

Day Six

Waiting for a promise to be fulfilled

Today's reading: Luke 2: 25 - 40

It appears that most of us are not good at waiting. However, there are times when we have no choice but to wait. In spite of wanting to see everything done "yesterday", God has his own timing.

The period between the two Testaments is a period of waiting. The blank page in your Bibles, found between the two Testaments, covers 400 years of history. During this period, God appears to be silent.

God's last words, in the Old Testament, were given to the prophet Malachi. The prophet Malachi finished his prophecy, just like Joel, speaking about the coming "day of the Lord." However, his prophecy ended with the promise of the great prophet Elijah, who will prepare the way for the Messiah. *"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse."* - Malachi 4: 5 - 6

During the 400 years of silence, the people of God have seen their hopes of freedom slowly dying as several rebellions against the Roman occupation were brutally suppressed. Their political leaders had failed to successfully revolt against their oppressors and restore the throne of king David.

Many Jews believed that their moral and religious values have been lost. Some have retreated into the wilderness, living in closed communities, trying to save their faith in God by physical means. Others have taken the law in their hands. Three generations of revolutionaries have tried to fulfil the Messianic expectations, with no success. Many great military leaders, among them the Maccabees, have been caught and killed by the Romans.

Although people still believed in the promise of God for a Messiah and Saviour, most of them had got tired of waiting and had given up! However, a small group continued to believe. They did not give up! Waiting is not easy, but we are encouraged to persevere and wait patiently on the Lord who is able to keep all His promises.

"Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord". - Psalm 27: 14

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"Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled." - Romans 15: 4

The good news is that we have, in the Bible, enough examples of people who have patiently waited for God's promises to be fulfilled. They did it with fasting and prayer. Two of such wonderful saints are Simeon and Anna.

Simeon

We are not told much about Simeon. We do not know much about his background, what his occupation was or any details surrounding his family. All the details we are given concern his character, his waiting, his relationship with the Holy Spirit and how he held on to God's promise for a Messiah.

"At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah." - Luke 2: 25 - 26

His righteousness and devotion to God must have been so visible to those around him; that doctor Luke, the writer of the Gospel; does not seem to feel the need to give any extra explanation. He was simply, a righteous man. Everyone could see it so Luke states that fact with ease. It fascinates me to consider that Simeon, a righteous man, is in Jerusalem at that exact time, when Jesus is brought to the Temple to be circumcised. You and I should know that these details are not simple coincidences.

We are also told that he was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. What is amazing is that, unlike his contemporaries, Simeon was able to recognise God's Messiah, in baby Jesus. This little detail caused many to stumble and miss the coming of the Messiah, all together. Simeon must have spent his entire life in waiting. Eugene Peterson describes Simeon using a wonderful choice of words: *"a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel."* - *The Message - Luke 2: 25-32*

Another important aspect regarding Simeon is: *The Holy Spirit was upon him.* This is a clear indication that Simeon was set apart by God for a specific purpose. In Joel 2 we have seen how prayer and fasting can result in a filling with the Holy Spirit. His prayerful expectation of God to rescue Israel produced a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he saw the salvation of the Lord. The grammar of the text suggests that the promise had been made sometime in the distant past. However, on that specific day, it was also the Holy Spirit who led him into the Temple. Here is a righteous man, led by the Holy Spirit, having an attitude of waiting while praying.

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That day, his waiting came to an end. All his prayers were finally answered. His joy was so full and complete, that Simeon declared his readiness to be released from this life. What an amazing way to live and die!

Anna

Anna was a prophetess and her story is very similar to that of Simeon's. Although we are given a few more details on Anna. We know she was from the tribe of Asher, the daughter of Phanuel. The tribe of Asher inherited the region of Galilee. So we can assume she had lived away from home for most of her life.

We also know that she was a widow, most likely, around 84 years old. She had been married to her husband for seven short years and after his death, she came to live at the Temple. The next detail is as fascinating as it is to be admired: *"She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer."* - Luke 2: 37

Anna, worshipped the Lord, night and day, with fasting and prayer. The fact that she was there, on that very same day, alongside Simeon suggests that God had placed them there for the same reason: to meet Jesus. It is very probable, that both had the same prayerful expectation: the coming of God's Messiah. God, being faithful to His promises, blessed them both with a personal preview of His salvation.

"She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem." - Luke 2: 38

Anna does not seem to stop at praising God for the awesome privilege of seeing Jesus, the promised Messiah and the salvation of God. She goes on telling everyone about the baby. And not just everyone, but all those whose hearts were filled with expectation. For all those people, the waiting had ended. Waiting was replaced by exuberant joy and peace. The promise has been fulfilled. No more waiting.

Chapter Summary

Waiting can turn into frustration and disappointment. Do not give up! Persevere with fasting and prayer. Worship the Lord as you wait. Salvation will come but expect to be surprised. Sometimes, God answers in ways we do not expect. Everyone expected a Messiah, but not many expected a baby. Simeon and Anna, as much as the shepherds and the wise men, accepted that the answer had finally come in a way of a baby.

God has made some wonderful and amazing promises in His word. Some have been fulfilled throughout history. Others are yet to be fulfilled. God is in the business of keeping his word. *"For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!" And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory."* - 2 Corinthians 1: 20

Day Six

Personal Focus

Has God given you any personal promises, through His word? What are the things you are waiting for? As you pray and fast, take time to bring to God your needs and struggles. See if there are any promises for you in God's Word.

Write down these promises and bring them to God again, with a renewed commitment to wait on their fulfilment.

Public Focus

God's promises are amazing and He will keep them, no matter how long we must wait. If God has given you, as a church, precious promises; do not give up while you wait. Do not lose hope. Trust in His Word.

Use the space below to write down these precious promises and continue to pray, as a church, for their fulfilment. Or maybe you need to write down new promises God give you as you pray. Listen to God's voice and remember His faithfulness.
