

The Value of Waiting on Jehovah

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

One of the truly thrilling passages of the Old Testament is nestled in the book of Isaiah.

“[T]hey that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Is. 40:31).

Historical Background

To appreciate this passage some background is in order.

The book of Isaiah is one of the most remarkable writings of the ancient world. The prophet of God, like a flaming comet, lights up the dark sky of Israel’s history in the latter half of the 8th century before Christ. He principally attacks the wickedness and hypocrisy of the kingdom of Judah.

Isaiah urges genuine repentance, and promises that the Creator will abundantly pardon if only his people will turn to him.

The prophet also shows the universal sovereignty of Jehovah and the general accountability of man to him. Accordingly, a divinely appointed judgment is certain to fall upon numerous cities and nations of that ancient world.

Against this stark background, however, there is a ray of hope. The prophet sweeps across the centuries and foretells the coming of the promised Messiah.

The establishment of the Messiah’s reign is vividly portrayed. Its beneficent effects during the Christian era are artfully displayed on the canvas of prophetic testimony. It is the “gospel” in Old Testament form.

The book contains sixty-six chapters that easily fall into three sections.

Chapters 1-35 deal principally with coming judgments from God; punishment upon the northern kingdom of Israel, and then upon Judah and Jerusalem. In addition, calamity would fall upon such peoples as Moab, Edom, Damascus, Babylon, Assyria, Tyre, Ethiopia, and Egypt.

Chapters 36-39 contain a historical interlude in which the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib is previewed, as well as the account of Hezekiah’s sickness, the visit of Babylon’s king after Hezekiah’s recovery, and Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming Babylonian captivity.

Chapters 40-66 focus upon the theme of comfort from Jehovah. It contains extensive prophetic and encouraging discourses in which Isaiah foretells the return of Judah from captivity. He consoles the people with promises of divine assistance. The prophet also describes the sufferings of the coming Messiah.

Contrary to the claims of liberal critics (e.g., Willis 2009, 573-574), these divisions do not represent various authors who “were addressing a small Jewish community in and near Jerusalem in the mid-to-late-fifth century” before the Christian era. This would place the book some three to four centuries **beyond the time of the prophet Isaiah** and in conflict with **New Testament testimony** regarding the authorship of the document. For a refutation, see Jackson (1991, 3-6).

Isaiah 40

This chapter begins with the consoling expression, “Comfort, comfort my people....” The sections leading to the illustrious verse of our present inquiry are as follows.

1. There is a prophetic depiction of the work of John the Baptizer, who would prepare the way for the coming of “Jehovah” (ASV) — whom the Gospel writers identify as Jesus (1-8; cf. Matthew 3:1ff). This is a prophetic depiction of the deity of Christ.

2. There is a glorious preview of the “good tidings,” i.e., the gospel message, that would begin to be announced in Jerusalem (9-11; cf. Acts 2).
3. Isaiah sets forth a vivid contrast between the true God and the false idols of paganism with which Israel so frequently had involved themselves (12-26).
4. Strong emphasis is placed upon the sustaining power of the Lord; he never grows tired, as so frequently is the case with frail humanity (27-30).
5. Finally, the virtue of endurance is affirmed beautifully (31).

“Wait Upon Jehovah”

Several terms in verse 31 warrant close attention. The verb “wait” is not the drudgery of merely passing time. It is endurance, remaining steadfast — combined with a confident expectation of better things in the future. There are many Old Testament passages that encourage waiting for the Lord (cf. Ps. 27:14; 37:9, 34; 130:5).

“Renew” conveys the idea of replacing that which has failed in strength with the new or fresh. “Mount up” is employed of an ascending maneuver, illustrated by the eagle’s ability (because of its wing design) to ride warm currents upward to breathtaking heights documented at near 10,000 feet.

Those who wait will be able to run swiftly and not become exhausted. They shall walk without showing the signs of tiredness. For more complete definitions of these terms, see Brown, et al. 1907.

Strength-sapping Life Issues

As a practical matter, it would be beneficial to reflect momentarily upon some of life’s difficulties that tend to drain a person’s strength.

An excellent Old Testament example can be found in Job of Uz. Satan challenged the worthiness of God to be served selflessly by humanity (cf. Ps. 18:3). God permitted the malignant archenemy of humanity to afflict the patriarch — who would demonstrate that **Jehovah is worthy of human service**, independent of the manifold blessings he bestows.

A consideration of the various avenues of temptation employed by this enemy of humanity is worthy of serious reflection.

- Financial disaster or even mere hardship, has been the downfall of many (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). Job suffered a tremendous economic loss (1:3; 13ff).
- Family tragedy can render a heartbreaking blow. Job lost his ten children (1:18-19), and even his wife urged him to renounce God (2:9). He effectively lost her as well.
- The patriarch was besieged by an incurable physical pain (possibly leprosy or elephantiasis); the agony was beyond our ability to appreciate. At least fourteen passages chronicle the horrible symptoms of the malady (2:7-8, 12; 7:5, etc.). Such depressed him acutely (3:25).
- Finally, he became the target of harsh criticism from both family and friends (19:13ff).

The Deficient Soils

In Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mt. 13:3ff; Mk. 4:4ff; Lk. 8: 5ff) four types of soil were mentioned. The first was the hardened, wayside soil, representing those whose hearts have been a roadway for the world so long they have no interest in gospel truth.

The fourth soil constituted the “good” ground, which signified those who happily embrace the kingdom message and produce according to their respective abilities.

Between these extremes are the shallow soil and the cluttered soil — neither of which produced anything worthy of reward. Those of the shallow variety quickly embraced the gospel without counting the cost. Hence in time of persecution, they rapidly fell away (Mt. 13:21).

Note the contrast between those who quickly yielded to apostasy, versus “waiting” on the Lord.

Similarly, those whose hearts are crowded cannot bear to wait for lush production because he or she is too preoccupied with materialism and physical pleasure (Mt. 13:22; Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14). Waiting on the Lord would have avoided these destructive detours.

Surely such hardships and distractions can wreck a person’s spirituality if they are permitted to take hold and corrode one’s faith.

The remedy is to **resist acting impulsively**. The child of God must wait on the Lord for such remedies as may come with time, and most certainly will arrive with the eternal reward.

Biblical Examples

Examples always help to “flesh out” abstract statements, and scripture abounds with models for emulation, from both Testaments.

Job

Already we have called attention to the trials that assaulted the patriarch of Uz which, at the very least, involved months of suffering (Job 7:3). The pseudepigraphic Testament of Job (5:9), first century B.C. or A.D., extends the suffering to seven years.

At times Job was woefully discouraged and said foolish things which ought not to have escaped his lips (Job 9:22-24; cf. 42:3b). Nonetheless, this book ultimately paints a beautiful portrait of the word “patience.” James wrote:

“Behold, we call them blessed that endured: you have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful” (James 5:11).

In the Greek Testament, “patience” is *hupomone* from *hupo* (“under”) and *meno* (“to abide”). It thus suggests the trait of one who is able to abide under the weight of trials. In his discussion of this word, Barclay observed:

“It is the spirit which can bear things, not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope; it is not the spirit which sits statically enduring in the one place, but the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory; it is not the patience which grimly waits for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn” (1964, 144).

This is precisely the significance of “waiting” on the Lord! Job’s persistent trust in God, in spite of severe trials, is magnificently reflected in such passages as Job 13:15; 16:19; 19:25ff.

If we maintain our fidelity to God, even under great tribulation when we do not understand what is happening, this is patience. Ultimately, everything will be made right!

Joseph

Joseph was sold as a slave by his envious brothers (Acts 7:9a). He was taken into Egypt where he was falsely accused of attempted rape. He was imprisoned in chains for years (Ps. 105:18; cf. Gen. 37:2; 41:46).

Had God abandoned him for those dismal thirteen years? Hardly. And there is not the slightest hint that this young man fainted under the unjust treatment and mental pressure.

Ultimately he would inform his cruel brothers (who came to Egypt to obtain grain) that his movements had been providential. “God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. ... it was not you [alone] that sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:5, 8, cf. 9).

Later he would reaffirm this confidence: “And as for you, you intended evil against me; but God intended good, to bring it about that many people might be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20; Acts 7:9b).

His faith sustained him to the very end of his earthly days (cf. Heb. 11:22).

Paul

Saul of Tarsus was a bitter persecutor of the Christian Way (Acts 9:2). He determined to extinguish the detestable “Jesus sect” (Acts 24:14).

When, however, he had a personal interview with the resurrected Christ, his heart burned to know what was required to receive pardon (Acts 22:10).

Subsequently, he was given instruction concerning what he “must do” to receive the forgiveness of his sins (cf. Acts 9:6; 22:16).

As Christ’s specially chosen apostle, Paul began a sacrificial career of service that would span approximately a third of a century and travels that significantly eclipsed the 12,000 miles of his three missionary campaigns.

During these years he endured a siege of bloody persecution that most likely was unparalleled in Christian history. The Lord had foretold the suffering to which his apostle would fall prey (Acts 9:16).

The following catalog is but a partial record of the hardships he endured. The apostle declared he had been:

“[[i]]n prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times I received thirty-nine stripes. Three times was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and intense pain, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, without food often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are exterior, there is that which presses upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Yet there is no quiver in his quill, no trembling voice. Instead he “longed to know the fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10; cf. 2 Cor. 1:5). The theme of suffering, as cataloged in the New Testament, mostly is that which Paul endured on behalf of the Son of God.

Jesus

Our Lord, of course, was the supreme example of faithfulness under fire.

As to earthly prosperity, he had none (Mt. 8:20). His lived on the level of a “slave” (Phil. 2:7), a life of abject poverty (2 Cor. 8:9). The sacrifice offered when Christ was a baby was a reflection of his family’s impoverishment (Lk. 2:24).

Jesus was the brunt of sustained vicious criticism. False charges were constantly hurled against him. He was accused of having been born of fornication (Jn. 8:41), of being a glutton and wine-bibber (Mt. 11:19), of being demon-possessed (Jn. 7:20), of violating the Sabbath (Jn. 5:16-18), and of blaspheming God (Mk. 14:64).

Even his family once said he was out of his mind (Mk. 3:21 ESV). His own brothers “did not believe on him” until after his resurrection (Jn. 7:5; Acts 1:14).

Isaiah’s notation that Christ was a “man of sorrows” must not go unnoticed (Is. 53:3). He sorrowed over the ordeal of humanity’s suffering (Mk. 7:34; Lk. 7:13). He was grieved at the common spiritual dullness and hardness of heart of his generation (Mt. 16:8; Mk. 3:5).

The Savior was saddened by unbelievable ingratitude (Lk. 17:17), and a lack of common courtesy (Lk. 7:44), by religious insensitivity (Mt. 21:12) and human treachery (Mt. 26:20).

The ordeal of facing death to pay the price of the world’s sins was excruciating beyond any modern person’s ability to grasp.

He “redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,” he was “heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7).

Again, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 12:2).

He suffered and endured for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Surely there has never been a better model of waiting on Jehovah than that of our Savior himself. May we follow his example of endurance with joyful anticipation.

The Benefits of Waiting on the Lord

The verb “wait” is found a number of times in Old Testament literature. This perseverance is said to produce rich dividends. Consider the following.

Waiting allows one the opportunity of receiving **divine instruction**. “Guide me in your truth, and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day” (Ps. 25:5).

Waiting **facilitates assistance and protection** from the Lord. “Our soul has waited for Jehovah: he is our help and our shield (Ps. 33:20).

Waiting **accommodates contentment** in the face of the rebel’s bewildering prosperity. “Rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for him: do not fret yourself because of him who prospers in his way; because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass” (Ps. 37:7; cf. Ps. 73).

Waiting **elicits goodness** from the hand of the Creator. “Jehovah is good to them that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him (Lam. 3:25).

And according to the text in Isaiah 40:31, waiting **provides strength** for reaching the ultimate goal of life.

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Isaiah 40:31; 1 Thessalonians 5; Isaiah 40; Matthew 3:1; Acts 2; Psalm 27:14, 37:9, 34, 130:5; Psalm 18:3; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 13:3; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5; Matthew 13:21; Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; Job 7:3; Job 9:22-24; James 5:11; Job 13:15, 16:19, 19:25; Acts 7:9; Psalm 105:18; Genesis 37:2, 41:46; Genesis 45:5, 8; Genesis 50:20; Hebrews 11:22; Acts 9:2; Acts 24:14; Acts 22:10; Acts 9:6, 22:16; Acts 9:16; 2 Corinthians

11:23-28; Philippians 3:10; Matthew 8:20; Philippians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Luke 2:24; John 8:41; Matthew 11:19; John 7:20; John 5:16-18; Mark 14:64; Mark 3:21; John 7:5; Acts 1:14; Isaiah 53:3; Mark 7:34; Luke 7:13; Matthew 16:8; Mark 3:5; Luke 17:17; Luke 7:44; Matthew 21:12; Matthew 26:20; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 5:7; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:21; Psalm 25:5; Psalm 33:20; Psalm 37:7; Psalm 73; Lamentations 3:25

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Fortify Your Faith

P.O. Box 11746

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