

## “Longsuffering”

*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. I:704-705. [1915]

The word “longsuffering” occurs in the English NT in Luke 18:7 (RV only; AV “bear long with”), Rom. 2:4, 9:22, 1 Cor. 13:4, 2 Cor. 6:6, Gal. 5:22, Eph. 4:2, Col. 1:11, 3:12, 1 Thess. 5:14 (RV only; AV “patient”), 1 Tim. 1:16, 2 Tim. 3:10, 4:2, 1 Pet. 3:20, 2 Pet. 3:9, 15. The Greek words corresponding to this are μακροθυμος, μακροθυμια, μακροθυμειν. These forms, however, occur in the original in a number of passages, where the English Bible (both AV and RV) has as their rendering “patient,” “patiently,” “patience” (Matt. 18:26, Acts 26:3, Heb. 6:12, 15, James 5:7, 8, 10). In the LXX the word occurs in the following passages: Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18, Neh. 9:17, Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Prov. 14:29, 15:18, 16:32, 19:11, 25:15, Ecc. 7:8, Jer. 15:15, Joel 2:13, Jon. 4:2, Nah. 1:3. In all these passages the Hebrew has אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם, or the noun-form of the same word. Besides these there are four instances where the LXX renders by μακροθυμια other Hebrew words, or is based on a different Hebrew text, so that the conception does not occur in the English Bible. These are Job 7:16, Prov. 17:27, Isa. 57:15, Dan. 4:24. μακροθυμια is a word belonging to the later Greek.

The Hebrew אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם and the Greek μακροθυμος absolutely coincide in their verbal structure. None the less there is to be noted a difference in the basic figure underlying each, which will explain the difference in usage. The Hebrew אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם specifically means “anger,” “wrath,” and accordingly the אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם is one who is “long,” in the sense of “long-delaying” his anger; hence in many cases the word is rendered by “slow to anger” in the English Bible. On the other hand, θυμος in μακροθυμος does not specifically denote “anger,” but has the general meaning of “temper,” although it can also have the former specialized sense. A μακροθυμος is therefore he who keeps his temper long, and this can be understood with reference to willful provocation by man, in which case it will mean the exercise of restraint from anger; or with reference to trying circumstances and persons, in which case it will mean the exercise of patience. The Greek term thus comes to have a double meaning whilst the Hebrew equivalent has only one, never being used in the sense of “patience.” Jer. 15:15 is no exception to this, for when the prophet here prays, “Take me not away in thy longsuffering,” he relates the longsuffering to his persecutors, and expresses the fear that God’s deferring their punishment may result in his own death.

μακροθυμια is in the NT employed in both senses – that of “longsuffering” and that of “patience” – with reference to both God and man. The only instance of the meaning “patience” in its application to God seems to be Luke 18:7. Here it is said that God will “avenge his elect that cry to him day and night (και μακροθυμει επι αυτοις) although he is longsuffering over them.” The αυτοις does not have for its antecedent the persecutors of the elect, but the elect themselves. The meaning is that God proceeds slowly and patiently in attending to their case (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9: βραδυνει, “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise”). In all other cases the word when used of God denotes specifically the restraint of His anger and the deferring of the execution thereof (= οργη); thus Rom. 2:4, 9:22, 1 Tim. 1:16, 1 Pet. 3:20.

This Divine longsuffering is exercised with a two-fold purpose: (a) to give its objects time for repentance (Rom. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9, 15); (b) to gain time and prepare the opportunity for the execution of His purpose in other respects (Rom. 9:22; here the “enduring with longsuffering of the vessels of wrath” is placed side by side with the purpose of God [θελειν] to show His wrath, and the μακροθυμια

does not imply a reversal or suspense of this purpose [so Weiss], but simply a delay in its execution, among other things for the reason stated in v. 23, “that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy”).

μακροθυμια as exercised by men towards men may be both “longsuffering” and “patience.” It is not always easy to tell with certainty which of the two is in the mind of the writer, but in a case like Col. 1:11, where υπομονη, “patience,” and μακροθυμια, “longsuffering,” occur together, the meaning is plain. Trench (*NT Synonyms*, 1876, p. 191) observes that μακροθυμια always refers to persons, never to things. This is not quite correct, for Heb. 6:12, 15 proves that it can be used in respect to circumstances or things as well as to persons. Patience can be exercised with reference to trying persons as well as to trying circumstances; and, from the nature of the case, where the former happens the distinction between “longsuffering” and “patience” will become more or less a fleeting one and the line will be hard to draw (cf. Gal. 5:22, Eph. 4:2, Col. 1:11, 3:12, 1 Thess. 5:14, 2 Tim. 3:10, 2 Pet. 3:15 on the one hand with James 5:7, 8, 10 on the other).

μακροθυμια in the sense of “longsuffering” has for its synonym ανοχη; in the sense of “patience,” υπομονη. The difference between μακροθυμια and ανοχη (Rom. 2:4, 3:26) seems to be that in ανοχη the idea of the temporariness of the suspension of punishment is given with the word as such, whereas μακροθυμια, so far as the word is concerned, might be never exhausted. As to υπομονη, this differs from μακροθυμια in having an element of positive heroic endurance in it, whilst the patience called μακροθυμια is a more negative conception which denotes the absence of a spirit of resistance and rebellion. As stated above, μακροθυμια occurs of God at least once in the sense of “patience”; υπομονη is nowhere ascribed to God. θεος της υπομονης (Rom. 15:5) is not “the God who shows patience,” but “the God who gives patience” (cf. Rom. 15:13, Heb. 13:20, 1 Pet. 5:10). It is predicated of Jesus in 2 Thess. 3:5, Heb. 12:1, 2.