

TEXTS IN DIALOGUE

JAMES 5:11 – A SHORT VERSE AND MANY QUESTIONS

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Is Job indeed said to have been “patient”?

The biblical Job is anything but “patient” throughout all 40 chapters. Only in the framing story we encounter a person who accepts whatever is happening to him. This Job I find utterly provoking. Endure suffering and oppression and injustice just like that? If the letter of James prompts me to do *this*, if *that* is to be the „distinctively Christian thing,“ then I prefer to do without it!

What is it actually written there?

There are different, sometimes contradictory translations of this verse: patience, resilience, perseverance, steadfastness ...

The Greek term ὑπομονή („*hypomoné*“) means staying upright under pressure in an almost unbearable situation: “not letting yourself be crushed” (Elsa Tamez). In the New Testament, the word occurs almost exclusively in contexts dealing with the difficult life situations of the believers in Jesus.

In verse 5:10 (cf. v. 5:7f), there is another word for patience: μακροθυμία („*makrothymía*“), literally: “having a long mind”, endurance. As the example of the farmer (in 5:7) shows, it is about the aspect that in some situations I can do little or nothing. I have to endure that – and still do whatever is possible.

What is “patience” not, and what could it be?

It’s not about keeping my hands still. That would suit some Lords of the world! But that’s not what God wants from us: to accept, to give up, to say yes and amen to everything. In contrast, “*hypomoné*” is an active power of resistance. This inner attitude opposes all oppression with a strength that says: “Violence will not have the last word. We won’t let ourselves be broken. Life will be different.”

What does that have to do with believing in God?

This steadfastness is an attitude that requires strength. Sometimes it helps to know from experience that we have survived difficult times before and have become stronger and wiser afterwards – like the farmer and the gardener who know from their experience that the seed will sprout, even if it takes a long time and I meanwhile can’t do anything.

The letter of James also says: You can rely on this: God is present. God holds the reigns, God’s intervention (“judgment”) puts an end to your misery. This can give us strength for the inner resistance, not to be belittled, not to be fobbed off. For the daily struggle not to give up, not to give in, not to despair.

This brings us back to Job in chapters 3–41, the not-so-patient Job: He stuck to the fact that God is a God of life and justice. He fought and struggled for it, holding up his last spark of vitality. *This “patience of Job”, I would willingly take as a model!*