Section One: From the Narrative Books

10. THE ANCESTRESS OF ISRAEL IN DANGER

The books Genesis to II Kings, which in the Hebrew canon are known collectively as the Torah and the Former Prophets, are the oldest of all transmitted material, and are predominately of a descriptive nature. The influence of these stories has been tremendous, and not only upon Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan thinking. This is because of their astounding directness which, even after all this time, still has the power to stir the hearts of hearers, scholars and simple people alike. This plainness is by no means awkward or ungainly. Indeed it is profoundly and unwaveringly directed upon the essential problems of human existence.

These narratives have been arranged in the form of a continuous account of the period from the creation until the Babylonian exile. However, a close look will quickly reveal that most passages were originally independent short stories complete in themselves, which on the whole are only loosely linked to each other. The fact that they were previously separate narratives is evident from the way in which individual stories about Abraham, Moses or Joshua are taken out of their context and are used quite independently of each other in church-service pericopes, or in the instruction of young people in the Christian church, or even in Western art. This would by no means occur as a matter of course. Where a written work is all of a piece such as St Luke's Acts (or, outside the Bible, the Greek tragedies), it is much more difficult to select individual passages.

Form-critical research is not only concerned with an accurate definition of the outline of ancient narrative units but it also attempts to achieve a better understanding of them by looking into their setting in life and the changes they undergo over a period of time. Therefore to provide the reader with a firm basis to start from it is best to begin by looking at narratives which crop up twice or even three times. There are a few examples of this in the Old Testament, although not as many as in the Jesus narratives.

The story of the ancestress of Israel in danger occurs three times in Genesis (xii. 10–xiii. 1, xx. 1 ff., xxvi. 1 ff.) and is also found in late Israelite literature. It is therefore very suitable material for a first form-critical study.

A. Defining the Unit

And there was a famine in the land:

and Abram went down into Egypt and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur;

to sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land.

And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister; for he feared to say, My wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebeckah: because she was fair to look upon.

And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:

sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father;

and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these lands; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

And Isaac dwelt in Gerar.

And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, My wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebeckah: because she was fair to look upon.

And Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, because of the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

Said he not himself unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.

And God said unto him in the dream, Yes, I know that in the integrity of thy heart thou
A
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hast done this, and I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

7 Now therefore restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.

8 And Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.

9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and wherein have I sinned against thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.

10 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?

11 And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

12 And moreover she is indeed my sister, and daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife:

13 and it came to pass ("ת") , when God caused me to wander (xii. 1 And Abram went up out of Egypt . . . into the South)

B
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18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so that I took her to be my wife:

10 And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee; and in respect of all thou art righted.

17 And Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

13 And the man waxed great, and grew more and more until he became very great.

C
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from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.

14 And Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants, and gave them to Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

15 And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

Narrative A begins: 'And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land.'

To the modern reader this is an unsatisfactory beginning to an independent
narrative. Which land is referred to? Who is Abraham, the central figure? But the Hebrews do not like full expositions; they prefer to go directly to the heart of the matter, as in the book of Job, or Ruth. Moreover Abraham was naturally a familiar figure to them. And then form criticism cannot be applied to a translation: when the translation says, 'the land' we ask 'Which land?' But when it is וֹּאֶפֶּן, without any closer definition, it is quite clear to any Israelite that the land referred to is Palestine. And to him it is very natural for a Palestinian to journey to Egypt at a time of famine, for Egypt has the Nile for its water supply and is not dependent upon rain. It therefore has means of sustenance when, as frequently happened, those in Palestine were starving though lack of rain. But the most important fact that a study of the introduction in the Hebrew text reveals is that the introductory clause 'And there was . . . ' or 'It came to pass' (לפי) is a much-used method of starting off a narrative (cf. xxvi. 1, 14; but also vi. 1; xi. 2; I Sam. i. 1, etc.). The phrase is then repeated with a time-indication at the start of a new scene (verses 11, 14; I Sam. xviii. 6,10, etc.). So for an Israelite verse 10 is a completely satisfactory beginning to a story. It tells all. The well-known figure of the patriarch has journeyed to a foreign, hostile country, where he has only the limited rights of a sojourner. This provides the basis for the story as it immediately develops. And the conclusion? Pharaoh bids Abraham, 'Now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way', and the narrator concludes, 'And Pharaoh gave men charge concerning him: and they brought him on the way, and his wife, and all that he had.' This ends the narrative very satisfactorily. The Hebrew often ends a tale with a speech which is intended to abate the suspense, and a subsequent short narrative remark on the further fate of the hero (Gen. ii. 23 f., iv. 15 f., xi. 7–9, etc.).

The context in which A stands also indicates that it was once a complete unit. Chapter xii. 1–9, which immediately precedes it, describes Abraham leaving his home at the command of God, and with his promise, to go into an unknown land. He arrives in Palestine, and there he founds two sanctuaries, in Shechem and Bethel. At this point A begins. This is odd. For now Abraham wanders out of Palestine, just after God had said to him in Bethel, 'Unto thy seed will I give this land' (verse 7). So Abraham unhappily leaves the land which according to the text has just been given him. Why is it that the author inserted this story at this point? It is a matter which will concern us later; here it is sufficient to say that the link between the two tales is loose. A look at what happens in chapter xiii, which follows the tale, will show even more clearly that the author has squeezed the story in its present position:

And Abraham went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el, and Ai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first.

See the Joseph narrative and ANET 259; also the well-known picture of Beni Hassan ANEP 3.

So the narrative of Abram's journey through the Promised Land, which was in the process of being narrated before the story of the ancestress of Israel, (xii. 5–9), is now resumed. Only a few intermediary sentences have been inserted to provide a link with our story. In fact, A could quite simply be taken out of the context. Indeed, if this were done, the description of Abram's journey through the Promised Land in chapters xii and xiii would flow more easily. This can only be explained by assuming A to be an independent narrative which was in general circulation, of course in oral form. So long as it continued to be retold by word of mouth the story remained a brief one. It impressed itself easily upon the mind, so that everyone could easily remember it.

Narrative B begins: 'And Abram journeyed from thence toward the land of the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.' This looks even less like a proper introduction than that of A. Abram journeyed 'from thence'. This presupposes a previous indication of place and also a previous piece of narration. But this link proves to be the writer's later insertion, for the setting out 'from thence' is as little motivated as the stay in Gerar. This happens often in other places in the narratives about Abraham's travels and elsewhere in the Genesis stories. In A famine was the straightforward reason; as there is none given here it is possible that the author inserted the journey 'from thence' to the south merely to provide a link between the two passages. Also there is no reason given for the second journey from the south to Gerar. It seems probable that famine was once also mentioned at this point, but because of its mention in chapter xii (A) and later in xxvi (C) the author left it out for he did not want to mention it too often. The introduction to the independent oral version which we assume also existed here, could well have begun: 'And there was famine . . . Abraham sojourned in Gerar.'

The conclusion in verse 15 provides a completely satisfactory ending. After all that has been said and done things return to normal. Abraham is given permission to stay, and what is more he will no longer be troubled by others; Sarah is compensated, and Abimelech's house recovers. Here too the tale is ended after two conclusive statements (verses 15 f.).

A look at the overall context shows that B can be taken out of its present position just as easily as A. Before it is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which certainly has nothing to do with the ancestress of Israel. (Originally chapter xx must in any case have had a different context, for it appears to have been written by the Elohist. Chapter xix is by the Jahwist—but we will look into this later. In general it is supposed that as with chapter xii narrative B was also preceded by the promise of great issue to Abraham; but this is most certainly a later connection.) But the connection is closer with the chapter which follows, which was originally by the same writer, the Elohist, and which is about Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac. But even here this can scarcely be the original link, for it is assumed in the story

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1 Von Rad ATD reflects whether the Sodom catastrophe was the cause of this departure; this would have been a weak motive, which will clearly have been added later, by the first writer of the story at the earliest.

2 Were traces preserved in chapter xv?
that they do not yet have children. Chapter xx (B) could just as easily be
taken out of its present context without affecting the progress of the story.

With narrative C things are a little more complicated. However, the
beginning is clearly the start of a previously independent unit: 'And there
was famine in the land ... And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the
Philistines unto Gerar.' As with A, the narrative is characterised by the
clause 'And there was' (It came to pass) . . . , which is a traditional begin-
nning to a narrative unit. But the supplementary clause, 'beside the first
famine that was in the days of Abraham' has a clumsy ring to it in the
Hebrew mind the beginning is thoroughly satisfactory; all that is presup-
posed is a familiarity with the person of Isaac, and with Palestine as the 'land'.

But the conclusion to the narrative is not so straightforward. It is true
that verse 11 contains a conclusive statement which dissolves the tension
created by the tale, and that verse 12 provides a correct ending. From now
on Isaac and his wife enjoy the protection of both God and the king. But
the passage describing Isaac's wealth in verses 12 f. stands out, and seems
to have been expanded by the writer to prepare his audience for the next
story about the envy of the Philistines.

The overall context of this narrative also reveals that it was preceded,
as was A and B, by the description of a divine promise. But here the con-
nection is not merely external: the two stories are in fact merged. Yet the
transmission history will show that they were merged relatively late. It
will also show that the close link with the second half of the chapter is not
an essential one. Yet even in the oral tradition narrative C had become part
of a series of sagas about Isaac, telling of the favour he enjoyed in Gerar
and Beersheba and the envy that this aroused among his neighbours there.
However, looking at the wider context there seems to be no particular
reason why this section should have been inserted at this point in the book
as a whole. In the previous chapter, chapter xxv, Jacob and Esau are born,
but here their parents, Isaac and Rebecca, do not appear to have any
children, thus contradicting not only the previous chapter but also the
following one. If they had already had children no one in Gerar would
have believed the story that they were brother and sister. The collection
of narratives in chapter xxvi could well have grown up in oral form, and
could have been taken over by the writer just as they stand. Nevertheless
there is still reason to assume that at an earlier stage they were individual
units. The promise of favour at the beginning, which has been squeezed in
between the command, 'Sojourn in this land', and its performance, 'And
Isaac dwelt in Gerar', is almost distracting. The second half of the chapter
is even more loosely connected. Not only does it begin with the customary
introduction to an independent unit, 'And it came to pass . . . ', but it also
presupposes a place other than the city of Gerar. Thus C, even more than
A and B, is only intelligible as a component literary type in a complex
unit; though in spite of this there is indication enough that it was once an
independent unit. Therefore all three tales about the ancestress of Israel
once circulated as independent narratives.

As the tales were once independent their literary type must be determined,
irrespective of their present, written context. What type of story are they?
Obviously all three are of the same type. Past centuries of Christian and
Jewish thought believed them to be historical, but a closer study of them
has made this seem very unlikely. A fundamental condition for any histori-
ical report is that the narrator of the tale is quite sure of the path the material
has taken between him and the original eye witness. Here this alone is
enough to present difficulties. How can the narrator know what happened
in the harem of a foreign potentate? Indeed, what can he know of a dream
giving divine injunctions? Further, is it possible to imagine the patriarchs
describing this kind of delicate event in detail for the benefit of their
descendants? And Abraham did the same thing twice! Usually this kind of
experience is not one which would be bandied around. And the Israelites
were particularly sensitive about such matters. These considerations need
not be conclusive; what is more important is that the story contains nothing
that could positively indicate a historical report. There is no indication at
all of when the events took place, and dates are vital to any history. It is
significant that later, when the story was built into a historical narrative, a
date was added (Jub. xiii. 10 f.). The story is not concerned with a con-
stitutional or national crisis, but rather with family matters. Narrator and
audience obviously believe themselves to be descendants of this Abraham
and this Isaac; the fortunes of the patriarchs are theirs also, and the beauty
of the patriarch's wife is a matter for pride. And what is important is that
God so ordered the world as to show favour to their own ancestors (at least
in A and B). Against this figures of any political importance have only a
secondary position in the story. We are not even given the name of the king
of Egypt. The presentation of a world event of this kind in terms of the
family will later be more exactly shown to be characteristic of the saga.

But to the details of the literary type. Apart from the characteristics
of the saga which have already been mentioned, the introduction also, 'And
there was or It came to pass . . . ', is not of a type which is concerned with
the narration of historical events. Also, the speeches near the end are more
the climax to a personal dispute. And the presentation of simple scenes
(introduced by 'And it came to pass . . . ') is also typical of the abrupt
manner of story-telling: Abraham bids his wife pose as his sister; it is
assumed as a matter of course that she will do this. A gives no details of
what happens between Sarah and Pharaoh at the palace, but it is made

4 Gunkel, Genesis XXXIV sees the scene as a narrative unit, which is distinguished
from the preceding or following one by a shift in either characters, scene of action,
or in the action itself.
obvious from the tale itself. In A also no details are given of what Abraham says in answer to Pharaoh's admonitions. And we are not told at the end whether Pharaoh's house recovered health. On the other hand there are embellishments which are very characteristic of the saga: a long list of sheep, oxen, asses, she-asses, camels, manservants and maidservants (obviously of great interest to the writer and his original audience), and the humorous feature when Abimelech looks out of a window and sees how things really lie. This is the state of affairs in A and C. But B, with its long speeches, reveals other characteristics which need some investigation.

But the term saga is not enough to provide an accurate designation of the literary type. It is too indefinite. It includes a whole group of literary types, each of which must be more closely defined. With material as limited as our three narratives this need only be a preliminary. But one prominent feature of these narratives is that although there are no indications of when the events actually happened there are quite definite indications of place. Great importance is attached to the rights which the patriarchs are allowed in a foreign country; in C the position of a sojourner is even emphasised by a command from God. The official escort in A, after the happy ending, is also emphasised, as is the compensatory gift in B, and the king's ruling (verse 11) in C. Abraham, the ancestor, is pictured as a stranger in a foreign society: as a nomad he and his people are of inferior status and have few rights as soon as they enter the bounds of a 'state'. It is not a matter of Abraham's relation to individuals but to strange nations established in a particular area. It is true that in B and C Abimelech the king appears as interlocutor for the other side, but he is only representing the conditions in the land of the Philistines, in 'this place' or 'that land'. And when Pharaoh in A is given no name this is because he is merely a typical representative of Egypt. In such sagas, therefore, the position of the nomadic Abraham and Isaac, including their strikingly beautiful women and their people, is contrasted with the soft lascivious people of an established land.

Gunkel therefore termed this literary type the *ethnological saga*. In such sagas the predominant fact for the Israelite is that his God, the God of Israel, has influence on what happens between nations, and reveals himself as a divine leader. Because of the emphasis on ethnological relations other races also appear, and it is made quite clear that the power of God is by no means restricted to his own nation. The God of a small, nomadic people, not yet become a nation, can guide the Egyptian Pharaoh as well as the king of the Philistines. Stories of this type are of particular importance in assessing what later became the universal Israelite concept of God. (Gen. xxxiv is also of the same kind, showing the relations between the Jacob group and the established peoples of Shechem, as is the saga of the curse of Canaan in Gen. ix. 20 ff.).

The ethnological saga is a complex literary type comprising a host of smaller component types. One of these is the form in which God's commands appear. C starts with a simple command from God, with the imperative usual in such cases (verses 2, 3a), and then a longer benediction which has at least some resemblance to poetical language and *parallelismus membrorum*:

'That the man or his wife shall surely be put to death.'

This command is of particular interest, because this is also the way in which an Israelite king ended an obligatory command to meet a critical situation;

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- This classification is right is open to question; but in any case it is a point to be borne in mind that the words which the saga has put into the mouth of

A. Alt has brought all such 'enumerations of crimes worthy of death', which begin with a participial clause and an object belonging to it, and which end with a paronomasia (תָּנַךְ תָּלָה תָּלָה) under the heading of apodictic divine law, thereby including the literary type of the divine commands (the Decalogue), although these take a slightly different form. Whether this classification is right is open to question; but in any case it is a point to be borne in mind that the words which the saga has put into the mouth of

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the foreign king are those of a customary legal form in Israel. The manner in which a man speaks to his wife is less distinctive. xii. 11-13, xx. 13 show how he addresses her while they are travelling.

A look at these component literary types reveals that the most disparate psychological, religious and legal aspects of life have gone into the making of this tale. (But this does not mean—as Keller maintains—that the story was written for the sake of embodying such motives.)

C. Transmission History

When we defined the extent of the unit we came to the conclusion that the three sagas probably existed for a long time previously in oral form. However, material transmitted orally changes its form only imperceptibly. Are there obscure sentences which are survivals of an earlier stage? In the first place we must investigate the relationship the three narratives have to each other. Are they all based on one original story? It is only a question of dialect which makes them appear in A as Abram and Sarai, and in B as Abraham and Sarah. Such a custom still prevailed in Germany as late as the eighteenth century. It is unlikely that a couple should fall twice into the same strange predicament, or that he should practice the same deceit or mental reservation twice, having already once got into difficulties because of it. In C it is true that the couple is different, but the foreign opponents are the same, and so is the city. Isaac must surely have known of his father’s experience: is he likely to have made the same mistake himself? Abimelech knows the people he is up against, and how they behave: is he likely to allow himself to be hoodwinked again? (It is just as unlikely—if we take the story as a saga and not as a historical report—that such embarrassing circumstances should be twice ascribed to the forefathers.) It therefore seems probable that all three versions come from a common source. This is further indicated by synonymous wording at the decisive points: each time the patriarch is in a foreign country as a ‘sojourner’. Each time he fears death, Each time he is reduced to passing his wife off as his sister. Each time the foreign potentate discovers the ruse he is a chosen man of God, a Nabi (prophet), who is capable of interceding effectively on behalf of foreign kings. These are all views of a later period. In no other place in Genesis is Abraham seen as a Nabi. Here also he does not lie: although he has suppressed the fact that Sarah is not his wife, according to this narrative it is quite true that she is his sister (verse 12). Hence this is a much later stage of the story than A. The most important development is that he no longer acts unseen on behalf of his people. The other than this, however, the original material has been retained intact. There are no later additions.

Chapter xx differs from A chiefly in its long conversations. The characters’ speeches give some indication of their psychological state. The king of the Philistines is timid, but absolutely honest: and the ‘prophet’ Abraham asks wherever he goes whether the people there are god-fearing. This version of the story is more artistically constructed. It does not merely follow the simple course of events, but in many places doubles back on the story by adding details at a later stage, only indicating for instance the real relationship between Abraham and Sarah quite late in Abraham’s speech to the king. The malady which has affected Abimelech’s house is only mentioned at the end; the fact that Sarah was not touched is also reported relatively late (verse 4), as is the fact that it was God who prevented the crime (verse 6). Abraham has been clever but is not pleased by his cleverness. At the end he does indeed go away with gifts, but also slightly shamefacedly. There is nothing humorous about the story. Instead, serious words are used, such as saddiq, ‘faultless in social relationships’ (verse 4), ‘integrity of heart and innocence of hands’ (verse 6), ‘great sin’ (verse 9), ‘fear of God’ (verse 11). Whereas in A Abram was a simple Bedouin, here he is a chosen man of God, a Nabi (prophet), who is capable of interceding effectively on behalf of foreign kings. These are all views of a later period. In no other place in Genesis is Abraham seen as a Nabi. Here also he does not lie: although he has suppressed the fact that Sarah is not his wife, according to this narrative it is quite true that she is his sister (verse 12). Hence this is a much later stage of the story than A. The most important development is that he no longer acts unseen on behalf of his people. The
story now has religious overtones, God first warns the man who is about to commit an offence even though he is a heathen, and only later takes positive action. However there are still indications of an earlier version of the story. No motive is given for Abraham's journey to Gerar in verse 1, although it involves leaving the Promised Land, which is no small matter for an Israelite. In an earlier version the famine would have been given as the cause, just as in A. So here something has dropped out. Then verse 9, 'Thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin' assumes that Abimelech has actually committed adultery; it is true the writer has extenuated it in verse 6, where he says that Abimelech had not touched Sarah, but this sentence is clumsy and was therefore added later. Hence over the course of the time the story became more sensitive in sexual matters. Also when Abraham justifies himself in verse 12 by saying that Sarah really was his sister, this not only doubles back on the story, but is obviously a later insertion. The narrative does not expressly say that Sarah was a very beautiful woman, for its present position in Genesis would make Sarah well past an age when this could have been so. So this sentence will also have been dropped. Therefore what can be discovered of an earlier version from this text is nearer in content to narrative A than to its wording here.

Narrative C is so broken up by speeches that it is scarcely a story any more. The king of Gerar becomes the king of the Philistines, which itself is an anachronism, for at the time of the patriarchs there were as yet no Philistines in Palestine. At the beginning there is the great blessing given by God, which is a repetition of that given to Abraham merely transferred to the person of Isaac. This is followed by the dialogue between Abimelech and Isaac in verses 9–11, which does not begin, as in A and B, with a blunt statement in reproof, but with an astonished assertion. Nothing dangerous happens in the whole of the story, other than when Abimelech looks through a window and sees Isaac sporting with Rebekah. The delicate situation has become a mere eventuality; there is no longer a threat from a foreign king, but at the most one from his people. Therefore there is no need for any direct intervention by God: the protective words of the king suffice. The blessing at the end does not come from the Philistines, but from Jahweh, and has little to do with the actual story. Everything points to a later stage in the development of the saga, where the story has lost its original form.

The long speech by God at the beginning shows signs of having been much elaborated. The passage 'Go down into Egypt . . . ' was only inserted when the saga was written into its present context. And the blessing in verses 310–5 is also of a later date. It can be found almost word for word in other passages attributed to the same writer. 'For unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these lands' suggests xii. 7, xiii. 15. 'I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven' is a promise already stated in xv. 5. 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' is similarly expressed in xii. 3, xviii. 14. And the speech, 'And I will establish the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father' appears to be an even later insertion, for it is first found again in Jer. xi. 5, as is the reference to the keeping of 'my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws' (Deut. v. 29–31; x. 13, xi. 1, etc.). A benediction which promises land is particularly unsuitable in Gerar, for this is a Philistine city far down in the south on the Palestinian coast and did not belong to ancient Israel, the Promised Land. The whole passage incorporating the blessing is therefore a later addition.

Crudely stated A is the most ancient, B the middle version and C the most recent version of the story. Yet this does not mean that A is the oral tradition or even the written source for the two other versions. The situation is more complicated than that.

(b) This is shown by comparing the three versions, in an attempt to discover the original form of the story.

1. According to A the patriarch travels to Egypt, to the land of Pharaoh, and according to B and C only to Gerar, the city of Abimelech. Pharaoh and Abimelech are the counter-heroes. Abimelech and Gerar have the advantage over Pharaoh in that they appear twice. However it is much easier to imagine a story being transferred from a relatively small and insignificant king and country to one that is generally known, such as Egypt and its ruler, than it would be the other way round.

2. In chapter xii it is not stated whether Pharaoh touched Sarai; in chapter xx he had not done so, but this is a point which has clearly been added later. In chapter xxvi it had not even reached the stage when Rebekah entered the king's harem. The oldest narrative is the one with least scruples; it has described an actual, although unwittingly committed, case of adultery.

3. The discovery of the mistake in C, where it is only a matter of the possibility of a crime, occurs by chance. In B it is the God of Israel who reveals the situation, through the medium of a dream; and in A, the earlier version, it is revealed through a foreign god, or soothsayer. This last fits in least well with the later attitude in the Old Testament, so this will be the original version.

4. In chapter xii the patriarch has to leave the country; in xx and xxvi he is allowed to remain. It is not possible to determine which will have been the older version.13

5. In A Abraham receives gifts when Pharaoh takes Sarah, in B only later, after they are reconciled and honour is satisfied. In C, however, the blessing comes after the event, and from God, not from men. Each succeeding narrative reveals an increasingly refined moral attitude.15

6. The story as a whole is told almost entirely in dialogue; but the speeches have been inserted in different places in the narrative, and have therefore arisen quite independently of each other. A dialogue between the patriarch and his wife crops up in A and B, but at different points: in A following the run of events, but in B only later in the conversation with Abimelech. When the patriarch is summoned before the king in B and C a dialogue ensues. In C there is also a dialogue between Isaac and God,

13 Though later in chapter xxvi Isaac is asked by the Philistines to leave the land.
14 The difference is easy to explain along tradition-historical lines, and one cannot agree with Keller (see note 2) who sees the end of the incident reported quite differently in each of the three sagas.
and a ruling announced by Abimelech to his people. B contains the most conversation; other than those speeches already mentioned, there is a dialogue between God and the king, and Abimelech talks to Sarah. Also a talk between the king and his servants is indicated, as well as a prayer of intercession by Abraham to God.

7. The style of A is exceedingly concise. The listener must assume many of the essentials himself. In C all the important points are elaborately laid out. Narrative B on the other hand does not just follow the course of events. The writer doubles back on his tracks very sophisticatedly. Here A is most definitely the earliest version. It is written in the style of the old saga, which Gunkel terms the concise style, while the style of B and C corresponds to the elaborated style of a later period.

8. The biggest difference is in the name of the hero. Was Abraham or Isaac the original subject of the story? The general rule in the transmission of the saga is that the least known figure is the original (compare the change from the king of the city of Gerar to the Pharaoh of Egypt). Accordingly Isaac was originally the subject; he was later replaced by Abraham, who for the Israelites represented their ideal of the god-fearing Israelite. Here narrative C, the latest version, contains the original matter.

The original version will thus have run: Because of famine Isaac travelled from the desert in southern Palestine to the nearby Canaanite city of Gerar, to live there as 'sojourner', i.e. to keep within the pasturage rights on the ground belonging to the city. He told everyone that his wife was his sister so that his life would not be endangered by those who desired her. However, Rebekah's beauty could not pass unnoticed. The king of the city, Abimelech, took Rebekah into his harem, amply compensating Isaac. As a material sin was about to be committed, God struck the people of the palace with a mysterious illness. Through the medium of his gods, or a soothsayer, Abimelech recognised what had happened. Abimelech called Isaac to account: 'What is this that you have done to me?' He then restored him his wife and sent him away, loaded with gifts.

All the variations have occurred in their own particular fashion, but when compared with what we know of the original version they reveal a general tendency which gives us some basis for a history of the literary type of the ethnological saga.

(a) The narratives become elaborated by speeches, which gradually achieve a status equal to the deeds of the hero. Through them the thoughts and impulses of the people are expressed. This method of expression is one that is used increasingly later on in the Bible (cf. the long speeches in the Genesis-Apocryphon).

(b) Moral sensitivity becomes gradually stronger. Sexual matters become treated with more and more restraint.

(c) God's intervention is less tangible in the later versions. Divine action is understood in a more universal way. Sometimes God even intervenes on behalf of the heathen king and his people. Thus when the patriarch

13 The name Jehovah (in A and C), which first arose at the time of Moses, will not have been part of the original version of the story. We do not know what was the earlier designation for God.

of Israel associates with such people he is obliged to maintain his loyalty and faith for his God's sake.

(ad) During the story's development there is a tendency to transfer the action of the story to more familiar people and powers.

D. Setting in Life

Where would such a story circulate? It is a robust kind of tale, and would be in keeping with the small nomadic tribes of pre-Israelite times living with their herds of cattle in the desert of southern Palestine. In fact, the hero of the story is one of them. It is significant that sheep are considered a man's greatest possession. Also it will concern people who were very familiar with the conditions in Gerar. In other words, this was a story narrated by the forefathers of Israel before the conquest; in fact, by that particular branch of the Israelites who would trace their descent back to Isaac, and who roamed about in the south of Palestine with their small herds of cattle. Such a story would perhaps have been related by men before the tents, when it was evening, after the herds had been settled and the children slept. When times were hard these people were compelled to go to a city in the civilised region and there to beg permission to graze their cattle on the city outskirts. On the one hand they were inferior to the city dweller, who possessed a quite different means of authority. Their position was one of men in need of protection. On the other hand they felt themselves superior to the men living in established cities. Their own ancestor had been cleverer than the townspeople. 'The narrator gloats over Abraham's astoundingly successful lie, which made a virtue out of necessity. He identifies himself joyfully with his forebear's sharp practice' (Gunkel). That is why they are so proudly conscious of the fact that their women are more beautiful than those living in the cities. Their own nomadic god is more powerful; when need is greatest he intervenes in favour of his flock. In moral considerations, too, they consider themselves superior; the city dwellers are weak and susceptible to feminine charm. (Even today our own country people have sometimes the same feeling of superiority over the townspeople in that respect.) A man of Isaac's people cannot be seduced quite so easily. There is one feature of the story missing which would be natural to us: there is no reluctance to surrender the woman's honour, 'that my soul may live because of thee'. However, it seems obvious that the Bedouin women are so devoted to their menfolk that to protect a husband's life they would willingly lose their honour. All this points to very early conditions. Moreover, at a later time exception would have been taken to the marriage between half-brother and sister in B (Lev. xviii, xix, etc.). The conception of objective guilt which calls down punishment even though the crime was committed unwittingly and unintentionally, is also an old one.

Now that we have come so far in investigating the transmission history and setting in life, it would be as well to look into the historicity of the story, and to look for a connection with archeological findings and with what we know of the geography of early Palestine. This will enable us to determine
the setting in life more exactly. To begin with it must be recognised that the saga is wholly imbued with the atmosphere of the period it describes, and therefore must certainly belong to the period before the settlement of the later Israelite tribes. The saga's 'framework' is historical; its local colour, its moods and feelings, are undoubtedly those of Isaac's people in Palestine. Also historical is the position of 'sojourner' in the city of Gerar. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to place this city. Archeologists are still uncertain whether it was on tell assehmmé, 14 km. south of Gaza (Fl. Petrie) or on esh-shéria, 25 km. south-east of Gaza (Alt), or on tell abu húéré, which is 7 km. from there.14 Only the first of these hills has been excavated, and this produced nothing which specifically applies to our story. But we cannot yet say that Abimelech never existed. Archeological evidence may yet show that he did. In any case the saga gives us a good picture of a Canaanite city king of the second millennium. However, Isaac's part in the story cannot be substantiated by archeological evidence; for it seems from the Genesis traditions that it was unlikely that Isaac and his people knew writing, and that therefore there will be no written evidence to excavate. And as they lived in tents it seems unlikely that other sorts of material evidence will be found. With this we have reached the point where we can prove nothing else in the story to have a historical basis. As Isaac is assumed in the saga to be an ancestor of the people relating it, he is likely once to have been leader of their group. It cannot entirely be ruled out that in his lifetime he did get into the delicate situation which the story presents, but it is highly unlikely. The origin of the story is more likely the result of the general disposition and situation of Isaac's people than of the personal experience of Isaac himself. Anyone looking for a historical 'core' in this saga will be looking in vain.

When the Isaac group settled and was united with the Abraham group to become the tribe of Judah, Isaac was then replaced in the story by the more familiar Abraham. The setting in life also changed. The nomads with their small herds became farmers, living together in established villages. Oxen also came to be mentioned as part of Pharaoh's gift (A). According to C Isaac lived in a proper house; and seed and harvest are the images used in the divine benediction. Later still the story is taken up by prophetic circles, or at least an earlier version of narrative B. These will have been people like those around Elijah and Elisha in about the ninth century; no later, for there is no sign of the melancholy outlook of the later writing prophets. In this setting in life Abraham is raised to the rank of a prophet; he is given the office of intercessor. It is now a question of sin and purity, lies and unwitting offence. The saga has now become a legend about the prophets (see under). Finally, however, the story of the ancestress of Israel becomes an episode in a greater written unit. With that we come to the last section.

E. Redaction History

What is the point of tracing back the tangled threads of this tradition? For a start it discloses important facts about the beliefs and the way of life of the pre-Israelite period. Secondly, displayed on such a background the meaning of the story is quite startlingly revealed. Once the traditional history has been traced, it is then possible to discover the purpose behind the source of writings. It is no longer a question of the cunning Isaac, overcoming all enemies with the help of God, but of a stage in the great salvation history of God. The story is now no longer an isolated literary type, but an integral part of a greater whole.

The fact has long been established that Genesis is not the uniform work of one writer, but goes back to three of four sources running parallel to each other describing the same period of time, and which are continued here and there in the books of Exodus and Numbers. Chapter xx (B) is the work of the so-called Elohist, i.e. the source describing the period before Moses which only uses the general term Elohim (God) for God. Technically he is known as E. His authorship is indicated in Chapter xx by the word 'God' in verses 3, 6, 11, 13, 17. Verse 18 is an exception, for here the word 'Jahweh' (Lord) is used, but this verse is stilted and was added later by way of explanatory comment. It is not the work of the original author. The Elohist was also responsible for the Abraham narrative in chapter xxii, and perhaps for chapters xv and xxii. There is a particular linguistic usage common to these passages, for instance the word הִנֵּה for maid, while other sources use חָיָה.18 It is an open question whether the Elohist, of whose work only traces remain, wrote a complete history, or whether he merely collected individual narrative units. But in any case chapter xx is clearly the work of a different writer from that of chapters xii and xxii. It seems unlikely that the latter author should have also taken up narrative B and inserted it along with his own pieces, for then he would have reported the story three times altogether, and twice of Abraham. Even if this were so, it is inconceivable that he should not have adapted the style of the story to fit in with his own. Typical of E is that striking tendency to double back on the story, and not merely to follow the course of events. Chapter xxii, also Elohistic, does the same. Moreover E has a weakness for long speeches (cf. the Elohistic chapter xxxi). As we only have fragments of the E source it is difficult to pinpoint the writer's general outlook. However, the many place indications17 at the beginning and the reference in verse 13 to 'when God caused me to wander from my father's house' (lit. to go astray), infer that he saw Abraham as a wanderer, and a wanderer with the rank of a prophet. It is for this reason that he does not simply fear the foreign country, but of a stage in the great salvation history of God. The story is now no longer an isolated literary type, but an integral part of a greater whole.

18 However in VT III, 1958, 293-7 A. Jepsen has brought forward a strong argument against crediting the two designations to different sources. For E it is also significant that God appears to men in dreams.

17 The Elohist obviously had little idea of the geography of southern Palestine, otherwise he would not have placed Gerar, which is situated near Gaza, between Kadesh and Shur, which are two towns on the Sinai peninsula (cf. Speiser, who thinks differently). Perhaps he was thinking of a town with the same name on that peninsula, which could live on in the present Dehur near Tén qedes (Kadesh). Indications such as these lead us to believe that the Elohist was a native of northern Israel and not of Judah.
fearing enough, which is of course to be presumed in a heathen community.

Morally he is not at fault: he does not lie, for Sara is indeed his sister.

Narrative A, on the other hand, is the work of the Jahwist. He is the writer who in Genesis, from the creation onwards, always uses the term ‘Jahweh’ (Lord) for God, and whom we refer to briefly as J. We have considerably more information about him, because a large part of his work was taken up into the Tetratuch. It ranges from the beginning of the world and mankind, over the time of the patriarchs, to the Exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness right up to Israel’s conquest of Palestine. The time of the patriarchs is given particular emphasis because in it God’s relationship to mankind, previously quite unrestricted in any way, became concentrated entirely on one clan and the nation which arose out of it. The selection of this particular clan was made known through the command given to Abraham to start on his travels, and particularly through the benediction which accompanied it, which extended to a promise to Abraham of great issue, possession of the Promised Land, and a blessing of all the families of the earth. This is first formulated in Gen. xii. 1-3, 7, which is the real core of the Jahwistic material, for everything that happened, right up until Isaac took over the land, is understood in the light of this divine benediction. The writer intends to show how this blessing is transformed from a promise into a fact. This does not happen quickly and straightforwardly, but in a thoroughly complicated fashion. Again and again the realisation of that promise seems endangered, either by the subject of the blessing himself, or by his human adversaries. This theme running through the book lends fresh meaning to the story of the ancestress of Israel, for Sarah is Abraham’s only legitimate wife, and only through her can the ‘seed’ be expected. If Sarah is taken into the harem of a foreign potentate then Abraham’s hopes are shattered, and God’s promise comes to nothing. To the Jahwist it is undoubtedly important that Abraham, ‘when he was come near to enter into Egypt’, had forgotten the divine blessing which accompanied him, otherwise he would not have feared death, or felt personal anxiety: ‘that my soul may live because of thee’. But Jahweh is not as fickle as man. Although Abraham had forgotten him, he intervenes in Abraham’s favour and plagues the house of Pharaoh ‘because of Sarai Abram’s wife’, for the sake of the promise he must see realised. It is clear that the humorous aspect of the story has been ‘entirely banished’ (von Rad). The saga has become a historical narrative.

To link this previously independent saga with his other material on the Abraham period, the writer needed to add comment. The beginning of the chapter saw Abraham on the way from Mesopotamia to Shechem and Bethel, i.e. to mid-Palestine. However, the oral tradition of A gave the southern part of Palestine as the starting point of the story. The Jahwist therefore links up this distance with the sentence: ‘And Abraham journeyed, going on still toward the South’. At the end of the narrative also comment had to be inserted to connect it with further Abraham traditions taking place back in central Palestine. So J adds: ‘And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the South’. With this the starting point of the previous tradition (xiii. 7 ff.) is reached. And then, in xiii. 2–5, we are again told that Abram and Lot acquired large herds and one day came again to Bethel. Thus the path is prepared for the following dispute between Lot and Abram. This passage is a particularly good illustration of the Jahwist’s aptitude for linking previously independent units by explanatory comments, and thereby divesting them of their self-sufficiency and making them components of a complex literary type.

Chapter xxvi also gives the impression of having been written by the Jahwist, despite the use of the word God in verses 2 and 12. It is difficult to know where this version of the story belongs, because J had already described the birth of Esau and Jacob, Isaac and Rebekah’s children, but in here they appear to be still childless. This problem can be solved either by assuming, with Eissfeldt, that there is a second Jahwistic source which he calls the Lay source, and that xxvi. 1 followed immediately after xxv. 11: ‘And it came to pass that after the death of Abraham that God (i) blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt by Beer-lahai-roi.’ Or it can be assumed that the original J sequence ran xxv. 11—xxvi. 22 ff. and that it was rearranged only later by the final redactor of the Genesis material, for an as yet unknown reason. In both cases it must be recognised that the writer had already found the saga of the Israelite ancestress Rebekah connected with other Isaac traditions (xxvi. 15 ff.), but the literary type of these traditions was not quite as fixed as that of others, so that it could therefore be more easily incorporated into a greater complex. Chapter xxvi does indeed give the impression of a mosaic. To bind the Isaac material more closely together, and to give it an overall theme, the writer had already found the saga of the Israelite ancestress Rebekah connected with other Isaac traditions (xxvi. 15 ff.), but the literary type of these traditions was not quite as fixed as that of others, so that it could therefore be more easily incorporated into a greater complex.

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writer has assumed and has therefore inserted a divine revelation at the start of chapter xxvi. He also repeats the promise of benediction which was earlier bestowed on Abraham. The oral stage of the tradition will simply have begun with Isaac departing to Gerar because of the famine, under the command of God. No reference to the blessing would have been necessary. With this new concept of the story the end is also modified with a reference to the realisation of the divine blessing (verses 12–14).

In A the writer obviously holds much by the idea that the recipient of the blessing was in fact his own greatest enemy, because no sooner had he received God’s promise than he thoughtlessly jeopardised it. But this is not an idea which has much prominence in narrative C. Here it is more a question of the inheritance of the blessing. In J’s (or L’s) opinion the blessing is not naturally inherited by the next in succession, as was earlier assumed, but had to be reaffirmed to each new generation. Hence its strong representation in verses 12–14. The story of the ancestor of Israel, although it has lost much of its strength through retelling, is thus inserted into the Isaac material to bring out this point. Against this background we can see that it has been ‘preserved for purposes of admonition’ (von Rad24), and was intended for the ears of those people who were to become the Israelite nation.

Here also the writer’s method of procedure is very involved. This is very evident from the reference at the beginning to the earlier famine in the days of Abraham, and to Abimelech as king of the Philistines, which is of course a reference to the history of a later period, when the Philistines became the arch-enemies of the Israelites. Indeed the blessing of verses 3–4 is complication enough.25

The redaction history does not end with the story’s incorporation into the Jahwistic and Elohistic writing. There are later Deuteronomic revisions (xxvi. 5), and additions in the Samaritan recension of the Pentateuch (xxii. 20) and in the LXX. And in the book of Jubilees and the Genesis-Apocryphon the story has been even more clearly remodelled. Thus it is that the final versions of the story are the start of a long history of its interpretation.

11. SAUL AND DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS
(I Sam. xxiii and xxvi)

Up till now the second half of Samuel I has only been studied from a form-critical point of view in the commentaries by H. Gressmann: (SAT II, 1910, 1921) and W. Caspari (KAT 1926).

We have two descriptions of a meeting between King Saul and his former army leader in the wilderness:

24 von Rad ATD.
25 The changes made by J and E would be clearer if we knew the setting in life of both.

And David abode in the wilderness in the strong holds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.

15 And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in the wood.

16 And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

17 And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.

18 And thy two made a covenant before the Lord: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

19 Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in the strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of the desert?

20 Now therefore, O king, come down, according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him up into the king’s hand.

21 And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the Lord; for ye have had compassion on me.

22 Go, I pray you, make yet more sure, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtly.

23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me of a certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.

24 And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah on the south of the desert.

25 And Saul and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down to the rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon.

26 And Saul went on this side of the mountain and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.