

Patiently Waiting For Christ'S Return

Active Patience

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My daughter, Kristen, told me about this humorous statement that she read about in an article on Positive Thinking this week. The article said "How to make God laugh: Tell Him your plans for the future." We can relate to that, can we not? I thought of another way of expressing that, which I think is humorous as well. "How to make God laugh: Tell Him His plans for the future." What I mean by that is that we are all speculating constantly and trying to figure out what He is going to do next, and He must get a real chuckle out of seeing some of the ideas that we come up with.

In the late 1960s, many members of the Worldwide Church of God believed that it was possible that the church as a whole would flee to a place of safety in the spring of 1972; and then three and one-half years later, on the Feast of Trumpets in 1975, Jesus Christ would return. This anticipation was the result of several factors. Much earlier, Mr. Armstrong had written a booklet entitled "1975 In Prophecy" that helped fuel the human tendency of impatience.

From what I understand, Mr. Armstrong said that he used the date 1975 pretty much in an arbitrary manner. I think he had read something years before that, by another minister who had written something about 1975 in prophecy. And Mr. Armstrong used a similar date; but he never expressed any definite position about that being the date of Jesus Christ's coming.

Now, the anticipation was also fueled by a lot of effort by members to try to speculate and calculate the exact date of Christ's return. In a sense, there was this frenzy. Everyone was just frantically trying to calculate exactly the day and the hour that Jesus Christ would come.

Keep in mind that this urgency that people felt, and impatience, was partially the result of the turmoil that we saw in the 1960s. Remember that this was the height of the Cold War, with the nuclear threat hanging over everyone's head. And the U.S. and Russia were on the brink of nuclear war over the Communist missile bases that we found out were being built in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. George Wallace, the governor of Alabama, was shot and crippled while campaigning for the presidential nomination. Senator Kennedy was also assassinated, while campaigning for the presidential nomination. Martin Luther King was assassinated.

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Our nation's major cities were in flames because of the race riots of the 1960s. Thousands of Washington, DC residents were living in tents in the mall area between the Capitol Building and the Washington Monument, because their homes had been burnt to the ground. In many major cities, snipers were shooting at the police, fire fighters, and the National Guard as they tried to bring order to the cities.

I remember very well not being able to go into downtown Baltimore, because there were snipers shooting at anyone walking on the streets. Fire fighters were being shot. And this was in our nation—a nation that is supposedly a peaceful nation.

The Vietnam War was raging and going very badly for the U.S. Thousands of our young men were dying each year. The hippie movement, with its free sex and mind-bending drugs, was rapidly changing our whole culture. That all these things were happening, on this scale, was even a huge shock to many in mainstream Christianity.

And so, in a sense, you can see why the church felt a sense of urgency and then became impatient about Christ's return. It seemed that there was evil continually, and the church became weary of fighting sin as the 1970s rolled in. The church's genuine urgency for God's way of life to replace Satan's world turned to impatience for the return of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to Acts 1. This same impatience affected Jesus' disciples nearly two thousand years ago. He corrected them for their impatience in wanting to know the time of His coming.

Acts 1:6 Therefore, when they were come together, they asked of Him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Keep in mind that they were going through turmoil and tribulation as well. They were under Roman occupation. So things were not very pleasant in their society.

Acts 1:7-11 He said unto them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth." Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, "Men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into

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heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

We see there that the disciples at that time felt a very strong impatience about Christ's return. They wanted desperately for it to come; and it had gone beyond the urgency that they felt—into impatience. And we see Jesus Christ, in a sense, correcting them at that time. And not just the apostles, but the whole church for decades lived in expectation of the immediate second coming of Jesus Christ. Even as late as the 50s AAD, James was exhorting scattered members of the church to wait with patience for the few years that remained. That was almost two thousand years ago, and he was telling them to have patience.

James wrote his epistle to the members of God's church—of the twelve tribes that were scattered all over the known world at that time. That included those who had been dispersed from Jerusalem in the persecution from Stephen's death. These members, who were scattered throughout the area east of the Mediterranean, had no easy access to God's ministers and the apostles. The apostles traveled around as best they could, to see everyone and to preach. But a lot of it had to be done by letter, as James did.

Let us quickly paint a picture of the condition of the scattered church that James saw and wrote about—just to give you some background, and to help you relate this to our situation as well. Remember that by the late 50s AAD, more and more difficulties and persecutions were confronting the scattered brethren throughout the church. This was the time that the church was under the persecution of the Emperor Nero, who was persecuting the church from about AAD 54-68. The book of James was written some time around 60 AAD (The date is not exactly clear, but that is the time that he wrote.)

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Also, the religious "convictions" of some in the church at that time were becoming "preferences." Their beliefs were merely a superficial formality. We see that, skipping down to verse 22.

James 1:22-24 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes his

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way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Not only were these things problems in the church, but also the scattered brethren's discriminatory practices revealed their lack of love. They were discriminating in favor of the rich, the wealthy, who were attending the church at that time.

James 2:1-4 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come unto your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes; and you pay attention to him that wears the fine clothes, and say unto him, "Sit here in a good place." and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

We can see there that after the church is excited about the news of the future coming of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God that the church was on a decline already, in the 60s AAD, in a moral sense and a spiritual sense. Also, the unconverted rich were oppressing the members. Some of these "rich" were attending the church—being right in there with the members, as we just read in James 2.

James 2:6 . . . Do not the rich oppress you, and drag you into the courts?

This was another problem that the church was going through. They were oppressed by the wealthy and rich, who were both inside the church as well as out. There was a problem with harshness in the way that some spoke to others, and critical attitudes marred their friendships.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

The "many masters" means overly mastering others, or 'lording it over' others. So those who 'lord it over' others will receive a greater condemnation.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many things. If any man does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Apparently the reports of such problems among the scattered brethren reached James at Jerusalem, and he felt it necessary to address the problems in a general sense. So it was not just to one church that he was writing, but to all of the scattered brethren. He wrote to urge his people to make the needed changes in their lives and in their combined, mutual relationships with each other. The subject of James' letter is the inadequacies—the sins and mistakes—of the members of the church, and how they could correct them.

Now, the early preaching of the church was enthusiastically about the grace and the glory of the risen Christ. So the church had an enthusiasm and an urgency that really drove them, and they were able to accomplish many things. When you read through the book of Acts, it is amazing how many things that were accomplished by the apostles and the brethren. But, as time went on, that urgency for Christ's return turned into impatience.

In James 5, James warns the oppressing rich of the coming judgment. In the later sections, he encourages the oppressed members to be patient. We will read verses 7-11, which will be the pivotal point of this sermon, and we will be referring back to it constantly.

James 5:7-11 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until he receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the judge stands at the door! My brethren take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and of patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate [caring], and merciful.

Patience is mentioned five times in this short section of Scripture. There are several very important principles within these five verses, which are directly applicable for us today—as we wait for Christ's return. James mentions (1) establishing our hearts, (2) grumbling not against another, (3) suffering affliction, and (4) enduring—all of which require that we ***wait patiently for the return of Jesus Christ.***

In order to properly do these things, we have to have patience (and not impatience). James obviously saw a problem of impatience within the members of the church; and he

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felt that it was extremely important to address this tendency, because patience is necessary to properly wait for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

What could be so hard about waiting patiently? We think that we do not have to do anything. We can just sit back and wait and relax—and then we are patient. There is nothing to it, right? Well, that is not the case at all. *True patience is God-given restraint while facing trials.* It is active. It is not passive by any means, and it takes a great deal of active effort to be contently patient. That is another aspect of patience that is very critical, and that is contentment. To be patient, we have to be content.

In the Old Testament, the concept of patience is more clearly seen by understanding that God is said to be long, or slow, in anger. Just to give you an example of how that is used. . .

Exodus 34:6 And the LOORD passed by before him [Moses], and proclaimed, The LOORD, the LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.

Longsuffering is the type of patience that we should have. Here is another example.

Nehemiah 9:17 And they [the Israelites] refused to obey, and were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and [You] did not forsake them.

That phrase, **slow to anger**, is the meaning of the word "patience" in James 5. So we see that the basic Old Testament concept of **patience** is *long in suffering* while being *slow to anger*.

Proverbs stresses the practical value of patience. It avoids strife and promotes peaceful resolution of disagreements—especially when one is provoked by another. Peace between nations requires a great deal of patience, while diplomacy seeks to find common ground on which the two sides can agree. There cannot be effective diplomacy, between people or between nations, unless there is a patience involved—a great deal of patience, a longsuffering type of patience that is slow to anger (slow to get upset).

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Now I want to give you the definitions of some Greek words. This will give you some background to James 5:7-11. There are two Greek words that are used there for *patience*. One is *makrothumia* and the other is *hupomone*. The word "patience," or "patient," in verses 5, 8, and 10 is translated from that Greek word *makrothumeo*. This is a New Testament Greek word, which is often translated as **longsuffering** (as we talked about in the Old Testament) and well as **patience**. So it is translated both ways.

Makrothumia means the longsuffering type of patience that enables the mind to remain firm before it becomes frustrated and angry. The synonyms for it are **forbearance** and **fortitude**.

Thus, to have proper patience is for there not to be any anger or frustration involved.

The other New Testament word that is sometimes translated as "patience" is *hupomone*, which means constancy in endurance, patient continuance, waiting. It is the word that "patience" is translated from in James 5:11, where it speaks of the patience of Job. So it is a different type of patience than the longsuffering, slow to anger type. But James mentions both types in James 5; and, a little later, we will look at each of them.

The Greek verb *hupomone* describes the attitude of **self-restraint** that does not try to 'get back' or 'get even' for a wrong. It usually refers to patient continuance towards persons, rather than things. So James calls for patience towards everyone, but not towards sin. Sin we are not to have patience for. We should not allow it to exist for very long in our lives. Rather, we should try to get rid of it immediately. So it is not 'patience' with that kind of thing, but it is patience with each other. It is a mutual concern and patience.

In the face of the afflictions and trials of the present age, our patience is in knowing that God will always take care of us. If we know that—beyond a shadow of a doubt that God will take care of us—then all of a sudden we can allow ourselves to be patient for His return. We will know that He is already taking care of us, and He is already with us—as if He had already returned.

We should still have **a sense of urgency** for His return—because we see the sins in the world, and what needs to be stopped, and the new government that we need here. Controversies (like the calendar) test our faith, and the immediate result is patience.

Romans 5:3-4 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

We see there a relationship between patience and going through trials and tribulations. The result of being patient through tribulations is experience. It is knowledge. It is wisdom in God's way of life.

James 1:3 Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

There we see a way that we can have **patience**. We have to have **active faith**—faith with works.

James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

So by having true faithfulness—trust and reliance that God will return; and that, in the meantime, that He will take care of our needs and every hair of our head—then we will be wanting nothing, if we have that patience.

In II Thessalonians 3, Paul writes a principle that directly applies to the calendar controversy and patience.

II Thessalonians 3:1-6 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for not all men have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things which we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ. But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly, and not according to the tradition which he received of us.

We see that a lack of faith causes impatience. With a failing faith, a person becomes impatient in their waiting for God. They can become impatient because they do not feel that God is fulfilling prophecy as quickly as they would like. They humanly reason that God wants them to step out on faith—a faith that is, in reality, an emotion. When they step out on this **false faith** of emotion, they begin to find ways to try to manipulate God and to force Him to bring about what they want—rather than that His will be done.

This is what we see happening to those who have rejected the Hebrew calendar—a calendar that God's people have used for more than 2,000 years (and probably since the institution of the holy days). These people have lost their urgency for the coming of Jesus Christ, and it has turned into **impatience**. Their impatience has caused them to read into prophecy what *they want* to read into prophecy, and not what God has decided His plan will be. If it was not so serious, I am sure God would be laughing at the ridiculousness of some of the prophecies that people come up with—and how they try to make them happen themselves.

Let us go back to James 5:7-11, which we read earlier. This exhortation concerns **patience**, and it is built around three illustrations: (1) the farmer, (2) the prophets, and (3) Job. The first illustration of patience is found in verse 7. It is that of a farmer who waits patiently for the early and latter rains. In Palestine, the early rains came in October and November—after the grain was sown, so that it could germinate. Then the latter rains came in about April or May—as the grain was maturing.

Both rainy seasons were necessary for a successful crop. Knowing this, the farmer was willing to wait patiently all this time—for both rains to come—so that they would provide the needed moisture for his crops. He knew that his patience would be rewarded, and that he had to have patience. But he did not sit all winter and do nothing. He had to have an active patience.

The proper timing of these rains was **conditional** to both the farmer's obedience and his patience. The righteous farmer acknowledges that God blesses the harvest by His power, His goodness, and His faithfulness. In Deuteronomy 11, Moses writes and tells us what happens as the result of the farmer's obedience and patience.

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 And it shall be that if you diligently obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LOORD your God and serve Him with all you heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.

We see the converse of this in Jeremiah 5. Jeremiah writes about what happens as the result of the farmer's disobedience and impatience.

Jeremiah 5:24-25 They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LOORD our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He

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reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest." Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good things from you.

It is not my purpose to go into the possible prophetic meanings of the former and latter rains, but rather to illustrate to you that the kind of patience we are to have in waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ is the type of patience that the farmer has to have in waiting for his crops to mature. The farmer needs patience to wait until God's design and nature does its work. And we need patience to wait until Christ completes the preparation of firstfruits and then returns. In due time, the farmer expects the return of the rain. In a similar way, we should patiently anticipate deliverance from our trials and from this sinful world. So we see a similarity there between the farmer's waiting and our waiting for Jesus Christ.

Back in James 5:8, with the words "be you also patient," James urges us to establish our hearts. What does he mean by **establish your hearts**? While the farmer waits for his crops to mature, and while we wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ (while we patiently wait for God to heal us of our affliction, and to help us through our trials—during this waiting period—we cannot stand by idly and do nothing. That is not patience. We have to do whatever it takes to **confirm our faith**. It must be firm and unwavering—not indecisive and fretful.

The clause in James 5:8, which is translated "establish your hearts," is literally *strengthen your hearts*. This phrase gives the idea that we must have solid support from God that enables us to stand without budging in the course of trials. This takes a lot of work, and a long-time intimate relationship with God—prayer and fasting, and Bible study, obedience, and submission.

Turn with me to Proverbs 4. God inspired King Solomon to emphasize that it takes **work** to establish your heart. Faith without works is dead. And faith without works does not produce patience.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it spring the issues of life.

We see how important it is to **keep our heart**—to establish and strengthen it—physically and, especially, spiritually.

Proverbs 4:24-27 Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and perverse lips

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put far from you. Let your eyes look right on, and let your eyelids look straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left: remove your foot from evil.

We are to have a straight and narrow path of obedience to Jesus Christ and God the Father, and a very submissive and humble attitude. Our faith must undergird any tendency toward a faint heart and make it strong. We must know whether our beliefs are *preferences* or *convictions*.

Preference is something that we like better than something else. It is a desire of something we hope for. It is our first choice, but not necessarily our only choice. We feel that IF we make a decision ("Well, this is the way I want something.") and IF things get tough, THEN we can just change our mind and have a second choice.

But **conviction** is a strong belief that we are certain of, and willing to suffer and die for. It is our only choice. An "established heart" is one that is convicted. That is how we strengthen our heart. We become convicted in the faith—the faith of Jesus Christ.

In James 5:9, James admonishes us to be patient both toward (1) those outside the church, who take advantage of us, and (2) those inside, who irritate us. We are to "grudge not" against another. What does James mean by that? The *New King James* translates this phrase "do not grumble against another." *The Living Bible* translates it "Don't grumble about each other." Others translate it "do not complain against each other" or "murmur not against another."

So there are many ways of saying this, but the key here (and what James is telling us, and the scattered brethren that he wrote to) is not to blame one another for the trouble in which you find yourself. If you do, you break the commandment that forbids us to judge another.

Matthew 7:1-2 Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

So in all that he writes to the scattered brethren, James seems to think that the coming of Christ is near. He even says, "The Judge stands at the door"—using the phrase that Jesus Christ used earlier.

The word **grudge**, which is used in the *King James Version* of James 5:9, means to groan or sigh from an *inward* unexpressed feeling of sorrow. It is *inner distress*, more than open complaint. So this grudging against another is not the grudging that we may do when we talk badly about someone else, or put someone else down openly and verbally. This is a deeper, inner grudging. It is one that most people do not know about; one that we bottle up inside of ourselves and have resentment against each other, for any number of reasons.

Some of them could be about events that happened years and years ago. But we have bottled them up inside ourselves, and we have an animosity against someone for a ridiculous reason. It may even be for something that the other person probably never knew that they did to insult us. So this is an inward distress—an inner complaint, rather than an open one.

So the members were not being corrected, by James, on the loud and bitter denunciation of others; but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or of smothered resentment that openly expresses itself only in a small sigh or groan. It is such a quiet sigh, or groan, that you do not even hear it. It is a feeling that some get when they are irritated with someone, but you do not say anything.

Turn with me to Zechariah 8. Zechariah records God's command to the church (and to Jerusalem in the Millennium) of what He expects righteous people to do, and not to do, with regards to each other.

Zechariah 8:16 These are the things you shall do [this is a commandment]:
Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace.

"In your gates" means within your house, or within your area of control. When we travel to the Feast, "within our gates" is in whatever area of control we have—with our children included.

Zechariah 8:17 Let none of you think evil in your hearts against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.

So not "grudging against one another" is a very important aspect of **waiting patiently** for Christ's coming. It is something that we have to rid ourselves of, because it will eat away

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at us; and it also causes impatience. If this hateful practice of imagining evil in their hearts does not end, it will result in judgment. And the Judge is represented (in James 5:9) as standing at the door, as if His hand was right on the doorknob about to open it. This is the urgent attitude we have to have about **overcoming** these problems.

We know that there are certain things that have to happen before Christ returns, but we have to have the urgent attitude that He may return tomorrow—even though we know that it is, at least, three and one-half years away.

The first illustration, of the farmer who waits patiently for the early and latter rain, is one of **faith** and **trust** that God will take care of us until He returns. That is the result of a well-established heart of obedience. Obedience is a definite aspect of waiting patiently.

Now let us go back to James 5:10. Here we find the second illustration of patience—that of the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord.

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

In Jeremiah 38, we will see one of the most extraordinary examples of patience in the Bible—that of Jeremiah. Every time that I read this story of Jeremiah, and what he went through, I am just flabbergasted that anyone could have **patience** through all of that, but it appears that Jeremiah did.

Just to give you a little background on this: Although James refers to all of the prophets as a group; Jeremiah is certainly one who stands out above some of the rest for enduring mistreatment with patience. At one point, he was put in stocks. He was thrown into prison on several occasions and lowered into a miry dungeon.

The "miry dungeon" aspect is what we will read about in this chapter, just to see what some have had to go through. As we go through this, think about how impatient we get sometimes in **our** cushy lives. But place yourself in Jeremiah position and situation. Think of how "easy" it would be for **us** to have patience in similar circumstances.

Jeremiah 38:1-4 Then [the princes] heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people, saying, "Thus says the LOORD, 'He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence: but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.' Thus saith the LOORD, 'This city shall surely be given into the

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hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it." Therefore the princes said to the king, "Please, let this man [Jeremiah] be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words unto them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm."

You can just hear this being stated, here in this nation, in a few years—as the persecution against Christians increases, where this nation gets tired of hearing that they are doing something wrong and that they are going to be taken over by another nation or army. So you can understand why the leaders (the princes, here) would want to remove this man from society.

Jeremiah 38:5-6 Then Zedekiah the king said, Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you. Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son. . .

I was just curious. This says that this individual owns this dungeon. I wonder how many dungeons they had in Jerusalem at that time, that they had ownership. Maybe it was like some of the castles that came later in history where each one had its own dungeon, or 'keep,' in medieval times.

Jeremiah 38:6 . . .which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

Now, if you can imagine this muck being in the bottom of the prison—at the very lowest depths of the prison, then what would flow in there? Of course, the human waste of his cellmates would flow in there, or be pushed in there. The muck and grime that would be on heavy stone floors in a cold, damp, very dreary prison. Garbage from the lunches and breakfasts that they ate—the leftovers would probably be thrown down in there.

Probably one of the easiest ways to imagine this is, if you have ever seen a septic tank, when the cover comes off, the worms that are down in there and bacteria. If you remove the water out of that, you would have this muck. Then, jump in! It makes my stomach squeamish just to think about it.

How a man could have patience down in a dungeon? I do not know how long he could

bear it.

Jeremiah 38:7-9 Now Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. When the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin, Ebed-melech went out of the king's house, and spoke to the king, saying, "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city."

Apparently the city was under siege, and food was scarce. So not even the residents had food to eat, much less the prisoners. This Ethiopian was obviously acquainted with Jeremiah, and was concerned about him.

Jeremiah 38:10-12 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he dies." So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took there old clothes and old rags, [So we have a picture of filth everywhere, at this time.] and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah. Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so.

At this point, Jeremiah probably did not care how rotten those rags were. He was just happy to have something to pull him out, because he was definitely in worse shape than the rags were.

Jeremiah 38:13-15 So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes, and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison. Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the LORD. And the king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me." Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me."

Skipping down through the event that is being described here, to verse 28, we see that Jeremiah was put back into the prison.

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Jeremiah 38:28 Now Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And he was there when Jerusalem was taken.

I do not know how many months or years that Jeremiah was in there; but, to me, one minute would be enough for me to become very impatient. But Jeremiah came out of there continuing to preach. He did not let that sap his strength, or cause him to be impatient. Rather, he went right back to doing the work of God, realizing the **urgency** that there was in preaching God's Word. Even after all of this, Jeremiah persisted in his ministry without bitterness and without accusations of individuals.

How many of us would have had this **positive attitude** after suffering so much, as Jeremiah did? All of us COULD **if** we let God establish faith—rather than just emotion—in our hearts. **If** we trust Him, obey Him, and submit to Him, **then** we too could have patience like Jeremiah did in that pit. It is hard to imagine; but God is capable of anything, and He will give us the strength that we need to get through any of the trials and tribulations that we may be put through.

One of the things that we have to be patient for is the time God needs to develop others in preparation for the resurrection of the firstfruits and the Kingdom. It is a selfish thought to be only thinking of what we want now, because God is still working His plan on this earth with individuals. We know that He will be calling individuals into His church right up to the end. So it is selfish thoughts for us to look beyond what God wants and to ourselves become **impatient** with *God's timetable*.

This is what we saw happen with this issue of the calendar. The timetable that God has was not quick enough for those individuals. (Not all of them, but some of them.) They felt that they had to move ahead, and to push prophecy beyond what God had already planned. And there is a very severe and very serious punishment for those who do not have patience. So patience is very, very important. Without patience, we can be deceived into **forcing prophecy** to go the way that we want it to, rather than the way that God has designed.

What if God granted our desire to be resurrected right now (interrupting His plan of salvation)? How many would miss out on their opportunity to become part of the Kingdom of God? We must consider our impatience with God's timeframe; and we must adapt our patience so that it is according to the will of God.

As those who have already died in the faith, we must wait patiently for our time to be

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resurrected. I am not saying that we should not feel a strong hope, or sense of urgency, toward Christ's return—for we should. But Hebrews 11:1 says that "faith is the substance of things hoped for."

So, yes, we should be hoping for the return of Christ. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." True faith enables us to have **hope with patience**. Here in Hebrews 11, we see the examples of those prophets, and others, who had been faithful—faithfully and patiently waiting for Christ's return.

Hebrews 11:32-40 And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; also of David, and Samuel, and the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. (Of whom the world was not worthy.) They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

These individuals had **patience**. That patience enabled them to weather many of these things. It is not the only quality that was needed, but in order to weather the trials and tribulations and persecutions that come upon God's people, we have to have a patience that is **longsuffering** and **slow to anger**.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also since we are surrounded about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

So this second illustration of **patience**, which we have just seen, had to do with the prophets who suffered great afflictions through faith. It is an encouragement to us that

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we too can have the proper patience to patiently wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ. And we do need to have that patience. We need to have **urgency** as well. Not an urgency that we want God's timetable to be changed, but an urgency that we want God to come and set up His Kingdom.

Back to James 5:11, and we will see the third illustration of patience—that of Job.

James 5:11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord; that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

The patience of Job is used as an example of the type of patience that **we** should have. This patience of Job is somewhat different from the other type. It is continual patience. (We will get into the details of that in a second.) The phrase "we count them blessed who endure" portrays a very blessed group of people. In chapter one, James pointed out the enviable joy of a person who does not cave in during trial and testing, but turns it into a positive experience. This positive experience is helped by having the correct patience.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proven [or, tested], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

In James 5:7-10, the admonishment is for the Greek *makrothumia*, which I mentioned earlier. That is the **longsuffering** type of patience that enables the mind to remain firm before it becomes frustrated and angry. That is the type of patience that we were speaking about with the farmer and the prophets.

However, the type of patience that we are speaking about with Job is from the Greek word *hupomone*. That patience is *constancy in endurance, patient continuance, and patient waiting*. (These add some other aspects to the longsuffering and slow to anger of the other Greek word.)

The reason that trials should be considered grounds for **joy** is that they are capable of developing **perseverance**. They put our faith to the test, and this experience produces faithful patience and endurance. We will see that in Job's life. But it is interesting that James is actually speaking of the patience of Job—that is, the patience that Job **eventually developed** through trials—because Job can hardly be said to have

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exemplified the quality of patience during the course of his trials. Take, for example, his words in Job 16.

Job 16:2-3 I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all! Shall words of wind have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer?

That is about as impatient as you can get, I think. At least, verbally, when your friends are trying to explain to you why you are in the situation that you are in. There are similar comments in Job 12:2 and Job 13:3-4. They show that Job had just come to the end of his patience, and blurted out some unkind words. He was, however, an outstanding example of perseverance in the most trying situations.

Job 1:21-22 And [Job] said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LOORD gave, and the LOORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LOORD." In **all** this Job did not sin, nor charge God with wrong.

As his trials progress, we begin to see patience developing in Job. He is beginning to see the end result of his endurance, and also the hope of Christ's second coming.

Job 19:25-27 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know [It seems that Job had worms eating his flesh, as possibly Jeremiah also did.], that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

So we see a changing of Job's mind, into a more patient and content attitude in knowing that God was dealing with him at that time. His experience is also proof that the Lord is full of tenderness, and compassion, and mercy—as we see how God finally blessed Job. As Job persevered and humbled himself, God gave him twice as much as he had before.

Turn with me to Job 42, and we will see that Job *developed* patience. As you read the last few chapters of Job, you begin to see a type of patience developing in him; but it took all of those trials before it really began to take hold. We will see Job's right frame of mind, in his reply to God.

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Job 42:2-5 I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose can be withheld from You. You asked, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore have I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, "I will question You, and you shall answer Me." I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You.

One of the reasons was because Job was able to become content with the situation and to wait with patience for God to correct the situation and bless him. Total submission to God's will requires patience. You cannot be totally submissive without patience.

In James 5:7-11, where James speaks so often about patience, he urges us not to fight back at injustices against us, but to exercise longsuffering patience towards those who take advantage of us. Jeremiah was a fine example of this. James admonishes us to establish our hearts, developing stable and secure convictions about our own beliefs, and trusting that Jesus Christ will return according to the will of the Father (and not according to our will). When we become impatient for Christ's return, then we start wanting His will to be changed, and that is not healthy.

Let us look quickly at the signs of the times that we are to look at. What does James mean, in James 5:8, when he says that the coming of the Lord is at hand? Do we need to know the exact moment of Christ's return? When he said that the coming of the Lord is at hand, it very well may have been that he thought that Christ was going to return any time. But we know that just did not happen. Down through the history of the church, God's church has almost always believed that Christ could return at any time. That has been very healthy for the church, because it has given it that urgency.

But it is when members of the church lose sight of the goal and what God is developing within us in the meantime, that the church has become impatient. Whenever the church has become impatient, as a whole, there have been a lot of schisms. A lot of churches have broken away. We saw some of that in effect. Over the last thirty years that I have been in God's church, I could not count the number of schisms there have been where individuals, or groups of people, have become impatient with what God is doing.

An example of that is back in the early 1970s. A group broke off and called themselves the Associated Churches of God. Ken Westby, Walter Sharp, Bob Jenness, and many other ministers took large amounts of people out of the congregations on the East Coast and formed the Associated Churches of God.

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One of the things that they were not happy with was that Mr. Armstrong just did not seem like he was ever going to die. They became impatient with Mr. Armstrong. And so they decided to take matters in their own hands—in their own homes as well as in their own lives—and break away. Of course, there were other reasons involved—in order to justify it—but **impatience** was a great deal of that.

You can probably see impatience involved in many of the breakaways from Herbert Armstrong, before he died in 1986. It is a real shame to see, but people underestimate the value of patiently waiting for Christ's return. But it is clearly stated in the Bible that the date of Christ's second coming cannot be known in advance.

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Matthew 24:42 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord is coming.

Mark's example of how we cannot know the hour of Christ's return, in advance, is given in chapter 13.

Mark 13:32-33 But of that day and that hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

Here, we are told what we are to *do* in the meantime. We are to **take heed**, and **watch**, to **pray** and to **develop faith** to work with God **in submission**. From this basic fact, one thing is clear: human speculation about the time of Christ's second coming is vain. Surely no man should seek to gain knowledge that is hidden from Jesus Christ Himself, and which resides only in the mind of God the Father. Therefore, all calculation is ruled out; and we live in daily expectation precisely because the date cannot be known.

I do not mean that it is wrong to speculate, or even to do some calculations with numbers and dates. It is when we become obsessed with it—thinking that we have the answer—that it begins to develop impatience in us. In Matthew 24 are listed all the signs by which the church, in every period of history, "knows" that it lives in the end times; but they do not provide the timetable. Only the coming of Christ itself will be unmistakably **the end**. We do know that Christ's second coming will be as **sudden** as lightning, and as **unexpected** as a thief.

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Matthew 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west; so also will the coming of the Son of man be.

Matthew 24:37-39 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away; so also will the coming of the Son of man be.

God does reveal more to those in His church than just those who watch in general. He tells us that He will give us the knowledge that we need to have to tell us about where we are in history. Speaking to the Sardis era of the church, it says:

Revelation 3:3 Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard; hold fast, and repent. [And here is the big "if."] Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I come upon you.

So we so get the indication here that we will know, when the time comes, when Christ's return is. We will have a general idea of about when it is, but we cannot know exactly when it is. And we should not try to figure out exactly when it is, if we take it to the point where it develops impatience in us.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets.

We have that promise that He will let us know what is happening. God still does not promise to reveal the day or the hour to His church and the ministry, but we will not be surprised at His coming. We will know the signs of what happens before. We will know that He is coming soon. We can even look at the signs of the times today and know that it is not long yet before He returns.

Just as God did not let the Israelites know where they were going next in their forty years of wandering, so also He does not tell us the details of where we are going next in prophecy—other than in a very general way. What He has given us is a road map with only the major routes and destination, but not the day or the hour when we will arrive. But the comforting part is the God is the driver. So we do not have to worry about when

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we are supposed to be there. He will get us there at the proper time.

This temporary nearness of the coming of the Lord is qualified by the expectation of certain events that must happen before hand. For the sake of time, I will not read Matthew 24:3-12. You know what they are. It is speaking of wars and rumors of wars, pestilence, and earthquakes, and the delivering up of the saints to be hated and persecuted, and false prophets.

Matthew 24:13 But he who [patiently] endures to the end shall be saved.

The characteristics of the whole of this age—from the resurrection of Jesus Christ till the end—are the **global** problems of the false prophets, wars, famines, pestilence, disease, natural disasters, and persecution of the church. I do not believe that ever in history has there been a time when this has been on such a global scale. Therefore, we must be very close to the end, but we have to have patience.

Now, what is **our patient responsibility** while waiting for the second coming of Christ? I have developed *five points* regarding this. Due to the time, I will just summarize these.

1. We must always watch and pray.

Luke 21:36 Watch you therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

2. We must not let what seems like a long delay to lead to despair and depression.

II Peter 3:3-4 Knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the father fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

3. We must allow God to establish our hearts with godly love, actively using it for the benefit of all.

I Thessalonians 3:12-13 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another, and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may

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establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Remember that an established heart is one that is convicted in true doctrine. True doctrine is rightly applied with love.

4. We must fellowship in sincerity—not grudging against one another.

I Peter 4:8-9 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Fervent love requires patience. Without it, you do not take the time to show outgoing concern for one another. What we need is mutual help, mutual Christian fellowship, and mutual encouragement. And we have to continue this mutual concern for each other until the day that Christ returns.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching.

5. We must patiently endure trials and tribulations until the end. It is those who endure to the end who are saved.

Luke 21:19 In your patience possess your souls.

There is a wonderful quality that we can develop, if we will just have **patience** in waiting for Christ's return. But remember that it is not an inactive, or passive, patience. It is an active patience.

Matthew 10:22 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Mark 13:13 basically says the same thing. He who endures to the end shall be saved,

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but that endurance must be a **patient endurance**. The phrase "in your patience" (there in Luke 21:19) includes perseverance and faithful continuance in God's Word and doctrine. This encourages us to establish our hearts and stand firm, because God promises to deliver us. There is no doubt that He will. Of course, there are certain qualifications for that—such as obedience, submission, and so on.

We must feel **urgency** for the coming of Christ, rather than impatience. Urgency is the feeling that we need to take action, but not just any action. It must be action that is based on truth. So any action that we take must be based on true doctrine. On the other hand, impatience is the need to take any desperate action. It is restless eagerness to do something. It comes from a feeling of annoyance because what we want has been delayed, or opposed.

As I mentioned earlier, in the thirty-seven years that I have attended God's church, there has been many times when people have had impatience, and it has taken them out of the church. Not just impatience, but that has been an aspect of it. Many had obsessions about prophecy. They felt they had figured out the details of God's plan, and they wanted to force God to do it in the way that they had figured out. They became impatient and left.

Watching people leave, year after year (because they became impatient with the way God is dealing with them), shows a major reason why the apostles Paul and James mention **patience** so often—as a necessary quality of endurance and perseverance. The author of Hebrews also mentions it.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore seeing we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him [patiently] endured the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Impatience causes weariness and fainting of the mind. Patience gives us a very strong and established heart if we allow it to work with faith and love and endurance. The best preparation for meeting Christ is to patiently develop an intimate relationship with Him. Patiently establish our hearts in love, and faith; and patiently endure the trials that God puts before us to refine us into pure and righteous beings that are worthy to meet Him at

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His return.

We have a wonderful God (and Jesus Christ at His right hand), who wants us to be in His Kingdom. And He is willing to do everything that He can to help us to get there. But we have to make sure that we patiently wait—according to His timetable.