

IT TOOK TOO LONG

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I can remember as a child traveling around town with my father. He would stop at various locations and transact his business while leaving me to sit in the car. I waited. I waited. And sometimes I just kept on waiting. I said once that I spent half my life waiting on my father. Sometimes things just take too long. Or at least they seem to do so. In the Scriptures we have some cases where to some individuals it seemed that the time taken was just too much.

Moses. When God called Moses up to Mt. Sinai the first time, he stayed forty days and nights. However, instead of reflecting on their wondrous deliverance from Egyptian slavery, instead of meditating on the fact that one of their own had been called up to have a “visit” with God, instead of doing those appropriate things that should have characterized every responsible Israelite in camp, the people began to degenerate. It was when Moses seemed to delay his coming back that the people decided enough was enough. “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him” (Exo. 32:1). Isn’t that strange? The man whom God had used to lead them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea was not “on time.” More thought need not be given to him or to God who had employed him. Aaron made the golden calf, the people rose up early the next day and offered sacrifices, “and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (32:6). Years later, Paul uses this case of apostasy as a warning to Christians. After their deliverance by God, the Israelites became idolatrous (1 Cor. 10:7). Initial deliverance from slavery is one thing; being faithful to God following that event is another. Do you think at judgment that any apostate Israelite will be able to justify himself with the claim, “If Moses had not waited so long to come back, we would have done better”?

Samuel. Even before Saul plainly disobeyed God in sparing the life of Agag and some of the livestock (1 Sam. 15), he had indicated the ease with which he would do other than what he was told. Indeed, Saul was caught up in a trying and desperate moment. The Philistines were a real threat to Israel. There were thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and the rest of the Philistine army was like the countless grains of sand on a sea shore (1 Sam. 13:5). Samuel had told Saul that he would come to him before the battle was engaged so that the appropriate sacrifice could be made. Samuel had planned to be there before seven days were done. However, the seven days came and went. And when the Israelite army saw how many Philistines they were opposing, some of them began to hide (v. 6). Others ran away (v. 7). And those who remained with Saul “followed him trembling” (v. 7). Saul seeing his army dwindling decided he had waited on Samuel long enough. Since Samuel had not come to Gilgal according to the prearranged plan, he would take it upon himself to do what he was not authorized to do. “And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering” (v. 9). Immediately after the burnt offering was made, Samuel came, and he asked Saul, “What hast thou done?” (v. 11). Saul gave four seemingly good reasons for his unauthorized act: (1) The people were scattering from him, (2) Samuel had not come within the days appointed, (3) the Philistine army were in place, and (4) he didn’t want to fight the battle without making suppli-

cation to God (v. 11). Thus he claimed that he “forced” himself to make the offering (v. 12). Samuel said Saul had done “foolishly” and that his kingdom would not continue (vs. 13, 14).

Jesus Christ. Almost two thousand years ago now, Jesus left the earth from mount Olivet, a mountain just outside of Jerusalem (Acts 1:9, 12). During his ministry he had warned his followers with regard to the matter of time. In Matthew 24 he declared that his second coming would be, in a sense, a surprise. No one would know until it arrived. He likened his second coming to the days of Noah when the contemporaries of Noah, though they had been warned, were completely unprepared and shocked when the flood came “and took them all away” (24:37-39). Then, he declares that his second coming will catch some unprepared and some prepared (vs. 40-42). Then, he likens his second coming to a thief who breaks in unannounced (v. 43). He says, “Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (v. 44). In the following stories that he tells, the human propensity to think that “it has taken too long” is addressed. In the first story, the lord “tarrieth” (v. 48). In the second, the bridegroom “tarried” (25:5). In the third story, the lord of the servants returned but it was “after a long time” (v. 18). Peter also warns us about falsely evaluating the divine schedule. One day to God is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is comparable to a day (11 Pet. 3:8). The Lord is allowing more time for salvation (v. 9, 15). But the Lord is coming as a thief (v. 10). Those who have given up hope because they ran out of time will find that they have given up everything. 📖