

Genesis 21:22-24

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King Abimelech knows that God favors Abraham, so he makes a covenant with him, asking for fair and honest dealing. Abraham agrees.

The writer returns our attention back to *Abraham*. *Abimelech*, King of Gerar, approaches Abraham, accompanied by his military *commander*, *Phicol*.

Abraham first met Abimelech in chapter 20, where he told him that Sarah was his sister to avoid being murdered. Abimelech took Sarah to be his concubine, but then received a dream from God telling him “You are a dead man” because Sarah was Abraham’s wife. Abimelech promptly returned her to Abraham, to avoid God’s discipline. When Abimelech confronted Abraham, Abraham answered, saying he did this to avoid being murdered so Abimelech could take Sarah (which Abimelech did not deny). Further, he noted Sarah really was his sister (being a half sister).

Abimelech returned Sarah to Abraham because of God’s intervention. An alliance was born between the two men, and each one helped the other. Abimelech gifted Abraham with silver, livestock, servants, and permission to settle in the land. Abraham prayed to God, who had previously “closed fast all the wombs” of Abimelech’s household because he had taken Sarah. God answered Abraham’s prayer and “healed Abimelech and his wife and maids” of their temporary infertility ([Genesis 20:17-18](#)).

Now approaching Abraham again, Abimelech acknowledges that *God is with Abraham in all that he does*. Abraham’s success is due to God. Abimelech knew that God was blessing Abraham both by observance as well as by direct revelation from God. Abimelech had authority as the king of Gerar, but he knew that a powerful God was with Abraham, due to his dream where God spoke to Abimelech, and from Abraham’s intercessory prayer that brought healing to his people ([Genesis 20:3-7](#), [Genesis 20:17-18](#)).

Since Abimelech knows that God is with Abraham *in all that he does*, he asks Abraham to swear *by God* that he will have an honest relationship with him going forward. In order to swear an oath, one swears to a higher power that would oversee retribution or vengeance for breaking the oath. Abimelech invokes the God of Abraham for Abraham to swear upon: *Swear to me here*

by God. The *oath* Abimelech asks Abraham to swear spans generations. Abimelech asks Abraham to swear that he *will not deal falsely with Abimelech or with his offspring or posterity.* Abimelech is asking Abraham to swear on behalf of both himself as well as future generations.

The standard Abimelech proposes is that Abraham and his offspring would swear to treat Abimelech *according to the kindness* that Abimelech had *shown* Abraham. Abimelech asks Abraham to show this *kindness* to both Abimelech as well as *to the land in which you have sojourned.* So Abimelech is asking for Abraham's favor on behalf of his people and territory.

The *kindness* Abimelech references is the money, livestock, and servants he gifted to Abraham. As a further incentive for Abraham to swear to him, Abimelech reminds Abraham that he is a sojourner in the land of Gerar and does not have the status of a native.

Abraham's response is simple and to the point, "*I swear it.*"

Promises were frequently formalized in the ancient world by oath-taking or pledges. Giving your word or pledging an oath was highly esteemed in a society without written records.

Biblical Text

²² Now it came about at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "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 offspring or with my posterity, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojourned." ²⁴ Abraham said, "I swear it."