

A. Resorting to Deceit (1-2)

Practice of This Deceit

"She is my sister" (2)

Half-Truth = Deception (12)

Compare to **Gen 12:11-13**

B. Reprimanding of Evil (3-13)

Reprimanding of Abimelech

-Elucidation (3)

The Word of God was the difference between life and death to Abimelech (3,7,17,18)

-Explanation (4,5)

Abimelech defends himself
"had not approached her"

-Exoneration (6)

"Yes, I know..."

God knows the heart of man (1 Sa 16:7)

-Education (6)

"I...kept you from sinning against me."

"I did not let you touch her."

The promise concerning Isaac was protected.

-Exhortation (7)

"return the man's wife"

-Elaboration (7)

"he is a prophet"

-Extrication (8)

"rose early in the morning"

Abimelech was prompt in obeying the word of God to remove himself from this situation.

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There → **Gen 19:27** "And Abraham went...to the place where he had stood before the Lord."

1From *there* **Abraham** journeyed toward the territory of the *Negeb* and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in *Gerar*. ← **Gen 10:19**

Compare this story to **Gen 12:11-20; 26:1-16**

2And **Abraham** said of **Sarah** his wife, "*She is my sister.*" And **Abimelech** king of *Gerar* sent and took **Sarah**.

Abimelech → **Gen 21:22-34; 26:1-16**
(Deceived by Isaac); 26:26-33

3But **God** came to **Abimelech** in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, *you are a dead man* because of the woman whom you have taken, for *she is a man's wife.*"

4Now **Abimelech** had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people?"

5Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' *In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.*"

6Then **God** said to him in the dream, "*Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.*"

7Now then, *return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.*"

8So **Abimelech** rose *early in the morning* and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid.

9Then **Abimelech** called **Abraham** and said to him, "*What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.*"

Place of This Deceit

"Sojourned in Gerar"

Gerar -> At the southern border of Palestine

Gen 13:18 - First move since he came to Hebron

Negeb -> Either "South" or the land South of Judah

Peril of This Deceit

-Imperiled the princess

"Abimelech...took Sarah"

Why was Abimelech attracted to an 89-year-old woman? (**Gen 12:11,14**)

-Imperiled the promises

God had just promised that within a year Sarah would bear Isaac. (**Gen 17:15-16; 18:9-10**)

Imperiled the Philistines

"For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech" (18)

Eastern kings have for ages claimed the privilege of taking to their harem an unmarried woman whom they like.

Reprimanding of Abraham

-Confronting of Abraham (9,10)

*Injury

"What have you done to us?"

"For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech" (18)

*Innocence

"how have I sinned against you?" (answer is implied)

*Iniquity

"You have done to me things that ought not to be done"

*Outline for Life of Abraham: Butler, John G – *Abraham: The Father of the Jews* (Bible Biography Series, Number Nine), L B C Publications, 1998

**-Confronting of Abraham
(Continued)**

*Instigation

"What did you see, that you did this thing?" →
i.e. *Why did you do this?*

**C. Reconciling of Men
(14-18)**

**-Propitiating by Abimelech
(14-16)**

*The Presentation

"sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants"

"a thousand pieces of silver"

Compare to **Gen 12:16**

*The Restoration

"returned Sarah..."

*The Invitation

"my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you"

Compare to **Gen 12:19-20**

**-Praying by Abraham
(17-18)**

"Abraham prayed...God healed Abimelech..."

¹⁰And **Abimelech** said to **Abraham**, "**What did you see, that you did this thing?**"

¹¹**Abraham** said, "I did it because I thought, '**There is no fear of God** at all **in this place**, and **they will kill me** because of my wife.'

¹²Besides, **she is indeed my sister**, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.

¹³And **when God** caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, '**This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother."**' "

¹⁴Then **Abimelech** took **sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants**, and gave them to **Abraham**, and **returned Sarah** his wife to him.

¹⁵And **Abimelech** said, "Behold, **my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.**"

¹⁶To **Sarah** he said, "Behold, I have given your brother **a thousand pieces of silver**. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

¹⁷Then **Abraham** prayed to God, and **God healed Abimelech**, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.

¹⁸For the **LORD** had **closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech** because of **Sarah, Abraham's** wife.

**-Contending by Abraham
(11-13)**

*Character of Gerar

Abraham Assumed → "There is no fear of God...in this place"

*Preservation of Life

"they will kill me"

Compare to **Gen 12:12** →
"Then they will kill me"

Abraham put himself over others

Gen 12:13 → "that it may go well with me"

*Relationship of Sarah

"she is **indeed** my sister"

Even though this was a half-truth, it was still deceitful

*Orders of God

Abraham blamed God, because He "caused me to wander."

*Kindness of the deed

"This is the kindness you must do me"

This kindness was only

Compare To...

Genesis 12:11–20 (ESV)

¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

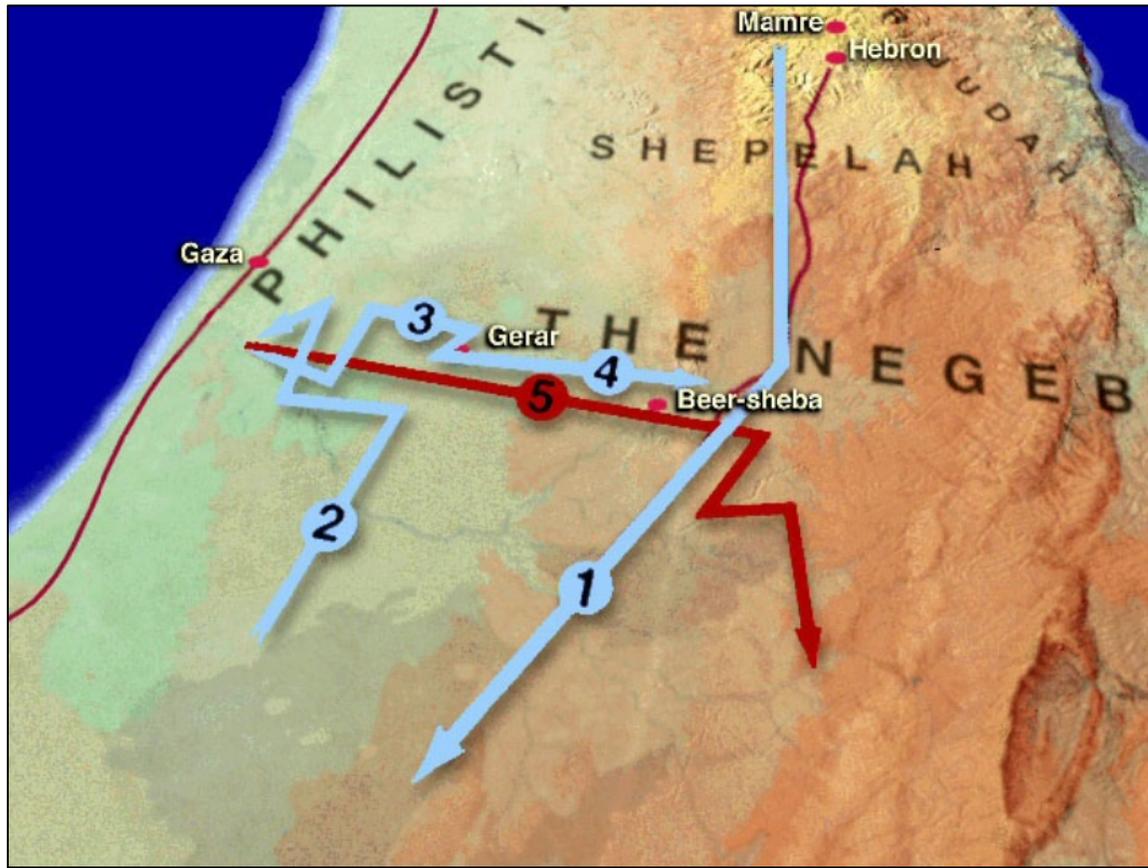
Genesis 26:1–16 (ESV)

¹ Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance. ⁸ When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. ⁹ So Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought, ‘Lest I die because of her.’ ” ¹⁰ Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” ¹¹ So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”

Gerar



Gerar—a region; lodging-place, a very ancient town and district in the south border of Palestine, which was ruled over by a king named Abimelech (Gen. 10:19; 20:1, 2). Abraham sojourned here, and perhaps Isaac was born in this place. Both of these patriarchs were guilty of the sin of here denying their wives, and both of them entered into a treaty with the king before they departed to Beersheba (21:23–34; 26). It seems to have been a rich pastoral country (2 Chr. 14:12–15). Isaac here reaped an hundred-fold, and was blessed of God (Gen. 26:12). The “valley of Gerar” (Gen. 26:17) was probably the modern Wady el-Jerdr.¹

Genesis 13:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

¹ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Abimelech

Genesis 21:22–34 (ESV)

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do.” ²³ Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.” ²⁴ And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

²⁵ When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, ²⁶ Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸ Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” ³⁰ He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.” ³¹ Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

Genesis 26:1–16 (ESV)

¹ Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

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¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.”

Genesis 26:26–33 (ESV)

²⁶ When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, ²⁷ Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” ²⁸ They said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.” ³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. ³² That same day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, “We have found water.” ³³ He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

ABIMELECH, KING OF GERAR (אַבִּימֶלֶךְ, *avimelekh*). Misled to believe that Sarah (Gen 20) and Rebekah (Gen 26) were the sisters of Abraham and Isaac, respectively. Makes a covenant with Abraham (Gen 21) and Isaac (Gen 26) at Beer-sheba. If Abimelech is a throne name, there could be two people named Abimelech represented in these stories.

Etymology and Occurrences outside the Hebrew Bible

“Abimelech” is made up of two West Semitic elements: אב (*'b*) meaning “father” and מלך (*mlk*) meaning “king,” together meaning “my father is king”. The name *a-bi-mil-ki* occurs eleven times in the El Amarna texts and appears to be the name or title of the official of Tyre. The name also occurs several times in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Punic texts (Hess, *Amarna Personal Names*, 18–19). Abimelech is likely a throne name for the ruler of Gerar (Matthews, *Genesis*, 403).

Abimelech, King of Gerar (Early Second Millennium BC)

A character named Abimelech appears four different times in Genesis: in the accounts of the deception of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 20:1–18; 26:1–16) and the covenant at Beer-sheba (Gen 21:22–34; 26:26–33). In Genesis 20:1–18, Abimelech takes Sarah into his house because he believes she is Abraham’s sister. The text states that he does not approach her sexually; whether Abimelech is an upright person or has been rendered sexually impotent by God (Gen 20:17–18) is open to debate (Novick, “Almost, at Times, the Fool”, 277–290). Abimelech reappears in Gen 21:22, accompanied by Phicol (his general) to make a covenant with Abraham, establishing Abraham’s (and his descendants’) claim to the well, and the site of Beer-sheba. In Genesis 21:34, Abraham dwells in the land of the Philistines—most likely an anachronistic name for the people of the region (see Hamilton, *Genesis*, 94)—implying that Abimelech is their king.

These two stories closely parallel stories about Isaac, Abraham’s son. In Genesis 26:1–16, which recapitulates both Gen 12:10–20 and 20:1–18, Isaac goes to Abimelech, called “king of the Philistines,” in Gerar during a famine. However, Abimelech does not take Rebekah into his house, even though Isaac has declared that she is his sister. Abimelech spies on Isaac and sees him caressing Rebekah; thus he discerns the truth. He rebukes Isaac and warns his people to stay away from Rebekah. Unlike the friendly resolution of Abraham’s story, Abimelech sends Isaac away in Gen 26:16 because his wealth poses a threat to Abimelech’s people. Later in Genesis 26:26–33, Abimelech initiates proceedings for a second peace-covenant between his people and Isaac’s, which takes place at Beer-sheba.

Other Occurrences

In Psalm 34, the name Abimelech appears as the king before whom David pretended to be insane. In First Samuel 21:10–15, the king’s name is Achish, indicating either historical inaccuracy or a second, possibly semitic, name for Achish (Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, 205). Finally, the Masoretic text of 1 Chronicles 18:16 names Zadok and Abimelech as priests during David’s reign. Second Samuel 8:17 and most other textual witnesses of 1 Chronicles 18:16 use the name Ahimelech instead.

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Imperiled the Princess

Butler → *It imperiled the princess*. Fortunately, the taking of Sarah by Abimelech was not for immediate marriage. “When Abimelech takes Sarah, that implies, not as the phrase sometimes means to take in marriage, but only to take into his harem” (Leupold). But that was bad enough, for the fact that Sarah was in Abimelech’s harem meant that in due time she would be corrupted morally. So the lying of Abraham and Sarah greatly imperiled the virtue of Sarah. Truth does not imperil virtue, but lying certainly does.³

Butler → Some folk wonder what Abimelech saw in Sarah, who was then eighty-nine years old. What Abimelech saw in Sarah was her beauty. In our times, we do not think that eighty-nine year old women have the outward beauty to attract male attention. But Sarah had some things going for her that women do not have today. First, women lived much longer than they do now; so eighty-nine years would not affect a woman’s appearance then like it does now. “Sarah, though now eighty-nine years of age, was as youthful in looks as a person of forty would now

² Lee, K. (2012). Abimelech, King of Gerar. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.) *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

³ Butler, J. G. (1993). *Abraham: the father of the Jews* (Vol. Number Nine, p. 201). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

be” (James Murphy). Second, God had just rejuvenated Sarah physically so she could bear a child. That this would improve her outward beauty is not unreasonable thinking. Third, it was only twenty years or so earlier that Abraham had said in Egypt, “Behold now, I know that thou art a fair [beautiful] woman to look upon” (12:11); and the Egyptians beheld that “she was very fair [beautiful]” (12:14). These observations in Egypt about Sarah’s beauty were made when Sarah was in her late sixties. So to conclude she still was attractive and desirable to men in that day is very justified. And we might add, Sarah had not hurt her looks through tobacco, strong drink, and wild living—habits which wreck many women’s looks quickly.⁴

Faithlife Study Bible → 20:2 She is my sister Just like when Abraham and Sarah went into Egypt (12:10–20), Abraham fears that his life is in jeopardy as he leaves Canaan. However, the text does not tell us why. There is also no mention of Sarah’s beauty, and we already know that she is well past childbearing age (18:11 and note). It is possible that the goal of taking Sarah in marriage would be to form an alliance with Abraham, a man of great wealth and reputation after the war described in chap. 14 (see 21:22–23, where Abimelech seeks a friendly nonaggression agreement with Abraham).⁵

Imperiled the Promise

Genesis 17:15–16 (ESV)

¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Genesis 18:9–10 (ESV)

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

God Knows the Heart of Man

1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

⁴ Butler, J. G. (1993). *Abraham: the father of the Jews* (Vol. Number Nine, pp. 201–202). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

⁵ Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ge 20:2). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.