

J

E

Gen. 26:6-11

Isaac and Rebekah fool
Abimelech in Gerar.

In each of these three stories a patriarch presents his wife as his sister in a foreign court. And in each case God directly intervenes to preserve the Hebrew line. Some say, "That only happened two times, once to Abraham and once to Isaac, both recorded in J; the E account evolved by mixing the two stories in J." The redactor of J and E supposedly was careless enough to insert the Gen. 20 story as a separate event. But the documentary hypothesis assumes that Abraham could not have tried the same trick twice -- an unwarranted assumption. Human weakness often falls into patterns of behavior, and defense mechanisms develop. The Abimelech of Gerar in Gen. 20 need not have been the same Abimelech of Gerar in Gen. 26; the name Abimelech simply means "My father is king," and may have been a common name for Gerar's rulers. Similar recorded events should not necessarily be interpreted as two corrupted accounts of the same event.

Other events in the Pentateuch show similarity with each other: the geneologies of Cain and of Seth (Gen. 4,5), the dismissing of Hagar and of Hagar with her son (Gen. 16,21), the associating of laughter with the birth of Isaac (Gen. 17,18,21), the naming and renaming of Bethel (Gen. 28,35). The mutidocumetary hypothesis explains each of these sets of similarities as two or three different reports of the same event. But similar events do happen in history. The thinking person will be slow to