



Impatience

God expects His people to patiently wait for His timing.

GENESIS 15:1-6; 16:1-6

It is difficult for children to wait patiently for something they're excited about. Schoolteachers know that children grow more antsy and impatient as summer break draws near. Impatience is a normal response for children because patience comes with maturity. Sometimes adults struggle to be patient too. In God's dealings with Abram, we learn that He expects believers to be mature in their faith and to exercise patience, trusting in God's perfect timing in all things.

○ **Why do we often struggle to wait patiently for God's timing?**


UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 15:1–16:16

After Abram experienced a great military victory over a coalition of kings who had kidnapped Lot and his family, Genesis 15:1 returns to the narrative begun in chapter 13 concerning the promises God made to Abram. The Lord had promised that Abram's offspring would be as numerous as the dust on the earth, yet after years of waiting Abram still had no offspring of his own. Nevertheless, God came to Abram in a vision and reassured him that his offspring would be numerous like the stars in the sky. There was no visible evidence before Abram to support what the Lord promised. But when Abram heard these words, he believed God, and the Lord credited it to Abram as righteousness.

This act of God in response to Abram's faith was followed by a covenant ceremony to provide a visual confirmation to Abram that God would be faithful to keep His promises. In this ceremony, sealed by blood sacrifices, God revealed to Abram that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in a foreign land for four hundred years, God would then deliver them from their oppressors, they would go out from them with great possessions, and then they would return to the promised land.

Genesis 16 records how Abram and Sarai tried to fulfill the promises God made to them through their own efforts. Instead of waiting on the Lord's timing, Abram and Sarai contrived a way to try to speed up things. Since Sarai was barren, they decided to use Hagar, Sarai's maidservant, as her proxy and have a son in Sarai's name. Hagar became pregnant and had a son named Ishmael, but these actions resulted in turmoil in Abram's family. It became so difficult for Hagar that she fled from them. Nevertheless, an angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her to return, promising to greatly multiply her offspring through her son who was to be named Ishmael.

-  **As you read Genesis 15:1-6 and 16:1-6, identify the problems that arose because of Abram's impatience.**
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EXPLORE THE TEXT

BELIEVED (GEN. 15:1-6)

¹ After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great.

² But Abram said, “LORD God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ Abram continued, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir.” ⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to him: “This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “Your offspring will be that numerous.” ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

VERSE 1

After these events leads us to look back at the preceding chapter. Genesis 14 records how a coalition of kings raided Sodom and the surrounding region, taking Lot and his family captive. When Abram learned what had happened, he took his men to pursue these marauders and rescue Lot. Abram defeated the invaders and recovered everything and everyone they had taken. In its aftermath, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, blessed Abram, and the king of Sodom expressed his gratitude to Abram.

It is after these events in chapter 14 that *the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision*. *The word of the LORD came* appears only twice in Genesis and both instances are in this passage (vv. 1,4). However, it occurs numerous times in the Old Testament concerning the prophets. This phrase is an indication Abram was God’s prophet (Gen. 20:7). This is emphasized even more by the fact that it came to Abram *in a vision*. Again, this is a connection to God’s prophets, as the Lord often communicated to them through visions.

The text does not reveal what Abram saw, but it does reveal the words God spoke to Him. The Lord told Abram to not be *afraid*. He knew Abram would be tempted to be *afraid*. He told Abram, *I am your shield*, meaning He would protect Abram, and *your reward will be very great*, promising He would provide for Abram’s needs. What’s more, God would reward Abram with the fulfillment of all the promises God had made to him.

VERSES 2-3

Abram believed God, but at the same time he struggled in his faith. It is similar to the father who brought his son to Jesus to expel an unclean spirit from the boy. The man said to Jesus, “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Having no children of his own, the only possible **heir** Abram had was his servant •**Eliezer of Damascus**. Regarding the land, at this point Abram owned none of it. He believed God, but there was absolutely no visual evidence of God’s promises to him coming to fruition.

Note how Abram asked and answered the question. Abram suggested that *Eliezer*, a servant born in his house, would be his *heir*. Ancient Near Eastern records indicate that what Abram suggested was practiced by those who did not have children of their own. On one hand Abram appears to have been struggling to believe God. On the other, because Abram believed God, he was trying to figure out the best way to make it happen himself using the logic and alternatives within his own cultural context.

Although Abram had questions, taking those questions to God was a demonstration of his faith in God. God was helping Abram to grow in faith as Abram deeply desired to see the fulfillment of God’s purpose for him and promises to him. Faith is like a rubber band; it is most useful when it is being stretched.

VERSES 4-5

In response to Abram’s suggestion, ***the word of the LORD came to him*** a second time. This is not an indication of a gap of time between verses 3 and 4. It is a way of communicating that again the Lord spoke to Abram and told him that he needed to stop trying to figure out a way to make things happen. Instead, Abram needed to trust in the Lord that He would enable Abram to have a son. ***This one***, meaning Eliezer, would not be Abram’s **heir**. This means that Abram would need to continue to wait patiently on the Lord and trust His timing in the matter.

In verse 5, we are made aware that what had transpired in this passage so far must have been taking place within Abram’s tent. God now led Abram outside to continue the conversation. It also apparently happened at night since the Lord told Abram to ***look at the sky and count the stars***. In 14:22, Abram had declared that God is “the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.” So, the Creator of the heavens, and the God who is able to count the number of stars in them (Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26) now instructed Abram to look up to them and try

to count all of them himself. Just as it was impossible for Abram to count all of the stars because they are so numerous, so Abram's offspring will be just as numerous. This recalls God's promise that Abram's offspring will be as numerous as the dust of the earth; the number will be incalculable (13:16).

God assigned Abram's faith the value of righteousness.

VERSE 6

This statement is not only one of the most significant statements in Genesis but in the entire Bible. It is quoted or partially quoted three times by Paul and once by James to establish that justification has always been by faith (Rom. 4:3,22; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). Faith has always been God's standard for ***righteousness***. By grace God called Abram to Himself for His own purpose and made wonderful promises to him. It was Abram's unequivocal faith in God—His person, character, and promises—that alone resulted in God's crediting Abram as righteous. This means that by grace, God assigned Abram's faith the value of *righteousness*. Saving faith does not look to oneself but entirely to God.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Kingdom*

The Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See Romans 4:22-25; Galatians 3:5-6.)

The construction of verse 6 in Hebrew indicates that the faith Abram demonstrated here was another occasion in a sequence of events where Abram demonstrated his faith in God. Consequently, this verse takes into account everything Moses wrote about Abram since he introduced him in 11:27. Nevertheless, Abram did nothing to merit what God did. Instead, his obedience to God throughout his life was an outward expression of his faith in God, corroborating his saving faith (Jas. 2:21-24). It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that we are credited with righteousness before God and saved.

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IMPATIENT (GEN. 16:1-4)

¹ Abram's wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. ² Sarai said to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her.

VERSES 1-2

Apparently, there was still one huge hurdle that Abram and Sarai believed to be insurmountable. How could Abram have an heir who was his own flesh and blood since Sarai was barren (Gen. 11:30). So Sarai concocted a plan to bring about what God had promised. In ancient Near Eastern culture, the practice of using a female servant as a proxy on behalf of a barren wife to have a child in the wife's name was not unheard of. Sarai's personal servant was an Egyptian named **•Hagar**. Given their years of oppression by the Egyptians, Moses's Israelite audience certainly must have winced at what was transpiring in the account. Also, note how Sarai blamed God for her barrenness before directing Abram to lie with her slave. Furthermore, we should note how Sarai didn't even mention her servant's name when she told Abram to go to her. Apparently, Hagar was just a means to an end to relieve Sarai's embarrassment over not being able to have a child.

In one sense, the fact that Sarai and Abram considered this idea demonstrates they believed God's promise for Abram to have a child that would be his own flesh and blood. They were just trying to figure out

what they could do to make it happen. However, they were once again unwilling to wait on God and His timing.

One may say it was good for them to “act” on the promise of God, and of course it is good to act on God’s promises. The problem here is that God had not instructed them to do this, and they could have easily inquired of the Lord if this was His plan, as Abram had done in the case of Eliezer (15:2-3). Instead, Abram agreed to do what Sarai told him. He was readily obedient to his wife without considering God’s will in the matter. It is reminiscent of Adam’s response to Eve when she gave him fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden and God’s rebuke of Adam for having listened to his wife at that time (3:6,17).

VERSES 3-4

It seems that Sarai and Abram’s patience had run out after having lived in Canaan ten years, waiting for God to fulfill His promises. So Sarai gave her personal servant, Hagar the Egyptian, to be Abram’s wife in order to make it possible for him to have a son. This also gave Sarai a means of control over Abram’s acquiring a second wife, should he have thought to do so. When Abram slept with Hagar, she became pregnant. When Hagar realized that she was pregnant, Hagar took on an attitude and disposition of superiority toward her *mistress*. The word *mistress* refers to a woman of high social rank, and Sarai’s name literally means “princess.” Therefore, Hagar, the servant, was able to do for Abram what Sarai, the princess, had failed to do for him: give him an heir.

- What are the dangers of looking for a shortcut to fulfill God’s promises?

IMPETUOUS (GEN. 16:5-6)

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the LORD judge between me and you.” ⁶ Abram replied to Sarai, “Here, your slave is in your power; do whatever you want with her.” Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

VERSES 5-6

It is no surprise that Sarai was upset with Hagar's disposition toward her, and she blamed Abram. Therefore, she called on the Lord to **judge** between them concerning who had done wrongly. The truth is both Abram and Sarai were responsible for what transpired. From Sarai's point of view, she was trying to help Abram. She believed Abram was failing to uphold his responsibility as the head of the clan by ignoring how Hagar was treating her instead of stepping in and putting an end to it.

Abram told Sarai to do with Hagar whatever she wanted. Consequently, Sarai **mistreated** Hagar, which means she was abusive to her, treating her like a slave. It became so difficult for Hagar that, out of desperation, she fled from all that being part of a clan should have afforded her.

- What kind of excuses do people create when they try to do things without God?
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BIBLE SKILL: *Compare the attitudes and actions of different Bible characters.*

Create a chart with three columns labeled Sarai, Abram, and Hagar. Read Genesis 16:1-6 and identify the incorrect attitude and action of each person. Write words and phrases in each column to express your thoughts. What might each person have done differently that would have eased the difficult situation? What lessons can you learn about relating to others from this study?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can celebrate being declared righteous through faith.
- + Believers must safeguard against accepting shortcuts to God's plans.
- + Believers must take responsibility for their own sin.

○ Discuss as a group ways you have seen people accept shortcuts to God's plans. How does being part of a Bible study group help safeguard against this?

○ Examine your own life for ways you have attempted to do things without God. How would waiting on God have led to different outcomes? What would it look like to take responsibility for your sin?

○ Memorize Genesis 15:6.

Prayer Needs
