

God's Waiting Room

Genesis 15-16

INTRODUCTION – One of the hardest tests of faith is not persecution, not temptation, not even suffering—it's waiting. When God has spoken, when you know what He has promised, and yet the days turn into years, and the years into decades—faith is tested at its deepest level.

And here's where we often fail: instead of simply taking God at His Word, we reinterpret His promise. We scheme. We adjust His truth to fit our timeline. We look for a way to help God out, as though His faithfulness needs our creativity.

Abram and Sarai found themselves right there. And the story in Genesis 15–16 shows us what happens when faith is fixed on God's Word... and what happens when it tries to force God's hand.

There are many obstacles on the journey of faith but none as imposing as time. The man who can look **temptation** in the eye without blinking may fold under the passing of time.

Patience has never been easy, and I think our generation may have experienced its greatest deficit.

- **Restaurants** - You get to the restaurant and ask, "How long is the wait?"
 - **Yoggi Bera**, *After having to wait too long in a particular restaurant, left saying to the matridee, "That's why no one comes here, you never can get a place to sit".*
- **Fast Food** - If you want to see your Pastor backslide... follow me to a fast food place when they say sir, could you please pull up there and we will bring your food out to you? For those of you in the food service business... that's ok... I really don't mind... BUT TELL ME before you take my money. I feel like I'm being held hostage! Yes, I have issues...
- **Dr. office**. You go there when you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, and the first place they send you – the waiting room. A good PR director would tell them that they could accomplish a lot by simply changing the name of that place – call it the Fun Room, not the Waiting Room. But you sit there and you sit and you wait. You just know that this doctor is undoubtedly showing off his new golf clubs while you wait.

CONTEXT: Last week, we ended with Abraham fresh from the battle to rescue his nephew Lot, along with the Kings of the South. If you remember, the King of Sodom offered Abraham great treasure as a reward following his victory. Abraham, however, refused the gift lest it be said, “The King of Sodom made Abraham rich”.

TEXT: Genesis 15:1–6 (ESV)

¹ After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

This verse seems to imply that the decision to refuse the King of Sodom’s treasure was not easy for Abram, yet he did the right thing anyway. So God says, “Do not fear any longer... I will be a shield to protect you, and I will be your reward”.

² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

1. Receive God’s Revelation

⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; **your very own son** shall be your heir.” ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Verse 6 is considered by many the most important verse in the entire OT. It is to the OT what John 3:16 is to the NT. It is that simple verse that Paul built an entire theology around in Romans and Galatians.

- Adam had taken his gaze off of God and looked to self sufficiency - thus cursing the human race.
- Abram had taken his gaze off of self sufficiency and looked to God by faith - trusting God’s promise... and God said, “That simple act, the gaze of faith, is counted to him as Righteousness”.

Genesis 15:7–16 (ESV)

⁷ And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”

So notice here the growing specificity. Before God sent Abram to a land he knew not of. Now, God is saying, “I am giving you THIS land”, the land of Canaan.

There is something strange you will find about faith. It tends to move from

VERY General to VERY Specific. Abram didn't struggle with believing God for the conceptual realities of the call, but now it's getting real... no longer, "A land", but rather, "this land".

Isn't that how it goes?

- God calls you to trust Him, believe He exists...
- Then it's trust me for your eternity....
- Then it's trust me for your future mate...
- Then it's trust me for this particular person...
- Then it's trust me for this person and this particular day...

The fear grows and your faith is tested with each iteration of God's call.

Even Abraham begins to raise questions...

⁸ But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

Now, we expect verse 9 to say, "And God rebuked Abram for his questioning and lack of faith"... but that's not at all how God responds.

2. Rely on God's Reaffirmation

⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

God didn't tell him to cut them in half but he did... why? Because he knew exactly what was going on. This was the prescription for a **covenant**.

ILLUSTRATION: In Abraham's day - when two Kings made a covenant this is what they would do - they would arrange a sacrifice like this and the two kings would walk through the pieces as if to say - may what happened to these animals happen to us if we break this covenant. May we be torn asunder and may the birds feast on our carcasses if we break covenant.

This is called, "cutting a covenant".

You see this language in **Jeremiah 34:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts—

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for

certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

That is to say, “Abram, my promises to you are far bigger than one man... I’m speaking in terms of your legacy”. The same is true for us - when you trust the promises of God it has implications for everyone in your circle of influence.

¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

Genesis 15:17–21 (ESV)

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

This is a difficult passage to make sense of.... but one thing we know for certain is that the words for **flame** and **smoke** are the same as the words used to describe God’s appearance on Mt. Sinai and the same as the Pillar of **smoke** and **fire** used to describe God’s guiding Israel in the wilderness. So it’s the Shakina glory of God, His manifest presence.

God is passing through the pieces. He is saying that if I don’t keep my word to you... my God Himself be torn asunder.

OK - so God’s will for Abram has become progressively clear through the years.

First God said, “Go”, Abram says, “where?”. God says, “Just wander and I will show you”.

NOW, God says, that he intends to give Abram’s offspring the territory of Canaan. AND that God intends for Abram to father as son who would ultimately father innumerable people.

3. Resist the Tendency toward Reinterpretation

NOW - this is a VERY DANGEROUS place to be. You have SOME of the information... but not all of the information.

It is at this point we begin to wonder... how will all of this play out? **Was God speaking in metaphor** perhaps? I mean Abram was 75 years old and he had no progeny. Perhaps this would be no literal offspring, perhaps it would be an offspring of influence that God would grant Abram.

It seems at this point fear began to grip the heart of Abram, thinking, “perhaps I misunderstood”.

It is at this point that we tend to be tempted to scheme and help God out a little.

Genesis 16:1–2 (ESV)

¹ Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

Sarai knew that God had promised Abram that a son coming from his own body would be his heir (cf. 15:4), but it had not yet been explicitly revealed to her that she would be the mother. That would happen when her name would be changed to Sarah (cf. 17:15, 16).

It is then that human reason begins to wrestle with divine revelation.

There is a tendency to want to fulfill a Godly mandate in an ungodly way.

Keep in mind according to the culture of Canaan, this polygamous solution was perfectly acceptable, it was normal, everybody was doing it.

Genesis 16:3–4 (ESV)

³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

The Bible tells us that sin is pleasurable for a season, but it soon becomes bitter to the taste.

2 Samuel 13 tells the story of Amnon who rather than trust God for a bride decided to take a shortcut and forced himself on his half sister. ¹⁵ Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.

That’s the nature of human scheming and shortcuts.

At first Hagar was the answer to all of Sarai problems, but now she was the problem.

Kent Hughes said it well, *“Little did Abram and Sarai imagine that their shortcut would originate a conflict that would run for millennia and that oceans of blood would be spilt. How tragic was Abram’s expediency.”*

You see the result of Abram's compromise every time you read of the Arab/Israeli conflict.

- **Arabs – descendants of Hagar's son Ishmael**
- **Israeli's – descendants of Sarai's son Isaac**

Every day of your life you awake to fresh blood being spilt over that conflict.

CONCLUSION: Christian, the question is not whether God is faithful. He has bound Himself to His Word. He passed through the pieces in Genesis 15 to say, "May I be torn apart if I do not keep my promise." The cross of Christ proves the same—that God keeps His Word, even at the cost of His own Son.

The question is—will you take Him at His Word? Or will you reinterpret, scheme, and settle for human shortcuts that always end in bitterness?

Trust what God has said. Obey what you already know. Wait in faith for what you do not yet see. Because every time you scheme, you create an Ishmael. But every time you trust, you prepare the way for an Isaac.

So, don't just wait—believe. Don't just believe—obey. And in God's perfect time, you'll see that His Word was faithful all along.

Obey God in what you do know, trust and wait upon Him in what you do not.

- **Isaiah 40:31**, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

ILLUSTRATION: A good filet minion takes time to prepare – it involves:

- The breeding of the cattle
- The proper slaughtering of the animal
- The proper storage of the meat
- The proper marinating of the meat
- At times it requires you to sear the cut in olive oil and garlic
- Then a slow cook over low heat for 30 minutes or longer.
- Then you want the sauce as prepared as the steak, you don't dip it in ketchup.

A can of Vienna sausage is a lot quicker but not nearly as enjoyable.

NOW LISTEN: *God is not a microwave God, He is a crockpot God.*

Some of you today are half way between the promise of God and holding of the baby. Be patient, God's working on you, He's working in and through others... Don't rush the process.