

Abraham's Costly Detours

Objectives:

- 1.) Understand more of Abraham's weaknesses so that we can better learn from his life.
- 2.) Show how insecurities develop and avoid such paths.
- 3.) Be aware of relativism and instead pledge to live by God's Word no matter what it costs.
- 4.) Reject making life decisions by our senses and prioritize faith.

Haven't we all made some bad decisions in life?

One would think that God would not be so hard on Abraham for his bad decisions. God recorded Abraham's mistakes right beside the LORD's great promises. The reading seems so awkward.

Disobedience always costs. God does not count how long you have been a Christian or what you have done for His kingdom. If anything, we find that those who get closer to God are held up to a more scrutinizing standard than others.

We have a difficult time understanding the consequences God brought to Abraham's life if we do not rightly understand God and His ways. God treats holy those who are close to Him. We see this illustrated by the fire that came from Yahweh's presence to consume Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. Moses tried to calm Aaron down by explaining God's strong action in Leviticus 10:3

**It is what the LORD spoke, saying,
By those who come near Me I will be treated holy,
And before all the people I will be honored.**

It was only after this that Aaron was willing to quiet down. We find this same demand for holiness to be among Abraham. We find it with all of God's people. Disobedience reveals an arrogance that we have about God. We find our opinions or judgments to be more worthy than what God has said.

With this theme in mind, we can learn from the mistakes of Abraham. We can learn from the study of history but in the end, history is the study of the decisions and consequences of decisions that certain individual have made.

We here will here explore three detours that Abram took which got him off God's path. Let's take a good look at them. The reason that they were recorded were to keep us from making the same mistakes in our spiritual journey.



Now the LORD said to Abram,

“Go forth **from** your country,
And **from** your relatives
And **from** your father's house,
To the land which I will show you
And I will make you a great nation.”

A. Place Detour (Genesis 12)

Went where he wasn't suppose to.

B. Person Detour (Genesis 13-14)

Stayed with those he shouldn't

C. Procedure Detour (Genesis 16)

Did things in ways he shouldn't

When God speaks, listen carefully. Pay attention to details. They might not make sense for awhile, but they are important.



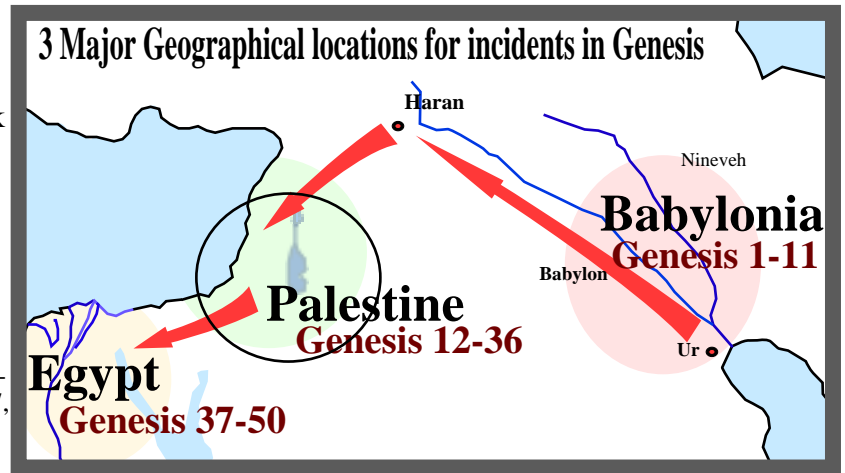
A.) Place Detour (Genesis 12:10-20; 20)

Going where you shouldn't

Is it God's will to go to such and such a place? This is an often asked question. We need to look at two basic questions to help us grow in our discernment.

1) Where did the Lord originally want you to go and why?

The LORD told Abram to go to the land of Canaan, or Palestine, the land Yahweh pointed out to him in two stages. Genesis 12:1 kept the place as a mystery. Later in 12:7, we see the LORD clearly affirming His purpose,
"And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'"



We are right to applaud Abram on actually getting this far. This was sheer faith that he acted upon. This is the scene where God's promises would later be fulfilled in his son's life and ours through Jesus!

God spoke clearly to His purposes. This was to be a long term place for Abraham to live.

Application: God doesn't often (if ever) reveal to us His whole plan for our lives all at once, at least not clearly. As we take one step in obedience, in His time He shows us more. He is never late in revealing what we need to know.

2) Has He asked you to go elsewhere?

The reason we ask 'Why?' on the first question is to see if God would put a time limit or special purpose on sending one to a certain place. Often, when this is done, one returns to where he was before. God often sends a person to a place just for a short time. Many times they go somewhere to study or help someone.

Two times Abraham left the place without clear direction from the Lord. Each time we see different motivations shaping him.

a) Abram went down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10).

Abram went to Egypt because of famine. Of course Egypt promised better things to him. There could be some desire for more than what God has given to him. Contentment is importance in following God.

He should have trusted in the Lord. Because he left the place God wanted him to reside, he was able to be tempted in a special way. It is remarkable that this happens again in Genesis 20.

b) Abraham settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he lived in Gerar (Genesis 20:1). Notice the step by step procedure.

Perhaps the incident with Lot and Sodom created resentment in Abraham. Whatever the case, Abraham committed the same sin of deceiving others about his wife because of fear for his own life. He gave his wife to be part of another man's collection of women just so he could be safe!

Application: Note the pattern below. Peace comes from obedience. Insecurity comes from disobedience.

Disobedience -> Insecurity -> fears -> Immoral decisions
Obedience -> Trust -> Peace -> Good decisions

WATCH WHERE YOUR STOMACH MIGHT LEAD YOU!

WATCH WHERE YOUR RESENTMENT MIGHT LEAD YOU!

The Story of Grace (Continued)
 Despite Abram's moral failures, God intervened and kept Sarah pure. This was important for the promised child. So despite Abram's failure, God kept her pure and still blessed Abram.

Abraham's willingness to shabbily treat his wife would cause marital problems and influence the attitudes and treatment of his sons to their wives.



B.) Person Detour (Genesis 13-14)

Being with those you shouldn't

The second detour that Abraham takes is uncovered in two different incidents, but it all revolved around being with someone God told him not to be. Have you ever been with those you shouldn't? This is a person problem.

Many of Abram's problems developed because he brought Lot along.

Genesis 12:1 told Abraham "Go ... from your relatives."

But what do we find in **Genesis 13:1**, "So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him; **and Lot with him.**"

Chapters 13 and 14 record two big hassles Abraham could have avoided had he obeyed the LORD.

#1) Abram and Lot's Workmen. (Genesis 13)

The first problem was over Abram and Lot's workmen. In verse **13:7** Abraham mentions that they were brothers and the real enemies were the Canaanite and the Perizzites. If they would argue, then they would become vulnerable to the enemy. In the end, they just couldn't get along with each other. Lot and his men were attracted to the glamorous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (**13:10**), and his family suffered forever because of it. Abraham settled in Canaan.

#2) Abram's Rescue of Lot (Genesis 14)

The second problem of having Lot nearby led to getting caught in a risky fight. Once Lot was nearby, Abram was responsible for his safety and well-being. The evil one often uses this method to distract God's people from their main work.

Abram would not have had any of these concerns had he just left Lot back in Haran. Abram risked everything against great advantages to help rescue Lot. Sure Abraham showed his courage and concern. And God had helped them out so to defeat this coalition army. It was not Abram's cleverness, but God's grace that got him out of trouble.

Application God clearly does not want us to associate with certain people.

- He doesn't want us to date or court non-Christians.
- He is not pleased when we marry people our parents do not approve of.
- He doesn't want us to hang around those given to anger.
- He doesn't want us to listen to gossip and backbiters.

God instructed Abram to help him avoid trouble. If Abram carefully followed what God said, he would have been spared from these two problems. Disobedience always has its consequences.

Abram was considered nice by bringing Lot along, but it got him into lots of trouble. Are you associating with people that you shouldn't?

A LOT OF PROBLEMS



C.) Procedure Detour (Genesis 16-17)

Doing things in ways you shouldn't

1. The difficulty

The problem and the temptation are seen in **Genesis 16:1**,

*"Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children,
and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar."*

Every crisis that we face in life also offers its own temptation. In there case, Abram simply didn't have any children after many years of being married. Along with the personal frustration was the social stigma. as in several societies today, we can expect they faced rejection from others because of it. The problem, however, was much greater than just Sarah's. Notice Yahweh's repeated promises to Abram.

"And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." (12:7)

"And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth..." (13:6)

The very blessing that brought Abram to the land was the promise of a great nation. But what good is it to have a land but no descendants?! The lack of a child became a severe test of Abram's faith. It is like saying to a **boy with only one arm that he would become a great baseball player**. The promise in a sense teased Abram and provoked him to understand more of God. We can sense Abraham's perplexed state a bit more from **Genesis 15:1-6**,

2 And Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."

It would have been easier if God had never spoken to Abram, but He had. In fact Abram's name means father. His destiny was wrapped up in what he did not have. Abram did believe God as **verse 15:6** says, but God was developing and greatly testing this faith. The real quality of endurance is not waiting up to almost when fulfillment would come but right up to when the full time had come.

2. THE DETOUR

There was a common practice in those parts recorded in ancient records found by Haran. If there was infertility, then it was legal and acceptable for the husband to impregnate his wife's slave girl. When the time of birth came around, the wife would be there at the birth and receive the baby, and they would treat it as her own. This is what is Abram did in **Genesis 16:3-4**.

"And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight."

We should remember it was not that they were impulsive. It seems that Sarah had mentioned this option ten years prior to him following up on it as **16:3** says. But as often happens, **time tests our faith**. We ask, "Did God really mean that? Maybe I misunderstood Him."

Application

Don't always follow the advice of your wife.
The husband is responsible to do the right thing.
Respect God's hand in fertility.
Remember it is God Himself who makes our situation harder at times.

If it was in modern times, Abram and Sarah might have joined the list of many others in seeing whether they could help the fertilization process along. They would check out the best hospitals but discover meager results. Or perhaps they would not have. They knew something that many of us do not know.

In **Genesis 16:2**, Sarai, his wife, said, *"Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children."*

The Lord was in charge of her fertilization. But if she really believed this, would she then have given Hagar her maid to Abram to lie with?! We can sense the doubts and frustrations in this chapter.



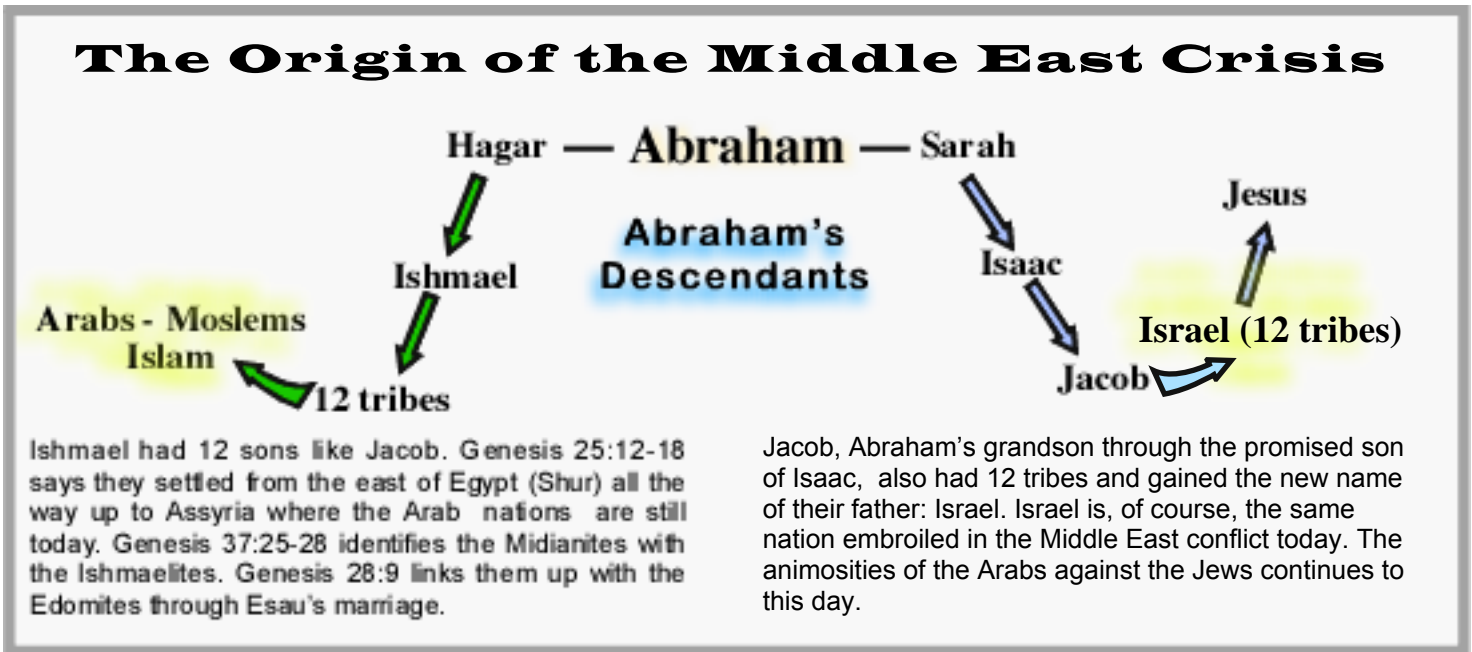
C.) Procedure Detour (Genesis 16-17)

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3. THE CONSEQUENCES

Self-reliance is our biggest problem. This is especially true in a materialistic and wealthy society. We have so many ways to ‘help’ God out. We pride ourselves on our self-reliance. We are rebuked probably like Abram for not doing what he could do. Every imitation, however, is a poor imitation of God’s best. Things get worse and worse until by God’s grace He steps in. **When one does not do things in God’s timing and ways, then all sorts of bad things happen.**

- Ishmael’s descendants became a major threat to Israel (of Isaac the Promised son).
- Further difficulties in Abraham and Sarah’s marriage (cf. Genesis 16).
- Unable to prove God’s faithfulness in his own life.
- Poor testimony to the world. (“I didn’t think there was such a God.”)



The Middle East conflict arises every time Israel is revived. After the captivity, Nehemiah faced great hostility (Nehemiah 2:19 “Geshem the Arab”). After the United Nations chartered Israel back into existence in 1948, the Middle East has been filled with hostilities.

This is true spiritually too. One important principle highlighted in Galatians is that the flesh is opposed to the spirit. Truly Abraham’s “work of the flesh” has produced a long-lasting illustration that we can well see even today 4,000 years afterwards.

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.
(Galatians 5:17)

FLESH

(that which we do in our own strength and wisdom)



SPIRIT

(that which we do in God’s strength and wisdom)



C.) Procedure Detour (Genesis 16-17)

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4. GOD'S SOLUTION

God of course wants us to endure the test and withstand the enemy's testing. It is good to summarize some of the suggestions of the world and compare them to what the Lord says. This incident with Hagar and Ishmael highlight these differences.

EVALUATING DETOURS

The World	The Lord	Proof
World's ways best	World's ways never best	Bad consequences
Seems compelling	Not urgent	Waited 14 more years
Self-reliant	God dependent	Isaac – miracle!
Prideful	Exalts God	God supplied
Relativistic	God's principles	Abraham's marriage
Lives by senses	Lives by faith	Abraham's faith

Assignments

Please answer 2 out of 3 questions.

1. List a spiritual crisis that you have or are now experiencing. Identify what the actual temptation was. How was your faith tested? Did you endure through the testing? What was God trying to teach you?
2. Temptation (detours) become sin if we fail to trust God. When we fall, we need to get up right away. How long have you been a Christian? How has the time from which you fall and the time you repent and confess your sins changed. If you before took two days, is it now shorter?
3. Explain the principle of flesh versus the spirit. How is it important to a Christian who walks in the Spirit?