

Unshakeable Faith

Pastor Ken

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Why do I give to God's work-the local church? Because I am providing seed for the sower.

¹⁰ Now God who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your supply of seed and will cause the harvest of your righteousness to grow. (2 Cor 9:10-NET)

How do you know when a test from God is a **detour, destructive decision** or **destiny**?

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. (Gen 16-NIV)

So, when you come to church at Bethel you will always enjoy two elements: you will experience God in worship and prayer and have God's word explained to YOU! You will experience an encounter with power, and an encounter with truth.

God told Abraham to leave and go to a country where God would show him later. God did not give Abram the GPS coordinates.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Heb 11-NIV)

God did not give him the name of the country either-Canaan. Go to a land I will show you. So, Abram goes to his local moving company and announces. I need a half dozen camels, 5 donkeys and 3 of your carts with extended cab.

I will pick up these ancient moving vehicles-camels, donkey's and carts with extended cab on Saturday after Shabbat. As Abram is filling out the paperwork, showing ID, and getting some extra blankets to wrap Sarai's prized antique furniture, he leaves the question of destination blank on the form.

As the Penske camel guy looks over the paperwork, he notices you did not complete the paperwork and he asks, "what is your destination?" I see your name is Abram. Are you related to Terah?

Where are you planning to move too?

Where will you be dropping off my camels, donkeys and carts with extended cabs?

Abram answers, "I don't know where I am going. Better give me unlimited miles on the camels. And I don't need to prepay for fuel, I will fill her up when I return the camels, donkey's and carts with extended cabs.

Wherever that is. Whenever.

Whenever? Says Penske Pete.

Yes, wherever, says Abram.

Wherever the Lord takes me. He has not told me yet.

What kind of answer would that be? With a shocked look on his face, Penske Pete, is wondering how much has this guy had to drink today?

God has given each of us the freedom to make choices. And each of us can decide if that kind of arrangement works. Because not knowing where, is what learning and living in **Unshakeable Faith**, is all about.

I choose to follow Abram's journey and adventure and observe carefully how he grew in his Unshakeable Faith, **so I can grow in mine**. Now, as we been learning, **Unshakeable Faith** grows when you face a test. So, God allows or causes us to be tested.

² Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of temptations (various trials, obstacles, troubles, testing's and hardships); ³ for you know that the testing of your trust produces perseverance. (James 1-CJB)

²⁻⁴ Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. (James 1-MSG)

When you successfully pass the test, your Unshakeable Faith grows. **When you fail the test**, your Unshakeable Faith still can grow, if you learn from the test.

So, Abram is tested by God to trust God. And the way God does this is when Abram is called to leave his homeland – **DESTINY**.

I call this the destiny test. Abram delayed by staying in Haran before God got him back on track to fulfil his destiny.

Sarai was barren for many years, 30 Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. When Sarai turns 90, she becomes pregnant with Issac thus fulfilling her destiny.

17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (Gen 17-NIV)

God has an assignment for you. We often call it your destiny. But, to fulfil your destiny, God has to develop you. Test you. So, God used moving Abram from Iraq to Israel and closing Sarai womb, as the methods to test them and grow them for their destiny.

God must get us ready to fulfil our destiny, but since we are not ready, we have to be tested. Testing comes before destiny. If we do not grow in testing, we will waste, abuse or neglect our destiny.

God has a kingdom reason you are here-your destiny.

It is a prepacked and custom-made destiny that requires preparation. And that preparation comes in the form of testing. And two types of testing's are seen in the life of Abram and Sarai-detours and destructive decisions.

And both are breeding grounds for learning how to possess Unshakeable Faith.

Before this life ends, you want to be able to say, "I fulfilled the destiny, God had for me." And along the way of discovering my destiny I took some detours and made some destructive decisions, but God was merciful, and he still led me into my destiny. At the end of this message, we see God's faithfulness in Romans 11:29.

He did not discard me.

He did not abandon me.

God developed me every step along the way!

And he will do the same for you. For you. And for you.

Now, Abram has a destiny God wants him to fulfill, but it is not in Iraq, it is in Israel. About 1300 miles just southwest of Iraq/Iran. God had a destiny for Abram and his little family, and it would be declared and put into action in the form of a promise, but the promise was in the Promised Land. And the promise was that God would bless the nation of Israel.

"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Gen 12-NIV)

There are so many aspects of **Unshakeable Faith** that God wants to develop in you; but you have to get walking.

Get moving. Get unstuck. Quit being stagnant.

The Jews are the only people group to ever establish a nation state in this territory God is going to show Abram, and this claim to the land began thousands of years ago. Israel is not as much a religious nation, as a nation with a divine constitution. A constitution given by God himself. And the story of the relationship between the Jews and that promise, or constitution is what makes up the Old Testament portion of your bible.

The Old Testament constitutional republic framework given by God to Moses has become the framework for many governments.

Harvard Law Professor Eric Nelson says the American Constitution was specifically designed to incorporate elements of the early Hebrew republic.

Because of Israel's unique relationship to the Almighty she is a lightning rod among the nations. Some love her. Many hate her.

Israel is the only one of the 193 member nations of the UN, whose right to exist is regularly challenged. (Rabbi Doron Perez)

The country is made up of a variety of viewpoints from Ultra-Orthodox Jews, religious Jews, secular Jews and Arabs, this makes governing her almost impossible.

While the US, has two dominant parties and a few smaller ones, there are 55 parties in Israel. And 15 of these hold seats in the governing body called the Knesset. With a bewildering array of viewpoints internally, and a constant onslaught of external attacks from all over the globe...

The only uniting factor or only reason Israel even survives is that the Israelis are bound together by a sense of destiny.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Gen 12-NIV)

And that destiny is charted from the early days of the nation’s existence, and it is these biblical stories connected to Abram and Sarai in Gen 12-50 that gives Jews the right to exist today.

And these stories have been told for several milieus to Hebrew kids for generations. Now, not only does Abram and Israel have a destiny, so does Sarai. But Sarai starts out barren.

Sarai is barren - **DESTINY.**

She will be the mother of the promised child Issac. Her destiny is fraught with all kinds of heartache and struggle. Her husband treats her badly is a mild way of putting it. She lives in a culture where barrenness leaves you discarded in terms of value. Even your own female servants, who can bear children carry more value.

As we have seen, along the way to the Promised Land Abram and Sarai get stuck in Harran. The word Harran means delayed.

But when they came to Harran, they settled there. (Gen 11-NIV)

So many are stuck in the wrong place with God. While God is present in that wrong place, you are in the wrong place. He is with you any time, in any place and ready to offer you relief.

So many almost get to their destination but come up short. And as we see this wasn’t the only time Abram and Sarai make a detour. It will happen after they are settled in the Promised Land and a famine hits the land.

A detour is simply staying too long in the wrong place. It is a longer, often much less direct way to get where you are going.

Come on, you know exactly what I am talking about. You are in a hurry to get home. You have to take kids to practice. And all of a sudden, the traffic goes down to one lane, because of an accident. Now, you are on a crowded side street taking a what? **Detour.**

It has been a deluge of Wichita weather for a half-hour. The streets are flooded, and you have to go through West Street in Wichita. Flooding will often cause you to take a what? **Detour.**

In our text Abram and Sarai take a detour, one that lasts 15 years and another that takes them to Egypt.

Along the way they get stuck in Harran and later flee to Egypt -
DETOUR.

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. (Gen 12:10-NIV)

Although Abraham was a friend of God he failed big time. He should have stayed and allowed God to create Unshakable Faith in a famine. And it is often true that one bad decision, can lead to a series of more bad decisions.

And there are clear reasons why he failed. Life is hard and dry during famine. Days pass without rain. The sun scorches the earth, leaving the wells dry and people experiencing dehydration. Plant roots strain to find moisture. People become impatient, fearful and anxious about the future. And fear and anxiety got ahold of Abraham's heart. His assessment of the situation was wrong.

And his lack of patience and lack of self-control would be his undoing. It would not only impact him, but his whole family. We see him not turning to the Lord, building an altar or calling for prayer and fasting.

He had his eyes on the clouds instead of the Christ.
He had his eyes on the ground, instead of God.

As Abraham is watching the harsh environment consume the lives of those around him, he loves, he opts to skip God's scorched Promised Land for the greener pastures of Egypt.

Egypt was not the real estate God has promised and enroute, we can see how the haste of fleeing was going to lead to Abraham's convictions becoming colored by compromise. Fear and anxiety will do that. They will color your convictions.

They will crumble your convictions.

They will cause you to cower when you should have convictions.

Abraham becomes carnal and his convictions become nonexistent.

Abram lies about Sarai's family status – **DESTRUCTIVE DECISION.**

¹⁴ When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. (Gen 12-NIV)

Abram's destructive decision is tied to and shackled to Sarai's life as well. The decision that Abram makes to flee to Egypt, impacts Sarai as well.

The weighty consequences of destructive decisions are often not immediately felt. Not immediately noticeable. In time the diminished spiritual vitality will be obvious to all. And the pain of every move, every decision is felt by all.

The bible is filled with story after story of compromise. Jonah secured passage in the opposite direction of his assignment.

Samson lingered in the Philistia valley of Sorek after hours. David's rooftop patio afforded the best view of the market and another man's maiden.

Each of these decisions brought personal tragedy.

One verse to finish out the chapter, but it shows what a spineless and self-centered and narcissistic man Abraham really was at times.

¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you." (Gen 12)

Abraham was willing to exchange his safety for his wife's security. For his wife's sexuality. For his wife's chastity.

No amount sin is ever ok, even if you prosper. That is a big fat deception. Abraham prospered even though he was sleeping on the couch. Even though it took Sarah a long time to trust him. Don't be fooled, that just because prosperity is happening, there could be foxes in the vineyard. Riches are not a sign of God's favor; righteousness is a sign of God's favor.

So here are 3 questions I want to ask you, about your life.

When is a test from God a **DETOUR**? (Gen 12:1) Abram and Sarai's prepackaged and custom-made life is full of twists and turns.

When is a test from God a **DESTRUCTIVE DECISION**? (Gen 12:10-14) Abram and Sarai's prepackaged and custom-made life includes some bad decisions.

When is a test from God a **DESTINY**? (Gen 16:1-5) Abram and Sarai's prepackaged and custom-made life reveals God is in control.

For the final few minutes, let's look at the painful consequences of a detour and destructive decision all in the name of destiny caused by the undertow of impatience.

God had promised now for over 10 years, and he reminded Abram and Sarai in Gen 15, they would be proud parents. Instead of waiting for God's hour of destiny, they took a detour and made a destructive decision.

1-2 Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't yet produced a child. She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "God has not seen fit to let me have a child. Sleep with my maid. Maybe I can get a family from her." Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

3-4 So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her Egyptian maid Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Abram had been living ten years in Canaan when this took place. He slept with Hagar and she got pregnant. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she looked down on her mistress. (Gen 16-MSG)

When you run ahead of God, you stumble every time. The detour resulted in a foolish plan. The destructive decision resulted in a foolish plan.

Abram took Sarai's handmaiden and fathered a child through her. This child named Ishmael would be the father of the Arab nations. Years later

Sarai would finally become pregnant, and the child Isaac would be the heir of Abram's blessing.

Yet, generations would feel the pain of the detour and destructive decision. Look closely at the schemes from within. And the tampering with God's promise. God helps those who help themselves. Wrong!

Benjamin Franklin

Schemes from within: tampering with the promise. (Gen 16:1-4a)

God promised a child, but he did not say Sarai would be the mother. You can see the wheels of thought turning for Sarai as over 10 years have passed since their arrival to the new promised land.

It sure did not seem like much of a promise as days turn into years. The home is a tent, and it is void of the sounds of children playing, crying and nursing.

I am sure Sarai kept reminding her now forgiven husband, hey Abe, I am not getting any younger, I have passed through menopause, I am my middle 70's. I believe the promise is from God, but the traditional route, our parenting days are gone.

What is available to us is adoption. You go into Hagar; we will have a child and then adopt him. No social stigma was connected to such a practice, in fact it seems like we have come full circle with the idea of donors of eggs and sperm. Now, let's call it what is, they agree to use marital unfaithfulness to accomplish God's plan.

Pressures from without: dealing with the consequences. (Gen 16:4b-7)

Physics teaches us that for every action there is an opposite reaction. And even families with a promise and blessing from God are subject to the same laws.

The child arrives. There is temporary happiness. Soon there is a chain reaction of emotions.

1.Hagar despises Sarai. Hagar's pregnancy changes the way she views the first family. Soon her position as a mother trumps Sarai's position as a wife of Abram. Hagar looks sheepishly and sinisterly at Sarai.

Not once, but all of the time. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise Sarai as a barren and disgusting wife. Perhaps, Hagar was hoping for more than surrogacy, she wanted a new standing that rivaled Sarai.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. (Gen 16:4b)

2.Sarai blames Abram. The green light that Abram had passed through sent him right into the tent of Hagar resulting in a child... **was now flashing raging RED.**

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. (Gen 16-NIV)

How could you? How could you? How could you? This question could be heard long into the night. Sarai berated Abram. It was like she had some pent-up frustrations and unforgiveness for his little episode where she landed in Pharaoh's haram. *...they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. (Gen 12:15)*

Abram is seen walking around the tents and at the marketplace talking to himself, **"I thought that is what she wanted."** As the pressure mounts, he makes another destructive decision. Another test.

3. Hagar becomes the victim.

Abram is seen walking around the tents and at the market talking to himself, **"I thought that is what she wanted."**

As the pressure mounts, he makes another destructive decision. Another test. *⁶ "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. (Gen 16-NIV)*

Sarai's jealousy drives Hagar into the desert. Her only fault in this affair was being obedient to her masters. All Abram wants in the family is peace at any price, so he declines to interfere.

Abram could have intervened, cared for mom and child but he surrenders to family pressures. And together Abram and Sarai show nothing but disrespect to an Egyptian slave-surrogate who is watching the leading family of promise melt down.

This is about as low as it gets for this little family, who are only trying to find God's destiny. They had fallen so far off the grid of grace that they could not see Hagar's side of the story.

Hagar needed compassion and not condemnation.

I would guess many of you are trying to fulfill your destiny. Waiting patiently for God's promise to arrive. And you find yourself like Abram and Sarai saying, "I could care less about any destiny. "

No way God is going to fulfill whatever plans he has. We have blown it too much. We have gone off the rails. Now, even in the midst of total darkness, despair, or depression I am here to tell you,

God has not abandoned you Hagar.

And he has not discarded you Abram and Sarai.

One more detail. Instead of Hagar wasting away in the wilderness, God will show up and tell her to return to her master.

The meaning of Hagar's name is "God hears. "And God heard Hagar. He hears Abram. And he hears Sarai. All are wondering how God can use me.

The story is far from over, while the family learns to live together with Ishmael being adopted by Abram and Sarai it would still be over 13 more years before the arrival of the Promised child. And never forget that running ahead of God, is a detour and it leads to destructive decisions. But never forget you still have a destiny. We learn years later in Romans that God reminds us, our destiny is not based on our performance, our destiny is based on God's faithfulness.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! (Rom 11:1)

God has not rejected his people even though they have rejected him. And a day will come when all of Israel will serve the true King-Jesus Christ. But neither has he rejected you-for the gifts and call of God are irrevocable. (Rom 11:29-NET)

So, here is how I want to end. (1) Those who need a renewed commitment to join God once again in full participation to discover and fulfill your destiny stand all over this place. (2) And for those who need some

encouragement because at times you feel like you have fallen too far off the rail, we are going to pray for you at the altar.

(3) And finally, for all of us, I want you to this week, in your chair time to ask yourself these questions and join God in your desert time and begin to experience the God who hears. Hagar's name means, "God hears." So, let's ask these questions, and listen to what God has to say about your **detours**. Your **destructive decisions**. About your **destiny**. Can you identify a life experience where you took a detour?

Can you identify an occasion when you made a destructive decision?

Can you identify an event in your life that defined your destiny?