

The book of James: Disciple

LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 8-James 5:1-12

November 5, 2017

As you study each day, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what God has said through James, and how that understanding can influence your walking in God's way.

In this chapter James continues his investigation of wealth. In Chapter 1 he urged a person who is rich to *take pride in his low position;* in Chapter 2 he warns against favoring the rich; in Chapter 4 he warns against pursuing profit without consideration of God; and here he utters very strong warnings to rich people who are not Christians. He also provides guidance and urges patience and perseverance for those oppressed by harsh rich overlords, probably the large land-owners typical of his day.

DAY 1: Read James 5:1-2

1. Both James 4:13 and James 5:1 begin "Now listen." Do you find any other connections between these two sections?

While both sections may refer to people engaged in business or trade, the first is a warning to believers, while the second is prophetic words to those not practicing the faith.

2. If you are puzzled or shocked by the vigor of James's language, find parallels in the Old Testament. (Job 13:28; Isaiah 50:9; Ezekiel 30:2)

Weep and wail are frequently used by the prophets to describe the reaction of the wicked when the Day of the Lord comes. Wail is found only in the prophets (Isaiah. 13:6, 15:3, Amos. 8:3) and always in the context of judgment. The possession of wealth is not the Old Testament issue; it is the misuse of wealth in an oppressive or cruel way. The prime illustration was of land owners who had very large holdings.

3. How would you say these verses still have relevance even though the specifics do not at all apply today? (Our stocks or real estate probably haven't rotted, and we do have moth balls.)

Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha (books written between the Old and New Testaments, quoted by Jesus but not considered conical), uses *decay* to refer to all forms of human accomplishment. At Matthew 6:20 Jesus warns us of the danger of moths eating earthly treasures. The Bible is using pictorial language to warn us of the common human habit of trusting in our possessions instead of trusting in God.

DAY 2: Read James 5:3-4

1. What is James saying about the corrosion of gold and silver (which doesn't happen), as evidence against the rich particularly when they hoard? What does James mean by the phrase "eat your flesh like fire"? Is this too shocking to read to children?

The word *rust* had already been applied to gold and silver in the Epistle of Jeremiah 6:12 in the Apocrypha. This was a typical figure of speech in that day referring to the undependability of physical things. *Eat your flesh like fire* appears at Judith 16:17, also in the Apocrypha, referring to God's vengeance. *Hoarding* was the practice of storing harvested grain until winter when it would command a much better price. But since this practice was cruel to those poor living hand to mouth, hoarding is condemned in the prophets. *Do not send a hungry man away empty* (Luke 1:53 and James 2:16).

2. Verse 4 speaks about workers who not been paid by their wealthy employers. In our own society, have you heard of workers not being paid for the hours they have worked? When this happens to the poor, what redress do they have? What responsibilities do we have to address these problems? (see Psalm 12:5)

The press reports this sort of things happening to for example fast food workers and housekeepers in motels. Poor people usually cannot afford to hire legal counsel. Proverbs 14:34 reminds us that "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people." Sometimes Christians need to take a stand on behalf of those who are exploited.

DAY 3: Read James 5:5-6

1. James is quite critical of wealthy people in these verses. What reasons or justifications do rich people offer for treating people—including other Christians—this way? How would you answer if a homeless person made this accusation today?

Someone might say, I earned it -I am entitled to spend my money as I want to. People can forget how interrelated we are and how dependent we are on others for everything we do. Amos is critical of irresponsible wealth in 4:1 & 6:4. See also Ron Sider's classic book R ich C hristians in an A ge of C which is an urgent call for more biblical thinking and action about economic inequalities.

2. How can we be implicated in misdeeds done both intentionally and unintentionally? What light does James 4:17 shed on this?

See Amos 8:5-6. We read in the press that the life expectancy of those living in poor neighborhoods can be 10 to 15 years less than those living in affluent areas. Or think of those found guilty for crimes they did not commit partly because they could not afford counsel. The *day of slaughter* probably refers to the day-of-judgment at the end times. These verses are a vigorous wake-up call for those outside the church.

James 4:17 is relevant because the Scripture affirms that every human being (we would except some handicapped) has a conscience, and therefore knows the difference between right and wrong. And this truth obtains regardless whether she listens to her conscience or not, and regardless whether she is Christian or not. (Of course, we have learned that under adverse circumstances a person's conscience can be trained for the worse.) So, the non-practicing business people to whom these verses were directed would have had, in some sense, an inner feeling that what they were doing was not completely right. See Proverbs 20:27 where the spirit of a man "as indicated by its 'searching' activity, is conscience". (Robert Reymond, A New Systematic Theology, p. 418.)

DAY 4: Read James 5:7-9

1. Why does James counsel us to be patient in our suffering? If you were among the oppressed referred to in verses 4-6, what Christian resources would be available to you?

See also James 1:2-4. The Lord God gives us faith when we sincerely knock on the door. One of the greatest tests of faith is the strength we receive when we are in a period of sustained oppression, or a trial of sickness or family disaster. We read in Acts 1:7: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority*. But the Bible does tell us that the Lord is coming soon. In the meantime, however, this fact does not let us off the hook. We remember Martin Luther on this 500th anniversary of his nailing 95 these to a chapel door. Luther said, *Even if the Lord were coming tomorrow, I would plant a tree in my garden today*. Being alert and ready includes right now making God's kingdom more and more real, especially for those hungry, thirsty, of immigrant status, sick, poorly dressed or imprisoned. (Matthew 25:35-36)

2. What does James write about the time factor related to the Lord's coming? How should your answer to this question affect your hope in a time of trial? (See also Matthew16:27 and Titus 2:13.)

The Psalms in particular, and many other places in the Scriptures, describe God coming to us and helping in time of trial. James is hinting that if we are grumbling, then we may not be calling upon the Lord for help, but simply be grieving over our not having our own answers readily at hand. Today we might call this a *control* issue. (Philippians. 4:4-7)

3. Once again James peers into what we are talking about, even in a time of trial or oppression. In such a time, how can we avoid complaining, griping, or blaming someone for our misfortune? How is this verse an illustration of James 1:26?

Being patient and standing firm when in a time of trial includes not quarreling against or blaming others. We need to keep a tight rein on or tongues especially when suffering pushes our emotions to the limit.

DAY 5: Read James 5:10-12

1. Why would James use "the prophets" as an example of those speaking in the name of the Lord who had to be patient? Why would "those who have persevered" be considered blessed?

The prophets were often solitary characters, and speaking or acting out teachings few could understand. (Jeremiah 9:1, 11:18-20) They were God's preachers in the Old Testament, drawing people back to their covenantal responsibilities at times of slack-heartedness. They were often persecuted for it. While they had visions of the coming messiah, and waited patiently for salvation, the messiah did not come in their day. They persevered in the name of the Lord, and were blessed because of their obedience.

2. Why did Job have to persevere, and what "did the Lord finally bring about"?

Job is an amazing story of the suffering of the righteous. Job, believing he was innocent and seeking vindication, persevered. It turned out that Job was being tested by God. Rather than smacking him down for his brashness and spiritual pride, the Lord had *compassion and mercy* towards Job, gave him a personal audience, restored him and gave him a second chance.

3. While verse 12 seems like a non-sequitur, can you find a connection with the preceding verses? Why is the integrity of your word so important to James?

James has inserted a proverb here, and it is not altogether clear why. It is a close parallel with Matthew 5:34-37. Some Anabaptists have taken these verses to mean that no oaths are to be taken, even official oaths in court. Others make a distinction between *official* and *voluntary* oaths, and say that the teaching refers only to the latter. What James may be affirming is that while Christians (and the poor generally) may be at times under the heavy hand of oversight by the rich and powerful (James 2:6), and as a consequence be discounted or mocked, nevertheless, the weak have their character and should make every effort to stand on it. The Lord does not abandon us regardless of circumstance. (See Naboth's Vineyard, I Kings 21)

4. Why would James begin verse 12 with the words "above all"?

The words *above all* give priority to standing on one's character and not making false promises or dicey half-truthful commitments in times of oppression.

DAY 6: Reread James 5:1-12

- 1. Think of one of God's teachings in these verses that is of special meaning to you personally and memorize the verse.
- 2. James always wants us to move from Bible study to incarnational action. What are you moved to do as a disciple of Christ because of this passage?