

James Chapter 5

Verses 1-6

“Ye rich men”:

James’s common address, “brethren”: is not found once in this section.

By contrast, it occurs four times (in verses 7-12).

James is now addressing wealthy, unsaved Jews who have poor Jews working for them.

They have mistreated the poor, so God’s judgment will fall on them.

James 5:1 "Go to now, [ye] rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon [you]."

“Rich”:

Those with more than they need to live.

James condemns them not for being wealthy, but for misusing their resources.

Unlike the unbelieving rich in Timothy’s congregation (1 Tim. 6:17-19), these are the wicked wealthy who profess Christian faith and have associated themselves with the church, but whose real god is money.

For prostituting the goodness and generosity of God, they can anticipate only divine punishment (see verse 5).

The rich man spoken of here, is the rich man who has no regard for others.

This would be a rich man that would be cruel to his employees.

This would be also, a man who would push any of his fellowmen down to acquire his riches.

The only problem this man has is not just that he is rich, but is the fact of what he is doing with his wealth.

The miseries that will come upon him are for the way he has treated his fellowman.

Verses 2-3

“Corrupted ... moth-eaten ... rust”:

James points out the folly of hoarding food, expensive clothing, or money, all of which is subject to decay, theft, fire and other forms of loss.

James 5:2 "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten."

We know that the rich man here, must have attained the riches in a corrupt manner.

This would be a man who put his wealth ahead of everyone and everything.

It is not the riches that are evil, but the use of the riches by this corrupt man.

James 5:3 "Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days."

“Last days”:

The period between Christ’s first and second comings.

James rebukes the rich for living as if Jesus were never coming back.

Ironically, they have stored up treasure for their “last days” (retirement), which God will use against them in the last days.

Look with me at the following Scriptures, and see what Jesus had to say about this very thing.

Matthew 6:19-21 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:" "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:" "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

We do know that there is nothing wrong with silver and gold in their selves.

God established them as blessings from God, back in Genesis.

He established gold, silver, and cattle as true value.

Even the fact that silver means redemption and gold symbolizes the purity of God, tells us that the metal is not bad.

It is our use, or rather misuse, that is bad.

We see (in verse 3 above), that this rich man, spoken of here, is putting his faith in the gold and silver, rather than in God.

All of the gold and silver in the world will not save a person from the wrath of God.

It is not wrong, however, to own silver and gold.

In fact, they are the only true money.

James 5:4 "Behold, the hire of the laborer's who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

"Hire ... you kept back":

The rich had gained some of their wealth by oppressing and defrauding their day laborers, a practice strictly forbidden in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15).

"The Lord of Sabaoth":

Meaning the Lord of Hosts (i.e. of armies), this describes the omnipotent, avenging character of the God.

The One who hears the cries of the defrauded laborers, James warns, is the Lord of hosts (a name for God used frequently in the Old Testament), the commander of the armies of heaven (angels).

The Bible teaches that angels will be involved in the judgment of unbelievers (Matt. 13:39-41, 49; 16:27).

Now, we see where the sin comes in.

This man is so greedy that he has not even paid the wages to the people who harvested his fields.

God will not let this go unnoticed.

In our society today, this is the first thing a person must pay.

James 5:5 "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter."

"Lived in pleasure ... been wanton": "lived in pleasure":

This leads to vice when a person becomes consumed with the pursuit of pleasure, since a life without self-denial soon becomes out of control in every area.

After robbing their workers to accumulate their wealth, the rich indulged themselves in an extravagant lifestyle.

"A day of slaughter":

Like fattened cattle ready to be slaughtered, the rich that James condemns had indulged themselves to the limit.

This is a vivid depiction of divine judgment, in keeping with the metaphor likening the overindulgent rich to fattened cattle.

We see the character of this rich man is under attack here.

"Wanton":

This means to live in pleasure.

You can see that this is extreme, because it is expressed twice in the verse above.

This means that this man throws extravagant parties and lives extravagantly, as well.

He has no regard for the feeling of others.

His earthly pleasure is all that interests him.

This day of slaughter, reminds us of the Scripture speaking of the days of Noah. They were eating, and drinking, not having any regard for God.

This seems to be the life style here as well.

This is a very fleshly man who pleases only his own flesh.

James 5:6 "Ye have condemned [and] killed the just; [and] he doth not resist you."

"Condemned ... killed the just":

This describes the next step in the sinful progression of the rich.

Hoarding led to fraud, which led to self-indulgence.

Finally, overindulgence has consumed the rich to the point that they will do anything to sustain their lifestyle.

"Condemned":

This comes from a word meaning "to sentence."

The implication is that the rich were using the courts to commit judicial murder (2:8).

This is just how bad this man's sin has become.

Of course, this could be not only saying that this man killed to get his money, but also, he helped nail Jesus to the cross for his sin.

In the case of Jesus (the Just One), we all nailed him to the cross with our sin.

Verses 7-8

“The coming of the Lord”:

Few doctrines concerning Jesus Christ are taught in James.

His vicarious death and resurrection are omitted, yet Christ’s return is cited for us to encourage patient endurance.

“Early and latter rain”:

Farmers in Palestine absolutely depended on two rainy seasons, both late fall and mid-spring, for their crops.

James 5:7 "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain."

“Patient”:

The word emphasizes patience with people (1 Tim. 5:14), not trials or circumstances (as in 1:3).

Specifically, James has in mind patience with the oppressive rich.

“The coming”:

The second coming of Christ (Mathew 24:3).

Realizing the glory that awaits them at Christ’s return should motivate believers to patiently endure mistreatment (Rom. 8:18).

“The early and latter rain”:

The “early” rain falls in Israel during October and November and softens the ground for planting.

The “late” rain falls in March and April, immediately before the spring harvest.

Just as the farmer waits patiently from the early rain to the latter for his crop to ripen, so must Christians patiently wait for the Lord’s return (Gal. 6:9; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13).

We see from this an encouragement to wait patiently on the coming of the Lord.

It seems in this part of the world that James is writing to, the rain came early in planting time and then the rains came again at harvest time.

Many believe the early and latter rain, spoken of here, is speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God.

In the Spiritual sense, this could certainly be.

The fruit of the Spirit goes along with the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

It is the rain (Spirit), which makes the beautiful fruit.

We also know, that those you win to Christ, many times are spoken of as the fruit of the harvest.

We should not get impatient, when we plant the seed (Word of God), it takes time for it to take hold and produce fruit.

James 5:8 "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

“Stablish your hearts”:

A call for resolute, firm courage and commitment.

James exhorts those about to collapse under the weight of persecution to shore up their hearts with the hope of the second coming.

“Nigh”:

The immanency of Christ’s return is a frequent theme in the New Testament (Romans 13:12; Heb. 10:25; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18).

James, as many other of the penmen, realizes that the great work of salvation which takes place in the heart.

It is the heart that must be stayed upon God.

2 Thessalonians 3:5 "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

James 5:9 "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."

"Grudge", in the verse above, means to murmur.

God does not like murmuring.

He does not like anyone holding a grudge either.

He says, when you come to the altar, forgive others first, and then come to the altar.

James pictured Christ as a judge about to open the doors to the courtroom and convene His court.

Knowing that the strain of persecution could lead to grumbling, James cautioned his readers against the sin (Philippians 2:14), lest they forfeit their full reward (2 John 8).

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

Whatever judgment you make on others, is the same judgment God will use on you.

The Lord Jesus is the Judge that standeth at the door.

He is the True Judge.

James 5:10 "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

Job is the best example I can think of for patience and enduring suffering.

He kept the faith in terrible suffering in the loss of his children, and even unto the pain and suffering in his own body.

His suffering was not in vain.

God rewarded him greatly for keeping the faith.

Most of the prophets were martyred for their belief.

The historians tell us that Isaiah was sawed in two.

All of the prophets before us are examples to us that we can wait with patience.

The following is what Jesus said about this very thing.

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

James Chapter 5 Questions

1. Why will the rich man in verse 1 weep and howl?
2. What kind of man is this rich man of verse 1?
3. Why will these miseries come upon him?
4. Your riches are _____, and your garments are _____.
5. It is not the riches that are evil, but what?
6. He had heaped treasure up for when?
7. Where your treasure is, there will your _____ be also.
8. What does silver mean spiritually?
9. What does gold symbolize?
10. What is paper money?
11. What had reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth?
12. What is the man's real sin?
13. What does "wanton" mean?
14. The fact that something is said twice in one Scripture indicates what?
15. Describe this rich man's life style.
16. What is the only thing this man is interested in pleasing?
17. How bad had his sin become?
18. Who really nailed Jesus to the cross?
19. ____ therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.
20. What do many believe the early and latter rain are speaking of?
21. What does the fruit of the Spirit go along with?
22. What could the rain be speaking of here?
23. James told them to stablish their _____.
24. Why were they to do this?
25. Why should you not grudge against another?

26. What does the word "grudge" mean here?
27. What are we to do, if we have anything against someone, before we come to the altar?
28. How will we be judged?
29. Who, in the Old Testament, is a very good example of waiting patiently and of overcoming suffering?