

7843U

SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLE SCHOOL - 1997

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #8 Encouraging the children of their faith together

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 come to the conclusion of our studies on the life of Abraham and Sarah. Really, there's nothing left in the record to talk about as far as the Old Testament is concerned, because you see, what we've reached is Genesis 21, when they enjoyed the son of their love together. We saw that circumstance of time, when really Sarah's faith here soared above and beyond that of Abraham's; Abraham is struggling with his fleshly relationship with Ishmael; Sarah with far greater spiritual perception now, seeing what was required in that household, if they were to raise a godly seed. The answer being, of course, that out of the house should be cast all of those things that were scornful of the principles of the truth. We took the lesson, didn't we? that in our own households if we want to provide that spiritual environment for the developing of a godly seed, then we will remove all that offends, all that is of the world, all that does not remind us of the truth, all that fails the test of the apostle Paul when he says, 'Finally brethren, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, honest, of a good report, think on these things'. That which fails the test of the apostle, should indeed, be cast out of our houses.

Now, you see, in our earlier studies, we've looked at Abraham and Sarah as a husband and a wife; but by the time they come to chapter 21, of course, they are now a father and a mother. The father and the mother of the very first child begotten of the principle of the operation of God upon them, by divine intervention of His grace, that through their weakness was manifest in His strength. Now, in the book of Genesis, there is no more left of the story because, you see, in Genesis chapter 22 we have the offering of Isaac; in Genesis 23 we have the death of Sarah; in Genesis 24 we have the marriage of Isaac; and in Genesis 25 we have the death of Abraham. So really at the end of chapter 21, the curtain as it were, closes on the story of their marriage; there's no more about the marriage in the book of Genesis; we come, as it were, to see them for the last time in that chapter, as in oldness of age now, they rejoice as heirs together of the promise that God had given them.

But when we come to the New Testament, ah, now that is a different story! because, you see, in the New Testament there was a burning issue, wasn't there? The great issue that burned in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ concerned the matter of Judaism,

and the issue of Judaism very much centred on the question of lineage and paternity and genealogy. The burning issue of Judaism was the pride of the Jewish people, that they considered themselves to be the offspring of Abraham, and they rejoiced in that, didn't they? They counted themselves as the unique people of the world, higher, superior to all others because they were Abraham's seed, and therefore, the burning question of the New Testament was, who really are the offspring of Abraham? What we're going to do this morning, b&s, is we're going to trace the story of Abraham and Sarah now, in the New Testament record. We're going to find that Sarah is implied in Matthew chapter 3, mentioned in Romans 9, mentioned in Galatians 4, mentioned by implication in John 8, mentioned in Romans 4, mentioned in Hebrews 11, mentioned in 1 Peter 3, as this wonderful argument is developed both by the apostle and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the New Testament to answer the great issue of the day, who really are the offspring of Abraham? You'll find in answering that question, Abraham and Sarah are inseparably bound together in the record and in the answer to that question.

Now, come with me firstly, to Matthew 3 and verses 7 to 9, and what we're going to do is trace through this wheel of New Testament passages to see the way in which Abraham and Sarah become, indeed, the mother and father of a whole family which they encourage by the principles of faith. So, we take up the issue then in Matthew chapter 3, the first of these New Testament quotations that expound upon the life of the patriarch. Now, in Matthew 3 and verse 7 we read these words concerning the work of John the Baptist, it says, 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham'. Now here's the very first episode in the New Testament record where Abraham appears in the story. The issued now is going to be joined with the forces of Judaism on the one side, who counted it a matter of personal pride that they were descendent from Abraham, and the true answer as to who the offspring of Abraham really were.

Now, you see what John the Baptist says therefore, in verse 9, look at what he says! 'Think not to say within yourselves'; so, you see, they weren't saying it out loud, were they? No one was so blatant, so bronze as to say it out loud, 'we're Abraham's offspring', but you see, INSIDE they really did! Just like we can! we're Christadelphians, we have the truth, we are the people of God, it's so easy to feel that inside, a secret, smug self-satisfaction. The private reflections of self worthiness, 'think not to say within yourselves' says John the Baptist, 'we have Abraham to our father'. Now, in the Emphasized bible the text of the Greek shows that the word 'Abraham' is emphasized, in fact, Rotherham puts it the other way around and inverts the phrase and reads it this way, and I think this is classic in terms of capturing the spirit of the day, this is Rotherham, 'and think not to say within yourselves, as our father, we have, ABRAHAM'. Oh, you can just hear the Pharisees, can't you? you can just hear that spirit in Israel in those days, and this is how John the Baptist took issue with that spirit of

self-satisfaction, of personal pride; he says, (and look, here's one of these famous statements of the bible where every word is loaded with meaning) he says, 'For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham'. Now, here's one of those phrases where every single word carries its proper weight of meaning.

Now, here's the first thing, now you know what the lesson of the birth of Isaac was? the lesson was not that he was just the son of Abraham and Sarah, was he? he was in a sense the son of God because he was born by the operation of divine intervention in their lives, quickening their dead bodies. Now this is what John the Baptist said, 'you think you're the seed of Abraham, you think you're the offspring of Abraham, but I'll tell you, said John the Baptist, if you want to know who the offspring of Abraham is, I say unto you, GOD! all descent, all true descent from Abraham begins with the operation of God in your life; and if God is not in our life then we are not counted as Abraham or Sarah's seed. And what is God able to do? well, He's able, says the record, but you know what the word 'able' is in the Greek, it's the word 'dunamis' = power, GOD HAS THE POWER. The offspring of Abraham are those who have been the subjects of divine power in their lives. Now who may be the subject of that operation? says John the Baptist. Well, he says, I say unto you that God hath the power of these stones' — now I know there's been different views in the brotherhood on what the 'these stones' are all about, some people have suggested that John the Baptist was standing in the Jordan at the very place where the 12 stones were placed, when Israel first came in across Jordan); and that maybe so, I don't know, but I actually tend to think that it's more likely that he reached down into the muddy banks of the Jordan, because the Jordan was a singularly unattractive river, and he grab forth with his hand and drew up into his hand, a handful of black, muddy stones, oozing and dripping with slime and says, — 'God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham'. In other words it doesn't matter what our descental background is, it's not our inherent worthiness that makes us the sons of Abraham, says John the Baptist; it doesn't matter where we come from, these stones could be built into the children of Abraham, God's got the power to do that, he says. The offspring of Abraham are those whose lives have been dramatically changed by the truth operating upon them, irrespective of where they came from in the past.

Then you notice what he says! He says, 'God is able (or has the power) of these stones to raise up children; now the word 'raise up' is the word 'egeiro' (1453), that's the word for the resurrection. The offspring of Abraham are those who all have experienced the principle of a resurrection in their lives, to a new way of thinking, and a new way of living. They are the children of the resurrection. And the word 'children' (5043) 'teknon' here is a very important word as well, not that we're going to make comment on it now, but because ,it becomes the key theme of these passages, 'the children or the offspring' of Abraham. Now, you see, really, in a sense, Sarah is implied in the argument of Matthew 3, isn't she? because the argument of John the Baptist was: descent from Abraham is not a matter of national pride, but the operation of divine power in our lives to raise us to being the offspring of Abraham, and that operation of divine power didn't just occur in Abraham's life, it occurred in his wife's life as well —

They were in it together.

But if you think that Sarah is maybe only implied in Matthew chapter 3, come and have a look at the argument now of the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 9, because he is far, far more explicit and he now mentions Sarah by name. There's no implication in the apostle Paul's argument as he takes the thoughts of John the Baptist a little further. Now, you see what Paul says in his argument in Romans 9, it's a brilliant argument! reading from verse 6 for connection, he says, 'Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called'. Now, before we go any further, you see, any Jew could just not resist the power of Paul's argument in the 7th verse. Every Jew would nod their head in strong agreement with what the apostle says in verse 7; so you see what he says, he says, of course, just because you're the seed of Abraham doesn't mean that you're all counted as his offspring or his children, and every Jew would say, absolutely right! because Ishmael was the seed of Abraham, but he was cast out of the house even though Abraham had pleaded for him, and so sonship in Ishmael's case did not bring heirship. He might have been the seed of Abraham, but he was not counted as one of the children that would be an heir of the father. So, what Paul says, and this was an argument that every Jew could only heartedly agree with, he said, just because you're the seed of Abraham doesn't make you an heir of Abraham, you've got to be the right seed! 'You're absolutely right', says the Jew; 'in Isaac shall thy seed be called'.

Now see what the apostle goes on to say! Verse 8, 'That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God'. Now notice, we're talking about who are the true seed of Abraham, who are the true offspring of Abraham, and by the time the apostle gets to verse 8, he says the true children of Abraham are those who are the children of God; the true seed of Abraham and the children of God are interchangeable ideas, says the apostle, because these are they that have been the subject of the divine influence in their lives; so he says, these which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise accounted for the seed. 'FOR he says, (and notice that word 'for' is a joining word) 'FOR this is THE WORD OF PROMISE'. Now, what does Paul mean when he says that? As we said the other day, I believe that what he's saying is that this is the pith and the kernel of all that Abraham was ever promised! It all centres on this, says the apostle, verse 9, 'At this time will I come' (God's involvement) 'at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son'. He says, that's the pith and kernel of all that was promised to Abraham; do you want to know how to be counted as Abraham's seed? it's those who have had the operation of divine power in their lives! Bro. John Carter says, he makes a statement upon this passage as follows in his book on Romans: he says, 'A man must have a different relationship than that of mere flesh to be a seed of Abraham; he must be begotten through the operation of divine power. Literally so, in Isaac's case, but by the Word of God in the case of other children'.

Now, I'll tell you what's really remarkable about what the apostle is really implying in this

chapter, in terms of our study of Abraham and Sarah. You see, the Jew gloried in his fleshly descent from Abraham and what the apostle Paul says in Romans 9 is this; he says, it's simple really, there were two boys, they both descended from Abraham, but only one was counted as the true offspring. What made the difference? and the answer was, not who your father is, says Paul, but who your mother is? The question is not whether Abraham's your father, says Paul, the question you've got to ask is whether Sarah is your mother! The great issue says Paul is the motherhood, because there were two boys and they both were descended from Abraham, but one was the child of promise and one was the child of flesh, and the great thing that separated them was, who the mother was! and the circumstances of their begetting! — Sarah's child was the child of promise born of spiritual principles not of the flesh. Paul says, forget about counting descent from Abraham, you worry about whether you're descended from Sarah! Now we see why it was so vital that Isaac be born not just to Abraham, but to Sarah as well! she's intrinsic to this argument.

Now, come and have a look at Galatians 4 and the apostle Paul develops that even further in the great allegory of Galatians 4. He says the real crucial thing is the mother! Now you see what the apostle Paul says then in Galatians 4, here's the allegory beginning from verse 22, 'For it is written, he says, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman (Hagar and Sarah). But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory', says the apostle Paul. So there was! there was a great allegory that the apostle Paul draws out in Galatians 4, and it's all based on two women not two men; two women, it's the issue of the women that count in Galatians 4. Now in this chapter what we have then is as follows:

2 women)	
2 mountains)	
2 covenants)	common element = all descendants of Abraham
2 cities)	
2 sons)	

So Paul says, you might be descendants of Abraham but that doesn't prove anything unless we've worked out who your mother is. Now let's just see how that allegory develops, one is a bondslave and one is a freewoman. Well, says Paul it answers to two mountains, Hagar answers to Sinai in Arabia, which of course, by the way, answers to the Law, doesn't it? Sinai in Arabia answers to the Law; do you see what he says in verse 24, 'the one from Mount Sinai which generates to bondage which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children'; so Hagar stands for the covenant from Sinai, the letter that killeth, that brought forth not sons but slaves, those in bondage to the Law of Moses. That's what Hagar stands for, says Paul. But Sarah, the freewoman, she answers to Zion in Israel; she answers to the Law of Christ. She answers to the spirit that gives life, she is the mother who brings forth not servants or slaves, but sons! So the crucial issue says the apostle, is the motherhood!

Two cities — Jerusalem that now is and the Jerusalem that is to come. The Jerusalem that now is, of course, in the apostle's day, still practised the Law, and although the Law was founded in Sinai, it was practised in Jerusalem where the temple was. Hagar answers to those who are the offspring of Abraham according to the natural principle of being in bondage to the Law of Moses. Sarah on the other side, relates to that great Jerusalem yet to come, when all will be resurrected to newness of life, and will live their lives under the Law of Christ in an age yet to be revealed.

Two sons — one born after the flesh, one who was a persecutor but who was ultimately cast out. The other son born after the Spirit, who although persecuted, was nevertheless the one that abides in the house as the heir.

So, let's read verse 24 now, 'Which things are an allegory, he says, for these are the two covenants' (but the RSV says, these women are the two covenants, and I think it makes the matter plain) 'these women are two covenants; the one that gendereth to bondage; and the other, verse 26, 'Jerusalem which is above is free, (and Jerusalem here, of course, stands for Sarah) 'which is the mother of us all'. Actually, the Diaglott translates verse 26, 'But the exalted Jerusalem represents the free woman'. The exalted Jerusalem represents the free woman, now you see, when Paul talks about two covenants here, the Jews didn't understand that because you see, to the Jewish people there was only ever one covenant; do you know what the one covenant was? to the Jews there was only one covenant, it was the Abrahamic covenant **which then grew into** the Mosaic covenant, and **the thing that connected the two** was circumcision. The Jew only saw one covenant made with their people; Abraham's covenant grew into Moses' covenant. Not so! says the apostle, Abraham's covenant and Moses' covenant are two quite different things.

Now, we consider ourselves to be part of the Abrahamic covenant, don't we? We talk about the Abrahamic covenant, don't we? but really on the basis of Galatians we ought not to call it the Abrahamic covenant, should we? We should, to really make it clear, call it the Saraic covenant, because the new covenant is really through Sarah; that's the argument of the apostle, isn't it? in these verses, 'she's the mother of us all'. FOR, verse 27, it is written, Rejoice thou barren that bearest not, break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate have many more children than she which hath a husband'. So now the apostle quotes Isaiah 54 and says that's Sarah, the barren one who has finally broken forth on both sides, because she has finally now born children. Do you know why Sarah was barren? and Hagar was fruitful? because all natural Israel were born automatically under the Law. There was no shortage of offspring born under the Law! but the Abrahamic covenant, the Saraic covenant, has no natural born sons or daughters, does it? No one is naturally a child of the Saraic covenant; only those who have experienced the operation of divine power in their lives. That's why she was barren! because there are no natural offspring to this covenant.

So, verse 28 says that nevertheless the desolate will eventually have many more children: 'Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he

that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not offspring of the bond woman, but of the free'. So when Paul concludes his argument here he says the real issue of whose offspring you are, is whether we're the offspring of the free woman. Not whether we're the offspring of Abraham, but whether we're the offspring of Sarah! Is Sarah your mother? says Paul.

Do you know where Paul got that argument from? It wasn't Paul's argument actually, he took it from the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, because earlier on this argument had already been joined between the Lord and those who opposed Him. I believe that it's the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who first brings forth the argument of counting our descent from Sarah and not Abraham, in John chapter 8; now come and have a look then at the argument of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Reading from verse 31 for connection! 'Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, (now here we go, just listen to this) We be Abraham's seed, and were never, never in bondage to any man: how saith Thou, Ye shall be made free?' Now when the Lord replies to this statement of the Pharisees, at first sight you think that He seems to have ignored everything that they've said, until you read a little more closely. 'Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore' (ah, and you suddenly realize then what the Lord Jesus Christ is getting at; do you see what He's saying?) What did they say? they said, we're Abraham's seed and were never in bondage! bondage, ah, Abraham's seed and bondage, now how could anyone who was of Abraham's seed possibly be in bondage? and the answer is, they can! if they're born of Hagar, can't they? If they're Hagar's offspring they are in bondage; if they're Sarah's they're the offspring of the free woman, so what the Lord says is absolutely pertinent now to the thread of the argument, because you see, in verse 34 this is what He says, He says, 'I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin, and I remind you, says the Lord Jesus Christ, that the servant didn't abide in the house, did he? Ishmael was cast out; only the son of the free woman abides in the house, says the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Son shall make you free, then ye shall be free indeed', because you'll all be counted as being born of the free woman. So the issue is, says the Lord Jesus Christ, yes, you say that you're Abraham's seed, but remember, says Christ, there were two sons; one was a servant, one was a son; one abided not in the house but was cast out, the other stayed and remained in the house as the heir of all the promises. So the real issue, says Christ, is not whether you're Abraham's seed, but who your mother is!

Now do you see what He says in verse 37, 'I know that you're Abraham's seed: but ye seek to kill Me', now do you know what the Lord is really saying in verse 37? remember what the apostle Paul said in Galatians, he says, 'So then as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit'; what did Ishmael do? He mocked

Isaac, and if Ishmael had been allowed to remain in the house, who knows but what his antagonism and bitterness may have in the end have culminated in him rising up and killing his brother. So what the Lord is really saying in verse 37 is, 'you hate Me and in so doing what you really show is that you're Hagar's seed', because you show the same animosity to Me as Ishmael did to Isaac. Yes, you're the offspring of Abraham but through the wrong mother! Do you see what the Lord is saying? Oh, it's a splendid argument!

Verse 38, He says, 'I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children (and there's our key word all the way through; who really are the children of Abraham?) 'ye would do the works of Abraham'. So what the Lord teaches in the end, is that sonship of Abraham is predicated on actions. You can always tell who the offspring of Abraham and Sarah are, says Christ, because you'll see it in their lives; they're motivated by the same principles! Verse 40, 'But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to Him, verse 41, 'We be not born of fornication'. Now when they said those words, b&s, they manifested who their mother was, didn't they? because that was the taunt of Ishmael to Isaac, wasn't it? concerning the legitimacy of his sonship; and the Jews without even realizing that they had witnessed against themselves, when they called into question the matter of the sonship of Christ in John 8 verse 41, gave witness to the fact that they were Hagar's children not Sarah's. Isn't that true?

Jesus says in verse 42, 'If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God', all those who are the true offspring of Abraham, in the end count God as their Father as well. So Jesus joins issue with them on the same principle by which Ishmael had to be cast out of the house; He says, 'I come from God, I'm the true seed and if you can't acknowledge My Sonship, then you cannot remain in the house'. You're the children of the bondwoman, you must go, if you cannot acknowledge my divine sonship!

You see, it's a tragedy really, but you see, what really happened in the life of these two was this: here's the story of the two sons.

One man and two women = two children that were the offspring, but how different they were. Now you notice that Hagar comes into the life of Abraham before Sarah does, doesn't she? and that's 1 Corinthians 15, isn't it? = first that which is natural and then that which is spiritual. Although both of these boys counted their descent from a common father, the reality is that they were quite different lads. They turned out to be quite different boys with quite different characteristics. One was born after the flesh of a bondwoman, who turned out to be a servant, who was cast into exile; the other was born after the Spirit of the freewoman who was the true son, and who abode in the house as the heir. So you'll notice what we've got here, is that although Hagar came into Abraham's life, she was never like him and neither was Ishmael, it's almost as if she came into his life and straight back out again, and Ishmael was never Abraham's

son, was he? he was his mother's son through and through, an Egyptian, a thinker of the flesh. Whereas the other boy was the product of this couple, who when they finally brought forth this child, their lives were blended together and he was truly their offspring. Their offspring! Isaac wasn't Abraham's son, he was Abraham and Sarah's son, wasn't he? Now I don't know what you think about that , but I think that's fantastic the way that in the New Testament, the whole issue of the begetting from Abraham is answered by the question of not who the father is, but who the mother is? So of course, Sarah had to bear the child, it was crucial that she be the mother!

Now, come and have a look at Romans 4. Now what does Romans 4 say? Romans 4 verse 16, 'Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all'. Now I don't know if you recall the statement in Galatians 4 but don't you recall the statement in Galatians 4 which said, 'and she is the mother of us all'? remember that? Now we've got in Romans 4 'and he is the father of us all'; they were in it together! you can never separate Abraham and Sarah, they are the father and the mother together of the promised seed. Verse 17, 'As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead', (and there was the key, you see, how was all this to happen?) what was the fundamental point of counting offspring from Abraham and Sarah? and the answer was that God quickened the dead!

Now see how he takes it up in verse 19. Verse 19, 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead' (the RSV actually puts that slightly different and says, 'he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead; neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb'). So says the apostle Paul, do you want to know who are the true offspring of Abraham and Sarah? do you want to know how they're born? Do you want to know by what principle the offering of this couple are brought forth? he says, it's simple! It's based on one, one fundamental principle and that is, **God operated on dead bodies**, that's what He did! isn't it? That's how these two brought forth, God operated on dead bodies, there is no natural means of producing children for the Abrahamic covenant apart from the operation of God on dead bodies. He operated on both of them, says Paul, they were in it together, Abraham and Sarah joined together in the argument of Romans 4. You cannot separate this couple!

Hebrews 11, (so we're almost around the circle)! You see, what we've tried to do is to try and take up what we consider to be virtually every major New Testament passage, that makes some significant exposition on the life of Abraham. What we're saying is, that virtually whenever we find Abraham, we'll always find Sarah.

Now here's another one then, Hebrews 11 verse 8, 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance' (but we want verse 11 this time). Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him

faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude', and so again the apostle says, 'Look, it's not her offspring, it's not his offspring, it's their offspring, she conceived seed, verse 11, and therefore, sprang there from one man, verse 12. I want you to see what the apostle Paul does say of Sarah in the 11th verse here; they were co-joined together God hard at work in the lives of individuals, and she received power to do what? to conceive seed, but do you know what that word 'conceive' really means in the Greek? The word 'conceive' here actually means 'to lay a foundation' (2602), she received power to lay a foundation, Rotherham translates it, 'that by faith Sarah herself received power for founding a seed', and you see, this brings us all the way back to Genesis 16, when Sarah first said to Abraham, that he might go in unto Hagar so she (Sarah) might be builded by her', she wanted to build Abraham's house, remember? She wanted to build the house of Abraham, well, here was the foundation stone now of that house that had been laid on the proper basis, and the proper basis was, 'except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain'. Here was the foundation seed, Isaac was the prototype of all to come, they'd all be born according to the same principles. So, in the end, you see, Ishmael could never be counted as Abraham's son, because he didn't manifest the qualities of his father. So, in the end, those that are the sons and daughters are those that have the same principles in their lives; they manifest the same characteristics and they're all built into the same house, the house of Abraham and Sarah.

1 Peter 3, now we've already looked at 1 Peter 3 and we've seen, we believe, that Peter's exhortation to both husbands and wives is founded in the first instance on the living examples of Abraham and Sarah in their lives. But, you see, this chapter talks about offspring as well. Here it is, in the 6th verse, he says, 'Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are (but the margin's right, you see, it's not 'daughters' it's 'children') whose children ye are. That word 'children' is the same word that we've had all the way through these passages today; it's the same word in Romans 9 verse 8, 'these are the children of promise'; it's the same word in Galatians 4 verse 28, 'these are the children of the freewoman'; it's the same word in Hebrews 11, 'she conceived' she laid the foundation of the first child'. We can be the offspring of Abraham and Sarah, says Peter, and what was the basis for being counted as their offspring? he says, 'as long as ye do', that's all! As long as ye do, so it's 'the doing' that counts. The offspring of these parents manifest the virtues of these parents, and that's how they show their true family lineage. Are they really the offspring of Abraham and Sarah? then you'll see the family likeness of faith at work in their lives.

Now, can you think of any other major, not incidental, reference, any other major New Testament reference to Abraham, that we haven't caught in the net of this circle? Acts 7?

I can tell you Sarah is not mentioned in Acts 7; do you know why she's not mentioned in Acts 7? because Acts 7, Stephen's great apology is tracing the history of the natural seed, isn't it? Acts 7 is placing the history of the natural seed, there's no need to mention Sarah in that story. Any other place? There's one other obvious one, a New

Testament epistle written by the Lord's brother — James! Now, James, of course, also mentions the faith of Abraham, doesn't he? in his second chapter. He never mentions Sarah, do you know why he doesn't mention Sarah? because what James is trying to prove in James 2 is, he's drawing on Abraham as a superb example of faith and works joined together in the life of the individual. But when he comes to the end of that chapter he's going to draw on another example, but instead of using Sarah he uses Rahab. Now, why does he use Rahab instead of Sarah? and the answer is because what James is trying to show in James 2, is two opposite extremes of faith at work. So, in the one case there is Abraham, the Hebrew, the father of the faithful, and on the other side is Rahab, a Gentile, who was a harlot. You couldn't have two more different people and James says, that that principle of faith can work in either of those two by way of contrast. But if he had selected Sarah, she would have been just like Abraham, wouldn't she? she wouldn't have been a contrast! because she was Abraham's mirror image, she was his counterpart, she was his equal; so he couldn't use Sarah in James 2, could he? if he wanted to show faith at work at extreme ends of the experience of life. So that's why Sarah's not in James 2!

Well, b&s, there aren't any other passages! no other major passages, and you see, when you get to the end of that circle, you are suddenly impressed with how extensive, therefore, the references are in the New Testament to this couple. How special they are as that question was dealt with concerning who really are the offspring of Abraham? and the answer was, those who have been born of Sarah. Isn't that wonderful? Now, do you know where all that came from? do you know where all of those arguments came from? You know, the centre point of it all, a passage in Isaiah 51, so, I'd now like you to turn to it.

Isaiah 51, I think this is where it all came from, you see, the whole thread of the argument that both the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles drew forth in those wonderful New Testament expositions all came from this passage. Isaiah 51 verses 1 to 3, 'Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek Yahweh: **look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged**. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you:' So, what Isaiah says is, if you want to know about the principles of true righteousness, that righteousness which is of faith, then you go and have a look at the marriage relationship of Abraham and Sarah, he says, because that's where you'll find it. If you want to understand the righteousness which is of faith, then you go back to this couple, because that's where it is! To their joint faith which brought them to the fruits of parenthood! **Now, what was the great issue of the New Testament?** children, children, children, children, offspring, do you see what Isaiah 51 verse 2 says, 'Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you!' so the emphasis is on their offspring, isn't it? **the emphasis is on Abraham and Sarah as the father and mother of a whole family of people born of them**. These are the offspring of promise of faith, the offspring of righteousness; do you want to learn righteousness? says Isaiah, then you've got to look to this couple and you've got to be counted as their children!

Now, what he says in the second verse is that, 'I called Abraham alone; and I blessed

him and I eventually increased him'. I called him, it was the operation of the divine power in their lives. So also it was in Sarah's life because Sarah is verse 3, 'For Yahweh shall comfort Zion'. Now, Sarah is Zion, and what was Zion like? 'waste places, wilderness like Eden, desert like the garden', this is the barren woman, you see, and God operated upon the father in verse 2 and upon the mother in verse 3, and the waste places became like the garden of Yahweh; these are the figures of a barren woman who's now brought forth children. It's obviously based on Sarah, isn't it? and so the fruitful earth of the 3rd verse is a figure for the child bearing of Sarah after Yahweh comforted her! When at the end of verse 3 it says 'joy and gladness shall be found therein; thanksgiving and the voice of melody', doesn't that take you back to Genesis 21 and to the great rejoicing there was in Abraham's house on the day that Isaac was weaned? and the great feast and the laughter of Sarah's joy? You see, Isaiah 51 is all about the happiness of this couple as God operated in their lives, and says Isaiah, anyone who wants to find true righteousness can only find it by looking to this couple and being counted as their seed. Wonderful! that's the foundation of it all! I think all that New Testament teaching was born out of Isaiah 51.

I'll show you something interesting, you know, one of those little things, (I love little things that all fit together properly). What happened was, I got to verse 2, you see, and I read 'look unto Abraham your father, and Sarah that bare you: for I called him, I blessed him, I increased him'. I thought what a pity! it all focuses on Abraham and yet they were such a wonderful couple, and then I looked at verse 3, you see, 'He'll comfort her, He'll make her and her'; there are 3 'hims' and 3 'hers', they were in it together, b&s, you just can't separate this couple! Isn't that lovely? they're only little words but I like to see that there were 3 of each.

Well, the day came, of course, when this couple grew old. We have a whole chapter in the book of Genesis devoted to Abraham's care and attention in arranging for a burial place for his wife. He, of course, buried her as we've seen right from the beginning in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron, and when he eventually died, his sons buried him in that same place also because that was all he wanted, wasn't it? when Abraham died, all he wanted was to be buried alongside this woman. When she died (look, b&s, I've tried to enter into the feelings of this couple on many things, but I don't know how Abraham felt when Sarah died). He probably felt as if a knife had come and cut him in half and he'd lost half of himself, because they were truly inseparable; they had come to know each other and understand each other, you see, so wonderfully, hadn't they? And when he finally died and was buried in that cave with her, as we saw at the outset, they were folded together in fellowship because that's what 'Machpelah in Hebron' (3717+2266) means, how appropriate for this couple as they fell on sleep. We don't know what was on their tombstone, we can only imagine! perhaps something like this:

Here lie Abraham and Sarah,
Faithful husband and wife,
Joint possessors of the covenant of promise
Father and mother of a great multitude.

They are enfolded together in the fellowship of death
But their certain hope is to stand before Him
Who quickeneth the dead that
They might be made heirs together of the grace of life.

And one day, b&s, the great stone of that sepulchre will be rolled away. It's still there, you know, and Ishmael and Isaac still squabble over the grave of their parents, don't they? Even today, it's not finished, the controversy, the son of the bondwoman and the son of the freewoman are still arguing over the grave of their father; but one day that grave will be opened and it will be seen who were the true seed of this couple. A man and his wife will come forth and Abraham and Sarah will stand at Sinai amidst a great multitude which no man can number, everyone of them called and chosen and faithful.

— Abraham will rejoice to see that from him hath sprung so many as the stars of heaven for multitude, and Sarah will laugh and laugh and laugh, that she has given children suck!

— Abraham will wonder at the way that God has called him and blessed him and now has indeed increased him, and Sarah will sing that she has broken forth on the right hand and the left, and that her seed hath encompassed the Gentiles.

— Abraham will marvel that God has made him exceedingly fruitful and Sarah will be astonished that she has laid the foundation for a seed, from whence came this vast multitude.

— Abraham will learn that kings have come out of him, and Sarah will learn that kings of people have come out of her.

That all that stand there, b&s, in that day with them, we pray, will not just be the offspring of Abraham and Sarah, that will be the sons and the daughters of God, who count their parentage from him.

How humbling, b&s, to know these words,

'And these both, having obtained a good report through faith,
received not the promise;
God having provided some better thing for us,
that they without us should not be made perfect'.
(Hebrews 11 verses 39 and 40).