

## Is Any Time Right For You?

**Martin G. Collins**

**Given 03-Oct-15; Sermon #FT15-08**

Often the first question that enters our mind when we wake up in the morning or wake up from a nap is, “What time is it?”

Let us say that Julie was always late to work no matter how much she tried to be on time, or how many times her boss scolded her. She just could not wake up on time. Her boss said she would be fired if she did not stop getting in late.

So Julie decided to seek the advice of her doctor. He prescribed her some medication and told her to take one pill before going to sleep. She wanted to make sure that they would work well, so she took two. She woke up before the alarm clock sounded and headed into work feeling well rested and enthusiastic for her job. Julie told her boss about the doctor’s prescription and how well it worked. Her boss said, “Well that’s great Julie, but where were you yesterday?”

Time has been called many things: an illusion, a dimension, a smooth-flowing continuum, and an expression of separation among events that occur in the same physical location. I know John Ritenbaugh covered time in his sermon in Ecclesiastes, and Joe Baity also talked about time, but this is just a different aspect on it.

To many people alive today, John F. Kennedy's assassination fifty years ago seems like ancient history. The one hundred and fifty years since Lincoln's Gettysburg address seems so long ago that few grasp its nearness and timeliness of the message. People eighty years old today, have been alive for about one-third of the life of the United States. For someone that age, it is really hard to believe.

A light year is the distance light travels in a year at a velocity of 186,282.4 miles per second, or roughly 461 million miles per hour. One might say, “How on earth are we supposed to think about time and distances like that?” In human terms such scales are unfathomable, and a lot of our potential theoretical destinations are thousands or millions of light years away. We take one look at those pictures of the universe and our minds just shut down trying to comprehend it all.

Time rules our lives and we all wish we had more of it. Businesses make money out of it and scientists can measure it with astonishing accuracy. American researchers have unveiled an atomic clock accurate to better than one second.

But what exactly is time? Despite its familiarity and ineffability, it has defied even the greatest thinkers. Over 1,600 years ago the philosopher Augustine of Hippo admitted defeat with words that still resonate to this day. He said (speaking of time): “If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.”

Now what exactly is the true nature of time? There are many definitions for it. A proverb says: “A man with one watch knows what time it is; a man with two watches is never sure.” That is such a simple truism.

Now God looks at time one way and humans look at it another. Here is an illustration of that: A man was taking it easy, lying on the grass and looking up at the clouds. He was identifying shapes when he decided to talk to God. "God," he said, "how long is a million years?" God answered, "In My frame of reference, it is about a minute." Then the man asked, "God, how much is a million dollars?" God answered, "To Me, it is a penny." The man thought a minute and then asked, "God, can I have a penny?" And God said, "In a minute."

Jesus Christ told His brothers, "Your time is always ready." So I ask, is yours? But what time is He talking about?

**John 7:1-10** After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

So, Jesus purposely stayed away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take His life. But when the Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers tried to pressure Jesus to go to Judea to perform miracles, as it says there.

Now because even His own brothers did not believe in Him therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for Me has not yet come; for you any time is right." Having said this, He stayed in Galilee. However, after His brothers had left for the Feast, He went also, not publicly but in secret, as we read there.

Few things in this life are as important as time and Jesus Christ certainly knew the value of time. But time is often wasted and thereby becomes unimportant. It often is spent on which later proves to have no meaning whatsoever. But Christ's use of time always has meaning—He never uses time in vain.

When life is empty, time drags. When life is full, time flies. Seeing life and wealth fall before it, the Roman poet, Ovid, declared time: "The devourer of all things."

Now in order to make great use of your life, you must spend it on something that will outlast it. But how do we know what will outlast it? We, in God's church, should have a pretty good idea.

Since we are bound by time, how can we see beyond its horizons? It helps to have the revelation of Christ and the written Word of God. One answer to how we can make our time count, not only for this life but for eternity also, is to be found in a saying of Jesus Christ to His brothers just before He went up to Jerusalem for the final time to begin the last phase of His work on earth, as we have already read in verse 6.

Eventually, He was alone with His disciples and, to judge from this narrative, in contact with His family. He seemed unwilling to leave Galilee, because He lingered there for approximately six months.

This is the period between the time of the Passover, by which the events of John 6 may be dated, and the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the time noted in John 7:2. The opening verse of chapter 7 explains the reason for Christ's delay in returning to Jerusalem, because the Jews were seeking to take His life at that time, so that was not the right time to make Himself available to such a thing.

At this point Jesus' brothers approached Him. The Feast of Tabernacles was approaching and it was their recommendation that Jesus go up to the Feast with them and do miracles there. Maybe they thought this would revive Jesus' sagging popularity. So you can see the human reasoning in that. We see that attitude in the TV preachers today.

They were not altogether altruistic in their suggestions. John tells us that even His brothers did not really believe in Him. So Jesus' reply was emphatic and it was not for them to tell Him where and when to go. There was a great gulf in understanding between them. They were not converted and did not have God's Holy Spirit. Besides Jesus' steps were ordered by God Himself. His exact words were:

**John 7:6-8** Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come."

We can see there that Jesus' life was ordered and that God had set the time for everything that was going to happen. John goes on to tell us that Jesus remained for a time in Galilee but eventually made His way to Jerusalem secretly.

If we are to understand what Jesus meant by declaring that "His time" was not the same time as the time of His brothers, and if we are to gain insight from that for the time that is given to us, we must begin with the recognition of "God's time" and that it is different from "our time."

In fact, it is questionable whether we can use the word "time" in reference to God's time at all. Time is a word for creation, and God is not in time. God is outside of time and He stands in eternity. Consequently, we should not make the mistake of applying time concepts to Him.

To give an example, look at the solar system and what happens in the revolving of the planets, sun, and moon. That is how we calibrate time in our human lives. But did God have the solar system before He created it? So then what was God using as time? God creates time.

There is no good illustration of how God relates to what we call "time," because every illustration, every word that we can draw upon, has "time" limitations. Nevertheless, the following illustration may help.

We must imagine a river winding across a countryside. It begins in a mountainous interior, passes down through an evergreen forest, across coastal plains, and into the sea. We may imagine a man in a

rowboat making his way down this river. He is in the mountains on Monday, among the trees on Tuesday, in the midst of the plains on Wednesday, and at the river's mouth on Thursday. For him, the mountains, forests, plains, and sea are in a time sequence. He sees only one of these geographical features at a time. That is the way we view life.

On the other hand, we can imagine a pilot flying five miles above the earth's surface, and we can see that, for him, all the geographical features are present at the same time. He can see all the way from the mountains to the seas in one glance. God sees like the pilot because He is not confined by time as the man in the rowboat is.

We can make the same point also by imagining time to be something like a motion picture. We view it in sequence. God views it as though it were millions of individual frames, all seen at once. From His perspective God sees Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, Christ on the cross, and you and me almost simultaneously, because He sees the complete picture; He has a mind that can do that.

Now I am not talking about time travel, or going back in time, or "back to the future," I am just talking about God's perspective compared to ours and how narrow our perspective is compared to what God sees in His plan and how He has designed it.

This is not just an interesting play of the imagination, of course, because it has bearing on what we understand of God and His relationship to our days. We see it primarily in the area of what you and I call "decision."

For us, a life in time is filled with decisions. We make decisions constantly, and we do so in an effort to cope with variables, ignorance, previous indecision, and other things. Our decisions are attempts to deal with problems not previously considered. But God's mind does consider all problems before they even happen. He has that capability.

God's decisions are not like this because of the nature of His relationship to time. There are no variables or indecision with God. Consequently, His decisions are rather in the nature of eternal decrees, unchanging and unchangeable. As He says, "I change not!"

Now that does not mean that He does not adjust His decisions along the way, so that we get the most use of the character building, or whatever He wants us to learn from the experience. God does not make decisions because He suddenly is confronted with a problem that He has not foreseen. He determines both the problems and their solutions in advance. He is never surprised, never caught off balance, thus, there is never a problem that baffles Him or a work that He does not intend to finish. Because of this we can rest in Him and trust Him for the ordering of our own days.

God is a creator who is constantly creating, so He is also constantly learning. The importance of these truths becomes particularly clear in relationship to the time of Jesus Christ, because here was God, the inhabitant of eternity, now living in time. What do we learn about the time of Jesus Christ? We learn that the time(s) of Jesus Christ was fixed by the eternal decrees of God.

As we read the New Testament we are amazed at the number of verses that indicate that Jesus was born, lived, and died according to the fixed plan of God. For instance, the apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 4,

**Galatians 4:4-5** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

In Revelation 13, Christ's death is placed in this context as the apostle John speaks of the "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Meaning that the very first sin that man did, the Lamb had to be slain.

**Revelation 13:8** All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Now Paul links the same event to the prophecies of Scripture in I Corinthians 15, saying:

**I Corinthians 15:3** For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

So these things were set down before time. Now turn to Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost in AD 31, Peter linked both the element of prophecy and the fixing of time by the Father to Christ's crucifixion.

**Acts 2:22-23** "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."

So He was delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. That is planning! Now something that is determined and that there is foreknowledge of, is within a time frame. Later, in his first epistle, Peter repeats the same truths in writing to Christians and in writing to us today.

**I Peter 1:18-20** Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

Naturally, there are many more verses that could be cited, but we can draw all the important conclusions even from these. There are four conclusions I would like to give here, and they are: First, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was the most important event of His life, and it was eternally planned and determined by God. Secondly, not only His death, but also the details of His death and other minutiae of His birth and life were similarly determined.

The third conclusion is that when Jesus came to this earth, He was conscious that the events of His life were marked out for Him by God. And the fourth is, since these things are true, it follows that everything planned by God for Jesus Christ and revealed to us in the Scriptures has been or will be accomplished within the time frame of God's plan.

One very important conclusion flows from this. If the events of Christ's life were ordered by God, as we have seen, then it follows that the most important thing that can be said about the death of Jesus Christ is that God the Father determined it and planned it so that we could receive salvation. That shows us how much God really loves us and wants us to be in His Kingdom.

God the Father put Jesus to death and He is the only one who could offer Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice. In the history of the church there have been times when men and women have emphasized the role that the Jewish leaders had in the crucifixion. This has led in a very unjustifiable way to much antisemitism that we still see to this day. It is true, of course, that the religious leaders did have a part in Christ's death, but this is relatively "unimportant."

Others, to counter this line of thought, have emphasized that it was actually the Gentiles, in the person of Pilate, who sentenced Christ to death. But again, while this is true, it is nevertheless relatively unimportant to the big picture. By relatively unimportant I mean that since, as Paul shows in Romans 3, everyone who has ever lived and is living has had a part in causing it to be necessary to put Jesus Christ to death. Every person who has walked the earth has had a responsibility in that.

**Romans 3:23-25** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

The important thing is that God the Father put Jesus Christ to death and that He did so in order that there might be an atonement for our sins. He planned it and He planned it all within His timeframe.

Now there is one more point that must be brought into focus here in order for us to understand John 7:6 and apply these truths to our own situation.

**John 7:6** Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready."

The point here is that not only were the events of the life of Jesus Christ predetermined by God, as we have seen, but even the time at which they occurred was determined. This is the only truth that gives meaning to John 7:6. For on one day Jesus refused to go to Jerusalem, but then just three or four days later He reversed Himself and did go.

The Bible does not provide us with detailed time references for every event of Christ's life, although we do get a great deal of detail in Scripture about everything including the two trials by the Romans and also by the Jews before His death.

There is a principle of time-determination that is useful and in Daniel there is a reference to the time of His death that is so exact that we are justified in applying the same principle to all the events of His birth and ministry. The prophecy is the Seventy Weeks prophecy which I will not go into today (since Clyde already went into it a few days ago).

Now God has a timetable in world history, and He is working carefully according to that plan. This does not mean we are always able to understand His timetable or see His plan. We know this because no one knows the day or hour of His return. We will see signs of the conditions of the world, but we still await the revelation of the exact time.

We know that He is unfolding His timetable and that one day Jesus Christ will come again and all who are in rebellion against Him and His Kingdom will be judged.

Clearly, then, even the precise years and days of the events of Christ's life were determined. Also, this tells us a great deal about the nature of the Scriptures.

In the seventeenth century an English astronomer by the name of Edmund Halley announced, on the basis of Newton's newly discovered laws of gravity, that the brilliant comet that had been seen in Europe in the year 1682 would return in 1759. Halley died in 1742, seventeen years before the time he had predicted for the comet's return. But in 1759 the comet did return, right on schedule, and the laws by which he had calculated its orbit were vindicated.

In the same way, the scriptures of the Old Testament foretold the time of Christ's coming, even though those who had originally been the vehicles of their writing and who had received them had died long before they were carried out.

The years dragged on and throughout the ages all who had faith in God looked to the heavens and awaited the fulfillment of these prophecies. Finally, the Messiah was born and the birth gave way to the life; the life gave way to the crucifixion; and the crucifixion gave way to the resurrection and ascension.

Now all that had been planned and determined by God concerning Jesus Christ was accomplished just as it was planned and all within the timeframe that was planned. The Scriptures were vindicated and as a result, and we were also given a firm basis for our confidence in God and our hope in Christ's return. We know that it happened, that it happened on time and under God's control, and we have the same expectations and encouragement to see and follow for our future as well. God has guaranteed His people and it is the best guarantee that there has ever been.

Now if the foregoing concepts of time are shared between the Bible and human experience generally, the Bible also gives us a complex of concepts that are unique to time within the Bible. A series of related conceptions of time can be related to "waiting time," meaning they are related to a superior reality that is either above ordinary time or reaches down from a superior domain to create a plan of salvation for mankind. So basically what I am saying here is that the plan for the salvation of mankind is divinely ordered.

Prophetic time is evident in the prophetic books. It is a sometimes bewildering mixture of references to historical time, the natural cycles of days and years, and future messianic or future disastrous times. There are many different approaches that the Bible takes to the concept of time.

It is a commonplace understanding that time is radically telescoped in some of these prophetic visions. Sometimes referring to an imminent military event, sometimes predicting events in the incarnate life of Christ, and sometimes portraying events that will occur before the end of history and at its consummation.

The orientation of prophetic time is to the future, whether immediate or distant. However the future is portrayed as having urgent implications for the present. So we can break down prophetic time into two categories: end-time and future-time.

So prophetic time's distinction is that it predicts what conditions will be like at "the close of the age." Such time is a mixture of mystery and specific time sequences. It is a mystery because you do not know when the time will come. That is why when we read the book of Revelation we get an indication of certain things that we know are specific, and other things we wonder what the timeframe is.

It is specific time sequences, as shown in Jesus' Olivet Prophecy, that contains a fully developed chronology of what will happen "then" or "after" an event. So this time is not simply oriented to the future but specifically to the end. Occasionally this is underscored by the terms "the last day(s)" or "the last time."

We receive a strong impression as we read the end-time and future visions of the Bible that we are beginning to be given a preview of final things. As we read, we know that we are being given a preview or a picture of what is to come.

In another category of time, we find a timeline that might be called the "time of salvation." Central to this concept of time is a great divide that parcels out universal history into eras that are before Christ and after Christ, and personal history into before and after conversions.

The messianic prophecies of the Old Testament prophets are energized by excitement and longing for what will transpire at some future point. The Old Testament prophets and writers were excited about what was going to come in the future. Even the New Testament writers were excited, as are we, to what is coming in our future.

That was just a general overview of time. It gives you an idea of how the Bible approaches time from different angles. Now Jesus Himself claimed, as recorded in Mark 1, that:

**Mark 1:15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

While in Galatians 4 it pictures Christ's birth as occurring:

**Galatians 4:4** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

More generally, New Testament writers view believers as living "in these last days" or at "the last hour." So there is an urgency in what they write, although they were writing to the people at the time in the church then. As we read it, it applies to us and we see the same urgency about two thousand years later. This shows how God worked out His plan, to the detail, through the ages that His Word would effect people then and now with the same urgency. The urgency prompts us to work harder.

If the orientation of the Old Testament prophets is futuristic, the focus of the New Testament is the present.



**II Corinthians 6:2** For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. [or “a day of salvation”]

To us, as God’s people and as firstfruits, we are being judged now, so our time is now. It is a process. Now a similar division of time into “before” and “after,” or “once” and “now,” characterizes the life of each of us as individual believers.

**Ephesians 5:8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

We have past and present tenses there.

**Ephesians 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

**Colossians 1:21-22** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

A final dimension of “waiting time,” which is what we have been talking about here, is the time between Christ's resurrection and His second coming. For lack of a better term, we can call this the “time of waiting.”

The New Testament church for the last 2,000 years has been between the times. It both participates in the new possibilities that Christ brought into the world and waits in longing for the consummation of redemption.

On the one hand, Christians live in an awareness of the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints—to us. The whole world is in a mystery, they are blind and have no idea of what the future holds. They guess, try to project what life will be like, try to understand prophesy, because we, as humans, want to know what is in the future.

But on the other side, the creation and the church groan inwardly as they wait for their final redemption. So you have on the one hand the world, who is just in a fog as it were, and then on the other hand you have God’s people who are very clearly directed and have the revelation of what is going to happen and have confidence in that.

One of the surprising things about this interval of waiting is that New Testament writers regard it as a short time whose end will come quickly. According to verse 29 of I Corinthians 7:

**I Corinthians 7:29** But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none.

**Revelation 22:20** He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Satan knows that his time is short. We are reading the exact same words that the saints read in the second century. They thought time was short then and were told so. We believe that time is short and can see that, never in the history of the world has mankind had the capability of destroying life on earth as it does now.

In the first century AD, the church began to grow weary of well doing. That has always been a problem in the church, it is still a problem to this day. We try hard and push ourselves and then we begin to wear down. So we have to push ourselves harder than normal people in order to continue in faith. The church's genuine urgency for God's way of life to replace Satan's world turned into impatience for the return of Christ even then in the first century AD

This same impatience affected Jesus' disciples and He corrected them for their impatience in wanting to know the time of His second coming.

**Acts 1:6-11** Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. [or you could say in His own time frame] 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 to the end 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 do you stand gazing up into 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."

Not just the apostles, but the whole early church, for centuries lived in expectation of the immediate second coming of Jesus Christ. Even as late as the late AD 50, James was exhorting scattered members of the church to wait with patience for the few years remaining in their lives.

James wrote his epistle to members of God's church of the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad, which included those who had been dispersed from Jerusalem in the persecution following Stephen's death. These members who were scattered throughout the area east of the Mediterranean no longer had easy access to the apostles.

I am going to quickly paint a picture of the condition of the scattered church that James saw and wrote about. By the late 50's AD more and more difficulties and persecutions were confronting the scattered members of the church. This was the time of the persecution of the church by the Roman Emperor Nero, that lasted from about AD 54-68.

**James 1:2-4** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing 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 were becoming preferences. Their beliefs were merely a superficial formality, and the scattered brethren's discriminatory practices revealed a lack of love. They had begun to lose their first love, His truth, and their love toward Him.

In addition, the unconverted rich were oppressing the members of the church. Some of the persecutors were actually attending God's church. There was also a problem with harshness in the way some spoke to others and critical attitudes marred their fellowship.

Apparently, reports of such problems among the scattered brethren had reached James in Jerusalem, and in response to that he wrote to urge the members to make the needed changes in their lives and in their combined relationships.

The subject of James' letter is the inadequacies, the sins, and the mistakes of the members of the church and how they could correct them. Since we go through the very same things today, this is very applicable for us.

The early preaching to the church was enthusiastically about the grace and the glory of Jesus Christ. As the enthusiasm wore off, the preaching, after about AD 50, became, as it is so often today, lectures against the imperfections of the members of the church. In James 5:1-6, James warns the oppressing rich of coming judgment. In the middle section of James 5, James encourages the oppressed members to "be patient."

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 it 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 is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and 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 and merciful.

There are several very important principles here in James 5 within these five verses that are directly applicable to us today as we wait for Christ's return. James mentions several things here: establishing our hearts, grudging not against another, suffering affliction, and enduring. All of these require that we wait patiently for the return of Jesus Christ.

James emphasizes patience five times. It is similar to a necessary thread that is woven through a piece of fabric, it ties it all together. Patience is a moderating force on our urgent tendencies for immediate action.

James obviously saw a problem with impatience with the members of the church and he must have felt that it was extremely important to address this tendency. Patience is necessary to properly wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ, which we are commanded to do.

What is so hard about waiting patiently? True patience is God-given restraint while facing trials, that is if we have God's Holy Spirit. It is not passive by any means and it takes a great deal of active effort to be contently patient.

In the Old Testament, the concept of patience is more clearly seen by understanding that God is said to be "long," which in Hebrew is *arek* or "slow," which in Hebrew is *erek*. So God is said to be long or slow to anger. Here are two examples of its use:

**Exodus 34:6** And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.

**Nehemiah 9:17** They [that is the Israelites] refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You [speaking to God] did among them. But they 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 did not forsake them.

We are so very thankful for God’s mercy and His graciousness in this way. If He did that for a rebellious Israel, how merciful and gracious is He to us, who have His Spirit and who are the apple of His eye?

So in the Old Testament basically the 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. Peace between nations requires a great deal of patience, while diplomacy seeks to find common ground on which the two sides can agree.

I mentioned that James emphasizes patience five times in James 5:7-11. There are two Greek words translated as “patience” here. I am going to read these verses putting the Greek words in. This will help us to see the difference between the two Greek words here.

**James 5:7-11** Be patient, [*makrothumia*] brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently [*makrothumia*] for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient [*makrothumeo*]. 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 is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience [*makrothumia*]. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance [*hypomone*] of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

You will notice that enduring and patience are connected there. So the words “patience” and “patient” in James 5:7, 8, and 10 are translated from the Greek word *makrothumia*. This Greek word is often translated in the New Testament as “longsuffering,” as well as “patience.” It means the longsuffering type of patience that enables the mind to remain firm before it becomes frustrated and angry. Its synonyms are: forbearance and fortitude. You can hear the strength in those words and see that there is a determination involved there.

The other New Testament word found in verse 11, and many times in other scriptures, translated “patience” is *hypomone*, which means constant endurance, persevering continuance, and persistent waiting. *Hypomone*, describes the attitude of self-restraint that does not try to get back or try to get even for a wrong. It usually refers to patient continuance toward persons rather than things.

So James calls for patience toward everyone but not toward sin. Our patience with respect of persons must be matched with an equal patience with respect of things, that is, in the face of the afflictions and trials of the present age.

**Revelation 13:10** He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The statement “The patience and the faith of the saints,” in this context is that vengeance is God’s. We have to be patient and wait for God to handle the situation. We are not to seek revenge but we are to wait for God to bring about justice. This testing of our faith results in 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.

Now turn to II Thessalonians 3. Paul writes a principle that directly applies to the fact that faith results in patience.

**II Thessalonians 3:1-6** Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will 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 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 from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

A lack of faith causes impatience and with a failing faith a person becomes impatient in waiting for God to fulfill prophecy. How many times have we seen people leave the church because what they thought was an interpretation of prophecy never came about and they lost hope?

They humanly reason that God wants them to step out in faith; a faith that, in reality, is emotion. When a person steps out on this false faith of emotion they begin to find ways to try to manipulate God or force Him to bring about what they want rather than to wait patiently for His will to be done.

In James 5:7, concerning patience, James builds his illustrations of patience around the farmer who waits patiently for the early and latter rains.

**James 5:7** Therefore be patient [makrothumia], brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently [makrothumia] for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

So we see there that the farmer is to have patience for the crop. In Palestine the early rains came in October and November soon after the grain was sown so that it would germinate. The latter rains came in April and May as the grain was maturing.

Both rainy seasons were necessary for a successful crop. Knowing this, the farmer was willing to wait patiently until both rains came and provided the needed moisture. He knew his patience would be rewarded because God’s attributes are clearly seen in creation and the farmer certainly sees that on a regular basis.

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

**Deuteronomy 11:13-14** "And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your 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."

On a spiritual level, God guarantees and promises us that He will do the same thing for us if we earnestly obey all His command and love Him. Now Jeremiah 5 tells us what happens as a result of the farmer's disobedience and impatience.

**Jeremiah 5:24-25** They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest." [He appointed weeks, thus establishing God's timeframe here.] Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good from you.

Again, the spiritual application for us is that if we are disobedient or impatient, then we lose these blessings. God promises to provide our necessities, but not necessarily our wants.

Everything must be timed just right for a successful harvest. A major part of that patience requires obedience. The farmer needs patience to wait until God's design in nature does its work, and we need patience to wait until Christ completes the preparation of the firstfruits and then returns.

In due time, the farmer expects the return of the rain and, in a similar way, we should patiently anticipate deliverance from our trials and from this sinful world. In James 5:8, with the words, "You also be patient," James urges us to establish our hearts. Everything is timed according to God's purpose.

Let us shift gears here a bit. A passage where all of biblical depictions of time converge is here in II Peter 3. Peter writes this end time passage in an awareness of living in "the last days."

**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 fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

The scoffers, he refutes, base their skepticism about Christ's second coming on the cyclic succession of nature that has persisted since the creation of the world. But Peter in turn adduces historical events that happened once for all as a precedent for Christ's second coming. Continuing on here in verse 5:

**II Peter 3:5-7** For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then

existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

This shows that God's plan continues right on through. Peter also paints vivid pictures of the end of time that will mark the transition from earthly history to eternity. He portrays the present age as being an urgent time for repentance, salvation, and a time of "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God."

**II Peter 3:8-12** But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, [there again God is holy and we are to be holy if we are to be His children.] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Permeating all these references to earthly time is the conviction that God is both above time and in control of it. With the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. We find that God is waiting for the right time so He can be gracious to us and have mercy on us. Now we will go to Isaiah 30.

**Isaiah 30:18** Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him.

That is why He is not bringing the Millennium today or tomorrow. In His set time it will come and this waiting and His mercy includes us who are now waiting. Everyone during the Millennium is going to be doing the work and the will of God the way God wants it done and when He wants it done. In a sense, they, and we, will be waiting on God, waiting for His plan and His instruction.

**Isaiah 30:19** For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

As you know from other scriptures, He is really going to do some wonderful things. He is going to answer right while you are asking, and that should help us to be able to have even more faith in prayers as we speak to Him.

In a sense, God always answers the prayers of His saints now, but sometimes His answer is no, which is an answer we do not like to get. We must be careful that when we pray we do not cancel out our requests when we finish praying. As an example here, say you have prayed with all your heart out and have been as fervent as you can, say "Amen," and then immediately stand up and say, "I wonder if God will answer this prayer?" You have just undone everything that you have asked for. Now continuing on in verse 20, referring to the past Isaiah prophecies, it says:

**Isaiah 30:20-21** And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

One thing that I find interesting here is the duality in this scripture. It is talking about the Millennium, but it is also talking about you and I, as saints in God's church today. Spiritually, for the church, this is being fulfilled right now because of the power of the Holy Spirit. "My sheep (and "My teachers") hear My voice and they follow Me."

Now, it is not going to be like it was in the past for people, there are not going to be those trials and tribulations there in the Millennium or in the Kingdom of God, at least not in the same way that they are for people today.

We will be teachers. Teaching is one of the important responsibilities that we are training for now. How exciting it is that we are being prepared right now for those duties so that we will be able to help billions of people to live God's way of life!

So when we die and are put into the grave, or we are still alive and changed when Christ returns, we are resurrected as spirit beings into the Family of God, so all of a sudden the time has come for us to be spirit beings. At that time we will have another form of existence, so we are going to be doing things for the very first time with more power than we have ever imagined, and we are going to need some instruction on that.

The conclusion of this is simple. It is that our time can either be like the world's time, or it can be like the time of Jesus Christ, and like God's time. If it is like the world's time, our time has no meaning. On the other hand, if it is like the time of Jesus Christ, it can be filled with meaning.

Your time has become part of that great and eternal drama of salvation, which is God's plan for the ages, and you must allow God to plan your time. If you do, He will give your life meaning and fill all your times with opportunity.

Many things in this world escape us because we are locked in a fixed time progression. Some things move too fast for us to see, such as the flight of an insect. Other things move too slowly, such as the growth of a flower or the moving of clouds. We can see each of these things physically, but we miss the beauty because we are locked in our own time system.

In the same way, we often miss the beauty of what God Himself is doing in our lives, not because we cannot see the individual features of His work, but because His work is either too slow for our comprehension or too fast.

Adjust your time to coincide with His time through faith, hope, love, obedience, humility, prayer, and Bible study. Trust Him, and rejoice in the fact that one day your perspective will be His own, and you will live completely on God's time. May it be the right time for you!