

# Genesis 23–24

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## 1 Lecture 12 (10 May 2018)

### SECOND PAPER (FOR TUE MAY 22)

One of these two topics:

1. What view of women's roles did the well scene in Gen 24 mean to convey? Did it reinforce what was expected from women in kinship arrangements or did it bring something new? Base yourself not only on the story of Rebekah in Gen 24, but also on the roles of Sarah (Gen 12 in Egypt; 18:1–15; 20–21; 23), Hagar (16; 21), the daughters of Lot (19:30–38), and Rebekah (24).
2. There are seven iterations of the promise of descendance, land and universal blessing. These covenants or contracts are intertwined with a number of discrete events in Abra(ha)m's and Sarai(h)'s lives. Why do the authors develop the story of Abraham and descendance in this way? What values do they consider important in the lives of these putative ancestors and why?

### HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1. Map:
2. Historical overview of Levant's kinship systems



Figure 1: Southern Levant 02

periods	kinship structure	Book of Genesis
1200 to 850	kinship system with reciprocal gift arrangements meant to reinforce status as well as insuring economic exchange; limited mechanisms to prevent rise of individuals?	? Oral traditions about heroic ancestors and their travails?
900+ to 700 and 600	monarchy: need to contain elites and competing kinship groups by sharing power, marriage (including to outsiders), military conquests and redistribution, accumulation of wealth, and attaching to oneself the services of people not protected by kinship arrangements.	written J (Yahwist) and perhaps E (Elohist) under kings' leadership
700/600 to 400/300	After the conquests by Assyria and Babylonia, how did the kinship system evolve? Did it become more important again, given the foreignness and distance of the imperial centers? Some groups portrayed as enemies (Samaritan leadership; Tobiyah: see Ezra-Nehemiah, ca 400)	P (Priestly) and perhaps redactor(s) who continue to add oral traditions?

## GENESIS 23

### Text of Gen 23–24

How did the notion of property of land develop, under what conditions, and when?



Figure 2: Patriarchs' Tomb in Hebron

1. What was the status of the land in Canaan? One would expect a corporate association between the gods of the pantheon and the land.

Fertility would have been directly related to proper “investments” most properly expressed by the sacrificial systems (same for Abraham’s story, here incorporating something very old?).

Demographic pressures and more intense investment of labor in agriculture would lead to more defined property rights.

2. What happens, on the contrary, when land is lost, which is the background for the P author of Gen 23?

The traditional (Iron II) explanation: corporate punishment by the god(s), based on a notion of group’s disease or impurity process, no matter the origin of the affliction (often unknown, or deemed unknown, such as a ritual failure, or an absence of recognition of sacred forces as of yet uncoded).

Here is where the analysis of Abraham's saga is so important: the divinity seems to appear everywhere before there are altars or temples. It is not limited by "its" territory.

3. Yet, the story in Genesis 23 seems to be about limits. Three peculiarities of the story (read):
  1. Sarah's burial is mentioned seven times, yet Gen 23:19 on Sarah's burial is brief. How significant were burials in antiquity, especially for people without access to land?
  2. Is Abraham's acquisition of this piece of land from Ephron alone or from the Hittites?
  3. What role do the mentions of status really play in the story? Are they simply stylistic, amusing notes, or do they have a deeper meaning related to the acquisition of property?

What system of land tenure is assumed to exist in this story? Is there a hierarchy of rights to the land, depending on its various uses? Rather than the absolute property to the fruit of one's labor that we know from modern times (John Locke, Adam Smith), we would have a series of integrated rights and obligations, with social status as an important marker of the relationships (See Russell).

Use of land for burial is different from use as pasture, cereal growing, olive plantation, or a house. It is in perpetuity. The whole field comes with it. Is the field a metaphor for the whole land of Israel and Judah?

## GENESIS 24

Late story? How would one know? First analyze the story, themes, composition. So, for instance, do all the elements of the story fit so well together that it must be a composition *sui generis*? Other things: does the vocabulary indicate unity of voice? More difficult question (helped by the remark by Westermann on oral traditions): how would one know 24 is a fiction, that is to say, an invention by a single author? artistry in the composition (i.e. a poem-like work without any remainder once figured out the structure?); narrative "voice"? that is a certain way of introducing the matter? the creative use of elements coming from other parts of the tradition, and providing an explanation for certain lacks (origin of Rebecca, explanation

of Jacob's craftiness—he got it from his mother's side—, preparation for Jacob's subsequent travel to Laban?)

Let's start with the type-scene: What are the elements?

1. a young unmarried man is sent on a mission: there is an order, or a call? No fleeing (as for Jacob, or Moses) In this case, not the son Isaac but a trusted slave;
2. A long trip through the desert;
3. Arrival in the evening, at a well or spring, near a city;
4. Surprise: a young nubile woman coming to the well;
5. A test of strength;
6. Identity revealed;
7. Woman runs back home;
8. Feast and betrothal;

Compare:

- [Genesis 29:1–14](#) (Jacob and Rachel);
- [Exodus 2:15–22](#) (Moses and Zipporah);
- [John 4:1–30](#) (Jesus and the Samaritan woman)