



It is not a simple, nor a simplistic way to understand human history, it is a way for us to make our lives count for His purposes, because like Abraham, our lives need to be based on His promises and yet we will all encounter setbacks and sidetracks.

Let's look at a few of these this morning so that we do not become like Terach and settle outside the Promised Land or become discouraged when disasters, like the one which overtook Lot, occur in our lives (in the lives of our children, congregation, extended family). Mishpocah, we need to be careful not to let disasters (setbacks or sidetracks) define the direction or quality of our lives). When we have nothing but the promises and when all we can do is wait and take care of business, this waiting and taking care of business, which Abraham did for some 25 years after his arrival in Canaan, is what it may mean for us to walk in faith at various points in our lives.

Abraham did not waste His time in Charan and he did not waste his time in Egypt. He blew it when he lied about Sarah, but he recovered and kept on going. This may be a description of what is going on in our lives at different times in our lives: we blew it, recover and keep on going.

The whole episode with the rescue of Lot speaks of a man of action who just wasn't sitting around, but who got involved and responded with integrity and commitment as he waited – looking after family is a valid use of our resources and of our time (it is only a problem when it becomes the focus of our lives, instead of one of the expressions of our faith).

There are still many Melchizedek's in our world in whose lives G-d is also working and with whom we can bless the L-rd as we see His purposes still driving the direction of human history (despite all the sidetracks and setbacks). The important thing for us to consider from this Torah Portion is that while we cannot always control the things which happen to us in our lives, we can control how we respond to them and frequently the responses of Abraham are what we are left with.

He waited 25 years to see the covenant blessing begin to take shape – in between, despite sidetracks and setbacks, he continued to trust in what G-d has promised Him and this trust was the basis upon which his righteousness was built. He had a Hagar moment, which did not complicate human history - the Moslems may claim to descend from Ishmael, but a careful reading of the Scriptures helps us to see that this is not true. There are many descendants of Ishmael who are alive today, but this is the only promise which G-d gave to him and to his mother – besides their ability to encounter and to surmount a lot of resistance and opposition.

He was shown a timetable which extended beyond his own life time and in which he took comfort and helped him to stay focused on the promises.

I believe that G-d has called the Messianic movement into existence for three reasons. First to restore a balance to the church which I believe has been lost at least since the time of Constantine. Next to be a witness to our Jewish brethren, so that they can understand that the Gospel will always be first a Jewish thing which was promised to Abraham forever, along with the land.

Third, He will always move through His purposes and will drive history in order to see these fulfilled and if we want to remain part of this drive, we need to be at least as tenacious and as patient as Abraham and learn to continue to see the promises as more real and as more enduring as all and any sidetracks and setbacks which we might encounter in our lives.

I wish I could promise you that as you walk with Him, you will get bumped to the front of the line and see a constant stream of wonders and miracles always surrounding you every step. Sometimes, we may blow it like Abraham, or we may blow it like Sarah (Hagar and Ishmael was her idea). Sometimes we may have to invest our time and energy rescuing the Lots which all families seem to be bless or stuck with.

Sometimes we may have to go through great panic and deep darkness in order to see how enduring and finally real the purposes of G-d are on at least two levels and I will conclude with this. First on a generational kingdom level, we need to see and to believe that He is both active and finally supreme over all the twists and turns of our confusing, darkening, foolish and spiritually bankrupting world. What is He doing? He has a sevenfold agenda (creation, fall, flood, scattering, ingathering, grafting-in and kingdom) and we are in stage six, despite tsunamis, economic meltdowns, pollution and social injustice.

G-d is not discouraged and He has never lost control over the events of human history – have you allowed the events of your history to remove His control from the events of your life? This leads me to the final level I want to talk to you about. Waiting is a valid expression of aggressive faith and frequently how we respond to the setbacks and to the sidetracks is a sign of how thoroughly we are living under His control – how full we are keeping our lamps and how much of a light we are being and how well we are being salty in this spiritually tasteless world.

There is always something we can be doing for the L-rd, because being light and salt is as valid an expression of our faith and waking on water, casting out demons and going to the ends of the earth, and until we can learn to wait on Him when it appears nothing is going on in our lives – except serial setbacks and endless sidetracks – then we are not getting ready to move when it is His time.

How about you? Do you believe that His hand is working in the world around you – do you believe it is working in your world? Are you being guided by His promises or are you letting the sidetracks and setbacks define who you are and how you live?

Abraham stubbornly clung to the promises, even through some major sidetracks and setbacks, but because of his persistence (steadfastness is, after All, redeemed stubbornness), he remains the father of our faith (and not Terach) and let's not forget Sarah, who knew how to laugh at her mistakes and to keep on trusting until the promise began to come.

Abraham was given a timetable vision – we are not told what she was given, except that she knew the promise had to come through her weakness and it did.

May the new beginning which we all have in 5757, be a time for us to cling to the promises and to not let any setbacks or sidetracks cause us to lose track of what is really going, both in the world and over and above the raging and the roaring of human history as the final ingathering moves unstopably towards that blessed eventuality – the Kingdom.

May His kingdom be established in your life time, and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, yes, speedily soon and all said amen.