

Lekh L'kha

לך לך

“Get yourself out”

Genesis 12:1 – 17:27

Torah Together



In this *Torah* portion, we meet Abram, with whom we'll spend the next several lessons. Abram, who later becomes Abraham, was the man chosen by God to carry out His master plan for mankind. We can learn many important and powerful lessons from the life of Abraham. As you read, try to put yourself in Abraham's shoes. It can help you understand the kind of relationship God would like to have with you.

1. The call of Abram - 12:1-9

a) Where was Abram when God told him to leave his country?

Although it may not be clear from verse 1, Acts 7:2-5 implies that Abram heard from God while he was in Ur of the Chaldees.

b) Carefully analyze the promise that God made to Abram in verses 2 & 3. With the perspective of 3500 years of history, would you say this has come true?

It has been said that this passage contains the theme of the entire Bible. It is God's plan for both the Israelites and the rest of the peoples of the earth. History seems to show that those nations that 'bless' Israel prosper, while those that 'curse' Israel tend to suffer. Furthermore, all peoples on earth have been blessed through Israel by the giving of the Bible and most especially through Yeshua, the Savior of all mankind.

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 12:2-3

c) Can you put yourself in Abram's shoes and imagine what it must have been like to move from his home to a place yet-to-be-named?

It is not difficult to imagine how hard it must have been for Abram to leave his homeland to go who-knows-where at the request of an unnamed God. Maybe others have had similar experiences.

Scripture Link:

Acts 7:2-5 adds some details to this story. Jewish tradition holds that Abram's father, Terah, was a manufacturer and seller of idols. This may have been a point of contention between Abram and his father after Abram's encounter with the real God described in this passage.

The Bible's Key Theme

Many people believe that **Genesis 12:2-3** contains the theme of the entire Bible. In these two verses God states how He intends to use Abram and his descendants to impact the world in the future. There are many ways in which these promises have been realized throughout history. The most obvious, of course, is the coming of the Hebrew Messiah, enabling anyone who is willing to have a personal relationship with God.



Abram's gallantry?

It seems clear from this passage that Abram was concerned for his own safety while in Egypt. Because of Sarai's beauty, Abram was afraid that another man might find Sarai so attractive that he would kill Abram and take Sarai for himself. To avoid this possibility, Abram introduced Sarai as his sister rather than his wife. Presumably, the idea was that Abram would be better able to protect both himself and Sarai if others thought they were brother and sister. Clearly Abram did not foresee the events that would take place. God, however, rescued both Sarai and Abram from the situation and in the process increased Abram's wealth substantially. When they left Egypt, among other items, Sarai had acquired a handmaiden named Hagar. Do you think Abram acted foolishly in introducing Sarai as his sister?

d) Locate Ur, Haran, Shechem, Bethel, Ai and the Negev on a map and trace Abram's travels. What did Abram do near Shechem and Bethel?

Ur is thought to have been located near the mouth of the Euphrates river. Haran is approximately 500 miles northwest of Ur. Shechem is present day Nablus, about 30 miles due north of Jerusalem. Bethel and Ai were on the road from Jerusalem to Shechem, about a third of the way. Ai was a few miles east of the road and Bethel (or Luz) was a mile or less west of the road. The Negev is the desert region encompassing the entire southern part of Israel south of Beer Sheba. Abram built altars and sacrificed to God near Shechem and Bethel.

2. Abram in Egypt - 12:10-20

a) When the famine came upon the land, Abram went to Egypt. Do you think God instructed Abram to do this?

It is unclear from the text whether or not God instructed Abram to go to Egypt. Perhaps God didn't give direction and Abram felt he had to go.

b) What ploy did Abram use to protect himself while in Egypt? How did this plan work for him? Do you think God instructed Abram to do this?

In order to protect his own life, Abram told Sarai to say she was his sister rather than his wife. Pharaoh then took her for his harem, paying Abram well for his "sister." It seems highly unlikely that God instructed Abram to do this. (Note that in Genesis 12:20 Abraham tells Abimelech that Sarah is "the daughter of my father though not of my mother." Thus Sarah would be Abraham's half-sister,)

c) How did God act to protect Sarai and to reunite her with Abram? ***God inflicted Pharaoh and his household with "serious diseases" (thought to be a skin disorder, like boils) and as they sought the cause, they discovered Abram's deception. Pharaoh returned Abram's wife, Sarai, to him.***

d) What caused Abram to leave Egypt? How was his material wealth affected by his sojourn in Egypt? ***Pharaoh ordered Abram to take his wife and whatever had been given to him, and to leave Egypt. He left a richer man than he came, including a young slave girl named Hagar.***

3. Abram & Lot separate - 13:1-18

a) To where did Abram return when he left Egypt? What was his first act there?

Abram went back to his place between Bethel and Ai, rebuilt his altar and “called on the name of YHWH.”

b) What were the reasons that Lot and Abram chose to separate? Abram gave Lot his choice of land. What does this say about Abram’s character? How does Lot’s choice reflect his character? Are there any lessons for us here?

Their flocks and herds had grown too numerous for the land to support them both. Abram wanted the best for Lot and he never had been too concerned with material things. Lot, however, chose what appeared to be the best land. Lot appears to be worldly-minded, choosing to dwell in fertile land near the cities of the plains. Abram appears to desire to follow God and prefers a more rural setting.

c) After Lot and Abram part, what does God do to encourage Abram? Where does Abram settle?

God restated His promise to Abram. Abram settled at Hebron.

4. Abram rescues Lot - 14:1-24

a) Verses 1-9 relate the political situation in the area that led to the “War of the Kings.” Can you find out any details about the names and places mentioned here?

Amraphel of Shinar is thought to be a descendant of Nimrod, a predecessor of Babylonian rulers. Kedorlaomer was from the area of Persia and led the alliance of 4 kings. The other 5 kings ruled the cities in the plain south of the Dead Sea.

b) What is Abram’s response when he learns of Lot’s capture? Who helped him rescue Lot and his family and how many men went with him?

Abram gathered an “army” and went to rescue Lot. He had 318 of his own men plus the men of Eschol & Aner.

c) Upon his return from the rescue of Lot, who does Abram encounter? Describe the interactions between the two men. Can you find any types and shadows? (See also “Digging Deeper” section)

Abram met Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, a type of Yeshua. Abram had bread and wine with him (shadow of the last supper) and Melchizedek blessed him. Abram honored him with a tithe. (See Hebrews 7:1-10)

d) How did Abram’s dealings with the king of Sodom reveal his attitude toward him?

Abram wanted nothing from the king of Sodom lest he take some credit for making Abram wealthy. Abram clearly held the man in low esteem.

Why the Sacrifice?

After God had blessed him in some specific way, Abram would show his appreciation to God by offering an animal sacrifice. This was a common practice of the culture at that time. Even today, taking the time to make a heart-felt sacrificial offering to God for a received blessing is still an appropriate way to acknowledge God’s role in our lives.

Scripture Link

The “Plains of Shinar” are located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. According to **Genesis 10:6-12**, this area was settled by Nimrod and his descendants and may have been the site of the Tower of Babel. Also, it is believed that Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities located near each other at the south end of the Dead Sea. In addition, three smaller cities were thought to be in the same area: Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar (**See Genesis 19:22**).

Scripture Link:

From God's perspective, faith is simply believing what He says. **Genesis 15:6** then teaches that when we have faith (that is, believe what God says to be true), He counts that as right conduct on our part, considering us as acting in a godly manner. This key concept is further explained in **Romans 4:1-5**, **Galatians 3:6-9**, and **Hebrews 11:11-12**.

Cutting a Covenant

The strange ceremony described in this passage was the common form of making a covenant between two parties in the ancient near east. The pieces of the sacrificed animals were laid out in pairs and the two parties would walk between the pieces and say, "May God do to me what has been done to these animals if I break the covenant promise that I make today."

The sin of the Amorites

The Amorites were one of the people groups that inhabited the land that God had promised to Abraham. Like the other cultures in this land, they were involved in pagan practices which God found detestable and would later judge. It appears, however, that God would allow the Amorites several hundred more years to repent of their sins, even though he knew that they would not.

5. God's Covenant with Abram - 15:1-21

a) At this key meeting between God and Abram, what doubt does Abram express? How does God respond? What is significant about verse 6?

Abram didn't see how he could become a great nation as he had no heirs. God corrected him and said that Abram would indeed father a son. God was pleased because Abram believed Him even though it seemed impossible.

b) Describe the covenant ceremony that God and Abram performed. What do you know about covenants in ancient times?

Abram killed a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon, dividing the bodies in half and arranging the halves opposite each other. This was a typical ancient near-eastern covenant ceremony. The parties to the covenant walked between the pieces and swore that if either broke the covenant, then what had happened to these animals would happen to them.

c) Analyze the details of God's promise to Abram. What do you think is meant by the phrase 'the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure'?

God again promised Abram unconditionally that his descendants would inherit the land. Furthermore, God foretold that Abram's descendants would be enslaved in a foreign country for 400 years but would come out with "great possessions." God implies that while He knows that the Amorites will not turn from their wicked ways, He would give them more time (up to 400 years) to do so. Thus part of their punishment for their sin would be that Abram's descendants would take over their land.

6. Hagar and Ishmael - 16:1-16

a) How do you think Sarai acquired Hagar? It was a practice in that culture for a woman to bear children “through her servants.” Whose idea was it to get an heir in this way?

Although not explicitly stated, it seems likely that Sarai acquired Hagar when she was temporarily a part of Pharaoh’s household (Genesis 12:10-20). It was Sarai’s idea to conceive in this way.

b) What caused Sarai’s unhappiness after Hagar conceived? Who did she blame it on? What was Abram’s response? What caused Hagar to flee?

Hagar developed an attitude of superiority and began to treat her master (Sarai) disrespectfully. Sarai blamed the situation on Abram. Abram said that Hagar was Sarai’s maid and she could do whatever she wished with her. So Sarai “mistreated” her. (Perhaps she demanded more respect from Hagar.)

c) Analyze the prophecy that God gives Hagar concerning her son. What does his name mean? How old was Abram when Hagar gave birth?

God said that her son (who she was to name Ishmael, meaning “God hears”) would be a “wild donkey of a man” who would “live in hostility with his brothers.” (Ishmael is the father of today’s Arabs.) Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born (Genesis 16:16).

Ishmael’s Descendants

Both Jewish and Christian traditions hold that Ishmael is the father of the Arab peoples. While there is no direct proof of this, **Genesis 25:12-18** records the descendants of Ishmael and it seems likely that his descendants remained in the area of eastern Egypt and northern Arabia. Moslem tradition, however, sees Ishmael as the son favored by both Abraham and God. Note that while both Jews and Christians accept the *Torah* as the Word of God, Moslems do not.

Ishmael’s descendants

If it is true that today’s Arabs are primarily descendants of Ishmael, do you think God’s prophecy is accurate? It’s important to keep in mind that while the Bible clearly teaches that God judges nations, He also knows the heart of each individual. If anyone, regardless of their heritage, chooses to believe the God of the Bible, then he can trust that God will create within him a new heart, a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone. **Ezekiel 36:26**

What is a Covenant?

A covenant is a legal agreement between two parties, usually to do or not do something specific. It is essentially a promise. A covenant often defines a sign or symbol to remind the signers of their promise.

We first encountered a covenant when Noah and his family left the ark after the flood (**Genesis 9**). This is known as the Noahic Covenant. Here we encounter the Abrahamic covenant, made between God and Abraham. Another common form of covenant is the marriage contract, in which each party promises “to have and to hold from this day forward...” the other. The sign of the marriage covenant is usually the wedding ring.

The concept of covenant is central to a good understanding of God.

7. The Covenant of Circumcision - 17:1-27

a) How old was Abram when God “confirmed” His covenant with him? What is significant about God revealing himself as El Shaddai? What was Abrams response?

When Abram was 99, God revealed Himself to Abram as El Shaddai, meaning “God Almighty” or “God, the strong and powerful”. It would appear that this is the first time God had appeared to Abram in this form. Abram “fell facedown” at this revelation of God’s strength and power.

b) Specifically what did God promise Abram? What was the significance of the name change from Abram to Abraham?

God told Abram (“exalted father”) that he would be “a father of many nations,” making him very fruitful and changed his name to Abraham (“father of many”). God established His covenant with Abraham’s descendants and again promised to give the land (Israel) to his descendants. God also promised Abraham a son by Sarah who he was to name Isaac, which means “laughter”.

Two Covenants

The concept of covenant is as old as civilization itself and is still in use today. It is essentially a formal promise made between two parties. God uses this formal legal agreement in the Bible to record His agreements and promises to mankind.

The Book of **Genesis** records two **unconditional** covenants between God and man.

God’s covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17)

- **Parties:** God as one party and Noah, his descendants, and every living creature on Earth as the second party
- **Unconditional promise:** God would never again destroy all life on earth with a flood
- **Sign:** Rainbow in the clouds

God’s covenant with Abram (Genesis 15 & 17)

- **Parties:** God & Abram
- **Unconditional promise:**
 - Abram’s offspring more numerous than the stars in the sky
 - God gives the land of Israel (Israel, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates”) to Abram’s descendants
- **Sign:** Circumcision

God reconfirms his covenant with Abraham with his sons Isaac and Jacob as well.

c) What was Abraham's response when God told him Sarah would bear a child? What was the child to be named? What is significant about God's promises in verses 19 - 21a? How does this apply to us today?

Abraham laughed to himself when he heard that he was to father a child by Sarah. God told him the child was to be named Isaac ("laughter") and that He would establish His covenant with Isaac, not Ishmael. As believers, we are heirs to this covenant. (See Romans 9:6-9)

d) What did Abraham do after this meeting with God? Based on **Galatians 5:1-6** and **Colossians 2:11-15**, how do you think this applies to us today?

Abraham immediately circumcised all males in his household. For us, circumcision has no value if it is done to achieve justification before God.

Sign of Circumcision

The sign that God defined for the covenant he established with Abraham and his descendants was circumcision. It is an outward symbol of the agreement between God and Abraham and his family. Notice that it is the covenant (or promise) that is important – not the sign. God allowed for others, who wished to follow the God of Abraham, to be adopted into the family. But again, it's the commitment to God, to be in covenant with Him that is important, not the symbol of the covenant. After the coming of the Messiah *Yeshua*, the apostle Paul makes it clear in **Galatians 5:1-6**, **Romans 4:9-12**, and other places that circumcision, in and of itself, proves nothing. It is by our commitment to God demonstrated through our faith in Him that we become sons of Abraham.

Digging deeper

1. Research Melchizedek and find out what you can about him. (See **Psalm 110** and **Hebrews 5** and **7**) What does his name mean? Compare and contrast him to the King of Sodom. What significance do you see in the way Abram treated these two?

Melchizedek, meaning “king of righteousness”, is mentioned in Psalms as the model after which the Messiah will serve. The book of Hebrews explains that Yeshua is that new priest “after the order of Melchizedek.” Many believe that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate Yeshua. It is interesting that the story juxtaposes the King of Salem and the King of Sodom. It is fairly clear that Abraham views the King of Sodom with disdain while revering the King of Salem.

2. Read **Romans 4**. What additional insight does this give you into Abraham’s interaction with God described in **Genesis 15**?

Romans 4 is used by Paul to explain that men are justified before God by faith, not by works. God was pleased with Abraham because Abraham “believed” Him, that is, he had faith that God would keep His word. This is all faith is, believing that God will keep His word.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Brit Hadashah : Acts 7:1-8; Romans 3:19-5:6; Galatians 3:15-18;
5:1-6; Colossians 2:11-15; Hebrews 7:1-19; 11:8-12