

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 13

Chapter 12

At the end of Chapter 11, Abram's father had died at the age of 205. When Abram's task of caring for his aging father was over, the LORD continued to move in his life.

Call of Abram

Genesis 12:1 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; ²And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The LORD inserted Himself into the life of Abram while he was living in Haran after the death of his father, Terah. The LORD gave Abram three instructions.

- Leave the country where he was living.
- Leave behind the relatives who were still living in his deceased father's house.
- Allow the LORD to direct his steps to a new plot of land in order to establish a new home.

Scholars are in general agreement that a firm custom in family units existed during this time. When a father died, the oldest son became the head of his father's house. He would inherit everything; however, that inheritance also included the liability of being responsible for the welfare and basic needs of all the remaining family members. This custom is played out specifically in the rest of the Bible with the kinsman-redeemer teaching in the book of Ruth as one example. At Terah's death, either Abram or Nahor became the new head of Terah's house; we do not know which son was the oldest; therefore, we do not know if the LORD was asking Abram to abandon his accustomed responsibility to his family or to leave his father's family which was under the leadership of his brother Nahor and begin a new family and tradition of his own. Most likely, the latter was the case.

The LORD gave Abram three promises when he left Haran and his extended family behind.

- Abram's family will become a great nation.
- Abram will be personally blessed.
- Abram's name will become a revered name in history.

Living in the twenty-first century, we can look through the pages of history and report that the LORD has fulfilled these three promises to Abram.

- More than 50% of the inhabitants of the world look back to Abram as the earthly “father” in their faith including all Jews, Muslims and Christians; only Buddhists and Hindus do not.
- The legacy in the first promise should be enough, but the LORD blessed Abram tremendously during his life on earth as will be revealed in the next few chapters in Genesis.
- During and after his life, the memory of Abram will transcend through the centuries to be a household word in the families of three major faiths.

The LORD promised that Abram would be a blessing to others in four ways.

- In general, Abram will be a blessing to all people of the earth.
- Specifically, Abram will be a blessing to all people who bless Abram in return.
- The LORD will curse those who curse Abram.
- All the families of the earth will have the opportunity to receive a blessing because of Abram’s obedience.

These three instructions and seven blessings offered the world to Abram. Notice that the LORD did not force him into this agreement; after hearing the LORD’s offer, Abram showed his acceptance with actions rather than words.

Move from Haran to Canaan

Genesis 12:4 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan.

Abram’s living brother had a family and would remain in Haran. Abram’s deceased brother left a son named Lot. For some reason, Abram decided to allow Lot to travel with him into the new land.

We do not know how old Terah and Abram were when they left Ur of Chaldee and headed for the land of Canaan. We do not know how old they were when they reached Haran and decided to establish their homes there instead of continuing to Canaan. Haran was many miles north and out of the way from the direct path to Canaan. Why did they go out of their way to Haran? Were family members there? Probably! Who? Probably the parents of Nahor’s wife as recorded in Genesis chapter 11.

According to the last chapter, Terah was 70 when he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. Here, Terah died and Abram was 75 years old; therefore, Terah must have been 70 when Haran or Nahor was born and 130 years old when Abram was born.

At the age of 75, Abram left Haran with Sarai, Lot, “all their possessions” and the “persons which they had acquired in Haran.” What possessions did Abram take on the journey? If Abram had been the oldest, his possessions would have been everything that was owned by his father. Taking everything would have left Nahor destitute. Surely that was not the case! Nahor was probably the oldest and the family had been established in Haran long enough for Abram to establish a home on his own, work and gather valuable basic possessions essential to maintaining a family.

Who were the “persons which they had acquired in Haran”? They were not children because Abram and Sarai would not have a child for another 24 years. Were they relatives? Probably not. The LORD instructed Abram to leave his relatives behind in his father’s house, most likely under the care of Nahor. Were they slaves? We do not believe they were slaves in the sense of persons who were owned by Abram; rather, these were souls who were employed by him as well as souls who trusted him and wanted to journey with him. One thing is certain; they were not from Ur of Chaldee because the Scripture states that they were gathered by Abram while he lived in Haran. The ancient text uses an interesting word for these people that has already been used in this commentary, *nephesh* which means “souls.” Some scholars adhere to the belief that while in Ur, Terah and his family were worshippers of multiple gods and the journey to Haran allowed Abram to espouse his belief in One God. With that opportunity after the death of Terah, Abram was able to convert many poly-god believers to the One True God and therefore their souls had been changed forever through his ministry. They were devoted to Abram because of the change in faith that had come into their lives and they followed him. Such a case cannot be proven. Nevertheless, Abram had a group of unrelated people who left Haran with him and traveled to the land of Canaan.

Oak of Moreh in Shechem

Genesis 12:6 And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.



Map 12: This modern map shows the distance from Haran to Shechem as 508 miles.

The passage is correct when it says that Abram arrived at “the site of Shechem.” It was not called Shechem in Abram’s day; it will not be named Shechem until the time of the adult life of Abram’s grandson, Jacob, at least 170 years in the future. Genesis 33 reveals that Hamor was the father of Shechem who will assault Jacob’s only daughter and the sons of Jacob will kill him. From that time on, the site will be called Shechem. Many important events will occur in Shechem throughout the Bible pages. For now, Abram enters the area that will one day be called Shechem and navigates to an oak tree owned by a man named Moreh. The Septuagint called it a lofty tree, meaning one of great proportion. Moreh means “sorcerer”; therefore, literal translations rightly render it the “oak of the sorcerer.” The area is located between two mountains separated about 500 feet by a valley.

Notice that the passage says, “Now the Canaanite was then in the land.” Canaan’s descendants were living in the land; they were the descendants of Canaan’s son, Hiv, and called Hivites.

Gift of the Land

Genesis 12:7 And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.



At the oak tree of Moreh, the LORD promised to give Abram the land on which he was standing. The Hivites were the current owners, but Abram and his descendants would eventually own the land.³⁷

Abram was a man of faith; when the LORD spoke to him, Abram entered into a time of worship. Here, he received a gift from the LORD and in reverence built an altar which indicated that an offering was given to the LORD. We must not forget; Abram was not alone at Shechem. Sarai and Lot were there as well as the people who had followed from Haran. From the Canaanites, Moreh was there and most likely some of the Hivites who lived in the valley near the oak were there. The altar meant a time of worship and surely all of Abram’s group participated.

To Bethel and Ai

Genesis 12:8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

Leaving Shechem, Abram led his party to a small valley between Bethel and Ai. When Abram arrived, it was called by its Canaanite name, Luz; over 150 years later, Jacob would rename it

³⁷ Today Shechem is in the West Bank of Israel and once again under the control of the Canaanite Palestinians.

Bethel. Luz means “separation” or “departure.” Interestingly enough, in the next chapter in Genesis, Abram and Lot will make the decision to separate from each other while they are camped in Luz. Later, when the name was changed to Bethel, that name initially applied only to the area of Jacob’s sanctuary in Luz. Bethel means “house of God” and is a reference to the place of Jacob’s worship. Bethel is about 10 miles north of Jerusalem and about 30 miles south of Shechem. It took Abram and his party about two days to arrive at Luz from Shechem.

Ai means “ruin” or “trash heap” and it was located about two miles east of Luz. Abram’s group pitched their tents between the two villages. Both villages were controlled by Canaanites, descendants of Periz and called Perizzites.

At that new location, Abram built an altar and “called upon the name of the LORD.” As far as Scripture reveals, the LORD did not ask Abram to do this. As leader of the group, Abram entered into a time of worship. It is important to note here that just because the LORD did not speak to Abram in Bethel/Ai, it was still Abram’s responsibility to worship the LORD. Most likely the building of the camp and time of worship occurred on the Sabbath or the new moon. If Abram’s party had traveled 20 miles per day, they were about 28 days out of Haran. They probably did not leave Haran on a worship day, thus departing on the second day of the month and arriving in Bethel/Ai in time to worship the LORD on the day of the new moon. Or, perhaps, they arrived at Shechem in time for the new moon to appear and then celebrated the Sabbath two or three days later in Bethel/Ai. All of that is speculation, but one thing is a fact; Abram would have built an altar to worship the LORD on the occurrence of the new moon and the Sabbath. In this case, it is important to draw an application for today; when it is the proper time to worship, we must spend time in worship whether we hear a word from the LORD or not. In worship we pay our respects to God for what He has done; it is about God, not us! As we come to a time of worship, we are not unlike Abram in this location; on one side is Bethel, the house of God and on the other is Ai, a heap of trash. May we go to worship in the house of God and leave the heap of trash behind. Within the house of God, may we find His way to deal with the heap of trash to which we are about to return at the end of our worship of the Almighty!

Toward the Negev

Genesis 12:9 And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

From Bethel/Ai, Abram journeys on down in the direction of the Negev. It is about 130 miles from Bethel/Ai to the center of the Negev but the passage does not say he went to the Negev; rather, he traveled toward the Negev. Somewhere on the way to the Negev in the southern part of the Canaanite land, Abram made a decision to turn west and seek help in Egypt.



Map 14: Modern map showing the Negev Desert

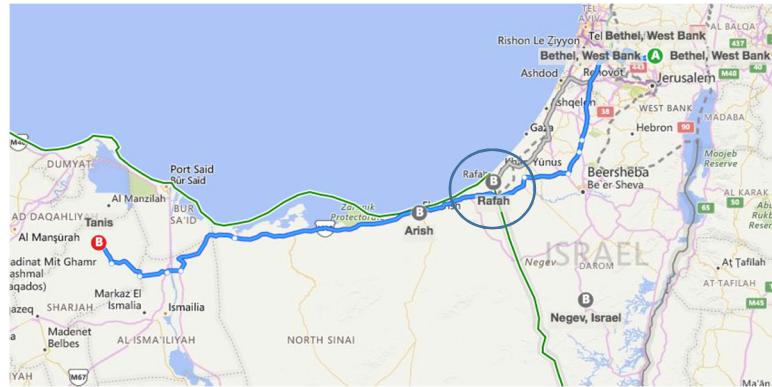
Famine and Egypt

Genesis 12:10 **Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.**

Abram was distracted by the basic needs of his traveling companions because of the severe famine in the land of the Canaanites. He cut short his journey to the Negev and turned his attention toward Egypt. The distance Bethel/Ai to the Egyptian border is only about 100 miles but to enter into the city of Pharaoh in that day, Abram had to travel deep into Egypt to the city of Tanis, 275 miles from Bethel/Ai, a 14 day journey.

Instruction to Sarai

Genesis 12:11 **And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; ¹² and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ "Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."**



Map 15: Modern map showing Bethel/Ai to Tanis, the capital and home of Pharaoh in Abram's day.

About in the middle of Map 15 is the village of Rafah. Just southwest of Rafah is the green line that represents the national line between Israel and Egypt at the Brook of Egypt. That line was the dividing line between the land of Canaan and Egypt in Abram's day. Most likely, this instruction from Abram to Sarai occurred as they crossed the Brook of Egypt at the boundary line. The blue travel line in Map 15 is essentially the same route traveled by Abram as well as, throughout the centuries, a road from the Promised Land to Egypt.

Upon crossing the brook, the possibility of Sarai's being taken by Pharaoh's men was imminent. The prominent duty of Pharaoh's army was to protect Egypt from threats, especially at the borders. A second duty was to find and bring to Pharaoh's harem all the beautiful women of Egypt and those female foreigners entering the land. The book of Esther tells a similar story in Persia except there, all the women entering the harem were to be virgins. Not so in Egypt! Any beautiful woman was to be brought to Pharaoh's harem whether or not she was married. The reputation of this Pharaoh concerning beautiful women had reached Abram's ears and he asked Sarai to tell Pharaoh's men that she was his sister. It was not a lie; Sarai was Abram's half-sister; Terah was their father but they had different mothers.

Why did Abram say, “so that it may go well with me because of you”? Does Abram have a plan to take advantage of Pharaoh with Sarai as the bait? He seemed to know that if it was revealed that he was her husband, he would be killed.

Sarai and Pharaoh's House

Genesis 12:14 And it came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

As expected, upon entering Egypt, Sarai's beauty even at the age of 65 came to the attention of the officers and she was taken to Pharaoh's house or rather to his harem house. It was the custom in almost all kingdoms that the women in the harem would spend one full year in beauty and health treatments in preparation for their first meeting with the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's Gifts to Abram

Genesis 12:16 Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

Abram did well in Egypt; because of Sarai, he became wealthy from the herds of animals given him by Pharaoh as well as the servants included with the gifts. These servants were employees who went with Abram to care for his herds. They were the property of Pharaoh to give; however, it does not seem that Abram treated them or considered them as property. It appears that all the persons who surrounded Abram all his life did so because of their own free will. As gifts from Pharaoh, they did not choose to be given to Abram; however, being a gift perhaps offered them total freedom. Once they met Abram and experienced his grace as a leader, they would not want to leave his presence.

We must remember that Abram had not traveled to Egypt alone; everyone who came out of Haran was still with him as well as all the possessions because Abram owned no land and had no place for storage. Because Sarai was his sister, Pharaoh realized that Abram needed to provide for the large group. Pharaoh gave a large gift to Abram, which made him wealthy.

Wealthy, Abram remained without his wife. Why did he not call upon the name of the LORD to rescue Sarai in this situation? The answer is not found in the Scripture.

Curse on Pharaoh

Genesis 12:17 But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

Regardless of whether or not Abram called upon the LORD, the LORD intervened on behalf of Abram and Sarai. The details of these plagues do not exist and we are left without an understanding of how devastating the plagues were to Pharaoh and his house. Nevertheless, they were destructive enough to catch Pharaoh's attention and he determined that Sarai was the cause.

Pharaoh and Abram

Genesis 12:18 Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

How did Pharaoh discover that Abram had partially lied to him? How did he come to associate the plagues with Sarai and Abram? Why did he not kill Abram immediately? Surely, Pharaoh did not want any further devastating attacks on his house and fear motivated him to drive Abram out of the country lest he hurt Abram and bring catastrophic disaster upon him and his kingdom. His instruction to Abram was to take Sarai and leave the country.

Pharaoh's Command to His Men

Genesis 12:20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

Not leaving anything to chance, Pharaoh gave strict orders to his men to accompany Abram and all of his party out of the country. Pharaoh did not ask for any of the gifts back; evidently he did not want to risk the wrath of the gods by retrieving the gifts, nor did he want any tainted animal or servant back under his control. This order even included the Egyptian maid who was assigned to Sarai as will unfold in the Genesis story.

Chapter 13:1-5

Return to Bethel and Ai

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. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. 3 And he went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar, which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Most likely, Pharaoh's men escorted Abram to the Brook of Egypt and watched as the huge conglomeration of people, animals and possessions made their way northeast through the upper edge of the Negev, through the Gaza strip on the road to back to the Bethel/Ai region where Abram had built an altar to the LORD. Once reaching Bethel/Ai, Abram did exactly what he had done before; he went to the altar and "called upon the name of the LORD."

Abram was now 10 miles north of what will later be known as Jerusalem. He had left that place on his own without the direction of the LORD. He had put the lives of his family and clan in

jeopardy. He had trusted the LORD for his own soul but it seems that he had not learned the lesson to trust the LORD for the welfare of his body. The famine was too great and he failed to trust the LORD to provide and moved to Egypt on his own, placing everything in danger's way. Even then, the LORD did not forsake Abram but protected him in his unfaithfulness. The odd reality of this story shows that the LORD blessed Abram even in his disobedience; Abram physically received wealth for doing nothing but showing up in Egypt with a beautiful wife who was taken from him. In Hebrew, the words *cabed meod* means "exceedingly rich." In essence, both Abram and Pharaoh did wrong; Abram lied, Pharaoh stole. Pharaoh was the loser in this story unless the LORD used the event as a divine encounter to acquire Pharaoh's attention in order to protect Abram and his descendants from the wrath of Egypt for many years to come. The event might also have been a divine encounter with Egypt for Abram; his foot had touched the delta of the Nile and the boundaries of the Promised Land were established. Within the last six months, Abram had left Haran just north of the Euphrates River and traveled about 800 miles to the Nile River. **Genesis 15:18** says, "the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.'"

But the 800 mile journey from Haran to Egypt was not the completed trip for Abram; leaving the Nile delta in Egypt, Abram and his clan had to travel the 275 miles back to Bethel/Ai where Abram "called upon the name of the LORD" in worship. At least in temporary earthly blessings, the LORD had kept His promise to Abram. He had blessed Abram with more people, cattle and other possessions and He had made Abram's name known from the Ur of Chaldee to the River Nile.

Lest we forget, during all of these events in Abram's life, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah and Eber were still alive.

Abram's Move to Canaan and His Journey to Egypt – Year 2068

