

Genesis chapter twenty-six opens with a scene may seem familiar to those who are acquainted with earlier chapters of this book...

“There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.

And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.’

So Isaac dwelt in Gerar” (Genesis 26:1-6).

If these events seem familiar, it may be due to the fact that Isaac’s father Abraham had a similar experience earlier in Genesis chapter twelve.

The famine referenced in the opening verses of Genesis chapter twenty-six was typically caused by the periodic rainfall shortages of that era. In addition to the negative effect on the drinking water supply, these droughts affected the agricultural harvest and limited the grazing areas where livestock could feed.

Abraham responded to an earlier famine condition by [relocating to the nation of Egypt](#), and it seems that Isaac was considering a similar response. However, Isaac received a message that averted those plans: ***“Don’t go to Egypt. Stay where I tell you” (GW).***

So, rather than allow Isaac to escape these conditions, God instructed him to remain where he was and follow His instructions. This brief episode from Isaac's life reminds us that God may not permit us to escape the difficult situations we encounter. Instead, He may require us to stay within those circumstances and continue to trust Him in the midst of them.

Genesis 26:1 introduces another individual we’ve seen before. That person is Abimelech, a man who appeared earlier in [Genesis chapter 20](#)...

“...For a while (Abraham) stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, ‘She is my sister.’ Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her” (Genesis 20:1-2 NIV).

That incident with Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech took place about one hundred years prior to Isaac’s era. This means that it’s highly unlikely that the Abimelech of Genesis chapter twenty-six is the same person Abraham encountered earlier in Genesis chapter twenty. This probably means that “Abimelech” served as a title, much like a “President” or “Prime Minister” today.

However, Isaac's encounter with Abimelech was not the only familiar aspect of this account...

“And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘She is my wife,’ because he thought, ‘lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold’” (Genesis 26:7).

So Isaac followed a path that his father Abraham chose twice- once in [Genesis chapter twelve](#) and again in [Genesis chapter twenty](#). However, Isaac’s response to the men of Gerar diverted further from the truth. When Abraham misrepresented his wife Sarah as his sister, he was telling a literal half-truth. Sarah was actually Abram’s half-sister; they had the same father but different mothers, according to [Genesis 20:12](#). However, there was no truth in Isaac’s statement, for his wife Rebekah was actually his 2nd cousin ([Genesis 23:24](#)).

We should also consider the similarities in these accounts. For example...

- Abraham and Isaac's wives were physically attractive.
- Each man feared for his safety in light of their beauty.
- Each misrepresented the truth concerned their marital status.
- Abraham and Isaac made these choices in the midst of a famine.

While these similarities may seem to be little more than an interesting aside, there is something important to learn from these examples. That “something” involves the effect of our decisions upon others.

For instance, let’s consider these examples in terms of a parent/child relationship. Since children often grow to imitate their parents in different ways, we have developed a maxim to describe that effect: *“Like father, like son.”* Later, when a child grows older, he or she may reproduce the attitudes and character traits demonstrated by a parent.

We can see an example of this in Isaac’s life as he imitated the actions of his father. Nevertheless, it’s possible to avoid reproducing the shortcomings of a parent if we seek God’s help in those areas. Thus, we would do well to remember and apply the encouraging message of Philippians 4:13: ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).***

Yet even though Isaac elected to represent his wife as his sister, it won’t be long before these “siblings” get caught.

“Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife” (Genesis 26:8).

While it is not entirely clear what Abimelech observed in this interaction between Isaac and Rebekah, it clearly represented a level of physical intimacy that was characteristic of a marital relationship. That meant Isaac had some explaining to do...

“Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, ‘Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, ‘She is my sister?’’ Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her.’”

And Abimelech said, ‘What is this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us.’ So Abimelech charged all his people, saying, ‘He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death!’” (Genesis 26:9-11).

Perhaps Abimelech recalled a similar situation that developed with Isaac’s father Abraham as mentioned earlier in Genesis chapter twenty. In that incident, God came to Abimelech in a dream and said, ***“You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman” (Genesis 20:3 NIV).*** That might explain Abimelech’s response here in Genesis chapter twenty-six: ***“Don’t you know what you’ve done?’ Abimelech exclaimed. ‘If someone had slept with her, you would have made our whole nation guilty!’” (CEV).***

These incidents thus serve as a warning and example for God's people today. Isaac failed to represent God properly, and Abimelech’s response reminds us of the need to exercise care in the way we represent God to others. This is one reason why the New Testament book of Philippians advises us to, ***“...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians NAS).***

If we conduct ourselves in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, then we will be certain to provide others with the right example to follow.

***“Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous”
(Genesis 26:12-13).***

It was an exceptional achievement to receive a hundredfold return on a crop planting, especially if it occurred during a famine ([Genesis 26:1](#)). So, it's clear that Isaac had been the recipient of God's favor, but there were some who resented those blessings...

“for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.

Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.' Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there” (Genesis 26:14-17).

Possession of a water-well was a valuable and necessary commodity in that era. However, a rival group known as the Philistines vandalized Isaac's wells by filling them with dirt. Without access to those wells, Isaac would likely struggle to produce enough water to support his crops and livestock.

Isaac's neighbors thus delivered an unmistakable message: “*we don't want you around.*” So, following a personal appeal from Abimelech, Isaac obliged them by relocating to another region. However, Isaac soon found that his new neighbors were just as inhospitable as his old neighbors...

“And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, 'The water is ours.' So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah” (Genesis 26:18-21).

Isaac's experience reminds us that others may not respond positively when God brings His blessings into someone's life. Instead, Isaac found that God's favor doesn't offer immunity from the uncharitable acts of others. If and when such things occur, we can take solace in Jesus' message from John 16:33...

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (NIV).

“And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, 'For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'

Then he went up from there to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.' So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well” (Genesis 26:22-25).

So Isaac maintained his focus upon God even in the face of unjust treatment from others. That attitude helped position him to receive God's direction and encouragement: “***Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you...***” (NIV).

“Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army” (Genesis 26:26).

So it appears that Isaac was minding his own business when Abimelech decided to pay him a visit. Only this time, Abimelech showed up with a friend, along with his military commander. Since Abimelech was the same person who had earlier asked Isaac to depart from his area, this visit naturally aroused his suspicions...

“And Isaac said to them, 'Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?'

But they said, 'We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.'”

So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

It came to pass the same day that Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, 'We have found water.' So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day” (Genesis 26:27-31).

When God blesses those who honor Him, others take notice. They may not be happy about it (like the Philistines who stopped up Isaac’s wells), but they will recognize it, nonetheless. This was the case with Abimelech, and their peace treaty serves to illustrate the message behind Proverbs 16:7:

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (NKJV).

“When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah” (Genesis 26:34-35).

The concluding verses of Genesis chapter twenty-six turn our attention from Isaac to the relationship choices made by his son, Esau. Earlier in Genesis chapter twenty-four, we saw how Isaac's father Abraham arranged to provide him with an appropriate marriage partner when it came time for him to marry. [Those efforts](#) resulted in Isaac's marriage to Esau's mother, Rebekah.

With this in mind, let's compare Isaac’s marital example to Esau’s marital choices...

- First, we're told that ***“...Esau... married Judith... the Hittite, and... Basemath... the Hittite” (NIV)***. There’s nothing to indicate that Esau sought God’s direction before he made those marital decisions.
- It doesn’t appear that Esau consulted his God-fearing parents regarding these choices, nor did he follow the pattern set by his grandfather Abraham in seeking out an appropriate marriage partner.
- In fact, there’s no indication that Esau was concerned about his wives' character or spiritual beliefs at all. We're simply told that he married Judith and Basemath.

Because of this, it’s not surprising to read that, ***“...Esau’s wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah” (NLT)***. That discord may relate to the fact that Judith and Basemath belonged to a local people group known as the Hittites.

Since the Hittites were not known to be a God-fearing people (as Esau's parents and grandparents were), it's likely that Judith and Basemath exerted a negative spiritual influence upon their son. This brief passage thus reminds us of the need to prayerfully consider the spiritual character of a perspective marriage partner in advance, lest he or she become a source of grief to ourselves and others.