

8104U

SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #6: Experiencing the triumph of faith together

Reading: Genesis 20: 1-18

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

'What a joy it is', as our presiding brother has said, 'to have the lights back on, and bibles open and eyes that, at last, can see what the speaker is about to say, to verify whether these things are correct or no.'

In Genesis 20 then, we take up the story this evening, as our chairman has said, to the title 'Experiencing the triumph of faith together'; and, you might consider, by the way, that that's a rather strange title to have for this chapter because we seem to have a chapter here, don't we? of further mistakes and further disaster in the household, and yet the title of this study is experiencing the triumph of faith together. I hope by the time we finish this study that you'll agree with the title because, I think, you see, the very episode of this chapter did finally bring this couple to that high point of faith that was necessary before their God, so that He could now move to fulfil the promise that He had made to them so long ago.

Now, in Genesis chapter 20 we read in the first verse these words, 'Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar'. Now, it's interesting, actually, that we're being told that something rather dramatic had happened in the life of the patriarch, you see, because we're told concerning Abraham, that he first moved into the area of Hebron and pitched his tent there in Genesis chapter 13 verse 18, and he has never ever moved from Hebron since! He's been dwelling in the city of Hebron for approximately 20 years; now the question is, you see, in Genesis 20 verse 1, Why is it that Abraham suddenly moves from the place where he had been settled for 20 years of his life? What prompted him to suddenly journey away from Hebron in Genesis 20 verse 1? Well, you see, I think there is an answer and I think the answer is Genesis 19 and verse 27. You'll remember that when the angels visited them, that he pleaded to them for the case of Sodom and in particular for the case of Lot, his nephew. 'If there be 10 righteous in the city', he says, 'wilt thou spare the city?' And the angel said, 'if there be 10 righteous I will not destroy the city', and Genesis 19 verse 27 says, 'And Abraham gat up early in the

morning to the place where he stood before Yahweh: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace'. Obviously, there had been, you see, a huge catastrophe down in the Jordan valley; the whole area of the Sodom, we believe, had been blown up by the fire and brimstone which had been rained down out of heaven by Almighty God. Quite probably, Abraham did not know at this stage that his intercession had, in fact, been successful! He may well have thought that Lot was dead, despite his petition on behalf of his nephew, because verse 29 says, 'It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow', but Abraham didn't know this at this stage, did he? All he saw was the smoke of the burning ascending up to heaven. So, you see, what I think happened here was that perhaps the catastrophe, the holocaust, in the Jordan valley caused a migration of people up onto the hill country of Judaea; people were fleeing out of the whole region up onto the hill country and, perhaps, with that there became a migration of people that lead to pressure on the area, pressure on pasture, pressure on places for flocks, whatever the circumstance was; either the advent of other people or deep distress at the possible death of Lot, we're told that Abraham journeyed from thence.

We're told that he moved toward the south country. You know, b&s, Abraham never did well when he travelled in that direction; whenever Abraham headed south he always seemed to run into trouble, and this chapter, of course, is going to be no exception. For what we're told is, in the second part of that verse, 'he sojourned in Gerar', and verse 2 says, 'And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah'. Remarkable really, isn't it? now you see the drama of this because, remember what's happened, remember what's happened in Genesis 18, that the angel has made promise to Abraham and Sarah, and what had the angel said? what he said was, 'I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life', that's the quickening period of gestation; they'd already been told in chapter 17 that the child will be born 12 months from now, that's in chapter 17. Then in chapter 18, the angel reassures Sarah that he will shortly visit her, to quicken her womb that she might conceive; and here, now, in Genesis chapter 20 verse 2, on the very eve of the conception of the promised seed, Sarah is in another man's house! What crisis is this? and of course, we ask ourselves the question don't we? How could he do this? How could Abraham possibly do this all over again? This sounds like Genesis 12, doesn't it?

Well, you see, b&s, I think partly the reason is this, that Abraham had faith in God's ability to produce the child, but he was not immune to the weaknesses that were already inherent in his own character. We've learnt something about Abraham already, that Abraham was a man of faith but he was not a man of natural courage, he was naturally timid. His timidity on this occasion, again, let him down badly and he reverted to the same weakness of habit that he had shown in the past. By the way, the past in Genesis 12, was 25 years ago, that's quite a long time back now, it's 25 years of time, but ask yourself this question, b&s, in all honesty and in all fairness, is there anything in your life, any weakness in your life, that you are aware of, that you've had for 5 years

and it's still a weakness in your life? Anything at all that you can think of? some weakness of character, some susceptibility to a particular matter of sin? some flaw? is there something you've had for 10 years that you haven't overcome yet? perhaps even 20 years? and you're still struggling with a particular problem in your character? are we any greatly different from Abraham really in our lives?

Do you know what the drama of this was? You see, the drama is this, that verse 2 says there are 2 men and 1 woman; one man is called Abraham and the other man is called Abimelech. Abraham means 'father of many nations' (85), Abimelech means 'father of a king' (40). Of Abraham it's said 'that kings shall come forth of thee'. There are 2 men here, you see, and both of them have the name 'father'; 2 fathers and 1 woman and, of course, the great drama of this story, isn't it? is the question who would be the 'father' of the promised seed? Isn't that the crisis of the household, who was going to be the father? There are two men here at the very same time, a circumcised Hebrew and an uncircumcized Philistine, and a child that's about to be conceived, and this woman is in the wrong place undoubtedly.

Verse 3 says, 'God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said that thou art a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.' Now, how could this have happened? how could this have happened? Well, as we said, we believe that there was a matter of weakness in Abraham's character, but I don't think it's just that, I think in this particular story there's more to it than that, you see, you've got to think carefully about this, and I have, and you see, I think in this particular matter that there is a difference between Genesis 12 and Genesis 20. In Genesis 12, I don't think there's any doubt that the blame rests on Abraham, I don't think there's any doubt that the blame lays on Abraham; he's the one that makes the proposal, he's the one that Pharaoh condemns, the whole episode of Genesis 12 centres around Abraham proposing the idea and being reproved in the process. That's not quite the same in Genesis 20. I think they were in this matter together this time, in fact, I'll go further and say, I think Sarah lead in Genesis 20. I think this was Sarah's idea this time, I think she's the one that made the mistake! and Abraham went along with it.

Now, let me show you why I think that! It's all in the way you read the record! Here's the evidence! The first thing is that the record states in verse 3, 'that she was a man's wife'; she was a man's wife says the record, now that phrase in the Hebrew, do you know exactly what it is? 'she is baulat (1166) to a baal', the margin's quite correct, she's married to a husband, or she is baal to a baal, that's the phrase in the Hebrew. It's a most unusual phrase, in fact, it's so unusual that it seems to be used in only one other place in the scriptures. I'd like you to come and have a look, that's the reference in Deuteronomy 22, and it's the only place, that I'm aware of anyway, where this particular expression in the Hebrew is to be found, that 'she was baulat to a baal.' Now, Deuteronomy 22 verse 22 says, 'If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel'. Now the question is, why was it that both of them perish? and the answer is because this verse says, 'because she is

baulat (1166) to a baal' says the verse, she's married to a husband, it's the only other place where that Hebrew expression is found. I think the lesson of Deuteronomy 22 verse 22 is this, that a man's wife ought to be in her husband's dwelling. If she is baulat to a baal, then she ought to be in her husband's dwelling and to be found elsewhere with another man can only indicate her consent in the matter. That can contrast to the cry of the unheard virgin that's found later on in this chapter where she's been taken by force. Not so in this verse, it says that this woman can only be with another man because she's consented, and she will be put to death with the man. Why? because she belonged already to a baal, she's married to him, and she carries her own share of the responsibility for what has come upon her. She should never have been there in the first place says the Law. That's the only other time that expression is used; so, come back to Genesis because that's the expression used here of Sarah, that she was 'baulat' to a baal, and I think the expression is used here to indicate the gravity of her involvement in this offence.

That's the first thing! Not only that, but when you come to the fifth verse of Genesis 20, notice what Abimelech was particularly offended by. He says in verse 5, 'Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother'. Now if you were to ask the question in verse 5, which of the two, Abraham and Sarah, was Abimelech the most upset about in terms of having mislead him? I think the answer is 'Sarah', don't you? She, even she herself said, He is my brother? and the thing that offended Abimelech more than anything else was her complicity in the matter. When we come to Abraham's excuse a little later on in the 13th verse, we notice that Abraham tries to explain what they had done, and this is what he says in the 13th verse. 'And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother'. So Abraham's excuse here is couched in terms which are an explanation of Sarah's behaviour rather than his own. If he was explaining his own behaviour, wouldn't he have said, well, we agreed that I would say she was my sister'. But he doesn't say that, he says 'we agreed (you see) that she would say, He is my brother', he's explaining what she's done; the emphasis is on Sarah's action in this particular verse.

When you come over the page to verse 16, you'll find that Abimelech in rather cutting irony says to Sarah these words, 'Unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother', now that was ironical wasn't it? I have given thy brother, he says, now to whom is the sarcasm if you like, of Abimelech directed on this particular occasion? The answer is it's directed towards Sarah, isn't it? If his irony was mainly to be directed towards Abraham, he would have said, 'I've given on behalf of your sister', but he doesn't say that, he says 'I've given your brother'. The direction of Abimelech's reproof, if you like, is mainly towards Sarah, not to Abraham, and finally at the end of verse 16, we read these words, it says, 'Thus was she reprov'd', and at the end of verse 16 that term 'reprov'd' (3198) carries with it the meaning of censure and correction; 'thus she was corrected'.

So, you see, I think the circumstances of Genesis 20 are different to Genesis 12, I

believe, in fact, that Sarah lead in this particular matter of sin; not that we wish to exonerate Abraham. By the way, he followed, he agreed, he should never have done so, he was not exercising proper headship in his house. It's like Ananias and Sapphira that had agreed together in a matter of deceit, but I don't think on this occasion, in fact, that Abraham was the instigator of the deceit. I don't know why Sarah proposed it, but I think for some reason, perhaps in the immaturity of her faith which had not yet developed to fullness, she, in fact, lead in this particular mistake.

Do you see what verse 3 says? It says, 'God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken'. In the Hebrew it says 'thou art a dying man', and I think what we're being told, you see, in verse 3, is that God had smitten Abimelech. The first thing that God did, you see, God was going to allow no chance for conception to occur; God had to move swiftly in order to safe guard the promised seed. So, the first thing He does is He smites that man — Abimelech was dying — and God appears and says, 'I want you to know why you're dying, because of that woman; because she's already a man's wife'. Nothing was going to happen in that house, and God moved swiftly in order to safeguard the matter of the promise.

Now, in the 4th verse we're told that Abimelech had not come near her: 'and he said, Yahweh, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?' Now, of course, they weren't righteous, the Philistines, but it's all a case of relativity, isn't it? you see, they probably lived under the same laws of Hammurabi as did all the other nations of the time, and I think, on the relative basis, I think, what Abimelech is saying is, 'look, we're a decent nation, we're a righteous people; we've got some integrity, we've got certain courage of practice and conduct; wilt Thou slay us?' says Abimelech. He's grieved you see, but the thing he's grieved about most of all is in the 5th verse, and that is the fact, as he says, 'Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and didn't she say', and so the thing that upset Abimelech most of all was that the dilemma that had now come upon his whole nation was as a result of their deception in the matter. And he goes on to say, he says, 'In the integrity of my heart and in the innocency of my hands have I done this'. In other words, he says my heart and my hands are pure in contrast to theirs! It's interesting actually, you see the word 'integrity' (8537) in 'the integrity of my heart', do you know, that's the same word used in Genesis 17 verse 1 when God says to Abraham, 'I am Almighty God, walk before Me in integrity (be perfect, be upright)', the same word used of Abraham and here now is a Gentile monarch claiming that what he'd done, he had done in the integrity of his heart. You see, I think Abimelech was right, on a relative basis, Abimelech was right; what he had done, he had done in innocency of the true situation.

You know, that word 'integrity', there's a couple of interesting places in the scriptures elsewhere where it's used, and you might like to take a note of, 2 Samuel 15:11, 1 Kings 22:34, we have another couple of illustrations of that Hebrew word, that shows the true meaning. We're told in 2 Samuel 15 verse 11 that there were a group of people who went with Absalom and they had no idea what was really going on and it says that

they did it in the integrity of their hearts, in other words, the spirit of the word is 'devoid of an deliberate wrong', the idea is that they were absolutely devoid of any willful or deliberate wrong. Maybe the example in 1 Kings 22 verse 34 is even more dramatic, it's the story of a man, says the record, who drew a bow at a 'venture'. Remember that? and it smote the king! 'he drew his bow at a venture', but the Word says, 'he drew it in the simplicity of his heart', in other words, he had no idea that he would strike the king. There was no deliberateness about who he was aiming at, was there? he was devoid of any particular deliberation in the matter of sin. I think that's what Abimelech is saying here, he says, 'look, I've done none of this deliberately!'; they, in fact, had deliberately sought to mislead me'. Now Abimelech in verse 5 is justly offended, isn't he? rightly so, that his whole household should have been plunged into this disaster because of the mutual deceit of this couple who have agreed together in the matter of sin.

Verse 6 says, 'God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her'. So God acknowledges Abimelech's integrity of purpose and the justness of his claim. But He says this, did you notice this in verse 6, 'He said, 'I also withheld thee from sinning against Me', says the record. Now all sin is against God, isn't it? we know that, ultimately all sin is against God, but you see, I think there's something quite personal in that phrase in the 6th verse. What God says to Abimelech is, 'you touch that woman and you sin personally against Me'. God had a special relationship with this woman, and a person that touched Sarah personally offended the Deity in this particular matter; He had special care for her in that way; you see, they were under the providential care of God, so God says to Abimelech, 'I know what you've done, you weren't aware of the drama you were involved in, and I withheld thee, because these people are under My providential care, therefore, 'suffered I thee not to touch her'.

Now, do you see that expression, 'I suffered thee not to touch her'? come and have a look at Psalm 105, because here is the inspired record of scripture now at a later time, commenting on the circumstances of Genesis chapter 20; here's the comment by the Psalmist on the spirit and lesson of this particular episode, you see; reading from verse 12, 'When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it; When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes: Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm'. You see, that's a commentary on Genesis 20 and I want you to notice a couple of interesting things about these particular verses. The first thing is this, 'He suffered no man to do them wrong; He reprov'd kings for their sakes; He said touch not mine anointed ones (as it ought to be in the Hebrew, because it's in the plural); and do My prophets no harm'. Abraham and Sarah were cared for together by God, they were both under the providential care of the Father in the same way; touch not My anointed ones! Neither the man nor the woman in this case, would be permitted to be touched or offended against in any way because of the providential care of God upon them and this crucial stage in their lives. But of the two, it was Sarah, wasn't it? at the moment who needed the greater anointing of spirit power in order that she might conceive.

So you see, Abimelech had to be made to understand, I think, because he was caught up in a story here that was far deeper and far greater than his own mistreatment of the household. Providence, you see, they were under the influence of divine providence, weren't they? 'He suffered no man to do them wrong; He reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm'. You see, the bible promises to all of us the spirit of providential care, doesn't it? if only we can believe, if only Abraham and Sarah could have understood that they truly were under the care of the Father; they obviously didn't, did they? not fully! they would never have made this decision if they had truly appreciated the providential care of the Father, Who on this particular occasion rescued them in spite of themselves, rather than because of what they'd done. Proverbs 14 verse 26, 'In the fear of Yahweh is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge'; do you remember the words of Hebrews 13 verses 5 and 6, 'For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do to me'. Isn't this the spirit of Psalm 34 verse 6, the words of the man who said, 'This poor man cried unto Yahweh, and He heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles; The angel of the LORD encampeth around those that fear Him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that Yahweh is good'. Isaiah 41 verse 10, 'Fear not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness'. Deuteronomy 33 verse 27, remember these words? 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms'; 1 Peter 5 verses 6 and 7, 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you'; the prophecy of Zephaniah 3 verse 17, 'Yahweh thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save thee, He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in love'. We're all under the providential care of the Father, but at times we seem to find it very difficult in our lives to accept that we are; if only we could be more sensitive to the influence of the Father in our lives and more careful, therefore, in all that we do, to see that we walk according to His principles. If we desire that the Father truly shall care for us, then, how important it is that we walk in accordance with His ways.

Well Genesis 20 says in verse 7, and you notice, by the way, in the next verse of Genesis, notice the connection with the psalm, because the psalm said, didn't it? 'touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm, and Genesis 20 verse 7 says, 'Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee'. Now I'll tell you what, verse 7, when you think about it, is a remarkable verse! You see, imagine if you were Abimelech; God says, 'it's simple, all you've got to do is restore the man his wife, and he'll pray for you so that you might live; and by the way, if you don't restore her, you'll die and so will all your household; it's quite simple really, that's all you've got to decide to do!' He'll pray for you, you see! can you imagine Abimelech! he could have had just indignation at this, why should a man pray for him who had just been the cause of the problem? Would you accept the prayer of that person? when that person had brought catastrophe upon your household? You see, I think what's been implied in the record is, quite possibly, Abimelech was brought into the story, into the spirit of this matter, perhaps with more detail than is revealed in scripture. It was truly a

remarkable thing that Abimelech agreed in this particular matter and the lesson of verse 7 is this, it is clearly this, that Abraham, for all his failings, sustained a closer relationship to God than did Abimelech; and Abimelech had to learn that! I think that's a good lesson in the truth too, isn't it? You see, sometimes in the truth we see failings in others, but we must be careful, that another in the truth that we presume to criticize, may sustain a closer relationship to God than we ourselves do! We ought never to be hasty in judging one another in the things of the truth!

Well, Abimelech didn't waste any time, did he? do you see what it says in the next verse, verse 8! It says, 'Abimelech rose up early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done!'. He was right! he was absolutely right, you see, Abraham had badly misjudged this man and this nation. I think that's a sin with all of us; actually, we have that funny tendency to impute the worst motives to others, rather than the best. Have you ever noticed that? Quite often in the circumstances of life, we seem to be hasty in imputing the worst reason why someone had done something rather than the best. Well, in the truth with regard to our brethren, we ought never to impute the worst motive, we should always assume in the first instance, the best of motives, and even more so, within the marriage relationship itself.

Verse 10, 'What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?' or as the RSV says putting it a little more bluntly, 'what were you thinking of, to do this thing!?' Good question, excellent question, and I know what Abraham was thinking of, he was thinking of himself! That was the problem, wasn't it? he had acted in absolute fear, they did not trust in the providential care of the Father. Now, look at the nervousness of poor old Abraham in the 11th verse as he tries to stutter out his explanation. Look, you can see shame and tension and nervousness all over the record. Verse 11, 'Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place';. Oh, now, that wasn't the problem, b&s, he said he thought, his concern was that the fear of God wasn't in Abimelech's heart. Do you know what the real problem is? the real problem is the fear of man was in Abraham's heart; that was the real problem, wasn't it? funny how we always seem to blame someone else in life, isn't it? You see, Abraham here attempted to exonerate himself when there was really no basis for excuse whatsoever, and there are two important words in the 11th verse, that have begun many problems in life. I thought, ah hah, a lot of problems start with those two words, don't they? 'I thought', hum! we sometimes make assumptions in life, don't we? You see, I believe, that although Sarah lead in the episode of Genesis 20, I think, that Abraham is doubly to blame here, compared to the incident of chapter 12, do you know why? because in chapter 12, his own faith was as yet perfect, but since that time Abraham had learnt two things. He had learnt unequivocally that the seed must come from his loins (chapter 15) and he also knew now that the seed must be nourished in Sarah's womb (chapter 17), and he still agreed to this, doubly to be blamed in view of his increased knowledge in

the intervening years. In verse 12 he says, 'ah, yes, indeed she is my sister, she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother'; what a weak excuse, there was no justification really for this whatsoever, was there? You know, Abraham would have been a better person in verse 12 to have said, 'I'm wrong and you're absolutely right in rebuking me'. You know, b&s, that's a very hard thing for a man to say! even in marriage, very hard for a man to say, 'I'm wrong', but wise men learn to do so, especially if they want to have 'happy' marriages, because that's actually a great strength in a man, not a weakness, and Abraham would have been better here to have faced up to his responsibilities and to accept that he had made a mistake and to allow the rebuke of Abimelech to justly come upon him.

So, verse 13 is all part of this unacceptable excuse about what they had decided to do. Actually, it's interesting because you see verse 13, they had obviously agreed on this back in Ur of the Chaldees. This was the planning of pagans, this was the scheming of idolators, Abraham should have given this up long ago, he was a man now who lived by faith! He rested in the care of Almighty God, he believed in El Shaddai, what was he doing planning this sort of deception after the thinking of the carnal mind? NO, not good enough!

Now, look at verse 14. You see, verse 14 says, 'That Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and men servants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife'. We look at that and say, 'that's just like Pharaoh in Genesis 12!' Does it sound like Pharaoh in Genesis 12? Well, you're absolutely wrong! It's absolutely nothing like Pharaoh in Genesis 12, is it? for one reason, you see, Pharaoh gave Abraham his gifts when he got Sarah, but Abimelech gave Abraham his gifts when he gave Sarah back! Did you notice that? this is a far, far better man than Pharaoh, b&s; a man of far better personal integrity and, by the way, if Pharaoh's gifts had caused a twinge in Abraham's conscience, imagine what these gifts would have felt like! They would have stunned Abraham to the quick, wouldn't they? a righteous man, he not only gave him his gifts but restored him his wife. Oh, how that would have hurt! Abraham felt about this big! just at the moment, and if he felt that big, he felt even smaller after verse 15, because look what verse 15 says, 'Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee'. Now, that sounds quite simple really, but do you notice something? first of all, bible echoes, this is why we've got to read the bible carefully, because there are so many wonderful bible echoes and here they are: Abimelech said, 'behold, my land is before thee?' who said that? the answer is Abraham in chapter 13, come back and have a look! Abraham said that to Lot on an earlier occasion, 'behold, my land is before thee'. Now you see, in Genesis 13 when there was a strife between Lot and Abraham, it's Abraham who says to Lot in the 9th verse, 'Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right', and Abraham on a better occasion with a better understanding of the truth, shows a better feeling in dealing with Lot. The whole land's before you, you choose, he says, I will walk by faith whichever way you go!

'Behold, the whole land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee', that's interesting,

where it pleaseth thee, wasn't that chapter 16 in the advice that Abraham gave to his wife? Wasn't that Genesis 16 verse 6, 'Abram said unto Sarai, behold, thy maid is in thy hand, do to her as it pleaseth thee', it's the same expression in the Hebrew, and you see, here are two episodes in Abraham's life where he was the example of faithfulness and integrity and he acted in a better way; and now he has to stand before a Gentile monarch, who's got his own words of integrity coming out of his mouth! Now I don't think Abraham felt very big at this stage, justly rebuked he was by the integrity of Abimelech, who by the way, must have been a remarkable, remarkable man.

I'll show you how remarkable he was! Come and have a look at verse 16 of Genesis 20, this is how remarkable Abimelech really was! Now do you see what he says in this verse, he says this, 'Unto Sarah Abimelech said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver'. Now that's an interesting idea, a thousand pieces of silver, where does that come from? Right, come and have a look at the Song of Solomon chapter 8, why did Abimelech give Abraham 1,000 pieces of silver? well, I think the reason or the answer to the riddle is in Song of Solomon 8 and verse 11, it says, 'Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon: he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a 1,000 pieces of silver'. So, the hire of Solomon's vineyard was 1,000 pieces of silver, presumingly, so 1,000 pieces of silver was the hire price of this vineyard and in verse 12 it says, 'My vineyard, which is mine, is before me', now who is speaking in verse 12? well, it's the bride of Solomon now, and she says, 'well, I've got a vineyard as well, it's mine, you see! But then she says, 'Thou O Solomon must have a thousand; now if she's got a vineyard that all belongs to her, why should a 1,000 pieces of silver go to Solomon for the hire of her vineyard? The answer is she is married to him and she belong to him absolutely, the 1,000 goes to the husband to show that this woman belongs absolutely to this man. It's my vineyard, says the bride, but the 1,000 pieces of silver goes to the husband because I'm his!

Now come back to Genesis 20 and have a look at the context of that, you see, in the 16th verse of Genesis 20, isn't this what Abimelech is doing? Why do you think he gives a 1,000 pieces of silver, not to Sarah notice, not to Sarah but to Abraham; he says in verse 16, 'I've given thy brother a 1,000 pieces of silver, and you see, what I think happens is this, is that Abimelech moves to really safeguard the situation, because you see, God could have destroyed Abimelech just like that, couldn't He? But the real trouble in this chapter was, who was going to believe that there had not been a relationship between Abimelech and Sarah? and the answer is, that in a sense, you see, only Abimelech could put that matter right. So he says to everyone, 'do you see this woman, well, I want you all to know that the 1,000 pieces of silver goes to this man here, because this woman belongs to that man, and that man alone; I'm pure from her, I have nothing to do with her, she belongs to him'. Do you see what he goes on to say? He says, 'behold, verse 16, 'he is to thee, a covering of the eyes', but the word here is probably not right in the Hebrew, it should be according to Rotherham, 'lo, that is for thee', or another translation says, 'it shall be your vindication', so the 1,000 pieces of silver was the means by which Abimelech formally repudiated any contact with Sarah, and signified that she belonged absolutely to her husband Abraham, and he did it

before everyone, because the verse goes on to say, 'it's before all that is with thee and all other', he wanted everybody to know this! What a remarkable man he was, a remarkable man! 'Thus' says the record in verse 16, 'was she reproved'. I think the words mean exactly that, Sarah was reproved in this particular matter.

So, verse 17 says, 'So Abraham prayed unto God; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children'. Can you imagine, b&s, the difficulty of that prayer? can you imagine the fervency and the humility and the sincerity of that prayer? as a man who understood that he was thoroughly unworthy of offering prayer, now lifts up his voice with a contrite heart, 'heal oh, LORD, I beseech thee'. Abraham must have felt dreadful in offering that prayer, because he knew he was praying for others in a matter that he had personally sinned in; he was really thoroughly unworthy of holding the role of intercessor, wasn't he? on this occasion, but he had to perform the office, and he would have prayed with great fervency!

Verse 18 says, 'For Yahweh had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife'. There's the key, isn't it? that's the moment that Sarah came to faith, see it there? did you notice it? she's just come to the triumph of faith, because what happened was, with a blinding flash of realization was this, Sarah suddenly realized that the prayers of her husband could open wombs! Sarah suddenly understood that the prayers of her husband were powerful enough to draw down the healing virtue of Almighty God that wombs could be opened, and that children could be born, and she'd waited 25 years for that child. You see, I think her faith sprang to life at that particular moment, and the remarkable thing about it was, the prayer that convinced her, huh, the prayer that convinced her, two things; it was not for her, it was for others, and secondly, it was a prayer uttered at a time when they were both not worthy to be heard by God. What a remarkable, remarkable thing! You see, I can just understand how Sarah thought this through: here she is standing in shame and disgrace having been reproved by Abimelech, and Abraham her husband lifts up his voice in prayer, and the wombs of the house of Abimelech are opened and children are born, and Sarah suddenly says, 'so Abraham's prayer can open wombs; so if he can open wombs with his prayers to God, why can't he open my womb?' Then she suddenly thought, 'well, of course, he can; the only reason he can't is because I haven't believed that he can'. At some stage later on, Abraham must have knelt down and prayed again now for his wife, and Sarah knelt down with him, with a fervent 'Amen', but this time, for the first time in her life, she believed that her husband's prayer could do exactly what he pleaded for; and that's what God had been waiting for! just that she would believe!

Now, do you want to know why that's right? because chapter 21 verse 1 says immediately after that incident, 'Yahweh visited Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did unto Sarah as He had spoken, and Sarah conceived'. Hard on the heels of chapter 20! the moment that prayer had been offered in Abimelech's household, Sarah suddenly conceived a child; she'd come to faith. Prayer, this is an extract from the book, Making Prayer Powerful, 'We might continue to pray without receiving immediate relief, is that an indication that Yahweh is indifferent to our prayers? By no means! Perhaps there's

some lesson He's trying to teach us; perhaps we're resistant to His guidance; perhaps the time is not right! Yahweh's not indifferent to our state, nor unmindful, but is seeking some greater result in our lives'.

Well, this is the greater result that He'd been waiting for in Sarah for a long time, had God, and that was the triumph of faith, that she could believe, just believe that God could do what she couldn't do! and with the prayer of her husband on this occasion, I think her faith suddenly leapt, loud, blossomed into fullness, so that that child might be conceived. You know, I think there's a lot more prayer could be done in marriages! I think there should always be prayer in marriage every day; sometimes it's not possible to open in prayer together if husband and wife arrive and leave at different times in the morning. But I think at nighttime there should always be a concluding prayer as the day comes to an end, at the very least. Isn't there an old proverb that says, 'the family that prays together, stays together', yes, we need the power of prayer in our marriages, don't we? to help keep them together. The power of prayer, of course, in our ecclesias, as we lift up our voice in supplication, to the same God that heard Abraham's prayer, on this wonderful, wonderful occasion. So, you see, I think she reached the triumph of faith; now remember we started this story with a barren tree, the man and woman that could not bear a child, but you see, by the time we get to the end of this chapter, the tree, you see, has flowered, and I just want to show you this, I want you to see how wonderfully the scripture brings together the fact that, not only had she just come to faith, but that the triumph of faith was now to be seen in both husband and wife!

Now here's Abraham in Romans 4, he's already come to faith back in Genesis 17. This is what the record says concerning him in the story and account of Romans 4 verse 20. It says firstly, 'that he staggered not at the promise but was strong in faith'. Then it says, 'he was not weak in faith although even though he was considering the fact that his own body was now dead; he understood that his body was incapable of producing the child, but his faith did not waver, why? because says the record, 'he was fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able to perform'. His faith leapt immediately to the end of the promise of El Shaddai, and he had absolute conviction that it could happen; and not only that but he knew that that faith had to surmount the deadness of his partner as well, because Sarah also was now past age where she could bear children, and yet as a result of that wonderful faith, the promise was that he might become the 'father of many nations' according to the word spoken, 'so shall thy seed be' . So, you see, the husband's been there for a while now, but we've been waiting for the wife!

She's had a deeper struggle, hasn't she? because she's a woman and matters of children are very close to womankind; but she's got there, she's there now! She's reached the triumph of faith, and I'll tell you what, b&s, having got to that triumph, she's the equal of her husband in every way. Do you want to see her in Hebrews? stride for stride, she's up with her husband, you see! Hebrews 11 says, 'Through faith, Sarah herself received strength to conceive'; strong in faith, it says of Abraham, strength through faith it says of Sarah. 'And she was delivered of a child', says the record, 'when she was past age', just as Abraham understood, his own body now dead was no

impediment to the birth of a child with the operation of God's spirit upon him. What was the basis of her faith? Of Abraham it says, 'he was fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able to perform' and of his wife it says, 'because she judged Him faithful who had promised'. They're almost identical expressions, aren't they? she'd come to the same conviction, you see, and she realized that the problem wasn't just with her, it was with her husband, because 'therefore sprang there of one, and him as good as dead' Hebrews 11 verse 12, says the record, 'so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore', the triumph of faith in both husband and wife together! They'd reached it, b&s, they had finally reached it, and now the child can come, the child that they'd waited for, for a long, long time, until they could finally learn with complete and absolute conviction, rest in the power of El Shaddai. Experiencing the triumph of faith together!

In our weakness, we sometimes fall into circumstances which jeopardize the operations of God; how deplorable when we've agreed together to deceive. God's strength, however, is perfected in our weakness. His providential care is towards His saints even in their folly.

Misjudgment of others should not be compounded by attempts of self exoneration, and very often their subsequent action, only serve to rebuke us further. Abraham prayed with contrite heart and Sarah's faith triumphed; they are now equal heads. God is able to lift us to new heights, out of failure, through prayerful supplication.

Such are the lessons of this wonderful moment of their life, where finally out of disaster, the triumph of faith was reached!

The Lord we serve maintains His throne,  
Above the clouds, beyond the sky,  
His will shall through the earth be done,  
He answers when His servants cry.