

Hashem tells Avram to go to Canaan.

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרָי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ
 אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן:

“And Avram took Sara, his wife, and Lot, his nephew, and all the wealth that they amassed; along with the soul they made in Charan. And they went out to go to the Land of Canaan. And they came to the Land of Canaan.” (Bereishis 12:5).

This pasuk is curious on several points. Sara and Lot are both proper nouns (preceded by אַת). What is the pasuk including? It commences with “Avram took” and then it mentions *their* wealth and the soul that *they* made. Why the change? Then it says *they went out to go to the Land of Canaan* and it finishes *they came to the Land of Canaan*. Why not just say, they went out and made it to Canaan? Also, how did they know Canaan was the destination? Finally, what is this life or soul that they made in Charan?

Gemara Avodah Zarah 9a says, *the souls that they made refers to men and women who Avram and Sara brought closer to Hashem. This is the beginning timeline of the Torah.*

Gemara Avos d’Rabbi Nasan 12:8 explains, *they didn’t actually make people. However, bringing them closer to Torah is creating their soul, figuratively.*

This is also found in Gemara Sanhedrin 99b, *anyone who teaches Torah to the son of another is as if he formed that son’s soul.*

Gemara Megillah 14a says, *Sara was Lot’s brother. She is “Yiskah” mentioned in the pasuk. (Bereishis 11:29).* This is curious. First, the Torah mentions that Lot was Haran’s son. (Ibid 11:27). Then, it says Haran was the father of Milcah and Yiskah (Ibid 11:29) but does not mention Lot. This Gemara is saying that Yiskah is not another name for Lot but was another child – Sara.

Rashi says, *“made” means acquired. It refers to their manservants and maidservants.*

Ibin Ezra says, *rechusham is their wealth – cattle. “The souls” refers to servants.*

Sforno says, *the Land of Canaan was known as a religious land, where they can worship their Lord without hinderance.* This is corroborated by the encounter with Melchizedek who was a worshiper of the “Lord on High.” (Bereishis 14:18). Avram refers to Hashem as “the Lord on High.” (Ibid 14:22). *“They came to Canaan.” Unlike Terach who stopped at Charan.*

Radak says, *Lot preferred Avram’s company so he left his grandfather to finish the travel to Canaan. The wealth was both his and Avram’s, thus the plural. “They left to go” because they had the mindset already to leave. With Avram they arrived in Canaan.*

“And Avram took.” וַיִּקַּח “and he took” is a term of transaction. He did not take by force but he exchanged something with them for coming along with him. He gave them

a partnership in the blessings. “I will make you into a great nation...you will be blessed...all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” (Bereishis 12:2-3). Hashem only told this to Avram. Avram shared this for the company of Sara and Lot.

“Sara, his wife.” Sara does not have a stated lineage in the Torah. “Avram and Nachor took for themselves wives; the name of Avram’s wife was Sara.” (Ibid 11:29). It cannot be, like the Gemara Megillah suggests, *supra*, that Sara is Yiskah. The pasuk continues “and the name of Nachor’s wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran.” (Ibid). It does not say “daughters” implying that only Milcah was a daughter of Haran – who also had another child, Yiskah. (Ibid). Nachor’s wife has lineage, but Sara is a mystery. אִשְׁת־סָרָה means Sara as a proper noun. He didn’t just go with his wife, Sara. We already knew Sara was his wife. (Ibid). It means Sara came with Avram not merely as a wife, but the women who will be the mother of a nation, the foremother of Yisroel. Avram shared the blessings with her and it is this mother of Yisroel who came.

“And Lot, his nephew.” Lot would also be a father of two nations, Amon and Moav. Neither of these nations were to be conquered by Yisroel (Devarim 2:9). It was not just Lot the nephew that went, it was the ward of Avram (see Bereishis 11:28) and the father of nations. That is why it says אָם.

“And all their wealth.” Their wealth was chattels and cattle. They were rich with cattle, silver, and gold. (Ibid 13:2). The great test that Hashem put Avram through was leaving the fertile crescent of the Euphrates River in Charan, Aramea. “And I took your forefather, Avraham, from the other side of the River.” (Yehoshua 24:3). The Euphrates runs through Aramea (Padan-Aram or Naham NeArayim) and Charan is on its bank. Avraham left there to a land that is mostly desert. “He continued traveling south.” (Bereishis 12:9). He left the lush north of Canaan for the dry south. He was forced to leave the south because there was a famine. (Ibid 12:10). He went to Mitzrayim because the Mitzrayim district of the Land of Mitzrayim (the north) is lush land fed by the Nile. (See *ibid*). Avram then left Mitzrayim. Please note: this entire episode only calls it “Mitzrayim.” This is because he did not go to the consolidated *Land of Mitzrayim*, as it may not have already been consolidated. Remember, this is just years (or even just a couple of centuries) after the Tower of Bavel incident when world travel to the west commenced. Further, his purpose was to graze in the north – the Mitzrayim district, in Lower Egypt – where the Nile made the land vibrant and fit for grazing.

Avram did not leave Mitzrayim because the famine was over. He left because of the episode with Sara and Pharaoh. (Ibid 12:20). He also believed he can go to Mitzrayim – leave Canaan – because he already traveled the entire land. (Ibid 12:7-9). When he came up from Mitzrayim, he and Lot had to find separate places to graze because of their mass amount of cattle was too much for the arid land. (Ibid 13:6). Lot chose the rich grazing on the Yarden River, by Sodom (at the time there was no Dead Sea there). (Ibid 13:10). This is the wealth that the pasuk refers to.

“That they amassed.” There is a lot of Avram’s life that is missing in the Torah, much akin to Moshe’s early years. However, he certainly amassed a lot of wealth in Charan. All three of Terach’s children became great. Nachor had a city in Aramea. (Ibid 24:10). This could be why Nachor did not go with Terach to Charan. (Ibid 11:31). Lot

fathered two nations. Avram fathered several nations including Yisroel, Midian, and Yishmael. Either Lot also amassed the wealth or Avram shared it with him when he “took” him on the travels to the Land of Canaan.

“And the soul that they made in Charan.” *שׂוּפָּוּ* can mean “souls” as in the category of all souls of beast on earth, when it says *שׂוּפָּוּ לְכָל*. (Ibid 9:15). However, that is when it refers to the *entire* category of living souls or beasts. In the pasuk’s context, “the soul” refers to one in particular. It cannot be referring to a child, as that is an awkward phrase to be used for a child. This “nefesh” is referred to elsewhere. The king of Sodom wanted “the nefesh” in exchange for all the loot of the war. (Ibid 14:21). This “soul” was certainly someone very important. It is Eliezer, the Damascene. Damascus is on the way from Haran to Canaan. It is possible he was a runaway and Avram and Sara built him up and gave him purpose. They “made” his soul, adopted him. He could also be the “fugitive” that informs Avram about Lot’s capture.¹ (Ibid 13:13). It is feasible that Eliezer came with them and then went with Lot when Avram and Lot split up. Or, he could have been sent by Avram to protect Lot. He then came back to give news to Avram. He was so vital that the king of Sodom would trade all booty for him. And later, Avram refers to him as his entire household, his sole heir. (Ibid 15:2).

“And they went out in order to travel to the Land of Canaan.” This was Avram finishing his father’s mission. (Ibid 11:31). Also, they could not simply go to the Land of Canaan. They had to go out and leave their past life behind. This was not a temporary trip where they can return. This was them leaving, a final exit. A question though, is Hashem said He would show them a land. (Ibid 12:1). How did they know that the destination was Canaan?

“And they came to the Land of Canaan.” They arrived there and they were there to fulfil their purpose. Note: Hashem merely promised to take them a land He will show them. (Ibid 12:1). This pasuk is informing that their destination was Canaan. How did Avram know this? It was because his father already wanted him to go to Canaan but they got bogged down in Charan. (Ibid 11:31). Nothing in life is chance. Avram knew he was correct when Hashem promised him the entire land. (Ibid 12:7). Canaan was already a destined land to Terach’s family. Avram reached there and received the blessings for himself and his progeny.

¹ I think a better explanation of the ‘fugitive’ is Moshe. Moshe is the only other person in the Chumash that was a fugitive. (Shmos 2:15). Therefore, it appears to me that Eliezer was a preincarnation of Moshe. That is why he is referred to as “soul” because he was Moshe’s soul.

BONUS SHTIKEL

Who was Avram and why did he benefit in the blessings? The Torah says painfully little about Avram's early life. However, a fine reading teaches enough to know who he was and why Hashem chose him.

We know he was the tenth generation after Noach. (Bereishis 11:26). Also, Terach was an important person. After Noach, the Torah says אֵלֶּה הַיְּלִדָה תְּרַח "These are the progeny of Terach." (Ibid 11:27). His important purpose in life was fathering Avram, Nachor, and Haran. (Ibid). Avram was the oldest son of the oldest son direct descendant of Shem. (Shem was Noach's oldest and his oldest son begot an oldest son who begot... Terach, who was the oldest, who begot Avram, the oldest).

Another important feature about Avram was that all three of Terach's children became great. Haran died early, but his son, Lot, fathered Amon and Moav. Nachor had his own city, the City of Nachor in Aram. Avram fathered several nations, including Yisroel, Yishmael, and Midian. This is what the pasuk means when it says, "Terach begot Avram, Nachor, and Haran; Haran begot Lot." (Ibid). Each line became great.

For some reason, Terach chose the Land of Canaan as a destination. (11:31). They only made it as far as Charan, though. (Ibid). They left their homeland of Ur Kasdim (Ur of the Chaldees). (Ibid). Ur is one of two places. Either it is in southern Iraq, in the heart of Mesopotamia – south of Bavel; or it is in the mountains just south of Ararat, in modern day southern Turkey, in the Kurdistan Mountains. The latter is correct. First, the ancient city of Ur found in Iraq is on the west side of the Euphrates River. We know that Avraham came from "the other side of the [Euphrates] River." (Yehoshua 24:3). The Euphrates runs southeast to northwest through Iraq (ancient day Mesopotamia) to Turkey. Avram would then have to cross it to go southwest to Canaan. Further, the Kasdim (Chaldeans) are known to live north of Aram. Thus, Ur may have been a city near Bavel. However, Ur Kasdim was another city of Ur, that of the Chaldeans, in northern Mesopotamia, north of Padam-Aram. This would also make the pasuk make sense. "Go forth for yourself from your land, and your birthplace." (Ibid 12:1). If he left Ur and went to Charan how can Charan be his birth place? The answer is, Ur is a city in the same lands as Charan is.

What is important about Canaan as the destination is the purpose in going and the sacrifice of leaving. "They left to go to the Land of Canaan *and* they came to the Land of Canaan." (Ibid 12:5). Leaving was as significant as arriving. Terach's family was rich. They were rich in cattle. Therefore, they needed a constant water supply to feed their animals. More than a well they needed land that was vibrant and fertile. They needed lush vegetation to feed all their cattle. Ur, either in Iraq or Turkey, met that requirement. It was on the Euphrates River. That is why Terach got bogged down in Charan. Charan was in lush Aram.

Avram, however, had Hashem's command and he went. He finished the journey to Canaan. He didn't even stay in the luscious green northern part. He went all the way south. (Ibid 12:9) to the arid part of the country. He was forced to go to Mitzrayim where the grazing next to the Nile was suitable, only to be forced back to Canaan. This was the adversity they faced in leaving. What was the purpose in going?

As the eldest of the eldest of the eldest, going back to Shem, Avram carried a tradition and a calling. Especially as Ur Kasdim is located in the north of Mesopotamia, it is just south of Ararat. Ararat is where Noah settled after the deluge. Both Noah and Shem were still alive during Avram's lifetime. Avram would be young, but he could have met Noah. He certainly had time to learn from Shem. Noah saw Adam in his lifetime. Thus, Avraham had a direct connection straight back to the beginning of mankind, the origination of the tradition. The destiny of the Land of Canaan as a promised land could have been passed down to Avram—certainly to Terach—from the sources itself. The Land of Canaan was also significant for another reason.

This could be why Terach wanted to go to the Land of Canaan and it could answer curious wording in the pesukim. Noah got drunk sometime after the deluge. (Ibid 9:21). He became uncovered in his tent. (Ibid). "And Cham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and he told his two brothers outside." (Ibid 9:22). Cham was wrong for going into Noah's private quarters, in the tent, uninvited. The reason for privacy was apparent. Instead of leaving the situation alone he told his two brothers. They covered him without looking. (Ibid 9:23). Noah knew what his little son *did to him*. (Ibid 9:24). The result was he cursed Cham's son. (Ibid 9:25).

This episode seems perplexing. What did Cham do to Noah besides see? Why did Shem and Yafes have to cover their father up if he was in his own tent? Finally, why was Canaan cursed, not Cham? The answer is in the fine reading of the pesukim. Cham—the father of Canaan—saw, mistaken or otherwise. Canaan, his son, was involved in this episode. Then instead of leaving it alone, Cham revealed it outside—publicly—to his brothers. Seeing that their father was vulnerable—while drunk—even in his own tent, they took action and the two older sons covered him up. Then Noah sobered up. (It did not say he was sleeping. He was drunk and now came to his wits).

וַיִּקָּם נֹחַ מִיֵּגְוֹנוֹ וַיִּדַע אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה-לּוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן; "And Noah got up from his drunken stupor, and he knew that which was done to him by *his* small son." (Ibid 9:24). אֶת reveals a significant deed was done to him (making the deed a proper noun). בְּנוֹ "his son" refers to Cham's son. The Torah starts with Cham seeing. It ends, still using Cham as the pronoun, *his son*. Canaan was Cham's little son. What was done is not stated. However, Canaan knew from his father that his grandfather was vulnerable and took advantage. Noah cursed Canaan.

Terach knew that Canaan was cursed. The curse was that he should be a slave among slaves to Shem. (Ibid 9:26). Therefore, Terach may have wanted to go to Canaan to conquer it or take it from Canaan. If Canaan was a slave to Shem and Terach was the eldest son of the eldest son, etc. of Shem, then Canaan was to be his slave. However, Terach got bogged down in Charan because the care of his cattle came first.

Avram was willing to leave the welfare of his possessions and wealth and go to a land that is unfit for grazing. Not the lush north but even the arid south. He was willing to do what his father did not. He left the comfort of Charan and went to the Land of Canaan. However, he did not come as a conqueror. Hashem instructed go "To a land that I will show you." (Ibid 12:1). The destination was no secret, this was mere instructions

about purpose when going to the land. *I am just going to show you the land. Others will conquer it.*

Avram came in peace and awaited Hashem's instructions. He knew of the curse to Canaan and knew that Canaan had to be his subservient. That is why "Avram settled in the Land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plains." (Ibid 13:12). Avram did not go all the way to the Yarden. He stayed in the lands of Canaan knowing that his purpose was to secure this land from Canaan. He bided his time and waited for Hashem's instructions. Avram was the next in line to be Canaan's master. Hashem promised him better: after a sojourn of a few centuries, his children will return and evict and destroy Canaan. (Hence the importance of making Yitzchok the *only* eldest son, and Yaakov's need to acquire the eldest title).

This gives some insight into who Avram was and why he was destined for Hashem's blessings, and to be the future lord of the land.