

Pre-Tutorial HANDOUT: Traditions about Israel's Pre-Monarchal Period and Early Monarchy

The traditions about the ancestors of Israel were built *freely* on numerous oral traditions. Much more than just a game of telephone. The following exercise aims to illustrate this. (see pp. 39-42 in Carr, *Intro.*)

Background: scholars have observed parallels between three stories where a patriarch, whether Abraham or Isaac, passes his wife off to foreigners as his sister and she is later rescued: Gen 12:10-20 (Abraham and Sarah in Egypt), Gen 20 (Abraham and Sarah in Philistine Gerar), and Gen 26:6-11 (Isaac and Rebekah in Philistine Gerar). The latter parallels are continued by parallel narratives about well disputes between the patriarch and the Philistine king, Abimelech, and his general Phicol, concluding with a covenant at Beer-Sheba (with 'Sheba' interpreted as 'oath' though the root also can relate to 'seven').

Part 1 - Instructions: underline parallel elements in the narratives below. Be prepared to discuss how much of an earlier oral tradition seems to be reconstructable behind these two narratives.

Traditions about <i>Abraham</i> in Gerar Gen.	Traditions about <i>Isaac</i> in Gerar (coastal)
<p>20:1 Abraham left there for the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While staying in Gerar,</p> <p>2 Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister,' and Abimelech the king of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.</p> <p>3 But God visited Abimelech in a dream one night. 'You are to die,' he told him, 'because of the woman you have taken, for she is a married woman.'</p> <p>[Gen 20:4-13 Abimelech's protest to God, God's reply with call to return Abe's wife to him,] Abimelech's complaint to Abe [20:9b]</p> <p>"What have you done to us? What wrong have I done you, for you to bring such guilt on me and on my kingdom? You had no right to treat me like this. 10 Abimelech then said, "What possessed you to do a thing like this?</p> <p>11 'Because', Abraham replied, 'I thought there would be no fear of God here and that I should be killed for the sake of my wife. 12 Anyway, she really is my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's, besides being my wife. 13 So when God made me wander far from my father's home I said to her, "There is an act of love you can do me: everywhere we go, say of me that I am your brother.'"</p> <p>[No parallel in this story to Isaac gaining riches through being blessed in his farming by Yhwh. Instead, here Abimelech gives riches to Abraham and in return, Abe prays for him and a previously unreported plague of barrenness in Abimelech's house is ended!]</p> <p>[Gen 21:22-24 oath scene where Abimelech and Phicol get Abraham to swear that he will act honestly with them.]</p>	<p>Gen. 26:6 So Isaac stayed at Gerar.</p> <p>Gen. 26:7 When the people of the place asked him about his wife he replied, 'She is my sister,' for he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife,' thinking, 'The people of the place will kill me because of Rebekah, since she is beautiful.' 8 When he had been there some time, Abimelech the Philistine king happened to look out of the window and saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. 9 Abimelech summoned Isaac and said to him, 'Surely she must be your wife! How could you have said 'She is my sister? Isaac replied, "Because I thought I'd be killed on her account."</p> <p>10 Abimelech said, "What a thing to do to us! One of the people might easily have slept with your wife. We should have incurred guilt, thanks to you."</p> <p>[Gen 26 does not have Isaac replying to Abimelech here, but earlier in 26:7 the story says "When the people of the place asked him [Isaac] about his wife he replied, 'She is my sister,' for he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife,' thinking, 'The people of the place will kill me because of Rebekah, since she is beautiful.' This is similar to the version of the story about Abraham where tells Sarah to lie to Egyptians about being his wife, Gen 12:11-13]</p> <p>[26:11 Abimelech orders protection for Sarah]</p> <p>Gen. 26:12 Isaac sowed his crops in that country, and that year he reaped a hundredfold. Yhwh blessed him and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he was very rich indeed. 14 He acquired flocks and herds and a large retinue. The Philistines began to envy him.</p> <p>[Gen 26:15-22 Report of a series of well disputes between Philistines of Abimelech and Isaac, with Isaac reopening wells dug by Abraham and supposedly stopped up by Philistines (a way to coordinate this tradition with Gen 21!).]</p>

<p>Gen. 21:25 Abraham then reproached Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 'I do not know who has done this,' Abimelech said. 'You yourself have never mentioned it to me and, for myself, I heard nothing of it till today.'</p> <p>27 Abraham then took sheep and cattle and presented them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. 28 Abraham put seven lambs of the flock on one side. 29 'Why have you put these seven lambs on one side?' Abimelech asked Abraham. 30 He replied, 'You must accept these seven lambs from me as evidence that I have dug this well.'</p> <p>31 This was why the place was called Beersheba: because there the two of them swore an oath. 21:32-34 [Philistines return, Abraham stays.]</p>	<p>Gen. 26:23 From there he went up to Beersheba. [Gen 26:24-25 report of Yhwh appearing to Isaac at night, promising blessing and protection to him, and Isaac building an altar at Beer-Sheba]</p> <p>Gen. 26:26 Abimelech came from Gerar to see him, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. 27 Isaac said to them, 'Why do you come to me since you hate me, and have made me leave you?' 28 'It became clear to us that Yhwh was with you,' they replied, 'and so we thought, "It is time to have a treaty sworn between us, between us and you." So let us make a covenant with you: 29 that you will not do us any harm, since we never molested you but were unfailingly kind to you and let you go away in peace. Henceforth, Yhwh's blessing on you!' 30 He then made them a feast and they ate and drank.</p> <p>Gen. 26:31 Early next morning, they exchanged oaths. Then Isaac bade them farewell and they left him as friends. 32 It happened, the same day, that Isaac's servants brought him news about the well they had been digging. 'We have found water!' they said to him. 33 So he called the well Sheba, and hence the town is named Beersheba to this day.</p>
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Part 2 – Instruction (looking for how an oral tradition *like* these might be read in pre-state context): Gen 25:29-34; 27:1-45; 30:25-43 (Jacob with Laban's flocks); 31:22-42 (focus on 33-42 with Rachel on father's gods) - **Question:** How might story x have been heard at time of Deborah? ...