

Wait for the Lord

Introduction

One of the items that is mentioned again and again in Scripture, is the necessity for believers to “wait for the Lord”. That is, it is necessary for us to wait patiently for God to fulfill His plans for us – despite all of the difficulties and trials that we have to undergo. Of course, this requires us to have faith – i.e., *trust* – in God, that He has our best interests at heart – and that He will ultimately bring about our salvation.

Here is a small sample, of the many passages that exhort us to wait for the Lord:

Psalms 27:13-14 (ESV):

¹³ I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living!
¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

Proverbs 20:22 (ESV):

²² Do not say, “I will repay evil”;
wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

Isaiah 40:30-31 (ESV):

³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
³¹ but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

James 5:7-8 (ESV):

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Lamentations 3:25-26 (ESV):

²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

Jude 1:20-21 (ESV):

²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,
²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Psalm 37:7-9 (ESV):

⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!

⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

⁹ For the evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Trying to “Rush” God’s Plans

As shown above, Scripture strongly encourages believers to wait for God to bring about His plans. Unfortunately, however, over the course of history many people have grown *impatient* with God – and have tried to “take matters into their own hands”, so to speak. This has been the case even in situations where God has made **explicit** promises to people.

One example of this situation – of people trying to “rush” God – can be found with God’s promise to Abraham, about his offspring. Here is the initial promise that God made to Abraham, about his descendants:

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.” 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.” 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.

So, we see that God *explicitly* promised Abraham that he would have a son – despite the fact that Abraham was already 76 years old at the time. Unfortunately, Abraham did not wait for God to fulfill His promise – instead, Abraham tried to bring about the plan himself:

Genesis 16: 1-3 (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. 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.

There were serious *consequences* of that event, though. First of all, look at what happened next:

Genesis 16:4-6 (ESV):

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. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!” ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

So, when Hagar conceived, she treated Sarah with contempt – and then Sarah began to treat Hagar very harshly. In other words, the fact that Abraham had a child with Hagar caused enormous strife between Hagar and Sarah. (This outcome is not very surprising...)

In *addition* to that, though, there were also “long term” consequences of Abraham having a child with Hagar:

Genesis 16:11-12 (ESV):

¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her [Hagar],

“Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.
¹² He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone’s hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”

The child of Abraham with Hagar was Ishmael – and Ishmael was the forefather of the Arabs. Of course, Arabs have been very frequent **enemies** of the *Israelites* – the descendants of Abraham through **Sarah** - for millennia.

So, the fact that Abraham tried to “rush” God’s plan had *enormous* ramifications – it resulted in severe long-term struggle and suffering, for his descendants through **Sarah** – i.e., the descendants that God *promised* to Abraham.

Another example of people trying to “rush” God’s plans, can be seen with God’s promise of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In many of the prophetic books, God promises the Israelites that He will eventually **restore** them to their land – and have **His** king rule over them – so that they will be able to live in peace, and worship God, free from any foreign domination. One of the more inspiring prophecies on that subject can be found in the book of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 37:24-28 (ESV):

²⁴ “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children

shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

As a result, we can be assured that God will bring about His promise – that the kingdom will be restored to Israel. Unfortunately, some people have tried to “rush” this promise. For example, a group called the “zealots” tried to restore the kingdom through *violent uprisings* against the Romans, around the 1st century AD. Two prominent examples of zealot leaders – Theudas and Judas the Galilean – are mentioned in Scripture:

Acts 5:36-37 (ESV):

³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

All of the revolts instigated by the zealots were **futile**, however; they never succeeded in driving out the Romans. On the contrary – the revolts precipitated harsher and harsher reprisals by the Romans; including the siege of Jerusalem – and the destruction of the temple – in 70 AD.

So, the underlying point is that people will never be able to “rush” God’s plans into fruition – and in fact, even *trying* to do so will often have serious negative **consequences**.

“Giving up” Waiting for God

As noted above, some individuals have tried to “rush” God’s plans. In addition to that, though, some *other* people have had the “opposite” issue – i.e., in some cases people have “given up” on God fulfilling His plans at all.

For example, the apostle Peter warns us that in the last days, many people will doubt that Jesus will *ever* return at all – despite the fact that God has **explicitly** promised us that in Scripture. Here is the beginning of the passage in question:

2 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV):

...Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

The reason this is important is because if people “give up” on God, then that leads them to give in to worldly desires – which puts them in danger of judgment. Peter continues the above passage as follows:

2 Peter 3:5-7 (ESV):

⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Finally, Peter encourages believers to be diligent in waiting for God – so that the “scoffers” will not lead us astray:

2 Peter 3:14,17-18 (ESV):

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Jude also refers to the danger of “giving up” waiting for God – and encourages us to avoid falling into that trap:

Jude 1:17-21 (ESV):

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”

¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Similarly, the parable of the ten virgins emphasizes the importance of being vigilant in waiting for God to fulfill His plans – so that we will be ready when Jesus returns:

Matthew 25:1-13 (ESV):

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered,

'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

As a result, Scripture is clear that we must never “give up” waiting for God to fulfill His plans – because if we do, then that will cause us to become in serious danger of judgment.

The Lord’s Timetable

Another item to be aware of, about this overall subject of “waiting for the Lord”, is the fact that God’s “timetable” for completing His plans is often **much** longer than we anticipate. For example, from our standpoint, most of us would expect that 10 years is an *extremely* long time to wait for one of God’s plans to be fulfilled – but in many cases, God’s timeframe is far longer than that.

One example of this can be seen in God’s promise to Abraham, about inheriting the promised land. One of the times when God makes this promise is recorded below:

Genesis 13:14-17 (ESV):

¹⁴ The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

So, God explicitly stated that He will give the promised land to Abraham (and to his descendants). Now, consider the following passage, about the fulfillment of that promise:

Acts 7:2-5 (ESV):

² And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

As we can see, Abraham did **not** inherit any land, during his *entire lifetime*! In other words, this promise that God made to Abraham has still not been fulfilled. This means that that promise will not be fulfilled, *until* Jesus returns – and Abraham is resurrected. So, in some cases, God’s promises will not be realized until *thousands of years* after the promise is made!

Another example of this situation is the Israelites’ enslavement in Egypt. Consider the following passage, in which God speaks to Abraham about the enslavement – and rescue – of the Israelites:

Genesis 15:12-14 (ESV):

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.

The above prophesy is confirmed later on in Genesis, and in Exodus. First, the Israelites – beginning with Joseph – settled in Egypt. After the death of Joseph, the Egyptians enslaved and oppressed the Israelites. Finally, God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt – and the Israelites were given many of the Egyptians' *possessions* when they left.

Certainly, the account of the Passover – when Moses led the Israelites to freedom – is very inspiring. However, it is also important to note that a long time passed (at least 144 years), between the death of Joseph and the Passover. As a result, *thousands* of Israelites undoubtedly lived out their entire lives under very harsh Egyptian slavery. In other words, those people were born, lived, and died, under the yoke of the Egyptians – without *ever* seeing the promise of God rescuing them from Egypt.

As a result, when God makes a promise, we can be assured that that promise *will* be fulfilled – but we, ourselves, might not see the fulfillment during *our* lifetimes. In other words, we may have to wait until the next age – when Jesus returns – in order to see some of God's plans come to fruition. After all, Christians have been waiting for almost two thousand years for Jesus to return.

Conclusion

Scripture exhorts us, time and time again, to be patient in waiting for the Lord. Most people can understand that we need to have this patience with regard to God's big, "overarching" plans – such as sending Jesus back to the earth, and establishing the kingdom of God on the earth. However, from what I have seen, many people have difficulty waiting for God's assistance, with regard to their own *personal* trials and sufferings.

In other words, it is (understandably) quite difficult to be patient waiting for God, when we are undergoing very difficult personal issues. Fortunately, Scripture tells us that God *cares* about our personal trials – and that if we are patient in waiting for Him, then He will allow us to get through those difficulties:

1 Peter 5:6-11 (ESV):

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.