

**THE WAIT PROBLEM IN THE LIFE OF FAITH  
GENESIS 16:**

Ten years is a long time for any one. It had been more than ten years since God had first made a promise to Abram. He has now been in the land of Canaan for ten years. He has nothing to show for the ten years. He has no heir! He has no deed to any part of the Promised Land! He has been waiting and waiting and waiting and God has done nothing.

Sarah was not inclined to wait any longer. She wanted very much the fulfillment of the promise that God had given to her beloved husband, Abram. She began to think about the problem in a very practical way. Was there anything she could do to be of assistance to her husband to end this time of waiting? She had not been able to conceive a child so is there any other alternative? This kind of thinking led to the situation that develops in this chapter.

If Abram and Sarah had difficulty waiting in that slow paced ancient world, what about those of us who live in this fast paced contemporary world. We are accustomed to seeing a problem proposed and solved in a one hour television drama. Wait for ten years! We are accustomed to fast food and fast everything. We are not very good at waiting. Yet, waiting is a basic part of a life of faith. No one will ever be successful in living the life of faith that does not learn to wait. Let's see what we can learn from this chapter concerning the wait problem in the life of faith.

**I. THOSE WHO WAIT UPON THE LORD WILL FACE TEMPTATION.**

What happened to Abram and Sarah happens to all of those who are called upon to wait upon the Lord. They find themselves facing some very real temptations.

1. The temptation to second guess God's timing.

God has a time in which He will do what He has promised to do. His time rarely ever fits into our schedule. Abram and Sarah knew that the days were passing swiftly. Sarah considered herself already beyond the childbearing age. Abram was old enough to be a grandfather if not a great grandfather and yet he was not a father. Surely, if he was ever going to be a father the time was now. They could not delay any longer.

Many of us have been in a situation like this. We could see the need and we knew the promise of God, but God had not been pleased to do anything. So we began to second-guess God's timing. We began to take time into our own hands and to make something happen now. We put too much emphasis on now instead of waiting until God has chosen to act in His own time.

2. The temptation to use unapproved means.

What Sarah proposed to Abram was not totally new. It was a practice of the people who lived around them in the land of Canaan frequently. It was almost expected that if a man's wife was not able to conceive that he would take another wife. What may have been in this situation is that Sarah proposed Abram taking Hagar instead of Abram making the proposal. It originated in the mind and in the heart of Sarah. She was the one that was concerned that Abram have an heir.

Even though Hagar is called a wife in our text, it is probably better to understand that she was a concubine. Whatever child would be born to her would actually belong to Sarah since Sarah was her owner and master. She in no way would be an equal wife standing along side Sarah in the household of Abram. Instead she was still in a subservient role.

What Sarah proposed and Abram approved was an unapproved means of carrying out the purpose of God. It is true to this point that God had not made it clear that the heir was to be born through Sarah. This would be revealed clearly at a later time, but to this point all that was revealed was that Abram was to be a father of many nations. However, Abram and Sarah did know that it was the will of God that one man have one wife. This method that she proposed was a departure from God's original method. There is always the temptation when you are called on to wait to try some means or method that God has not approved. If God does not do it His way, then you seek to do it your way. This temptation is very real to those who are waiting upon the Lord. It is a part of our wait problem.

3. There is the temptation to play God.

If God doesn't do what He is suppose to do, then we will do what God is suppose to do. Abram was taking matters into his own hands at the encouragement of his wife, Sarah. Instead of waiting until God moved and God gave an heir, he moved to accomplish what God alone could do.

Oh the temptation to play God instead of wait upon God is real for everyone of us who seek to walk by faith. There is always the temptation to do what God alone can do. So, we need to be aware of this wait problem and the temptations that it brings.

## **II. NOT WAITING CAN LEAD TO SEVERE TROUBLES.**

The clear lesson of this chapter is that a departure from waiting is an entrance into trouble.

At first it appeared that Sarah's plan was working wonderfully. Abram was cooperative – most men would probably have done the same thing in those circumstances. He had no sooner taken Hagar as a concubine than she conceived. It must have been an electrifying moment in the tents of Abram when the word began to spread that the Egyptian slave, Hagar, was pregnant and Abram was the father of her child. It was the beginning of trouble for everyone involved.

### 1. Trouble for you.

Abram discovered almost immediately that he had a problem. He now found himself with a wife and a subservient concubine. The concubine was pregnant. Instead of there being the thrill that one should know when he is expecting to be a father, there were multiplying heartaches. Hagar took being the concubine of Abram very seriously. She was soon flaunting the fact around the tents that she was carrying Abram's child in her womb. Every time she was around Sarah she had some way of reminding Sarah of her barrenness. The text indicates that she despised Sarah in her own eyes. This created a tremendous tension for Abram.

Before long Sarah was standing in Abram's tent casting blame upon him for the situation that had developed. She accused him of being the creator of all the trouble. She evidently forgot that the whole scheme was her idea. Abram responded by putting the responsibility in her hand to do with Hagar whatever she pleased. It pleased her to make the life of this slave woman, who was carrying her husband's seed in her womb, as miserable as possible. She evidently physically and emotionally harassed Hagar day by day. The harassment became so severe that Hagar left the tents of Abram without any place to go. Can you imagine trying to be Sarah's husband and the head of your household with all of this female confusion going on in the family? Trouble and trouble and trouble! And it all goes back to the failure on Abram's part to wait upon the Lord. You and I need to be mindful of this. When we stop waiting on the Lord, we began to create for ourselves a multitude of troubles.

## 2. Trouble for the family.

Not only did Abram's failure to wait create a problem for himself, it created a problem for the whole household of Abram. When we look beyond the statement of this text into later chapters, we discover that when God finally gave Abram a true heir that Ishmael became the antagonist of the true heir. Conflict developed in Abram's family. In fact, from the time that he failed to wait on the Lord until the end of his life his family was never free from this conflict. It began when he abandoned the posture of faith and began to act on God's behalf in a way that was inappropriate.

This is a dimension of the life of faith that we must never forget. When we walk by faith we not only acquire a blessing but we open the door to blessing to everyone who is associated with us in

our family. When we succumb to temptation and stop waiting on the Lord, we not only bring down on our own heads trouble, we also bring trouble down on the head of those that we love.

### 3. Trouble for the work of God.

Abram learned this important lesson – when we try to do God’s work our way we create problems for the true work of God. The failure to wait on Abram’s part led to the birth of Ishmael. Ishmael became the adversary of Isaac when God later gave Isaac. And the descendents of Ishmael became the antagonist to the descendents of Isaac. To this very day in that ancient part of the world in the near East that antagonism continues. The greatest antagonist to Christianity and Judaism in the world today is Islam. Islam is a religion that began among the descendents of Ishmael. Its primary propagators in the modern world are still the descendents of Ishmael. Trouble and trouble and trouble! This is all that you can expect when you stop waiting on the Lord.

I wonder how many of our personal and congregational problems could be traced back to some incident in which we failed to wait upon the Lord. I think I can trace some problems in my own life back to such incidents. Can you? I would venture that I might be able to trace some back for this congregation. Today’s solution has a way of becoming tomorrow’s problem.

### **III. GOD’S GRACE WILL TRIUMPH IN THE END.**

This is not a chapter just about the failure of a man of faith. It is not a chapter just about the “wait” problem; it is ultimately a chapter about the mercy and grace of God prevailing in spite of human weakness and human failure.

1. Grace over rules our blunders for good.

When Abram impregnates Hagar and Sarah makes life so miserable that she becomes a runaway God intervenes. The God of grace meets Hagar when she is at the end of her resources and points her in the direction that she needs to go. This expectant mother became the recipient of a gift of grace, a visitation from the Lord. When the whole incident is completed Abram does have a son and Hagar is a mother. Hagar being the mother of Abram's son was never in God's best plan for Abram and Hagar, for God over rules the situation to make out of Ishmael a great people. We must never forget that human failure does not determine the outcome of things in the end but rather the grace of God.

2. Grace accomplishes God's ultimate purpose.

God does not abandon Abram because he failed the test of waiting. God does not abandon him and find someone else through which the seed of woman will come into the world. Instead God moves on and in spite of Abram's failure in God's good time Sarah conceives and bears Abram a son. He has an heir in the end which was God's plan all the time. At every point it is obvious that everything works out because God is a God of grace and a God of mercy.

Thank God that this is still true! When we waiver, God does not waiver. When we fail God still succeeds. When the last chapter is written God's plan will be accomplished. What you and I need to do is to learn that the wisest, most reasonable thing we can do is to live a life of faith and learn to wait on the Lord. Waiting on the Lord is a basic part of the life of faith. We will never be able to live a life of faith if we do not learn to wait upon the Lord.