



When Patience Must Give Way to Endurance

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. (James 5:7-11)

Since there is near universal agreement, regardless of doctrinal orientation, that the Epistle of James is most likely the earliest of all the New Testament writings preserved in the canon of Scripture, it is interesting to note what he sees as most important to affirm to the early Christians where the Second Coming is concerned. James does not mention **any** of the End Times milestones or activities which consume most present-day discussions, books and websites such as the timing of the Rapture, but highlights two basic things which he believes will see Christians through to the end: patience and endurance. In other words, he does not remind them of the particular mechanics or timeline of the Last Days, something which at this point in time the Early Church would have understood from Christ's Olivet Discourse, but succinctly places the emphasis on the more important issue of how a Christian lives and behaves in the course of seeing those things played out. This is actually the essence of the accompanying parables and illustrations Christ provided not just in the Olivet Discourse, but in all His teachings on the Second Coming, that the more important issue for Christians is going to be whether or not they are found to be practicing, serving Christians when the Master returns. In those teachings, no one is ever approved or rewarded for keeping an accurate End Times chart.

This is particularly interesting when you consider that it is difficult to find many discussions or writings of an eschatological nature which at some point does not make an attempt to provide parallel proof of its biblical correctness by quoting some very

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early historical source. The academic rule of thumb is that the closer such a source lived in proximity to the Early Church, the truer the contents of their writings reflect the original interpretation of Scripture by the original Apostles and that very first generation of believers. This amuses me at times because there are so few authentic original writings actually authored from the 1st Century, so “the closest” is often someone from the 2nd Century or beyond. In other words, their “close” source is not actually a firsthand witness, but a sort of “someone who knew somebody who knew somebody who was there” kind of thing.

And this tickles my funny bone because that is *exactly* what the New Testament writings are—the testimony of the *original* witnesses from that very first generation of believers! It is ironic that some feel the need to quote someone who wasn’t even born during this time to make a case for what they believed, when we have “writings” such as James, the acknowledged earliest of them all, to tell us what they believed, and even better, Holy Spirit-directed. (Admittedly, this feeds into my obnoxious mantra plagiarized from an old-time saying, “Seminary is a place where they answer the questions no one is asking.”)

Historically speaking, this was a time when the Church’s knowledge of eschatology was based primarily on the Olivet Discourse and the Old Testament Scriptures. A span of about sixty years would separate the Day of Pentecost and John’s vision on Patmos, during which every other book of the New Testament canon would be given without any knowledge of Revelation, the very last to be provided. But when it comes to that very first generation of believers, it is also universally agreed regardless of which eschatological “ism” embraced that they maintained a fervent belief Christ would return in their lifetime, probably far more intense than subsequent generations of Christians would exhibit. So it is particularly instructional to examine the condensed summary of that which this earliest of all writings identified as most important in this regard.

James does not identify signs, does not point to any of the End Times personalities who dominate that landscape, nor revisit any particular milestone of the overall timeline. Instead, he summarizes what is deemed most important in a short list of examples of *patience* and *endurance*. It’s not that believers simply need to wait for it while they go through it, but must do so according to the biblical definition of what it means to be patient and endure. The whole thing boils down to *behavior*—Christians acting like Christians.

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The Crux of the Matter

*⁷Therefore be **patient**, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being **patient** about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸You too be **patient**; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰As an example, brethren, of suffering and **patience**, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹We count those blessed who **endured**. You have heard of the **endurance** of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. (James 5:7-11)*

The main theme of James' contribution to New Testament eschatology is patience. In just these few verses we are presented with a complement of similar attributes such as "patient" (three time in v.7-8), "waits" (v.7), "patience" (v.10), and "endured" and "endurance" (v.11) But the opening example of patience in the illustration of the farmer is particularly relevant. Like the promise of Jesus in John 14:1-3 that He will return even though it is to our benefit that He be away for a time, and His statement in Luke 17:22 that He will be away for such a length of time that they will long for Him, and the many examples in the Olivet Discourse of a master or bridegroom being away for an extended period of time, **all** generally parallel the imagery of the patience and working of a farmer, especially in the context of seasons.

What is clearly implied, first of all, is that a farmer must **experience** the seasons, caring for the soil and the crops, only expecting the crop to ultimately be ready and available at harvest time. Crops blossom and mature not on a particular day according to the farmer's will, but only during a specific season at a time which must be monitored as it is ultimately under divine control. No farmer would expect that he could skip past the other seasons to go directly to the harvest—they are actually necessary and required precursors in order to achieve the desired end result. This closely parallels Jesus' admonition in the Olivet Discourse to pay attention to the signs of the times in the character of seasons.

In addition, there is reference to the specific seasonal conditions of the "early and late rains", something unique to Israel because of its geographical location and climate. Many have pointed out that this reference to the two periods of expected rain for the meteorological conditions specific to Israel is a metaphor relating to God's working through the outpouring of the Spirit. Just as there is an expected separation of time on

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the Hebrew calendar between the early and late rains, this most likely has the dual meaning of what took place on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 as the first of these rains, and then a second similar outpouring yet to come in the Last Days in the character of the first. But in both this example and that of the farmer, there is the unavoidable parallel of a specific lapse of time which takes place as well as between the expected rains so crucial to the harvest crop. These provide the application of both patience and endurance which are the hallmarks of our behavior in the interim in the same way that what becomes between these inevitable climate changes in Israel must be endured, and as it turns out, absolutely necessary.

The farmer must pay attention to seasons, must be faithful to carry out the appropriate work at the appropriate times, but ultimately has no control over the weather, which will inevitably take place in an anticipated sequence for varying lengths of time and, of course, cannot be expected to arrive on a day or hour which can be precisely predicted. Each seasonal change always comes in the same sequence, but not only are the exact starting and ending dates of each impossible to pinpoint in advance, but often overlap in such a way that it is difficult to be sure when the transition from one season to the next has permanently taken hold. It is usually only from hindsight that the farmer can look back and pinpoint the exact day or week in which the current season actually began, even though it inevitably arrives in the general timeframe expected.

It is further telling to juxtapose this against what is eschatologically revealed, in that the overall timing of the eschaton is also recorded in Scripture by Jesus' statement, "*When the crop permits*". (Mk. 4:29) These things precisely mirror what has already been foundationally established concerning Christ's Return, that it would take place future to the Early Church, could not be precisely predicted by setting a specific date, but would arrive in an unmistakable environment of foreshadowing signs and events so that its nearness is still obvious. (Regardless of the crop, look at what takes place just a week or two before it is ready.) For Christians in particular, there is a repeated admonition to not just be ready and waiting, but to be consistently faithful in carrying out the work and responsibilities of the Body of Christ in the example of the farmer.

But perhaps what is especially important in the character and working of a farmer is how this points to the need for us to be out working in the field, doing what needs to be done during each season leading up to the final harvest. It echoes the *Parable of the Talents* in Matthew 25, of the contrast between those who, upon the Master's Return,

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are found faithfully employing in this life what has been entrusted to each of His servants, versus those who have not. In every Christ-given parable and illustration provided in an eschatological context, the moral of the story is whether Christ will return to reward faithfulness or to punish and remove unfaithfulness. James' parallel illustration of our working patiently in the character of a farmer certainly confirms and reinforces this yet again.

The Example of Job

Of particular note, however, is the example of Job who is offered to explain how the expectation of patience for the End Times gives way to the more penetrating need for endurance. We could probably write an entire, separate book comparing and contrasting in minute detail all the parallels between what took place in the book of Job and that which the End Times Christian is to expect in the season of Jesus' Return, but here are a few highlights:

- The earthly events which take place, although permitted by God, are actually carried out by Satan.
- What happens to Job is not the result of sin or as a deserved consequence of his own actions, but is in reality a test of faith.
- **Everyone** turns against Job, not just worldly enemies who take his physical possessions, but his closest friends and even his wife, just as in the Olivet Discourse Jesus warns that family and those previously close to us will turn against us in addition to the usual earthly elements.
- Job was not exempted from earthly trials, but required to participate in and **endure** them, although still preserved by God **through** them. By faith he ultimately overcame them, but in the course of endurance of then-historic proportions.
- At the time all these things took place, Job did not fully understand them, and it was only in hindsight that everything was explained and completely understood.
- When these things began to take place, they occurred very quickly and in rapid succession in an attempt to overwhelm him.

However, what may be most important about the example of Job where Christians are concerned is his spiritual condition before going **into** his time of tribulation:

¹There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. (Job 1:1)

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Where the example of Job is concerned, and in light of the most important aspects of the Olivet Discourse and Christ's related teachings, what may be most relevant for us is that **prior** to all that would come upon Job, he was a practicing, righteous believer who **entered** into a time of distress "*blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil*". We could probably write yet a whole additional book on all that Scripture speaks to concerning the quality of one's walk based on these four crucial attributes. Such is spiritually **ready** for that time of unprecedented testing in their Christian life because they are spiritually **prepared** to this degree. The "*endurance of Job*" carries with it the **prerequisite** of the **faithfulness** of Job in the first place. He did not obtain these qualities **in** his time of tribulation, but in the course of his whole life leading **up** to it as the prerequisite of his subsequent successful endurance.

It can be further argued that this is the pattern replayed over and over in Scripture, that whenever a rescue takes place (a figure of the Rapture), the faithful have been present to be tested **before** their extraction is transacted. Noah and his family had to endure the sin and wickedness of their time, Lot and his family lived among such corruption that God could not allow it to continue, Israel followed God in Egypt in spite of an antichrist figure in Pharaoh and their many false gods and experienced specific hardship, Rahab and her family were a remnant of believers in the God of Israel amongst the majority who were not, and so on. All ultimately escaped the wrath of God which came upon their contemporaries for yielding to Satan's ways, but in every case, God's faithful were not exempt from Satan making every effort to entice them as well. Everyone was equally tested even though the faithful were ultimately exempted from the consequences of God's wrath reserved for those failing the test. Even the raptured Enoch and Elijah lived in the shadow, so to speak, of Satan.

¹⁰As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:10)

We could work up the same kind of profile as Job for the "*suffering and patience*" of "*the prophets*", showing that in every case they entered into their own times of tribulation as spiritually **prepared** servants. They did not become faithful **in** times of testing, persecution and trial, but achieved it well **before** in the course of everyday life. Like Job, they were hopelessly outnumbered, often betrayed by those closest to them, and assigned the role of preaching God's Word and carrying out His work in spite of the

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circumstances—all attributes which will be shared by the End Times Christian according to the caveats of the Olivet Discourse.

These two examples of Job and the Prophets actually extend the opening example of the farmer, in that just as their pursuit of always living according to God’s Word and ways prepared them spiritually for the season of testing and endurance to come, the farmer likewise must faithfully accomplish all the work necessary in the seasons leading up to the harvest in order to reap its benefits when the crop matures and finally becomes ripe for the impending harvest.

The Example of Elijah

It can be no coincidence that at the beginning of chapter 5, James refers to the farmer patiently awaiting the rains, and then we find at the end of the same chapter the reference to Elijah and his relationship to the rain:

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. (Ja. 5:17-18)

It is first and foremost notable that both Jesus and James refer to the literal, historical Elijah, but whereas Jesus casts him in the context of His First Coming, (Lk. 4:24-26) James’ usage is for the Second Coming, perhaps an oblique reference to the early and latter rains as well.

Just as the illustrations of the farmer and Job have much to teach about expectations for End Times Christians, so the life of Elijah can contribute to the same, most notably in the fact that he does battle with an antichrist figure in Ahab, a system of spiritual seduction in the character of Mystery Babylon and that of Jezebel and the prophets of Baal, and lives at a time when the remaining faithful have become just a small remnant. (1 Ki. 17-19) Most importantly, of course, he is someone who was not only **literally** raptured, but lived for a short period when his imminent rapture was not only anticipated, but **expected**. (2 Ki. 2:1-11) They recognized that Elijah’s rapture was going to take place soon even though they did not know the day or the hour.

But whereas Jesus uses Elijah to illustrate what was taking place in the course of His First Coming, drawing a parallel to being rejected by Israel and then going to the

Gentiles in a replay of events similar to Elijah's life, James instead highlights the withholding and restoring of rain as the seminal event parallel to the Second Coming.

One of the primary lessons specifically applicable to us in this example is that it was not Elijah's natural talents or abilities which made him an effective, great man of prayer, but rather his dedication and faith, things achievable by **every** believer—"a man with a nature like ours". It was the quality of his faithfulness in everyday life which was the best preparation for the extraordinary power and faithfulness which would come when times were hardest and darkest.

This is the repeated lesson concerning the condition of the End Times Christian which New Testament eschatology from beginning to end attempts to establish as pivotal. Elijah's participation in a spiritual battle of epic proportions in his encounters with Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of Baal so as to withhold the rain and then restore it to bring an end to a drought was accomplished by someone whose faithfulness in times of relative peace prepared him for those times of extraordinary testing. Remember, James preceded this example of Elijah by first asserting, "*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*". (Ja. 5:16b)

It is Ultimately Very Personal

At this early point in Church history, James does not provide additional information to what was given in the Olivet Discourse, but rather an exhortation for patience and enduring faithfulness in the examples of Job, Elijah and the Prophets, and as it applies in the illustration of the farmer working toward a future, inevitable harvest. That which is deemed most important at this early juncture in the history of the Church is Christian behavior in the character of the most important defining characteristics of a Christian at **any** time in history: patience and endurance. But tucked away in the very middle of his teaching is a very personal warning which has absolutely no meaning or application to anyone except Christians alone.

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. (James 1:9)

Because we only see what is published on the websites, blogs and forums residing on the Internet, it is tempting to make the blanket assumption that what is taking place therein is a one-to-one reflection of every current member of the Body of Christ. (Lord, truly help us if that is actually the case.) The optimist in me, and my real-life contact

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with believers who are not regularly contributing to those mediums, suggests that there is still a “silent majority” faithfully clinging to God’s Word and ways which are vastly underrepresented. But as to what *is* published as coming from Christians in all the various iterations of that venue is admittedly far more often a long way distant from the biblical definition of someone patient and enduring in general, and occupying opposing hemispheres when it comes to our treatment of each other. There are far too many examples of the **lack** of patience in Christians’ cyber-treatment of anyone and everyone whether they are biblically qualified believers or not, and perhaps even that is outnumbered by the prolific examples attempting to avoid anything remotely approaching endurance in the myriad End Times charts, published calculations of the date of Christ’s Return, or the daily chorus of all things allegedly proving, “The end is near!” A brief visit to an online “End Times” forum, regardless of the “ism” advocated, often reveals the worst examples of Christian-on-Christian “hate” crime.

The overall Christian presence on all things cyber at times makes me wonder if anyone is still working the field in the character of the farmer, how well any understand where attacks on Christians and Christianity are actually emanating from in the character of Job, or if anyone is ready to take the fight for the Lord as directed in the character of Elijah. Even more so according to each of these examples, and knowing that this is but the beginning of far more **potent** fulfillments to come, is anyone still pursuing the work of sanctification necessary to prepare them in advance for the extraordinary, yet inevitable, to come?

What would the Christian presence both on the Internet specifically, and in the world in general, look like if, in the shadow of the Second Coming, their most visible and public testimony was presented in their behavior primarily rooted in patience and endurance both in waiting for Christ and in the meantime with each other?

In Him,

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