

Week 10: Patience in Suffering

The Place of the Passage

Having warned the rich and powerful oppressors of God's people about the coming judgment, James turns now to encourage the church with the same reality. One day, Jesus Christ will come again to rescue his people from those who oppress and persecute them. He will put an end to injustice and evil. In light of that reality, God's people should live and wait patiently, as a farmer waits patiently for his crops to grow from the earth. That patience is warranted precisely because God has shown himself faithful. He will, without fail, keep his promises, just as he always has.

The Big Picture

God's people should wait patiently for God to keep his promise to judge the wicked and rescue his people from oppression.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, [James 5:7–12](#). Then review the listed passages and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 2398–2399, available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Be Patient in Suffering ([James 5:7–9](#))

What is the main exhortation that James gives to his readers in this paragraph? Why do they need that exhortation?

What illustration does James use to show his readers the meaning of patience? How would that illustration help them understand what he is exhorting them to do?

What does the phrase "establish your hearts" mean, practically speaking? How does the reality of Jesus' return help you to do that?

Are there circumstances in your life under which you need to be patient? What are they? What truths help you to be patient under those trials?

What function is [James 5:9](#) playing? Why does James warn about grumbling? How could a heart that is not "established" lead a person to grumble? What lies at the root of most grumbling, and how could having an established heart cut that root?

Examples of Patience ([James 5:10–12](#))

Why does James point to examples of patience? How do examples from the Bible help us to see what God wants from us, and the importance of those things?

James says that "the prophets" are "an example of suffering and patience." About whom do you think James is talking there? What examples from the Old Testament can you think of in which someone endured suffering with patience?

In [James 5:11](#), James mentions two things that should give believers comfort and encouragement to stand fast in their trials. What are those two things?

How does being reminded of the steadfastness of Job encourage you to stand fast as well? How does being reminded of the “purpose of the Lord,” that is, “how the Lord is compassionate and merciful,” encourage you to stand fast?

What is James doing with [James 5:12](#)? How does ungodly oath-making (like the grumbling in [James 5:9](#)) reveal a heart that is not steadfast and established? How does an unestablished heart lead to ungodly oath-making?

Do you think there is any connection or resonance between [James 5:12](#) and [James 4:13–15](#)? If so, what is the connection?

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to reflect on the Personal Implications these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE COMING OF THE LORD. It’s interesting that James treats the coming of the Lord very differently in this passage than he did in [James 5:1–6](#). There, the day of the Lord was a fearful thing, bringing only destruction and condemnation. Here, it is actually something to be longed for; it is to bring comfort and solidity to a Christian’s life. The difference, of course, is between James’s two audiences. In [James 5:1–6](#), he is talking to people who are not Christians, who have not submitted to the Lord Jesus in faith and repentance. In [James 5:7–12](#), on the other hand, the focus is on those who have repented and believed in Jesus. It is a stark—and eternal—difference that James sketches. Believers joyfully await the coming of the Lord Jesus, by whose work all our sins are forgiven and heaven awaits, won for us through the victory of another.

THE COMPASSION AND MERCY OF THE LORD. James reminds us again in [James 5:11](#) how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Those truths lie at the very heart of the good news of Christianity. It is God’s love for sinners—his mercy and compassion—which led him not simply to leave them in their sin, but rather to act in Jesus Christ so that they might be saved. As Paul said, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” ([Rom. 5:8](#)).

Whole-Bible Connections

THE STEADFASTNESS OF JOB. Job is a paradigmatic example in the Old Testament of patience in suffering. Tested by Satan through the death of his family and the loss of everything he owned, Job prayed to God and questioned him, but he never cursed God or turned his back on him. He remained faithful and was commended in the end. Job’s faithful patience is held out for us here as an example we are to follow as we face our own trials and temptations.

CHRIST’S COMING. “You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” ([James 5:8](#)). In Eden, the Lord dwelt and walked with Adam and Eve. The fall fractured this fellowship and God withdrew. From that point on he was accessible only through special visions or, mainly, at a later stage, in the tabernacle and the temple. In Christ, however, the Lord came into this now darkened world. In the middle of history, God began decisively to restore the fellowship that was lost in Eden. And at the end of history, Christ will come a second

time, as the Lord returns one final time to restore the cosmos to its Edenic state. James calls believers to be patient in light of that great hope.

Theological Soundings

THE COMING OF THE LORD IS AT HAND. The Bible teaches that the return of the Lord Jesus to bring his people home and consummate his kingdom will be “soon” ([Rev. 22:20](#)). Of course, what that means finally is up to God, for whom a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day ([2 Pet. 3:8](#)). God is not bound by time as we are. He is eternal, and so we would be wrong to accuse him of being slow. After all, what is two thousand years—or a hundred thousand!—to the eternal God? The point is that we do not know when Christ will return, and so we ought to be ready for that glorious moment all the time. The Christian life is to be one of readiness, not laxity.

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. Remarkably, James speaks of the “purpose of the Lord,” not “the purpose of Satan” in describing Job’s nightmare experiences ([James 5:11](#)). Though Satan was working most immediately and directly in Job’s affliction, all was done under the sovereign and good hand of God—a God who “is compassionate and merciful” ([James 5:11](#)). Job himself indicates that he understood this ([Job 1:21; 2:10](#)). Even the hellish experiences of life are under the providential, all-ruling hand of our heavenly Father.

Practical Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [James 5:7–12](#) for your own life today. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord regarding (1) the Gospel Glimpses, (2) the Whole-Bible Connections, (3) the Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. [James 5:7–12](#)

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you engage in this study of James. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and to take note of things to review again in the future.