

LONGSUFFERING

Brian Orchard, March 31, 2023

I put together some material with the Passover particularly and the Days of Unleavened Bread in mind. I'd like to give some material that I hope will be a plus to whatever other material you'll be studying around this first Holy Day period, particularly the Passover.

For those of you who have been around the Church a few years, you'll understand that we have tended to look closely at events in the Middle East. Prophecy takes our focus ultimately down to the Middle East where Christ returns. That's where the great war takes place. But the Middle East is going to be a focal point even before Christ's return.

The Wall Street Journal recently published an article titled "War in the Middle East is closer than you think." It didn't say 'might be closer' it *is* closer than you think. The subhead to that was: "Russia isn't parked, (It's not stopped its development of the war with the Ukraine.) Iran isn't pacified, (t's going ahead full force with its nuclear program.) and both are coordinating strategies with China.'

Russia, Iran, and China, particularly if Iran has nuclear capabilities, is going to become a potent force in the world scene. And given the geography of Russia, China, and Iran, we can see a bull's eye being painted on the political nation of Israel today. Hence, I think we need to keep our minds focused a little more, perhaps on what is developing in the Middle East.

From what I can gather, I don't believe that all we're being told in the press is true and we need to dig a little deeper to get down into the truth of it. But the Palestinians will embrace the Iranians if they can use the Iranians to obliterate Israel, which is their stated goal and desire. And America is not being very strong at the moment in terms of supporting Israel. The trends are more toward supporting the Palestinians. It makes this Passover season that much more valuable in terms of focusing our minds on what is going on at the moment in terms of what God is doing.

The connection between the Father, Jesus Christ, and us is a very powerful one. And that is reinforced as you took or will take the Passover service depending on when you hear this, this year. Christ is the important connection or the important connector that allows a high degree of oneness with the Father.

At this time of year we spend considerable time thinking about Christ's sacrifice and its implications. What I want to do with this material is just add a little bit to it. This is

additional to your thoughts towards this oneness that comes through so powerfully in terms of Christ's sacrifice.

In the final hours before His crucifixion He was totally focused on why He came as a human, the unity of the Father and His creation weighed very heavily on His mind. Oneness was at the forefront. He stated in John chapter 17: 23, near the end of that very focused prayer with His Father that:

John 17:23 I in them, and You in Me; ...

He's not just talking about the disciples because earlier He made it clear that any who are called and brought to Him by the Father from that point on is being included in what He's saying. It's creating a unity between the spiritual and the physical realms that would be a witness to the world, as He said.

23 ... that the world may know...

And it is a very powerful witness to a very divided and fractured world. If God's people could have that oneness of the Elohim family it would be a very powerful witness. This world desperately needs to know the Father. That came through in Christ's thinking prior to His crucifixion.

It means that we have to leave behind those things which have been developed in us by an environment created by the god of this world. And that's why, as we come up to Unleavened Bread it's a time when we think about putting things out and putting something in to replace it. We take on the characteristics of Christ as we are putting off and putting on. A process that is essential for God's intended purpose of creating a family.

One characteristic of God that's exemplified in Christ and therefore to be developed in us is longsuffering. After we are baptized and after we have God's Spirit, Christ lives His life in us through the Holy Spirit. And so, if Christ exemplifies this it's going to have to be exemplified by us in our lives.

Since Christ was the God of the Old Testament, we will begin in the Old Testament and move forward to the time when the Holy Spirit becomes available to the human mind.

We're going to back up to Moses to begin with, we're going back to Exodus 33 because Moses had a unique experience with God. He talked with God. It says God spoke with him face to face as a man speaks to a friend. That's incredible to consider that Moses had that opportunity to talk with God that way. Moses asked God if he could see His glory. That was the tenor of the conversation that Moses felt comfortable to ask, "May I see Your glory."

Exodus 33:18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

That's an incredible request of the Great, Supreme God. it's exemplified in Jesus Christ, of course. The response was, Yes:

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. (He continued to say) I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Moses was about to see the character, the nature of God. The goodness. "My goodness with pass before you. I'll show you a substance of who and what I am" in other words. These qualities that we're going to see expressed by God towards Moses, we will see expressed in Jesus Christ as we come forward. Exodus 34:6:

Exodus 34:6 And the Lord passed before him

He put him in a rock, covered him with His hand because His glory would just fry him. God protected him.

6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

The central quality of being merciful and gracious leads to the central quality of longsuffering. It's really a product of God's mercy and graciousness that He is longsuffering towards us. An interesting Hebrew word, a derivative of 'to be angry'. As I said, it's a derivative of that and it refers to the nose. The Hebrew word of interest here is *Aph*, just *Aph*. It refers to the nose and particularly to the act of breathing rather than the actual organ itself. Anger as expressed in the appearance of the nostrils. When somebody is angry they're breathing hard.

This thought is from the Theological Wordbook, 'that God takes a deep breath as He holds His anger in abeyance'. Longsuffering, God takes a deep breath and holds His anger in abeyance. There are many times when God gets angry that is completely justified anger on God's part. But there are many accounts of where He withholds that anger. He is long of breath, longsuffering. There is an example in Nehemiah 9:15-21:

Nehemiah 9:15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, And told them to go in to possess the land Which You had sworn to give them. (This is God's plan. He's being gracious, He's being merciful to His people.)

16 "But they and our fathers acted proudly, Hardened their necks, And did not heed Your commandments.

17 They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks, And in their rebellion They appointed a leader To return to their bondage. But You are God, Ready to pardon,

Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them.

Here is a situation where, if we read it correctly, God had every right to be angry with these people for what He was doing with them and their response. They turned their back on Him. It says He was slow to anger.

18 "Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, And said, 'This is your god That brought you up out of Egypt,' And worked great provocations,

19 Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, To lead them on the road; Nor the pillar of fire by night, To show them light, And the way they should go.

20 You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, And gave them water for their thirst.

21 Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell. Verse 30-31:

30 Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful.

A very important aspect of God's longsuffering, we cut it down a bit but enough to get the flow, the feeling of God's graciousness and Israel's rebelliousness, what is the key? Verses 26, 29:

26 "... Cast Your law behind their backs...

God gave them His law, He gave them a covenant, promises, wonderful blessings and they didn't want anything to do with it. So, you drop down to verse 29 and we get a very good definition of what God is longsuffering.

29 ... That You might bring them back to Your law...

That's why God is longsuffering. God allows space for repentance. He did that many times with the nation of Israel. In Psalm 86, Israel misread God's longsuffering as permission to continue to do some of the things that they were doing. But that's human nature:

Psalm 86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

This is a quality of God that is a beautiful quality but it's for our good, He expresses it for our good. The longsuffering, what does that do for God? Essentially nothing. It's just a

characteristic of who and what He is. But when He expresses it, it becomes a great benefit to whoever He is expressing it. Psalm 103: 6 it tells us that:

Psalms 103:6 The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.

14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

God's longsuffering is associated with mercy, and it equates with pity as we read here. Mercy in verse 11 and pity in verse 13. It means to have compassion, or empathy. It says here "He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. That is mercy and that is pity that He understands, and He can put Himself in our shoes and understand some of the things that we're going through and experiencing. This is the Being who was God, who was with God and became human knowing that we needed a Savior.

You might want to take some time, to study, Psalm 136 because it's interesting tying mercy and pity in here. It's a song and it has a refrain to every verse which is, "His mercy endures forever."

You might want to take a little time to look at verses 10 - 22 because in that section, we have the plan of salvation as acted out by Israel. And every verse, every statement is backed up with "His mercy never fails."

In verse 10 "To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn." There you've got the original Passover service and the freedom being given to Israel to come out of Egypt. "He brought out Israel from among them," He made Israel pass through the midst of the sea, it talks about here. He overthrew Pharaoh and his army. You come down to the various kings of the areas that Israel passed through on their journey. It talks about the Amorites, it talks about Og, king of Bashan. It comes down to:

21 And gave their land as a heritage...

22 A heritage to Israel His servant...

Moving Israel to the Promised Land was a type of the Kingdom of God. But after every point he made here, "His mercy endures forever." Maybe you just want to spend a little time and think about that yourself. It's the plan of salvation being laid out and it's a merciful act of God that He has not lost patience with humankind. He's very, very compassionate for our lot in life, so to speak. From Egypt to the Land of Promise God's longsuffering is on display here. Let's just break this down for a moment if we could. What can we get a little more specific about? What does this do for us, this longsuffering of God? Firstly:

1. **God's longsuffering provides hope.**

The longsuffering that God exhibits towards mankind, the example of Israel provides hope. Hope is in the space for repentance. God always allows enough space for repentance. He's not so harsh and cruel that one foot over the line and He slams you. He will warn and He will give every opportunity for somebody to come to repentance. He did with Israel over and over and over. Look at Jonah to pick up an example:

Jonah 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Here is a situation where I would say God would be justified in what He's going to do. He's going to wipe out Nineveh. And I think with good justification. It's not an evil act. It's a just act on God's part. It tells you, "the wickedness has come up before Me."

Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

I don't think Jonah was expecting this particular response from the people.

6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, (Declare a fast throughout the city.)

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

He gave them space for repentance and in this case they took the graciousness of God and did something about it. So, God withheld what He intended to do. God took a deep breath and held His anger in abeyance. Even though His anger was justified He was longsuffering with the people of Nineveh. This godly characteristic is going to be on display in the future. Joel refers to the future by referring to the Day of the Lord:

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the Lord is coming, For it is at hand:

Here is a situation coming up in the future. What is God wanting? Is it just an expression of His anger? He can't hold back His wrath.

12 "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.

We just saw that example. God is very responsive to repentance, very responsive to repentance where something wrong is being put out and something right is being put in, just in the simplest sense. Another factor that I could read into this here is:

2. God's longsuffering serves as a warning.

It serves as a warning. It's wrapped up in this space that God gives for repentance. He wants something to be produced, not just bringing something to an end. He wants something positive to take place.

Numbers 14:11 Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?"

12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

Justified anger is what I am calling this. That is not wrong. God does not do something that is not just. It's justified for Him to go ahead and carry that out. But in verse 17 Moses is interceding on behalf of the people:

17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying,

18 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.'

19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

He goes on to say if You just wipe these people out what kind of an example is that to everybody roundabout. The people You are trying to give a good example are going to say, "We want nothing to do with that God." He intercedes. These people had space to repent but they didn't. They didn't take the opportunity. They didn't heed the warning

that God had given them. These people are representative of carnality, I suppose you could say.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

That's the attitude of longsuffering. That's what God wants. That's why He expresses longsuffering as a characteristic or an attribute of His nature. The intent of God's heart is very clear. It's not weakness on His part. He's wanting a positive result after He expresses longsuffering. But we need to understand that space is not grace. Don't misread God's longsuffering as approval.

Maybe I'm stepping ahead a little bit early here, but we need to be very careful that, sometimes we know we've crossed the line and there's not a thunderbolt, there's not a lightning strike. Nothing happens but we've crossed the line. Nothing happens. It's easier to cross the line the second time. Easier the third time and before long you're on the other side of the line but your life hasn't come to an end. You're not a piece of ash on the ground. And you can misread God's longsuffering.

Let us bring it forward into the New Testament. As you would expect, the Greek gives exactly the same understanding of longsuffering. It's using a Greek word, *makrothumia*, meaning long temper. In reference to God the same understanding is carried forward.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

They were not heeding God's longsuffering. They were reading into it license instead of grace. "Knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance." God expresses longsuffering on a personal basis here rather than national. That's one difference already we can see from the Old Testament to the New Testament. All of the examples we read in the Old Testament were essentially toward the nation of Israel. When it comes to the New Testament you could say it's towards the Church but it's more towards the individuals that make up the Church:

Romans 9:20 ... Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"

21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory...

The reading of it here is He could have exercised His anger. He had good reason to, but He exercised longsuffering instead. Here He's trying to bring the Gentiles into the scope of the plan of salvation. What if these circumstances justified God's anger but rather He takes a deep breath and holds His anger in abeyance? He makes known the more important aspects of His glory and mercy.

However, as we factor in Christ's death and our reconciliation we must factor in the same character attribute to ourselves. The obvious are the fruits of the Spirit. This is why around this time of Passover and Unleavened Bread we need to think about some of these things because we have a new life that Christ has given us through His death, through His sacrifice, through His resurrection. Some of these characteristics we just don't stand back and say, "Well, that's God." It's Christ in us. These characteristics, you and I have to learn to develop.

In Galatians 5:22 we see that 'longsuffering' is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit:

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace (all these things flow from God), **longsuffering** (right there), **kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

Colossians 1:11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power (he's talking about us human beings), **for all patience and longsuffering with joy;**

We need to be fruitful in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God. Now we see longsuffering is not just a quality of God. Quoting Vines Expository:

"Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger and is associated with mercy." That's talking to us. It's not talking about Jesus Christ. We have to have this quality of self-restraint.

I think we're living in a society that is going to test our patience to the Nth degree. It's going to be very easy for us *not* to exhibit self-restraint because there are going to be a lot around us going on, maybe happening to us that justify anger. And anger of itself isn't wrong. It's how it's handled. But there's going to be a lot of things in this world that are so anti-God and so anti-God's way of life that we are going to have a difficult time with. We are probably already. But it's only going to intensify. We need to think about this quality of longsuffering. The ability to take a deep breath and not just respond straight off with anger.

1 Timothy 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,

13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

God's dealing with Paul showed a pattern that we can be deeply encouraged by: "I'm the chief." (We all know what Paul did when he was named Saul, how he treated the people of God and killed them and persecuted them and so on.) So, he said we look at how God dealt with him, God's longsuffering, and be encouraged that God is willing to give us the same degree of longsuffering. Christ's longsuffering offers mercy to each one of us. This is a great source of hope for us, or you can turn it around the other way, hope helps us be longsuffering.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit...

So we can see that even though we have been justified by faith we are going to experience tribulations because those difficult times develop strong, godly characteristics within us. But what helps us? Hope. Hope does not disappoint. It doesn't take away the tribulations. It doesn't take away the hardness of perseverance and character and so on. Hope helps us see beyond that which is going on which is hard to bear. That which will produce anger, perhaps in us. Hope allows us to see a purpose, really, of what's going on here. And what's going on here is, as I said, going to intensify because that's just what the Bible says. That's what God says. We're going to go through tough times. Are you going to get angry? Or are you going to take a deep breath and hold that anger in and allow God to do His work?

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Then it talks about)

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

And you can wrap all kinds of things up in the creation itself, human life, the world. All of this hardness of being a physical human being in a deteriorating, satanic world. Hope lifts you out of that:

24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

These things flow in together. Hope of the glory to be revealed lifts us above the sufferings of this present time. We don't get angry. We don't get upset with God because something negative is happening within our lives. The longsuffering that we put into practice as a result of Christ's sacrifice and our receiving God's Spirit lets us see with hope and hope encourages us to be longsuffering.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (How important is that?)

15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

Space for us to get our act together to respond to...here we are coming up to Passover and Unleavened Bread. We're examining ourselves. We're looking at ourselves. We're realizing there's still changes that need to be made. So, God gives us space to deal with these things. It's not open ended. There is a time coming when these things will move in and God will say, "Time. That's enough. You've had enough time." But there will be enough time. That's the point. God is not willing that any should perish. We will all have the experience of God's longsuffering so that we can produce good fruit.

It is an attribute of God that He extends to us to enable us to be motivated to value the salvation that we have through Christ.

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,

12 that you do not become sluggish (or lazy as the margin says), but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The word here is *makrothumia*, longsuffering. ‘through faith and longsuffering inherit the promises.’

Let’s be mindful as we are in these days to think about what it means, “I in them, and You in Me”. It means that the longsuffering of God becomes a character attribute that we are to have. Draw from God’s longsuffering to fuel our personal ability to overcome, to change, to develop.

I’m hoping that as you think about Passover, you are examining yourselves. You are thinking more deeply about the personal aspects of this season and in it is some incredible promises for us as far as eternal life in God’s family is concerned. But we’ve got some space and we need to use it. And we need to realize that it’s closing in.

‘War in the Middle East is closer than you think’. And you add to that the suddenness that Jesus Christ talked about in Matthew 24. Everything is going to come together quickly. Then we need to use this space that we have. We need to be people who can hold our temper, not get angry and just fly off the handle quickly. I think the environment around us lends itself to that, promoting that. We need to take a deep breath and just slowly contemplate the situation and let God handle it. Have faith, trust and in hope look forward to Christ’s return very, very soon.

I wish you all a meaningful Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.