

There are a couple ambiguities in the original Greek of this passage that make it difficult to determine whether Sarah or Abraham is the subject of the sentence (whose faith are we talking about?)

- It is complicated and we need not trouble ourselves with it here
- But we should acknowledge that the NIV has a different translation (Abraham as the subject of the sentence)
 - **11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.**
 - Cf. New Century Version (The only 2 translations out of the 20 I looked at)
- Either way the explicit mention of Sarah should be seen as a commendation of her faith
- Either way both of them needed and had faith with regards to God's promise of offspring
- And either way the lesson I want to draw from the text is the same

Abraham and Sarah's **lives of faith** exemplify **faith that is waiting**

- **Abel** was faith that is **worshiping**
- **Enoch** was faith that is **walking**
- **Noah** was faith that is **working**
- **Abraham** was faith that is **willing**
- **Sarah** teaches us about faith that is **waiting**

Faith that worships **walks**—Faith that walks **works**

Faith that worships, walks, and works is **willing**

And faith that is willing will often have to **wait**

To be quite honest, Abraham and Sarah had a hard time waiting (25 years!)

- They made a monumental mistake and Sarah had a very revealing moment of doubt
- This is true of almost all in Hebrews 11 (They could all be in the Hall of Shame as well)
- A lot like you and me
 - And when it comes to **faith that is waiting...**

Nobody likes to wait

- The wait at restaurants
- My trip to London and waiting in airports—I hate to travel—because I hate to wait
- We all hate to wait

Waiting feels like work!

- But waiting (when it is on God) does work
- (There is a work that is accomplished in waiting)
 - It fortifies, purges, matures, and tempers us
 - Yields: Greater character, integrity, trust, resolve, and motivation in us
- All of these qualities are shaped and molded in us **by God** through the process of waiting **on God** (Because of this...)

Waiting is an inescapable part of the Christian life

- Because God's ways are not our ways¹
- And God's timing is not always our timing
 - We will all find ourselves waiting on God
 - There is a right way (and a wrong way) to wait on God

3 Points on how to wait on God—We need to be:

1. *Waiting without being passive*
2. *Waiting without causing problems*
3. *Waiting without missing God's promises*

1. Waiting without being passive

Genesis 15:1-6

- The promise of a son and innumerable descendants
- Abraham is 75 years old
- v. 6 = **he believed the Lord**
 - He would have to wait 25 years total!!! (on God's promise)

What are you waiting for?

The first thing we need to be sure of is that we are waiting **on God** (His promises)

- Be clear on the object of your faith
- Be clear on the promise that He made
 - Is it His call, plan, purpose, mission?
 - Or your own?
 - Abraham and Sarah had a promise from God
 - The promise would affect and bless them, yes, but really it was all about God's plan and purpose to reveal himself and bless the nations
- **Remember God is accomplishing his purposes not necessarily yours**
 - Our time-scale is too small
 - God's promises to Abraham and Sarah would take thousands of years to unfold really
 - The Nation of Israel, the Messiah, all the nations blessed
 - Our time-scales are too small
 - We are so caught up in 'now'
 - Myopia (Nearsightedness)—We need to see the big picture when waiting
- Not realizing that it is about God's purposes and not our own breeds **false expectations**
 - "Much mental suffering is tied to our false expectations. We may so link our hopes and joys and future to a new job, to a promotion, to certain kinds of success, to prosperity, that when they fail

¹ Isaiah 55:8

to materialize we are utterly crushed. But quiet confidence in God alone breeds stability and delight amid 'all the changing scenes of life.'"²

- This is especially prominent in the face of the false Gospel of health and wealth
- Are you waiting on God, actually?
- Or some idea that you have proposed to God?
 - Are you demanding some sort of rights or sense of entitlement?
 - You have none! (Frustration is usually about perceived rights)

Once we have established that we are actually waiting on God and not merely our own desires, we need to realize that our faith is to be an **active faith**

- Waiting on God never means paralysis
- We are to be engaged with God
 - To wait on the Lord does not mean doing nothing
 - We are to be waiting without being passive
 - We are to thoroughly engage with God
 - In all that that means:
 - **Praying (Asking, seeking, knocking)**
 - **Reading**
 - **Worshiping**

A friend of mine (and member of Reality) is going through a hard time

- (Explain...)
- I interviewed Him about waiting on God since he is currently doing it
- **What are you doing while you waiting on God?** (His answers are below) (Do you think he is doing it well)
- Playing out every scenario in my head that could ever exist—over and over
- Serious times of anxiety—physical manifestations
 - “The peace of the Lord takes that away”
 - Peace is connected to prayer
 - Philippians 4:6-7
 - 6 **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**
 - 7 **And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**
 - The degree of our peace of mind it tied to our prayer life!
 - “This is not because prayer is psychologically soothing, but because we address a prayer-answering God, a personal God, a responding God, a sovereign God whom we can trust with the outcomes of life's confusion.”³
- A repeated surrender (not just a one time deal) Progressive surrender. Some things multiple times... and then other things as they are revealed.
- Keeping track of what God has been telling me (journaling)
- Paying more attention to and listening to the Body of Christ and wise counsel

² D. A. Carson, *How Long O Lord: Reflections on Evil & Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 242.

³ *Ibid.*, 243

- Watching for how the Lord might speak to me in His Word
 - “He has been faithful to reassure me as I go to Him in the Word”
 - = **listening to God’s prophetic voice, corporate voice, written word**
- Going away to a quiet place. It takes about **an hour** to really be still before the Lord. To turn off all the stuff in your head.
- Being saturated in the **presence** of the Lord—Worship and prayer
- Try to be **other focused** as opposed to being caught up in your own deal. Praying for others and their situation. You get consumed with your own situation.
- Seeing that God has been faithful **throughout history**. He is accomplishing His **larger purpose**. Your part is important, but it is not everything. You are part of the bigger plan.
- Wherever He has you, He has you there for a purpose
 - (A purposeful God—not random)
- Increased prayer life—new and vibrant ways.
- Worshiping more.
- Asking the Lord what He would have me do.
 - Praying specifically and being obedient to move forward or not.
- Doing practically what you need to do to be able to wait on him—for me that means trimming expenses and style of living
 - (Means different things for different situations)
- It involves deep emotions

My friend is waiting without being passive

God is all about the process!

- We are all about the goal... a disconnect exists there between us and God
 - Cf. The one year Bible reading
- All the while that Abraham and Sarah were waiting, God was doing **a work in them!**
 - **If God has us waiting, it is because He is working** (Not ‘cause He is too busy!)

A common, modern view of God is that He is involved in the ‘big things’, the major turning points of history, but not necessarily the details of our lives

- Much of our own theology is just that
 - Not spoken theology, but lived theology—We act this way (it is an error)
- It simply is not true
 - Jesus argued the opposite in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt. 6)
 - Jesus *assumes* the Father watches over **every sparrow** and **each flower** and argues from the lesser to the greater:
 - If God cares for these things—which are of little cosmic and eternal significance—mustn’t we believe that He watches over, cares for, and is involved with the lives of men and women?
 - A correct view of the God of the Bible is that He is **immanent**
 - Immanent—**operating within**
 - (not to be confused with **imminent**—**about to happen**)

- God is preparing you for **His** purposes
 - Throughout history God has chosen to work through people rather than independent of people
 - *If God has you waiting it is because He is working*
 - Working **in you**, that He might work **through you**

Me with Channel Islands Surfboards and 7 years of waiting

- The thrust was I didn't know which so I attempted to be faithful with both and glorify God in both
- Teaching and preaching and shaping and sharing
 - God was teaching and shaping me... He knew
 - But it was imperative that I not miss the process

Waiting without being passive

2. Waiting without causing problems

Genesis 16:1-2, 15-16

- Abraham (and Sarah) believed God at 75
- But at 85/86 they figured God needed a little help (10 or 11 years later)
- They took the situation into their own hands
 - And birthed **Ishmael**—the proverbial work of the flesh

What this act of taking the situation into their own hands revealed was really a **lack of trust/lack of faith.**

Wait on God without causing problems—don't birth an **Ishmael**

- We need to seek to pursue God's purposes, God's way

Instant gratification and immediate satisfaction

- Kids pester their kids with continuous cries of "Now!"
- In their eyes of our heavenly Father we must appear about the same

I continued the interview with my friend and asked him:

Why is it so hard about waiting on God? (his answers below)

- **Surrender**—
 - Your wants and desires, your wisdom, you have to trust the Lord with everything.
 - You have to trust the Lord is smarter than you.
 - You want to be comfortable.
 - You just want to know the plan... in excruciating detail. (The in-between story)
 - Relying on God to be the provider and not me. I have to trust the Lord to provide not only for me but for my family as well (wife and kids)
- **Relationally difficult**—
 - Other people wondering what you are doing. (We do not live in a society that values waiting)

- You feel judged.
- You are not doing what makes sense. You're going against common sense
- **Doubt—**
 - The uncertainty of what will happen.
 - And doubting whether or not it will be good
 - Trust issues emerge
- **I feel like I can just fix the problem—**
 - With my own ingenuity (**Ishmael**)
 - "Why am I waiting?"

Waiting without causing problems

3. Waiting without missing God's promises

Genesis 18:11-15; 21:1-5

- There were some obvious failures—Ishmael & laughing at God
- But in the final analysis (according to **Hebrews 11**) Abraham and Sarah chose to believe God's promise over and above their circumstance.
- Hebrews 11:12^b
 ... she considered Him faithful who had promised

They knew that the situation was humanly impossible—but chose to have faith

This does not mean that they chose to ignore the facts (a popular misconception)

- Faith and facts are not mutually exclusive
 - In simple terms, two events are **mutually exclusive** if they cannot occur at the same time
 - In logic, two **mutually exclusive** propositions are propositions that logically cannot both be true.
 - I.e. I must either live by faith or reason, but I cannot have both (False)

Faith without reason is **fideism**

- The doctrine that knowledge depends on faith or revelation
 - Faith without reason

Reason without faith is **rationalism**

- The belief or theory that opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge rather than religious belief
 - Reason without faith

Faith does not mean that we throw away reason, and reason does not demand that we throw away faith.

- Biblical faith is a composite of the two

Abraham and Sarah did not take an unreasonable leap of faith

- “[They] weighed the human impossibility of becoming parents against the divine impossibility of God being able to break His Word and decided that since God is God, nothing is impossible.”⁴

Genesis 18:14^a

Is anything too difficult for the LORD?

- Abraham and Sarah did not know how the Lord would fulfill the promise
- But it was reasonable to believe that He would

We are not to engage in faith without reason (fideism) or reason without faith (rationalism)

- R. Kent Hughes explains:
 - “We are to rationally assess all of life. We are to live reasonably. When we are aware that God's Word says thus-and-so, we are to rationally assess it. Does God's word actually say that, or is it man's fallible interpretation? And if God's Word does indeed say it, we must then be supremely rational, weighing the human impossibility against the divine impossibility of God being able to break his word. And we must believe.”⁵

Psalms 130:5

I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, **and in His word do I hope.**

- Waiting without missing God's promises
 - Romans 8:28
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:13
No **temptation** has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the **temptation** will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (test, trial)
 - 1 Peter 5:7
casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.
 - Isaiah 40:31
28 Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired
His understanding is inscrutable.
29 He gives strength to the weary,
And to him who lacks might He increases power.
30 Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
31 Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (a promise!)

Genesis 18:14

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews*, Vol. 2 (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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.**

- God was not late (though we often think so)
- Abraham and Sarah, in their flesh were early (Ishmael)
- God may want to do more than we expect or could
 - 100 yrs old (Before God would, He made sure they could not)
 - **John 11** (They were looking for a healing—God wanted to give them a resurrection)
 - Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God is:
able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think

Psalm 27:13-14

13 I would have despaired **unless I had believed** that I would see the goodness of the LORD

In the land of the living.

14 Wait for the LORD;

Be strong and let your heart take courage;

Yes, wait for the LORD.

I asked my friend: **What is good about waiting on God?**

- **The nearness of God—**
 - As I wrestle with the Lord He has been faithful to bring about peace
 - (That surpasses understanding—not from understanding)
- **Hard and good—**
 - You realize how wicked your heart is. Waiting on the Lord gives you time to really be searched by the Spirit. It reveals the core issues. What do you really trust in? You get to repent of things you did not even know were there. The Lord can make you whole in areas you didn't even know you were broken.
 - Learning where I put my faith and why.
 - Why do we have faith in the Lord—selfish reasons or for His reasons?
 - Is he just my sugar daddy or my problem solver or am I really looking to get on His mission
- **Finally—**
 - I am finding out over and over again: **God wants me.**

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When we do this we experience the preparation of us for the purposes of Him

- To such a degree that, having waited for Him to **prepare us**, we are willing to do whatever He asks **of us**
- Abraham and Sarah were as we will see next week