

DESPERATION AND FRUSTRATION: AVRAHAM'S SEARCH FOR A SUCCESSOR

I. WHO IS AVRAHAM? AND WHAT IS GOD'S ROLE IN HIS LIFE?

I. Genesis 11

26 When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.^A 27 Now this is the line of Terah:^B Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. 28 Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren, she had no child. 31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there.^C 32 The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

A. Genesis

4:1-2/5:3 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, ... She then bore his brother Abel. ... When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and he named him Seth.

6:10 Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

B. Genesis

2:4 Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. ...

6:9 This is the line of Noah ...

11:27 Now this is the line of Terah ...

25:19 This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham.

37:1-2 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. 2This, then, is the line of Jacob:

1. ספר בראשית פרק יא

כו וַיְחִי־תֵרַח שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן: א כז וְאַלֶּלֶה תּוֹלְדֹת תֵּרַח: ב תֵּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט: ג וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֵרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלְדֹתוֹ בְּאֹר כְּשָׂדִים: ד כט וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁת־נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַת־הָרָן אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וְאֲבִי יִסְכָּה: ה ל וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֵד: ו לא וַיִּקַּח תֵּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־הָרָן בֶּן־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כִּלְתּוֹ אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאֹר כְּשָׂדִים לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה פְּנִיעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: ז לב וַיְהִי יְמֵי־תֵרַח חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמֵאֹתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֵּרַח בְּחָרָן:

A. ספר בראשית

פרק ד פסוקים א-ב/ה:ג וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן ... וַתִּסֹּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל ... וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בְּדִמּוּתוֹ כְּצִלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת:

פרק ו פסוק י וַיֻּלְּדוּ נָח שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת:

B. ספר בראשית

פרק ב פסוק ד אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם ...

פרק ו פסוק ט אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ ...

פרק יא פסוק כז וְאַלֶּלֶה תּוֹלְדֹת תֵּרַח ...

פרק כה פסוק יט וְאַלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם ...

פרק לז פסוקים א-ב וַיָּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ פְּנִיעַן: א אֵלֶּה | תּוֹלְדֹת יַעֲקֹב ...

C. Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis 11:31*

Haran is situated some 550 miles northwest of Ur, about 10 miles north of the present-day Syrian-Turkish border on the left bank of the Balikh River. The name means “route, journey, caravan,” and it doubtless derives from the city’s location as an important station along the main international trade routes from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea. From the Mari archives it is clear that in the eighteenth century B.C.E. Haran was a center of seminomadic Amorite tribes. ... The reason for Terah’s detour is not given, but it may have had to do with Haran as a focus of the international donkey caravan trade and with the fact that both it and Ur were centers of the moon-god cult.

Genesis 12

1 The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.” 4 Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, **and Lot went with him.** Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, **and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran;**^D and they set out for the land of Canaan.

D. John Drane, *The World of the Bible* p. 53

Closer examination of the stories about **Abraham** reveals a pattern of life that reflects this semi-nomadic pastoral existence that is so well documented elsewhere. **Abraham** is clearly represented as one of the more successful nomads: he is the owner of large flocks and has considerable wealth at his disposal. Even the food he eats provides evidence for his prosperity: when a meal has to be prepared in haste to feed some unexpected visitors, it includes ‘cakes ... a calf ... curds and milk.’²¹ This menu is remarkably similar to the sort of food that was expected by Sinuhe, an Egyptian aristocrat who lived in Canaan for a while:

‘Bread was made for me as daily fare, wine as daily provision, cooked meat and roast fowl, beside the wild beasts of the desert ... and milk in every kind of cooking.’

TALE OF SINUHE

19. Joshua 24:2

20. Exodus 3:13–15

21. Genesis 18:6–8

ספר בראשית פרק יב

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: ב וְאַעֲשֶׂה לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְאַבְרָכָךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: ג וְאַבְרָכָה מִבְּרַכְיָךָ וּמִקְלָלָךָ אֲדָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה: ד וְיִלְךָ אִבְרָם כְּאִשֶּׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וְיִלְךָ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצִאתוֹ מִחָרָן: ה וַיִּקַּח אֲבִרָם אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רִכּוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בַּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן:

Like other well-to-do semi-nomads, **Abraham** and later members of his clan generally camped near to smallish settlements,²² sometimes staying for long enough to become farmers,²³ and at times of particular stringency they could even become city-dwellers for a while.²⁴ As the story unfolds, his descendants Isaac and Jacob gradually adopt a more settled existence until Jacob is persuaded to migrate permanently to Egypt²⁵ and adopt a far more urbanized lifestyle altogether. **Abraham** could also command large numbers of men, and was able to call on the services of what was in effect a private army, which he used to great effect in rescuing his nephew Lot from captivity.²⁶ The many kings mentioned in that connection correlate well with the description of the political organization described in a letter from Mari (a north Mesopotamian city-state) dating from shortly after 1800 BC:

Genesis 12

6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land. 7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." **And he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.** 8 From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and **he built there an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name.** 9 Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.^E 10 There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ... 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. ... 13:1 From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot. 2 Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. 3 And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, 4 **the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.**

E. Rashi

By stages: he stayed here a month or more, then travelled on and pitched his tent in another place. Yet all his journeys were towards the Negeb to proceed to the South of the land of Israel ...

ספר בראשית פרק יב

ו וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרֶה וַהֲכִנְעָנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ ז וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹזְרְעֹךָ אֶתְּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו: ח וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית-אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלָה בֵּית-אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעִי מִלְּקָדָם וַיִּבֶן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: ט וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם הַלּוֹךְ וְנוֹסֵעַ הַנִּגְבָּה:^E י וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִמָּה לְגִוּר שָׁם כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ. ... יז וַיִּנְגַע יְהוָה | אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דָּבָר שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם: ... [פרק יג] א וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַנִּגְבָּה: ב וַאֲבָרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב: ג וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמִסְעָיו מִנִּגְבַּ וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אֵהְלָה [אֵהְלוֹ] בְּתַחֲלָה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעִי: ד אֶל־מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרִאשֹׁנָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אַבְרָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

E. רש"י שם

לפרקים יושב כאן חודש או יותר, ונוסע משם ונוטה אהלו במקום אחר, וכל מסעיו הנגבה, ללכת לדרומה של ארץ ישראל ...