

“And He Loved Her”

Meditations on Marriage
from the
“Christian Shepherd”

—2005—

January 2005

“*And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.*” (Gen. 12:7).

We were seated in a huge room with high ceilings—beautifully restored to its original condition as built in the early 1800’s. Massive, intricately carved woodwork, luxurious carpet and thick drapery all spoke of the “quality” and “craftsmanship” practiced by 19th century master builders.

To me however, the most impressive item in the room was a large, ornately carved, red velvet chair. A presidential campaign during the 1860’s had found Abraham Lincoln engaged in a debate with Stephen Douglas on the steps of the building’s entrance. Afterwards Mr. Lincoln had gone into the room and set in that chair, greeting well wishers.

I was invited to sit in it and I still remember the sense of awe I had realizing *who* had once used it—one of the greatest figures of American history.

Abraham must surely have felt a much deeper sense of reverence and awe when building an altar to Jehovah. It was fitting that the place where the eternal *I Am appeared* to him, would become a place marked by an altar of worship to Jehovah.

When Abraham returned from Egypt (where he had fled to escape a *famine in the land*), he came to Bethel (Gen 13:4) where he had previously built that altar of worship. He had no altar in Egypt, but now back at that happy place, he again enjoyed the privilege of calling *on the Name of the LORD*.

What a vitally important thing in establishing a happy Christian marriage to “build” and “use” what is sometimes called “the family altar”. That is, for husband and wife to be in happy oneness, together reading, enjoying and speaking of the Word of God, while joining in prayer before *the throne of grace*.

We find lovely examples in Scripture of couples who, in like-minded faith, loved, worshipped and followed our blessed God throughout their lives. The results of those lives were not only happy marriages, but unions that bore spiritual fruit and blessing.

Consider Amram and Jocebed (Ex. 6:20)—both of the house of Levi, parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Scripture three times recounts how the infant Moses was preserved from Pharaoh’s destruction. The first (Ex. 2:2) tells us that his mother “*hid him*”. The second (Acts. 7:20) tells us Moses “*was nourished up in his father’s house*”. The third (Heb. 11:23) tells us that Moses was “*hid three months of his parents*”. What a blessing their individual and united faith and spiritual courage proved to be!

Zacharias and Elisabeth had spent their whole life walking in the fear and worship of God (Luke 1:5,6).

They were rewarded with a child, John, who was mightily used of the Lord (Luke 7:28).

We do not read that Aquila and Priscilla had children, but still their marriage brought much blessing—“*they took him [Apollos] unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly*” (Acts 18:26). May it be so with our marriages!

February 2005

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar” (Gen. 13:10).

In the pristine waters of the Australian Great Barrier Reef a large, ugly fish, almost half of whose body is mouth bristling with razor-sharp teeth, busily burrows into the sandy ocean floor. Soon, covered by sand, its greenish brown mottled colors perfectly blending with the watery surroundings, the Anglerfish (sometimes called the “Monkfish”) awaits its next meal. Except for the wormlike appendage attached to its mouth that tantalizingly wiggles in the clear sunlight waters, the Anglerfish is virtually invisible.

Smaller, beautifully colored varieties of reef fish swim nearby. A bright orange and white striped fish, seeing the tempting “worm” writhing in the water, unable to resist its allure draws near intending to make it a meal. But instead there comes an unexpected explosion of sudden movement accompanied by a quick, vicious snap leaving a dusty cloud of disturbed sand particles floating in the water. The beautiful little fish, now vanished into the huge, toothy maw of the predator, has become the “eaten” rather than the “eater”. What had appeared so tantalizing to the little fish caused its death. What had looked so beautiful to Lot soon became a place of judgement and death, and for him personally, great loss—his wife and family (save two daughters) and his moral dignity and honor.

In the beautiful pure and pristine waters of a happy, God-ordained marriage union, there also lie many hidden dangers—often appearing harmless, even appealing. For example the work world which Christian men (and sometimes, Christian women) occupy, though challenging and exciting, contains many hidden moral dangers. Male and female co-workers constantly are brought into close contact with each other in a “team” oriented corporate environment. Such contact may create subtle but very real moral temptations. If not prayerfully guarded against, necessary professional contact and relationships between male and female coworkers can easily slip into “social friendships”, eventually resulting in marital disaster.

Another danger is that Christian husbands (or

wives who are employed) may begin to judge their spouse by the standards of appearance, dress and conduct of those with whom they work. The corporate environment understandably requires that employees be polite, personable, well dressed, and attractive in appearance. How important that husbands and wives maintain even higher standards, reserved alone for each other.

Husbands do well to follow this heavenly wisdom for happy, satisfying marriage unions: “*Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe ... be thou ravished always with her love*” (Prov. 5:19). Each day when he returns home from work how important to say with joy and expectation: “*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck*” (Song of Solomon 4:9).

For a wife, the principle found in Rev. 19:7 has an important practical application for that happy moment each day when her husband comes home: “*Let us be glad and rejoice ... the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*”

For both husband and wife, the key to guarding against the many existing, yet often hidden, moral dangers which can destroy marriage is found in Prov. 4:23: “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*”.

March 2005

“*And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons (“souls”, JND Trans.), and take the goods to thyself.*” (Gen. 14:21).

“Give” and “take”. The game of chess is very much based on this concept. An astute chess player often willingly “gives” his opponent a valuable piece. But if he has developed a good plan of attack, the piece given up has, in reality, been purposely “sacrificed” in view of his eventually “taking” his opponent’s most valuable piece—the king.

Sodom’s king tried to play a solemn game of “give and take” with dear Abraham. He wanted Abraham to “give” him those so recently set free from captivity when he delivered his nephew Lot. Wanting those “souls” for his own wicked, lustful ends, he was willing to let Abraham “take” all the goods and spoil gained in the battle. But faithful Abraham refused the wretched offer and received instead the rich and lasting blessing of God’s priest, Melchizedek.

God’s wonderful institution of marriage was never meant to be lived as a game of chess—nor to be guided by the principle of “giving” to a spouse in order to “get” something in return.

A joyful, godly marriage is not a “give and take” union, but rather a “give and give” union. True love joyfully “gives” without considering how to “take”.

Such happy marriages will require the united efforts of both partners. One spouse can’t do all the “giving” while the other does all the “taking”. Not if the marriage is to properly picture Christ and His church, being a truly joyous, fulfilling union for husband and wife.

Society tells us just the opposite—a good marriage union is based on a strong “give and take” relationship between husband and wife—both partners compromise and give something to the other expecting to “take” something back in return.

Divine grace does indeed seek to “give” whenever possible and divine love “*seeketh not her own*” (1 Cor. 13:5). But God’s love expressed between husband and wife will always find a way to give the best to the other without expecting to “get something back”. Our blessed Lord Jesus gave Himself to gain His bride (nothing can ever equal the value of His “gift”) and in doing so has provided a gloriously perfect example of what He taught: “*remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).

April 2005

“*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*” (Gen. 15:6).

The story is told of a man many years ago, who had just completed a dangerous tightrope walk on a wire stretched across the river just above Niagra Falls. The crowd that had gathered to watch, heartily applauded his skill and bravery.

Turning to a nearby onlooker, the man asked, “Do you believe I can walk back to the other side without falling?” The onlooker’s response was an emphatic “yes”!

“Well then” continued the tight rope walker, “climb up here on my shoulders!”

The invitation was quickly declined.

How impossible things must have seemed at times to Joseph, to Daniel, to Jonah ... and to so many others recorded in the Word of God. Yet faith in God strengthened, guided, and preserved them, and though passing through many trials, sorrows and difficulties, their lives provide bright beacons of faith for us to follow.

Faith also forms a vital foundation for happy Christian marriages, even when experiencing the trials and sorrows of this life. Believing God’s Word, having *one mind* to obey it *together* as husband and wife brings rich joy and blessing. “*Shall two walk together except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3, JND Trans).

We would like to make a “moral application” of Abraham’s believing God, drawing a simple, practical principle for maintaining happiness in marriage: that is the vital necessity of marriage partners *being able to trust each other*.

Marriages where both husband and wife conduct

themselves in every area of life so that their ways build a strong foundation of confidence and trust in their partner, are very happy.

In Proverbs 31:10, 11 we find a lovely example of this very thing. *“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust (“confideth”-JND Trans) in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil”*. Later we read she did her husband good *all the days of her life* (Prov. 31:12). Her faithful care for the daily needs of her household gave confidence, joy and delight to her husband.

The apostle desired that *“younger women marry ... guide [“rule”JND Trans] the house ...”* (1 Tim. 5:14). Where a wife “guides” affairs of the domestic sphere in the fear of God what blessing results!

When Mary was found *“with Child of the Holy Ghost”*, Joseph acted in a way that his beloved wife could have full confidence in him, his love, and his care.

Briefly we note in Matt. 1 and 2 that (1) Joseph was *“a righteous man”*. He feared God in all he did. (2) Joseph loved his wife for he was *“unwilling to expose her (Mary) publicly”*. (3) He was a man of faith, proving it by his obedience to God’s Word. *“Joseph ... did as the angel of the Lord had enjoined him ...”*. (4) His actions, taken in the fear of God, were holy and seemly towards his wife—*“and knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son”*. (5) He protected his wife and Child taking them *“by night ... into Egypt”*. (6) He obeyed God’s directions in caring for his family—*“Arise ... go into the land of Israel ... And he arose and took ... the little child and its mother, and came into the land ...”*. (7) Joseph was not “reckless” in his ways—*“... having heard that ‘Archelaus reigns over Judaea, instead of Herod his father,’ he was afraid to go there; and having been divinely instructed in a dream, he went away ... dwelt in a town called Nazareth”* (JND. Trans).

May we, husbands and wives, so live and act towards each other that our behavior results in forming a strong bond of mutual faith and trust.

May 2005

At her wedding shower the young bride-to-be opened her parent’s gift last. A wrinkled, yellowed piece of paper was framed. Attached to the framed note was a card that simply said: *“May this always be so. Much love, Dad and Mom”*.

The message was scrawled in childish handwriting, written by the young woman years before—*“Today we had a test in history and I think I failed. I had to go to the dentist too. We did not win the paper drive. This is the worst day I have ever had in my life”*.

Our loving God desires to bring blessing, joy, and peace out of what may at times seem to be difficult marital problems. Yet when viewed in light of eternity,

such marital stress won’t overwhelm happy marriages.

Hagar’s experience in Gen. 16 provides moral warning, instruction and encouragement for husbands and wives seeking to preserve happy, fruitful marriages. Let us briefly consider seven principles found here.

(1) *“... when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes”*. Hagar was naturally and rightly happy when she had conceived a child. But immediately she becomes proud which in turn produces rebellion and strife. Marriages where a husband or wife demand constant, special and primary attention from their partner will create an atmosphere of strife in which the fruit of love won’t thrive and grow.

(2) *“... Sarai dealt hardly with her”*. Hagar began to reap the consequences of her pride. But rather than repenting, *“she fled from her face”*. When marital problems occur, each partner must accept responsibility for their part, repenting and confessing to the other. Trying to run away from disagreeable circumstances solves nothing.

(3) *“And the angel of the LORD found her ...”*. Hagar, fleeing from what she had caused, stopped where there was help: *“by a fountain of water in the wilderness ...”*. Our Lord knows and cares about every problem (large or small) that married couples experience. How comforting to find the answer for each difficulty in the Word of God.

(4) *“And he said, Hagar ...”*. It is wonderful to know that the feelings and desires of each individual are of personal interest to the Lord.

(5) *“whence camest thou?”*. Our Father loves us too much to allow His child an easy path of self will. The Lord knew all about Hagar, but He now begins a work of repentance in her heart with this question. Self will followed by either husband or wife, without repentance and confession, is a sure path to marital disaster.

(6) *“whither wilt thou go ...”*. The hostile wilderness was no place for an expectant mother. Hagar needed the care and protection of her husband and her home though not all was according to her liking. God tells us that what He *“hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Mark 10:9). No matter how serious the difficulty God’s expects the marriage union to remain undivided. Breaking this union merely because of dissatisfaction with one’s spouse is sin against His express command and can’t result in lasting happiness or satisfaction (see Matt. 5:32 as a Scriptural exception).

(7) *“And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself ...”* (Gen. 16:4, 6-9).

Here we have the key to overcoming marital difficulties—a desire to maintain unity (*return*) and a desire to walk as our Lord who *“humbled Himself”* (*submit*)—Philippians 2:8.

This is not to say that the husband should not maintain spiritual and practical “headship” in marriage.

But let him do it in love and let his wife willingly and joyfully walk *with* her husband as his *helpmate*. The result will be a truly happy marriage.

June 2005

“*And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be*” (Gen. 17:15).

Little Peter, whose family had just moved to a new city, was very excited about his new school and all his new classmates. The only problem was that there was another “Peter” in the same class with him. With the normal exuberance of children, whenever their teacher, Miss Green, would call out “Peter”, both would answer. To end the confusion she decided to find out what name they were called at home and use that in her classroom.

She asked the first ‘Peter’, “what does your mom call you at home?”

In a very proper, sober manner, the little boy answered, “My mother always calls me ‘Peter’”.

Turning to the new ‘Peter’, his teacher asked the same question.

With a big smile flashing across his face, this ‘Peter’ immediately answered, “She always calls me ‘sweetheart’!”

Names are important. Biblical names carry great significance, yet, “Who” gives a name is often more important—especially when that One is God.

We read early in Genesis that when God had created Adam and Eve He “*called their name Adam*” (5:2). In our chapter (Gen. 17), both Abram’s and Sarai’s names are changed by Him—to ‘Abraham’ and ‘Sarah’.

We would suggest three simple, practical and vitally important principles to be found in these ‘name changes’—principles that if practiced in dependence on the Lord, will result in stable, fruitful and strong marriages.

(1) God called “*their name Adam*”. We learn from this the vital importance of unity in every area of marriage. By its very nature, marriage brings two into “one”. How destructive to happy marriages if conflicts and dissensions are allowed to “*put asunder*” what God has made one (Mark. 10:9).

(2) God changed Abram’s name to “Abraham” because he would (through Isaac) become the father of “a multitude”. From Abraham, *the father of all those believing* (Rom. 4:11, JND), blessing would flow out to an innumerable company. Happy marriages are fruitful in many ways, providing blessing to many others.

(3) God also changed Sarai’s name to “Sarah”. G. V. Wigram suggests that “Sarah” has the sense of a princess prevailing, as in the birth of Isaac. According to Gal. 5:21-31 we learn that Sarah is a type of the “freewoman”, the “*Jerusalem which is above*”, the

“*Mother of us all*”. How important that the marriage union be characterized by spirit of “liberty” rather than “law”, and by a “nurturing” spirit rather than one which “demands” and “contends”.

July 2005

“*And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent*” (Gen. 18:9).

Abraham was able to give an immediate and happy answer to the Lord’s question *Where is thy wife?—Behold, in the tent*. What important principles for joyful, permanent and God honoring marriages we find in the Lord’s question and His dear servant’s answer!

We do not speak here of knowing the “physical” whereabouts of a spouse but rather of having an understanding and discernment of our wife’s feelings, desires, and spiritual condition. How important it is that husbands (and fathers) be very *diligent to know the state of thy flocks*” (Prov. 27:23). In application that is to be aware of (familiar with) the condition of a loved one.

In Neh. 2 King Artaxerxes realized something was troubling his valued cupbearer, Nehemiah. He asked, “*Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart*” (v. 2). Should not a husband be far more concerned about the feelings of his beloved wife than a heathen monarch was about his servant?

Modern technology which has produced mobile cell phones makes it quite easy to “keep in touch”. But our technologically advanced world is also a place of rapidly increasing moral darkness. No technology will ever be invented that is capable of *knowing* the true spiritual and emotional condition of the human heart.

It is so vitally important that a husband (who bears responsibility before God for the care of his wife and family) constantly takes care to *know where* she is in heart and mind.

God has not only commanded husbands to “*love your wives ...*” (Eph. 5:25, Col. 3:19), but following the example of Christ in His love for His church as *Saviour of the body* (Eph. 5:23), a husband bears solemn responsibility for her every care. such care cannot be effective if a husband is not *with her—(aware)* of her spiritual and emotional state. We readily understand the importance of care for *the body*—caring for the *soul* and *spirit* as well (see 1 Thess. 5:23).

Even with the *father of them that believe* (Rom. 4:11, 12) there were two occasions in his life when if asked “*where is thy wife*”, dear Abraham would have had to answer, “*In Pharaoh’s court*” or “*With Abimelech’s servants*”—knowing that his loved Sarah was *not with him* due to his personal lapse of walking by faith.

Beloved husbands do we love our wives enough to *know* where they are? Do we trouble ourselves to *enter* into each daily detail that concerns them? Do our beloved

wives have the sweet assurance that their husbands know *and* care about *all* that concerns them?

In Gen. 18, when the Lord appeared to him asking where Sarah was, Abraham was able to reply *in the tent*. Abraham's beloved wife was under his care, protection and enjoying the peace, joy and freedom found in her God given sphere. To this happy marriage condition a divine, wonderful, announcement is made—Sarah would bear a child in her old age.

What *blessed fruit* results from marriage unions morally characterized by husbands who truly know where their wives are—who know their state.

In Judges 13 we read of another divine, happy communication to a wife. But here we find her husband—Manaoh—was *not with* her. And even when the angel of the Lord came a second time (at Manoah's request) bringing again that happy announcement, we read; "... *the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her*".

What about you dear husband—do you know *where* your wife is?

August 2005

"*But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*" (Gen. 19:26).

Recently a dear Christian couple mentioned the shocking results of a poll that had been taken with 75 children who came from fundamental, evangelical Christian homes. What was shocking was that only 2 of the 75 characterized their homes as "happy"—the rest describing them as "unhappy".

The poll also asked the children and young people to list what changes they would make in their home (if they could). Their answers showed a very striking reason for the perceived unhappiness. The pollsters expected to get answers such as kids wanting "more freedom" or more "leeway in choosing friends and recreational activities". Instead, nearly all of the 75 polled responded that they would like to change the way "*mom treated dad*". The younger children simply expressed a wish that "mom would be happy with dad" or "that mom wouldn't always get mad and argue with dad".

An older college student wanted his mom to quit *always criticizing* his dad *in front of the family*.

Last month's "*And He Loved her*" article was mainly directed to husbands in view of their marriage responsibilities. This month we desire to consider a little the God-given responsibilities that wives have in maintaining a happy marriage.

How sobering that these young people seemed to feel the biggest problem in their home was a discontented, unhappy and critical mother. It is impossible to calculate

the harm a wife's unhappy, critical spirit of her husband brings to a marriage—damage to marriage *joy* (Prov. 5:18), damage to marriage *confidence and trust* (Prov. 31:11), damage to marriage *unity* (Gen. 5:2; Am. 3:3).

While every Christian husband would no doubt have to admit to much failure in his marital responsibilities, God does not allow failures in others as a reason to disobey His Word.

Children are to *obey their parents in the Lord and honour* them whether there is parental failure or not. Christians are to *be subject unto the powers that are ordained of God* regardless of how unrighteously those so ordained wield that power.

Thus we would learn a solemn lesson from dear Lot's wife. God calls him *just Lot*. Yet the reaction of Lot's family to his charge that they flee Sodom (Gen. 19:14) indicates that the failures of his faith evidently neutralized the impact of his warning.

Yet God did not suspend his judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, nor did He suspend the results of disobedience to his warning not to look back. With all his failure and lack of faith, Lot obeyed God, warned his family and refused, when fleeing, to look back at Sodom. But his dear wife (who perhaps had found more joy in *Sodom's society* then in her *husband's company*) looked back at what she was leaving. How much better had she kept her eyes fixed on her husband because of love for and confidence in him. Perhaps Lot didn't "earn" that, yet what a solemn price she paid! Disobedience to God's Word no matter how great the failure in others, is still disobedience which *reaps* solemn consequences.

Michal's critical spirit of King David her husband, caused her to *despise him*. David had made mistakes, he fell into greivous sin, yet even those failures were no excuse for Michal to scorn and reproach her husband (see 2 Sam. 6:16, 20-23). Her harsh, critical spirit denied her the joy of producing any fruit in her life.

May husbands *and* wives diligently follow the principles of found in God's Word concerning their marriage responsibilities. Deep abiding joy is sure to characterize such a union.

September 2005

"*And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah*" (Gen. 20:2).

While waiting to pick up a friend at the airport a man noticed another stop next to him to greet his family.

Laying down his bags, he first gave a long, loving hug to a 6 year old boy saying; "It's so great to see you. I love you. Sure did miss you!"

His son smiled back; "Me, too, Dad!"

Next, looking at his oldest son and gently taking

his face in his hands he said; “You’re my young man, Zach. I love you very much!” Again, there was a long, tender and mutual hug.

All this time, a little 1 year old girl was wiggling excitedly in her mommy’s arms, her little eyes staring at the wonderful sight of her returning daddy. Gently taking her into his arms he said, “Hi there baby girl!” As he kissed her face all over, holding her close to his chest, the little one laid her head on daddy’s shoulder in pure contentment.

Handing his daughter to his oldest son he turned to his wife saying, “I’ve saved the best for the last!” Tenderly embracing her, he whispered; “I love you so very much!” Then they stood holding hands, looking at each other with eyes sparkling, grinning big smiles that reminded the bystander of newlyweds.

“Wow!” the bystander suddenly asked, “How long have you two been married?”

“12 years” the man answered without looking away from his wife’s glowing face.

“Well, you sure must have been gone for a long time” continued the bystander.

His face continued beaming a joyful, delighted smile as the traveler answered; “Two whole days!”

The bystander was shocked for he had assumed by the intensity and passion of the greetings, he had been gone for weeks—perhaps months. With a longing sigh he said, “I sure hope my marriage is still that happy and passionate after 12 years!”

The traveler stopped smiling for a moment, turned and looked the bystander straight in the eye. In a sober, quiet but firm voice he said; “Friend, don’t *hope*—*decide!*” Then, shaking hands, he turned back to his family and together, they walked away.

Abraham’s denial of Sarah as his wife caused him loneliness, brought Sarah rebuke, and Abimelech fear. How much happier if dear Abraham would have joyfully displayed love for his beloved wife!—the kind of love spoken of in Proverbs 5:18,19: “... *have joy of the wife of thy youth ... be thou ravished continually with her love*” (JND Trans.). Where this kind of love exists, marriages flourish, joy deepens and others are blessed. But such love doesn’t just *happen*. It requires a *decision to love*. May it be so with each!

October 2005

“... *he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.*” (Gen. 21:21).

Hagar’s taking a wife out of the land of Egypt for her son Ishmael is quite solemn when viewed in light of God’s mercy shown them when *the bondwoman and her son* were cast out of Abraham’s house.

Scripture uses ‘Egypt’ as a type of the world in its alienation from God, thus Hagar’s sad act provides an

important moral principle (as well as a warning) for preserving and strengthening the marriage union.

Running out of the supply of food and water Abraham had provided, giving up all hope of life in the wilderness, Hagar leaves *the child* under a *shrub* (JND Trans.) and withdraws just far enough to keep from witnessing his evident impending death.

But Ishmael had learned something in his father’s house that his mother apparently hadn’t learned—he had learned to call on the God of his father, Abraham (v. 17). Though Hagar lifted up *her voice and wept*, it was Ishmael’s *voice* that God heard. In merciful compassion, He opened Hagar’s *eyes* to see the way of life in a lifeless wilderness—a *well of water*.

Sadly, in spite of Gods’ loving, merciful care of them in such seemingly hopeless circumstances, Hagar’s desires did not change. Though being fully satisfied from the well of God’s providing, she still looked to Egypt, the land of her nativity (Gen. 25:12), as the source of happiness and satisfaction for her son.

Each Christian partner in marriage brings two things to this wonderful union. Having received the gift of eternal life through faith, there is the realization that lasting satisfaction and true life can only come from a divine source—from a loving, freely giving God (Rom. 8:32, Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 4:8).

However, each partner also brings the flesh with its insatiable appetite ever craving satisfaction in the world, apart from God (1 Jn. 2:16). Hagar couldn’t provide *happiness* for Ishmael in giving him an Egyptian wife any more than Abraham could provide *life* for Ishmael with his bread and water.

Following the lusts and habits of the world to maintain marital happiness is a sure recipe for disappointment. Marriage, a delightful sphere of *natural joy*, must be guided by a *Divine Source* if it is to live and thrive. “*Doth not wisdom cry? ... Unto you, O men, I call ... those that love me ... I will fill their treasures*” (Prov. 8:1-21).

November 2005

“*And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor;*” (Gen. 22:20).

This news might have made Abraham envious or it could comfort him. In subsequent chapters we find that he surely was comforted by the news of the fruitfulness of his brother’s family (Gen. 24:3,4). Though Abraham had but one “*beloved Isaac*” while his brother Nahor had many children, Isaac was God’s promised seed and dear Abraham’s faith in God’s promises kept him from petty jealousy of his brother Nahor’s exceeding fruitfulness and large family.

Indeed the time would come when Abraham’s

beloved son, Isaac would reap great blessing of that fruitfulness for he would marry the granddaughter of Nahor his father's brother (Gen. 24:15).

In marriage, envy and jealousy cause deep hurt, growing isolation, and widening rifts which if not checked, will eventually lead to disastrous breakups. It might seem strange that a husband would be jealous of his wife or that she might envy him. Yet we find that very character in Michal, Saul's daughter who became David's wife (1 Sam. 18:16, 20). It seems that Michal's love for David was rooted in her "envy" of the glory he had gained through his fearless conquests. Yet, when she told David to flee for his life from her father's hatred, Michal refused to "go with" the one she had loved. She was instead, satisfied with a mere "image" of his person which allowed her to remain in the comfortable surroundings his victories had provided (1 Sam. 19:11-13).

Her envy eventually destroyed her marriage. In 1 Chron. 15:29 we learn that when David returned in great joy with the ark of God, "*Michal ... looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart.*"

What causes "envy" in marriage? It would be impossible to attempt a list, but we may summarize the cause of envy and jealousy in two words—"the flesh". In the list of "lusts of the flesh" mentioned in Gal. 5:19-21 we find "jealousies" mentioned in the middle and "envyings" listed just before "murders" (JND Trans.). How solemn!

Among other things, the flesh likes to be noticed, to be catered to, to be an object of importance, to be at ease, to have its way and to be right. There is a danger of a marriage partner becoming characterized by demanding to "be served" by their spouse, and also a danger of a spouse becoming so "self-absorbed" in their own interests and problems, that little concern is shown for what their partner feels.

A husband returning from work delights to hear his beloved ask "How did your day go, honey?" But all too often, we husbands may forget that our wives have also had "a day" and want to be assured that how "their day went" is important to us.

In Eph. 5—the perfect pattern for husbands and wives—early, we read these words: "... walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us..." (v. 2). True love gives, it does not demand. Envy and jealousy, if allowed between partners in marriage, erodes and eventually destroys love. May the Lord give each grace to "walk in love"—husbands to "love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" and wives to "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord". In such a happy marriage union there will be no room for selfish envy and jealousy.

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"And Sarah died in Kirjath-Arba: that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." (Gen. 23:2).

"Until death do us part"—how often we have attended that most happy of occasions, a wedding. The excitement and joy of the bride and groom has its effect on all. Often, the bride and groom are individually asked by the one officiating if they fully intend to remain faithful to one another; "for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others be faithful so long as you both shall live?". Both bride and groom always give a joyous and confident answer—"yes!".

Yet today the sad reality is that in North America (and perhaps elsewhere too), many of those couples who are married, promising on that day to remain faithful to each other until death brings parting, fail in keeping their promise. Separation, unfaithfulness, marital infidelity and divorce are rampant—rapidly increasing, specially in Western lands that once enjoyed the glorious light of Christianity. Such sad relationships now seem as "normal" and "acceptable" as couples who remain truly faithful to each other "until death do us part".

Dear Abraham, twice in fear for his life, had not remained steadfast in publicly acknowledging the marriage relationship which existed between he and his beloved Sarah (Gen. 12:10-14; Gen. 20). Yet, this mighty Patriarch—called "*the Friend of God*"—has left a beautiful example of faithfulness and love in his marriage to Sarah. The record of his *mourning* and *weeping* at her death poignantly displays the reality and depth of love that he had for her all their married life. But still, death finally brought separation.

Perhaps the farthest thought in the minds of a bridegroom and his bride on their wedding day is the inescapable fact that the joy and excitement of that day will, sooner or later, come to its inevitable conclusion—separation through death*. Yet, marital love, joy, and satisfaction *normally* grows in marriage. A marriage bond formed "*in the Lord*", founded on Biblical precepts, grows stronger rather than weakening into the sad separation of divorce. "*Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life ... which he hath given thee...*" (Ecc. 9:9).

*Note: We have the very real hope that death may not bring separation to our marriages. The Lord Jesus' promised coming is an infinitely precious expectation for Christian couples.