

## God is Longsuffering (Pt.1 Longsuffering)

Today we will begin a new study where we will look at the word *longsuffering* in the Holy Scriptures. We suggest however, that you do not attempt this study with an NIV or Good News version of the Holy Scriptures because the word *longsuffering* does not appear. However, in the Holy Scriptures the word *longsuffering* appears seventeen times, four of those in the Old Testament and thirteen times in the New Testament. Let us consider a meaning from within the Scriptures and also include a dictionary meaning.

In the Old Testament there are two Hebrew words that are translated *longsuffering*; (i) *arek*, which is also translated *longwinged, patient and slow to anger*, and ii) *aph* which is also translated *to be angry; before, countenance, face, forbearing, forehead, nose, nostril and snout*.

In the New Testament there are two Greek words that are translated *longsuffering*; (i) *Makrothumea* which is also translated *patience*, and ii) *Makrothumeo* which is also translated *bear long, have long patience, be patient, patiently endure and suffer long*. The dictionary meaning includes; "having or showing patience in spite of troubles, esp. those caused by other people".

From the Scriptures we can say that *longsuffering* means; forbearance, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, compassion and grace (Rom.2: 4).

In this study we will cover four points; (1) the Lord God is longsuffering, and (2) the Lord shows His longsuffering by enduring the wicked and (3) the Lord shows His longsuffering by not wanting any to perish, and (4) the Lord shows His longsuffering in His salvation.

Let us add a little detail to our points:-

### 1. The Lord God is longsuffering.

Ex.34: 6 *And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*

See also Num.14: 18

Other examples in Scripture where God shows His longsuffering: (i) in the days of Noah (see 1Pet.3: 20), and (ii) during Israel's journey in the wilderness when he showed His power, time after time, yet the people rebelled and were a stiffnecked people (see Ez.20: 13 & 14), and (iii) during Israel's time in the land, when they received the land full of milk and honey, then after each judge died they did that which was right in their own eyes (Judg.21: 25 cp. 2Kg.17: 13). Included in this point is the fact that the Lord is FULL of longsuffering (see Ps.86: 15).

Ask the Muslim if Allah is full of longsuffering to those on the earth, to the non-Muslim. And if he is, why do his followers believe they are doing his work when they kill the infidel or kidnap hundreds of school girls?

Ask the Buddhist if his idol Buddha is longsuffering. Because I cannot understand how a piece of wood can be patient to a human being's sin, given that it was made by human hands, in a similar way that the children of Israel would *not* have known the longsuffering of the golden calf *they* made by their hands, in the wilderness.

Do you see your God as being longsuffering? Because the Holy Scriptures proclaim that God Almighty *is* longsuffering.

Let us now consider the ways in which God Almighty of the Bible shows His longsuffering in our next three points.

### 2. The Lord shows His longsuffering by enduring the wicked.

Rom.9: 22 *[What] if God, willing to shew [his] wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:*

Verse 22 is a question that doesn't end in this verse, or the next, but rather the question ends in verse 24. And remember that the question is a "what if" question, similar to that in 1Sam.20: 10, Eze.21: 13, Mk.8: 36 or Lk.9: 25, therefore, it is a rhetorical question.

Now let us go back to our question and finish it as it is recorded in the Holy Scriptures:- Rom.9: 22, 23 & 24 "[What] if God, willing to shew [his] wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory. Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" And in the preceding verses he had referenced verses in Is.29: 16 and 64: 8 regarding the potter having power over the clay and

not vice versa. All to show a comparison between those who are raised up to destruction that God might show His power; and others that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy. And it is on the first group, those who are wicked, that God raises up to show His power. He wants them to repent and He gives them enough opportunities to repent, just as he did Pharaoh, because He hates sin, and He desires that they would *turn* from their sin, as He did Israel when they sinned. But when Israel rebelled time and time again in the wilderness, He showed His wrath. Yet, He was also longsuffering toward them, because He put up with their sin (see Ex.32: 9-14), and He said of Israel that their feet shall slide in due time (see Deut.32: 35), and it was only by His mercy (Ps.94: 18), His longsuffering and enduring of their sin, that they did not go down to hell before.

Every time a lost man says he does not believe God, that he gives the scientists the glory of creation, or human life, every time they glorify Him *not*, God is enduring their sin with much longsuffering. He could simply send them to hell at any moment, He would be justified in doing so, just as He did with Ananias and Sapphira his wife when they both gave up the ghost in Acts chapter 5.

Every time a lost man calls himself a woman and denies his Maker, God is longsuffering toward them by not allowing their feet to slide immediately into hellfire.

Every time a lost man votes to put through a Bill in Parliament that sets a law contrary to the Scriptures and denies His Maker, the Lord God Almighty is longsuffering toward them, by not allowing their feet to take their natural course and slide into the pit of destruction.

But instead of sending every non-believer to hell straight away when they give not God the glory, or thank Him not (see Rom.1: 21), He allows them to stay on the earth another week or month or year, in doing so, He is longsuffering toward their wickedness, even though He has the power to simply flick them off the face of the earth, as if they were never there.

Let us be fervent in season and out of season, telling the lost of God's forbearance of their sin, His longsuffering of their wickedness, and encourage them to repent *now*, and believe the good news of Christ crucified in their hearts. Because they never know which day the Lord God will cease to withhold His hand from them slipping into hellfire. Let us remember that believers do not know either, when God will remove His hand from the wicked, hence even a lost man on his death bed still has the choice to believe or reject and for those that choose life and believe on their death bed, they too have come to that realisation that God *is* longsuffering to the wicked every day He endures their sin.

### 3. The Lord shows His longsuffering by not wanting any to perish.

2Pet.3: 9 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

See also Jer.15: 15.

In 2Pet.3: 9 we see God's perfect will is for *all* men everywhere to come to repentance, for everyone to know His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and believe that He bore their sin on Himself. This desire of God is linked to a promise, and God is not slack concerning His promises,. Therefore, He is (a) longsuffering to us-ward, and (b) He commands all men every where is to repent (Acts 17: 30). Therefore, God desires that men should repent and he commands all men to repent, and in both, He shows His longsuffering by not wanting any to perish in hellfire.

It is similar to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that He would bring them into the Promised land. Along the journey there are those who reject God and place their trust in idols. God doesn't want them to trust in idols, because He is a jealous God. Therefore, one whole generation of Israelites did not make it into the Promised land, their carcasses were buried in the wilderness for their unbelief. Yet, Israel still entered into the Promised land and God fulfilled His promise.

How does God honour His promises? In longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish. But in honouring His promises he does not take away our free will to impose His will, but rather He gave us (those that are sinners) a way out, He gave us a perfect sacrifice, He gave us His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn.3: 16). God honours His promise by giving us a way out of our sin, a remedy for our flesh, that by its very nature transgresses His commandments. The only thing a lost person has to do is to believe His Son, receive His free gift, and repent of His sin and turn from it toward God (Acts 26: 20).

When I was walking in sin, when I was free from righteousness, when I was a lost sinner on my way to destruction, God was longsuffering toward me. And after my conversion, God still is longsuffering toward me when my flesh wars with the Spirit (Ga.5: 17).

Is that what you have found as well?

And remember that just because God is longsuffering to the heathen and does *not* want them to go to hell, everyone still chooses for himself whether to believe God or not, and so *not* all will be saved simply because God is a God of love (see 1Jn.4: 8), and He is longsuffering. Yet, many of the modern-day colleges teach that God is not willing that any should perish and so everyone goes to heaven because of God's love and His longsuffering. But He *will* show His wrath (according to our previous point) to those who reject His free gift of His Son (see Jn.3: 36). So given that God shows His longsuffering by not wanting any to perish, let us do our part and share the gospel with as many as we can, to sow seeds of the gospel of Christ in the hearts of the lost, such that there will be some that see their sin and believe the gospel of Christ. In doing so we will acknowledge that God does *not* want the lost to perish in hell for eternity.

#### 4.The Lord shows His longsuffering in salvation He provides.

2Pet.3: 15 *And account [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

Our final point is the cumulation of God's longsuffering, His forbearance, such that our verse says the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, and therefore we say that the Lord shows His longsuffering in His salvation.

Every time God saved Israel from their enemies, He also showed His forbearance. When God raised up a Judge to save Israel from their enemies, He showed His longsuffering. When Christ died on the cross for our sins, and was buried and rose again on the third day, God the Father showed His longsuffering. Why? (a) Because the Bible says so in our verse, and (b) because before God saved them, He was longsuffering to their sin.

For example, when He gave Israel water to drink in the wilderness, to save them from dying of thirst, He had previously put up with their murmuring against Him. When a man receives God today he doesn't come to God because he is well, for the healthy do not require a physician, but the sick do (see Matt.9: 19), and those that come to God have previously murmured against Him, they have rejected Him, they have blasphemed His name, glorified Him not, and neither have they been thankful. And God was longsuffering in their sin. At the moment of salvation God washes away their sin with the blood of Christ, He then imputes them with the righteousness of Christ. Hence, He shows His longsuffering, His forbearance, when they get saved, as the person's spiritual eyes are open, and for the first time they see that their God has been longsuffering toward them.

For those who preach or evangelise and use their own testimony as one of the tools in sharing Christ, they will be familiar with their story of "rags", (sin) to "riches" (saved sinner), where the memory of their past sin is forever embedded in their soul and mind, and they tend to acknowledge the longsuffering nature of God as He waited patiently for them to come to the point of repentance and trusting in Christ for their salvation. For the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation. For those who do not have such a vivid story, a colourful history where they were transformed from utter darkness into Light, then may you remember those like Saul (Paul) who persecuted Christians, throwing men and women into prison (Acts 8: 3), yet did so in ignorance (see Acts 3: 17). Paul knew that "Jesus Christ: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (Rom.3: 24b & 25), and he remembered that God was longsuffering to him and this realisation came when he was saved. Let us remember that the Lord shows his longsuffering in His salvation.

In this study we have looked at the word *longsuffering* in the Holy Scriptures and established a meaning of *patience*, and *forbearance*, and have covered four points; (1) the Lord God is longsuffering, and (2) the Lord shows His longsuffering by enduring the wicked and (3) the Lord shows His longsuffering by not wanting any to perish, and (4) the Lord shows His longsuffering in His salvation

(This is why we are to be longsuffering, refer to our next study in this series).