

James 5:1-12

James 5:1-12 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! (2) Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. (4) Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (5) You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. (7) Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. (8) You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (9) Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (10) My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. (11) Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord; that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (12) But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

Questions On The Text

What criticisms does James have of rich people?

Verses 1-6: First, he says that they have heaped up treasure in the last days referring to the current age of grace. He points out that the valuables of this life are constantly devaluing through corrosion or corruption. Precious metals corrode, food rots, and clothing deteriorates or becomes food for moths. These are three classes of wealth that were commonly saved in James' day and their very deterioration will be witnesses against the wealthy in the Day of Judgment that they placed their confidence in temporary things instead of in the Eternal God.

Second, they have defrauded their reapers (The word "mowed" primarily means to reap corn.). In early Palestine, labourers were hired by the day. These day labourers were poor and it was customary to pay them at the end of each day. (As an example see Matthew 20:1-16, one of Jesus' parables that centred on day labourers.) The Old Testament (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15) forbade land owners' refusing to pay at the end of the day. However, they often used technicalities to do so, and there was little the labourers could do about it.

Fortunately, God heard their cries as He always hears cries of the weak and defenceless when the rich and powerful abuse their position. "Sabaoth" means hosts, so the Lord of Sabaoth is the Lord of Hosts meaning the hosts of heaven.

Third, they have lived in pleasure and luxury. It is not that God doesn't want His people to experience pleasure or luxury, but it must be understood that wealth is of no value whatsoever unless it is used for the Kingdom of God. See 1 Timothy 6:17-19 for specific instructions to wealthy Christians. See also Luke 18:25-30 for Jesus' teaching on how difficult it is for wealthy people to enter the Kingdom of God.

Sadly, rich Jews often indulged themselves with excessive banquets while the poor who worked for them lived hand-to-mouth existences.

Fourth, they are guilty of condemning and murdering the just. Part of God's instructions to the Israelites was that they would be held accountable for murdering the righteous (see Exodus 23:7).

Why are we to be patient?

Verses 7-8: “Patient” is better translated as longsuffering and means protracted restraint of the emotions, particularly anger. Just as the farmer must be patient in waiting for his crops to grow, so also the Christian must be patient, throughout trials, in waiting for the return of the Lord. And just as the farmer plants with an expectation that he will get fruit, the Christian should exercise endurance knowing that the return of Christ is certain.

Why are we not to grumble against others?

Verse 9: The word “grumble” describes the kind of complaints that comes from the ongoing testing of patience. James forbids all such grumbling against other Christians because the true Judge is standing nearby. The person who judges is himself in danger of being condemned. (See also Matthew 7:1-5.)

What are the prophets an example of?

Verses 10-11: Endurance and patience were demonstrated in the lives of the prophets. Despite experiencing rejection, persecution and even martyrdom, the prophets endured and for that reason they were blessed. So, though we may suffer, we are blessed. Job is a perfect example of God’s intentions when suffering enters our lives. The Lord’s compassion and mercy were demonstrated in sustaining him through his trials, as well as in how Job was abundantly blessed after the trial.

Why is swearing wrong?

Verse 12: By swearing, it means the taking of oaths. Christians should not resort to oaths to prove that they are telling the truth. They should tell the truth all the time. If a Christian feels that they need to take an oath to prove the truthfulness of what they say, they are implying that it is okay for them to lie the rest of the time. That is not to say that in a court of law a Christian can’t swear on the Bible; that is not the intent of this verse. It is simply to underscore the fact that Christians should tell the truth all the time.

Further Questions For Discussion:

What is a Christian view of wealth?

How should Christian employers treat their employees?

How should wealthy Christians handle their money as good stewards?

How can Christians demonstrate longsuffering during trials?

What are some situations where you might be tempted not to tell the truth?