

8571U

SOUTH AFRICA BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #3: Enduring the stress of barrenness together

Reading: Genesis 16: 1-16

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 take up the story in this 16th chapter, to follow through the next episode of this couple, Abram and Sarai, as they grow and develop before their heavenly Father. We know, of course, from the 12th chapter, that we left them on that occasion, with Abram having learnt valuable lessons concerning the need to show faith in his life and also to show headship in the matter of protecting and caring for his wife. We remember that in that chapter it was really Sarai's wonderful spirit of submission that saved the household from disaster on that occasion.

Yet now, you see, when we come to chapter 16, this is not a good chapter for Sarai! Now the pendulum swings the other way, and by the way, it's not a really good chapter for Abram either, they both make mistakes in this particular chapter, but perhaps Sarai more so, and perhaps with good reason. You see, when you start the record in this 16th chapter it's clear that the problem principally rests with Sarai on this occasion, because you see how chapter 16 verse 1 begins, it says, 'Sarai, Abram's wife, bare him no children', and in the Emphasized bible of the Hebrew, the words 'Sarai, Abram's wife' are emphasized in the text, as are the words 'she had', so the whole focus now, the very beginning of the verse, the focus of the emphasis in the Hebrew is on Sarai. This was to be her moment, this was to be her move in this chapter, and what she was going to do, she was going to take over the leadership of the family, and she was going to do so, b&s, with disastrous results.

She had a problem now that she brooded on, that she'd dwelt on for so long that it now affected her attitude to everything in life — the matter of barrenness! It absolutely dominated her thinking, she was not balanced, she was eaten out by this problem to the point now, that it affected her thinking on everything in life. You can see the bitterness, can't you? in the words, 'Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children!' Oh how that ate at the heart and the soul of this woman, there was a bitter, hollow ring to these words. You see, it wasn't just that Sarai wanted children (every woman wanted children, every godly woman wanted to bear children) but, you see, especially this

woman because they had been promised certain wonderful things that would come through the seed. The seed, the promise rested on the seed! and she had not been able to produce the seed. You see, Sarai felt that it was her problem; you see, she felt that she had let Abram down; see what the record says, 'she bare him no children'. It was all her fault, that's how she truly felt, she saw that this problem was her responsibility and she felt, therefore, that it was her that should do something about it, and so she makes a move now in this chapter to try and secure the fulfilment of the promise that the seed might come because she's reached the point of desperation because she saw the whole problem as sitting on her shoulders. You know, I think there's a problem of communication in this family somewhere, how did she ever get to this point? How did Sarai ever get to this point within her where she felt this crushing burden of this problem as being hers and hers only?

You see, in chapter 15 and verse 4 it says this, it says 'Behold, the word of Yahweh came unto him saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir'. So, you see, Abram knew that the seed to come had to be his own child, didn't he? he knew that! he knew that the seed to come had to be his own offspring; but, what Abram hadn't realized on the basis of Genesis 2 verse 24, that there would be one man, one woman for life, cleaving together, whilst also that this child had to be Sarai's; and, even Abram didn't understand that at this stage. NO, there's a problem still in this marriage, isn't there?

So, Sarai moves, she makes a move and this is the move she made, it says in the first verse, 'Now Sarai, Abram's wife bare him no children, and she had', so you see, she had the answer in her own hands. She had the means to provide a solution in her own hands, she had. Well, what did she have? Well, she had a handmaid, an Egyptian whose name was Hagar'; so, you see, there are 3 things that we're told about this woman, aren't we? three things that we're told: first of all, we're told of her status-she was an handmaid; we're given her nationality - she was an Egyptian; and, we're given her character - her name was Hagar (1904). The name 'Hagar', by the way, means 'flight', to flee away, and that's what Hagar always did, she ran away from life's responsibilities; she's always fleeing! She was a person who did not wish to face up to the realities of life, she was a thoroughly unteachable person, she was a thoroughly unspiritual person, she was Egyptian in her thinking and fleshly in her attitudes, through and through, and she never ever changed, and the bible never ever recognizes her as Abram's wife. She was only ever Hagar the handmaid, the Egyptian, and she was absolutely unsuitable for a wife for Abram on all three counts. She was a fleshly woman through and through and Sarai brings her forth as the answer to all her problems! Sarai proposes a fleshly solution to a spiritual problem! Now that wasn't the answer, was it? that would never be the answer!

Come back to chapter 12 just for a moment into the 16th verse. Remember, we looked at this last night, now some of you already know this, but if you don't it's a good point of contact and a very valuable lesson. You see, Genesis 12 verse 16 says, that in the matter of Abram's sin, in allowing Pharaoh to take his wife into his household, it says,

'he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants'. Ah! so when it says in chapter 16 verse 1, 'and Sarai had a handmaid, an Egyptian, I think that's where she came from, you see, she was one of the maidservants given to Abram in Genesis 12 as a result of his sin; and, this woman would haunt the household of Abram; haunt the household of Abram, and you see, I think there's a great lesson that emerges from this and the lesson is this, we can be forgiven for our sins, but we can never escape the consequences of them. That's a really important lesson in life! the Father has promised that He will forgive our sins, and so He does, but we can never escape the consequences of our sins. This came home to roost in Abram and Sarai's life, Hagar the Egyptian handmaid!

So, verse 2 of Genesis 16 says that, 'Sarai said unto Abram, behold now, Yahweh hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her'. What bitterness was there, b&s, in these words when Sarai said, 'behold now, Yahweh hath restrained me from bearing'; no doubt she felt the fret and grief that Hannah did on a later occasion in 1 Samuel 1 verses 6 and 7, the bitterness of soul, on the fact that she was unable to have this child. You see, the matter of barrenness had become absolutely huge in her mind, hadn't it? It had grown out of all proportions! Now, you know, it says later on, 'by faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive', so, when Sarah conceived she conceived on the basis of faith; so, if she conceived on the basis of faith, then clearly the problem here was that she didn't have faith, and that's why she hadn't conceived. Of course, Yahweh had restrained her from bearing, but she hadn't understood why it was that she'd been restrained! The Father was waiting for the development of faith in her life, and He was pleased to bless that faith with the response of a little child once she had reached that maturity, but she hasn't reached it yet and this is certainly not the answer, to come at the problem with a fleshly alternative. But, you see, obviously what verse 2 is telling us, that so intense was the pressure on Sarai that she felt she could not wait on God any longer! You see what this verse is telling us, by the way? in verse 2, this verse is telling us, you see, that Sarai didn't just move to take over from Abram, she moves, b&s, to take over from God. Doesn't she? 'YAHWEH HATH RESTRAINED ME FROM BEARING, I pray thee do this, follow my solution'; and, she moves and assumes that God Himself was unable to fulfil the promise. 'Go in unto my maid', she says, but that was the custom of the day, wasn't it? a barren woman was obliged to provide a slave-wife for her husband. It was part of the laws of the day; but, you see, the real reason that that was so desperate in Sarai's mind; do you see what it says in verse 2, 'it may be that I may obtain children by her', and you see, that's what she really wanted but do you see what the margin says? the margin doesn't just say 'obtain children', the margin says 'that I might be buildd by her', do you see that marginal reference? it's absolutely right, 'that I might be buildd by her'. Now, you see, you might know that in the Hebrew, the word for 'stone', the normal word is 'eben' (68); and with 'eben' you build a house and what's the word for 'son'? the word for son is 'ben' (1121) and with 'ben' you build a household; so, you build a house with stones and you build a household with sons. What Sarai wanted here was to build the household of Abram, not just that she might be buildd, but that Abram's household might be buildd. That's what she really wanted! you know, there's

a phrase in Ruth 4 verse 11 which says this, 'We are witnesses, Yahweh make the woman that has come into thine house, like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel'. That's what she wanted to do, she wanted to build the house of Abram.

What Sarai proposes is that Abram's household be built by means of an Egyptian handmaid, and that was a bad mistake. It was an absolute mistake on every count! Now, there are 3 interesting references about the building of households, and on every count Sarai was wrong! and the things that she was wrong on were the very three things that we're told about Hagar the Egyptian.

— Here's the first, in Deuteronomy 25 verses 5 to 10, we have the law concerning the building of an house within Israel: it says 'if brethren dwell together and one of them die and have no child. The wife shall not marry without, her husband's brothers shall go in unto her, and if he will not perform the duty, his brother's wife shall loose his shoe, spit in his face, and shall say, 'so shall it be unto that man that will not (and here's the phrase), that will not build up his brother's house'. So, there was a law, you see, in the book of Deuteronomy, a law concerning the building of the house, known as the Levirate law of marriage. Now, what that law said was, that if that circumstance occurred, the woman was not free to marry without, did you notice that? she was not to marry a stranger. You don't build houses by marrying a stranger, says the Law but, Sarai proposes an Egyptian woman to build the house of Abram! now, you're never going to build Abram's house that way, will you?

— In Hebrews chapter 3 we're told in the 4th to the 6th verse these words, 'For every house is builded by some man; but He that builds all things is God', and then Hebrews goes on to talk about the relative merits of a house built by a son as opposed to a house built by a servant, and it says, 'Moses was faithful in all his house, but he was only a servant and he couldn't build the sort of house that the Lord Jesus Christ could build as a son over His own house. That was a far superior edifice, says Paul in Hebrews, compared to a house built by a servant and yet Sarah proposes that Hagar the handmaid be used to build the house of Abram.

— And lastly, what about the character of Hagar? Well, you see, we've said that her name means 'flight', she was not a woman who was prepared to face up to the responsibilities of life; but, it was more than that, you see, the problem with Hagar was she was a thoroughly unspiritual person. What we're going to find later on in this chapter is, the one person she didn't know and didn't appreciate was Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. She had no comprehension of Yahweh! and yet Psalm 127 says, 'except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it'; and, unless we should be uncertain as to what type of house the Psalmist has in mind, the psalm goes on to say, 'Lo, children are a heritage of Yahweh: and the fruit of the womb is His reward'. You don't build houses in the truth by means of those who do not know Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, and Sarah proposes Hagar, a woman who never knew God, never understood God, never appreciated God. No, Sarah's thinking is not good, it's not sound at all on this occasion, in terms of building the house of Abram,

she'd never solve the problems of their marriage in terms of producing seed by means of that sort of solution that she has proposed here.

Mind you, there's always a reason, isn't there? there's always a reason for everything in life that we do, even if it's a mistake that we make. Here's the reason in verse 3, actually, before we get on in verse 3, just a point from the end of verse 2. What did Abram do? It says, 'well, Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai' You know where that phrase comes from, don't you? that's Genesis 3 verse 17, 'And God said to Adam, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife', and that's what Abram did! Now, we have to be careful here, don't we? we're not saying, by the way, that husbands ought never to listen to the voice of their wives. You know, later on in the study, we're going to find in Genesis 21, that Sarai says something else to Abram and Abram's not sure what to do, and in the end, Almighty God intervenes and He says to Abraham, 'In all that Sarah has said, hearken to her voice', and God Himself endorses what Sarah says on a later occasion. There's nothing wrong with the husband hearkening to the voice of his wife, husbands ought to hearken to the voice of their wives. Husbands will never enjoy marriages where the spirit of submission is seen in a wife, if they never hearken to the voice of their wife. But, you see, I think the lesson is, what we're being told, you see, and by the way, that phrase in Genesis 3 verse 17, when Adam is told that he hearkened to the voice of his wife, he's in the verse context, isn't he? in Genesis 3, of Eve taking over the leadership of the household, isn't he? That was the problem! Abram ought to have listened to Sarah, but you see, he ought to have had the ability to weigh up the pros and cons, the rights and wrongs of the situation, and then exercise some leadership in the household. What Abram should have done is, he should have dealt with this right there and then, before it ever got any further; he should have said, 'Look, Sarai, I know how you feel, I also feel the same pain that the seed has not come, but I don't think this is the way, my dear, I really don't think this is the way! I think we have to have patience in the Father, we've got to learn to wait on Him; I believe in due time and in the right season God will perform this, and we've just got to learn to trust in Him. So, we'll wait, Sarai, and we'll wait together'. Isn't that what he should have said. He should have settled the whole thing down, you see, and he made a mistake, he didn't really exercise the headship that he ought to have!

Here's the reason for Sara's agony, her distress, her desperateness, then! Verse 3, 'Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt 10 years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife', and there it is in the middle of the verse, 'after they dwelt 10 years in the land', that's why she was desperate, wasn't it? For 10 years! they waited for this child and that's why Sarai makes the move she does, and that's probably why Abram agrees on this occasion. They have waited an awful long time, and what a sacrifice it was on Sarai's part, because, you see, what the verse says; 'she gave Hagar her maid, the Egyptian (notice that epithet!), verse 3, 'she gave her to her husband', HER HUSBAND! What an enormous sacrifice that was! No, they had it wrong, hadn't they? and wasn't this the lesson they should have learnt? learning patience in life! You see, the scriptures are full of exhortations about patience: Psalm 27 verse 14, 'Wait on Yahweh and He shall strengthen your

heart; wait I say on Yahweh!' Lamentations 3 verse 26, 'Yahweh is my portion, saith my soul, therefore, will I hope in Him. Yahweh is good unto them that wait for Him; a man should both hope and quietly wait'. You know, in Hebrews 6 verse 15, there's quite a significant exhortation about those who learn to have faith and patience in inheriting the promises; we find that the whole argument is built out of the life of Abraham and Sarah, who after they had patiently endured, obtained the promise! James says, of course, 'Count it joy knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have her perfect or maturing work, that you may be perfect and entire and wanting nothing', James 1 verses 2 to 4. Romans 8 verse 25 says, 'if we hope for that we see not then we with patience wait for it'. That's what Sarah had done wrong here, she'd forgotten to wait upon Yahweh! and it's hard at times, isn't it? You know, there are times when we feel that we've just got to move ahead in a situation; we've got to do something about it, we've got to do something about it now! and quite often our solutions are clumsy contrivances compared to the elegance of the Father's solutions, if we could just but wait on Him! Sometimes in ecclesial life, there are things that we just itch for them to deal with it, and wisdom says, 'no, no, no, just wait and Yahweh in His own good time, will provide a providential circumstance that will allow that problem to be dealt with wisely and properly. It's much better to wait than blunder in early unwisely! That's what this couple had to learn, wasn't it? they had to learn the principle of patience in their lives, in learning to wait upon the Father, so that in due time, He might bless them if they would but learn to put their trust in Him.

As with all fleshly contrivances, all the yearnings and desires that Sarai had in offering this solution, it turned out to be horribly wrong, didn't it? Verse 4, 'And he went in unto Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes'. You know, women can do that, you know! just a look; I can just see Hagar running around, no she'd be walking in a very stately way around the encampment of Abram; the odd look at Sarai, a little touching of the stomach, everything that would be done to hurt Sarai, and Sarai had hoped that she would be builded up by means of this particular matter, and far from Sarai being built up, she was pulled down by Hagar; and, I think, you see, that Sarai felt her barrenness far more acutely than she'd ever felt before when Hagar conceived. Not just because Hagar would make her feel bitter about the matter, but you see, now the whole world knew, didn't they? You see, up till now what had happened was this, this couple had no child; Abram and Sarai were in the problem together, this couple had no child, and now Abraham had produced a child, so now all the world knew that the problem was with her! didn't they? and Sarah felt dreadful!

Proverbs 30, have a look at this proverb, why, you'd almost think that this proverb was written for this story. 'When she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes', Proverbs 30 reading from verse 21, 'For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; For an odious woman when she is married; (AND says the record) and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress'. Do you see the word 'handmaid' there, and the word 'mistress', those are the same two Hebrew words found in Genesis

chapter 16, identical words. A handmaid (8198) when she is heir to her mistress (1404), but Rotherham says, 'a handmaid when she driveth out her mistress', and, you see, that's what Hagar wanted to do. Hagar wanted to supplant Sarai, she wanted to become the true wife of Abram, the chief wife of Abram. Hagar's intention was to drive her mistress out and to assume the affection in the life of Abram and to demand of him, his love for the boy, the child that would be born. You know, b&s, from that moment forth, that has been conflict between the Jew and the Arab, ever since that boy was born, and the earth has been disquieted ever since: a handmaid when she driveth out her mistress! oh, isn't that exactly what's happened here in Genesis 16 verse 4, and her mistress, says the record, 'was despised'.

Now, come and have a look and see what Sarai does in verse 5, because, well, poor old Sarai, have a look at this! 'Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: Yahweh judge between me and thee'. Now, firstly, the first phrase 'my wrong be upon thee', the RSV makes the matter a little clearer, it says, 'may the wrong done to me be on you'. So, it's quite clear where Sarai stands, isn't it? 'may the wrong done to me, she says, be on you', and she lays the blame for the whole matter on Abram! Now, in a way she was right, wasn't she? Abram hadn't exercised headship; if Abram had said the lesson of learning patience and standing together before Almighty God, this would never have happened. So, in a sense, she's right, isn't she? that Abram ought to have exercised proper headship in the family, but the fact of the matter is, she'd been the prime mover in the whole transaction, hadn't she? It was Sarai that had proposed the whole thing, and now she turns around and blames the whole thing on Abram.

Actually, it reminds me of another episode, when another woman later on in patriarchal history said to her husband (and she was barren too, by the way, she said), 'Give me children else I die', which was a difficult thing for the husband to do since she was barren. Now, you see, there's a lesson that comes out here, you see, this was an unreasonable comment for Sarai to make. What's it based on? It's based on passion and there are moments in time, especially perhaps in a woman's life (and I say all of these things advisedly because I don't want you to think that men are not susceptible to passion because sometimes they are; but, you see, I think it's one of the emotions, it's one of the feelings that a woman particularly has, it's part of her makeup), and there are times when a woman really becomes so passionate, so upset, so caught up in the feeling of the matter, that she's really unreasonable. Sarai was here really, wasn't she? 'may the wrong done to me'. It's all your fault, Abram! she says, and do you see what the rest of the verse goes on to say at the end of the verse, you really couldn't get anything stronger than this!

Actually I've jumped something in verse 5, because here's the reason why she was so upset: 'My wrong be upon thee, she said, I have given my maid into thy bosom (ah, hah! now you see, there's the problem) I think that's why she was so passionate. I've given my maid into thy bosom, she says; now, you see, that's an interesting expression 'thy bosom (2436)'. Now, we're not going to turn these up but I'd just like you to take a

note of a couple of references: Deuteronomy 13 verse 6, (now we're not going to turn these up but I'm going to give you the essence of them). Now, Deuteronomy 13 says that if there was apostasy in the land it was not to be accepted, not from anyone, and Deuteronomy 13 verse 6 says, 'If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or even the wife of thy bosom', even if she says let's go after strange gods, have nothing to do with it, says Deuteronomy. The wife of thy bosom, you see, this is an expression of tenderness of the one who is nearest and dearest to a man, isn't it? she rested in the bosom of Abram; I've given my maid into thy bosom, cries Sarai. You know, in Micah 7 verse 5, Micah said bad times are coming; a man has to be very careful what he says because if he says the wrong thing you'll be in trouble; there are spies lurking all around to report what people might say, so he says to be very careful to guard the doors of your mouth; 'don't even tell her that lieth in thy bosom', he says. The most intimate of relationships with one's wife, don't even tell her!, says Micah 7 verse 5. You know, b&s, that the Lord Jesus Christ, when He wanted to describe the goodness and the joy and the gentleness and the love and the delights of the kingdom age, He called that state in Luke 16 verse 22, 'Abraham's bosom'. That's what upset Sarai, wasn't it? that she had given this fleshly minded, unspiritual, unteachable girl into the bosom of a man she loved, and her heart was torn in two!

So, she says at the end of the verse, 'Yahweh judge between me and thee'. Oh, that was a dreadful thing to say, wasn't it? what an unwise thing to say because (I can just see Sarai doing this, and you see, a woman gets to that stage where she's so upset that she just has to think of the strongest thing that she can say, and so) she says, 'Yahweh judge between me and thee'. Do you know what I think she's saying? I think she's saying, that I know my reasons for giving you Hagar; but Abram, I don't know your reasons for taking Hagar! She's insecure, isn't she? in her marriage? She's desperately insecure now in her marriage and we learn a lesson from this, don't we? that unwise decisions can rupture trust and destroy affinity; and, this can happen even in a marriage.

There are thoughts that we ought not to do and ought not to say within our marriages because it can rupture the trust that's so essential to the happiness of married life! It's not just marriages, is it? it's in ecclesial life and ecclesial relationships, we can say and do things that rupture the trust and affinity that's there between brethren. Oh, we've got to be so careful with what we say and what we do, and you see, fortunately, Abram on this occasion was very careful; he was extremely wise and a tactful man he was!

He rises to the occasion now, fortunately, at this rather delicate time in the family in the 6th verse. Now, do you see what he does? very wise, you see, 'Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee'. Now, by the way, that was absolutely true in law, you see, a husband had jurisdiction over his wife (his chief wife) but he had no jurisdiction over handmaids, the handmaids were under the jurisdiction of the chief wife. So, firstly, what he says is technically correct, he said, 'Hagar is your problem'; but, you see how careful he is, now you see what he could have said, oh ! he could have got himself into a lot of hot water here, he could have

said to Sarai 'look, Sarai, I don't think you're right, I think you're being very unreasonable and I think poor old Hagar'; and, at this stage she would have interrupted him saying, 'well, you're on first name terms with her now, eh?' No, he didn't say that, he said, 'thy maid', see that? not Hagar, 'thy maid'; she's not my wife, she's thy maid, and she's not in my bosom, she's in thy hand'. That was wise, wasn't it? very wise.

You know brethren, there are times in marriage on certain occasions when you have to know it doesn't really matter what you say, you're not going to win this particular argument. So, you're best to say as little as you can! and what you do say ought to be as tactful as possible.

I think Abram's very wise, you see, in what he says here, he leaves the issue for Sarai to resolve: he says, look, it's your problem to solve, she's your handmaid not my wife! not in my bosom, but you see, he puts a rider on what he says; do you see what he says, verse 6, 'he says it's up to you, you sort about what you think is the right things to do. 'Do to her as it pleaseth thee'; but, you see, in the margin the word 'pleaseth' really in the Hebrew is 'that which is good' (towb - #2896) and, you see, I think what he was saying was, he says, 'look, Sarai, it's up to you to do whatever you think, but Sarai, one thing, you must be righteous with what you do', alright? righteous, do what's good!

Now, you might think, by the way, that that was a very wise answer! EMOTIONS! Learning to control emotions is a terribly important thing in life, certainly in marriages, and for that matter in ecclesial life as well. Isn't this exactly what Abram did on this occasion? 'A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger' - Proverbs 15 verse 1. You see, Abram gave a soft answer, didn't he? a gentle tactful answer, he just settled it all down.

Now, here's a good one! you see, this is really an essential thing for any good marriage! 'be ye angry and sin not, says the apostle in Ephesians 4 verse 26, 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath'. I think that's a lesson that every married couple ought to practice, from the moment they begin a marriage, it's something that every young married couple should make a vow on, that whatever problems they've had in life, whatever difficulties that have been during the day, before they go to bed that night, they will sort that matter out. They will kiss one another and they'll have a closing prayer together that night, and they'll fall on sleep reconciled. Don't ever let the sun go down upon thy wrath, says the apostle, well, that's good advice isn't it? Occasionally, through various circumstances, we sometimes ignore that and it's a terrible thing to wake up next morning; much better to do it the night before! Ecclesiastes 7 verse 9 says, 'be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools'. Proverbs 19 verse 11 says, 'the discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression'. We've got to learn to control our emotions in life, especially in marriages and especially in ecclesial life.

You know, it's my personal view, having travelled around various places and have seen

controversies when they occurred, it's a funny thing, you know, but I really believe that a great deal of controversy that occurs in ecclesial life, the funny thing about it is, it's not the issue that's the great problem, it's the way it's handled! More often than not, it's the way it's handled that determines the outcome, and I think that most of us have a lot of learning to do, as to what the real spirit of Christ is, in terms of how to handle issues to the glory of Yahweh and to the advancing of the cause of the truth. Essential in marriage, equally essential in ecclesial life!

Now, when you read the end of verse 6, you'd almost think that Sarai, you'd almost think that she didn't do what Abram asked, wouldn't you? Do you think she ignored him? Do you see what it says, 'When Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face'; you think, ohh! Sarai really didn't listen to Abram at all, she was brutal to the poor girl! Well, I don't think Sarai did, the word 'dealt hardly' in the Hebrew which is 'anah' (6031) means 'to browbeat or depress', and I think what Sarai did, she did humiliate Hagar, not by means of physical punishment, but by means of the menial tasks that she was given. You see, I think what Sarai did was this, she called her, 'Hagar, come here! now Hagar, I want you to remember there are certain things I want you to do around the household today; I want you to do this and this and this and this, and Hagar I want you to remember, I'm the wife and you are the handmaid, and I don't want you to forget that! Now, go and do those things, please'. She put her in her place, and I think Sarai had every right to do that! She put her in her place because this woman having any chance would have driven out the mistress from the household. I think what Sarai did was fair and what Sarai did was absolutely just, and lest you should think that's supposition, I'm going to prove it to you a short while later on in this chapter. And, so, when it says at the end of verse 6 that 'she fled from her face', even though the word 'fled' is not 'Hagar', it's typical of the girl, it's typical of the whole characteristic of Hagar; the word here means 'to bolt' (1272); so, she exhibited the character of her name: Hagar said, 'no one's going to speak to me like that; I'm off, poof, gone!' That's the sort of person she was, she was an unspiritual person, and she just took off. She said, 'I'm not going to be dealt with like that!'

Verse 7 says, 'And the angel of Yahweh found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur', which by the way means, of course, if the angel of Yahweh found her, then he was looking for her! Why was he looking for her, do you think? I think that the angel of Yahweh was looking for Hagar to impress upon her certain principles that she needed to learn and to know before she returned to Abram's household. So where does he find her? in the wilderness; here's a woman expecting a child and she rushes off into the middle of the desert. She wasn't quite as silly as you think, you know, because where exactly in the desert was she? and the answer is, she was in the wilderness by a fountain in the way to Shur; ah! the way to Shur! now, that's the same word that's found in 1 Samuel 15 verse 7, which said on one occasion, that when Saul smote the Amalekites that he smote them as far as Shur which is over against Egypt. Do you know what she was doing? she was on her way home, she wasn't just anywhere in the desert, she was en route to Egypt, that's where she was going.

Verse 8 says, 'The angel said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?' now, you see, those words are interesting, aren't they? Do you see what he says, he calls her Hagar, oh, she must have jumped in the desert when she heard that voice, HAGAR! but, you notice what the angel said, he doesn't just say Hagar indicating that he knew who she was, he also says, 'SARAI'S MAID', indicating that he also knew her status, so she is not called Abram's wife, is she? The angel said, you are Hagar, Sarai's maid, and I think there was a rebuke in that title, an endorsement of Sarai and Hagar's respective positions in the household — the angel says you're the maid of Sarai, aren't you, Hagar? Then he said, 'whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? Now, the RSV says, 'where have you come from and where are you going?' and I think that's a question that all of us have to ask when we're faced with trouble and trial in life, either within our marriages or within the ecclesias; where exactly have we come from and where on earth are we going? We have to stop and think about that at times, don't we? because, you see, the answer to life's problems never lies in simply running off blindly into the wilderness. So, Hagar says, 'I flee from the face of my mistress'; the Jerusalem bible says, 'I'm running away from my mistress'; and, you see, there's a lesson here, isn't there? You can never run away from the issues of life; the answer doesn't lie in running away. You can never solve life's problems by doing that, and the counsel of the truth has always been the counsel of verse 9, when the angel of Yahweh said unto her, 'RETURN', just that one word, and that's always been the way of the truth, hasn't it? You can't run away. You see, we live in a world of escapism, people don't like what's going on so they switch on their television to escape into a different world; or, they leap into a science fiction book to escape into a different world, maybe even a different planet; or, they walk down the street with things over their ears so that they can escape into a different world. We live in a world where everyone wants to run away, and sometimes that even happens in ecclesial life, where people don't like what's going on in this ecclesia, with this brother, or that fellowship, so they switch to another ecclesia or another city; they run away from life! That's not the answer, b&s!

FACING REALITIES IN LIFE! Most important in marriage, that when there's problems we sit down and we face them. This is a quotation from brother L.G. Sargent entitled Ecclesiastes and Other Studies, he says, 'There is a time for dancing as well as mourning but human nature is wrong in judging that dancing is always a good to be sought, and mourning an evil to be avoided. The principle that what is superficially unattractive gives deeper satisfaction, is illustrated by the experience of reproof: the wise man will appreciate the rebuke of wise men more than the company of fools. Facing the realities of life, brings a deeper and more enduring gladness than evasion of them! The facing of realities by deepening character brings a new poise and stability in life that is not only good, but glad'. Don't ever run away from problems, b&s, in your marriages, in your families, in our ecclesias, face them together and work them through, isn't that the way of the truth?

You see, what verse 9 says, 'Return to thy mistress and submit thyself under her hands'. Now, there's my proof, you see, that in verse 6 Sarai must have dealt wisely

and properly, because the angel would never have said to Hagar, 'return and submit thyself under her hands again, if Sarai's hands had been unjust and unfair. Isn't that true? The angel would never have said that; and I'll tell you another thing! see the word 'submit' in verse 9, that's the same word translated 'dealt hardly' in verse 6, it's the very same word. It's the same word that's used of Sarai's dealing with Hagar; the angel says, you go back to Sarai and you accept her dealings with you, same word. Obviously, Sarai had done the right thing and although she may have put Hagar in her place, her actions had been just and her principle was righteous, which by the way, I think tells us another thing, doesn't it? So, if that's true of what Sarai did, then Abram's prudent reply had borne fruit, hadn't it? His wife had listened to those quiet words that he had offered in verse 6 to her.

Verse 10 says, 'The angel of Yahweh said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of Yahweh said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, because Yahweh hath heard thy affliction'. You have to get the emphasis right in verse 11, it says, 'The angel of Yahweh said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, in fact, the Jerusalem bible renders the verse this way, now just look at the sense here! 'now you have conceived, and you will bare a son and you shall name him'. Do you see what the verse is saying? What the verse is saying, b&s, is this is not Abram's child and it's not Sarai's child either, it's yours, Hagar, it's your child, you conceived him, you will bare him, and you will name him; and for that matter, he's going to be just like you; but, he's not Abram's son! and he's not Sarai's son, and he's certainly not the promised seed that they are praying about and hoping for. But it does say, 'thou shalt call his name Ishmael, which by the way, the margin is correct 'God shall hear', because God hath heard thy affliction'. So, I think what it's saying is that God heard the affliction, in other words, God guarantees Hagar her right to her child, and that He would suffer no injustice to be done. You will be protected, Hagar, no injustice will occur, now you get back into Abram's household and under the hands of your mistress.

Verse 12 says, 'And he (Ishmael) will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren'. Do you know what it says about Isaac in another place, it says 'in Isaac (in the promised seed) shall all nations of the earth be blessed', the blessing came through Isaac; so, you see, everywhere Isaac went there would be blessing, but verse 12 tells us that wherever Ishmael went there was fighting. They are going to be two totally different boys and this child, the child of this union, the child of this chapter, is certainly not the promised seed!

Now, look at the spirit of Hagar in verse 13, 'She called the name of Yahweh that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me'. Now, in the Hebrew, the Hebrew expressions of verse 13 are a little bit difficult to decipher, but I don't think there's any doubt about the spirit of the verse. The overall spirit of the verse is very clear: what the verse says is this, that Hagar called the name of Yahweh, Thou El seest me, in other words, she did not know the covenant

God of Israel, she simply saw Him as a power who was watching her. That's what it's saying! She never knew Yahweh the covenant God of Israel, she only saw someone who was watching her trekking through the desert, and she was resentful; the spirit of verse 13 is that this was a resentful spirit, not a grateful one; she wasn't thankful that God was watching her, she hated it! and, you see, there's a lesson here, isn't there? in terms of our own lives, and our own sensitivity to the Father's hand in our lives. Who do we see, b&s, in our lives? You see, we can either be resentful of a power that watches us, or grateful for a covenant God that cares for us. Hagar never knew the covenant God of Israel, she was simply resentful at the influence of God in her life.

Verse 14, 'Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahoi-roi (as the margin says, 'the well of Him that liveth and seeth me'); behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram'. Verse 15 says, 'Abram called his son's name Ishmael', but you see, the name had already been given to Hagar hadn't it? All that Abram did was agree to the name that God had already given, but the great tragedy here is that the mother and the father of the child, saw the name from two totally different perspectives. You see, Hagar heard the name Ishmael, God shall hear, as a vindication that God had heard her affliction, that's what Ishmael means to her; do you know what Ishmael meant to Abram? God shall hear, do you know what it meant to Abram? it meant to Abram that God had not forgotten the promise! but he had now to bear the bitterness of what they'd done, what they'd agreed on.

You know, there's lessons for young people in verses 15 and 16, isn't there? because you see, it says in verse 15, Hagar bare Abram a son; so they had had a physical relationship this couple, hadn't they? they had entered into a physical relationship together and yet they were poles apart, the mother and the father. They had absolutely no unity of mind whatsoever; physical relationships do not unite. Which comes first, the physical relationship or the building of a mental affinity of two people whose hearts and minds are entwined in the spirit of the truth? No, never ever a physical relationship first, it's one of the hardest things for young people to remember, is that they must first focus on ensuring that their hearts have affinity the one with the other, about how they feel about the truth, the spirit of the truth, the principles they're both committed to, without that there's nothing. There was a physical relationship here and a child to prove it, and a father and a mother who were poles apart. It was an absolute tragedy, they were never married, this couple, she was only ever his handmaid, never his wife. Abram and Sarai were going to have to learn the lesson of 1 Corinthians 15 verses 46 and 47, 'First that which is natural and afterward that which is spiritual'. He is the natural son in this chapter, he is the natural solution; they had gone that way first, but it was the wrong way!

The tragedy of this chapter, b&s, was that he never had a marriage relationship with Hagar, and in the process of this chapter, he almost lost the marriage relationship with his wife! So, not a good chapter really in terms of either of this couple, as they

endeavour to endure the distress of barrenness together. What are the lessons? Trial may sometimes involve delay, but it's wrong to brood over problems, and worst still, to assume God's place in seeking a remedy. How often does our fleshly contrivance result in the very opposite effect of what we intended? Rather then, let patience have her maturing work. Let's remember that unwise decisions can rupture trust and destroy affinity. Sarah's emotion was unwise but Abram's tact restored harmony. We cannot run away from the issues of life, they must be faced and resolved; and in a matter that is sensitive, trust to the hand of the Father in our lives.

Aren't they the lessons of this episode, when Abram and Sarai endured the distress of barrenness together? and aren't they the lessons for us as well, as we journey towards the kingdom, b&s, endeavouring to keep our marriages honourable and happy, and our ecclesial life fruitful! In the words of a hymn which says,

Only be still and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with hearts content
To take, whate're thy Father's pleasure
And all discerning love hath sent;
No doubt our inmost thoughts are known
To Him who seeks us for His own.