

JAMES 5:7-12 | WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE KINGDOM, PART 1

VERSE 7 –

James asks his audience to **be patient...unto the coming of the Lord**. He uses the same terminology that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, where the rapture is in view. However, the Greek word *παρουσία* [parousia] is used both of the Second Coming (Matthew 24:27) and of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:15). The word cannot be used to designate which particular return is in context. So also, the body of Christ should **be patient** until the rapture, thus the *patience* is not unique to either rapture or Second Coming. We will have to use the context beyond James 5:7 to build support for our foundational argument that James is written from a Kingdom perspective, and thus will *not* talk about the rapture.

James uses an illustration of **the husbandman** awaiting his harvest and looking for **the early and latter rain**. It is doubtful whether much in terms of theology should be gleaned from that which is given as an *illustration* of the truth presented. To do so causes one to miss the primary point of the text. However, many have made theological conclusions out of the phrase **latter rain**. The phrase is used six times in the Old Testament, in addition to this single use in the New Testament. In four of the six Old Testament usages (Dt. 11:14, Job 29:23, Prov. 16:15, Jer. 3:3) the reference is purely agricultural. In Joel 2:23 and (likely) Zechariah 10:1, the reference is prophetic. Because James is making an agricultural illustration, it seems best to me to take it as part of the agricultural reference. In Joel 2:23 the term is used with reference to the glad times of the coming Messianic age and so is not prophetic of some kind of “last days of the church” latter rain, as taught by the Latter Rain movement (a charismatic movement that started in the early 1900’s).

VERSE 8 –

James emphasizes the need for patience and well-grounded hearts because **the coming of the Lord draweth nigh**. Once again, our study *presumes* the Second Coming, but nothing yet in context *confirms the assumption*.

It is easy to recognize that **draweth nigh** is certainly not a way of saying, “has arrived.” Yet when this same Greek phrase is used of the Kingdom (See Mt. 3:2) it is often translated *at hand* and is often taken as “has arrived.” The Kingdom does not arrive until the Lord has arrived.

Was James wrong, believing the the Lord’s return was near? This dilemma is solved in four ways by various interpreters. First, some say that James was indeed wrong. Typically this interpretation would be taken by those who reject Biblical inerrancy. Second, some say that the Lord’s work through our hearts has accomplished this. This approach would be taken by amillennialists. Third, some spiritualize the words **draweth nigh** to say that “God’s time-clock is different than ours, and a day is as a thousand years....” Such spiritualization would be typical among many evangelicals. Finally, some would say that after this point the Pauline mystery was revealed. The revelation of the mystery explained that the Lord’s return would be delayed. This interpretation is held by those who call themselves “Right Dividers.”

VERSE 9 –

This is the first verse in the context that gives validation that **the coming of the Lord** (v. 7) is the Second Coming and not the rapture. It is at the Second Coming that the Lord comes as **the judge**. The words **standeth before the door** are synonymous with **the Lord draweth nigh**.

The punishment for *grudging against another* is that they would **be condemned**. This is the same word as found in Romans 8:1, which declares that there is **no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**. The *only* way to reconcile these two passages is by right division, in which Romans 8:1 belongs to the age of grace and James 5:9 belongs to the age of the Law. Every other attempt at reconciliation does injustice to language itself. However, rarely does one find a commentary with a right-division perspective. The New American Commentary (a Southern Baptist publication) says that “James warned, however, that if the cursing of a brother took place, the one passing judgment faced the reality of answering for careless judgmental words at God’s judgment.”¹

VERSE 10 –

First using the illustration of **the husbandman** in verse 7, now James uses the example of **the prophets**, describing them as men **who have spoken in the name of the Lord**. They are his second illustration of **patience**, but also **of suffering affliction**.

VERSE 11 –

When James uses the pronoun **them** he is not talking about the prophets of verse 10. Rather, he is moving to a new illustration of sorts, one from everyday life, followed by the example of Job. In a Kingdom economy, there is no greater happiness than to **endure unto the end** (Mt. 24:13).

Job is the icon of patience throughout history. James instructs the Jewish believers to be reminded of this **patience of Job** and reminds them that they have **seen the end of the Lord**. What is this **end of the Lord**? Likely it is still connected to the Job account, and a reminder that Job’s story turned out well. See, for example, Job 42:12. The story reminds us that **the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy**. The word **pitiful** is *full of feeling*. The Oxford English Dictionary gives this first definition of *pitiful*: “Full of or characterized by pity; compassionate, merciful, tender.”²

VERSE 12 –

These words are a quote from Jesus, given in a slightly different manner in Matthew 5:34-37.

Why would James put this **above all things**? Hebrews 6:16 says that **men verily swear by the greater**. To swear, then, is to “call it greater.” And the one who calls the created order or anything in it greater than the Creator will **fall into condemnation**.

¹ Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, vol. 36, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 222.

² "pitiful, adj. and adv." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2022. Web. 23 September 2022.

As so many times before in James, this is not an epistle of grace, but of stern warning requiring works. To make all of these passages to be about “fellowship” or “reward,” as is the case with most evangelical preaching, is really to do disservice to the language of the epistle.