Playing the Waiting Game

Key References: Genesis 16; Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 13, pp. 145-147; The Bible Story (1994), vol. 1, pp. 156-161; Our Beliefs, nos. 7, 23, 22
Waiting. It’s such a hard thing to do. Wait for Christmas. Wait for your birthday. Wait till school’s out. Wait till you can drive. “Be patient,” your parents say. That’s because parents know that the results of impatience are usually a disaster.

Abraham and Sarah lived at a time when a large family was a great honor. But at the age of 75 they were still childless. By then they had probably given up on having children. Then God spoke to Abraham and told him he would be the father of a great nation. No doubt the promise gave Abraham and Sarah new hope, and the waiting began again. Yet even several years after the promise, no child was born.

“You have given me no children,” Abraham finally said to God, “so a servant in my household will be my heir” (Genesis 15:3).

“This man will not be your heir,” said God, “but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” Then God showed to Abraham by night the starry sky and said to him, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” The Lord then promised to Abraham, “So shall your offspring be” (verses 4, 5).

So they waited and waited and waited some more. Ten years went by, and still there was no baby. Abraham and Sarah finally ran out of patience. They decided to take matters into their own hands.
Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham as another wife. But ignoring God’s plan would have disastrous consequences. Even though he lived among heathens who thought nothing of marrying several wives, until now Abraham had not adopted their customs. Yet Abraham didn’t ask God when deciding to take Hagar as another wife. He was desperate. He had run out of patience.

So he took Hagar as his second wife, and sure enough, it wasn’t long until she was pregnant. Abraham might have thought that would solve his problem, but he was mistaken. Disregarding God’s plan for his family was disastrous.

In no time at all wife number one and wife number two were not getting along. Hagar was expecting the child that Sarah couldn’t have, and she probably reminded Sarah about it every chance she got.

Sarah ran to Abraham. “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering,” she wailed. “I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me.”

“Your slave is in your hands,” he replied. “Do with her whatever you think best” (verses 5, 6).

Sarah was certainly angry. Jealous. Even mean. She mistreated Hagar, and Hagar ran away to the desert.

Out there in the desert, near a spring, an angel found Hagar all alone.

“Go back to your mistress,” he said, “and submit to her. You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has
heard of your misery” (verses 9, 11). So Hagar returned, and Ishmael was born. At long last Abraham had a child, a son whom he loved, and things seemed to settle down.
But just as a roof that’s been fixed superficially and in haste keeps things dry for only a while, Abraham’s family problems were far from over. It wasn’t until several years later when Isaac was born to Sarah that Abraham found out how big a mistake he’d made. The conflicts between his two wives and their sons became unbearable and tore his family apart. If only Abraham had trusted God. If he had waited for Him to fulfill His promise in His own time, Abraham could have saved himself a lot of grief.
Abraham was desperate for the heir God had promised and charged ahead with his own plan for a son. It wasn’t until he was an old man that he finally learned he could trust God with everything in his life, especially what was most precious to him—his family.
Below is a Bible quote and four clues. The numbers (which represent letters) in the clues match the numbers in the verse.

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1  2  3  4   5  6  7   8  9  10
11 12 13 14
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**CLUES**

- 1  3  5  10  What Eve was to Adam.
- 9  2  7  14  Difficult.
- 13  12  8  Decay.
- 11  6  4  Abraham's nephew.