

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. – Like the farmer who must depend upon the divinely ordained order of the seasons, and the rain that comes to sustain the crops, so the believer must depend upon the strength He has promised, strengthen oneself in the means of grace, and endure, i.e., “be patient,” always being spiritually strengthened by the sure promise of Yeshua’s return.

James states that “the coming of the Lord is near.” Some might question how this can still be true given that nearly 2000 years have occurred since he wrote this epistle, and Yeshua has yet to return. But it seems clear that the words of James here are emphasizing the imminent return of our Lord, not giving an indication of a “length of time.”

The immanency of the Lord’s return, therefore, referred to the necessity of constant readiness and persevering faith based upon the knowledge that he may return at any time. This larger passage tells what the nearness of the Lord signifies and how the knowledge of it strengthens the heart of the believer.¹

It is the reality that our Lord Yeshua may return at any time that urges us always to be prepared, to be ready for His appearing, and allow the inevitability of His coming to strengthen us and enable us to endure with patience.

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

The context of James’ admonition here is that in the believing community to which he writes, there were those who had greater wealth than others, as well as those who were common laborers and may even have been unjustly treated by unbelieving wealthy land owners who employed them. As such, it would have been easy for those within the believing community to grumble against their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord who had greater wealth, ascribing to them a selfish and unkind disposition which characterized the wealthy unbelievers.

If this is, in fact, the scenario to which James addresses his words in our verse, then it is also reasonable to consider that there would have been a growing division with the local assembly of believers as people engaged in slander and gossip against each other.

¹ Richardson, *James* in *The New American Commentary*, p. 221.

James' use of the Greek στεναζῶ (*stenazō*) in the opening "Do not complain, brethren" (μὴ στενάξετε, ἀδελφοί) may well indicate "grumbling," for the Greek *stenazō* "commonly appears in contexts of adversity where it bears the sense of sighing or groaning."¹ In the Lxx we find it used in Lam 1:21.

They have heard that I groan; there is no one to comfort me; all my enemies have heard of my calamity; they are glad that You have done it. Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed, that they may become like me. (Lam 1:21)

An interesting parallel to this use of *stenazō*, "to groan" or "to sigh," is Heb 13:17.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief [sighing or groaning], for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb 13:17)

This strengthens the idea that *stenazō*, the Greek word used in our text, often describes inner turmoil that results in a situation where misunderstanding or an unwillingness to guard oneself has issued in sharing with others one's complaints against a fellow believer. Rather than bringing the problem to a God-honoring resolution, such *lashon hara* (evil speech) foments bitterness and gives way to the enemy.² Thus, the NASB translation "complain" pictures verbal interaction with others. One's own "groaning" has issued in "complaining...against one another," clearly a form of gossip or slander.

...so that you yourselves may not be judged; – In seeking to judge those against whom one has a complaint by discrediting them to other people, is gossip or slander, and clearly that which God hates (Prov 6:16–19). This is James' very point: in trying to discredit others by slandering them, one is actually putting oneself in a place to be judged by God. Yeshua Himself taught us: "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." (Matt 7:1).

... behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. – James reminds us of the truth which ought always to be in the forefront of our minds,

1 Vlachose, Chris. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: James* (B&H Pub., 2013), p. 172.

2 Cf. Eph 4:25–27.

namely, that our omnipresent Savior Who is always with us, sees and knows all things. Nothing is hidden from Him. Thus, when we mistakenly think that our “private conversation” is hidden from the “Judge of all the world,” we are greatly mistaken. Yeshua is listening to every conversation and even knows our non-verbalized thoughts.

Thus, when James states that “the Judge is standing right at the door,” he not only reminds us that the Almighty knows everything we are saying, but he also emphasizes that the Judge is “ready to enter the courtroom” to proclaim His verdict. As the author of Hebrews states:

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Heb 4:13)

The parallel of our text with 4:11–12 is clear. There, James warned against slandering one another and reminds us Who the true Judge is and emphasizes that we are to be doers of God’s commandments and not the judge of His divine ordinances.

Thus, when James states in our current text that “the Judge is standing right at the door,” he intends us to recognize that ever imminent return of our Lord. We are to live with this reality, that Yeshua could return at any time and we therefore purpose within ourselves that when He returns, He will find us faithful, striving to live righteously so as to honor Him.

One is reminded of Rev 3:20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev 3:20)

10 – As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James does not mention any specific prophet but simply refers to the prophets of the Tanach as a collective example of enduring suffering for the cause and glory of God. Jeremiah, who suffered at the hands of pagan kings and even by his own people, obviously comes to mind. He was given the message he was to deliver to Israel, but before he began, God told him that the people would not listen to him or receive his message.

You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. (Jer 7:27)

Their response to Jeremiah's message was total refusal.

"But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" (Jer 18:12)

He was beaten, put into stocks (Jer 20:1–2), sentenced to death (Jer 26:11), the divine message he delivered in a scroll was burned (Jer 36:23), and he was thrown into a cistern that had no water, sinking into the mud and left to die (Jer 38:6). And even after being rescued, he was called a liar and dismissed (Jer 43:2).

Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest, was stoned in the very Temple court itself.

Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. (2Chron 24:20–21)

When James writes of "suffering and patience," we should understand the word "patience" (*μακροθυμία*, *makrothumia*) to mean "the ability to endure or persevere." Paul uses this same term when describing the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (*μακροθυμία*, *makrothumia*), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

The final clause, "against such things there is no law," has been variously understood by commentators. I take it to mean that "the work of the Spirit (in the believer's life) is not fixed by a set measure, but is unending."¹ That is, the power to persevere in difficult circumstances,

1 Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (TorahResource, 2010), p. 249.

including being persecuted for one's faith, is given by the Spirit of God as the child of God submits to His leading and waits upon Him for strength to endure.

... *who spoke in the name of the Lord.* – And what was it that caused the prophets of old, of whom James refers, to be so persecuted? It was that their words brought God's truth to the people they addressed, calling them to humble themselves, to repent, and to seek God's forgiveness. This went contrary to their self-centered bent and issued in their attempts to destroy the message of God and those who came speaking it.

11 – We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

We count those blessed who endured. The word translated here as "endured" is the Greek ὑπομένω (*hupomenō*) meaning "to persevere," "to remain under" the difficulty or struggle and not to give up. We encountered this same word in 1:12.

Blessed is a man who perseveres ὑπομένω (*hupomenō*) under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.
(James 1:12)

Thus we learn another important lesson from James' use of the prophets to illustrate his point: it is possible that even though one is speaking the truth and doing so to honor God, he or she may still be persecuted by those who are condemned by the message of truth, for they hate the message and the messenger.

This, of course, shows the fallacy of the so-called "prosperity gospel," that if one will simply say "yes" to "the preacher's invitation," one's life will be sheltered from trouble and persecution and all will be prosperous. Surely the blessing of God comes upon those who are His, but this does not negate the reality that the child of God may experience persecution (to one extent or another) by those who hate the message of truth because it unmask their feeble self-sufficiency.

Surely it is true that the primary goal of our salvation is that God would be glorified, and this can be accomplished regardless of the events that come upon us. We can magnify Him when we are prosperous, and we can glorify Him even when persecuted. This is well demonstrated by the true prophets of old.

You have heard of the endurance of Job... – Because the KJV became the most popular Bible throughout the English speaking world, its translation of this phrase produced the well-known phrase, “the patience of Job.” However, the Greek is, once again, the noun ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*) which is cognate to the verb ὑπομένω (*hypomenō*) which we encountered in the first clause of our verse. The verb means “to persevere” and the noun means “perseverance,” that is, “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”¹ Thus, the proverbial phrase, “the patience of Job,” should be corrected to “the perseverance of Job.” Granted, patience and perseverance have much in common, but the primary aspect of our word “perseverance” has the added emphasis of remaining faithful even in very difficult times and events.

It is interesting to note that Ezekiel mentions Job together with Noah and Daniel yet he emphasizes “righteousness” as the outstanding virtue of Job.

...even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.” (Ezek 14:20, cf. 14:14)

As Kistemaker notes:

Even in the Book of Job, patience is not one of Job’s outstanding characteristics. Job betrays his impatience when he curses the day of his birth (3:1) and when he says that the “long-winded speeches” of his three friends never end (16:3).²

...and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings – It was the perseverance of Job that God blessed and it is this that James intends us to see. For in the final chapter of Job we read:

The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. He had seven sons and three daughters. (Job 42:12–13)

...that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. – The question that may enter the minds of some when they see “bad things happening to good people” is if this somehow diminishes the goodness of God or brings into question His sovereign control of our world. But this is

1 BDAG, “ὑπομένω,” p. 1039.

2 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 169.

the very reason James compels us to consider the prophets and Job. For even though Job encountered great trials and struggles, he persevered and in so doing, proved God to be righteous, holy, and good, and that He is full of compassion and mercy. This is clearly taught in the Tanach itself. Consider the proclamation of God's self-revelation as He met with Moses the second time on Mt. Sinai.

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed,
 "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious,
 slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;
 (Ex 34:6)

Or the words of the Psalmist:

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and
 abounding in lovingkindness. (Ps 103:8)

Though James does not reference such texts as these from the Tanach, he uses a word in our verse which is only found here in the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures. It is the Greek word *πολύσπλαγχνός* (*polusplaghnos*) which combines two words: *polus* meaning "very," "a great number" and *splagxnon* (literally) meaning, "inward parts," but is the Greek way of describing deep feelings of "love and affection."

The point that James intends for us to grasp is this: while our English translation has "full of compassion," the word used in our text would favor a more superlative description: "abounding in compassion" or "overflowing with compassion."

Thus, the emphasis James desires to give us is that nothing can come into our lives but what God intends for our good and His glory. Therefore, being infinite in His compassion, He never fails to give to His own all that is necessary to persevere in genuine faith and in so doing, to bring Him the glory He deserves.

Thus we see that James, as he comes to the conclusion of this epistle, takes us back to the beginning, thus forming "bookends" to the whole.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has
 been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the
 Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)