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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## Waiting God's Time

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Extract from "The Faith of the Overcomer" Chapter 2.*

*"When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son..."*

When the fullness of the time came! It is not difficult for us to see in the case of Abraham how his faith was brought into relation to God's time. The time factor with Abraham was a very real one, and was perhaps one of the keenest and most acute factors for his faith.

Now, that time factor in the case of Abraham affected many points in the significance of his life. Abraham received a very comprehensive representation of Divine truth and a very full revelation, and therefore by its significance his life affected many things, and again and again we come upon a test of Abraham's faith along the line of the timing of God. Indeed, from one standpoint, we may summarize the whole of his life and say that it headed up at last to the triumph of faith upon that particular factor. In the full Divine sense he never received the promises in his lifetime. At the end of his life he was still looking for the fulfilment of the promise, and if his faith had given way he would naturally have taken the attitude that, since the thing had not been fulfilled in so long a time and in his lifetime, it all represented perhaps a big mistake on his part, a false expectation, some misguidance, and so on. But right at the end, if the letter to the Hebrews is to be taken as revealing the actual position, he still believed. He believed, therefore, that God had His time for fulfilling His purpose, and that, although it might not come in his own lifetime, it nevertheless would come. But during his lifetime, within the compass of the whole range of Divine purpose, there were instances of testing on the time factor, and having been tested on that factor the promise was fulfilled.

It is the principle that we want to get hold of. We have it illustrated perhaps supremely in connection with the promise of Isaac. You remember how, in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, the Lord came to Abram and gave the promise that in his seed there should be universal blessing, and how that the battle then commenced, and how Abram prepared a sacrifice, and himself, from his own side, entered into a covenant with God by faith. When he had made his side good, that is, the side of his faith, that he believed God, and ratified it with a covenant from his side by the sacrifice, then we are told, when all that was done, God made a covenant with Abram.

The incident seems to indicate a very thorough belief in the promise of God concerning the seed; that Abram took a position over it, and a position which was utter and which involved him in going all lengths by faith. It involved everything, and that is only understood and recognized when you see what God committed Himself to on that day; for God never made a covenant, only in relation to His own Son. It is important to remember that God's covenants bear upon His Son. They are bound up with the Lord Jesus. When God that day made a covenant with Abram in blood by the altar, God on that day committed Himself to all that He had, all that He could give, all that He could do. He committed Himself to the extent of His only and well beloved Son, and that unto death; for that altar and that sacrifice foreshadowed God's fullest and uttermost gift in covenant. From his side Abram entered into that. Whether he knew what was coming or not we may not know, but he must have known that, from his side, the covenant involved him in being as utter as God was committing Himself to be that day. That which followed some years afterward was the demand being made by God upon Abram to fulfill his part of the covenant. "Take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest..." Abram was really tested on that subsequent day concerning what had taken place on that particular day, and it is the one faith which receives the son and gives the son.

### **The Purpose of Delay**

Now in chapter 15 you have the promise, and although it does not look like it, since the story is so quickly got over, it seems that it was at least fifteen years before the promise was fulfilled. It was fourteen or fifteen years at least, but how much more we cannot say as the Hebrew is very uncertain in this matter. You remember when the men came to Abram's tent and ratified the promise, their words in our translation are something like this: "at the time" or "about the time", or "in the season" (Gen. 18:14). The words are very indefinite. Some have translated it, "This time next year it shall be", but we cannot render it so with certainty. All we can say is that it was a definite ratification of the promise, that in God's appointed time it should be fulfilled. That ratification in the tent was some fourteen or fifteen years after the events of chapter 15 when the promise was given. Now, taking every other circumstance into consideration; promise, age, and so on, you can see that this was a real matter of faith, this time factor. The time is getting on. We are getting farther and farther away from any possibility of fulfilment. Abram was ninety and nine years old when this ratification of the promise was made. You see the time factor was a real test. Moreover it was a deliberate and definite movement of God. Why did not the Lord, knowing what He would do, wait until He was about to do it and just come and say, Abram, this shall be! and bring it about? But no! He came, announced it, and went away, and year after year passed by. Then He came again, ratified His promise, and upon that there was still more waiting. The Lord has strange ways. He deals with us like that. He must bring His instruments into oneness with Himself.

There is a little phrase in the New Testament which runs like this: "When once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah". If that word means anything it means that delay, in a case like that of Abram's, is not a pleasant thing for Abram, not a thing that he would choose for himself. It would

at least imply that if the Lord could have His way He would perfect His purpose at once. Long-suffering, forbearance, patience, endurance; these things on God's part are not the things that He would choose in carrying out His purposes, seeing all the suffering, and the distress and the pain that there is. But He suffered, and suffered long, and His instruments must come into oneness with Him, oneness with His heart.

The point is that it lifts this thing on to a certain level. It is not that the Lord is just dealing with you and with me like a schoolmaster, trying to get something in us. It may be the Lord wants moral qualities developed in us; patience, longsuffering, and so on; there is no doubt that is true, but it is not just that. The Lord is saying, I am not going to do this until you show signs of certain qualities. The Lord is lifting us right up on to the same level as Himself, bringing us into actual oneness with Himself, so that we have the same feeling towards others and toward the situation, toward the need, that He has. I believe that when the Lord can get a corporate cry in His Church which is His own cry, then His time has come. The Lord is not just waiting for a time. There is something bound up with that time, and He is seeking to produce in the heart of His instrument that which is in His own heart, so that it cries one cry with Him. The Church has to cry, and it has to cry God's cry, and that one cry is not yet in the Church. There are many voices, conflicting voices; and by the agony of delay, and the agony of the growing impossibility of the situation, and by the agony of the need for that which is of God as over against all this other, the Church will be brought to cry that cry. At midnight there shall be a cry! Now that is oneness with God in His time.

Yet it is true that God has His time. There is a fullness of the time in respect of every Divine movement, and we cannot take things out of God's time. Perhaps we have learned that. We cannot precipitate things, we cannot hurry God, we cannot bring things about for which the time is not ripe. This knowledge is with the Lord, and He would bring us in spirit into oneness with Him on that point, to be one with Him in His time, that when His time does come He has us ready to His hand as those through whom He can move. Whatever be the purpose that is bound up with His time, the Lord must have an instrument through which He may move to its accomplishment. And when the Lord's time comes how we know it in our hearts! I think we all know something about this. Oh, how we have cried, and groaned, and agonized, and striven, and done all that we could do to get God to do certain things; but His time had not come. We have been tested in faith, and we have come at length to the place where we definitely and strongly stand with God for that thing and hold on, and then God's time comes, and we know in our hearts that the time has come, and in a wonderful way it just happens. All that it has cost of prayer and anguish would perhaps lead us to expect that, when it happens, the world will know all about it; but it just happens, and you hardly recognise from the outward indications that the thing has come about. God's time came, and it was so easy; it just transpired. But we can never say - we are forbidden to say - that our holding on to the Lord, our prayer, our standing with Him, our getting through on that matter was unnecessary; that it would have happened in the appointment of God at His time, whether we agonized or not. You dare not take that position over anything in the way of God. Isaac may have been pre-determined before ever there was a world, and yet Abram's faith was the essential factor to the bringing in of Isaac. The whole Word of God bears down upon that, that God Himself demands the co-operating faith of His own people, even to bring through the works which were foreordained.

Now, we might spend a good deal of our time on that, in tracing it through the Word, but we shall not do so now. But I would suggest to you that the time factor in the Word of God is a very helpful thing to know.