

## THE PATIENCE OF JOB

### JAMES 5 v 10 & 11

**My brothers and sisters, remember the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Take them as examples of patient endurance under suffering. We call them happy because they endured. You have heard of Job's patience, and you know how the Lord provided for him in the end. For the Lord is full of mercy and compassion.**

The English language is full of idioms & expressions that we use in our everyday conversations. Many of them have their origin in the bible. Some are a little obscure; others are very clear. One example of the latter type is, 'The patience of Job'. I'm sure we are all familiar with this expression. You will have heard it said of someone who is dealing with a difficult situation; "John has the patience of Job". The origin of this idiom is found in James 5 v 10-11.

Among the many examples of patience in the Old Testament, Job is selected as the prime one. As someone has said; "**Job is the exemplar of a patient man**". Why is Job famous for his patience? Before we attempt to answer this question, it is necessary for us to understand that the English word 'patience' is not an accurate translation of the Greek word 'hupomone'. It doesn't refer to patience in the sense of being patient with people, but rather it refers to perseverance i.e. 'a steadfast endurance of adverse circumstances in the settled assurance that they are all being governed by the overruling providence of God'. If truth be told Job was not actually a patient man. Indeed he was known for losing his cool on occasions.

The patience of Job, or more accurately, the perseverance of Job, stands out because his story is extreme in the amount of suffering he endured. Job lost all his children and all his wealth in a single day. He was then covered with painful sores. His wife offered him no support. She encouraged him to give up, curse God and die. When Job's three friends, Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz came on the scene to comfort him, they couldn't even recognize him from a distance. Adding to Job's pain, his friends falsely accused him of wrongdoing and blamed his troubles on his unrepentant heart. Throughout all his trials Job retained his steadfast faith in God. At the end of one dreadful day when he lost his entire family and all his animals he fell to the ground in worship and said, "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised*"; Job 1 v 21. Later on, when the pressures upon him had become even greater, Job's trust in God was so firm that he could say, "*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him*"; Job 13 v 15a. It is impossible for us to measure the degree of perseverance Job demonstrated under such severe trials.

James uses Job as a prime example of perseverance in suffering, because of what lay in store for his readers. James wrote this letter sometime around AD 45-47. It was a troubled period. The early church

was suffering many trials. The Christians were in need of steadfast endurance in very difficult circumstances.

With the many forms of suffering facing these early Christians, it was important for them to be reminded that they, like Job, had done nothing to deserve their suffering. Nevertheless, they had to patiently endure for the sake of Christ. Just as Job faced many hardships, they too, would have to face all kinds of hardship in living out their Christian faith. As we have noted in our earlier studies in the book of James this is one of the key themes in the letter.

To this day, the patience of Job serves as an encouragement and inspiration to Christians in many parts of the world who are going times of terrible struggle and suffering. It is equally applicable to each one of us in the particular situation we find ourselves in.

Notice James' comment on Job's experience; v 11c. Job's story only begins to make sense when we realize that through it all God was at work and that his ultimate purposes were loving and kind. Without this thread holding everything together, Job's suffering collapses in a meaningless heap of pain, sorrow and heartache. When we see what the Lord finally brought about, we can see the worst of Job's disasters in their proper perspective. John Calvin said; "**Afflictions ought ever to be estimated by their end**". In Job's case the end was glorious. In terms of material things, we are told in Job 42 v 10, "*After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before*". But Job was blessed in a way far beyond anything of a material nature. His character was completely vindicated and his spiritual experience and understanding enriched beyond measure.

We live in a world full of afflictions and pressures of one kind and another. We are all living with lots of stresses and pressures. There are times when we are tempted to despair and give up. We must never do this. We must keep in mind the end purpose of hardship. At the end of the day, we will be able to look back to our darkest experiences and see in them evidence of the Lord's compassion and mercy. May we all have the patience of Job. What I really mean to say is; May we all have the perseverance of Job.