

GOD ... who sometimes moved very slowly
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Impatience has been one of my greatest weaknesses. In my impetuosity, I have often thought I could drive my car a hundred miles before God could start His engine! Then, ten miles down the road when He found and lifted me from a ditch, I asked "What took you so long?" It always seemed strange that although God took only six days to create the world, He sometimes took six years to answer my prayers. Many of the delays of God are described in the Bible, but for the purpose of this study, only four incidents will be considered. Each one has a distinctive charm.

Methuselah ... the delay to proclaim His mercy (Gen. 5:27)

Long ago when the world was young, when foreign countries were unknown and the inhabitants of the earth lived in a very small area, there lived a man called Enoch. He was not a recluse, but he loved to walk in the country with God; he appreciated excellent company! When he was sixty-five years of age, his wife gave birth to their first child, and the gift changed the father's life. Prior to the arrival of the baby, Enoch lived; after he "walked with God." (See Gen. 5:21-22.) Possibly the mother was surprised when the father called his son Methuselah. The name had never previously been given, and probably has been little used since. Enoch was a prophet who foretold the outpouring of judgment on the earth (Jude 14-15), and the arrival of his son deepened his convictions. Doctor Lang states the meaning of the name was "It shall not come till he die." It can hardly be a coincidence that, from the names and years mentioned in the fifth chapter of Genesis, the devastating flood of Noah's day began in the year that Methuselah died. The man lived 969 years and some of his contemporaries surely thought he would never die. The length of the patriarch's life was an indication of the mercy of God. Judgment would coincide with the death of Methuselah, and therefore, the longer he lived the greater became the opportunity for sinners to repent.

Abraham ... the delay to prove God's man! (Gen. 22:16-18)

The birth of Isaac was a miracle, for Sarah his mother was beyond the age for childbearing and was barren and incapable of conception. When God announced she would bear a son, it seemed ridiculous, and the woman became convulsed with laughter. (See Gen. 18:12.) Yet, the miracle happened, and no language could describe the joy of Abraham when he beheld the impossible! God promised that in Isaac should all people be blessed, that his seed would be as the sand upon the seashore. It was surprising when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his boy upon an altar. The patriarch was a seer who became God's friend. He considered the matter and came to a conclusion. If Isaac died and remained dead, he could never have children, and God's promise would never be fulfilled. That realization enabled him to say to his servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ... Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11: 17-19). Yet God delayed rescuing the helpless lad until the last moment, when "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." However great the man's faith, the prospect of plunging a dagger into the heart of his beloved son was frightening. God watched with interest as the saint triumphed and then said, "Because thou hast done this thing ... in blessing I will bless thee."

Hannah ... The delay to produce God's messenger (I Sam. 1: I 1)

A dedicated woman can be a joy to the soul; a nagging one is a pain in the neck! Elkanah, who had two wives, hardly knew what to do to preserve peace in his home. Hannah, the favorite wife, was

GOD ... who sometimes moved very slowly childless; and, realizing this fact, Penninah taunted, nagged, and probably made Hannah furious. Repeatedly she asked God to give her a son, and each time her request was denied. Ultimately, becoming very desperate, the distraught woman "Prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt ... give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life" (I Sam. 1: I 1). Then God smiled and said, "At last! " Hannah desired a son to prevent the nagging of her rival; God looked for a man to save a nation from destruction. When Hannah exhibited total surrender, her prayer was granted instantly. The Lord was very wise. He waited a long time before granting the request of that desperate woman.

Mary of Bethany ... the delay to perfect his method (John 11:6) "When [Jesus] had heard therefore that [Lazarus] was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was." Probably this was one of the strangest delays of all time! It was difficult for Mary to believe the Savior would not respond to her request for assistance. He had visited their home, had been given the best they could offer, and for Him to refuse to respond to a cry for help was inconceivable. Yet Jesus, having heard of the situation in Bethany, I stayed two days still in the same place where he was. " Doubtless, He later explained this was done deliberately. They believed Him to be a friend, preacher, counselor, and possibly the Messiah, but when Martha was questioned on the highway, she said, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27). That was her first genuine confession of faith. The Lord had tried to develop that kind of trust for a long time. Finally the sisters recognized Him to be Lord of life and death.

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