

Chapter 9 - Waiting on the Lord

9.1 Introduction

Given the “signs of the times” in which we are living, with the threat of the Covid-19 virus and the worldwide conditions the pandemic has brought about, it seems appropriate that we should conclude this series on *Walking Worthy of our Calling* with a chapter on *Waiting on the Lord*, since the Bible tells us that “*those who wait on the Lord ... shall walk and not faint.*”

Isa 40:31 *But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

What does it really mean, to *wait on the Lord*? More importantly, what does the Bible mean when it says we are to *wait on the Lord*? We will use **four steps** to try to clarify the meaning of the clause. The process will be described in some detail, because it is useful in trying to discern the meaning of not just this clause, but of any passage of the Bible.

9.2 Step I – Establish the Historical and Scriptural Perspectives

Firstly, there is always a danger, when pulling a single verse from Scripture, that we miss the **context** of the verse, and so we can easily misinterpret the verse. So we need to first establish both the historical and the scriptural perspectives of this verse.

The prophet Isaiah lived through a pivotal period in the nation of Israel’s history, the second half of the 8th century BC. This was the time of the divided kingdom, with the ten tribes forming the northern kingdom of Israel, and Judah forming the southern kingdom. The first half of the 8th century BC was a period of relative peace for both Israel and Judah, but this changed at the time of the death of King Uzziah in 740 BC. It changed because Assyria was aggressively bent on building an empire, and had its eyes on Israel and Judah. Assyria first attacked the northern kingdom of Israel, and by 722 BC, Israel had been defeated by Assyria, and the people taken into captivity. The territory which had been the kingdom of Israel became a cosmopolitan Assyrian province. The kingdom of Judah in the south was also threatened by Assyria. King Hezekiah of Judah eventually revolted against Assyria, which brought the might of King Sennacherib of Assyria down upon him in 701 BC, and left the little kingdom of Judah almost prostrate in spite of the miraculous rescue of Jerusalem.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah deal with this period, but also contain some remarkable prophecies, particularly Messianic prophecies. Isaiah explains this in the opening verse of the book of Isaiah:

Isa 1:1 *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*

Then the book of Isaiah changes dramatically in chapters 40 to 66, focussing on prophecy, particularly about the Babylonian captivity of Judah, which would take place over a hundred years' later, in the 6th century BC. So the structure of the book of Isaiah resembles that of the whole Bible. The Bible has 66 books; Isaiah has 66 chapters. The OT has 39 books; the first part of Isaiah has 39 chapters. The NT has 27 books; the second part of Isaiah has 27 chapters.

Getting back to our verse, Isa 40:31, note that it is in the opening chapter of the second part of Isaiah. The first part of Isaiah closes with Judah in critical danger of being destroyed by Assyria. Isaiah chapter 40 opens with the words, "*Comfort, yes, comfort My people!*" says your God, and then focuses on the power of God, which is contrasted with the weakness of the people of Judah. Chapter 40 concludes with these verses:

Isa 40:29-31 *He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but **those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint.***

So we see that both the historical and the Scriptural contexts give our verse both added perspective and added relevance. God's people were exhausted and defeated, and needed God's comfort and strength. But the truth of this verse didn't only apply to God's people some 2700 years ago. Its truth applies just as much to God's people today, particularly in times of stress and adversity, such as the Covid-19 pandemic which we are facing; "*those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint.*"

9.3 Step II – Determine what the Clause actually Says

Secondly, another very good guideline in interpreting Scripture is this: Scripture almost always means what it actually says! If someone gives you a long and complicated explanation of why a passage of Scripture doesn't mean what it appears to say, be suspicious! So "*those who wait on the Lord*" means – those who wait on the Lord! So that's the first clear meaning of the clause. To wait means to wait. We all know what it means to wait. "Wait until the weather is warmer"; "wait until the traffic light turns green"; "wait until you're older (or bigger or stronger or wiser)".

If a person says to me, "Wait here until I come back", and I do so, I soon see that waiting involves the exercising of some other attributes. Firstly, there is the question of **trust**.

Do I trust this person to do what he says he will do, namely, to come back? Do I **believe** that this person will really come back? Do I have **faith** that this person will return? If it is someone I **love** for whom I'm waiting, then that love plays a part in the waiting process. There is also the question of **authority** and **obedience** to authority. If the person is my boss or someone in a position of authority over me, then I will be more inclined to wait, to be obedient, because I respect that person's authority over me. If a long time passes, and the person still hasn't returned, I will no doubt become impatient, and realize that I must exercise **patience** and **endurance**. I mustn't lose heart, but must be **steadfast**. If we are "waiting on the Lord", then surely all these attributes will apply – trust, belief, faith, love, obedience to the Lord's authority, patience and endurance.

9.4 Step III – Explore other Passages with Similar Wording

Thirdly, we should see if there are **other passages of Scripture which use the same wording**, and see if we can get additional clarification of meaning from such passages. So, are there other passages of Scripture which contain the wording "wait on the Lord", or some equivalent wording?

The concept of waiting on the Lord is often found in the OT. By way of example, we will look at three verses from the Psalms, each of which adds an extra dimension to the concept of waiting on the Lord:-

Ps 25:4,5 *Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; **on You I wait all the day.***

In this verse we see that waiting on the Lord involves God leading us and teaching us. So learning about God, His nature, His ways, His works and His will, is part of the "waiting" process.

Ps 27:14 ***Wait on the Lord.** Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!*

Here we see that waiting on God requires courage and strength, and that God will strengthen us as we wait. Also, the strengthening may be a strengthening of the heart.

The third passage from Psalms doesn't actually contain the words "wait on the Lord", but it is nevertheless clearly about waiting on the Lord, but in a different sense; that of a servant waiting on his or her master.

Ps 123:2 *Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, **until** He has mercy on us.*

This is an interesting and informative verse. We learn that waiting on the Lord is like a servant waiting upon the master, looking for the slightest signal to be of service. So the waiting is not a mindless, dormant activity. We should be attentive and alert, with our minds focused and wide awake, and ready to do the Master's bidding.

9.5 Step IV - Explore other Occurrences of the Key Words

The **fourth** action we can take to try to better understand a verse is to look up key words of the verse in a concordance, to see where else in Scripture these key words are used, and in what sense they are used. Remember that we are always dealing with translations of the Hebrew or Greek original writings. If you have a copy of Young's Analytical Concordance, you will be able to trace where else the specific Hebrew or Greek words are used.

Using Young's Analytical Concordance, and looking up the word "wait", one soon realizes that there are at least 15 Hebrew words translated as "wait", as well as eight Greek words, each with a different nuance of meaning! There are about 100 verses in the Bible in which these words are used. The Hebrew word translated as "wait" in Isa 40:31 is *qavah*, which means to wait expectantly, in hope. I decided to look up the other OT passages where this word *qavah* is found. The bad news is that there are 28 such passages; the good news is that Young's lists only 5 passages in which *qavah* is used in the same conjugation as in Isa 40:31. (Hebrew verbs have seven conjugations.) So let's look at these 5 passages to see if we can learn anything more from them:-

Ps 25:1-3 *To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in you; let me not be ashamed; let not my enemies triumph over me. Indeed, let no one **who waits on You** be ashamed ...*

Here we see that *waiting on the Lord* involves trusting God, with the expectant hope and belief that God will get us through our difficulties, and help us triumph over these difficulties.

Ps 37:7-9 *Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently (chul) for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but **those who wait on the Lord**, they shall inherit the earth.*

Here we see that we should not fret about our difficulties, and become angry over them. Rather, we should "*wait on the Lord*" patiently, with our souls at peace and at rest, knowing that, with God's help, we will ultimately triumph over the difficulties.

Ps 69:5-6 *O God, You know my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from You. Let not **those who wait for You, O Lord of hosts**, be ashamed because of me; let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.*

So, in waiting on the Lord, we should not let the foolishness and sins of others distract us and confuse us.

Isa 49:23b *Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed **who wait for Me**.*

Again, we see the ultimate triumph and vindication of those who wait on the Lord.

Lam 3:25 *The Lord is good **to those who wait for Him**, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly (dumam) for the salvation of the Lord.*

Here “*waiting on the Lord*” is seen as equivalent to seeking the Lord; we should wait quietly and in biblical hope, which is overwhelming confidence; knowing that God is good to those who wait for Him.

So, in seeking to understand what the clause “those who wait on the Lord” truly means, we have checked the historical and scriptural contexts of the verse; we have assumed the Bible means what it says; we have looked at other verses which contain the same clause; and we have looked at other verses which contain the same Hebrew word for the key word *wait*. We can summarize the results of this search as follows:

9.6 Summary of what it Means to Wait on the Lord

So what does the clause *Those who wait on the Lord* really mean? We see that it applies particularly to those in times of stress and difficulties (such as the Covid-19 pandemic!). To wait means to wait. We should wait on the Lord in trust, belief, faith, love, obedience to the Lord’s authority, patience and endurance. The period of waiting is a time of seeking the Lord, and allowing God to teach us more about His nature, His ways, His works and His will. We should wait attentively, with the expectant belief and overwhelming confidence that God will help us overcome the difficulties. We should not fret and become angry, but wait patiently, quietly and peacefully. We should not allow others to distract or confuse us. We can be sure that God is good to those who wait on Him, and that we will ultimately come through the waiting process triumphantly and victoriously.

Devotional Exercise

- If you are experiencing stress and difficulties in the circumstances in which you find yourself, you particularly need to *wait on the Lord*.
- Having read through the notes carefully, pay particular attention to the summary on p9.5 of what it means to *wait on the Lord*.
- Go through the points one at a time, and check whether there are areas in your behaviour where you are falling short of the biblical standards.
- Prayerfully strive, with God's help, to make up for your deficiencies.

Those *who wait on the Lord ... shall walk and not faint*.