

GENESIS

In the preceding lesson, we noted that God confused the languages and dispersed the people of Babel. In this lesson, we begin by taking a look at the land that Abram was raised in, Ur of the Chaldees. We will also be examining the Amorite people, who lived in this region, and we will examine the associated geography of what would become known as Mesopotamia—"between two rivers" (the Tigris and the Euphrates).

If we are to have a better understanding of Abram, his father and his family, we need to know more about where he lived, what the culture was like, what he ate, and what he did as a young man. Knowing more about the geography will also give us insight regarding the magnitude of the journey that God was about to lead him on, into different lands and cultures where he would be a foreigner and a stranger, i.e., a "*Habiru*" (Genesis 23:4).

Abram was raised in the area near the city of Ur of the Chaldeans (see the map below), and while nothing is mentioned about his or his father's occupations it would appear from later texts that the family was a successful pastoral family, raising sheep, goats, and so on. As we will discover when we encounter "Abram's call" (by God), he will eventually travel with his family to Haran and from there, following his father's death, travel south into Canaan with "all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired..." (Genesis 12:5)

We also know from later narratives in Genesis that Abram/Abraham was educated. That is, he knew the cultures and ways of each land that God led him to (e.g., the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Babylonians, the Arameans, and the Amorites, etc.). He knew how to negotiate contracts, manage a large staff of servants and slaves, and talk with Kings and Pharaohs. Clearly Abram/Abraham was not just an average sheep or goat herder. Abram would have known the Babylonian language, been able to read cuneiform, and would have been aware of all of the gods that populated the many lands that he would travel through and eventually settle in.

The Geography

The geography represented in the map below covers a wide area and encompasses many of the peoples and cultures that Abraham—originally named Abram—would encounter. The land of the Ur of Chaldees was occupied by the Amorites. The land where Haran was located, i.e., the place Abraham would travel to from Ur, was the land of the Arameans, or the land of Aram. The land south of Aram, with the Mediterranean Sea as its western border, was Canaan. South of Canaan was the Negev and then Egypt.



Let's examine what the Bible tells us about Aram (comprised of present-day Syria, southeast Turkey and parts of Lebanon and Iraq) and its relationship to Abram and his family's line.

1. What does Genesis 10:22 tell us about Abram/Abraham's family line?
 - a. ANSWER: It indicates that a descendent of Noah and Shem was named Aram. Abram was a descendent of Aram. The sons of Shem were Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and ***Aram***. (Emphasis mine.)
2. What do the following verses also reveal to us regarding the country of Abram's origin?
 - a. Genesis 24:4
 - i. ANSWER: Abram refers to this land, the land of the ***Aram***, as "my country." (Emphasis mine.)
 - b. Genesis 24:10
 - i. ANSWER: His servant headed for ***Aram*** Naharaim. (Emphasis mine.) This region is in the northwest part of Mesopotamia. It is where Abram's family lives. Today it would be found in northern Syria.
 - c. Genesis 25:20
 - i. ANSWER: Isaac married within the family. He married Rebekah from Paddan-***Aram***. (Emphasis mine.) Paddan-Aram is Haran. It is the flatland area of Haran running along the Euphrates.
 - d. Genesis 28:1-5
 - i. ANSWER: We see again in these verses that the family of Abraham and his descendants continue to live in ***Aram***, and in particular around the city of Haran, which is also referred to as Paddan-Aram. (Emphasis mine.)
 - e. Genesis 31:20 and 24
 - i. ANSWER: These verses reference Laban as "the ***Aramean***." (Emphasis mine.)
 - f. Deuteronomy 26:5
 - i. ANSWER: In this passage, Joseph declares that "[his] father was a wandering ***Aramean***." (Emphasis mine.)

In summary, we can see that although Abram was living in the Amorite land of Ur of the Chaldees, he was likely not an Amorite. Rather, Abram and his family were Aramean from the area around Haran, the northwestern area of modern-day Syria by the Euphrates River.

To conclude our look at the geography, read Genesis 10:19 and answer the following question:

3. The Table of Nations describes how far the land of the Canaanites spread. Complete the following verse in Genesis 10:19: "...and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward _____."
 - a. ANSWER: "...Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, as far as Lasha." This verse, Genesis 10:19, indicates that Canaan stretched north-to-south from the land of Sidon to Gaza. Sidon is located in the southern part of Lebanon and in present times, we hear about the Gaza Strip, which is in the southern part of Israel. I have had the pleasure of having a hamburger in one of the McDonalds in Gaza City. Today, it is a bustling city on the southwest border of Israel. The references to Sodom, Gomorrah and so on place Canaan's original borders all the way to the east of modern day of Israel into the land of Jordan, running northward along the Jordan river. Sodom is located directly across the Jordan river from the city of Jericho, with Sodom's sister cities running northward up the Jordanian side of the Jordan river. The land of Canaan was the land that Joshua was to lead God's chosen people to conquer and occupy. It would become, and remains today, God's Promised Land for the Hebrews. Eventually, they displaced the Canaanites and David then led a united Israel into great years of conquest and prosperity—all in the land of Canaan described in Genesis Chapter 10.

As we learned in this lesson, the land that God will lead Abram/Abraham to travel was large. If we take the time to familiarize ourselves with this land and have a basic understanding of the geography, it will add depth to our understanding of Abraham, his call by God, and his great faith.

In the next lesson, we will briefly explore the gods of Abraham's day, their influence on life in Mesopotamia, and their subsequent influence on the Hebrews.

In Christ,

Wes