

(6) Avram traveled through the Land until he came to the area of Shechem, to Elon Moreh; at that time the Canaanites were in the Land.

(7) God appeared to Avram and said, “I will give this land to your offspring.” [Avram] built an altar there to God Who had appeared to him.

(8) He moved on from there to the mountains east of Beis-El and set up his tent, with Beis-El to the west and Ai to the east, and he built there an altar to God and called out in God’s Name.

God’s bidding. God was simply telling him the great differences between living in *chutz la’aretz* and in Eretz Yisrael, informing him that he would be able to come much closer to the Divine Presence in the holy atmosphere of the Land of Israel than in the impure lands of the nations. [This answers Question 1.]

But lest someone come away with the mistaken impression that Avram chose to obey God’s command because of the blessings he had been promised, the Torah testifies that this was not the case. *And Avram went as God had told him* — he went only because God had commanded him, not because of any promise of reward. [This answers Question 6.]

AVRAM RECEIVES TWO GIFTS

Consider the following questions:

1. Why do we need to be told so precisely where God appeared to Avram (*Elon Moreh*, which is in the area of *Shechem*)?
2. Why do we need to know at this point that *the Canaanites were in the Land*? What connection does this have to the rest of the narrative?

(ו) וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שָׁכֵם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרָה וְהִכְנִיעַנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ.

(ז) וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתְּנָה אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיְבָן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו.

(ח) וַיַּעֲתֵק מִשָּׁם הַהֵרָה מְקֹדֶם לְבֵית-אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלֵה בֵּית-אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעִי מְקֹדֶם וַיְבָן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'.

3. Since verse 7 begins, *Hashem appeared to Avram*, is it not superfluous to then say in the very same verse that *he built an altar there “to God Who had appeared to him”*?
4. Why do we need to be told so precisely where Avram set up the second altar (“*with Beis-El to the west and Ai to the east*“)?
5. Once we know that Avram built an altar to God, what is the Torah adding by saying that Avram “*called out in God’s Name*“?

In the opening *pesukim* of our chapter (verses 1–5) we learned about the spiritual advantages of living in the Land of Israel. The current passage comes to teach that the Jewish people’s ability to dwell there depends on their keeping the Torah, for Hashem especially designated Eretz Yisrael as the place where the Torah was to be observed.¹⁹ Thus *Devarim* 11:31–32 states, *You are crossing the Jordan River to come and inherit the Land which God is giving you ... and you shall be careful to keep all the rules and laws which I am placing before you today*. In other words, you are inheriting the Land in order to keep the commandments of the

19. See Alshich to *Devarim* 11:31.

Torah. The current passage also teaches the great spiritual merit that the Jewish people receive by observing the Torah.

With this introduction, we may begin to answer our questions.

Avram was destined to receive two specific gifts when he entered Eretz Yisrael. The first was that God would appear to him rather than just speak to him (see commentary on the end of 12:1). The second was the promise that the Land would be given as an eternal inheritance to his offspring. And he received both these gifts in Elon Moreh, as our passage says, *Avram traveled through the Land until he came to the area of Shechem, to Elon Moreh... God appeared to Avram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring."*

But Avram entered Eretz Yisrael from the north. To get to Elon Moreh, he had to walk more than halfway through the length of the country! Why did Hashem wait until Avram specifically reached Elon Moreh?

Despite the holiness of Eretz Yisrael, something still blocked God, as it were, from appearing to Avram when he first arrived in the country: namely, the fact that *the Canaanites were in the Land* — for the Canaanites had filled the Land with idolatry and, therefore, impurity. Elon Moreh was the “antidote” to this obstacle, for this was where the Jewish people (in the time of Yehoshua) would dedicate themselves to fulfilling the Torah, through the acceptance of a series of blessings and curses, as it says, *You shall declare the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eival. They are across the Jordan... at Elon Moreh (Devarim 11:29–30).*²⁰ Avram needed to reach that specific place so that he would not only have the merit of being in Eretz Yisrael,

20. God commanded that when the Jewish nation would cross the Jordan River and enter Eretz Yisrael, the people should set up twelve large stones at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival and write upon them the essence of the entire Torah in 70 languages. On that occasion, they should offer sacrifices and accept the Torah upon themselves through a series of blessings and curses (see *Devarim 27:1–26* with Rashi to verse 8; *Yehoshua 4:1–9* with Rashi to verse 3; *Sotah 37b*).

but also the merit of the Torah that his descendants were destined to accept there. The joint merit of Eretz Yisrael and Torah would enable him to overcome the barrier that was preventing God from appearing to him. [This answers Questions 1 and 2.]

Answer to
Questions
1 and 2

As soon as he arrived at Elon Moreh, *God appeared to Avram*. In order to emphasize that this was the first time that God actually appeared to Avram rather than just speaking to him, the Torah states, [Avram] *built an altar there to God* “Who had appeared to him.” [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

It is also in Elon Moreh that God tells Avram, “I will give this land to your offspring” (verse 7). It is through the merit of the Torah, which the Jewish people were destined to accept in Elon Moreh, that they deserved to inherit the Land of Israel — the place that God specifically designed and designated for the performance of mitzvos, because of its great holiness and its direct connection to the higher worlds. [This further answers Question 1.]

Further
Answer to
Question 1

Avram then saw with his prophetic vision that there were two places, fairly close to each other, where the Jewish people were destined to sin in two different ways. Each had the potential to threaten the viability of one of the two gifts God had just given him (God’s revelation and the inheritance of the Land). In one place, Israel would drive away holiness and bring impurity in its place — the antithesis of what was needed in order to achieve the gift of God’s revelation (as explained above). That place was Beis-El, where Yerav’am, the wicked king of Israel, would erect a golden calf as an object of worship.²¹ In a second place, Israel was destined to suffer an unanticipated setback in their efforts to conquer the Land in the time of Yehoshua — the antithesis of

21. After the death of King Shlomo, Yerav’am rebelled against Rechav’am (Shlomo’s son and successor) and formed a separate kingdom in northern Israel. So that his subjects would not go to worship in Yerushalayim (which was part of his rival’s kingdom), he set up two temples with golden calves — one in the south, in Beis-El, and one in the north, in Dan (see *Melachim I*, Ch. 12).

(10) There was a famine in the Land and Avram went down to Egypt to reside there, since the famine was very severe in the Land.

(11) And it was as he approached Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know now that you are a beautiful woman.

(12) “It will come to pass that the Egyptians will see you, and they will say, ‘This is his wife,’ and they will kill me and keep you alive.

a smooth inheritance of the Land by Avram’s progeny. This was Ai, where Israel was defeated by a small fighting force,²² thus putting into question their ability to conquer and take possession of Eretz Yisrael.

Avram therefore did what he could to prevent these two sins from threatening the ability of his descendants to experience the revelation of God and inherit the Land. Firstly, he *set up his tent* between the two cities where events were going to occur that threatened Israel — *with Beis-El to the west and Ai to the east, and he built there an altar to God*, hoping that by doing so in that specific location, he would counteract the damaging effect (in Ai) of Achan’s sin²³ and enable Israel to succeed in their conquest of the Land. Secondly, he *called out in God’s Name*, attempting to counteract the damage that would occur when his descendants would call out there (in Beis-El) in the name of idolatry at the time of Yerav’am.²⁴ [This answers Questions 4 and 5.]

Answer to
Questions
4 and 5

22. Just before Yehoshua led the Jewish people to their miraculous victory at Yericho, he declared that all the spoils would be sacred property, dedicated to God. However, a man named Achan secretly stole some gold, silver, and fine clothing and, as a result, the Jews suffered a humiliating defeat in their next battle against the relatively insignificant city of Ai (see *Yehoshua* Chs. 6–7). The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 43b–44a discusses why all of Israel shared in the blame for Achan’s actions.

23. See *Sanhedrin* 44b, where Rav Elazar attests that Avram’s prayers in this place saved the Jewish people from a much greater disaster at the battle of Ai.

24. The Alshich adds that the Jewish people were drawn more to the golden calf in Dan than the one in Beis-El (see *Melachim I* 12:29–30 with Radak and Abarbanel),