

Why You Should Never Lose Faith in What God Has Promised You

Godly patience is a character quality that sustains us—patience is a virtue. However, many of us grow impatient when waiting upon God for a promise to be fulfilled. In the delay, we can become discouraged if the season is long.

In the book of Proverbs, we read, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12).

Only hope anchored firmly in God and His promises can avoid discouragement during seasons of delay.

I want to share with you a story that illustrates that though God’s promises are delayed, we can fully trust Him for their fulfillment. The story also implies that we should not try and fulfill God’s promises in our own effort and strength. And finally, the story demonstrates that during our moments of greatest need, God sees and cares deeply about our situations and future.

The story I’m writing about is found in Genesis 16, with Abram, Sarai, Hagar and Ishmael:

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go into my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So, he went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had

conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me."

So, Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." And the Angel of the Lord said to her:

"Behold, you are with child,
And you shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the Lord has heard your affliction.
He shall be a wild man;
His hand shall be against every man,
And every man's hand against him.
And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram."

Ten years earlier, Abram believed God for a son. Now, he is 85 and Sarai 75. Their faith and hope weaken in God's promise for a son and to have many descendants. Here is a little more background before unpacking our Genesis 16 story.

God spoke to Abram in Genesis 12 and told him to leave his country, his family and his father's house to go to a land God would show him.

God promised to make from Abram a great nation, and all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. Years went by, and Abram and Sarai still found themselves childless.

How would all the families of the earth be blessed? Through the seed, or spiritual offspring of Abram, Paul wrote, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Paul elaborates in Gal. 3:15-18 that the promise was not to all the descendants of Abraham, but the promise was fulfilled in Christ and to those who are united with Jesus through faith.

Abram means *exalted father*. God would later rename Abram to Abraham, meaning *father of a multitude*.

In Genesis 15, God reaffirms His promises to Abram, and establishes what is known as the Abrahamic covenant with him (the Abrahamic Covenant is the OT model for the New Covenant in Jesus Christ). Abram believed God and His promise of a son and descendants, "And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith" (Gen. 15:6, NLT).

Paul quotes this in Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23. It is the basis for the NT teaching that God's way has always

been by faith, as we obediently trust His word, which causes right living.

However, 10 years elapse, and no child is born.

Abram and Sarai, weakened in faith, devise a scheme (Gen. 16:2-4), which Paul describes as of the flesh: "But he who was of the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but he of the free woman through the promise" (Gal. 4:23).

All of God's promises are yes and amen, if we have the faith and patience to wait upon them. The struggle for most of us is delay.

Delay can occur for many reasons.

Sometimes it's our own unbelief and we find ourselves wandering aimlessly around another mountain instead of possessing what God has promised and given. Delay can also occur because of an unrenewed mind or strongholds in the mind.

Another reason for delay is rebellion against God, His word and promises. Jesus said clearly, "If you love Me, keep my commands!"

But, as in this case with Abram and Sarai, there is also God's delay. When God causes the delay, faith and patience are needed to inherit His promises (Heb. 6:12).

God allows tension between His promises and their fulfillment. Quite often, God's promises and prophecies over our lives have delay—sometimes years. It would be another 14 years before Abram and Sarai would have their own child, Isaac, the son of promise (see Gen. 17-18).

But like Abram and Sarah, when divine delay occurs, many of us try to bring about prophetic promise in the flesh! There is a timing that only God can orchestrate. Like a symphony conductor, God knows exactly when every instrument, and every piece of the music, must be played in your life.

“Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son” (Gen. 18:14).

When God’s delay occurs, continue in the Spirit patiently, waiting upon the Lord to bring to pass the promise. “And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9).

I’ve had a season or two in my life where frustration gripped me. Tension occurred between the prophecy and fulfillment of what was promised. Sadly, like Abram and Sarai, decisions were made not of the Spirit or in God’s timing. Result: more pain, heartache and frustration. God is God—we are not! He only knows the timing of your life—trust Him.

Hagar Conceives and Sarai Becomes Angry at Her

Imagine Hagar’s pain. She is forced to have a child with Abram, knowing that by cultural standards the child would belong to her mistress Sarai. She has been taken advantage of and wronged. Hagar despises Sarai.

Sarai blames Abram for her maid’s attitude and condemns him for the situation! By the way, when we operate from human reasoning instead of Holy Spirit’s leading, we tend to become frustrated and angry. Left unrepentant, we tend to direct this toward others, and begin to shift blame.

Abram, operating from condemnation, yields to more human reasoning, “Well just send her away then!” Remember what Paul said in Romans:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

Your new life in Jesus empowers you to live in the superior law of the Spirit—above your flesh, your past and the legalism of religion apart from true faith in Christ.

Paul describes the birth of Ishmael as according to the flesh and the birth of Isaac as according to promise, and he states they are symbolic and represent the law and the new covenant in Christ (Gal. 4:21-31), where we are free from the bondage of legalistic religion. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17, ESV).

Hagar Flees From Sarai

In Gen. 16:6-7 we read that an angel appears to Hagar and tells her to return and submit herself to her mistress. God has a plan. If there are situations that are unsafe, we need to remove ourselves from those situations and place healthy boundaries around us or our family. But, at times, as with Hagar, God directs us to remain connected to others, as difficult and challenging as it may be, for His greater purposes.

Sometimes we flee connection and family because of the works of the flesh! It may be our wrong actions or the action of others—real or perceived. I am not making light of abusive situations, just pointing out that sometimes we run from the very place God is using to bring us into destiny.

Hagar, in a place of hopelessness and despair, encounters the Father, who gives her hope and speaks of her future.

The angel prophesies to Hagar about her son Ishmael (Gen. 16:10-12). The descendants of Ishmael roamed about the desert, often in conflict with others. Modern-day Arabs claim descent from Abraham and his son Ishmael; his brethren are the Jewish people. Keep in mind, God loves all people—Jew, Arab and every race!

Ishmael means, “God hears!” In other words, God was declaring

through the child's name that God heard Hagar's cry and God will hear our voice too.

By the way, every child has purpose and meaning. You are loved and valued by God, and so is all of humanity! God desires all men to be saved, to know how much He loves them and cares for them.

Her response: "You are the God who sees..." (Gen. 16:13, NIV). This is the Hebrew name of God, El Roi. This is the only occurrence of this covenant name for God in Scripture, and it occurs in a moment of despair and hopelessness, by someone despised, rejected and in the margins of society.

The message is clear for us: God hears and sees us in every difficult circumstance and we can trust Him, for God declares:

"For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Sometimes we grow weary because of God's delay, like Abram and Sarai, or maybe we suffer because of the actions of others like Hagar, but God sees, and He knows the plans and purposes He has for us!

Sometimes our greatest encounters with God happen at our place of despair. During the difficulties and challenges of life, God will often suddenly appear to us when we least expect it. Be confident that God hears and sees—always!

Hagar returns and gives birth to a son. Abram honors Hagar, by calling the child Ishmael as she was instructed to do by the angel.

Hagar must have told Abram what had happened, for Abram honors the angel's instructions to Hagar by naming the boy Ishmael. And in so doing, Abram affirms this child as his adopted son and heir to his family. This is precisely what Jesus has done

for us! When we were without hope, God sent His son Jesus to bring us into adoption and God's family. Paul wrote in Galatians of this adoption:

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of His Son, crying, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:6-7, MEV).

Abram, representative of the Father, affirms Hagar and Ishmael. The world is looking for love, acceptance and validation. As His representatives, we can bring others the Father's love and good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Final Thoughts

God hears your prayer and sees your situation. Don't lose faith in what He has promised you. God will bring it to pass in His perfect timing.

Continue to walk with Jesus faithfully, by obeying God's Word and by following the Spirit. Don't yield to the flesh or human reasoning. If you have, repent (change your thinking about the matter), ask God to forgive you and ask Him to restore faith in the promises He has made over your life! Know that God will answer your prayer—He hears and sees your need and the promises over your life!

For those reading who are in a difficult place, perhaps you have metaphorically fled to the wilderness because of the hardships of life. God wants to minister to you today! Like Hagar, remember you may encounter God's love, presence and power at your lowest moment when you least expect Him to break in. {eoa}

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