

PROCESSING PROMISES

The working of God's will often span a process of time. Over and over, the Old Testament states, "in process of time." In the New Testament, "it came to pass" and "when the fullness of time was come." God's promises are always realized through ordained processes.

In Romans 4, Paul reveals the "why" of God's reasoning in waiting to fulfill promises made. Firstly he says, Abraham, laid hold upon and then pursued the promises of God through faith. The apostle then explains why the wait. As with all great men in the Bible who worked under the clouds of promise and destiny, the purpose of waiting is a time and season for proving the man—proving the situation. God first calls a man before he starts this proving process.

If God responded immediately to every promise, He made, we would not need patience. If we never learned to wait, we would never learn to trust. Consequently, we would never truly experience God. No authentic relationship could ever be genuinely established. Paul explains:

THE PROMISE:

Romans 4:20-21

20) He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21) And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

THE PROCESS:

Romans 5:3-5

3) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4) And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

The process will always remain the mystery or the hidden truth, strengthening God's promises. The story behind the story. In verse 3, the secret place in God needed for enduring the process and passing the test is found in the word "knowing." Knowing reflects intimacy throughout scriptures. Knowing that tribulation produces patience. This imagery of intimacy defines the purpose of the process. Any personal pursuit of a promise in hopes of ascertaining it has one goal in mind, that I might "know" Him.

While the words "knowing" and "worketh" are mentioned only once in these verses, context and continuity allow them to work throughout the exchange within the verse interchangeably. For example, we know tribulation worketh patience, we know patience worketh experience, we know experience worketh hope. We know hope maketh not ashamed. Paul knew these things intimately through his relationship with Christ. He was a man who was obviously intimately engaged in the process.

Herein is the monumental challenge for some, however. They simply do not know these things. If we never "know" and understand this systematically spiritual process Paul is describing, then God will remain a mystery unto us, and any subsequent testing or times of proving will become an unreasonable and unnecessary burden unto us.

To truly know God, one must experience Him through the fellowship of His sufferings. The process accomplishes this spiritual initiative.

When God inaugurates the promise, be sure it is so. A season or process of time, however, is mandated to prepare men for the reception and fulfillment of the promise. Time will often be needed to not only prepare the man but also to prepare the situation itself. This waiting room of life requires trust. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and many more, were all introduced to a prolonged process after issuing the promises. To circumvent or abort this process is to eventually hear Him say, "...I never 'knew' you: depart from me..."

With the promise of their land for possession assured, God then initiated a 40-year process of testings for the Hebrews.

Moreover, today the Jews are still waiting on their spiritual and national promises to be fulfilled. Arguably, they are currently enduring a prolonged process. God historically made promises to the patriarchs that took many years to unfold. For some, even hundreds of years. Some of whom we learn of also died in the faith, having never obtained the promises but only seen them afar off. However, they were persuaded of them and embraced them, ultimately enduring the process while at the same time passing the prescribed test nonetheless.

Men seek spiritual power and instantaneous results. God seeks lasting intimate relationships. Men desire to capture trophy prey. God simply enjoys the hunt. Men want to arrive at the destination expeditiously, but God peacefully enjoys the journey. God, Himself is not a mystery unto man, but as Paul teaches, God's "ways" are a mystery.

While the promise itself is openly revealed, the process and any subsequent details thereof that networks within the framework of the promise are often hidden from our sight. For great is the mystery of godliness or God's ways.

Habakkuk 2:3-4

3) For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4) Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Though it tarry, wait for it... it will not tarry. Tarry means; to prolong; a longer or extended length of time. The prophet is saying though the promise is delayed, it will not be too long, so wait. He may not come when you want Him, but He'll be there right on time. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

"The appointed time" came and passed, and still nothing. Why? If you do not know the ways of God, or if you do not know what you know, this may be a faith killer. Know this; the promise is still good. More importantly, know this also; God often tarries or prolongs the process. Abraham staggered not at the promises of God; however, he certainly struggled at times with the process.

He ultimately and thankfully was victorious over the long struggle whenever he finally arrived on top of Mt. Moriah. With situations such as Terah, Lot, Abimelech, and Hagar all behind him now, and Isaac or the promise bound on an altar of impending death, the process had ultimately paid off. In the fullness of time, which reached its climatical summit at that critical moment, God said, "now I know."

After 25 years of initially and patiently waiting on his promise, only to be required then to give that same promise up, Abraham triumphantly passed the test. He humbly proved himself through the lengthy process. Process finished, promise secured.

One possible reason or consideration for Christ never submitting a definitive date for His return could be, He is allowing Himself a season for tarrying, "While the bridegroom tarried..." Thus not even the angels in heaven know that divinely appointed day.

In Matthew 24:44, we read, "...be ye also ready..." however, just four verses later, we then read, "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (v.48).

God alone holds the sovereign right to tarry or prolong, as needed, His appointed arrival. It is a divinely promised appointment established in tarrying. The Church must remain watchful while faithfully serving throughout the entire process.

The promise by Christ of Pentecostal power in Acts 2 was prophetically assured through tarrying also as part of the process. Why prolong the promise? Why such a trying process? Tarrying adds intimacy to the relationship. It cultivates, as Paul taught, an experience in God that worketh hope (Rom. 5:4). This as Paul teaches, "we know."

"Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright..." (Hab. 2:4), which means that God has more proving to do still yet. "Not upright" means; out of balance or not completely running smooth.

So God first calls a man an unfinished man, an unprepared man, not a disqualified man but often an unqualified man. An incomplete man who needs more work by God to complete him and mature him for the appointed task.

Preparedness is a prerequisite of promise. Faith is tried in the process. The just shall live by faith. So wait on the Lord. Be sure He will keep His promises, but be as equally sure He will also continue to equip us in the process by putting us to the test.

In the fullness of time, once maturity and trust are firmly established, we then know that all things will work together for our good. Again, this we know. In the meanwhile, we wait on the promise to be fulfilled through the process.

Heb. 10:36

36) For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Psalms 46:10

(10) Be still and KNOW that I *am* God...

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