

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

BE PATIENT

*A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
PART FIFTY SIX OF SIXTY FOUR*

When you consider the numerous qualities God wants His children to have, which do we seem to lack most? Many of us must answer, "patience." The usual word translated "patience" means "abiding under", but James uses a different word in his exhortation: "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5: 7). Here the word means "longsuffering." More literally it means "long-tempered." We don't use that expression although we are familiar with the opposite, "short-tempered."

The context of James is that of being oppressed. Those who suffer for the truth's sake may often be tempted to give place to anger against their opposers, or to waver in their faith under the pressure of their trials. Vindictiveness and despair arise easily from impatience. Oppressed saints also may be made to wonder why they suffer when all around them others are "never molested though in the wrong." James admonishes them to endure provocation and disappointment. They must not be turned away from Christ by threatening, difficulty, opposition, or persecution.

James uses three illustrations of the spirit God wants Christians to have: the farmer, the prophets, and Job (James 5:7,10,11). The farmer knows he must wait for the harvest.

The fruit of his labor does not come overnight. There may be numerous difficulties to overcome before the crops are in. Thus we must not despair. In due season we too shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).

The prophets were patient in their suffering. They were brave men who faced foes, even among their own people, in order to present the word of the Lord. As Stephen reminded his opposers, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?" (Acts 7:52). Their lives were sterling examples of patience and fidelity (Matthew 5:12). It is truly a shame that too many modern Christians are so unaware of the lives of the prophets they cannot appreciate the example used by the Lord and His brother.

While some are slightly more familiar with Job, his example of patience is one sorely needed in our time. The pressures, frustrations, difficulties, etc. of our existence put a real strain on our temper unless we interpret our life in the context of Christ's will. Then we are able, like the farmer, to wait "for the precious fruit" of our labor (I Corinthians 15:58). The difficulties of life are intended to make us better, not bitter.

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