

7517U

SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #5: Entertaining three angelic visitors together

Reading: Genesis 18:1-19

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

Well, last night in the midst of darkness, we left Abraham and Sarah on the occasion of the story of Genesis 17, with that marvellous promise having been given to them, that now, mighty God, El Shaddai Himself, was now to move ahead in the fulfilment of the promise that the son should be born. The great promise that all these things should come to pass, lay in the intervention of God's grace upon them both, that, even though they were weak in the flesh, that God would strengthen them in the quickening of their bodies by the operation of His grace, that that child might be brought forth. We realize that Abraham's faith, we believe, on that occasion, leapt ahead, leapt ahead of his wife's really, because he believed implicitly in the all sufficient power of El Shaddai to perform those things that He promised.

I think to me, one of the most wonderful things about the story of Genesis 17 is that fact, that Abraham now realized with absolute clarity, the fact that both he and his wife were co-joined in the fulfilment of this promise and in the bearing of this child. You know, we read the book of Genesis, don't we? and we talk about the promises to Abraham, and we read Genesis 17 as being all about the covenant made to the Jewish people with regard to their relationship to Abraham and the story of circumcision, and we fail to see that this chapter is not just about Abraham, it's about the two of them! They truly were to embrace the covenant blessing together! Abraham now, has finally reached the point where he finally understood that, and his faith soars ahead, ahead of his wife's really, because he thinks logically through the sequence of what God had promised him. God said, 'you can't do it Abraham; I'm going to circumcise you so that you understand that the flesh of itself cannot produce this child. But I, as El Shaddai, the nursing father, am working to operate on your life by the provision of divine grace. And Abraham believed, he absolutely believed, and he was thrilled with joy, he fell upon his face and we know he laughed in his heart, that his wife was intimately involved in this promise together with him. They were heirs together of the grace of life!

Now, you see, when we come to Genesis 18, you see Genesis 17 is principally about the fatherhood of the seed; Genesis 17 focuses principally on the fatherhood of the seed, that God would work with Abraham, 'My covenant is with thee and Me'; but, Genesis 18 is going to focus principally on the motherhood of the seed, because the problem now lies with Sarah not with Abraham; he believes but she, at this moment, still lags behind; and, we're going to see why it was that Sarah struggled in this chapter. She had every good reason to be doubtful at this stage, and so the focus of this 18th chapter is going to be to reassure both Abraham and Sarah, that she indeed will be the mother of the child and to try and bring her to that necessary peak of faith, that stimulus of faith whereby the child could finally be conceived.

So, Genesis 18 verse 1 says, 'And Yahweh appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day'. He sat in the tent door, says the record, in the heat of the day, and 2 Samuel 4 verse 5 tells us that the heat of day was at noon, and Psalm 55 verse 17 tells us that noon was one of the times for prayer. So, one imagines Abraham sitting in the tent door to gather what little breeze there might be in the heat of the day and, perhaps meditating upon the promises, perhaps even giving himself to prayer on this occasion as he cogitated on the wonderful blessings that had been given to him.

Verse 2 says, 'He lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door'. Three men stood by him, and you see, there's an element of surprise really in what Abraham said, you can see that reaction. 'He lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men'; and, you see, I think one of the reasons for that is that Abraham had a very large household, the encampment of Abraham was probably in excess of a thousand people and, no doubt, there would be guards around the perimeter of the encampment of the patriarch. Maybe one of the reasons for surprise was how exactly three men had walked unannounced right through the encampment, right to the tent in the middle where the patriarch himself dwelt. But, there they were! and there's a sense of surprise in Abraham's voice, isn't there? Lo, three men! standing in front of their tent. Of course, we know they were angels; it says they were 3 men, but we know, in fact, that they were angels. If you come over the page to chapter 18 verse 22, it says, 'And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before Yahweh'. Now, of course, it wasn't Yahweh, was it? it wasn't Almighty God Himself, it wasn't El Shaddai in the heavens above, it was an angel that bears the name of Yahweh, who is described for us in scripture as the angel of the Presence. So, what we're being told here is that one angel stayed back to converse with Abraham, and this angel bore the name of Yahweh. Now, look at chapter 19 verse 1, 'And there came two angels to Sodom at even', that's the other two men: one stays back, the other two go on; but, by the time we come to chapter 19 verse 1, they're described to us as two angels. Of course, they were angels!

Now, I think there's a lovely thought here, you see, which presents itself here in Genesis 18 verse 2 when these 3 men appear in the encampment of Abraham, a lovely thought! The thought is this: you see, the primary purpose of the visitation of these

three angels upon the earth at this time was to visit Sodom; that's what they were really coming for. These angels were coming to destroy Sodom, but they made a specific detour to the encampment of Abraham, for the special benefit of Sarah. They came especially for her! This episode, this story in Genesis 18 was especially for Sarah; Abraham already believed! but, Sarah doesn't; and, I think these angels made a special journey to help Sarah. That's a wonderful thought, isn't it?

You know, the word 'men' in Genesis 18 verse 2 is actually the word 'enowsh' (582) which means a 'mortal man', a 'weak man'; they looked like men in need of refreshment, they looked like weary travellers and, you see, this was obviously a contrast to the visitation of chapter 17; because, in chapter 17 verse 3 it says, 'And God talked with Abram' and at the end of the episode in Genesis 17, verse 22 says, 'And He left off talking with him, and Elohim went up from Abraham', and there was clearly a divine theophany that Abraham was aware of, but now, in chapter 18, these men just look like ordinary weary travellers, and I think the point being made is that, (and there's a reason for this in the New Testament) Abraham did not know that they were angels at this stage, did he? He didn't appreciate that they were angels, to him they were simply weary travellers, he did not recognize them!

Now, verse 2 says, 'That when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and he bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant'. You see, there was a wonderful spirit of hospitality in Abraham, and the first thing he does, says verse 2, he ran to meet them. Now, b&s, this is an old man! this man is almost an 100, he's the leader of the whole tribe, but he picks up his garments, he hitches up his girdle, and he rushes off to meet and welcome these men. 'Shalom, shalom, welcome, come in', with his garments flapping about his ankles, as an old man enthusiastically rushes forward. What a spirit there was in this man, and the whole sequence of events in these verses is very typical, of course, of the way in which greetings and hospitality was shown in the Middle East; to bow and then to kiss, to remove the shoes, to wash the feet, to anoint the head, to offer drink, to offer rest, to offer food, in that order and in that sequence. There was a protocol to be observed, there was a right and proper way that things were to be done; you know, there's an old oriental proverb that says, 'every stranger is an invited guest'. You see, this man is the chieftain of a tribe and yet he runs out: he, as it were, humiliates himself in showing hospitality on a personal basis to these men; you see, there was a fantastic spirit in Abraham, and it was the spirit of humility! One of the great things of Abraham's character was, he was a man of humility. This is an extract from bro. Dennis Gillett's book, The Genius of Discipleship, he says, 'Humility arises from reverence and reverence is compelled by a realization of what God is. Humility arises from the recognition of the absolute and utter sufficiency of God'. (Isn't that exactly what Abraham had come to believe in the all sufficient power of El Shaddai?) 'It means bowing with awe in the presence of the awful superiority of God, it comes from our

recognition of our absolute dependence on God, a sense of our need, and His wonderful resource. Humility is not the assumption of a shrinking attitude, it's not a prudent calculation to be lowly, humility is unconscious meekness, too committed to worry about reputation'. Yes, Abraham was a man of humility, you see! You know, that's a very rare virtue in a man! Men find it very difficult to marry together strength of purpose and humility of spirit! They find it very difficult to marry those two ideas together in the operation of their lives; men somehow feel that humility is tantamount to weakness, but it's really a sign of great spiritual things.

Now, do you see what the patriarch said? he said in verse 4, 'Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree'; and, look, he says, 'I will fetch you a morsel of bread'. Oh, what a lovely phrase! Some morsel, b&s, a morsel of bread in Abraham's household wasn't too bad at all! because you'll notice in verse 6 that what really happened was there were cakes made upon the hearth, there was a beautiful calf fetched out of the herd, verse 7, that was fat and tender and good, that was dressed and prepared, there was butter and milk, verse 8, and all of that sumptuous feast which was brought together quickly, was the morsel of bread that Abraham had in mind. Oh, he was a generous man was Abraham, you see, and there's a lovely spirit there that says we ought to be generous in the spirit of our hospitality to others; and, Abraham was, he was a very generous man and we're going to see that spirit as it comes out in the narrative.

Now, look what verse 6 says, that having run to meet the men and to offer hospitality, now he runs back to the tent, it says, 'He hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth'. So, he hastened, says the record. Now, I want you to see that word, verse 6, 'he hastened unto the tent, and said unto Sarah, make ready quickly', but do you see what the margin says, the margin says, 'hasten three measures of fine meal'; and then he ran out to the herd, verse 7, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto the young man, and he (the young man) hasted to dress it'. Do you see that sense of urgency with what Abraham does? You see, Abraham was a man who was able to imbue others with his eager, warmhearted, enthusiastic hospitality; he hasted himself and before you know it, he has the whole camp stirred into activity, he was that sort of a man.

Three men came and three measures of fine meal were prepared, says verse 6. Now, in the Hebrew the word 'measures' in verse 6 is the Hebrew 'ceah' (5429) and a 'ceah' is the third part of an ephah; so if you make 3 measures of meal, what you've really prepared is a full ephah. Now in Exodus 16 verse 16 in the matter of the gathering of manna, we're told that every man gathered according to his eating, do you know how much each man gathered? We're told that each man gathered and what was sufficient for his eating was an 'omer' which was the tenth part of a ephah, so, in other words, an ephah of cakes would be enough to feed 10 men, but Abraham has only got 3 who have come, so that's the spirit of his generosity, isn't it? Three men arrive, he bakes enough cakes for ten, the word 'cakes' (5692) here, by the way, were those round hard

cakes which can be cooked very quickly on the coals; it's the same word in 1 Kings 19 verse 6 when Elijah, fleeing in desperation is told to arise, and the little cakes are cooked upon the coals, that he might eat and be sustained for the journey. So, Abraham over prepares, you see, in his spirit of hospitality.

Now, I've got a question for you in verse 6: ask yourself this question, we're told in another place (the other place, by the way, being Genesis 14 verse 14) that Abraham had 318 armed servants in his house. He had 318 armed servants in his house, now if he had 300 men who could be armed in his encampment, then how many maidservants did he have? How many other people were there in the encampment? how many maid servants were there who were available to make cakes? But Abraham doesn't ask them, does he? in verse 6, he asks Sarah. An old woman of 90 bent down and blew upon the coals to make these cakes because her husband had asked her to make them; why would he do that, b&s? Why did he ask Sarah to make them? Well, I think because Abraham had learnt the very lesson of chapter 17, you see, we're in this together, we're heirs together, so, we'll extend hospitality together; so, the two of them are involved in the preparation of this fellowship meal, they work hand in hand. You don't believe that? have a look at chapter 19.

In chapter 19 verse 1, we know that the two angels come to Sodom. By the way, look at the spirit of Lot compared to Abraham, you see, Lot sat in the gate of Sodom and that is an important position, whereas Abraham stood up and ran forward enthusiastically; Lot, why Lot in chapter 19 verse 1, rose up to meet them, very gracious and dignified was this man! but, when he brought them into his home, although he did extend hospitality, look what verse 3 says; 'He pressed upon them greatly and they turned in unto him and entered into his house and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat'. Where's Lot's wife? no mention of Lot's wife cooperating together with him, is there? But Sarah did with Abraham because Abraham asked her to work together with him.

You see, the spirit of hospitality springs more readily from a happily married couple, in fact, hospitality is one measure of unity in a household. You know, if a marriage isn't going well, you'll probably find that there aren't too many invites into that house; a happily married couple who cooperates together tends to perhaps have a greater spirit of hospitality to welcome people into their house. This is one of the few things, you know, in the truth where a husband and wife can truly work together; and the wife takes care and thought to prepare the table and to prepare the food, and to do everything nicely, and the husband takes care and thought to see that all the guests are being attended to, that spiritual conversation flows throughout the day, that there's a time of warmth and happiness and fellowship; and husband and wife cooperate together in the provision of hospitality, it's one of those few labours in which a happily married couple can truly labour together.

You know, in John 12 verse 2, we're told concerning Martha that she served at supper, and the word used of Martha's service in the Greek is 'diakoneo' (1247), she served,

and here's the interesting thing about that word is that it's the same word translated 'deacons' in 1 Timothy 3 verses 8 to 13; so, a woman preparing a meal of hospitality shows the same spirit as a deacon in the ecclesia: it's all part of the same spirit, you see!

The words of Robert Roberts in the Law of Moses, perhaps taking a statement at the bottom here that we know very well but perhaps giving a more extensive quotation, because it's a wonderful passage. Brother Robert Roberts says, 'Though there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus, it is by a man and not by a woman that life has come, though she is instrumentally contributory for as she was the beguiler of Adam to the death and ruin of both of them, so she is made his rescuer; and being made use of in a virgin descendant of the house of David, to bring the Saviour into the world. Male and female are thus coordinate in the scheme without interfering with the headship appointed in the beginning. Man is the head, but only for nurture and protection and honour of the woman; woman is man's equal fellow heir of the salvation that is offered in Christ, but not to usurp the position that belongs to man both by natural constitution and divine appointment. Man is the strength, judgment and achievement, woman is the grace, sympathy and ministration; between them they form a beautiful unit, heirs together of the grace of life'. I think Abraham understood that, you see, and he rushes into the tent and he asks his wife to cooperate with him in the preparation of a fellowship meal, if they are heirs together then they will truly labour together in all things that they do, and in this first case, they were to labour together in entertaining three angelic visitors.

Now, in Genesis 18 verse 7, it says that 'Abraham ran unto the herd and fetched the calf, tender and good and he gave it unto the young man, and he hastened to dress it; and he took butter and milk and the calf which he dressed and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree and they did eat'. By the way, there are almost sacrificial overtones to this particular meal; the butter and the milk and the cakes and the calf all have certain symbology as it were, and you'll find that there's a very similar story in Judges chapter 6, when Gideon prepares a meal for an angel, and in the end that meal was consumed as an offering acceptable to God. I think the spirit behind that is this, strangers cannot repay hospitality, can they? so, therefore, in making an offering to strangers, we really give an offering to God. So, there were sacrificial overtones in the meal that was prepared, and look what Abraham did! he, whilst they ate, he stood, and they sat down and ate; he stood, and the one that stood was the servant who waited upon the guests, he stood by the guests. So, Abraham adopts the posture of a servant. What a marvellous spirit in this old yet famous man!

Now, just have a look at this, I'm going to show you something that's really fantastic! This is good! there were 3 key words here that are used to describe the spirit of Abraham in this passage. Come and have a look at them! Genesis 18 verse 2, three key words, so here they are: these three key words summarize the whole attitude of Abraham in this circumstance:

— First of all, verse 2, 'he ran to meet them', he ran to meet them, that was the spirit of the man.

— Here's the second word, verse 6, 'and Abraham hasted,

— and, verse 8, 'he stood'.

So, if you were going to describe in those key words the whole sum total of Abraham's extension of hospitality, the answer is, he ran, he hasted and then he stood. Now, just come and have a look at Luke 19 for a moment and the life of another man who extended the spirit of hospitality to our Lord Jesus Christ; now, see if you can catch any echo here! Luke 19 is the story of a little man called Zaccheus, and Luke 19 verse 1 says, 'Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. He sought to see Jesus who He was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature'. So, the first thing we're told about Zaccheus is he ran, in verse 4, and I want you to take note of that! Now, verse 5 says, 'When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him and He said to Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at thy house'. What did Zaccheus do? verse 6, he made haste, he hastened says the record, 'and received him joyfully'. Do you see that word 'receive' in verse 6 of Luke 19, the word in the Greek means 'to admit under one's roof and to entertain hospitality' (5264). He extended hospitality to Him. Now, all those that saw this incident, they 'murmured' in verse 7 because they sensed that he had gone to be the guest of a man who was a sinner, and the Diaglott says in verse 8, 'But Zaccheus stood', there's our third word! He ran, verse 4, 'he hastened', verse 6, and he stood, verse 8: do you reckon there's an echo there? and now I'll prove it to you. The Lord, as quick as a flash said in verse 9, 'Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham', and a little man showed the same gracious, enthusiastic spirit of hospitality as did Abraham the patriarch. Jesus caught the echo straight away. That's interesting, isn't it?

Now, come back to Genesis chapter 18. So, hospitality, you know, b&s, that we can improve in the matter of hospitality, I think in ecclesial life this we ought to be! Sometimes you go to a person's place and you don't even get offered a cup of tea which used to be a fundamental courtesy when you went to anyone's house. Sometimes when you go to a person's place and you happen to be there at a meal time, you get offered a morsel of bread but that's all it is! In the terms of the spirit inviting people out, I don't think that we're as gracious and as enthusiastic as the patriarch was in extending hospitality, and yet I think it's a terribly important part of ecclesial life; it's part of the social fabric of ecclesial life, that we extend hospitality, the one to the other. Great friendships are built in the social environment of the hospitalities of homes, where husband and wife labour together and extend that gracious principle to others.

Now, I want you to take a blank piece of paper and I'm going to get you to perform a

little exercise: now, what I'd like you to do with the piece of paper is I'd like you to write down the names of 5 people that you have not shown hospitality to in the last six months. These 5 people are those to whom you ought to show hospitality to in the next six months. They're only 5 of many probably. You know, in our ecclesia, Pauline and I take our address list and we go right through the membership list and try and go through the ecclesia in terms of invites home, and we manage to do it generally once a year, that's all! There's an awful lot of visits to our home and even then we've only seen everyone just once! Sometimes there are brethren that never ever get invited out because no one has ever thought of them, there's a lot more room for extending the principle of hospitality. So, once we've got five names written down, now I've said over the next 6 months because if you all do it next week you see, it's embarrassing, isn't it? they'll all know it was the name from the bible school, so we've got to spread this out over time, you see! Now, what I want you to do is to take that piece of paper and I want you to put it in your bible in Psalm 46 please. I want you to take the note with the names and I want you to put it in your bible in Psalm 46; then I want you to come back to Genesis 18.

Now, let's move on! oh, you want to know about Psalm 46? well Psalm 46 is the daily reading in 3 weeks time on Sunday morning, you see, and you'll go to the meeting that morning and open your bibles, and you'll say, 'oh, I haven't done anything about those people!' and you'll begin the invitations at that time, alright! Hospitality, an important part of the truth, you know, and this is one thing that this couple was good at, very good at! Romans 12 verse 13, 'Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality', says the apostle; 1 Timothy 3 verse 2, 'A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality', says the first of Timothy; 1 Peter 4 verse 9 says, 'Use hospitality one to another without grudging, as every man has received, let him so minister'; and, look at this one at the bottom because I think this one is the key to the story of Genesis 18, I think this is where this passage comes from, Hebrews 13 verse 1, 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'. You see, I think the apostle is quoting from the experience of Genesis 18 when he says that in Hebrews 13 verse 1.

Now, the proof that they were entertaining unawares comes in the next verse, in Genesis 18. You'll notice in Genesis 18 verse 9, that what happens immediately after the meal is that the angel, or the men as it were, now speak. So, they said unto him in the 9th verse, 'Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent'. Now, you see, there are two things about the statement of the angels in verse 9 that would immediately attract Abraham's attention; the first thing is that not only did they know that he had a wife, but they knew her name, not just her name but they knew her new name, did you notice that? Now, if she's only had this name for days or weeks at the very most, and yet 3 men who are absolute strangers walk into the middle of the encampment and they said to Abraham, 'By the way, where's Sarah?' and the moment the angels said that, I think Abraham realized, you see, that these were no ordinary men! Instantly he realized that these were no ordinary men, these men knew too much; and although the question is put through Abraham, I believe that it was said loud enough for someone else to hear, and that was a lady who just happened to be at the

tent door, in verse 10, just behind the tent door actually! Husband is outside talking, but the wife was Sarah; you see, we're in this together, Abraham! and you see, I think the angels said it loudly enough so that Sarah could hear as well. This question was to quicken her interest, because the words that were to follow were for her benefit. So, the angels said, 'Where is Sarah thy wife?' and the marvellous words of verse 10, 'I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son'.

You know, in Romans 9 verse 9, the apostle Paul makes comment upon the promises made to Abraham, and this is what he says, it's really quite interesting, I'll just read it to you. He says this in Romans 9 verse 9, 'For this is the word of promise' (in other words, this is the pith and kernel of all that Abraham was ever promised), 'this is the word of promise, says the apostle, 'at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son'. The apostle Paul says, that's the essential point of all the promises that were ever made to this man, the promise that his wife would have a son because God would come; I WILL RETURN, says verse 10 and the promise here of the angel was, of course, that He would come and there would be that divine intervention in their lives. So, what we're going to come to discover as we come to the New Testament record later on, we're going to find that it was absolutely essential that Sarah have that child and not just Abraham. When we come to the New Testament you'll suddenly see that she had to have this child. It wasn't just that it would be nice, she had to have this child, it was vital from a scriptural point of view, and we'll find that in the New Testament, God willing, in a few studies.

And Sarah, says the record, verse 10, she heard it alright, she heard it in the tent door which was behind him. Notice that, by the way, she was in the tent, you see, even though they had laboured together in providing hospitality, you'll notice that Abraham is the head of the house, and he's out there talking with the men. You see, Sarah doesn't bake the cakes and come rushing out and push Abraham to one side and say, 'How are you all' and begin a conversation; she doesn't take over, does she? she's not dominating, she's not assertive, she's in the background, but they still laboured together, but she heard these words.

So, how did Sarah react to them? Well verse 11 says, 'Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women'. You know, that word 'well stricken', well, I think that word is taken up in the gospels. We won't turn it up but it's in Luke 1 verses 6 and 7 that we read that about another couple, and it says that this couple were both righteous, but they were well stricken in years, do you know who that was? it was Zacharias and Elizabeth, they were well stricken in years, says the record, and they also were barren and desired of a child. The Spirit of God operated on them also, but do you know what 'Zacharias and Elizabeth' mean? 'Zacharias' = Yahweh hath remembered (2197), 'Elizabeth' = the power of His oath (1665): Yahweh hath remembered the power of His oath, and God's grace operated upon that couple and they brought forth a son, and you'd never know what they called their son? Well they called him 'John', of course, but you know what John is?

'Jehohanan' (2491) = the grace of Yah. I wonder if Zacharias and Elizabeth in their day, in the gospel record, thought back to this couple, well stricken in years in an earlier time who also were the subject of divine grace; and, who did bring forth a son: what comfort and encouragement must there have been to Zacharias and Elizabeth out of the story of Abraham and Sarah!

Do you see what it says in verse 11? 'It ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women'; now, you see, you've got to enter into Sarah's feelings on this occasion. You see, for year after year after year, Sarah had experienced in her body all the normal signs of having the ability to bear children. The cycle of womanhood, she felt it and she knew it, she'd been barren but her body said that it was possible, and now even that had stopped. So, verse 12 says, 'Therefore, Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' Aren't these words similar to Abraham in chapter 17 verse 7, 'Abraham laughed and said within his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that's a 100 years old'? but what we discovered, you see, last night, is that Abraham's laughter was the laughter of faith; he believed, he implicitly believed and with that sense of logic that is peculiar more so to a man, he leapt to the end result and he believed implicitly and his faith leapt over all the obstacles that might lie in the way. But, when it says in this verse that Sarah laughed, you see, Sarah's laugh wasn't the laughter of faith, was it? Not on this occasion because she still had problems, this was the laughter of disbelief, wasn't it? You see, Sarah had been barren all her married life, says chapter 11, and she had come to perceive that as a restraint from God in chapter 16, and that had been going on now for so long that she doubted that it could ever be removed. Here now, in chapter 18 verse 11, we're told that she had experienced the cycle of womanhood, despite her barren state, but now through waxing old, it had ceased to be with her after the manner of women. Her age had extinguished all natural hope of bearing a seed, and Sarah says, you see, 'shall I have pleasure': do you see those touching words in verse 12? isn't this a cry from the heart? 'Shall I have pleasure'. You see, the matter of a child was so personal, so intimate, so emotional, that she couldn't open her heart to the fullness of faith, for fear of further hurt if the promise didn't eventuate; she was too scared, wasn't she? She wanted to believe, oh! she wanted to believe but she was too scared of being hurt, you see! So, Sarah's attention was focussed on her own feelings of inadequacy and weakness which were a barrier to conception.

Now, just look at this marvellous statement in Hebrews 11 verse 11, because I think the apostle Paul puts his finger right on the pulse, he says, 'Through faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive', why does the apostle say 'Sarah herself? why didn't he just say, 'through faith Sarah received strength'? why did he say herself in Hebrews 11 verse 11? because there was the very problem, the problem lay within herself; and, by the way, I think the apostle borrows that word 'herself' right out of Genesis 18 verse 12. Do you see it there? 'Sarah laughed within herself', I think that's where the apostle gets the words from. You see, that's where the problem was, the problem was WITHIN HERSELF. You see, Sarah was faced with the indisputable evidence of her own body and she couldn't see past that . We've said before that a woman thinks intuitively and

all Sarah's intuition told her now that it couldn't happen! So, one thing we have to learn, you see, that intuition is not faith, and we've got to be careful; intuition is not the same as faith: you see, sometimes we want to believe a divine principle of assurance but we can't see past our own natural problem of the moment; and Sarah felt that way.

Verse 13 says, 'And Yahweh said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?' That's interesting! Verse 13 says, 'that Yahweh the angel said unto Abraham, why did Sarah laugh? but you see, verse 12 had said that Sarah had laughed within herself, she didn't laugh out loud. She laughed within herself and yet this man heard! What sort of man was he? You see, God knows our innermost thoughts and feelings, doesn't He? whether they be good or whether they be bad, whether they be the laughter of faith or the laughter of disbelief, she laughed inside, but this man heard! So, the angel said, 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?' You see, there was the problem, wasn't it? b&s, I'm old; you see, her age had extinguished all natural hope, but this had not been replaced by spiritual faith: she was half way there, she knew now that this problem was beyond her; that's the halfway mark, all she needed to do now was to believe that it wasn't beyond God!

Isn't that what the next verse says? Isn't that what the angel says really in verse 14, 'Is anything too hard for Yahweh?' Is anything too hard for Yahweh? 'At the time appointed, I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son'. You see, there's the mistake that Sarah makes in the 14th verse, you see, despite her personal feelings of inadequacy, what she was really saying was, that this problem was impossible for God to resolve, wasn't she? Now, that was a mistake. You know, isn't it true in life, b&s, that we often say, 'ah, I couldn't do that; I could never manage to do that! I could never do that in the truth, I wouldn't be capable'. Of course, we're not capable, b&s, but you see, the trouble is that if we say that too much about what we can't do, and what we're incapable of, we run the danger of what we're really saying is that God is unable to work within our lives; that God can't do it! Yet the truth is all about being empowered to do things, above and beyond our natural ability at times, when we wonder with amazement how it's possibly being done because we felt it was beyond us, but somehow it got done anyway, because 'it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do His good pleasure'. Do you know what Sarah should have said in the 14th verse? She should have cried the cry of Mark 9 verse 24, she should have said, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief'. Isn't that what she should have said?

You see, this question wasn't for Abraham, this lesson wasn't for Abraham, he believed, he was fully persuaded says Romans 4, but that the issue laid with Sarah, did she believe? could she believe? Now, you see, what she says, verse 15, and isn't this typical of life? Sarah denied saying, I laughed not (she was afraid); but he said, 'Nay, but thou didst laugh.' You see, her immediate reaction was to deny it; isn't that typical of all of us when we're caught in a situation and our attitude is wrong and our spirit is not good, and we know we're not good, we know that our attitude is not good, we somehow find it very difficult to acknowledge our fault? We find it very difficult to come forth and

say we're not very good at the moment! No, we don't find it easy to say that, do we, ever? and, so, she denies and do you see what the angel does? he presses her, he probes her, he pushes her, gently but incessantly. He says, 'Nay; but thou didst laugh' and he takes the matter to it's limit. Now, why does the angel do that to her? because you see, Sarah is being forced to consider her reaction. You see, I think what the angel was trying to do in the 15th verse was this, he wanted to impress upon Sarah this, he wanted Sarah to understand not only that he knew that she had laughed, but that he knew why she had laughed!. That's what he wanted her to understand, and you know, I think this episode, this incident with the angel, you see, I think it had a momentous impact on Sarah. The apostle Paul says finally in Hebrews 11, it says, 'Through faith, Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed for she judged him faithful who had promised'. The one who had promised was this angel, right now at this time, in this chapter, and finally Sarah had faith that that angel could do that, and I think, that part of what convinced her was that this man knew the innermost workings of her heart and her mind.

Verse 16 says, 'The men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way'. You know, it's funny how this whole dialogue goes, you see, this story is for the benefit of Sarah, isn't it? but do you notice that its not addressed to Sarah. Do you see what happens? verse 9, the angel says to Abraham, 'where's Sarah?' and he says, 'in the tent'; and the angel says in verse 10, 'I will return unto thee, and Sarah shall have a son'; and Sarah laughs in verse 12, and the angel in verse 13 says to Abraham, 'why did Sarah laugh?' And Sarah replies and says, 'I didn't laugh', and the angel says, 'you did', and then they rise up to go on their way, and Abraham walks out with them. You see, although the whole story is for the benefit of Sarah, the dialogue is all carried on through Abraham, did you notice that? I think the reason for that was to focus Abraham's mind on that which was preventing the child of promise, it was his wife's unbelief! That was the only impediment now, you see, to the bearing of this child, his wife's unbelief and, therefore, Abraham was being encouraged now to take up the responsibilities of caring for his wife, of encouraging his wife and of bringing her to that point of faith where they might finally conceive the child together.

The experience of life and our dealings with God should develop within us, the spirit of humility. There are many opportunities for service in the truth, and they should be executed with eagerness and enthusiasm. The finest service seeks no reward, but becomes an offering unto God. Abraham displayed this in his warm hearted hospitality and Sarah provided loving cooperation. Faith is a power that will help us to overcome physical weakness and personal inadequacy. With God nothing is impossible and He will empower us provided we acknowledge our need before Him.

Fulfil ye the joy of the Father and Son,  
By seeking the peace which their counsel hath won.  
Our prayers and our praises,  
God's grace will command,

Remember the glory, remember the land.