

10055U

SOUTH AFRICA BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #2: Encountering trouble and testing together

Reading: Genesis 12:10 - 13:4

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

Well, this evening then, we start as it were, on our study proper, in the first of these instances now, in which is recorded the life story of Abraham and Sarah. We saw them, of course, this morning, by way of introduction, as we first drew near to examine the details of their lives; now, we're going to study in this first part, in Genesis chapter 12 verse 10 through to chapter 13 verse 5, the story of their encountering trouble and testing together.

We're going to see the way in which, on this particular occasion, we believe that Abraham fell, and fell quite badly, in terms of his faith and his courage — he let his wife down badly; and, out of it, we hope and we pray, in fact, we know that he learnt a valuable lesson.

Now, Genesis chapter 12 and verse 10 then, starts this particular record by saying, 'There was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land'. There was a famine in the land, says the record. It's interesting actually because this is the very first occasion that the word 'famine' is referred to in scripture. You see, Abram was in a quandary because, back in verse 7, he had been promised this, hadn't he? it says, 'Yahweh appeared unto Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this Land'; unto thy seed will I give this Land; and, he had a barren wife on the one side who could not bear seed and, now, he has a barren Land that cannot bear fruit! You see, everything about him seemed to be contrary to the promise, didn't it? A barren wife, a barren land, and yet the promise rested on those two things, and yet all appeared to be the absolute opposite of what God had promised. So, we're told that Abram in desperation made a decision on behalf of the family, as if salvation depended upon himself, and, so, with the famine all about him, he made the fateful decision on behalf of the family that they would therefore, as the record says in the 10th verse, they would go down into Egypt.

Now isn't that a significant phrase, you always go down, you see, into Egypt, don't you? Now, you see, there's nothing wrong with going down into Egypt when it's directed by

God: we're told, for example, in Genesis 46 and verse 3, it says, 'Israel took his journey and God spake unto Israel and said, 'I am Elohim the God of thy father, fear not to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of thee a great nation'. So, there's nothing wrong, you see, with going into Egypt when it's directed by God. We're told in Matthew 2 verses 13-15, that another famous family in New Testament times were instructed to take a little child down into Egypt; but, when we're not told to go into Egypt by the divine direction, then it is, in fact, a retrograde step indeed. In fact, on another occasion, we're told by the prophet Isaiah who says in his 30th chapter verse 2, 'Woe to those that walk to go down into Egypt but had not asked at My mouth', says God . This was Abram's problem now, wasn't it? you see, he's made a decision on his own to go down into Egypt, as if somehow it would solve his problems. Mind you, of course, you see what he says, 'he's only going to sojourn there, I'm only going to sojourn, you know'. The word 'sojourn' means 'something temporary' (1481), doesn't it? it was temporarily expedient because of the difficulties of the situation; but, you see, the scriptures are full of those who have gone into the world to 'sojourn'. Aren't we told in Genesis 13 verse 12 of a man called Lot who pitched his tent towards Sodom? but, by chapter 19 verse 1 is dwelling in the gate of Sodom? Aren't we told in Ruth 1 verse 1 of a family under the headship of Elimelech who went to sojourn in the land of Moab but who ended in verse 4 'dwelling' there? Generally, those who say they're going to 'sojourn' in the world for just a short time, don't end up in the world a short time, they stay there! you see, don't they? The world is never the place to answer our problems for life in the truth.

Mind you, there was a reason! because you see, verse 10 says, 'the famine was grievous in the Land'. It was a very 'grievous' famine and the word means 'burdensome and severe' but, you see, the real problem was this, not that there was a famine but that Abram did not understand, you see, that behind the famine there lay spiritual lessons to be learned. Abram did not see that there was a spiritual dimension to life's problems! He only saw a natural problem requiring a natural solution! He didn't see that God's hand might be in the matter at all! and there's a tremendous lesson for us in life, isn't there? that whatever comes upon us, however natural it may seem, is generally not natural at all! It's God given! Just because it's a problem with a child, or a problem with work, or a problem with our finances, doesn't mean that it's outside of the scope of God's dealings with us; and, the spirit of the truth should be for us to say, 'why has this problem come upon us?' What should we be learning from this problem? what scriptural principles are involved? what's the divine mind on this matter? what would God want me to do? how would the Father want me to react in this particular situation? what lesson ought I to learn scripturally from this problem, from this difficulty? Yet, somehow we don't do that, do we? whenever we have a problem in life that's a problem, the truth goes out the window! and we say, 'don't worry about the truth, I've got a problem here!' The lesson, you see, to Abraham was that he had to learn that there was a spiritual dimension to life's problems. There always is! We either learn and profit from them so that our character is developed or we don't! He hadn't seen that, you see, his faith isn't strong enough!

Did you notice in chapter 12 verse 6, we're told that when Abram first came into the

Land, 'Abram passed through the Land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh', and it says verse 6, 'and the Canaanite was then in the Land', (did you notice that?), then there's a famine and Abram goes south into Egypt and he comes back up finally into the Promised Land; now, when he comes back into the Promised Land in chapter 13 and verse 7 we're told, 'and there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle; and the Canaanite dwelled in the Land'. Now, that's interesting, isn't it? you see, the question is, where did the Canaanite go during the famine? The answer is the Canaanite stayed in the Land and they were still there, still alive, still present when Abram came back. So, why did Abram need to go if the Canaanite could survive? You see, he panicked, he faced a problem and he panicked. Here's the principle, Psalm 33, (let's have a look at this one, it's a nice psalm), isn't this the lesson that Abram ought to have learned on this occasion? verses 18 and 19 , if the Canaanite could strive in the Land, then how much more should the faithful have been able to strive in the Land? did not Abram understand that? and, Psalm 33 captures the lesson when it says, 'Behold, the eye of Yahweh is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine', says the Psalm. The eye of Yahweh is upon them that fear Him, but Abram had forgotten this in the extremity of the situation; he ought to have understood and so ought we in all the circumstances of life and all the trials of family life, to remember that God's eyes always are upon those that fear Him. He'll keep them alive, He'll send them sufficient food to relieve their needs!

So, Genesis 12 verse 10 tells us that, really, on this occasion, Abram made his first bad mistake, you see, didn't he? he made a bad mistake in making this decision to head south, south down into the land of Egypt. Mind you, I suppose we should say as we close our thoughts on verse 10, that at least it's to his credit that he didn't do something else, because Hebrews 11 verse 15 says, in marking the faith of Abraham it says, 'And he might have had opportunity to have returned to that land from whence he came'. Do you remember those words in Hebrews 11? It said, 'he might have had opportunity to return', but at least Abram, you see, didn't go back to Ur of the Chaldees; oh, no, he'd left that behind, he'd crossed over from Ur of the Chaldees, he'd left behind the land of idolatry, he'd never go back to that! So, at least, there's a credit to his name there, but it wasn't a good move really, was it? on this occasion, to head south down into the land of Egypt.

Verse 11 says, 'It came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon'; it came to pass, says the record in verse 11, when he came near to enter, he hadn't even got there yet, before he's even entered into the land of Egypt, he realizes his mistake; he knows there's a problem, you see! Before he's even reached the border, he suddenly realizes, oh, oh! we're going to have troubles down there and I haven't thought this through properly, not as properly as I should have! But, you see, he'd already made the first mistake and the first mistake was in verse 10, deciding to head off into the world, to solve his problems anyway! Sin's a funny thing, b&s and young people, you see, what happens is that when we make a concession to sin in our lives,

somehow it leads to another one. When we make a concession to the principles of the truth in our lives, either personally or within our family, or within the ecclesia, somehow inevitably it leads to yet another and generally greater concession, doesn't it? You think about the story of Genesis chapter 12. You see, what happens is this: he displays his own lack of faith first, then he compromises his wife, then he deceives the princes of Egypt, then he implicates Pharaoh himself, then he plunges the whole house of Egypt into disaster, does Abram. Sin's like that, you see, you know, (we won't turn this reference up), but this story of how sin, you see, sin does two things, doesn't it? it deceives and it multiplies, we ought always to remember those two things about sin, it deceives and it multiplies! You know, this episode here of how it multiplies is very similar to another one, and you might like to take a note of this reference which we won't turn up, but 2 Samuel 11 verses 1, 2, 4, 8, 15, and you'll all know what that record is, it's the story of another man who made his first mistake when he didn't go to battle at the time when other kings were out warring the warfare of faith, and he decided to stay home. Do you remember that man? he walked upon the housetop and he saw a woman, and he compromised his own integrity and he implicated the woman, and he implicated the husband, and he brought Joab into the situation and finally the whole house of Israel was plunged into disaster, because David made a concession to sin. Oh, a very similar story, isn't it? Isn't there an old proverb that says this and how true it is! 'Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive'; that's what sin is like, isn't it?

Now, who was he talking to in verse 11? 'It came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai, his wife'; he said unto Sarai his wife; she's always called this, you see, in the record from the very moment, remember? that she enters in chapter 11, she's Sarai, Abram's wife, and so she is all the way through the story, she's Abram's wife. The whole problem though, of course, in this story, was that Abram didn't appreciate really what it meant for this woman to be his wife! He doesn't understand the fullness of what this marriage is all about. She was his wife, but Abram didn't understand the dimensions of exactly what that involved, not yet, not as yet. Now, do you see what he says in verse 11? he turns to his wife and he says, 'Look, ah look, behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon' (it's interesting actually that Blunt's Scriptural Coincidences makes a comment on this verse and he says, 'In most parts of the Middle East a woman went heavily veiled and so, therefore, a woman, no matter how beautiful she was, because she's heavily veiled no man saw her'); I understand that there was a very beautiful princess in one of the United Arab emirates, she is exceedingly beautiful apparently; she's ever only been seen by two men in her life, her father and her husband. So, why was Abram worried about other people looking upon his fair wife here in verse 11? (well, Blunt says, it just so happens that you see, in Egypt the women went unveiled). So, it was a problem there, and because they were darker skinned in Egypt, he feared that the fairness and the beauty of his wife would be something that they would be attracted to. Now, it's interesting actually, she's about 65 at this stage, is young Sarai; mind you, remember she dies at what age? 127, so if she's 65 and she dies at 127 then she's approximately middle-aged, isn't she? and she's still an extremely attractive woman!

Now, if you think that's interesting, wait till you get to chapter 20 and you find she's an awful lot older and she's still attractive in chapter 20! We're going to come to the reasons for that later on, the secret of eternal life in Sarah in Genesis chapter 20.

So, Abram's worried, isn't he? about what will happen, so what he says therefore, what he proposes in the 12th verse, is a solution. He says, 'look, it shall come to pass when the Egyptian shall see thee, that they shall say this is his wife, and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee'. So, you see, Abram is motivated by fear here, he thought that if she was his wife they would kill him, but if she was his sister they would leave him alone and alive. So, what really he suggests here in verse 12 is only a little concession, really, he says 'Look, we're still married, dear, it just that what we ought to do is to keep the public matter, the public relationship of our marriage, well, we'll actually compromise the public relationship. From a public point of view it won't be clear that we're married at all, we still will be, of course, but not in public, alright? Say, you are my sister!' Now, Abram was wrong on this, wasn't he? he was very wrong, actually he was wrong on several different counts. I've got at least 4 reasons here why Abram was quite wrong in terms of the suggestion he proposes. Let's just have a look at that in terms of ABRAM'S MISTAKES here:

1. You see, it was a brilliant solution from Abram's point of view: his life would be spared, no one would be looking at him or worrying about him, the only problem was that it solved his problem, but it didn't really solve his wife's, did it? In fact, it increased the danger to Sarai because what he was really suggesting here was that he withdraw the protection of his role as a husband. Now, we said that husbands ought to learn the principle of sacrifice; Abram says, 'I understand sacrifice, I'm going to sacrifice you!' Now, that's not quite right really, he casts the whole problem on Sarai, and he removed his protection as a husband. Now that wasn't the right thing to do, was it? How could any husband do that to the wife of his love?

2. Now, here's the second thing, and I think in some ways, it's a more serious one in terms of Abram's spiritual mindedness, you see, or lack thereof, because the Land had been promised to his seed (by the way, the Land hasn't even been promised to Abram yet only to his seed); did you notice that? Genesis 12 verse 7, 'Unto thy seed will I give this Land'; not to Abram, he doesn't get the promise until chapter 13. At the moment it's only promised to the seed, but the thing is that the seed hasn't been born, and not only has the seed not been born, it hasn't even been conceived as yet! So, if the seed hasn't been conceived as yet, then it's impossible for Abram to lose his life, isn't it? because it's got to be his child. So, here's a promise that rests on a seed that is going to spring from this man and this woman, and the child has not yet been conceived, then their lives are inviolate; but, Abram didn't understand that, did he? he hadn't worked out really the implications of the promise, had he? either for himself or especially for himself in this particular case — his life was safe! if only he could realize that!

3. But, you see, the third error he makes on this occasion was that in moving the

threat to his wife, what Abram was doing was jeopardizing her position as the bearer of the seed, and indicating thereby his lack of appreciation of her involvement. One of the things we're going to see in this story is the way that Abram's understanding is gradually increased to the point where he realizes that this is not going to be just his child, it was going to be their child, that Sarai was as intimately involved in this promise as he was; they were in it together. He doesn't actually understand that at the moment. I think that when Abram was told 'unto thy seed will I give this Land', he saw it as his boy, his child, he hadn't seen his wife's involvement and he shows that by what he's prepared to do here, he's going to jeopardize her position.

4. And, the fourth thing on which he was wrong was what had he really done? Well, what he had really done on the basis of fear was, he had prejudged the character and the standard of the Egyptians, hadn't he? he had prejudged what they were going to do and

what they would be like, and the fact of the matter is, he was wrong. Subsequent events proved that he had been most unfair in his assessment of their character.

So, you see, Abram was wrong, we believe, on at least four different counts in terms of his reasoning in this particular matter, when in verses 12 and 13 he makes this proposal of compromise and of concession to his beloved wife! This is not Abram at his best, is it? This is Abram making bad mistakes one after the other; this is a man who's not yet matured in faith; this is a man who does not see things through spiritual eyes as yet!

Now, verse 13 says, 'Say I pray thee, thou art my sister'. Of course, she was, wasn't she? Chapter 20 verse 4 of Genesis says that they had the same father; so, really it was true, wasn't it? No! it wasn't true, b&s, because even though they may have had the same father, the fact of the matter is that this was uttered with the intention to deceive; and, that's a lie, isn't it? There really isn't such a thing as a half truth. You know, it was a lie, deliberately uttered with the intention to deceive, and the fact is, that irrespective of whether she was his sister or no, the real issue was she was his wife, and that's what he's trying to hide, wasn't it? NO, this is wrong, this is not good, this is not Abraham the father of the faithful, not yet.

Did you notice just before this incident that Abram is seen in a certain posture; verse 8 of Genesis 12, it says that just before this episode occurs, 'he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto Yahweh and (here it is) he called upon the name of Yahweh'. That's prayer, isn't it? he was involved in prayer just before the beginning of this episode; when we come out the other side of the episode in Chapter 13 verse 4 it says, 'Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of Yahweh'. So, you see, Abram is seen in the posture of prayer just before and just after this episode, but right now, in the middle of the crisis, when prayer would have been so tremendously helpful to him, there's no mention of prayer. Not in the middle of the problem and, you see, I think there's a lesson here, isn't there? and I think the lesson is this, you see, when we get involved with the world it diminishes our spiritual perception.

You know, one of the hardest things is to try and assess a problem in life when we're already entangled in the middle of the problem; it's the hardest thing to be spiritually objective when we're already in the middle of it all. I suppose, one of the lessons, therefore, of this whole episode is, isn't it? that wisdom says both in terms of marriage and family life and for that matter, ecclesial life, is that we've got to develop the skill of seeing ahead! You know, there's a proverb that says, 'a prudent man foresees evil and hides himself', he sees ahead to the problems that are likely to come if we go this way or that way, if we do this or that spiritually there's a possible problem and we seek to avoid that before it even occurs. Abram's in the thick of a problem here now, when he could well do with prayer to his God; and, he's silent! there's no reference to prayer at all! he's right in the midst of it and struggling with his own problems.

Well, problems they were because verse 14 goes on to say, 'It came to pass when Abram was come into Egypt, that the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair'; which, by the way, I suppose, really says that exactly what Abram feared happened; it happened exactly as he thought it would. Verse 15 says, 'The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house'. Now, do you see the word 'woman' in verse 14 and the word 'woman' in verse 15? That's the word 'ishshah' (802) in the Hebrew and the interesting thing about it, it's the same word translated 'wife' in verse 11; 'wife' in verse 12, 'wife' in verse 17, 'wife' in verse 18, 'wife' in verse 19. You see, that was the great problem, isn't it? she wasn't just a woman, was she? she was another man's wife, and that's where the whole crisis was. The princes who saw this woman and commended her fairness, did not realize that she belonged to a man. She was married to him! You see, we understand why Abram did what he did, we know that he was motivated by fear, we all understand that but, you see, one of the hard things to appreciate, and I personally find it hard to appreciate, but it's alright planning these things in theory, isn't it? but what happens in the reality of life? Then what happened was, here they are living in a house in Egypt; then, one day, there came a knock at the door and the princes of Pharaoh arrive and they say, 'we're commanded to take this woman into the household of Pharaoh into the royal harem of Egypt'. Now, what do you do then? there's the real test, what do you do then? Then Sarai looked at her husband and Abram looked at her, and what was Abram going to do? They did look at each other, can you imagine that look, b&s? can you imagine that look between a husband and a wife? what do we do? — one last eloquent look, then Abram looked away! He looked down and the die was cast and he watched his wife being lead away into another man's house. How could he do that, b&s? how could he do that? You see, Abram, although he was a man of faith, he lacked natural courage, he was a timid man; and, he absolutely failed on this occasion to rise to the headship of his house; at the moment his wife needed him, he let her down badly, very badly, let her down completely and she was lead away.

Now, it's interesting, actually, because this chapter talks about 3 things: it talks about Abram speaking about how fair his wife was in verse 11; it talks about suggesting that

she call herself his sister in verse 13; and, it ends with her going into the household of Pharaoh in verse 15. Come and have a look at the Song of Solomon. Now, you see, here is a proverb or a poem upon the marriage of Christ and His bride in the age to come. The Song of Solomon and chapter 4, just have a look at this by way of contrast with the circumstances of Genesis chapter 12. Now, you see, Song of Solomon chapter 4 celebrates the time when the Lord Jesus Christ and His love, His bride will enter into the Promised Land together, and there we're told that the Bridegroom says of the bride in verse 9, 'Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou has ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!' Verse 12, 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed'. These are words and terms, b&s, that refer to the fact that this woman belonged to Him; a fountain sealed, she was his and none other! What a contrast that is with the disaster of Genesis 12: here's the Lord leading His wife into the Promised Land and Abram is leading his wife out of the Promised Land down into Egypt; here's the Lord saying how fair His love is, out of delight for her, Abram comments on the fairness of his wife out of sheer fear of her beauty. The Lord says concerning this one, in verse 10, that she is both His sister and His spouse, but Abram suggests that Sarai should be called his sister instead of his spouse. Here, the Lord celebrates the fact that the bride is a 'garden enclosed' verse 12, belonging to Him, Abram in Genesis 12 as it were, hands over the key to his garden to another man, and watches his wife walk away. No, this is not Abram in a good light, is it?

Come back to Genesis 12 verse 16, it says 'He entreated Abram well for her sake'; actually that's interesting because, you see, that phrase 'well for her sake', that really comes from verse 13, doesn't it? 'say I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake'. So really, you see, what Abram proposed came to pass! He said that what they ought to do was that it might be 'well for him as a result of her', verse 13, and that's exactly what happened, verse 16, 'it was well for him because of her'; but, you see, this was the reasoning of the flesh, wasn't it? sin deceives and we justify our actions. Do you see what verse 16 says? it says that Abram received all these wonderful blessings: it says that he had sheep and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses and camels' and they came pouring into his house until he had flocks and herds all around the house where he lived in Egypt, the blessings. But, you see, they weren't blessings from God, were they? they were blessings from Pharaoh says verse 16, because it says, 'he entreated Abram well for her sake'. They didn't come from God, they were the blessings of the flesh and how they must have stung Abram to the quick, because all these animals and all these servants came pouring into his house, he knew, b&s, that these were the price of his wife! HE'D SOLD HER FOR THESE ANIMALS! how do you think he felt about that?

Success in the flesh through compromising the Spirit! Proverbs 15 verse 16, a notable Proverb in terms of the lesson, I think, of this verse, and oh how Abram's heart would have ached for this! It was the one time when Abram would have been absolutely distressed to receive an increase to his flocks and herds. Verse 16 says, 'Better is little

with the fear of Yahweh, than great treasure and trouble therewith'. Boy! was this man in trouble right now, he was in grave trouble, and he just wished he didn't have the treasure that has now been heaped upon him in this verse!

If you come back to Genesis 12, it's interesting actually because do you see what verse 16 says? it says that 'he had sheep and oxen and he-asses', and you see, what appeared to be a blessing, in the end, you see, turned out to be a curse, because in chapter 13 and verse 5, when he comes back out of the land, 'that Lot also who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great so they could not dwell together and there was a strife between the herdsmen of Lot's cattle and the herdsmen of Abram's cattle'. What happened was that the very blessing of cattle and herds and flocks that he received in Egypt later became the cause of friction that lead to separation between him and Lot, and they ended up as a curse in his household, not a blessing at all. Actually, Rotherham says in verse 16, 'He treated Abram well for her sake' and then Rotherham says, 'so that he came to have sheep and oxen'. SO THAT HE CAME TO HAVE! now, you see, when you come to think about that, I think what we're being told in the 16th verse, is that this was probably a process of time; they didn't all arrive on the day after, it was a process of time. There were gifts and then more gifts and then further gifts from Pharaoh, which means, of course, that Sarai must have been in Pharaoh's household not just for a day, not just for two days, but perhaps for a week, another week, a month, we don't know how long, probably for some considerable period of time. Now, imagine how Abram felt as all these presents arrived; and, imagine how his wife felt, absolutely cut off from her husband, in the royal harem of Pharaoh, not knowing what would befall her! and time passing away.

Well, look what did happen, verse 17, and this is interesting, you see, you've got to read the bible carefully, don't you? It says, 'And Yahweh plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife'. Do you see the word 'plagued' (5061) here, it's the word used of leprosy in the Law. Now, we're not told, we're not told what the affliction was, but I believe that whatever it was, it was a physical affliction that stopped any relationship between Pharaoh and Sarai; that in some way, God physically afflicted the households of Egypt including the Pharaoh so he could not enter in to relations with Sarai. In other words, God moved to protect that woman, and do you know why He did it? He certainly didn't do it because of Abram, did He? He certainly didn't do what He did because of Abram! I believe that God acted because of the faithfulness of Sarai. Now, read verse 17 again carefully, don't you think it says that? 'And Yahweh plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife'. You see, I think God intervened not only to safeguard the promise, but in response to Sarai's faith. It certainly wasn't done for Abram, it was because she was faithful, and it wasn't just because she was faithful, b&s, she was something else, she was submissive!

Now come and have a look at 1 Peter 3 for a moment, because I believe that 1 Peter 3 is actually modelled upon this particular incident in the life of this faithful couple. In 1

Peter 3 reading from the very first verse, let's try and capture the spirit of what the apostle says about the principle of submission in the life of a wife. He says this, 'Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation of the wives. While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear', actually I've got it on an overhead here, so I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll go through it here, and what I'm going to do is actually show a parallel; we're going to take on the one side the thoughts of 1 Peter 3 and then on the other side we're going to show how we believe that the comments of the apostle are drawn not just from the life of Abram and Sarai, but I believe, from the very episode of Genesis chapter 12. Now, you see, the first thing that the apostle says, he says that 'if any (husbands understood) obeyed not the Word', and you see, what had happened on this occasion was that Sarai was led by her husband into Egypt, it was the husband that was making the mistake, wasn't it? You see, when Peter says 'if any husband obeys not the Word', I don't just think that relates to a husband out of the truth, I think it relates to a husband in the truth as well, who's not, in fact, complying with spiritual principles, as this was Abram on this occasion. He's not obeying the Word of God, he leads his wife into a difficult situation.

Then you see what it says. It says, 'if any man obey not the Word, verse 1, 'they also may without (and you'll notice what I've said on the overhead here) 'without a word' (and that's how it should be translated) 'be won by the way of life of their wives'. The word 'conversation' of course, really means 'way of life' (391), it's not speaking of its deeds; so, what this is saying is that a woman can win her husband without speaking a word; she can win her husband by what she does, not what she says.

Now, you know, it's interesting when you come to the record, of course, of Genesis 12, that in the whole story Sarai never speaks, did you notice that? without a word she won her husband. People say 'not Abram', but Abram is the one making the mistake, Sarai is the one who shows a wonderful spirit of courage and of faith and of submission, whose adorning says Peter, in verse 3, 'let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair and the wearing of gold and putting on of apparel', and from this we can deduce that whatever Sarai's fairness was like, that her fairness was not based on 'fashion', there was something more than what you see, that made Sarai attractive; there was something about her whole personality, her whole deportment, the deportment of a spiritual woman. Is there a proverb that says 'that favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth Yahweh she shall be praised'? I think that was Sarai, you see! NO, says the apostle, 'Let it be, verse 4, the hidden man of the heart', and you see, I think that's what Sarai did in this episode. You see, what she did is that she secretly kept Abram in her heart, and by the way, that word 'hidden' means exactly that, the word 'hidden' means 'concealed or private' (2927), and it's generally translated 'secret', 'let it be the secret man of the heart', and what Sarai did was she secretly enshrined her husband in her heart. Why secretly? because she was in another man's household, and whilst she was in Pharaoh's household she still called Abram 'lord' in her heart, even though he had let her down badly.

So, Peter says, verse 5, 'For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves', and, you see, I think this is the great lesson, you see, of chapter 12 of Genesis. What was Sarai to do in this episode? what could Sarai do? her husband watched her walk away, she went in the company of the princes into the house of Pharaoh; what could Sarai do but one thing, she said, in effect, there's nothing I can do but put my trust in Yahweh! I have to hand this matter over to the Father, I can't do anything but trust Him! I think that's exactly what she did do, you see, she committed the matter absolutely to God on this occasion. She also submitted to Abram's request in the matter of calling herself his sister. 'Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, says the record, calling him lord', and you see, I think that what's happened, is that her obedience on this occasion to her husband was truly from the heart!

Then, you notice that Peter says this in verse 6, 'Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him lord, whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement'. So, I think what Peter is saying is that Sarai showed faith in this particular episode, at a time of great terror and alarm! now, if you want to be like Sarai, then you ought to show the same spirit. So, she showed a spirit of submission to her husband at an extreme moment in their life. Now, you see, I think part of the problem here is that we, we live in an age where women's liberation and other developments in the culture, especially in the western world, have changed the view of people on this, haven't they? and somehow submission is not seen now as an important thing in marriage, but from the divine perspective it always has been, and I think, still is! It's the great principle as far as the woman is concerned — is learning the spirit of submission. You see, it's in all these major passages, isn't it? in the New Testament that deal with husband-wife relationships, Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, Colossians 3, Titus 2, the principle of submission is over and over again referred to.

Now, you see, we ought not to think, as a result of this, that Sarah was a meek woman or that Abraham was a domineering husband; submission doesn't mean that a woman doesn't have her own thoughts and her own heart on a matter. You see, Sarah was a strong minded woman, she was passionate about her principles, she felt strongly about things, in fact, later on in the record, we're going to find that she spoke very strongly to Abraham at least, well, on several occasions. You see, learning submission doesn't mean that a wife never talks, learning submission doesn't mean that a wife never communicates her feelings with her husband. What it does mean, though, is that when the principles have all been discussed and the communication is all ended, that Sarah deferred to her husband, as wives should to theirs!

How far do you think the principle of submission should extend? I think the answer is, it extends as far as a godly woman would extend it. But people say, 'ah well, that's all well and good, but you haven't met my husband!' and, you've got sisters who say, 'Well, I'm quite prepared to submit to my husband, as long as I see my husband behaving himself and living a spiritual life and living up to being the head of the house! but, I don't see

why I should submit to him when he's not playing his part properly!' But, you see, isn't the very thing that Peter says, is that you ought not to submit only when the husband is behaving himself, but he says, 'if any man obey not the Word' learn submission. It's easy for a wife to submit to her husband when he's displaying marvellous spiritual characteristics as the head of the house, but the really tough one is to submit to him when he's not! Isn't that exactly what Sarai experiences in Genesis 12? her husband was the one in the wrong; her husband was the one not displaying faith; her husband was the one who was spiritually weak; and, she still submitted to him!

You know what the apostle says, 'Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, in every thing', says the apostle, in Ephesians chapter 5. This is the hard one, isn't it? I think this is the hardest thing for a woman to learn! So, how did Sarai do it? how really did Sarai do it? Just come back to Genesis 12. How did she do it? Well, I think what she did is exactly what Peter said. By the way, he said, 'Let it be the hidden man of the heart'; now, you see, we know that when Peter refers to the 'hidden man of the heart', who does he really mean? Who's the hidden man of the heart really? the answer is Christ, isn't it? Isn't He the hidden man of the heart? But in a marriage relationship, the husband is Christ, he represents Christ, and the wife ought to look up to him as Christ, even when he's not manifesting the spirit of Christ, she ought to try and look up to him as Christ, so she enshrines Christ in her heart! and that helps her submit to her husband. So, you see, I guess the lesson of the story is, it's not the woman on the outside that counts, it's the man on the inside that counts! That's the really important thing, isn't it? it's whether the husband or Christ or both, have been truly enshrined in the wife's heart.

You know, it's interesting that Peter says that a woman can win her husband in these circumstances without a word; so, come to Genesis 12, and we never hear a peep out of Sarai. You know, one of the worst things, b&s, one of the worst things that the wife can do in a situation like this, when a man has made a bad mistake, is tell him! Now, when it's all over she says, 'you might have known this....', and away she goes! and the husband knows he's wrong, but the more she says the more he digs in his toes, and the more she says, until in the end he says, 'I know I'm wrong but too bad!' and he behaves unreasonably! You know, I think one of the lessons of this story out of Sarai in Genesis 12 is that she practised the spirit of Peter, she was silent, there was no word of rebuke from Sarai after the incident is over; you see, I think this, and it's a lesson for all women to learn in the interest of good and happy married life, believe it, that a woman's silence in the face of a husband's failure is a far, far more elegant rebuke than any words she might say! Any husband who's got an ounce of goodness in him, when he knows that he's at fault, and he's hurt his wife, and she does not respond in kind, ohhhh! he'll learn! he'll learn out of that! you don't have to say anything, wives, he'll learn; and the mere fact that you don't say anything will sting him far more than if you did. It's better to shut the doors of your mouth as Sarai did we believe, on this occasion.

By the way, I think one of the reasons why she did this, was they had agreed to it. We're told, by the way, later on in chapter 20, that they'd agreed before they came,

they'd agreed that she would say she was his sister, and therefore, Sarai acquiesced in that matter even though she knew Abram was wrong, because she agreed on that matter with him, and she stood by that agreement, she enshrined her husband in her heart and in silence she placed the matter before Almighty God, and God wonderfully, wonderfully intervened in this story. Verse 18 goes on to say, 'Pharaoh called Abram and said (now look what he says) 'What is this that thou hast done? why didst thou not tell me? why saidst thou?' and you get this barrage of questions now, indignant questions as a Gentile monarch justly rebukes the man of God. Pharaoh basically hauls Abraham over the coals and rightly so! Why did you do this? says Pharaoh, what have you done? why didn't you tell me? and you see, Abram had made a bad mistake, he had misjudged Pharaoh, hadn't he? Pharaoh was a far more righteous man than you might have thought! Verse 19 says, and do you see how close this crisis came, oh do you see, how desperately close it came? Verse 19, 'Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife'. That's not what Rotherham says, Rotherham says 'So I was about to take her to wife'. So, Abram is not rebuked only for his deception, but because that deception had almost lead to further sin. Pharaoh, a man ignorant of the truth, was still a man with sufficient integrity to repudiate an adulterous union with another man's wife, and he said, I want no part of it! But his intention was genuine, he says 'I was just about to marry her'. Now, do you see how desperately close the matter of this promised seed came, if God hadn't intervened because of a righteous woman!

But, the tragedy was, that even though God had intervened, and even though in that sense the situation was restored, these words came to be true; (you don't need to turn them up but you might like to make a note of them) 2 Samuel 12 verse 14, in fact, they're the words recorded after David's great compromise and these are the words. 'Howbeit, by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme', and that was the real shame, wasn't it? The truth had been brought into disrepute by Abram on this occasion; God had intervened and this situation had been remarkably saved, but the truth itself had been brought into disrepute, and so Pharaoh says at the end of the verse, verse 19, 'Now therefore, (and in the Hebrew, by the way, the words are very abrupt) 'behold, take, go'. He doesn't allow any further debate any further discussion, and Abram is taught a great lesson.

Do you know the lesson that I believe he was taught in this chapter? isn't that the lesson? or at least one of them? Learning the principle of honesty in life, and not only honesty in life, but you'll notice that these passages, 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 12, 'walk honestly toward them that art without', Romans 12 verse 7, 'recompense to no man evil for evil, provide things honest in the sight of all men'; 1 Timothy 2 verses 1 and 2, 'let prayers be made for all men, for kings and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all honesty and godliness' says the record. And, finally, in 1 Peter 2 verses 9 to 12, 'as strangers and pilgrims' says the apostle, 'abstain from fleshly lusts, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles'; honest among the Gentiles, that's where Abram had gone wrong, and he learned a valuable lesson from a Gentile monarch on this occasion, who justly rebukes him for a lesson he ought to

have learned.

See what verse 20 of Genesis 12 says, 'Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had', and somehow you see, in the reading of that verse, what we're given really is the absolute reversal of the terms of verse 15; really, aren't they? So, do you see what happens here, see in verse 15 it says, 'that the princes commended her to Pharaoh and she was taken in', and now, in verse 20, we read 'that Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him and he was sent away'. All things turn full circle; you see, God's reversed the whole unfortunate cycle of error that Abram has got himself into here. He's sent away out of the land of Egypt. You see what verse 20 says, Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him, and 'they sent him and his wife and all that he had'. By the way, that phrase 'all that he had', you know what that would include, not just the sheep, not just the oxen, but the menservants, and the maidservants, and the members of his household who all left Egypt in disgrace as the result of the failure of their master to be honest in the sight of the Gentiles. It wasn't a good day for Abram, was it? but, a wonderful demonstration of the spirit of true submission by his wife. Do you know, b&s, it would be fair to say in this particular context, that Sarai's submission saved their family in this day. Sarai's submission saved the family and the divine intervention was wrought because of the goodness of that woman!

Then chapter 13 verse 1 says, 'Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south'. Just as you see the record spoke of the going down into Egypt, now he comes back up, and how thankful he was! He came back up out of Egypt; it was a spiritual ascent, and did you know that Abram never, ever left the Land of Israel again! Well, that was one good thing, wasn't it? one excursion into Egypt was enough for him. He never ever left the Land again after this, and what did it say? verse 1, 'Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife'; well, here's his wife again. Now, let's just count up the number of times that she's mentioned as his wife in this story. Verse 11 of chapter 12, verse 12, verse 17, verse 18, verse 19, verse 20, chapter 13 verse 1: 7 times she is described as 'his wife' in this particular story. Now, you know what #7 is the number of, don't you? #7 is the number of the covenant, she was the wife of his covenant, now does that remind you of a bible passage anywhere?

The wife of his covenant, Malachi chapter 2, come and have a look at it for a moment, verse 14, 'Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because Yahweh hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant', says Malachi. You see, that was Sarai's position, she was the wife of his covenant, they'd made marriage vows together had Abram and Sarai, and yet on this occasion it says that God was a witness between Abram and his wife, and the way in which God was a witness between the two, was that He had intervened to save the wife because of the faithlessness of the husband. Verse 15 of Malachi goes on to say, 'And did not God make one? Yet had He the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one?' Now, by the way, what Malachi means when he says that is, 'Did not He make one wife for one man?' and yet had He the residue of the

Spirit; in other words, God had enough Spirit to make 10 wives for one man if He wanted to, but He didn't, did He? God, with all the Spirit at His fingertips, only made one man and one wife. Why? says Malachi? verse 15, 'That He might seek a godly seed' out of that relationship, and that was the very thing that Abram didn't understand at this stage. He truly didn't understand that his wife was involved in the bearing of this godly seed, and he brought them both into great danger as a result of this episode.

Verse 15 goes on to say, 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth', you see the word 'treacherously' there, it means 'to act deceitfully' (898), so as to be unfaithful. Now, you see, Abram hadn't been unfaithful to his wife in terms of taking another woman, but he had been unfaithful to his wife in exposing her to the attentions of another man through his own lack of headship on this occasion. Therefore, when Genesis 13 verse 1 says that he came up out of the land of Egypt, he and his wife, the fact is, b&s, he was lucky to have her! He was blessed to still have her in view of his absolute failure as a husband, to look after his wife, to shelter his wife, to guide his wife; so, it is a subdued and chastened man, we believe, who sets his face now again, towards the Land of Promise.

But verse 3 says of Genesis 13, 'He went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; Unto': now, you see, when you read verses 3 and 4, you notice that you've got a sense of, well, Rotherham says, 'he went by his removals, literally in the Hebrew it means 'he went by his stations'. The Vulgate says, 'he went back by the same route he had gone'. Do you see the phrase 'he went on his journeys' in verse 3, do you notice how similar that is to chapter 12 verse 9, 'Abraham journeyed going on still toward the south'; now he's coming up from the south and what he's doing is he's retracing his steps, you see, and so, all the language of verses 3 and 4 is the language of a man trying to undo his mistake. Do you see the words, 'from, 'to', 'unto, 'where he had been', 'between', unto, 'where he was at the first'; 'there' says verse 4: now, where was 'there'? the answer is Beth-el! verse 3, back, back, back, back, back he goes to the house of God. Back to where he'd been, verse 4, at the very first, back to the beginning, back to where it all started! Every phrase in these verses, you see, is eloquent of Abram's fresh start in life, he'd made a bad mistake, but one of the wonderful things about Abram, b&s, is he tries to recover himself. He retraces his way back to where he ought to have been from the very beginning; and verse 4 says at the end of the verse, 'And there Abram called on the name of Yahweh'. You know, Proverbs 24 and verse 16 says, 'a righteous man falleth down 7 times, and rises up again', and that was the spirit of this man, the greatness of Abram's faith, you see, is that he fell down badly here but he tries to get up again! he tries to get up again. That's what we've got to do in our marriages. Of course, we're going to fall down; but we're going to get back up again and we're going to retrace our steps back to where it's right!

So, the end of this whole episode is, at the end of verse 4, 'and there Abram called on the name of Yahweh'. Oh, what a prayer that would have been, b&s, can you imagine what that prayer would have been about? Open confession of failure, thankful

acceptance of divine providence, deep resolution to begin again with God's help; and, when the prayers, b&s, were all over, would there not be also a moment, in the quietness of the tent, to seek reconciliation with his wife? and to plead her forgiveness also? This was a chastening moment, wasn't it? for Abram! You see, they weren't immune from failure, were they? but, the record shows the greatness of their life lay in the fact that they tried to learn from their mistakes. They tried to learn the lessons of their life, and what were the lessons? Well, here are the lessons of this episode:

1. Life in the truth involves trial, but the solution never lies in turning to the world! In fact, it's very difficult to assess a problem when already entangled in it.
2. Involvement with the world, inevitably diminishes spiritual perception, and leads to sin and sin, well, sin deceives and multiplies in its effects.
3. Abram's faith could not yet conquer fear, but Sarai's submission saved their whole household from disaster.
4. Certainly, the truth is brought into disrepute where honesty is lacking, but faith in the end, b&s, will help us to rise up from failure and begin life anew, as we should in facing the problems of our own lives.

It all began when a man went south because of famine, who trusted not in God's gracious provisions.

The eyes of all things Lord attend,
And on Thee wait that here do live,
And Thou in season due doth send,
Sufficient food them to relieve!