us an inside into 25 years, into this very special couple and their lives; and, what those years show us above all things is that development of their faith, they were noted you see, for their faith!

They matched each other strive for, strive as they come to the matter of faith, each in their own way, because they thought differently. Of course, men and women think differently, don't they? men think logically! which means of course, all we're saying lest you should take the wrong impression, is that women think intuitively! But, there is a

difference, they do think differently and in these chapters we're going to see that a man and woman at times are not the same, but they cooperated together beautifully, finally, to come to the knowledge of faith, that they both needed. What we're going to learn above all things else, I think, in these chapters, is that the faith that they came to, the absolute triumph of faith that they came to, they didn't come to it at once, it happened gradually. It came in stages, it developed out of experience, it was borne out of trial, it was the work of time! So it is with all of us, isn't it? faith is not the work of a moment! nor brethren and sisters, are good marriage relationships, they take time. This couple took time, a long time, but they got there, and that's the story of their life.

You know, I think you see, that every marriage has its trials, and this particular couple, well, they had a special trial, a unique trial that this couple had to face like no other trial. It was the trial that was going to haunt them for 25 years of their life in the Land. It was the trial that was either going to make or break their marriage. It was the trial that would finally wring out from them, the last vestige of human hope until, finally, in absolute despair yet also in faith, they turned to the Father. Do you know what that trial was? the special trial of this couple? well, here it is, it's one of those things that as soon as you see it, you say, 'of course', but it was this, wasn't it? Look at this! for this couple, their personal trial was barrenness.

Now, look at these references, Genesis 11 verse 30, 'But Sarai was barren' says the record, 'she had no children'. You know, b&s and young people, that second statement is not necessary, is it? it's superfluous, why didn't the record simply say she was barren? But, you see, I think, what the record does is that it captures the despair in this marriage right from the beginning, she was barren, she had no children, says the record. That's what this woman wanted, and just as there was despair in Sarah's heart so there was in her husband's: chapter 15 verses 2 and 3, as Abraham converses with his God he says, 'What wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless; Thou hast given no seed', says Abraham. Can't you feel the pluckings of their heart, b&s, in those words? Oh, this was their trial, wasn't it? In chapter 16 verses 1 and 2, it says, 'Sarai bare him no children' and she says to Abram 'Yahweh hath restrained me from bearing: go in unto my maid that I may obtain children', says Sarai. What did it cost a wife, b&s, in the privacy of her own tent and with tears streaming down her face, apart from her desperate yearning for that child?

When Abraham hears the promise of the child, it's he, in chapter 17 verse 7 who says in wonderment of belief (by the way, not in unbelief), in wonderment of belief he says, 'Shall a child be born unto him that is a 100 years old?' and he cries out with the wonder of it. Sarah similarly says in the very next chapter, 'after I'm waxed old, shall I have pleasure, shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?' cries Sarah. Is there a guarantee, can I know for sure that I will have that child? When that child was finally in Sarah's arms in chapter 21 verse 7; and, you can just see her rocking this child wrapped in swaddling clothes with this delicious smile on her face, the tender smile of motherhood, and she looks down and she says, 'who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck'.

Twenty-five years they bore this trial, b&s, and you see, do you know what heightened the tension of that trial? come and have a look at chapter 12 and I'll show you what really built the tension, you see, into this particular trial. Over and over again there was something that made this trial more and more difficult to bear, and you can just see this exploding out of the record:

— Genesis 12 verse 7, 'And Yahweh appeared to Abraham and said, Unto thy seed will I give this Land: and there he built an altar unto Yahweh who appeared to him'.

— Chapter 13 verse 15, 'For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered'.

— Chapter 15 verse 5, 'God brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be'.

— Chapter 15 verse 18, 'In the same day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this Land'.

— Chapter 17 verses 7 and 8, 'God says I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God'.

And, you see, all the way through this story was promises to the seed, the seed, the seed, AND THEY HAD NO SEED! Do you think there was tension in that family? You see, this trial was so severe that it would either explode them apart or fuse them together! It all depended on their attitude; you see, it would either explode their marriage apart or it would bind them together forever, depending on their attitude. But this trial built character!

Now, you see, b&s, all of our trials are different, aren't they? I believe that all of us face, not only trial, but perhaps special trial for the development and the perfection of our characters. We're all different you see! In the case of one couple, their great trial was that of Abraham and Sarah's, that they are barren, they cannot have children and some experience that in marriage, it may not be for the same reasons as Abraham and Sarah, we know not what the reasons always are, but it's a trial, a trial to be faced. Then there are other marriages where children are born with relative ease, but there are tremendous problems in terms of physical health and ailments and imperfections that plague the household with grief through ill health. Then there are other marriages where the children are wonderfully healthy but the family has always been plagued with financial crisis, always struggling to meet the bills; always running from behind, never

quite able to make things. They face a trial of a personal nature in their marriage and in their family which is unique to them, financial woes. Then there's another family who have no trouble with financial matters, no trouble with unhealthy children, but they lose some of their family to the world, gone from the truth. Isn't that just as heart wrenching a trial? Then there are some who have no trouble with their family, no trouble with their finances, the children all grow up strong and healthy and they come in the truth, but they have crushing problems in ecclesial life, special burdens that they are called upon to bear that others aren't! and then there are some brethren and sisters who never have the joy of marriage at all, and their lot in the truth is to remain single. We all have trials, b&s, all of us, none of us are exempt, trial is the perfecting principle of our lives. Although our trials are different, the one thing that we must believe, and that we ought to know, is that Yahweh in His absolute and sovereign wisdom does know best! and upon us will come those trials that are necessary and pertinent for the development of our character before Him, that we might learn to trust in Him, and that we might learn to try in faith despite whatever trials will come upon us!

Now, you see, the wonderful thing about this couple in this story is that they tried, oh, how they tried! They really tried, this couple, they tried, and tried, and tried again, until finally their faith triumphed and they came to maturity and in the words of Job 14 verses 8 and 9 (and giving it a slight change): 'Though their root had waxed old and the stock was dead, through the scent of water it budded'; and, in the words of Isaiah 11 verse 1, 'there came forth a rod out of the stem of Abraham; the Branch grew out of his roots'; and, finally, at the end of that trial, a little child was born to this couple, a branch in Abraham and Sarah's house, and with the birth of that son, b&s, Abraham and Sarah, husband and wife, became Abraham and Sarah, mom and dad. In a sense, they reached the fullness of their life and how did it happen?

Come and have a look at Genesis 21, this triumph of faith to which they finally came, and the answer, you see, is it was all of God, because Genesis 21 verse 1 says, and look at this, 'And Yahweh visited Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did unto Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him'. It was God's work in their lives, wasn't it? through and through, and that's how they came to the climax of faith, the influence of God in their lives, God at work in their lives!

I'd like you to come to 1 Peter 3 and we'll close on this thought. Now, in 1 Peter 3, you'll notice that we have in the first few verses, a reference to characteristics of husbands and wives in the truth; I want you to notice one important word in verse 1, it's the word 'likewise', 'likewise ye wives'. Now, when it says 'likewise', what do you think that means? Well, 'likewise', I think, takes us back to the previous chapter and to the example of our Lord in verses 21 to 25, the example of Christ in the words of verse 21, 'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow', and the next few verses go on to tell us about two outstanding virtues that the Lord Jesus Christ showed in His particular life that we're asked to follow. The two outstanding virtues were, in verses 22 and 23, 'That when He

suffered He threatened not but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously'. He showed the principle of sacrifice on the one side (He sacrificed for others) and on the other side He submitted Himself to Him that judges righteously which was, of course, His heavenly Father. Then chapter 3 verse 1 says, 'Likewise, ye wives,' so what it's saying is that the spirit of a wife must show the same principles as the Lord. So, likewise, in chapter 3 verse 7 it says, (and here's the key word again) 'Likewise, ye husbands,' so, both husband and wife are exhorted here to follow after the example of Christ.

Now, here are the two things set now in the context of marriage, and this is what Peter says, it's very simple, Peter says, 'do you want to have a good marriage? it's very simple, there's only two things that you need to do in order to have a happy and fruitful marriage in the truth; simple he says, husbands, you've got to learn to 'sacrifice for your wives'. That's all! learn to sacrifice for your wives. Wives, learn the principle of submission to your husbands! Now, those are the two virtues of Christ, He sacrificed for others and He submitted to His Father; now, all you have to do is follow Christ, says Peter, very simple!

Of course, it's not as simple as that, is it, b&s? because it just so happens that those two

little things, husbands sacrificing for wives and wives learning submission to husbands, are two of the hardest things, aren't they? Now, let me show you the spirit in this couple's life. First of all, come back to chapter 17, Genesis 17, and let's have a look at Abraham for just one moment, one closing moment in terms of his attitude to his wife; 'giving honour unto the wife, says Peter, that's the principle of learning to sacrifice for her and respecting her needs, giving honour to her.

Now, look what happens in Genesis 17, Abraham's been promised a son and in verse 17, 'Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a 100 years old? and shall Sarah, that is 90 years old bear?' Now, do you know that that's a remarkable statement for two reasons, have a look at the highlighted words here:

— firstly, it says that Abraham fell upon his face and laughed and said in his heart, (I want you to notice that). What we're saying is, that whatever Abraham was feeling on this occasion wasn't for the benefit of other people, this was something inside himself, this is how he really felt inside. This is the feelings of Abraham's own heart, 'he said within his heart these words'; well, what did he say?

— What he said was, 'shall a child be born unto him that is a 100 years old, and shall Sarah that is 90 years old bear?' Do you see what's special about that? Verse 15, 'God said unto Abraham, as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be'. Now, you see, this man has been married to this woman for at least 25 years, they've been married in the Land for 25 years, let alone how long they were married for in Ur of the Chaldees; he's been married to this woman for 25

years and every day he's gone forth and he's called her Sarai (it's a bit of a habit after a while, you get used to your wife's name 'Sarai'), and the moment he's promised this child, he falls on his face and says in his heart, 'Shall Sarah have a child', and he instantly uses her new name. Quick as a flash just like that, wasn't that giving honour to his wife? He treasured this woman did this man, and the moment his wife's name was changed, 'thou shalt not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be', he gives honour to her immediately by appending that new name to her within minutes of it being given. He honoured his wife did this man, and how did his wife feel about her husband?

Chapter 18, just over the page, 'in subjection to the husband' said 1 Peter, 'likewise wives be in subjection to your husbands'. Now, verse 12 and 13, 'Therefore, Sarah laughed (oh, you can see the key words again, can't you?) Sarah laughed within herself, says the record, 'and after I have waxed old shall I have pleasure (shall I of a surety bear a child) my lord being old also?' Now, this woman is in the tent, b&s, and she's speaking within herself: this again, is the thoughts of her own heart. There's no one to hear, she's just by herself and she's marvelling on the prospect of the birth of a child, but do you see what she says of her husband? 'My lord!' that's how she truly thought about this man, she wasn't saying this for anyone else's benefit; this is her inward feeling, he is my lord, she says in subjection. This, b&s, is the true feeling each for the other. I'll tell you what, b&s, this couple were in love! they were deeply in love, and it was a depth of love based on the principles of the truth that nothing would shake, despite their ups and downs. This woman whom Abraham loved berates him with her hands on her hips and flashing eyes and tells him off good and proper in chapter 16, but he loved her all the same. Here's the man who weakly gives way and pretends that she is her sister in chapter 12 and places her in a highly difficult circumstance, but she still calls him 'my lord'.

They loved each other and so a couple, b&s, who began marriage as pagan idolaters, ended as the outstanding model of ideal marriage according to scriptural standards, and I'm sure, the very model that Peter had in mind when he gave his exhortations in 1 Peter 3, and, you see, I think the lesson of this, the lesson of the story is that the power of the truth is all sufficient to transform us, regardless of our background. This couple came from idolatry, how easy it would have been for them to say, 'well, of course, we had a bad background'. They end up as the outstanding role model for marriage in the scriptures: the truth can transform anybody, b&s, all we've got to do is grasp hold of the power of the truth to change us! If we really want it to change us and we have faith in the Father, He will work with us. We say of the truth, that it's worth grasping with both hands, and if we're passionate about it, then it will change us. We might experience trial, just as did this couple, but if they had to experience trial, then we ought not to be surprised if we will as well. These, the heirs together of the grace of life, so let us learn from them and begin to follow them now, as they embark on the journey of faith together.

'Why should we complain, of want or distress?
Temptation or pain, He told us no less,

The heirs of salvation, we know from His word,
Through much tribulation, must follow their Lord.