



# Pit Stops

## Perils, Pleas, and Passing Promises

March 1, 2026

Today we continue our journey with Joseph, who's waiting for us in the pit!



But first: **How many unopened letters has God sent you?** As children, we learn heavily censored Bible stories. But as adults, God wants us to relate to their uncensored reality. Cuz He didn't just observe and record it, **He designed it, so He can speak to us through it.** And all He asks is that we open His letters and wait for it. Previously on the dysfunctional drama of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Abraham gives Ishmael's firstborn rights to Ishmael's half-brother, Isaac (Ishmael's got the gold earring); then Isaac grows up and is deceived into giving Esau's firstborn rights (he's the hair hunter) to his second-born (smooth-skinned) twin, Jacob; who then, at the age of a 107, gives the rights to his eleventh-born, Joseph. Whom he then sends 55 miles north, all alone, to check on the jealous and murderous numbers 1-10. And to no one's surprise:

They stripped him of his robe ... and threw him into the cistern. ... [And argued about murdering him over lunch; but] As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and [to their surprise] saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming [they could tell by the gold earrings (according to Judges 8:24)] ... Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and [so, they weren't slave traders, but] they were on their way to take them down [south] to Egypt. [So, Jesus' forefather] [Judah said] "What will we gain if we [act like Cain and] kill our brother and cover up his blood? [Cuz like Abel's, it'll cry out, and God will hear, and curse us (Gen 4:10)] [So] Come, let's sell him to [our very hostile cousins] the Ishmaelites [who'll probably pay us for the privilege of doing our dirty work for us] and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother" [and the Ishmaelites' (according to Genesis 25:18) lived in hostility toward all their brothers] ... [And to no one's surprise] His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, [these Ishmaelites lived in Midian] his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who [maliciously] took him to [enslave him in] Egypt. – Genesis 37:23-28 NIV

Two huge, wonderfully pregnant, story-problems: 1) When the Ishmaelites pass by Hebron (Joseph's home) **why not ransom him to their uncle Jacob, for 100x the going rate of a slave?** He has the means. And Joseph would've been trying to convince 'em. And 2) **Why are the brothers so confident they won't?!** Cuz they won't risk their father finding out. But both issues are resolved by **the lust that's far stronger than riches: revenge!** Islamic tradition holds that Ishmael settled in what is now Mecca. Home to Islam's holiest site and the world's largest mosque. Classical Islamic genealogies trace Muhammad and many Arab tribes to Ishmael, whom they regard as the true heir of Abraham's covenantal legacy. And **you know what's in the center of that mosque? Genesis 21:19!**

God promises Abraham to *bless the world* through him by *turning him into a great nation!* **And all he has to do is to ... wait for it ... wait for it ... is to wait for it.** But, *ten years* pass by, and 75-year-old Sarah is *sick and tired of waiting*. Fact is, she's *downright indignant*. How could her God get her *hopes up*, with a *promise like that*, and then just do *nothing* for a *decade* and *counting*. So Abraham is like, "Should we *try again?*" And she's like, "Not tonight. I've got a Hagar."

So [to everyone's surprise] she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; [Hagar] perhaps I can build a family through her." [And then, to absolutely nobody's surprise] Abram agreed – Genesis 16:1-2 NIV



Faith and patience always go hand in hand. Cuz, **it's not enough to trust God's Word; we gotta trust His timing.** Which *doesn't mean* you sit on your hands and wait. **It means you don't sleep with the maid,** just cuz He hasn't made you happy with your current situation. He's working on it! Which is why **faith is living without looking for loopholes.** But, we do do everything in our power, short of violating His Word, His will, and His ways. So much of **faith is resisting trading a sure thing for a shortcut.** Those ol' love-birds should'a been stirrin' up the nest! What an assignment! They're not rebellious just reckless, but both will bite you in the end.

When [Hagar] knew she was pregnant, she began to despise [Sarah] – Genesis 16:4 NIV

This is what you get for **trying to meet godly needs in ungodly ways with self-made shortcuts.** They sound good on the front side, but bite you on the back side. It isn't rocket science. **If it violates His Word, it's not His will.** Take it or leave it. Sarah has buyer's remorse and leaves it and mistreats Hagar – who literally leaves it and runs away from her problems. So:

The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Go home to [Sarah] [and work things out] ... You will have a son. [And] You will name him *Ishma-El*, [lit. *God Has Heard*] because the Lord has heard your cries. ... [But] He will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. [And] He will attack all his brothers." [And Hagar] The [Egyptian] slave girl gave a [nick] name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are '*God who sees me*'" – Genesis 16:9-13 NCV

When *Ishma-El* (God-has-heard-your-cries) is thirteen, "God-who-sees-me" says it's time for 90-year-old Sarah to shine! Which He intended all along. But **like most true blessings, it was too big to comprehend beforehand.** Which is why the only thing she had to do, was ... wait for it. And:



[Abraham [the Father of Faith] said] "Please let *Ishmael* be the son You promised." [But] God said, "**No, [he represents your impatience]** Sarah your wife will have a son, [and he'll obviously represent My astonishing provision] and you will name him *Isaac*. [Laughter] ... As for *Ishma-El*, [The-Lord-has-heard-your-cries] I have heard you. I will bless him and give him many descendants." – Genesis 17:18-21 NCV

Abraham is called the Father of Faith. But Sarah is called the Mother of Grace. Know why? Because:

The Lord was *gracious to Sarah* ... [and] Sarah said, “God has brought me *laughter*, [which means their joy came by (God’s) grace through (their) faith!] ... But Sarah saw ... [Ishmael] mocking [his hostility already showing] and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son” ... [So] [Abraham] sent [Hagar] off with the boy. ... [And they got lost and ran out of water; and] *God heard [ishma-El] the boy [Ishmael] crying*, and ... [the-God-who-sees] opened [Hagar’s] eyes and she saw *a well of water*. – Genesis 21:1-19 NIV

Know what’s in the *middle* of that *mosque* in *Mecca*? *Well? Well? That well*. Long story short:

Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years ... and died, and ... his *descendants* ... lived in *hostility toward all their brothers*. [4,000 years and counting!] – Genesis 25:17-18 NIV

[And, so] As [Joseph’s brothers] sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of *Ishmaelites* coming ... with *spices, balm and myrrh*, and they *were on their way* to take them down to *Egypt*. ... [So] his brothers ... sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the *Ishmaelites*, who took him to [enslave him in] *Egypt*. – Genesis 37:23-28 NIV



The *Ishmaelites’ response*, and the *brothers’ confidence* (that they won’t *return* him home for a *reward*), has everything to *do* with *who* is still very much *alive and living* with *Jacob* in *Hebron*: His *father, Isaac!* The *reason* for *Ishmael’s hostility*, who doesn’t *die* for another *decade*. (*Jacob’s never gonna live down that stew!*) *Imagine* the *brothers approach*:

“Hey *cous*, nice *earrings*. Let’s *sheath* those *scimitars*. Cuz this *robe* is *our* little brother’s. Cuz, just as *Abraham* did with *Isaac* (*Ishmael’s* little brother), our *father, Jacob* just gave *our little brother* the *firstborn rights*. So, wouldn’t it be *poetic justice* for your *father, Ishmael*, to *send away* *Isaac’s grandson* to *Egypt* to be *enslaved*?”



One of my *favorite scenes* in the *Back to the Future trinity* – I mean, *trilogy* – is at the *end* of *part two*, when the *DeLorean* is *struck by lightning*, and *Doc disappears*, *hopelessly stranding* *Marty* in the *middle of nowhere* in the *past*. But then, a *car* pulls up, and a *man* from *Western Union* *hands* him an *envelope*, and says:

“We’ve had that *envelope* in our *possession* for the *past 70 years*. It was *given* to us with the *explicit* instructions to be *delivered* to a *young man* with your *description*, answering to the *name of Marty*, at this *exact location*, at this *exact minute*, on *November 12, 1955*. We had a *little bet* going as to *whether* this *Marty* would *actually* be here. *Looks like I lost*.”

Turns out, our *Doc*, **the Great Physician delivers His letters in much the same way**. *Joseph* is in the *pit*. His *voice* is *hoarse*. His *fingernails* are *broken* and *bleeding*. But the *worst part* is the *feeling of betrayal*. And the *silence* from *above*, as he *pleads* for his *life*, and *prays* for a *miracle*. But *then*, at that *exact location*, at this *exact minute*, along comes a *caravan* of **God-who-sees-you-has-heard-your-pleas-ites**. And *Joseph isn’t murdered*. Albeit, **his deliverance is by way of enslavement**. *Hard* to see that as an *upgrade*, unless you’re in the *pit*. But it *absolutely was*. And it was *accompanied* by this *profound reassurance*, *unwittingly delivered* at the *precise moment* it was *most needed*, by his *worst enemies*, over *100 years* after *God dropped* it in the *Ish-mail*. But, **it doesn’t stop the betrayal, or his abduction**. Because, *under God’s watchful eye*:

Joseph, [was] sold as a slave. [And] [those Ishmaelites] shackled his feet with chains; [and] collared his neck in iron – Psalm 105:17-18 NAB

Yet, **the Lord sent him a reminder that it's all in control, just not yours.** We can have a stunted, Sunday school *mindset*, that *obeying the rules gets a gold star from God, and life falls neatly into place.* Well, Joseph escapes his brothers' *clutches* only to *find* himself at the *mercy* of the even more *merciless God-who-sees-you-has-heard-your-pleas-ites.* But do you think he had *ears to hear* it and a *heart to receive* it? Cuz *that's* how the *Lord* sends a personalized letter *back* to the *future.* Because:

*"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."* – Isaiah 65:24 NIV

For your Father *knows* what you *need before* you *ask* Him. – Matthew 6:8 NIV

Before a *word* is on my *tongue* You *know* it *completely* – Psalm 139:4 NIV



He *answers* before we *call* because He *knows* before we *ask*, so **He's always an eternal step ahead.** Which is *why* it was a *no-brainer* for the Lord to *use Jacob's sons' murderous motivations*, and *Ishmael's sons' sinful lust for revenge*, to put His *perfect plan* into *motion* for *Joseph's astonishing journey*, and for his *bitter brothers' and his cruel cousins' own salvation.* Cuz *this caravan ride* actually *ends* in *13 short years*, when he becomes the *agricultural minister* of *Egypt*, second *only* to *Pharaoh!* And *oddly* enough, **I have some letters written 3,000 years ago, addressed to you!** And we have a *little bet* going as to whether you have *ears to hear* 'em and a *heart to hold* 'em. So let's *open* 'em.

My soul is *full* of *trouble* and ... I am counted among *those who go down* to the *pit* ... but I *cry* to You ... [and] in the *morning* my [daily] *prayer* comes *before* You. – Psalm 88:3-13 NIV

Because His *compassions* ... are *new* every *morning* – Lamentations 3:22-23 NKJ

When I *sit* in *darkness*, [waiting and watching] the Lord will be a *Light* to me. – Micah 7:8 NKJ

For *great* is Your *steadfast* [unfailing] *love* toward me – Psalm 86:13 ESV

[Again and again] I *waited* *patiently* for the *Lord*; and ... [He] *heard* my *cry.* He *also* brought *me up out* of a *horrible pit* ... and *set* my *feet* upon a *Rock* – Psalm 40:1-2 NKJ

And His *name* is *Jesus.* And **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** (Phil 4:13) *If* I *so choose.* So, the *next time* you're *forced* to take a *pit stop* – however *horrific* it may be – **open these words from the Rock, written a mere 2,000 years ago, and meant for your delivery today.**

For *He Himself* has said, "I will *never leave* you nor *forsake* you." – Hebrews 13:5 NKJ

That He who *began* a *good work* in you will *carry it on* to *completion* – Philippians 1:6 NIV

After you have *suffered* for a *little while*, the *God* of all *grace*, who *called* you to His *eternal glory* in *Christ*, will *Himself* *perfect*, *confirm*, *strengthen* and *establish* you. – 1 Peter 5:10 NAS

And *all that's required* of you is to *just ... wait* for it ... *wait* for it ...

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Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.