

Abram's Travels

By George H. Shaddix

Outside of Damascus, view of the main trade route. This was probably the route Abram took.

MOVING is a major event, especially moving from one city to another. Imagine all the emotions Abram and his family had when he received God's call to "go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you."¹

The Command to Go

Abram was to pack up all his belongings, leave the land of his father, and go to a new land that God did not identify. God promised Abram that He would show him a new land that would one day become the land of his descendants.

Abram, along with his father, Terah, left Ur and moved to Haran. Either Terah could not or would not go beyond this point; therefore, they settled there. In Haran, God spoke to Abram about cutting the cords with his family and going on to a new land.

God called Abram to go and also made him some wonderful promises (see Gen. 12:2-3). God promised Abram he would be

the father of a great nation, he would be blessed, his name would be made great, and he would be a blessing to others. God further promised to curse those who cursed Abram and to bless those who blessed Abram. Then came a final promise that all the people of the earth would be blessed through Abram.

Upon hearing this call, Abram was obedient. He left family and homeland behind. He took only his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and their possessions. Genesis 12:5 also says he took "the people he had acquired in Haran." These people were not slaves since slaves would be considered possessions or property. Clyde Francisco suggests these people were those "in Haran who had been convinced of Abram's cause."²

Imagine taking all the flocks and herds along with all the other possessions accumulated over 75 years and moving to a new—yet undisclosed—location. This is what Abram did! At the age of 75 (see v. 4), Abram followed God's instructions to move to a land that He would show him.

The Process of Going

Just the logistics of moving the livestock is difficult to comprehend. Such relocations would have required a large number of herdsmen.

Imagine the added difficulty of moving possessions. Abram could not call a moving company for assistance. Beyond that, Abram still did not know where he was headed.

The travelers also would have faced the matter of housing. Abram and his family did not have houses for dwellings. He and his family lived in tents that they had to take down and move from one place to another. Staying in a tent may be fun and exciting for a few days, but think about living in a tent day in and day out, month in and month out, and year in and year out. This was not an easy life.

Abram's move was gradual as he and his family moved from one location to another. One reason for this movement was to provide adequate food for the flocks and herds. Seasonal climate changes necessitated



relocation of flocks. “During the winter the clan moved the animals south into the Negeb [or Negev] and the marginal wilderness areas where winter rains provided grass for grazing. During the hot summer months the patriarchs sought relief from the heat as well as grazing lands in the higher elevation of the mountains.”³

Along the way they were faced with many dangers. Other people already occupied the land through which they were moving. So when Abram and those with him moved into an area, they often displaced others. This could create conflict. Wild animals also could attack the livestock as well as the people. Traveling on foot and living in tents added to their vulnerability. Add to these dangers the need for supplies and food. They had to develop relationships with the people of the land so they could trade with them.

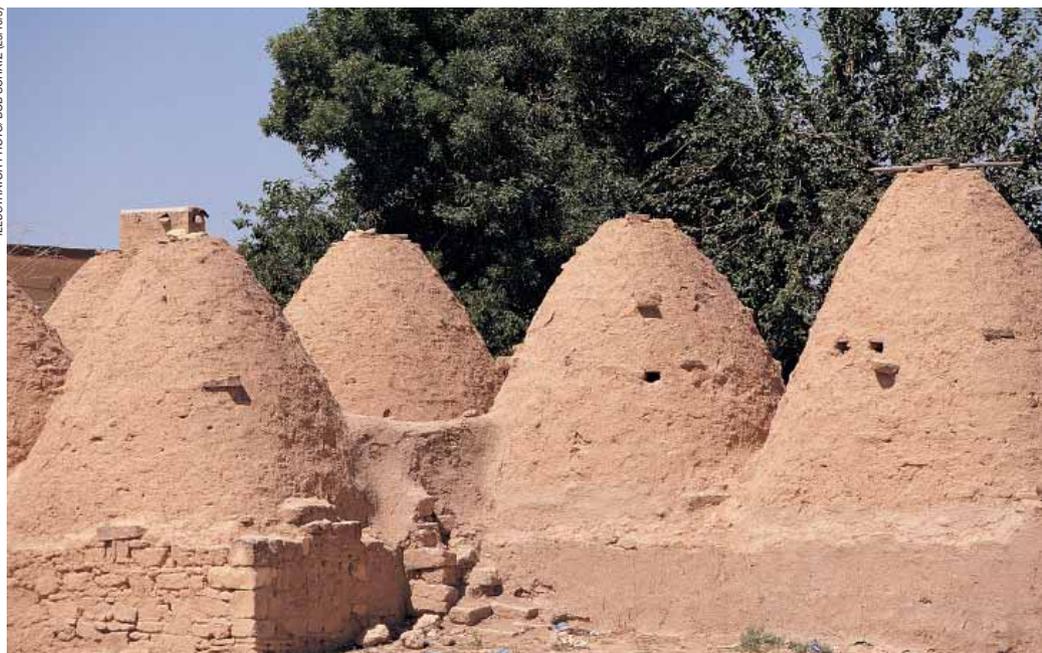
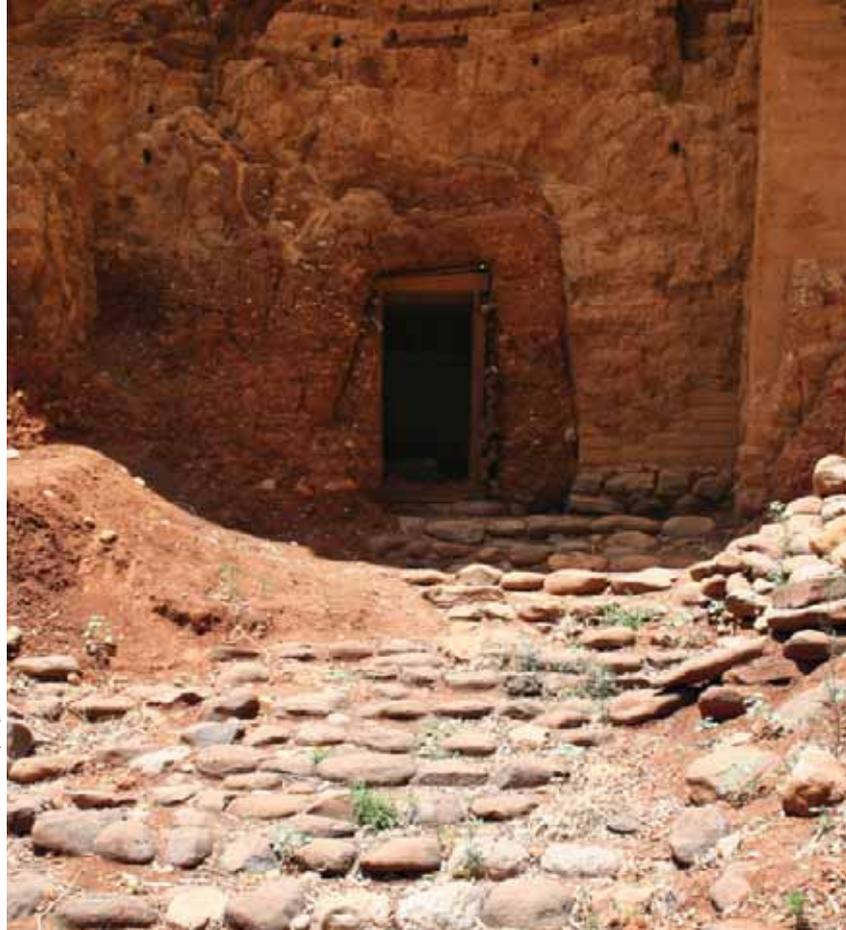
Add to all this the fact that Abram was traveling to a land that was unfamiliar to him. He could not call a travel agent to map out the best way to go. As a matter of fact, God did not give Abram detailed information about the land. God simply told him to leave and go to a land that He would show to him. Abram acted on faith in God.

Abram left Haran and probably moved west and then south into the land of Canaan. The inhabitants of this land were called Canaanites. They “were of Semitic stock and were part of a large migration of Semites (Phoenicians, Amorites, Canaanites) from NE Arabia in the third millennium B.C.”⁴

Upon moving from Haran, Abram settled at Shechem in the land of Canaan. This city

LESSON REFERENCE

BSFL: Genesis 12:1–13:18



Left: Palace ruins from Ebla (or Tel Mardikh). Although not mentioned in Scripture, Ebla was likely on Abram’s route into Canaan. Excavations at Ebla unearthed over 18,000 cuneiform tablets, many of which confirmed details

found in the biblical stories about the patriarchs. Further, the tablets also refer to many of the places visited by the patriarchs, and they confirm the then-current use of names such as Abraham, Esau, Ishmael, and Israel.

Top: This gate at Dan originally had three arches. The arches, the piers supporting them, and the towers flanking the gate were constructed of sun-dried bricks and were covered initially with white plaster. The gate has survived to its full height of about

23 feet. Today only this outer arch is visible.

Above: At Haran, beehive-shaped huts preserve a building model that may be as ancient as Abram’s time.

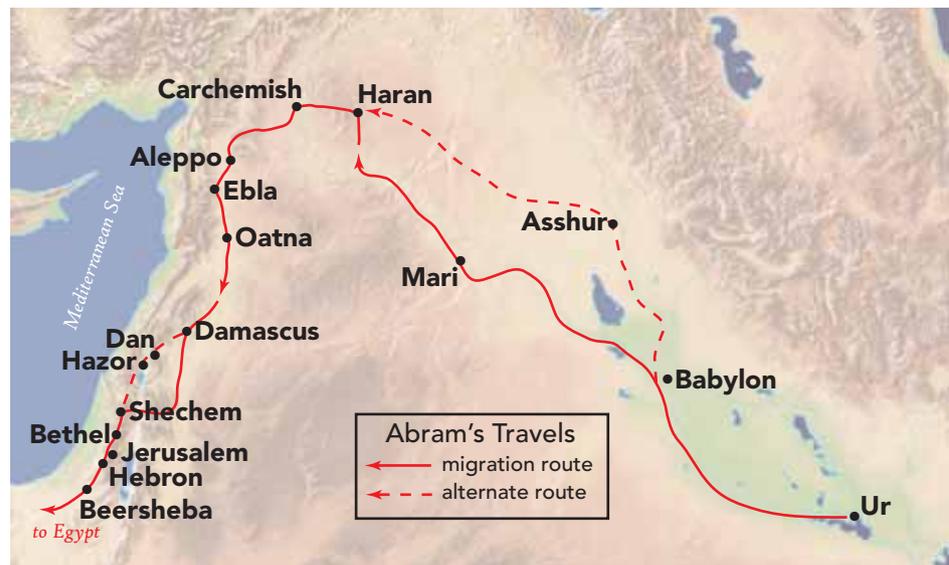


Shechem; the Lord appeared to Abram at Shechem and affirmed His promise of the land for an inheritance. Abram thus erected an altar and worshiped at Shechem (Gen. 12:6-7).

was located in the hill country in the central region, north of the Dead Sea. Shechem was important because it “lay in the pass which cuts through Mountains Ephraim, Ebal, and Gerizim.”⁵ Through this pass ran the road that “formed the easiest and the quickest means of communication between the East of the Jordan and the sea.”⁶

In Shechem, Abram stopped at “the oak of Moreh” (v. 6). This is a reference to a sacred spot in Canaan, perhaps a place where the Canaanites worshiped. This was the place where God promised Abram He would give this land to his descendants. While this promise was not realized in Abram’s lifetime, God’s words would be realized in the years ahead as the Israelites came into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Here at this sacred place, Abram built an altar and worshiped God.

Scripture does not say how long Abram remained in Shechem, but at some point he again gathered family and possessions and traveled to the south several miles to “the hill country east of Bethel” (v. 8). The city of Bethel was on the west, and the city of Ai was on the east. Bethel was another Canaanite city.



Upon arriving in the area between Bethel and Ai, Abram erected an altar so he and his family could worship God. Once again, Abram was demonstrating that his faith in God was the anchor of his life and travels.

From Bethel, Abram continued traveling south through what is known today as the nation of Israel. All of this land would one day belong to Abram’s descendants. Genesis 12:9 says Abram traveled “by stages to the Negev.” That is, he moved slowly, stopping along the way for periods of time. Abram did not build permanent dwelling places. As did many other

travelers in his day, Abram and his family maintained a nomadic lifestyle.

This nomadic lifestyle had to be more difficult for Abram than it had been at the beginning, when he left Ur. Two factors contributed to the difficulty. First, Abram was advancing in years. Surely the physical requirements were more demanding. And second, Abram had more possessions. “Wealth flowed to him through his herds, and in gifts from others (Gen. 12:16; 20:14,16), so that he became rich, owning cattle, sheep, silver, gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys” (Gen. 24:35).⁷



The Standard of Ur, assigned this name at the time of its discovery because excavators thought it might have originally been affixed atop a pole, like a flag or banner. No one knows for sure, however, the original function of this hollow box. Some think it was part of a musical instrument.

All four sides are decorated with inlaid mosaic scenes made from shell, red limestone, and lapis lazuli, set in bitumen.

Although one of the opposite sides depicts a war scene, this side depicts peace and prosperity. At the top the king is banqueting among his friends. The two bottom rows depict a procession of men bringing animals, fish, and other goods. A singer and a man playing a lyre entertain the travelers. The image of Abram and his family leaving Ur may have been quite similar to the scene of the procession depicted on this box.

Abram, however, forged on towards the Negev. Where is the Negev? This term refers to the area south and southwest of the Dead Sea. The Negev is desert country where water is scarce due to the lack of rainfall in the summer. “At other seasons of the year, however, it is used by the nomads for pasturage.”⁸

Genesis 12:10 says that due to a famine in the land, Abram went into Egypt to live. There he convinced Sarai to say she was his sister. Abram felt threatened by his wife’s beauty and feared for his life. This scheme resulted in Pharaoh treating Abram well, until God “struck Pharaoh and his house with severe plagues” (see v. 17). Pharaoh sent Abram and Sarai away.

By the time he returned to the Negev, Abram had amassed great

possessions. He had been greatly blessed. He journeyed back to the place at Bethel where he had earlier built an altar. There he again called upon the Lord (see 13:4).

Abram and Lot had been blessed with flocks and herds to the point that the land could not support them. Their herdsmen were quarreling. The Canaanites and the Perizzites also lived in this area (see vv. 1-13.). Abram offered Lot the choice of the land, and Abram would take what was left. After Lot chose the fertile Jordan plain, Abram settled in the land of Canaan, near Hebron.

Abram’s faith saw him through the many challenges he faced as he followed God’s call to go into a new land. Amazingly, Abram never personally possessed land. In fact, he “is represented as having owned only one piece

of land, the cave of Machpelah” (Gen. 23).⁹ Yet, God did give the land to his descendants, thus proving Himself to be faithful in keeping every promise He had made to Abram. **B**

1. Genesis 12:1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

2. Clyde T. Francisco, “Genesis” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 rev. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 156.

3. Thomas Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1998), 46.

4. Steven Barabas, “Canaan, Canaanites,” *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (NIDB), rev. ed. J. D. Douglas, gen ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 188.

5. W. Ewing, “Shechem,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 4:2756. 6. *Ibid.*, 2756.

7. A. R. Millard, “Abraham” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. in chief David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:36.

8. “Negev, Negeb,” NIDB, 699.

9. Millard, 36.

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