

Learn to Read Genesis Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

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:

X-Refs -
Genesis
12 v 1

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.

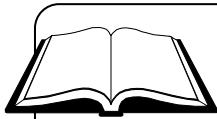
The Hebrews 11 reference makes the point that Abram didn’t know where he was going and his departure was therefore a sign of great faith.

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.”*

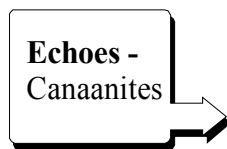
12 v 7 “To your descendants I will give this land.”

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.



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.



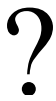
- Abram, like most of us, was surrounded by people who didn't care about the true God
- We should follow his example of keeping separate from such people

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.

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:

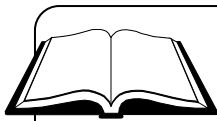
- God would give the land of Canaan to Abram’s descendants
- This land would stretch from “the river of Egypt” to the River Euphrates
- The nations occupying it at that time are listed in verses 19 to 21

X-Ref -
 Genesis
 15 v 18



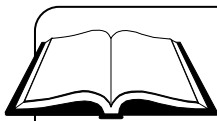
Nehemiah 9 v 8

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.

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

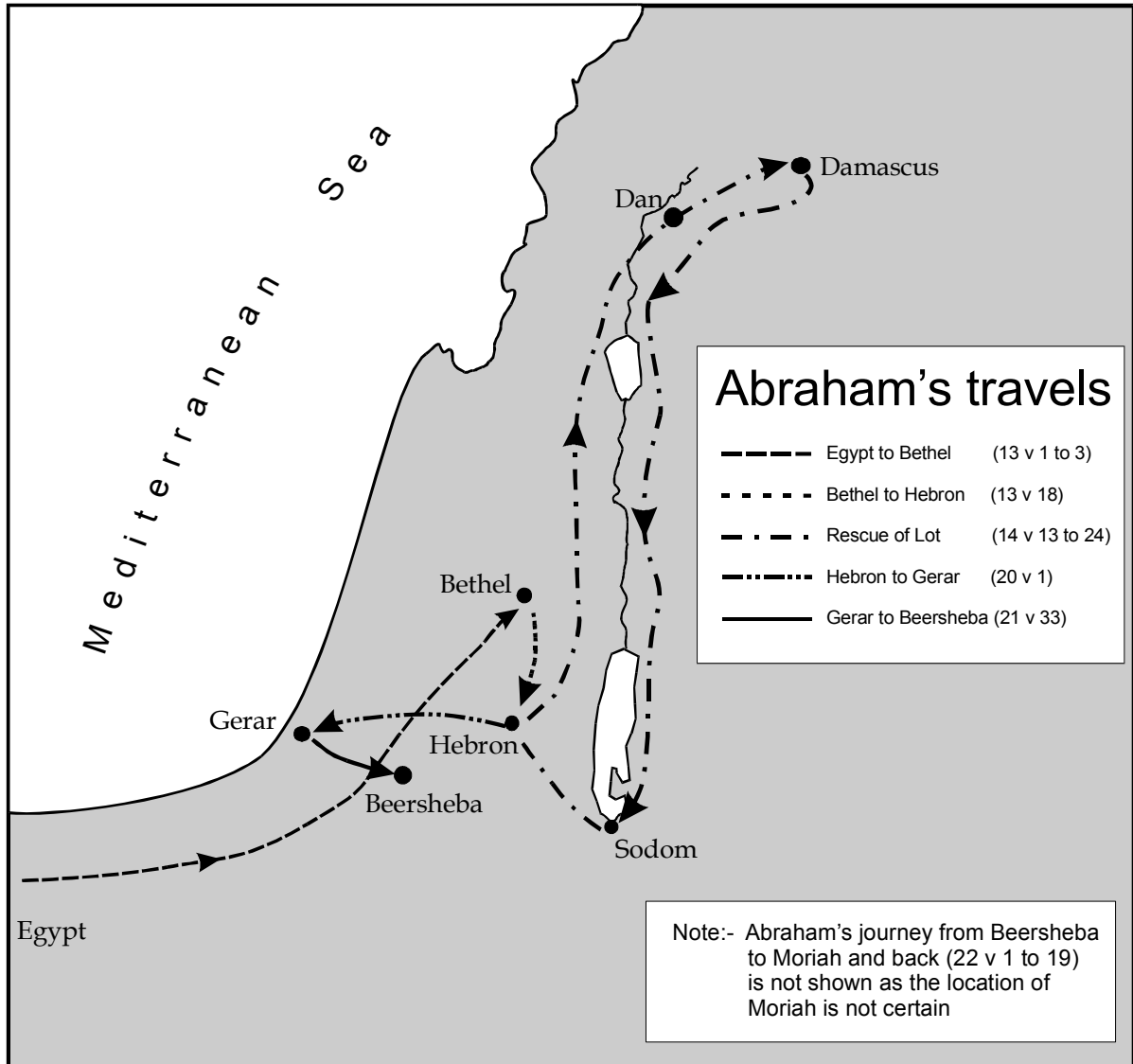
2 Peter 2 v 7



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.



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.

Notes