

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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BE PATIENT (JAS. 5:7-12)

Dave Rogers

A familiar old joke warns about praying for patience, lest our Father permit some trial to arise in our lives specifically to teach us that precious virtue! Likewise, the meme of one who prays “Lord, grant me patience... RIGHT NOW!” probably comes nearer the true attitude of many Christians than we’d like to admit. James 5:7-12 forms the beginning of our inspired penman’s conclusion to this short letter of encouragement for fellow Jewish Christians by pointedly urging patience in the face of trials.

James had begun by pointing to “patience” as the key to true spiritual maturity (Jas. 1:3-4), and his conclusion is predicated on the contrasts he had drawn in chapters 3:13-18 and 4:1-8. In those verses he had compared saints who strove for consistency in their Christian lives with some who had apparently fallen into the Pharisees’ fallacy of thinking there was no connection between their spiritual lives and their daily behavior. These comparisons illustrate one of the most effective challenges Satan can place before God’s children; the temptation to believe that passing time somehow diminishes the certainty that our Father will vindicate His faithful ones. James is emphasizing that Christians need to live with eyes ever focused on our ultimate goal, not on the difficulties, conflicts, and disappointments of our sojourn in this life. The patience he counsels here is from the same word Peter uses to describe the “long-suffering” of God Himself, in 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 3:9 & 15 (*makrothumia* — endurance, steadfastness). By cultivating such “stick-to-it-ive-ness,” Christians are actually reflecting the Father’s image. His admonition to “establish your hearts” (vs. 8) echoes this idea by associating patience with stability and consistency, likewise essential characteristics of God.

The “coming” of the Lord in verse 7 (His *parousia* — appearance, presence) is commonly understood as a reference to Jesus’ return at the end of time (as in 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; and 2 Pet. 3:4), though some bible scholars suggest that James instead has in view the impending destruction of national Judah and Jerusalem by the Romans in 69-70 A.D. Regardless of which “judgement” event James actually had in mind, it is interesting to note that he immediately turns our attention to the image of a farmer who has no way to “hurry along” his harvest after having planted the seed. It is God

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FROM THE EDITOR:

BE PRAYERFUL (Jas. 5:13-18)

Cody Westbrook

Of all the spiritual resources our God has provided, prayer is, perhaps, the most powerful and yet most misunderstood and underutilized. The New Testament regularly urges constant prayer in the life of every Christian. Jesus “spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Paul commanded, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). We should continue in prayer (Rom. 12:12), be watchful in prayer (1 Pet. 4:7), labor in prayer (Rom. 15:30), and be thankful in prayer (Col. 4:2). “...In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). Ours is a God who desires to hear from us (1 Pet. 5:7) and has provided a means by which we may approach His throne with boldness (Heb. 4:16) at any time. Thus, prayer, is a powerful resource for us as we seek to navigate the ups and downs of the Christian life. It should not surprise us, then, to note that James ends his instruction manual on Christian living with an exhortation to pray (Jas. 5:13-18).

Pray in times of Suffering (Jas. 5:13).

Suffering is a consistent theme in James. The book begins with an exhortation to rejoice in the suffering that comes through trial (Jas. 1:2-3). There is the suffering of the poor (Jas. 2:2-7), suffering which comes through conflict (Jas. 4:1-5), suffering which comes at the hand of wealthy persecutors (Jas. 5:1-6) and the need to look to the suffering of the prophets for encouragement (Jas. 5:10). James 5:13 (along with James 1:5) tells us how to deal with it. The passage is composed of two present imperatives paired with two extremes. Life consists of times of suffering and times of joy and happiness. What *should* (the sense of “let him”) we do in each circumstance? James said, “pray” and “sing.” The word translated “pray” in this passage is the most common word for prayer in the New Testament. Note that James uses it 4 times in this context. Whether in good times or bad the emphasis is the same—turn to God and cast your care upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7).

Pray in times of Sickness (Jas. 5:14-15a).

Certainly, our first reaction to illness should be to approach God in prayer. But what kind of illness

does James have in mind in this passage? The Greek term generally means “to be weak” and it is used in various ways throughout the New Testament. It refers to mental ability (Rom. 6:19), physical ability (2 Cor. 10:10), physical sickness (2 Tim. 4:20), and spiritual sickness (1 Cor. 11:30), among many others. Perhaps spiritual sickness is the best understanding of its usage in this passage. Contextually, it is not difficult to imagine one finding themselves spiritually weak as a result of suffering or trial. In fact, James deals with so many practical matters in the book it is not difficult to imagine a brother or sister struggling to apply any or all of the principles discussed. In such cases, James says, they should “call for the elders of the church” so that they “may pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” Elders watch for our souls (Heb. 13:17) and are charged with the responsibility to feed and care for the flock (Acts 20:28). The “anointing” in this passage is a symbolic action. What better way to deal with spiritual weakness than to call upon faithful spiritual leaders to intercede on our behalf in prayer?

Pray in times of Sin (Jas. 5:15b-16).

While it is not necessarily sinful for a Christian to struggle with spiritual weakness, there are times when sin is involved. Thus James says, “...And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Sadly, sin is still a reality in the Christian life. Not that we *are* sinners, we are not. We are saints. But we are not perfect and from time to time we *do* struggle with sin. No one is exempt. But, thankfully, God has provided a means to deal with it. John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). While John speaks of confession to the Father, James speaks of confession to one another. There is no dichotomy here. God is the one who forgives sins but there is great spiritual benefit to discussing sins and struggles that bring about spiritual weakness with faithful brethren whom we trust, and who can help us and pray to God on our behalf.

Prayer is Powerful (Jas. 5:16b-18).

James makes a simple yet profoundly powerful statement: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” James describes prayer as “powerful” and “effective.” The word “powerful” has to do with inherent strength or power, that which makes a person or thing sufficient for a task. Consider, for example, the idea of “untapped resources.” A parcel of land may hold an unimaginable amount of oil, but the full potential cannot be realized until the well is dug. The term “effective” has to do with the power or ability to get things done. So, as one writer put it, “When we pray about something, the inherent power of prayer is released as an effective power which accomplishes its objectives.”¹ One need look no further than the account of Elijah in 1 Kings 17-18 as an illustration of this truth. Prayer is a powerful weapon for every “righteous man.” We need only to use it.

Editor’s Note

It has been my privilege to edit the Christian Worker for the last decade. I appreciate the support and feedback received from so many of you through that time. I hope that you have found the effort to be helpful and encouraging, and I hope you will continue to support this work as it changes hands. Thank you for reading.

Cody Westbrook

¹ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 204.

CW

BE PURPOSEFUL (JAS. 5:19–20)

Kevin W. Rhodes

Jesus came to this world with the greatest purpose anyone could imagine: to save mankind from sin and offer eternal life. This reaches to the depth of our very being. The Creator of the universe sent His Son to suffer to restore a relationship with the people of His creation. Therefore, it makes sense that His people, who have benefitted the most from His grace, should also be purposeful in their relationships. Christianity creates a Father-child relationship from which we can learn and grow. However, it also inherently creates responsibilities to our fellow man (Matt. 22:37-40) and a brotherhood filled with sibling relationships. As a result, we should follow our Savior and be purposeful in these relationships in the same way He was when He made them possible.

Sadly, after the original investment in their salvation made

through obedience in baptism (Mark 16:16), many try to live off the interest, failing to commit themselves to a life of spiritual purpose (Rom. 6:3-4). But Christians should want more for themselves and expect more of themselves. Indeed, the life of the saved should focus on helping others be saved. Reaching the lost around us should become natural to a people whose purpose imitates Jesus. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). However, having spiritual purpose in life does not consist solely of having Bible studies and inviting people to worship. Instead, it requires a real investment in the wellbeing of others spiritually. James closes his epistle with these words: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20). The greatest purpose you can ever have in this life is helping ensure that others enjoy eternal life. But to achieve this demands approaching life and living life with this purpose clearly etched in your mind and engraining such behaviors into the very fabric of your life.

Connect with your brethren personally (“Brethren”) (Jas. 5:19a). To help others reconnect with God, we must first be connected ourselves (1 John 4:11). Christians should develop tight relationships around spiritual aims and spiritual service (Gal. 5:13). Show interest in others as individuals, build closeness through empathy and care, and intentionally include the spiritual in all that you do to create a context of spiritual purpose that transcends ordinary life and relationships.

Hold one another accountable (“if anyone among you wanders from the truth”) (Jas. 5:19b). Consistently point to the word of God as the standard for your own behavior and for your brethren (John 12:48; 17:17). Positively emphasize how much better your life is for submitting to God’s will (Jas. 4:7-8), and speak of past sins only with regret. Always place your relationships in a spiritual context so that any deviation from truth is a clear disruption of the closeness you have built. Never let social connections outweigh spiritual fellowship (1 Cor. 5:6-7). This requires focus from the beginning of the relationship.

Keep one another faithful (“and someone turns him back”) (Jas. 5:19c). Develop trust from the beginning to handle difficult questions and disagreements later, rather than overlooking such challenges to maintain a false sense of closeness. When questionable practices arise, ask whether they have considered how the scriptures apply to their behavior (Jas. 1:22), and confront them with the Scriptures, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), when they fail. Make moral and spiritual improvements a core component of Christian friendship so that your commitment to spiritual purpose in their lives is a reasonable expectation rather than a surprise.

See yourself and others as souls in need (“let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul

from death”) (Jas. 5:20a). Saving others from death remains a consistent plot in popular media. Whether fantasy, science fiction, comic book, war, western, or grittier drama, acting to save others remains the most heroic of all aims. Indeed, Jesus came with this purpose (Luke 19:10). However, in order to appreciate the true value of spiritual work in this way, Christians must make a spiritual perspective the root of how they see the world. When you regularly reflect on how Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection worked through the gospel to pluck you out of the abyss of sin, and this becomes vivid and real to you personally, you will appreciate what it means to reach for the hand of someone slipping into that chasm and hold on for dear life (Gal. 6:1).

Change people’s lives for the better (“and cover a multitude of sins”) (Jas. 5:20b). By being purposeful, Christians can make a real difference in the lives of those around them—saving souls and strengthening brethren. Spiritual interest in others provokes the best heart in God’s people (1 Pet. 4:8) and fosters an environment focused on pleasing God and walking with Him (1 Thess. 4:1). Far too often we accept a spectator’s role when we could become so much more with designed intent and spiritual purpose. Friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances need more of God in their lives, more Scripture in their decisions, and more love in their relationships. With the right purpose, we can provide exactly that.

Jesus showed us how to be purposeful in every relationship by the sacrifice He made (John 15:13). He not only told us to love one another (John 13:34-35), He showed us how to do it. Unfortunately, we often interpret this in a social sense rather than a spiritual sense. He wants us to love one another so much that we will not only be drawn together as a people but that we will also reach out to draw one another back when necessary. This is what God did for all of us, acting with the greatest purpose imaginable (Rom. 5:8-9), and this is what God wants us to do for others too.

CW

THE MESSIAH’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW

Don Walker

One of the greatest obstacles when speaking to members of a denomination is getting them to understand the distinction between the two testaments. Prophecies such as Jeremiah 31:31-33 are either ignored or simply go unheeded. Jeremiah wrote,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, That I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel,

and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; And will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:31-33).

The Hebrew writer quoted from this passage letting his readers know that the New Testament had replaced the Old Testament. In Colossians 2 Paul was even more bold in the proclamation of the same truth. In verses 14-17 he taught that the Old Law had been nailed to the cross and principalities and powers had been spoiled and defeated, so they were to not allow anyone to judge them by the standard of the Old Law any longer. He also reminded them that the Old Law was a “shadow of things to come.”

With such clear teaching in the above referenced passages and in others, it is difficult to understand why anyone would go back and view the Old Testament as legislating for us today. Yet, there are still those who would formulate teaching and practices based upon the Old Testament teaching. It is an understatement to say that it has clouded the minds of many so that they are unable to draw proper conclusions concerning what should be practiced today and what should be understood concerning the great “mystery of God.” Though there are many examples that could be presented to show our point, we will focus on one that may not be as prevalent in our thoughts. We will consider how an improper view of the Old Testament and its place in God’s plan affects men’s thinking and understanding of what the Bible says about Messiah.

One simply needs a cursory reading of the Gospel accounts to see that the Jews did not understand their own law concerning Messiah. In fact John proclaimed, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). The very One to Whom multiple witnesses testified¹ was finally rejected and murdered by the ones that should have been rejoicing at His coming. It is evident that Jesus came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) and yet much of the Jews rejected Jesus. Now the question is this: If the evidence was so abundant, why then did the Jew fail to recognize Jesus as the Christ when He appeared on the scene? Why did the Jews reject their Messiah and Savior? In general, we would answer the question by saying in the mind of the Jew, they did not need a savior. They were the seed of Abraham and they had been entrusted with Law of Moses. In their minds salvation for them was wrapped up in the Law of Moses. In perhaps a more specific approach we would see the answer being wrapped up in “context.”

It is no secret to the average Bible student that the Jews idea of Messiah and His work was warped when compared to the

¹ In John 5:31-39 Jesus gives five witnesses that testify that His claims concerning His Deity and Messiahship were valid claims. Those five witnesses are John the baptist, the miracles that Jesus did, the Father, the Scriptures, and finally Moses, their law giver.

inspired record. In fact, the Jew saw the Abrahamic blood line to be more significant than the Messiah Himself. They saw the Law of Moses, which had been given to the “seed of Abraham” as the power by which men would draw near to God and Messiah was just a small part of that Law. This is made clear when we consider that both John the baptist and Jesus addressed the fact that simply being descendants of Abraham did not establish them as God’s elect (See Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:39). The Judaizing teachers in the first century are also proof the Jew did not understand the position of Messiah and the role of the Old Testament. Paul would let them know it was not “salvation by race,” but rather it was salvation by grace. He would also make it clear that it was not “seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

In the end, it was the Jew’s unwillingness to see that the Old Law was simply a part of God’s overall plan and they and their lineage were not the answer to man’s need that finally led to their demise. Had they recognized that **everything** centered and focused on Messiah Jesus, then they would have been better equipped to receive and benefit from God’s great Mystery. It is paramount for men today to grasp the same truth and realize that the kingdom is here and will be delivered to the Father when Messiah returns and this world is dissolved and melted with a fervent heat. May we consider the import of this message as we all study our Bible more and more.

CW

WHAT HAPPENS...IF I DO NOT BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

Rick Brumback

It is an enigma. It is the most printed, most circulated, most often-given book in human history. Yet, it is increasingly doubted, challenged, and dismissed in the midst of technology and a dependence upon science and self. There are certainly doubters, and they have their objections to the Word which cause them to reject it. Of course this does not mean the Bible is not the Book from God; but it does mean people are encouraged *not* to place proper emphasis upon it. For those who do give up on believing this great text, there are significant and disastrous consequences that will follow. We want to consider some of those consequences.

First, there are consequences in relation to God. I deprive Him of the glory He is due as the Creator. Without His knowledge, I do not know where I came from, nor do I know where I am going. I am unable to praise though I am “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psa. 139:14). I also deprive Him of the glory

He is due as the Savior. Everything I know about Jesus and His loving work for me, and for all humanity, would be lost to me. I would know nothing about the cross or His sacrifice. Do you realize that outside of the Bible there are only a few paragraphs from all ancient historians about the person of Jesus? My disbelief deprives me of knowledge of Him and of all spiritual matters. Even if I desired to be religious, I would not know what to believe (Eph. 4:4). There are many in mainline Protestant denominations who profess Christianity but increasingly doubt that the Bible is actually God’s Word. They cannot share the Good News with others because they do not believe the Good News. Some do not believe in heaven, or hell, or even in Christ as the Only-Begotten Son!

Second, there are consequences in relation to myself. One is that I go to hell. This is one of the saddest thoughts to imagine, for myself or anyone else. When Jesus spoke with the Rich, Young Ruler, and the young man rejected the Divine word of Christ, Jesus was said to have looked at him with love (Mark 10:21). With this rejection, what sadness Jesus must have felt. What loss. It is a terrible thought to see someone’s face in hell, to see mine there, or to see yours. This is not a matter to joke or laugh about. God says that all those who do not know Him and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus will be banished from His presence and experience His wrath (2 Thess. 1:8-9). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man asked to have Lazarus go back and preach to his five brothers, who were living just as he had. Abraham told him no; they had Moses and the prophets.

But there are other consequences for ourselves that I want us to think about. Christianity is more than just “fire insurance” (John 10:10). If I fail to believe the Word of God, I lose the blessings that come with a life that is Christ-centered. Yet I still have to manage the business of life – I simply do it alone in my own, limited wisdom. I am doomed to bumble and stumble my way through life. The psalmist wrote, “*Order my steps in thy word*” (Psa. 119:133). It is good to recall that God wants to help me grow and mature, but I must give Him my attention (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Finally, there are consequences in relation to others. If I fail believe in God’s Word, I teach my children and family not to believe. Unbelief can be passed on just like belief, maybe even more easily. Remember the comment of Jesus, “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16). That positive influence would be completely lost if I did not believe what God had said. And should we change our mind later in life, what about those we helped down the wrong road. There may be no recovery for them. By my unbelief I may have deprived others of my support in receiving the life-saving message.

This is not about believing in spite of the truth. This is about believing what *is* the truth. This book, in whatever translation,

sits in the pews of all church buildings I know. The availability of this text is not in doubt, and certainly not for us. The reading and acceptance of it is the question. This is about believing God's life-giving message so that we may experience His grace, His mercy, and His blessings while we honor His name as it deserves. How could that be a bad life? How could that be wrong, or disappointing?

The Word of the Lord is meant to give us insight, understanding, and hope. It is meant to be Divine wisdom which helps us make it through this life successfully and stretch forth into the next as well. I encourage you to open your mind to the possibility that this book is what it claims to be. Give it an examination, a look-see. You will find it to be everything God has said it would be. And you will be blessed.

CW

"THE DECLINE AND FALL OF...AMERICA"?

Carl B. Garner

Many of us can recall the atmosphere of the late '50s and '60s. A constant state of fear of atomic warfare permeated our lives. We had seen the devastation of the first bombs over Japan, and we could not get it out of our minds. We can remember the "shoe-pounding" of Nikita Khrushchev in the United Nations. It wasn't hard to imagine him "pushing the button" that would start a war that might "end all wars." You could find plenty of places that would sell you an underground bomb shelter during those "cold war" years, and the chill was felt by us all. Things are different now. Many of the most war-like nations have made drastic changes, and war with Russia or Red China is not as likely today.

That does not mean that things at home in the good ol' USA are going "smooth and peacefully." Threats today are more internal rather than external. Surveys tell us Americans are more concerned about crime, drugs, AIDS, and Swine Flu. Armed guards are in many of our schools. Alcoholism is on the rise. Pundits tell us our greatest threats locally are not bombs from foreign enemies but handguns in our schools that threaten our homes as well. At least, that is what we read and hear in the evening newscast.

We try not to panic, but when we look at our history we realize it is foolhardy to act as though nothing could happen. Historians still read and give attention to Edward Gibbon's classic work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. What destroyed the most powerful, influential nation of ancient times? It was not outside enemies with wicked warfare, but it

was "a widespread immorality which destroyed family life" and their national integrity.

In 1831, Alexis de Toqueville visited America, and then he wrote a widely read book on our "experiment in democracy." Among other things, he wrote:

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I learn the greatness and genius of America. America is great because America is good. If she ever ceases to be good she will cease to be great.

That was in 1831. What if he were to come to America today? Sure, he would see many great individuals and many good things. But who can say that he would hear "her pulpits aflame with righteousness"? Has America ceased to be "good"? In Proverbs 14:34 by inspiration, the wise man wrote, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*"

Many years after de Toqueville's visit, this was posted in America's *Wall Street Journal*:

Basically what happened is that the "New Morality" of big cities like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco was imposed upon the rest of the country by movies, by TV, by magazines, and by default, by organized religion. Oh, sure, church doors are open every Sunday, but unhappily for those who enter. Much contemporary American theology has come to be based on a kind of dainty religious *mush* that has more in common with the sentiments of Rod McKuen and John Lennon than the precepts of Isaiah or the Apostle John.

It may be argued that the *Wall Street Journal* is hardly the best source for judging America's sermons, but what they have written is hard to deny. Not until sin is denounced and abhorred will any nation have the right to start talking about "righteousness." It is not that unusual for people to depart a church building on Sunday morning feeling good about themselves, but not having been challenged and motivated by their preacher to live by higher biblical standards.

It starts with you and me. Nations are made up of people, and America's people must be taught to be good before America's people will be good. Preachers are human, and we have many of the same desires everyone else has. We want to be true to the Lord, but it is very tempting to seek instead the favor of those who hear us preach. Solving this problem will take the efforts of all of us. Let us lead America back to greatness by insisting that the Bible be our measuring rod. Remember the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

God's way will always be the best way.

CW

Who will provide the necessary rains on HIS timetable, not the farmer's. (It may also be that the Holy Spirit is showing us that there were some even in that very early day of the church who — like various denominational theologians today — believed they could manipulate world events to “hasten” the Lord's coming. Galatians 6:9 offers a comparable admonition via Paul).

The farmer's perspective of patient waiting rests on his understanding of the nature of his craft; similarly, children of God should always try to “see” their situations from Heaven's viewpoint rather than their own. For Jewish believers in the era leading to Rome's destruction of Jerusalem, the ideas that “the Lord is at hand” and that “the Judge is standing at the door” would have borne the significance that their suffering and harassment at the hands of unbelieving countrymen was about to end! While we can certainly relate to the desire to “speed up” the end of their suffering, James cautions these saints in verse 9 about the danger of grumbling or complaining (“grudging,” KJV) about their circumstances. When we concentrate our attention on being dissatisfied with something, that self-centered focus impedes and obscures our ability to give appropriate attention to anything else (and that, in turn, prevents us from minding our own “business,” 1 Thess. 4:11). Not only is James pointing out here that whatever we endure for the sake of the Name does not begin to measure up to what Jesus suffered for us (see Heb. 12:1-4, also 1 Pet. 4:14-16), the image of the Judge “at the door” may also be meant to remind us that our Father hears even our “idle” words!

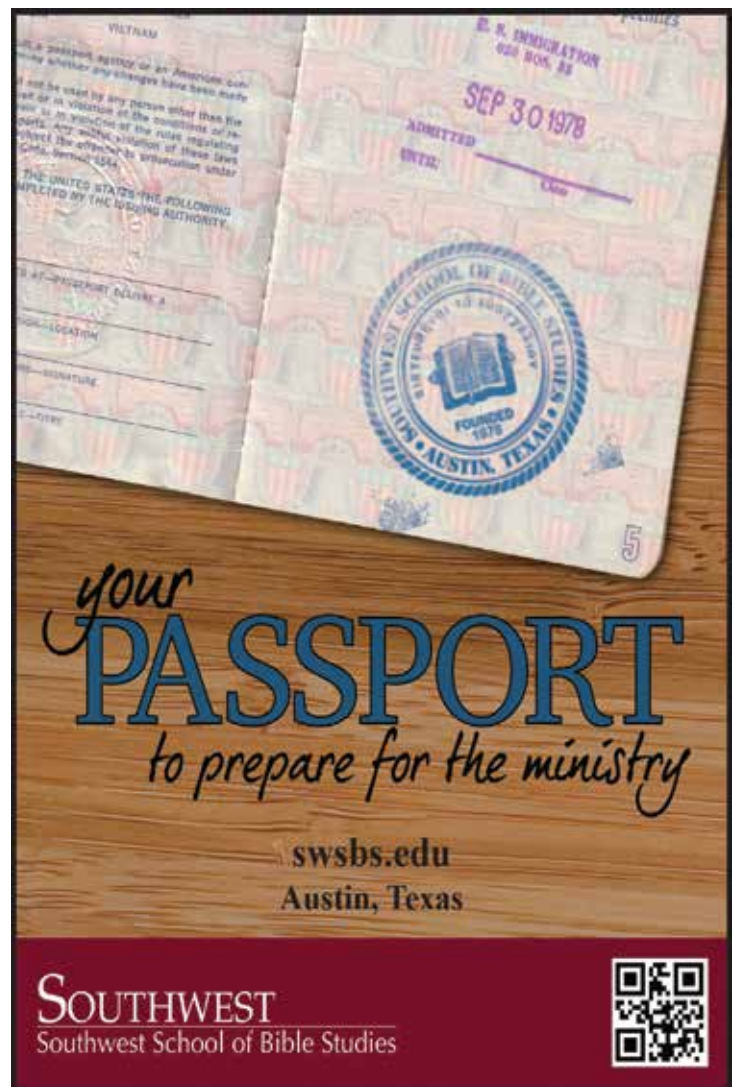
In the face of trials, James points us back to the examples of the prophets who were hated and persecuted for their dogged faithfulness to delivering God's message (cf. Heb. 11:35-40), and to ancient Job, whose latter end was far more blessed than his beginning (Job 1:22, cf. 42:12-17). The lives of these faithful ones are recorded specifically as examples for us of how trials are to be borne (Rom. 4:23-24; 15:4), and they help us put our own trials and challenges into a heavenly perspective.

It may seem strange in verse 12 for James to turn from examples of godly men to a warning against taking oaths in the face of trials and challenges to our faith, but a little recognition of the Jewish cultural background into which this letter was sent helps make sense of this seemingly abrupt shift. In the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:33-37) and again in His sharp condemnations of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:16-22), Jesus had taken to task those who readily offered and then abused oaths merely as a way to give the (dishonest) impression that they were serious about performing what was promised. In the setting of James' letter, the meaning of his warning turns on the word for “judgement,” which can be read to denote *hypocrisy* (as opposed to condemnation). Regardless of which reading

we use — condemnation or hypocrisy — James is warning us against falling into *practicing* such evil behaviors (i.e., kibitzing or criticizing God for not delivering us sooner; “swearing” that WE would do things differently, etc.).

From his introductory exhortation (Jas. 1:2-3) to the conclusion to his message, we might well say that James “bookends” this letter with patience! The practice of patience is a learned behavior, not an inherent human characteristic, as 2 Peter 1:6 shows. When James tells Christians to “be patient” (in 5:7) his inspired words come in the form of a command — not a suggestion. Patience is not an optional quality for Christians!

CW





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SWSBS

When I was a student at Southwest School of Bible Studies, there were a few fundamental classes that made the Bible come alive. I remember seeing the scaffolding of the Old Testament in the introduction class taught by Carl Garner. Others helped me to see redemption in Leviticus, the land in Bible geography, and the Messiah in Isaiah.

Unfortunately, some today believe the Old Testament is irrelevant. While we know this is not true (Rom. 15:4; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Gal. 3:1-29; etc.), preachers can help the congregation see the relevance of the Old Testament when we preach those texts. Here are some things (borrowed and adapted from many others), to consider when studying and preaching Old Testament texts.

- The Old Testament is not a collection of children's stories.
- The Old Testament is history and historical, but it is not a history book.
- The Old Testament is human (in that it is meant for mankind) and divine (in that it comes from the mind and mouth of God).
- The Old Testament is part of a completed book containing both Old and New Testaments and fits perfectly within itself and within the New Testament.
- One can see and preach the redemptive plan of God in the Old Testament.
- One can see and preach examples of faith and failure in the Old Testament.
- One can see and preach the problem and consequences of sin in the Old Testament.
- One can see and preach the divine actions and attributes of God in the Old Testament.
- One can see and preach the types of Christ (and the church and salvation) in the Old Testament.
- One can see and preach that the Old Testament looks to and longs for the coming Messiah.

When we study and preach the Old Testament, we can show people who God is and what He has done for us. We can help them see Jesus with clarity. We can help them see the struggles and triumphs of lives lived by faith in God. Let us help others by allowing the Old Testament to “come alive” in our preaching, by showing the relevance of every portion of God's Word, and by proclaiming God's eternal Truth!

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