

Genesis 12:4-7

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Abram, his wife and nephew leave Haran and travel to Canaan. Abram builds an altar for the Lord in Canaan.

Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him, his obedience to God was immediate and unquestioning. Hebrews mentions the incredible faith that Abraham had in obeying God, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. It can be noted that Abram was with his father for 75 years, then without a father or son for 25 years, and finally 75 years with his son. Abram left his father and brother Nahor and his family in Haran. Haran was about 600 miles northwest from Ur and 400 miles northeast from Canaan (Palestine). Abram's journey of faith started in Ur and ended 1,500 miles later in Canaan. If we had been Abram's neighbor, we might not have known Abram was exercising great faith. To us, it might have just looked like he decided to move. We know it was great faith only because God tells us. He knows, because God knows the heart. He understands motives. What God counts as great faith might look like little to nothing to other people. But God knows the heart and judges its intents (Hebrews 4:12).

*Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew with him. As Lot's uncle, it is possible that Abram became responsible for him after Lot's father, Haran, died (Genesis 11:27-28). As a custom, the oldest uncle assumed the guardianship of the child of his dead brother. Abram migrated with *all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran* from Northern Mesopotamia to Canaan. Abram had under his authority a substantial number of men and servants, many of whom may have been herdsmen (Genesis 13:7). Genesis 14:14 mentions 318 trained men *born in his household*. Abram was already well-to-do before he went to Egypt and received gifts from the pharaoh. Abram was willing to put what he had already accumulated at risk to follow God's command.*

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem. The most likely route for Abram to have followed would have taken him south through Damascus, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and then on to Shechem.

Shechem was an important city located in the center of Canaan at the strategic pass between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim in the plain of Moreh. It was Abram's first residence in the land. The site of Shechem is the modern Tel Balatah about forty-one miles north of Jerusalem. It is mentioned in the Egyptian Execration Texts and in the Khu-Sebek inscription, which both date to the 19th century B.C., roughly the time of Abraham. With large herds, Abram probably camped away from urban populations in such places as the *Oak of Moreh*. They could wander with their herds in good pastures without intruding on the rights of others.

It is to be noted that Shechem seems to have been particularly rich in traditions about trees of special significance. Jacob hid idolatrous accessories "under the oak that was near Shechem" ([Genesis 35:4](#)); Joshua "took a great stone and set it up at the foot of the oak in the sacred precinct of the Lord" in Shechem ([Joshua 24:26](#)); Abimelech was proclaimed king of that city "at the oak of the pillar" ([Judges 9:6](#)). All these may refer to one and the same tree. *The Canaanite was then in the land* so Abram could not take immediate possession of the land promised to him because it was already occupied.

The Lord appeared to Abram and reiterated the promise, *to your descendants I will give this land*, although Abram is still childless. *He built an altar there to the Lord* at Shechem, before moving further to the south. He acknowledged that the land of Canaan belonged to God ([Exodus 20:24](#); [Joshua 22:19](#)). Abram also built altars at Bethel, Hebron, and Mount Mariah ([Genesis 12:8](#), [13:18](#), [22:9](#)). Altars were very common during the patriarchal period because there was not a central sanctuary before the exodus from Egypt. Until the construction of the Tabernacle, altars were places where God could be encountered in worship ([Exodus 20:24](#)).

Biblical Text:

⁴ So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶ Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.