

Learn to Read Genesis Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 8



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SESSION 8

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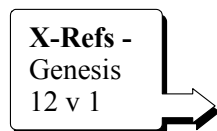
Genesis 11 v 31 to 21 v 34 – Abram’s travels

11 v 31 – Ur to Haran

We saw the beginnings of Abram’s travels at the end of chapter 11:

11 v 31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.

This verse seems to imply that Terah took the initiative and decided to go to Haran, taking Abram and the rest of the family with him. However, let’s look at the cross-references in the margin:



Nehemiah 9 v 7; Acts 7 v 2 to 4 and Hebrews 11 v 8

The reference in Acts leaves us in no doubt that God appeared to Abram in Ur and told him to leave. It seems most likely, therefore, that Abram told his father what had happened and Terah wanted to go with him. As head of the family, Terah took the lead as far as Haran, and Abram “honoured his father and mother” by allowing it to be so.

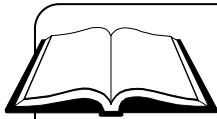
The Hebrews 11 reference makes the point that Abram didn’t know where he was going and his departure was therefore a sign of great faith.

Ur of the Chaldees was on the banks of the River Euphrates. The archaeological supplement to the *New International Version Thompson Chain Reference Bible (1984)* describes the discoveries at Ur. There were extensive quays, commercial buildings, schools and many two-storey houses with courts, fountains, fireplaces and sanitary systems. There were also grisly remains, suggesting that rulers often took large numbers of their servants with them into their hoped for “after-life”.

Ur also had a massive temple tower, or “Ziggurat”, which was a centre for worship of the moon goddess. When God told Abram to leave Ur, He was therefore asking him to leave a civilisation steeped in idolatry. From a worldly perspective, Ur would have been a pleasant place to live in, but not necessarily a good place to learn about the true God.

Abram left Ur, with Terah his father, Lot his nephew and Sarai his wife. He travelled in a northwesterly direction along the course of the River Euphrates and eventually came to Haran, a distance of about 600 miles (see map on page 8 of session 7). At God’s request Abram left a comfortable life to become a nomad living in tents. This shows the trust that Abram had in God.

12 v 1 to 20 – Haran to Egypt



Read Genesis 12 v 1 to 9

Even the small words are important in the Bible. There are two examples here:

Verse 1 says “the LORD **had** said ...” indicating that verses 1 to 3 are the command Abram received in Ur which prompted the move to Haran.

The word “**So**” in verse 4 shows that his departure from Haran was as a result of God’s command.

However, Abram must have remained in Haran some time, as he had acquired “possessions and people” (verse 5).

Verses 2, 3 and 7 contain the first promises God made to Abram.

*12 v 2 “I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

12 v 7 “To your descendants I will give this land.”

The main points in these first promises are:

- Abram would be father of a great nation
- God would bless Abram
- Abram would be a great character
- God would treat nations according to how they treated Abram's descendants
- All nations would be blessed through Abram
- The land of Canaan would be given to Abram's descendants

From Haran, Abram journeyed west and then south to Shechem with his wife and nephew, a distance of about 400 miles (see map on page 4). After arriving there he built an altar to God.

12 v 6 ...the Canaanites were then in the land.

**Echoes -
Canaanites**

Genesis 24 v 3 to 6, 37; Exodus 23 v 28; 33 v 2;
Deuteronomy 20 v 17 and 18

The details given in these references add up to a damning indictment against the Canaanites and other people living at the time in the area now known as Israel. As the reference in Deuteronomy, some 400 years later, states, the things they did in the course of their worship were detestable to God. Even so, God gave them several hundred years to repent before He destroyed them (Genesis 15 v 16).

God promised to drive them out eventually because of their evil practices and to stop their evil influence affecting His people. Even in Abram's day their evil was such that he did not want his family to mix with them.



- Abram, like most of us, was surrounded by people who didn't care about the true God
- We should follow his example of keeping separate from such people

Abram then moved to Bethel and built another altar and "called on the name of the LORD", a phrase which we looked at in chapter 4 verse 26, as the marginal references remind us. He then continued southwards towards Egypt.



Read Genesis 12 v 10 to 20

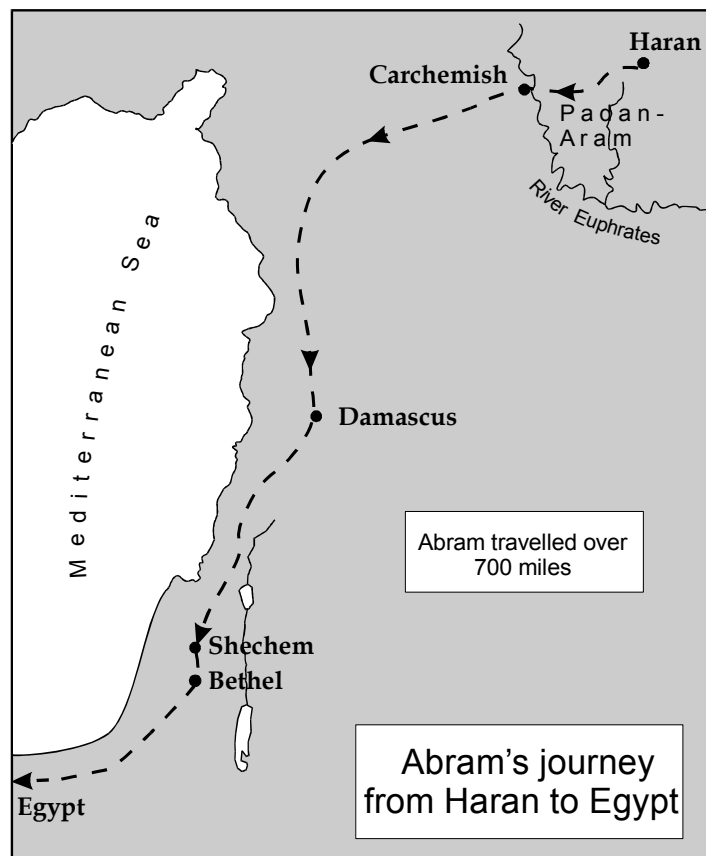
Sarai must have been at least 65 years old when she entered Egypt (see Gen 12 v 4; 17 v 17), but since people lived to a far greater age in those days, the ageing process itself must have been slower, so it is not so very remarkable that men should consider her attractive as stated in verses 11 to 15.

By any standards, in this incident Abram showed a lack of faith. God had told him (v 2) that he was to be the father of a great nation. If that was true, God would look after him in Egypt! Despite his temporary lack of faith, God rescued Abram out of the difficulties he had caused himself (v 17 to 20).



- With the single exception of the Lord Jesus, every one of the great men of the Bible had their lapses of trust in God
- Yet God still looked after them
- That can be a great source of comfort for us

The map below shows Abram's journey which we have just been considering.



13 v 1 to 18 – Egypt to Hebron

You can follow Abram's travels in the land of Canaan on the map on page 14 of this session.



Read Genesis 13 v 1 to 18

Abram and his nephew Lot left Egypt and gradually made their way north to Bethel. Both Abram and Lot now had a large number of cattle and servants. The herdsmen began to quarrel, and the reference to the presence of the Canaanites and Perizzites suggests this also was a source of tension. The differences between Abram and Lot are shown in their reactions to their situation.

Abram had to remind Lot that they were related to one another and should not quarrel. He suggested that they part company as a way of avoiding further disputes, and allowed Lot to choose his own direction. Lot seized the opportunity to take what appeared to be the best part of the land.

Verse 13, however, suggests that Lot did not choose well.

In response to Abram's choice, God made him further promises:

13 v 14 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are — northward, southward, eastward, and westward;

15 for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants for ever.

16 And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered.

17 Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

The main points in these second promises are:

- God would give all this land to Abram and his descendants for ever
- Abram would have a vast number of descendants

After receiving these promises he moved south to Hebron and built an altar there.

14 v 1 to 24 – Lot’s captivity and rescue



Read Genesis 14 v 1 to 24

When Bera, king of Sodom, and his neighbouring kings near the Salt (Dead) Sea rebelled against their overlord Chedorlaomer and his allies, they were defeated. Lot, who by now was actually living in Sodom, was taken captive with all his possessions. On hearing of this, Abram, with the help of his neighbours, Mamre, Aner and Eshcol, pursued and routed Chedorlaomer’s forces and rescued Lot. On his way back he was met by two very different kings – Melchizedek the king of Salem and Bera king of Sodom. On meeting Abram, Melchizedek gave praise to God. In response Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils. Bera was only concerned about the captives and goods. He wanted Abram to have the rest of the spoils but Abram declined any material reward.

For additional information on Melchizedek and the way in which his role and that of Jesus Christ as High Priest are compared see page 15 of the *Additional Notes* booklet.

15 v 1 to 18 v 15 – The birth of Ishmael and the promise of Isaac



Read Genesis 15 v 1 to 7

15 v 1 and 2 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

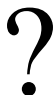
But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

God encouraged Abram, but Abram was greatly concerned that he had no son. As the promises God had made to him depended on him having a child, his lack of children was a problem to him. Verse 3 tells us that Abram considered one of his servants to be his heir, but in verse 4 God assured him that this was not the case.

15 v 5 and 6 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be”. And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

**X-Refs -
Genesis
15 v 6**

Romans 4 v 3 to 6; Galatians 3 v 6 to 9; James 2 v 23



What is meant by God “accounting righteousness” to Abram?



Look at the definition of “counted” and “righteousness” in the *Strong’s Concordance* entries on page 15 (The *Authorised Version* uses the word “counted” instead of “accounted”)

Genesis 15 v 6 is one of the core statements of the Bible.



- Abram had total confidence in what God had said
- Therefore God regarded him as approved or “being right”
- This is in contrast to Adam and Eve who failed to show this belief in God in the garden of Eden



Read Genesis 15 v 8 to 21

Because Abram showed such confidence, God made a covenant (or agreement) with him concerning his descendants. Cutting an animal in half and passing between the two halves was an ancient way of ratifying a covenant. We meet the same procedure in Jeremiah 34 verse 18.

*15 v 18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying:
 “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the
 great river, the River Euphrates—
 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,
 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,
 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”*

The main points of the covenant are:

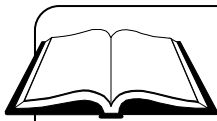
- God would give the land of Canaan to Abram’s descendants
- This land would stretch from “the river of Egypt” to the River Euphrates
- The nations occupying it at that time are listed in verses 19 to 21

X-Ref -
 Genesis
 15 v 18



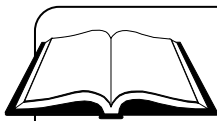
Nehemiah 9 v 8

This cross-reference gives one early fulfillment of this covenant.



Read Genesis 16 v 1 to 16

The birth of Ishmael to Hagar, Sarai’s servant girl, resulted in rivalry in Abram’s household. The rest of the chapter tells how God promised that Ishmael, though not the promised seed, would also develop into a large nation.



Read Genesis 17 v 1 to 27

We can see that thirteen years had gone by if we compare the age of Abram in the last verse of chapter 16 with his age in the first verse of chapter 17. And still Abram had no child by Sarai!

God made another covenant with Abram in verses 2 to 8:

17 v 2 “And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

4 “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.

6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

The main points of this covenant are:

- Abram’s family would grow to a great size
- Abram would be a father of many nations
- Abram’s name was to be changed to Abraham
- Kings would come from his family
- The covenant would be everlasting
- Abraham and his descendants would have an endless right to the land of Canaan
- Abraham’s God would be God to his descendants

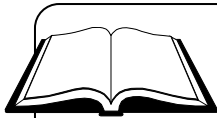
The sign of this covenant was to be the rite of circumcision, introduced in verses 11 to 14 which has remained with the Jews to this day.

In verse 15 we see Sarai's name changed to Sarah. God then said that she would have a son though she was 90. Abraham found it difficult to believe and asked that Ishmael might be taken as his son. God's answer was very clear:

17 v 19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."

The promise given to Hagar that Ishmael would become a great nation was repeated to Abraham in verse 20, but he was reminded again in verse 21 that the covenant would be with Isaac.

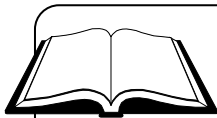
Abraham then showed his agreement to the covenant by circumcising himself and all the males in his household (v 23 to 27).



Read Genesis 18 v 1 to 15

Chapter 18 opens with the story of Abraham's hospitality to three men who turned out to be angels. They came to tell Abraham that Sarah was about to conceive the promised son.

18 v 16 to 19 v 38 – The destruction of Sodom



Read Genesis 18 v 16 to 19 v 38

Echo -
Sodom's
destruction

→ 2 Peter 2 v 4 to 9

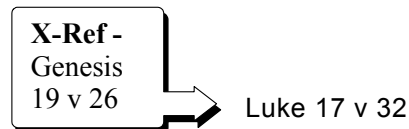
Because of God's respect for Abraham, God told him about His intention to destroy Sodom (18 v 17 to 21). We are not told whether it was concern for Lot or his concern for any other righteous people living in Sodom that motivated Abraham then to plead for Sodom.

There is a hint, however, that he had difficulty in understanding God’s motivation, and was concerned for His reputation for justice. He was afraid this might be diminished if God was seen to punish the innocent with the guilty.

The humility of Abraham was so well matched by his faith that he was able to question God’s actions and negotiate with Him without incurring a rebuke.

The depravity of Sodom is shown in verses 1 to 11 of chapter 19. Verse 15 implies that there were only four people there worth saving, so the city would be destroyed. However, even those four needed encouragement to come out of the city (v 16).

19 v 26 But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.



“Remember Lot’s wife” – one of the shortest verses in the Bible – short, and to the point!

Lot’s wife was not as strong in her faith as he was. They had been told not to look back (v 17). Not only did she look back, but she was “behind” Lot. We are not told how far behind him she was, but it could be that she was far enough behind to be engulfed in the destruction of Sodom. When God’s judgments are poured out on an evil world, we shall be destroyed along with it if that is where our heart is.

Lessons from Lot's life

Lot's life should be a warning to us. It shows us what can happen if we are attracted by the things a godless world has to offer:

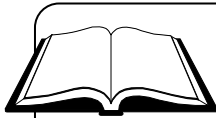


- He saw all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered (13 v 10)
- He chose for himself all the plain of Jordan (13 v 11)
- He lived in the luxury of the plain near to Sodom (13 v 12)
- He then moved into Sodom (14 v 12)
- He was almost overwhelmed by the destruction of Sodom (ch 19)
- We last hear of him as the drunken father of two incestuous daughters (19 v 30 to 38)

We should bear in mind that we live in a similar godless world to that of Lot's day (look at Luke 17 v 28 to 30).

X-Ref -
Genesis
19 v 26

→ 2 Peter 2 v 7



Read 2 Peter 2 v 7 to 9

This chapter tells us that Lot was constantly distressed by the behaviour of the people around him in Sodom. He had faith (Peter calls him a “just” or “righteous” man), but despite that he ended up losing almost all he had, including his wife. But for God's mercy he would have perished with the evildoers. Paul may have had Lot's experience in mind when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 3 v 10 to 17 of those who will be saved as if escaping from a fire but in the process losing everything they have.

Again the long-term consequences were evil. The descendants of Lot's daughters were the Ammonites and Moabites, who were later to become enemies of Israel.

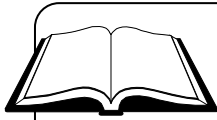
20 v 1 to 21 v 34 – Hebron to Beersheba



Read Genesis 20 v 1 to 18

Following the destruction of Sodom, Abraham moved on again, this time to Gerar in the land of the Philistines (see map on page 14).

Again Abraham seems to have suffered a lapse of faith, because he adopted the same ploy as he did previously when he was in Egypt (12 v 11 to 13), saying that Sarah was his sister:



Read Genesis 20 v 3

However, God ensured that the incident turned out better than Abraham could have expected. A treaty of friendship was made between Abraham and Abimelech the king. In fact Abimelech appears to have been quite an honourable man in all his dealings with Abraham.



Read Genesis 21 v 1 to 7

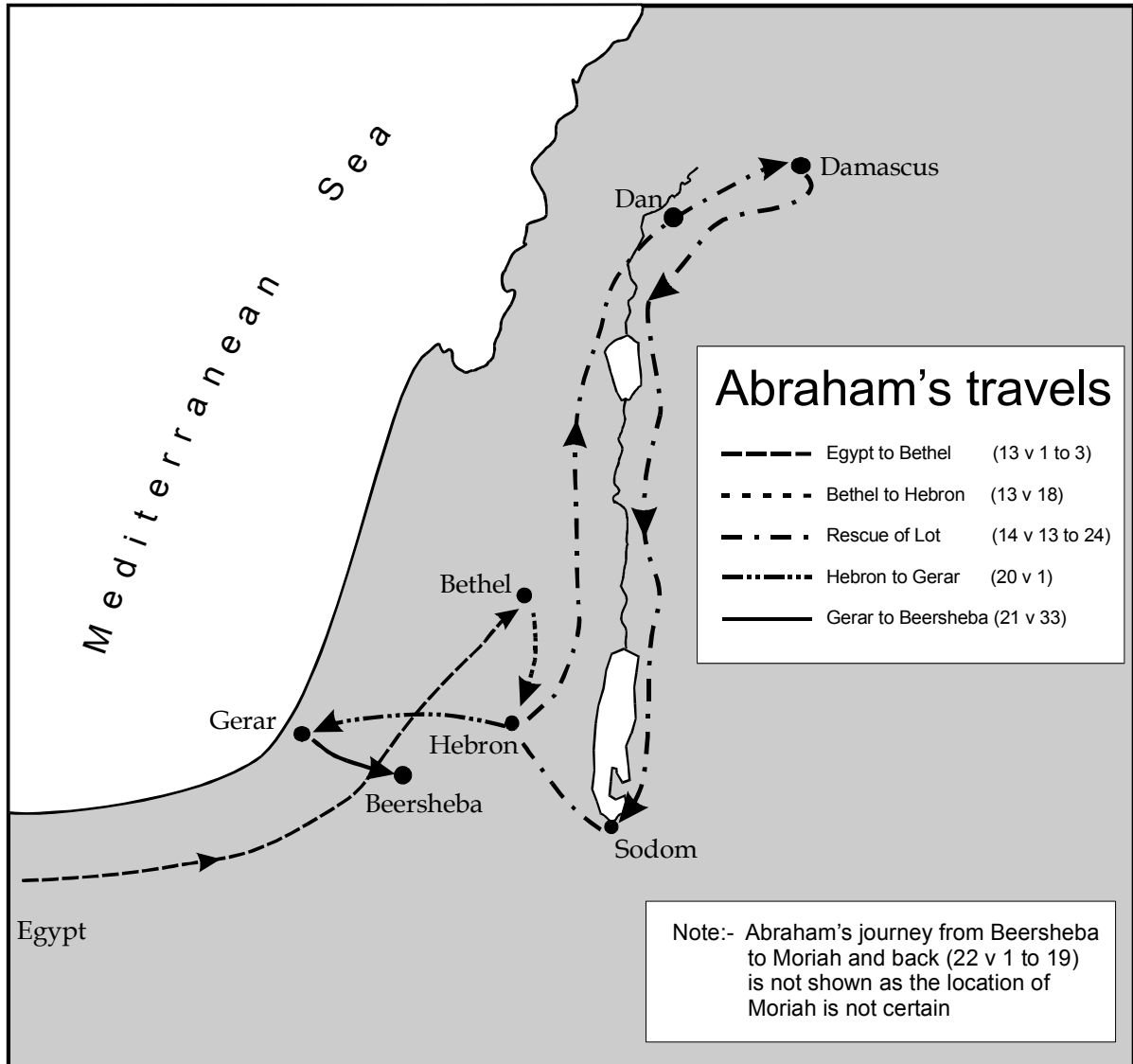
Abraham and Sarah at last had the child that God had promised them. This would have encouraged their faith and trust in God. They named him Isaac.



Read Genesis 21 v 8 to 34

The first half of this section tells of the way in which Hagar and Ishmael were removed from Abraham's household. Here we see the tension beginning between Abraham's household and the people who would develop into the Arab nations. Have a look at the section "The start of tensions in the Middle East" on page 16 of the *Additional Notes* for more information.

The second half of this section records the making of a covenant between Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba.



Optional assignment 8

"[Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness"

Look at the references given in the *Cross-references* booklet for Genesis 15 v 6 and see if you can learn any thing from them. If you have a Bible with references, follow other references given as well.

Strong's Concordance entries

COUNTED

2803 **châshab** (khaw-shab')

a primitive root;

prop. to *plait* or interpenetrate, ie (lit.) to *weave* or (gen.) to *fabricate*;

fig. to *plot* or contrive (usually in a malicious sense);

hence (from the mental effort) to *think, regard, value, compute*:

(make) account (of), conceive, consider, count, cunning (man, work, workman), devise, esteem, find out, forecast, hold, imagine, impute, invent, be like, mean, purpose, reckon (-ing be made), regard, think.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

6666 **ts^odâqâh** (tsed-aw-kaw')

from 6663;

rightness (abstr.), subj. (*rectitude*), obj. (*justice*), mor. (*virtue*) or fig. (*prosperity*):

justice, moderately, right (-eous) (act, -ly, -ness).

Notes