



"A fistful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains!"
—Joe Bradford

15-Jun-12

The Overlooked Work (Part Two)

As we saw last time, waiting is a foundational aspect of [faith](#), hope, and [love](#), and is sometimes one of the hardest works of all. The life of Abraham has several poignant examples of waiting, beginning with his calling by [God](#):

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. . . ." So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ([Genesis 12:1-2](#), 4)

It is not immediately apparent from these verses, but Abraham did some waiting that was not "waiting on God." Verses 1-3 relate what God previously "had said," and then verse 4 takes place sometime later. [Genesis 11:31-32](#) shows Terah taking Abraham, Sarah, and Lot out of Ur and dwelling in Haran, where Terah died. However, Stephen's account in [Acts 7:2](#) shows that [Genesis 12:1-3](#) actually took place while Abraham was in Ur (Mesopotamia), but Abraham did not leave Haran and his father's house until after his father had died. This means that there is a gap between what God

told Abraham in verses 1-3 in Ur, and Abraham leaving Haran in verse 4. God told him to leave his family and his father's house, but he waited until his father died before he left. Here at the beginning, God actually had to wait on *him*!

There is an important lesson here. Not all waiting is actually "waiting on God." It could be procrastination. It could be outright laziness. It could be dragging our feet because we are fearful, uncomfortable, or, like Jonah, we just flat out do not want to do what God wants us to do. We might convince ourselves that we are waiting on God, when He is really waiting for us.

We might think that Abraham and Jonah had it easy, because God spoke to them directly. We can read the accounts, and it seems pretty clear to us what these men should have done, and when they should have acted—right away! But on the other hand, we have a whole book full of God's instructions, yet we also tend to want to wait until the circumstances are more to our liking before acting. So we wait of our own volition, not because God requires us to.

In this, we see that there is a distinction between God's *promises* and God's *instructions*. In general, the time to wait on God is not when He gives instructions. When that happens, He expects us to act on it. Rather, the time to wait on God is when God promises to do something or states that something will happen. He may give us a glimpse of the future, but we have to wait on Him to bring it to pass. That waiting is work because it takes discipline, restraint, [patience](#), and focus. It is work to sit on our hands. The alternative is to go out and try to bring God's will to pass ourselves, and as we will see, that never ends well.

In [Genesis 12:2](#), God tells Abraham that he is going to be a great nation, which implies he will have children. Later, when Abraham is in Canaan, God again appears to him, and he brings up his childlessness ([Genesis 15:1-3](#)). God tells him that he will have an heir and makes a covenant with him (verses 4-20). But we know how the story goes—Abraham and Sarah decided to cause this to happen themselves rather than waiting on God ([Genesis 16:1-2](#)). So they came up with a "brilliant" plan that everybody agreed to—except God—and carried it out. Immediately, bad fruit began to be borne: strife and division. Nobody was happy with the way things turned

out—not Hagar, not Sarah; and if the womenfolk were not happy, we can be sure Abraham was not either. Abraham and Sarah took it upon themselves to "help" God fulfill His promise, rather than doing the real work of waiting on Him.

The next incident in Abraham's life is the one that he is best known for, and on the surface, it may not seem like any waiting involved. But there are some fascinating points to consider:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up [Isaac](#), and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. ([Hebrews 11:17-19](#))

Abraham concluded that God was able to resurrect Isaac. But there is no record of a resurrection up to that point. It is possible that Abraham reasoned that God would immediately resurrect Isaac. However, it is also possible that Abraham was willing to wait for *the* resurrection—the one that happens when [Jesus Christ](#) returns—for the promises to be fulfilled. In [John 8:56](#), Jesus tells the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." Abraham must have had a glimpse of the [Kingdom of God](#), which includes the resurrection. So, by faith, he concluded that God could resurrect his son. But part of that conclusion would have been that he was willing to wait the remainder of his days without his son, as well as all the millennia in the sleep of death, for God to fulfill His promises.

But that was not the extent of his waiting: "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" ([Hebrews 11:9-10](#)).

Abraham, although exceedingly rich, lived in tents without foundations—without permanence—while waiting for a city that has eternal foundations. God called him out of the highly-developed city of Ur, and he never lived in a city again. Content to be a pilgrim, he left Haran at age 75 and lived in

tents for the next century. The whole time, he was not merely existing, he was waiting. He had seen some of God's promises fulfilled, and he was waiting for the remainder.

Notice that the city that he was waiting for is not physical Jerusalem, but the New Jerusalem, the city whose builder and maker is God. Even though Jerusalem will be Christ's abode when He returns, it is not until after the Millennium that the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven. For the last 100 years of his life, Abraham was waiting, not just for his own resurrection and Jesus' day, but he was looking 1,000 years *beyond* that for the fulfillment of [Revelation 21:2](#). This man understood waiting!

The heroes of faith saw the promises of God afar off and were willing to wait on God and His perfect timing. God's promises were at the forefront of their minds, but if their minds were anything like our minds today, it took tremendous work to remain focused on what God said and not grow weary or give up or try to work out God's promises on their own.

The next time we find ourselves waiting for that email that is long in coming, waiting for the phone to vibrate, or waiting for the driver who is "well-advanced in years" either to speed up or move over—or the next time you find yourself waiting for a resolution to a problem that you have taken to God because it is out of your power to bring about—remember the great "waiters" of the Bible. Waiting on God was one of their greatest works, and it is also one of the hardest works that we will ever do.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Faith \(Part Three\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Faith, far from being blind, is based on analyzing, calculating, and comparing, adding up from evidence in God's Word, our own experience, and our calling by God's Holy Spirit. When our minds are opened by God,

we become able to see both spiritually through faith and carnally through our senses. Like Abraham and Moses, we must make a choice to turn our back on carnal pleasures and embrace the yet unseen spiritual alternative, overcoming our doubts and fears, rather than emulate Lot, who having a knowledge of the truth, nevertheless, carnally speaking wanted to have his cake and eat it too. One of the reasons God may have decided to work His purpose by faith was that it seems the best way of discovering a person's character.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[I Want Patience - and I Want It Now!](#)

by John O. Reid

John Reid discusses two forms of patience, showing how we need it to build godly character.

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