

Abram (Abraham)

- Abram and Abraham is the same person.
- His name was Abram up to Genesis 17:4 when God told him he would now be called Abraham.
- The primary source of Abraham is the narrative account given in Genesis 11:26-25
- He is mentioned by name more than 40 times in the Old Testament.
- The number of references by the New Testament exceeds 70.
- The etymology of the name of Abram is uncertain but the lengthened name Abraham bears the explanation “father of multitudes” (Genesis 17:5)

The life of Abraham

Ur in Chaldees, most generally identified as modern Tell el-Muqayyar, located nine miles west of Nasiriyeh on the Euphrates River in South Iraq, was the birthplace of Abram the son of Terah a descendant of Shem. Migrating approximately 600 miles North and West from Ur, Terah accompanied by his family settled in Haran located on the Balikh tributary of the Euphrates. (Genesis 11:26-32)

At 75 Abram, and his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all their possessions departed in response to God’s call for the land of Canaan (another 400 miles). Stopping enroute at Schechem and Bethel, Abram settled in the Negeb or South country, but due to a prevailing famine he continued into Egypt. When Sarai because of her beauty unduly attracted the interest of Pharaoh, divinely sent plagues brought about the release of Abram and Sarai. After this crisis Abram returned to the Negeb (Genesis 12:1-20)

Abram and Lot experienced an increase in wealth and that increase created an expedient separation. Abram magnanimously offered Lot the choice of territory with the result that Lot relocated in the sinful Jordan valley in the city of Sodom. As Abram settled in the Hebron area he received the divine promise of the land of Canaan for himself and his descendants who would be countless in number. (Genesis 13: 1-18). When Lot and the kings of the Jordan valley had the misfortune of being taken captive by invaders from the North, Abram and his allies overtook them at Dan, routing them beyond Damascus to rescue the captives. Upon his return Abram refused to accept rewards, but gave tithes to Melchizedek who was priest of the Most High God and king of Salem (14:1-24).

Although Eliezer of Damascus had been designated as his heir, Abram responded with faith when God assured him of a Son whose descendants would be as numberless as the stars and would become possessors of the land of Canaan. After a special sacrifice came the further revelation predicting Israel’s Egyptian enslavement and divine deliverance. God’s covenant with Abram provided assurance of ultimate possession of the Promised land for his posterity (15:1-21).

After a ten year residence in Canaan without visible prospects of having a son Sarai impatiently suggested that an heir could be procured for Abram through their Egyptian handmaid Hagar. Pregnant with Ishmael Hagar mocked barrenness with the consequence of being ostracized to the wilderness where an angel of the Lord came to her rescue. Upon her return she bore Ishmael to Abram when he was 86 years of age.

Significant was God's revelation to Abram thirteen years later. With the Covenant restated indicating that nations and kings would be heirs to these everlasting promises, God changed Abram's name to Abraham signifying that he was to be the father of a multitude of nations. Circumcision was established as the sign of the everlasting covenant.

With the divine promise of Isaac's birth Sarai's name was changed to Sarah. Subsequent to the divine revelation Abraham instituted the rite of circumcision in his household (17:1-27).

When Abraham was made aware of God's imminent judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, he made intercession for Lot who subsequently was rescued with his two daughters. From the plains of Mamre Abraham witnessed the terrible destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot escaped to Zoar where through incest, his daughters gave birth to Moab and Ammon whose descendants were known as Moabites and Ammonites (18:1-19:38).

Abraham migrated to Kadesh and Gerar where the local King Abimelech was divinely warned not to defile Sarah, but rather as Abraham as a prophet to intercede for him. With his life spared Abimelech greatly increased Abraham's wealth (20:1-18).

The promised heir Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah when the former was 100 years old. Although contrary to custom Abraham was divinely encouraged to expel Hagar with her son Ishmael, who exerted an unfavorable influence on Isaac. Miraculously, Hagar and her son were spared as they migrated to the wilderness of Paran with the assurance that Ishmael would become a great nation. After this Abraham made a treaty with Abimelech to secure rights to Beersheba as his dwelling place (21:1-34).

Severe and crucial was the crisis when it was divinely revealed to Abraham that he should sacrifice his only son Isaac. In obedience Abraham carried out the command to the point of actual sacrifice in the land of Moriah when a substitute ram offering was provided. Subsequently the covenantal promise was again confirmed. When Sarah died Abraham purchased a field with the cave of Machpelah in the Hebron area as a family burial place (22:1-23:20)

When Isaac was 40, Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to the city of Nabor in Mesopotamia to secure Rebekah, the daughter of Laban, as a wife for Isaac. Abraham designed Isaac as the sole heir to his possessions and the divinely revealed covenantal promise. Other sons born to Abraham were endowed with gifts and sent eastward by Abraham before his death. When Abraham died at the age of 175 he was buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah (24:1-25:18)