



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 14
James 5:1-6
“The Doom of the Rich”

Study By
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Greek NT

5.1 Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις. 2 ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, 3 ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται καὶ ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ. ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. 4 ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἔργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἰβοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα κυρίου σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν. 5 ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς, 6 κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον, οὐκ ἀντιπάσσειται ὑμῖν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

1 ¡Oíd ahora, ricos! Llorad y aullad por las miserias que vienen sobre vosotros. 2 Vuestras riquezas se han podrido y vuestras ropas están comidas de polilla. 3 Vuestro oro y vuestra plata se han enmohecido, su moho será un testigo contra vosotros y consumirá vuestra carne como fuego. Es en los últimos días que habéis acumulado tesoros. 4 Mirad, el jornal de los obreros que han segado vuestros campos y que ha sido retenido por vosotros, clama contra vosotros; y el clamor de los segadores ha llegado a los oídos del Señor de los ejércitos. 5 Habéis vivido lujosamente sobre la tierra, y habéis llevado una vida de placer desenfrenado; habéis engordado vuestros corazones en el día de la matanza. 6 Habéis condenado y dado muerte al justo; él no os hace resistencia.

NRSV

5.1 Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. 2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. 4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

NLT

1 Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. 2 Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. 3 Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. 4 For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. 6 You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.

The Study of the Text:¹

When does a Christian preacher start sounding like an Old Testament prophet? One answer to that question comes from this passage in James 5:1-6. And the answer would be: when he preaches a message of inescapable, impending doom on the wealthy as a word to reassurance to the poor who have suffered injustice at the hands of the wealthy. In this passage James takes on the mantle of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah

¹With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any application meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

and several other prophets in ancient Israel whose message to either the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom was the coming Day of the Lord with the pouring out of divine wrath on either the northern kingdom's destruction by the Assyrians in 722 BCE or that of the southern kingdom in 583 BCE by the Babylonians. These prophets saw the complete destruction of the Israelite nation either in the north or in the south as the judgement of a Holy God upon the sinful abuses of the people. And a major part of that sinfulness was the abuse of the poor by the wealthy in both kingdoms.

In the 30s and 40s of the first century world in Palestine a trend developed in which wealthy aristocratic Jews in Jerusalem and Judea began systematically taking over the property of Jewish peasant farmers in Galilee, especially the southern enormously fertile farmland region southwest of the Sea of Galilee, the Jezreel Valley area. Thousands upon thousands of Jewish farmers lived there and owned usually less than a hector of land but made a comfortable living off it for their family. This very small region -- not much larger than the Central Valley of Costa Rica -- was so productive that it functioned as the bread basket for most of the Middle East, since the vast majority of wheat, barley etc. grown in the Nile delta of Egypt automatically went to Rome to feed the Italian peninsula. By controlling the local Jewish courts through bribes etc., massive numbers of the Jewish peasants were turned into tenant farmers, i.e., little more than slaves, by the mid to late 50s in southern Galilee. Because of close connections of the Jewish aristocrats in Jerusalem with Roman aristocrats, the Romans got in on the land grab as well. Out of this would come by the early 60s the so-called Zealot Revolt beginning in Galilee that led to the first Jewish war against the Romans beginning in the mid 60s and eventually resulting in the complete destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple by 70 AD.

Against this backdrop comes these words of James right out of the mouth of the prophet Amos several centuries earlier. The Old Testament injustices were again plaguing the Jewish people in Palestine, and James sensed that history was going to repeat itself. Little did he realize how quickly it would happen when these words were put in writing in the late 50s, barely a decade before his beloved city Jerusalem would be turned into a pile of rubble and the huge temple rebuilt by Herod would be totally demolished. And this would be just the 'appetizer' of divine wrath in anticipation of the full day of wrath in Final Judgment.

Jewish Christians in the Diaspora were feeling the impact of all this by the late 50s, not to speak of later on when Roman vengeance spread beyond Palestine to Jewish communities all over the empire. Large numbers of Diaspora Jews would lose their lives, property etc. as a backlash to what took place in Palestine. This in part because of substantial Diaspora Jewish support of the war against the Romans in Palestine, both in volunteer fighters and financial support of the rebellion of the Jews back home.

James knew that believers who were Jewish peasants living in Galilee had suffered already from this injustice and that so would others in the future. The human urge was to strike back, which indeed the Zealot movement was already organizing to do with guerrilla warfare modeled after that three centuries before by the Maccabees against the Seleucids in Palestine. Jewish believers in the Diaspora often were victimized by wealthy powerful individuals -- both Gentile and Jewish -- around them in the various cities of the Diaspora outside Palestine.

Was there a Word from God to help these believers with these difficulties? James believed that mes-



sage from God came straight out of the Old Testament prophets and was that the God of this universe is a God of justice who will right the wrongs of this world by pouring out His wrath on those committing such injustices. That was the prophetic message to ancient Israel, and it remained the same to believers in the New Covenant as well.; Thus in a two part emphasis to his readers, he urges them to rest assured that God was still holy and would not tolerate such injustices (5:1-6), and so they needed to patiently wait upon the justice of God rather than try to seek revenge themselves (5:7-11).

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Background:

A clear understanding of the historical circumstances in the mid-first century world both in Palestine and across the Roman empire is critically important to understanding clearly the message of James to his readers in the first century.

Historical Setting.

External History. In the ten or so centuries of hand copying the text of the New Testament documents several variations in wording surface in 5:1-6 from comparing the several thousand manuscripts that contain this passage of scripture. But only one place reflects a variation considered sufficiently significant to impact Bible translation, in the editorial opinion of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.). In verse four, the participle ὁ ἀπεστερημένος is replaced with ἀφουστερημένος.² The first participle ἀπεστερημένος means ‘withheld by fraud’ while the second participle ἀφουστερημένος means just ‘withheld.’ Although Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, two of the three most important early manuscripts, support the second participle, the external evidence still favors the first participle and internal evidence is significantly in favor of the first participle.³



In the text apparatus of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) a total of nine variations in the wording of the text surface in these manuscripts.⁴ A careful examination of these variations once again reveals that they came about primarily as efforts to update and improve the Greek expression centuries later in order to bring the Greek in line with more natural patterns for these later dates of



²{A} ἀπεστερημένος AB² Ψ (33 81) 322 323 436 945 1067 1175 1241 1243 1292 1409 1505 1611 1735 1739 1852 2138 2298 2344 2464 Byz [(K L) P] Lect itar, ff, s vg arm (eth) geo slav^{ms} Didymus Cyril John-Damascus // ἀφουστερημένος κ B*

³“The perfect-tense participle ἀπεστερημένος has wide support among the manuscripts. The present-tense participle ἀποστερήμενος is simply a small stylistic change. The perfect-tense participle ἀφουστερημένος (withheld) appears to be a stylistic improvement in the Alexandrian manuscripts κ and B*. Both verbs mean ‘to hold back,’ but the verb ἀποστερέω has ‘the added nuance of deliberate fraud’ (Johnson, *The Letter of James*, p. 302) and is therefore a little stronger in tone.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 478.]

⁴Jakobus 5,1

* ὑμῖν κ 623. 2464 al vg; Nil (The personal pronoun plural dative, ‘to you’ ὑμῖν is added after ἐπερχομένης)

Jakobus 5,3

* 4 1-3 P^{7avid} A 33 pc (the wording of καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατώταται is re-sequenced)

* ο ἰος κ² A P Ψ 33. 81. 614. 623. 1505. 1852 al sy^h ac (ὁ ἰός is repeated after ὑμῶν)

Jakobus 5,4

* † αφουστερημενος κ B* (ἀπεστερημένος is replaced with ἀφουστερημένος)

| txt A B² P Ψ (33). 1739 M

* † εισεληλυθαν (A) B P 81. 1243. (1852) pc (εισεληλύθασιν is replaced with εισελήλυθαν)

| txt κ Ψ 33. 1739 M (εληλ– 1505)

Jakobus 5,5

* A Ψ 81. 623*. 2464 al vg^{ms} bo^{pt} (καὶ is omitted by some manuscripts)

* σαρκας Ψ al (t) sy (καρδίας is replaced with σαρκας)

* ὡς κ² Ψ 1739 M sy (ὡς is inserted before ἐν)

| txt κ* A B P 33. 1852 pc latt co

Jakobus 5,6

* καὶ 614 al t vg^{cl} sy^h (καὶ is inserted before οὐκ)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 595-96.]

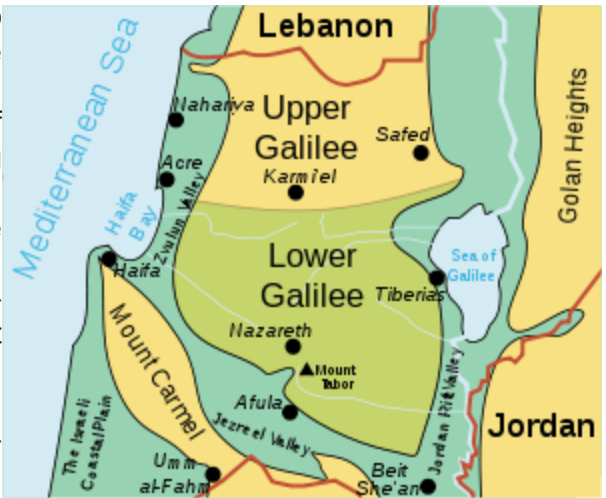
copying. None of them causes a change in basic meaning to the text. Virtually all of these variations come very late in the copying process.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence that it reflects the original wording written in the mid first century.

Internal History. In the background of this passage lies the practice of farming in ancient Palestine, along with land ownership among the Jews. Additionally, there is the issue of the land grab in Galilee in the mid-first century that provoked the open Zealot revolt beginning in 66 AD.

Farming in ancient Israel was centered in southern Galilee, although small regions scattered elsewhere in Palestine contained land for growing crops. The work was hard and ‘back breaking’ because of the primitive nature of the tools used. But in the region of southern Galilee, called “Lower Galilee,” was so exceptionally fertile and the abundant rainfall in that area brought about a concentration of agricultural activity centered largely on small farms owned and operated by Jewish peasants.⁵ According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the population in this region fluctuated between a million and a half and two million people.⁶ Life was hard but making a living off the land was possible, and usually profitable. Typically the farmers lived in small villages like Nazareth and tilled their land in the countryside near the village.

Among the Jewish people ownership of land was a huge religious tradition. When Joshua divided out the Land of Promise at the conquest of Canaan in the Old Testament, each of the twelve tribes received a portion of the land to claim as their own property. Jewish descendants living in southern Galilee clung to their small piece of land as the gift of God (cf. Gen. 12:7) to their ancestors that must be maintained in their family and passed on to the next generation. When their property began to be taken from them during the first



⁵An interesting re-creation of ancient Galilean life can be found at Kfar Kedem in Galilee today. A re-creation of life as lived in the ancient world in Galilee, this facility enables the visitor to experience life as it was in an ancient Galilean village.

“1. (35) Now Phoenicia and Syria encompass about the Galilees, which are two, and called the Upper Galilee and the Lower. They are bounded towards the sun setting, with the borders of the territory belonging to the Ptolemais, and by Carmel; which mountain had formerly belonged to the Galileans, but now belonged to the Tyrians; (36) to which mountain adjoins Gaba, which is called the City of Horsemen, because those horsemen that were dismissed by Herod the king dwelt therein; (37) they are bounded on the south with Samaria and Scythopolis, as far as the river Jordan; on the east with Hippene and Gadaris, and also with Gaulanitis, and the borders of the kingdom of Agrippa; (38) its northern parts are bounded by Tyre, and the country of the Tyrians. *As for that Galilee which is called the Lower; it extends in length from Tiberias, to Zabulon, and of the maritime places, Ptolemais, is its neighbor; (39) its breadth is from the village called Xaloth, which lies in the great plain, as far as Bersabe, from which beginning also is taken the breadth of the Upper Galilee, as far as the village Baca, which divides the land of the Tyrians from it; (40) its length is also from Meloth to Thella, a village near to Jordan.*

“2. (41) These two Galilees, of so great largeness, and encompassed with so many nations of foreigners, have always been able to make a strong resistance on all occasions of war; (42) for the Galileans are enured to war from their infancy, and have been always very numerous; nor hath the country been ever destitute of men of courage, or wanted a numerous set of them; for their soil is universally rich and fruitful, and full of the plantations of trees of all sorts, insomuch that it invites the most slothful to take pains in its cultivation by its fruitfulness: (43) accordingly, it is all cultivated by its inhabitants, and no part of it lies idle. Moreover, the cities lie here very thick; and the very many villages there are here, are everywhere so full of people, by the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contain above fifteen thousand inhabitants.”

[Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987). *The Wars of the Jews*, III.41-43]

10† §41 Τηλικαῦται δ’ οὔσαι τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τοσοῦτοις ἔθνεσιν 11 ἀλλοφύλοις κεκυκλωμένοι πρὸς πᾶσαν αἰεὶ πολέμου πείραν ἀντέσχον· 12† §42 μάχιμοί τε γὰρ ἐκ νηπίων καὶ πολλοὶ Γαλιλαῖοι πάντοτε, καὶ οὔτε 13† δειλία ποτὲ τοὺς ἄνδρας οὔτε λιπανδρία τὴν χώραν κατέσχευεν, 14† ἐπειδὴ πίων τε πᾶσα καὶ εὐβοτος καὶ δένδρεσι παντοίοις καταφύτος, 15† ὡς ὑπὸ τῆς εὐπετείας προκαλέσασθαι καὶ τὸν ἥκιστα γῆς 16† φιλόπονον. §43 προσησκήθη γοῦν ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκητόρων πᾶσα, καὶ μέρος 17† αὐτῆς ἀργὸν οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πόλεις πυκναὶ καὶ τὸ τῶν κωμῶν 18† πλῆθος πανταχοῦ πολυάνθρωπον διὰ τὴν εὐθηνίαν, ὡς τὴν 1† ἐλαχίστην ὑπὲρ πεντακισχιλίου πρὸς τοῖς μυρίοις ἔχειν οἰκήτορας. [Flavius Josephus and Benedikt Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera Recognovit Benedictus Niese ...* (Berolini: apud Weidmannos, 1888-).]

Christian century, great anger and unrest began boiling up in southern Galilee.⁷ Out of this came the Zealot movement that led the Jews into open war with the Romans in 66 AD.⁸ This ownership of land by Jewish peasants distinguished the Jews from the Romans, since land ownership was virtually the prerogative of the aristocracy among Romans.⁹ The unrest from this 'peasant revolt' simmered until it boiled over into open guerilla warfare.¹⁰

⁷The foundation for this turmoil was laid early in the first Christian century with Judas the Galilean violently rejected the restructuring of the Roman tax law for the Jewish people in 5 AD.

¹“(1) Now Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them till he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria, with a few others, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance; (2) Coponius also, a man of the equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews. Moreover, Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus’s money; (3) but the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any farther opposition to it, by the persuasion of Joazar, who was the son of Boethus, and high priest. So they, being over-persuaded by Joazar’s words, gave an account of their estates, without any dispute about it; (4) yet there was one Judas, a Gaulonite, a of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Sadduc,^b a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty: (5) as if they could procure them happiness and security for what they possessed, and an assured enjoyment of a still greater good, which was that of the honor and glory they would thereby acquire for magnanimity. They also said that God would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such counsels as might be successful, and for their own advantage; and this especially, if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same; (6) so men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. All sorts of misfortunes also sprang from these men, and the nation was infected with this doctrine to an incredible degree; (7) one violent war came upon us after another, and we lost our friends, who used to alleviate our pains; there were also very great robberies and murders of our principal men. This was done in pretense indeed for the public welfare, but in reality for the hopes of gain to themselves; (8) whence arose seditions, and from them murders of men, which sometimes fell on those of their own people (by the madness of these men towards one another, while their desire was that none of the adverse party might be left), and sometimes on their enemies; a famine also coming upon us, reduced us to the last degree of despair, as did also the taking and demolishing of cities; nay, the sedition at last increased so high, that the very temple of God was burnt down by their enemy’s fire. (9) Such were the consequences of this, that the customs of our fathers were altered and such a change was made, as added a mighty weight toward bringing all to destruction, which these men occasioned by thus conspiring together; for Judas and Sadduc,^c who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and laid the foundation of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal; (10) concerning which I shall discourse a little, and this the rather, because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction.” [Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987). cf. “Ant.” xviii. 1, §§ 1, 6]

⁸“The call for political activity was renewed with greater force when, after the death of Agrippa I. in the year 44, Judea became more emphatically a province of Rome and the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem was again deprived of its jurisdiction. Numerous bands of Zealots under the leadership of Tholomy, Amram, Hanibas (Taḥina ?), and Eleazar (see below) roamed through the land, fanning local strifes into wars of rebellion; but in every case they were ultimately defeated, and their leaders were either beheaded or banished for a time (“Ant.” xx. 1, § 1). Soon afterward Jacob and Simon, sons of Judas the Galilean, as mentioned above, organized a revolt against Tiberius Alexander, and paid the penalty of crucifixion (47). But matters reached a climax under the procurators Cumanus, Felix, and Florus (49-64), who vied with one another in bloodthirsty cruelty and tyranny when the Zealot leaders, in their desperate struggle against the overwhelming power of an implacable enemy, resorted to extreme measures in order to force the people to action.” [“Zealots,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*]

⁹“Land ownership was a dominant factor in distinguishing the aristocracy from the common person, and the more land a Roman owned, the more important he would be in the city. Soldiers were often rewarded with land from the commander they served. Though farms depended on slave labor, free men and citizens were hired at farms to oversee the slaves and ensure that the farms ran smoothly.[3]” [“Roman agriculture,” *Wikipedia.org*]

¹⁰“6. (23) But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty; and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kind of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord; (24) and since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no farther about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain; (25) and it was in Gessius Florus’s time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans; and these are the sects of Jewish philosophy.” [Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987). Cf. *Antiquities*, 18.6.23-25]

James' words in 5:1-16 should be interpreted against the backdrop of this tension and turmoil developing in Palestine, especially in the middle of the first century. His words come down harshly on the wealthy landowners who are abusing their workers, some of whom were believers, who were increasingly tempted to join the Zealot movement in protest against the injustices being done against them. This Hebrew pattern of expression by James invokes the powerful voices of the Hebrew prophets against Jewish believers joining this revolutionary movement against the wealthy. Unfortunately, James' voice was never heard outside the Christian community and in the larger Jewish world. Consequently hundreds of thousands of Jews got caught up in the violence that brought the Jewish people close to annihilation by the Romans.



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Literary:

Genre: In addition to being a part of the general paraenesis typical throughout this document, this text of 5:1-6 takes on some of the qualities of the Old Testament prophetic oracle,¹¹ and particularly a lament or woe,¹² which is commonly found in the Prophets section of the Old Testament. One important implication of this literary character of the text is that it targets 'outsiders' with the pronouncement of God's condemnation. It is not a call to repentance; rather, it is the oracle of coming doom upon the rich. James is clearly speaking to people outside the Christian community who are one of the sources of unjust abuse of believers. The message then to the believing community is the same as was Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-36. Note His introductory statements in 23:1-3:

23 Τότε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν τοῖς ὄχλοις καὶ τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ 2 λέγων· ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας ἐκάθισαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι. 3 πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν εἴπωσιν ὑμῖν ποιήσατε καὶ τηρεῖτε, κατὰ δὲ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν μὴ ποιεῖτε· λέγουσιν γὰρ καὶ οὐ ποιοῦσιν.

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

Followers of Jesus must avoid the example set by the powerful at all costs. Additionally, as we will note in the next pericope of 5:7-11, James makes it clear that his pronouncement of coming doom on the rich is designed to encourage the Christian workers suffering injustices from them to remain patient in full confidence in the justice of a holy God to right the wrongs committed against them. The foundation for that powerful admonition comes from the realization that God will punish evil done in this world.

Context: The literary context of 5:1-6 is complex. Clearly, from the introductory Ἄγε νῦν in 4:13 and 5:1, the two passages are tied together, as targeting outsiders for their sinful conduct being distasteful to God. Both the Jewish merchant and the wealthy landowner stand under the wrath of God. And as a warning

¹¹"An oracle is information transmitted from the deity to human beings, usually either answers to important questions or revelations about future events. This entry consists of two articles, one surveying the use of the word 'oracle' (Heb *maššā'*) in the OT, and the other surveying oracles as an element in ancient Egyptian religion. For other discussions of oracles, see PROPHECY; SIBYLLINE ORACLES; and WOE." ["Oracle" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 28.]

¹²"This distinctive form of prophetic speech is often found accompanying an accusation or threat which immediately preceded an announcement of judgment. The particle *hōy* occurs approximately 50 times in the OT. It is closely related to the less frequently occurring *'ōy*, as well as the particle *hāh*. All three particles are onomatopoeic in origin, expressing a sharp outburst of feeling, sometimes of anger, sometimes of grief, and sometimes of alarm. In its most striking occurrences in prophecy *hōy* is followed by a descriptive definition, frequently couched in participial form, of the persons and activities against which this feeling is directed. It is characteristic, therefore, that the woe cry should be used in an impersonal formulation expressing intense anger and directed against certain types of activity which are strongly disapproved of: 'Woe to those who do ...'" [Ronald E. Clements, "Woe" In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 945-46.]

for believers to avoid their example at all costs. But in addition, the οὖν, *therefore*, in 5:6 makes it clear that the following pericope of 5:7-11 grows out of implications built into 5:1-6. Given the content of 5:7-11, the nature of that connection becomes very clear: believers are to be patient in suffering injustices at the hands of the rich because the judgment of God is unquestionably going to wipe out the rich with eternal damnation. God's justice will ultimately prevail completely! Of that believers can be absolutely certain.

The material on either side of 4:13 and 5:11 remains unconnected to this set of three pericopes. Here James clearly addresses his Christian readers directly as the vocative ἀδελφοί, *brothers*, in 4:11, 5:7, 12 (ἀδελφοί μου) signals.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT

Of James¹³

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
BODY 1-194	1.2-5.20	
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
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Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

Structure:

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at certain points.

147 ^{5.1} Come now you rich people,
start weeping
with mournful howls
over your miseries yet to come.

148 ^{5.2} **Your wealth stands rotten**
and

149 **Your clothes stand moth-eaten,**

150 ^{5.3} **Your gold and silver stand corroded.**

¹³Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

151 **Their corrosion will be a witness against you,**
 and
 152 ----- ----- **will consume your flesh**
 as fire;
 153 **you have stored up wealth in the last days.**

5.4 Behold,
 154 **the wages of the laborers cries out,**
 who mowed your fields
 which have been fraudulently withheld by you
 and
 155 **the cries of the harvesters have entered the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.**

5.5 **You have lived luxuriously on the earth**
 and
 157 **you have given yourselves to pleasure,**
 158 **you have fattened your hearts for a day of slaughter.**

5.6 **You have condemned,**
 160 **You have murdered the just one.**
 161 **He does not resist you.**

Once again, James employs a the thought structure of admonition (statement 147) backed up by a defense (statements 148-161).

The admonition (147) is focused on eschatological judgment of the wealthy with nothing but eternal damnation in view for them. Using the language of many of the Old Testament prophets for the Day of the Lord, James pronounces certain doom on the rich and calls upon them to brace themselves for that day.

In light of the twisted theology about wealth in many circles of ancient Judaism where wealth was seen as an indication of divine blessing and thus divine approval of lifestyle of the wealthy, James felt the need to justify his utter rejection of this belief about wealth with an elaborate defense (statements 148 - 161). With the use of powerful argumentation he successfully defends his banishment of the wealthy to eternal damnation. The underlying thought structure of this defense revolves around two motifs: accusation of guilt and pronouncement of judgment. This pattern provides the foundation for the four sets of expressions in the defense: (1) condemnation of the ancient status symbols of wealth (statements 148 - 153); (2) condemnation of fraudulent means of gaining wealth (statements 154 - 155); (3) condemnation of the luxuriant lifestyle of the wealthy (statements 156 - 158); (4) condemnation of the abusive treatment of the poor by the wealthy (statements 159 - 161). This last set has an ironic twist to it that we will explore below.¹⁴

A charting of the arrangement of ideas visually reflects this understanding of the arrangement of the defense of the admonition in vv. 2-6.¹⁵

Four Sets of Arguments:	Accusation of Guilt.	Pronouncement of Judgment.
1. Condemnation of the ancient status symbols of wealth (#s 148-153):	148-150	151-153
2. Condemnation of fraudulent means of gaining wealth (#s 154-155):	154	155
3. Condemnation of the luxuriant lifestyle of the wealthy (#s 156-158):	156-157	158
4. Condemnation of the abusive treatment of the poor by the wealthy (#s 159-161):	159-160	161

¹⁴Acknowledgement for the seminal idea of this structure goes to a former seminary student, Timothy Ahlen, who through his training at Harvard University in literary structuralism spotted this foundational structure years ago while taking a class in advanced Greek exegesis with me.

¹⁵The numbers refer back to the block diagram numbering of the core statements in vv. 2-6.

One should note that condemnations one and three are paired as reflecting status attitudes about wealth, while condemnations two and four hold together as reflecting evil actions coming out of the wrong attitudes. In this highly creative manner, James weaves together a pattern of divine condemnation of the wealthy based upon the establishment of guilt in violating the commands of God in the accumulation and use of wealth. Thus an overwhelming defense of his pronouncement of doom on the wealthy is presented to his readers.

Exegesis of the Text.

The exegesis of the passage will revolve around the twofold core structure of the passage: admonition (v. 1) and defense (vv. 2-6). This understanding of the idea arrangement, especially in vv. 2-6, stands in contrast to the confusion about it typically found in most commentaries.¹⁶ Its complexity along with the usual lack of real training in literary structural analysis by most commentators combine to perpetuate this confusion.

a) The coming doom of the rich, v. 1

Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς τάλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.

With the identical first two words, Ἄγε νῦν, James introduces this pericope. Not only does this tie 5:1-6 on to 4:13-17, but it sets up the same posture of amazement at the lack of perception by οἱ πλούσιοι, **the rich**. That is, for wealthy Jewish landowners to live as they have been and not think that they are accountable to God for such behavior is incredible. They should know better than this!

Those being addressed directly are οἱ πλούσιοι, the rich.¹⁷ In James 1:10-11, **a rich man**, ὁ πλούσιος, is addressed as a believer. But in James 2:6-7, **the rich**, οἱ πλούσιοι, as a class of people, are addressed as non-believers persecuting Christians.¹⁸ It is this latter perspective using the identical term in 5:1 that is in mind in our text. With the further details provided in vv. 2-6 it is clear that James is alluding to wealthy Jewish landowners in this text. Being wealthy materially is generally condemned in the Bible, except in isolated situations.¹⁹ Particularly early Christianity saw dangers in wealth and spoke out vigorously against material wealth (cf. Mk. 20:23).²⁰ To be clear, some who became Christians came out of the upper levels of society,

¹⁶Confusion about how these verses were structured prevailed in my understanding until Tim Ahlen pointed it out to the advanced Greek exegesis class on James in the MDiv program that I was teaching at Southwestern Seminary in the 1980s. Once the class worked our way through this in testing out the various details, it was one of those ‘gotcha’ moments when all of us felt like “How could I have so missed that in this text? It is so clear now!” Tim’s training in literary critical analysis in his undergraduate work paid rich dividends for both him and the rest of us in the class.

¹⁷“Once more, the rich (*hoi plousioi*) take center stage (see 1:10–11; 2:5–6). Now, the tone of straightforward hostility is remarkable, matched only by some strands within the Jewish tradition (see 1 Enoch 94:6–9; 97:1–10; 98:1–16; 99:11–16; 100:7–9; 102:1–11) and within the gospel tradition (Mark 10:25; Matt 19:23–24; Luke 1:53; 6:24; 12:16–21; 14:12–14; 16:19–31; 18:23–25; 21:1–4). On this count, as on others, James seems close to the sensibility of some sectarian Jews in Palestine.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 298.]

¹⁸“οἱ πλ. (Menand., Cith. Fgm. 1, 1 Kō. [=Fgm. 281, 1]) Lk 6:24; 21:1; 1 Ti 6:17; Js 2:6; 5:1; Rv 6:15; 13:16; 1 Cl 16:10 (Is 53:9); Hs 2:8; 9, 20, 1f.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 831.]

One should make a clear distinction between the singular ὁ πλούσιος (substantival use of adjective, with or without the article), and the plural οἱ πλούσιοι (substantival use with the article), designating a class of people, i.e., **the rich**. The plural usage especially reflects a strongly negative attitude toward ‘the rich’ who are perceived as non-believers in opposition to God and His people.

¹⁹“Wealth measured in money, or the amount of property owned—whether land and buildings (Is 5:8–10), livestock (1 Sm 25:2, 3), or slaves (1 Sm 8:11–18). Great riches brought great influence and power, as the Hebrew word for ‘wealth’ implies.

“The Bible seems to speak with two voices on the subject of riches, sometimes describing material wealth as a sign of God’s blessing and approval (e.g., Gn 24:35), at other times virtually identifying the rich with the wicked (e.g., Ps 37:7, 16). Jesus, in particular, is very stern in his denunciations of the wealthy. ‘How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!’ (Mk 10:23).”

[Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1858.]

²⁰“In the NT wealthy men are often seen as godless, for example, the rich farmer (Lk 12:16–21) and the rich man with Lazarus (16:19–31). The wealthy are condemned for oppression and greed (Jas 5:1–6). Luke 6:24 pronounces woe against the rich, and all three synoptic Gospels speak of the dangers of riches (Mt 13:22; Mk 4:19; Lk 8:14).” [Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2134.]

but these were more the exceptions than the rule.²¹ In James, the strongly negative viewpoint in chapters two and five reflect the Jewish wisdom heritage which generally took a similar stance against material wealth.²²

The core admonition is a single word: κλαύσατε. The ingressive Aorist function of the imperative verb from κλαίω²³ calls upon the wealthy to begin screaming in mournful howls.²⁴ The language here reflects the prophetic call for weeping over the coming destruction at the Day of the Lord.²⁵

The expansion element to this core admonition ‘fleshes’ out the details strongly in the language of Old Testament prophetic denunciation of the wealthy: ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς τάλαιπωρίαῖς ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, [wailing over your coming miseries](#). The modal participle ὀλολύζοντες from ὀλολύζω is only used here in the New Testament but shows up some 21 times in the LXX from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Zechariah. Isaiah 13:6 typifies this usage, as well as its connection to the Day of the Lord:²⁶

ὀλολύζετε, ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου,
καὶ συντριβὴ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔξει.

[Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;](#)
[it will come like destruction from the Almighty!](#)

James echoes the language of the prophets in an oracle of doom upon the rich of his day.

What are the rich to scream over? ταῖς τάλαιπωρίαῖς ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, [your coming miseries](#), is the answer. Again the vocabulary of the prophets is utilized, in that τάλαιπωρίαῖς from τάλαιπωρία is used some 29 times by the OT prophets and the Psalms overwhelmingly to specify miseries suffered by those resisting God.²⁷ Two qualifiers heighten the focus. First, these miseries are ὑμῶν, [your](#) miseries. That is, the rich will personally suffer horrific destruction from the hands of God. Second, these miseries are ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, [coming](#). The use of the present participle here stresses the absolute certain of these events taking place. James does not speculate about how far out in the future this may be; but, he is completely confident of their happening in the timing of God.

The OT background image of the Day of the Lord, ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου, stands behind this expression.²⁸

²¹“The evidence of Acts (e.g., Acts 16:14; 17:12; 18:7–8) and analysis of names mentioned in Paul’s correspondence (e.g., Rom 16:1–23) suggest that there were many early converts who were well-to-do.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 826.]

²²One interesting side note: I have observed both in the scholarly literature as well as in church life generally, that one’s attitude about wealth depends heavily on where one lives. Dominantly those living in affluent western societies will acknowledge the biblical condemnation of the wealthy, but quickly make the excuse that it is the abuse of wealth, not wealth itself that is the problem. On the other hand, those living and working among the poverty stricken either in western society but especially outside of it will be much less inclined to defend the legitimacy of being wealthy from a biblical perspective.

²³κλαίω (Hom.+) impf. ἔκλαιον; fut. (B-D-F §77; Mt-H. 244) κλαύσω (TestJob, ApocMos, Just., Tat.) and κλαύσομαι (LXX; **Rv 18:9** v.l.; Hv 3, 3, 2; Jos., Bell. 1, 628; SibOr 5, 170); 1 aor. ἔκλαυσα; mid.-pass. ἐκλαύσθην; fut. κλαυσθήσομαι LXX.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 545.]

²⁴“James calls them to weep (κλαύσατε), the proper response to disaster (La. 1:1–2; Is. 15:2, 5; Je. 9:1; 13:17), for disaster is what is overtaking them.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 175.]

²⁵“Again, the verb *klaiein* means to give expression to sorrow and mourning by weeping (see Gen 37:35; Num 11:10; Deut 1:45). As with the other terms, it appears in prophetic discourse concerning the experience of sorrow at Yahweh’s punishment (Hos 12:5; Joel 1:5; 2:17; Isa 22:4; 30:19; Jer 8:23; 13:17; Lam 1:1).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 285.]

²⁶“The LXX, in contrast, uses the verb exclusively in the context of laments in response to the disasters visited on the people by Yahweh for their apostasy (see Hos 7:14; Amos 8:3; Zech 11:2; Isa 10:10; 13:6; 14:31; 15:2–3; 16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; 24:11; 52:5; 65:14). Its use here reinforces the strongly prophetic character of James’ discourse in this section.” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 298–99.]

²⁷“The noun form used here (*talaipōria*) can be used of miseries in general, such as those connected to poverty or mockery (Job 5:21; Pss 11:6; 39:3; 68:21; 87:19), but it is used predominantly in connection with the miseries suffered by those who have resisted God (Pss 13:3; 139:6; Hos 9:6; Amos 3:10; 5:9; Mic 2:4; Joel 1:15; Hab 1:3; Zeph 1:15; Isa 16:4; 47:11; 59:7; 60:18; Jer 4:20; 6:7).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 299.]

²⁸“‘The Day of the Lord’ (= ‘the Day of Yahweh’) is a central feature of the prophets’ message to their contemporaries. This phrase and such closely related expressions as ‘the day of the anger of Yahweh,’ or ‘Yahweh has a day,’ occur over two dozen times

That James dominantly has in mind eschatological judgment becomes very clear in the subsequent references to this day of misery. The accumulated wealth will stand as a witness against the rich on that day and will consume them like fire (v. 3). That day will be a reckoning with the Lord of Sabaoth (v. 4). It will be a day of slaughter (v. 5). Together these dramatic images paint an awful picture of final judgment and condemnation to Hell.²⁹ But is divine judgment at the end of human history all that this image assumes? I suspect not. For just as the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament contained a variety of temporal judgments, James' image can also include temporal judgments from God upon the wealthy. In ancient history, one such judgment upon the wealthy Jews in Palestine came with a devastating blow when the Roman siege of Jerusalem ended in 70 AD and the city was completely destroyed, something that Jesus had predicted prior to His death in AD 30: cf. Matt. 23:37 and Luke 19:41-44.³⁰

By mirroring the views of the Old Testament prophets James assumes a level of authority to speak words of doom concerning the wealthy Jewish landowners of his day.³¹ They are the primary target, but these words would have applied to other non-Jewish landowners participating in the land grab in Galilee as well. For the Christian community whose members were suffering these injustices both in Galilee and Judea, these words would have provided hope and encouragement to faithfulness to God. In the voice of the authoritative OT prophets James reminded his Christian readers that God is a God of justice and righteousness. Wrongs and evil do not reign supremely; only God does. From this holy God will come a day of reckoning for these evil doers who stand behind such injustices. From this suffering believers can find hope and consolation. And, the need to turn things completely over to God rather than trying to take matters into their own hands.

For Jewish Christian believers in the Diaspora, such words would have brought encouragement as well, as they felt pain for the injustices being suffered by brothers and sisters in the faith back home in Pal-

in prophetic books (most frequently in Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah), and once in Lamentations (2:22). Similar terms, particularly 'that day,' 'the day of,' and 'the day when,' appear nearly 200 times in the prophets, occasionally in Lamentations, and twice in Psalms (Pss 110:5; 137:7). These terms often are used interchangeably with the fuller expressions or in contexts that refer specifically to one or the other of them, e.g., Isa 2:12-22 (see vv 12, 17, 20); Jer 46:10; Ezek 7:5-27 (see vv 7, 10, 12, 19); and Ezek 30:2-3. In most instances, the same ranges of meaning are suggested." [Richard H. Hiers, "Day of the Lord" In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 82.]

²⁹Add to these images the explicit references to ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου, **the coming of the Lord**, in vv. 7-8, and that of God as ὁ κριτής, **the Judge**, in v. 9. The temporal references, ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν, **the coming of the Lord is near** (v. 8) and ὁ κριτής πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν, **the Judge stands just outside the door**, suggest that James expected the end of time to happen very soon in his own lifetime.

³⁰Josephus presents several very gruesome accounts of starvation by both the Zealots in one part of the city and by the aristocrats in another part of the city. In *The Wars of the Jews*, 5:10.4 he gives one of these accounts of the aristocrats. Here he is describing cannibalism that took place inside the sieged city:

(439) These were the afflictions which the lower sort of people suffered from these tyrants' guards; but for the men that were in dignity, and withal were rich, they were carried before they tyrants themselves; some of whom were falsely accused of laying treacherous plots, and so were destroyed; others of them were charged with designs of betraying the city to the Romans: but the readiest way of all was this, to suborn somebody to affirm that they were resolved to desert to the enemy; (440) and he who was utterly despoiled of what he had by Simon, was sent back again to John, as of those who had been already plundered by John, Simon got what remained, insomuch that they drank the blood of the populace to one another, and divided the dead bodies of the poor creatures between them; (441) so that although, on account of their ambition after dominion, they contended with each other, yet did they very well agree in their wicked practices; for he that did not communicate what he had got by the miseries of others to the other tyrant, seemed to be too little guilty, and in one respect only; and he that did not partake of what was so communicated to him, grieved at this, as at the loss of what was a valuable thing, that he had no share in such barbarity.

[Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).]

³¹"The word 'ānī is the most prominent of the terms for 'poor' in the prophetic literature, where it appears 25 times and connotes (1) economic oppression (Isa 3:15; Ezek 18:12; cf. Deut 24:12; Ezek 22:29; Amos 8:4); (2) unjust treatment in legal decisions (Isa 10:2); and (3) victimization through deception (Isa 32:7). Concretely, the society's leaders are said to have robbed the poor of their possessions (Isa 3:14; cf. Second Isaiah below). In another case, Ezekiel actually transforms the story of the destruction of Sodom by applying an economic interpretation: Sodom was destroyed because it withheld food from the poor (Ezek 16:49; cf. Gen 18:16-19:29). For First Isaiah and Jeremiah, the liberator of the poor is the king (Isa 14:32; Jer 22:16). In other prophetic texts, Yahweh alone is portrayed as the champion of the oppressed (Hab 3:14; Zeph 3:12; cf. Second Isaiah below)." [J. David Pleins, "Poor, Poverty: Old Testament" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 408.]

estine. Additionally, they experienced their own share of injustices at the hands of wealthy individuals in their own towns and cities, from both Jewish and Gentile aristocracy. Paul will allude to the suffering of believers in Asia and Macedonia in several of his writings, as well as Luke providing descriptions of this in Acts 13 - 21. Much of this persecution came from the leaders of the Jewish synagogues in Pisidion Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, and Beroea.

What we need to learn from this oracle of doom by James is a reminder of the dangers of material wealth. Particularly with living in highly affluent western societies, the quest for material wealth has a numbing effect on our lives spiritually. It gradually becomes the controlling motivation and pushes concern for the will of God to the side-lines, if not out of the game completely. We must never forget Paul's axiom, which echoes James' view point: *ρίζα γὰρ πάντων τῶν κακῶν ἐστὶν ἡ φιλαργυρία, For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil* (1 Tim. 6:10a).

b) The reasons for that doom, vv. 2-6

2 ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, 3 ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατῴεται καὶ ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ. ἔθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. 4 ἴδου ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὦτα κυρίου σαβαώθ εἰσεληλύθασιν. 5 ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς, 6 κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον, οὐκ ἀντιπάσεται ὑμῖν.

2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. 4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

In James' defense of his pronouncement of doom, he builds his case around accusing the rich of being guilty of violating God's laws and then on the basis of that guilt the divine judgment of doom falls on the wealthy. It is this last section that directly corresponds to and develops the concept of doom alluded to with ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, *your coming miseries*, in verse one. This structure is charted out visually above under **literary structure**, and is repeated here:

Four Sets of Arguments:	Guilt	Judgment
1. Condemnation of the ancient status symbols of wealth (#s 148-153):	148-150	151-153
2. Condemnation of fraudulent means of gaining wealth (#s 154-155):	154	155
3. Condemnation of the luxuriant lifestyle of the wealthy (#s 156-158):	156-157	158
4. Condemnation of the abusive treatment of the poor by the wealthy (#s 159-161):	159-160	161

Notice that in each of the four charges a twofold pattern exists. James first charges the rich with guilt of violating divine law. This becomes the basis upon which divine condemnation is pronounced. As noted in the exegesis of verse one, the primary thrust of this condemnation is the eschatological Day of Final Judgment at the end of human history. But within the prophetic tradition of the Day of the Lord among the prophets, a temporal judgment day could fall within the scope of this pronouncement as well. Clearly in this case during the first century, such did happen to the wealthy Jews with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Josephus describes in horribly gruesome detail the sufferings of Jewish aristocracy during the two plus year siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Many thousands of wealthy Jewish people perished when the city was finally overrun by the Romans.

These ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, *coming miseries*, are described in terms a consuming fire (v. 3), provoking a response from the Lord of hosts (v. 4), and a day of slaughter (v. 5). The ironic twist that is taken in the fourth set in verse six re-focuses the passage for the next pericope.

Even though no causal conjunction such as γάρ is stated making vv. 2-6 the basis for the admonition in v. 1, the flow of content makes it absolutely clear that this is James' intent. That such a conjunction would be omitted is not surprising given the short rapid-fire declarations that characterize this passage. Note this visually in the above diagram of the text. Considerable ellipsis is present throughout the text.

1) **Possession of wealth, vv. 2-3.** 2 ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, 3 ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται καὶ ὁ ἶδς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ. ἔθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.

Note the twofold structure that begins with an accusation of guilt (vv. 2-3a) and then the pronouncement of judgment (v. 3b-c).

Accusation of Guilt: ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, 3 ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται. James begins with the three ancient status symbols of wealth: food, clothes, and money.³² Solomon stands as the prime example of this among the Jewish people. James targets those three items here with ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν, τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν, and ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος. Although ὁ πλοῦτος does not itself specify food, the verb action of rotting, σέσηπεν, makes it clear that this is what he has in mind.

One must note the tense of the three Greek verbs, σέσηπεν, γέγονεν, and κατίωται. All three Greek verbs are in the perfect tense of ancient Koine Greek.³³ The use here is a highly specialized function of this tense form of the verb, sometimes labeled ‘prophetic anticipation’ or ‘futuristic perfect.’³⁴ The impact of this is simply that James is evaluating the present worthlessness of these status symbols against standards employed at the coming judgment of God. When view against the standards of what is valuable and not valuable in final judgment, these present status symbols suggest utterly worthlessness, although the owners and the society around them highly prized them as signals of high value and great importance. This particular function of the perfect tense provided a convenient vehicle for proverbial expression in ancient Greek. Additionally, James could be implying that by hoarding these expressions of wealth, rather than using them to help those in need, they were loosing them to rot and decay.

What James is stressing here is the contrast between what people value and what God values. Those in rebellion against God do not value the things He values. Their tendency is to elevate material accumulation to the high priority list. For the first century world where wealth and power served as the anchor of much of everyday life for all levels of society, the accumulation of wealth took on a high priority. This was true among the Jewish people as it was in pagan Greco-Roman society. Added to the Jewish emphasis on wealth accumulation was a religious view by some that possessing wealth signaled the blessing of God. And -- as the reasoning went -- the OT teaches clearly that God only blesses the righteous, so being wealthy amounts to being righteous before God. Of course, both Jesus and the apostles vigorously condemn such thinking, as is reflected in Jesus words to the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-25, which ended with the declaration: “Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Thus in this first accusation against the wealthy, James is stressing making the accumulation of wealth a high priority, and especially one that is more important than the will of God.

Pronouncement of Judgment: καὶ ὁ ἶδς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ. ἔθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. In the second part where divine doom is pronounced, James

³²“A status symbol is an object which is meant to signify its owners’ high social and economic standing. Although which things act as status symbols changes over time, they are always linked to the primary differences between the upper and lower classes within the society. In capitalist societies, status symbols are most often tied to monetary wealth.” [“Status Symbol,” *American Heritage Dictionary*] These symbols can and do shift from time to time and culture to culture. For a detailed discussion, see “Status Symbol,” *Wikipedia.org*.

One of the more curious status symbols in ancient Egypt was board games, as well as across the ancient near east. Passed around as elite gifts among the powerful and wealthy, they enabled the owners to pass the time of day by entertainment. See “Board Games Were Status Symbols in the Ancient World,” *Bible History Daily* online.

³³One should remember that the perfect tense in ancient Greek bears little resemblance to the perfect tense of modern English, or to any of its counterparts in the other modern western languages. The label ‘perfect’ tense for the Greek is rather misleading, but is well established in modern grammars dealing with ancient Greek.

³⁴“The use of the three verbs in the perfect tense can be interpreted as a ‘prophetic anticipation’ (Adamson, 185) rather than something that has already taken place. To the prophet’s eye the reality is as good as though it had already happened (Mussner, 194, citing as illustration Isa 60:1). Ropes points out that the shift to the future tense with ἔσται (‘will be’) and φάγεται (‘will consume’) undercuts the position that literal decay had already set in (284–85). Moo (161–62) notes this argument of Ropes and suggests that if we take 5:2–3a figuratively, then the ‘decay’ of worldly goods only emphasizes the ‘present worthless state’ of the wealth of the rich people. But Moo qualifies his own position by suggesting that it could be that at least some food and garments have actually started to decay as a result of disuse. That is, the rich hoard their wealth, and rather than help the needy they allow such goods to rot.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 177.]

sets up a similar threefold pronouncement. First their money -- which James says stands rusted now³⁵ -- in final judgment will take the stand as a witness against the wealthy possessor. Its witness will condemn the individual as being completely out of the will of God with having put a higher priority on accumulating money than in obeying God. Second, their rust ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν will consume their flesh as fire.³⁶ Third, in actuality the accumulation of wealth by these people is actually storing up a stockpile of fiery judgments that will be unleashed on them during these last days (ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις).³⁷

These stinging words were intended as a vivid reminder to his readers about the dangers of wealth accumulation. The ungodly who made such a top priority in their lives would pay a horrific price for such misplaced values. Clearly in affluent western society we need to hear this message over and over until it sinks in with life altering impact.

2) Accumulation of wealth, v. 4. ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὤτα κυρίου σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.

The second set of condemnations center on the manner of accumulating of wealth. The first one condemned making such accumulation a top priority. Now how it is accumulated comes under fire. And again James follows the twofold pattern of an accusation followed by a pronouncement of judgment.

Accusation of Guilt: ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει. The wrong doing asserted focuses on failure of the land owners to properly pay the wages of their workers, ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν.³⁸ These land owners live in Jerusalem and other cities some distance

³⁵One should note that scientifically gold cannot rust as the verb indicates. This was understood in the ancient world as well as in the modern world. The use of the concept of κατίωται for gold and silver signals that James is alluding to something beyond just the physical material aspect.

“But the main point of James’ discussion here is the temporal nature of such goods. (1) The food (or wealth in general) is rotten (σέσηπεν, perfect tense of σήπειν, ‘to cause to rot,’ a hapax legomenon in the NT; cf. Sir 14:19); (2) the garment is moth-eaten (σητόβρωτα, taken with γέγονεν, perfect tense, is a hapax legomenon in the NT; see Job 13:28 LXX and for the roots cf. Sir 42:13: ‘out of clothes comes the moth,’ NEB; cf. Isa 50:9; 51:8); (3) the transitory nature of gold and silver is depicted by James’ description of their rusting (κατίωται, perfect tense; another hapax legomenon; cf. Sir 12:11, LXX; ‘as sure as metal rusts,’ 12:10, NEB). This last point is proverbial rather than actual, for these precious metals do not rust. As an example of this manner of speech used of money rusting, see Sir 29:10; Matt 6:20. But all three images—rotting food or riches, moth-eaten garments, rusting gold and silver—depict the temporary and useless nature of worldly goods.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 177.]

³⁶“The rust will not only tarnish the gold and silver but will consume the flesh of the rich as fire consumes its fuel. This terrible picture conveys the image of the last judgment as (ὡς; a simile; so Adamson, 185) fire (πῦρ) consumes the flesh (σάρξ, i.e., the person; so Davids, 176–77; see Judg 16:17). In short, the wealth of the ungodly rich stands as a witness to accuse them (ὕμῖν is to be classed as *dat. incommodi*, i.e. of disadvantage!). As a result they will receive punishment in the fires of judgment (Matt 25:41; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 23; Rev 11:5; 20:9), akin to Gehenna (3:6). On the rabbinic teaching of a fiery punishment for the godless, see Str-B, 4:866–67, based on the prophets’ warnings (Isa 30:27, ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θυμοῦ ὡς πῦρ ἔδεται; 10:16–17; Amos 5:6; Ezek 15:7; cf. Ps 20:10[21:9]; 1QH 3:29–31).” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 177.]

³⁷“In line with other NT writers and in the light of his use of ἐν (lit., ‘in’) it appears that James reflects the belief that the last days have already begun to dawn upon the world (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18). Thus, the rich are laying up treasure in the last days, which are imminent to the point of arrival. But James may be offering a specimen of irony here (Davids, 127; ‘semi-irony,’ Moo, 162). The treasure in mind is not their vaunted riches but the misery that awaits them. While they think that the wealth accumulated is held as a perpetual possession, they are vulnerable to severe judgment because not only is such wealth temporary, but it is the witness whose testimony condemns the rich. Instead of sharing their wealth with the needy (a response already spoken of as a sign of a saving faith in 2:14–16) they hoard it; what makes this doubly tragic is that they do so in the last days and thus underline the folly of their actions. While the last days represent the period before the Parousia of the Lord (5:8) to vindicate his own, this same period highlights the nearness of judgment for those who oppose the Lord and his ‘poor.’ James is not saying that he knows the exact day of judgment; rather, he is implying that the day may come at any time. Thus, with such an ominous event on the horizon, the misuse of wealth is taking place as a prelude to the coming of the Lord.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 178.]

³⁸“On unattached workers hired by the day,¹³ see 3:14; Matt. 20:1ff. The greedy rich do not pay them at the end of the day, and there was then no practical way of enforcing the law of Lev. 19:13 and Deut. 24:14. Oppression of laborers is often denounced from early times onward (e.g., Isa. 58:9; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5; Sir. 34:22; Tobit 4:14). Prompt payment of wages is also enjoined by the rabbis.¹⁴ Unlike the slave, who had someone who might protect his interests, the free laborer¹⁵ had none. The scene is deliberately set after harvest: the owners of these large Galilean ‘estates’¹⁶ were well able to pay wages. The compound withheld¹⁷ indicates not just

from the property they now own, but during harvest time they and their field managers would be expected to be at their property supervising the harvest and to take care of paying the day workers at the end of each work day.³⁹ Their work is described as τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας, *who mowed your fields*. Not only are these individuals described as τῶν ἐργατῶν, *workers*, but they are also called τῶν θερισάντων, *harvesters*. The connection between these two terms is natural for agricultural workers in the ancient world where harvesting crops such as wheat and barley required cutting down the stalks of the grain, gathering them into bundles, and then winnowing out the grains through a back breaking process, now done by mechanical combines. Harvest time was not only important for the land owner, but also for the Jewish peasant in that it provided opportunity for season labor to help bring in income for surviving.

Wages to be earned by these day laborers was not much but it was essential to them for survival. But the wealthy land owners, fully able to pay generous wages, failed to pay their workers: ὁ ἀπστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν. The participle ἀπστερημένος from ἀπστερέω fundamentally means to steal or rob and especially by fraud. At minimum the land owners did not pay what had been agreed on to these workers, but more likely they found ways to not pay the workers at all. James picks up on Mal. 3:5.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, *against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages*, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

καὶ προσάξω πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν κρίσει καὶ ἔσομαι μάρτυς ταχὺς ἐπὶ τὰς φαρμάκους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς μοιχαλίδας καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀμνύοντας τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐπὶ ψεύδει καὶ *ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀπστεροῦντας μισθὸν μισθωτοῦ* καὶ τοὺς καταδυναστεύοντας χήραν καὶ τοὺς κονδυλίζοντας ὄρφανούς καὶ τοὺς ἐκκλίνοντας κρίσιν προσηλύτου καὶ τοὺς μὴ φοβούμενους με, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ.†

Pronouncement of Judgment: καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὦτα κυρίου σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.

James makes it clear that these workers have protested this injustice, κρᾶζει. What he wants these rich people to understand is that they are not the only ones hearing this cries of protest. With their power and control of the court system they can turn a deaf ear to these workers. But far more importantly these cries, αἱ βοαὶ, have already been heard by a just and utterly powerful God who is committed to principles of justice, κυρίου σαβαὼθ, *the Lord of Sabaoth*. The term κυρίου σαβαὼθ is functionally a synonym for κύριος παντοκράτωρ in Malachi.⁴⁰ The point taken by James from the OT prophets is that the God who possesses all power, that is far superior to any these evil land owners might possess, will hold them fully accountable for this injustice.⁴¹

delay but complete default.” [James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 186.]

³⁹“Behold,” cries James, using a rhetorical interjection which for him functions within paragraphs to call attention to important images and examples (3:4, 5; 5:4, 7, 9, 11), ‘the wages of those you wronged cry out against you.’ The imagery of the hired laborer (ἐργατῆς, Mt. 9:37; 10:10; Lk. 10:2, 7; or μίσθιος, Lk. 15:17, 19, 21; μισθωτός, Mk. 1:20; Jn. 10:12) who mows (ἀμάω, NT *hapax legomenon*) the fields (χώρας, as in Lk. 12:16; 21:21; Jn. 4:35) of an absentee or rich landowner was common in the history of Israel from monarchial times onward (cf. de Vaux, 167). Likewise the practice of paying wages late or legally bilking the worker of his wages is ancient, as a host of laws and prophetic threats demonstrate (Lv. 19:13; Dt. 24:14–15; Jb. 7:1–2; 24:10; 31:13, 38–40; Je. 22:13; Mal. 3:5; Sir. 7:20; 31:4; 34:21ff.; Tob. 4:14; Mt. 20:8; Test. Job 12:4; Ps.-Phocyl. 19).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 177.]

⁴⁰Σαβαώθ indecl. **Sabaoth** (LXX; TestSol; SibOr; Just., D. 64, 2; PGM 4, 1235; 15, 14; 18a, 1; 35, 20; IDefixWünsch 2; 3, 27; 4, 15) Greek transcription of סַבְאָה, pl. of סַבְאָה=army, in a name applied to God κύριος Σ.=יהוה יְהוָה Yahweh Lord of the Armies, Lord of Hosts (on the mng. EKautzsch, RE XXI 1908, 620–27 [lit.]; here 626f a short treatment of the usage in the LXX. Also XXIV 1913, 661f. More detailed information in Thackeray 9; PKatz, Philo’s Bible, 146–49; BWambacq, L’épithète divine Jahwe Sebbâôt, ’47; BHHW III 2205; ZTalsir, JQR 78, ’87, 57–75 [LXX]) **Ro 9:29** (Is 1:9); 1 Cl 34:6 (Is 6:3); **Js 5:4**.—M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 909.]

⁴¹“The cry of the laborer, who would likely be hungry from lack of money for food, is pictured as the cry of the wrongfully



Of that the mistreated workers can be absolutely certain.

The lesson from this to our day is the powerful lesson of social justice, especially in the work place. For a Christian employer to engage in cheating his employees out of just pay for their labor is unthinkable. In a greedy, materialistic pagan society that non-Christian employers would try to get away with such injustices is a given. The workers in James' day vigorously protested such treatment, and so should their counterpart in today's world. For the mistreated Christian employee the ultimate conviction is that the God of this universe will hold such employers accountable and their doom is certain at the hands of a holy and just God. Injustices will be addressed!

3) Use of wealth, v. 5. ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς,

The third condemnation builds the case against these rich people on the first two accusations of greedy preoccupation with wealth accumulation that prompts them to unjust treatment of their workers. Their greed for wealth has a luxurious life-style as its target. Here James' images become very dramatic, and contrastive to one another between the accusation and the pronouncement of judgment.



Accusation of Guilt: ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε. The two Aorist tense Greek verbs stress the lifestyle as the rich view it, while the verb in the next session views that same lifestyle from God's perspective. Once more James borrows heavily from the language of the Old Testament prophets to depict in general terms the lifestyle of the wealthy in his day.⁴² ἐτρυφήσατε, found only here in the NT, stresses living only for pleasure and self-indulgence.⁴³ The Old Testament prophets typically gave much greater detail than does James, but with his using their vocabulary to reference the lifestyle of the rich in his day he affirms a similar pattern⁴⁴

imprisoned wage, a cry for vengeance (Gn. 4:10; 18:20; 19:13; Ex. 2:23; 1 Sa. 9:16; Ps. 12:5 [11:6]; Sir. 21:5; 35:21; Lk. 18:17; Rev. 6:9–10; Eth. Enoch 47:1; 97:5). To say that the cry (βοή, NT *hapax legomenon*) of those reapers has entered the ears of the Lord Sabaoth, a phrase duplicated in Is. 5:9 LXX, where woe is pronounced on those acquiring large estates (cf. the other 60 times σαβαώθ is used in Isaiah as opposed to 9 times in the rest of the LXX; cf also Marshall, 31; Laws, 202–203), means that doom is imminent. For God to hear the cry of the poor is for him to bring judgment on their oppressors (cf. Pss. 17:1–6; 18:6; 31:2; Hermas Vis. 3.9.6). The term 'Lord Sabaoth' used here can only heighten this sense by referring to the majestic power of the prophetic God of Isaiah and the judgment which did follow his prophecy. James is using traditional material to attack a traditional class of oppressors; whether specific practices which withheld wages or the possession of large estates per se is in mind (cf. Is. 5:7–9; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47) one cannot determine. James sees injustice as part and parcel of why the landowners have their wealth to treasure up: he knows that in these last days the injustice is about to reap its doom." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 177-78.]

⁴²“The wealthy have lived a life of luxury on the earth (ἐτρυφήσατε, an NT *hapax legomenon* used neutrally in the OT: Ne. 9:25; Is. 66:11; Sir. 14:4), in contrast perhaps to what they will receive later, and they have lived in indulgence (ἐσπαταλήσατε; note the pejorative tone in 1 Tim. 5:6; Ezk. 16:49; Sir. 21:15; cf. Sir. 27:13; Hermas Man. 6.1.6; 6.2.6; Barn. 10:3). This is precisely the life-style of the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19–31), a life-style also condemned in other Jewish writings (Am. 2:6–8; 8:4–6; Is. 1:11–17; Eth. Enoch 98:11; 102:9–10), for it is self-indulgence in the face of the poverty of others. Whether or not James knew Luke's parable, he has painted its setting beautifully.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 178.]

⁴³“**τρυφάω** (τρυφή) fut. 3 pl. τρυφήσουσιν Sir 14:4; 1 aor. ἐτρύφησα (Eur., Isocr.+; Kaibel 362, 5; PLond III, 973b, 13 p. 213 [III A.D.]; 2 Esdr 19:25; Is 66:11; Sir 14:4; TestJos 9:2; Philo; Jos., Ant. 4, 167; 7, 133; Mel., P. 47, 335) **to lead a life of self-indulgence, live for pleasure, revel, carouse** Js 5:5; Hs 6, 4, 1f; 4ab; 6, 5, 3–5.—Of animals be contented, well fed (Philo, Dec. 117) Hs 6, 1, 6; 6, 2, 6 (though the sheep here represent luxury-loving people). In bold imagery and in a good sense, of reveling in the doing of good Hs 6, 5, 7 (cp. τρυφή 3).—DELG s.v. θρύπτω III. M-M.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1018.]

⁴⁴Cf. **Amos 4:1-2.** 4.1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring something to drink!” 2 The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.

The second term ἐσπαταλήσατε from σπαταλάω is similar in meaning with a stronger stress on immorality as integral to that lifestyle.⁴⁵ The two terms together express the portrait painted by Jesus in Luke 16:19-31: Ἄνθρωπος δὲ τις ἦν πλούσιος, καὶ ἐνεδιδύσκετο πορφύραν καὶ βύσσον εὐφραϊνόμενος καθ' ἡμέραν λαμπρῶς, *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day* (v. 19).

For the Jewish aristocrat living in this way, life was considered extremely good for him. Others did his work; he could play and do as little as he desired; all the food, clothing, and money he needed were at his disposal. Life was one party after another. For some who added the Jewish 'health and wealth gospel' to their vocabulary, all this material prosperity was the blessing of God for being more righteous than the poor peasants who did all the work for him.

Pronouncement of Judgment: ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς. This third expression shifts to God's view of this lifestyle. The image is agricultural in background. The animals are fattened up to be slaughtered at the appointed time. Again James reached back into the OT for the idea where the Day of the Lord becomes a day when God's enemies are slaughtered just like animals.⁴⁶ Thus the eschatological Day of Judgment becomes a day of destruction of the rich. Pointedly and bluntly James stresses that their living in luxury in this life is really getting them ready for that destruction.

4) Abuse of the poor with wealth, v. 6. κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον, οὐκ ἀντιπάσσειται ὑμῖν.

In this final condemnation James does a couple of surprising things. To some degree he returns to the injustice theme in the second condemnation, but now with a more pointed emphasis on the abuse of believers, which echoes what he had said about the rich in 2:6-7. And then instead of a pronouncement of doom on the rich for the second part, he takes a completely different twist stressing non-violent response to abuse. This paves the way for the next pericope in vv. 7-11 which focus on the abused believer and how he or she should respond to injustice.

Accusation of Guilt: κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον. Here the verbal expressions are strong and dramatic: *You have condemned and murdered*. Clearly the manipulation of the local Jewish court system against abused workers who are believers is the backdrop for these expressions.⁴⁷ Note 2:6b: *Is it not the*



⁴⁵σπαταλάω 1 aor. ἐσπατάλησα to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, live luxuriously/voluptuously (Polyb. 36, 17, 7; Kaibel 646a, 5; Ezk 16:49; Sir 21:15) **1 Ti 5:6; Js 5:5**; B 10:3. Of sheep in rich pasture be sportive Hs 6, 1, 6; 6, 2, 6.—DELG s.v. σπατάλη; s. also Frisk, w. suggestion of deriv. fr. σπάω in the sense 'suck in', e.g. wine. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 936.

⁴⁶“While the term never appears literally in the LXX (Je. 12:3 is the closest), its equivalent does in the MT (Is. 30:24) — it is part of a long tradition of the day of God's judgment as a day of the slaughter of his enemies (30:33; 34:5–8; Je. 46:10; 50:26–27; Ezk. 39:17; Pss. 22:29; 37:20; 49:14; La. 2:21–22; Wis. 1:7; Rev. 19:17–21; cf. Grill and Is. 63:1–6; Je. 12:3; 25:34; Ezk. 21:15). More importantly, Enoch explicitly connects the judgment of the rich to such an apocalyptic day: ‘Ye ... have become ready for the day of slaughter, and the day of darkness and the day of the great judgement’ (Eth. Enoch 94:9, APOT; cf. Eth. Enoch 97:8–10; 99:15; Jub. 36:9–10; Sl. Enoch 50:5). Furthermore, the expression appears for the apocalyptic day in 1QH 15:17–18: ‘But the wicked thou didst create ... to the Day of Massacre...’ (*lywm hrgh*; Vermes's translation), and its sense occurs elsewhere in the DSS (e.g. 1QS 10:19; CD 19:15, 19; 1QM 1:9–12; 13:14). In other words, given this tradition and the apocalyptic tone of the rest of the passage, one can hardly doubt that the eschatological day of judgment is intended (so Laws, 203–204; Spitta, 134; Ropes, 290; Marty, 188; Cantinat, 228; Mussner, 197–198—some go further to specify it as the time of Jerusalem's destruction but this is unlikely, Schlatter, 270; Feuillet, ‘sens,’ 273–279).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 178-79.]

⁴⁷“You have condemned and killed the righteous!” The sense is clearly that of judicial ‘murder.’ The term καταδικάζω is forensic enough to be parallel to the similar charge in 2:6 (ἔλκω εἰς κριτήρια; cf. LSJ, 889). The use of φονεύω gives the author's moral estimate of the result of the judicial process, an evaluation made repeatedly of the legal assaults of the rich on the poor in the Jewish piety-poverty tradition (Pss. 9:18; 10:8–9; 37:14, 32, 35; Pr. 1:11; Is. 3:10, 14; 57:1; Am. 2:6; 5:12; Pss. Sol. 3; Eth. Enoch 96:5, 8; 98:12; 99:15; 103:15; 1QH 2:21; 5:17; 15:15–17; 4QpPs37 2:7; Wis. 2:10–20). The claim of Spitta, 135, and Reicke, *Diakonie*, 51, that James depends upon the Wis. 2:20 passage remains unestablished because of a lack of verbal parallels. That legal confiscation of the property of the poor might be seen as murder appears in Sir. 34:22.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James:*

rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? οὐχ οἱ πλοῦσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; The extreme greed of these landowners moved them to rig the courts in order to take over control of the property belonging to the Jewish peasants, especially in southern Galilee. Any resistance by the peasants of this land grab would be met with the force of the legal authorities. And the peasants had virtually no recourse apart from all out revolt, which the Zealots were advocating all through this period of time. With its home base in Galilee at the beginning, it became very tempting to the hundreds of Jewish peasants who were turned into virtual slaves as tenant farmers by this land grab. Any resistance would bring about their execution by the authorities, which James labels a pure murder of the workers. And he lays the guilt for this at the feet of the rich.

The very unique thing that James does here is with the direct object of the two verbs: τὸν δίκαιον. This can mean both the Just One and the righteous. Who is James referring to here? Probably, to Jesus in His non-violent reaction to Pilate during His trial, and simultaneously to the abused Christian workers already mentioned in the passage.⁴⁸ Jesus set the example of non-violent response to unjust treatment during His trial based upon the Suffering Servant image of Isa. 53:7.⁴⁹ Peter picks this up clearly in 1 Pet. 2:23, written in the same time period as James: *When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly*, ὃς λοιδορούμενος οὐκ ἀντελοιδορεῖ, πάσχων οὐκ ἠπειλεῖ, παρεδίδου δὲ τῷ κρίνοντι δικαίως.⁵⁰ I'm firmly convinced that James evokes the example of Jesus as a model for the abused Christian worker. These abused Christian workers were seeking to follow the model as targets of abuse from the rich.

Pronouncement of Judgment (?): οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν. Instead of pronouncing doom on the wealthy, James picks up on the third person singular reference to τὸν δίκαιον, with his next declaration: *He does not resist you*. Both by example and by teaching (cf. Mt. 5:39), Jesus admonished His followers to avoid violence in responding to unjust treatment. This is the path being taken to this point by the abused Christian workers, and James strongly desires to encourage them to continue in this option, as vv. 7-11 will amplify on greatly. One interesting variation of this understanding comes with an alternative punctuation of this statement. Instead of it being a statement, it becomes a question: οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν; He resists you, does he not?⁵¹ To imply from this a physical resistance to the rich by the abused Christian workers is completely out of context with the clear thrust of vv. 7-11, and thus cannot be considered a valid understanding. If the statement is a question rather than a declaration, then a more sophisticated explanation must be given, such as that provided by Peter Davids.⁵² But the need to go this direction suggests questions about whether this is

A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 179.]

⁴⁸Not every commentator agrees with this view. See Luke Timothy Johnson:

Despite the view of Oecumenius, Bede, and Cassiodorus (and more recently, Feuillet, 276–77), there is no reason to see “the righteous one” (*ho dikaios*) as Jesus (see Luke 23:47; Acts 3:14) and even less to identify him with James (Mayor, 160 [possibly: Martin, 182; Dibelius, 240]). The reference is rather more general. Any laborer defrauded in this manner is “innocent” with respect to the oppressive action of the rich.

[Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 304.]

⁴⁹**Isa. 53:7** NRSV. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*

καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τὸ κεκακῶσθαι οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα· ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγῆν ἤχθη καὶ ὡς ἄμνός ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος οὕτως οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ.†

⁵⁰This quote comes as a part of a pre-formed piece of Christian tradition used by Peter. This argues strongly that either this confession of faith declaration, or, more likely, early Christian hymn had established itself in the larger Christian community as a part of the affirmations about Jesus in the teaching of early Christianity generally. All James needs to do is reference τὸν δίκαιον, the Righteous One, in order to evoke the image of Christ's example of non-violent response to injustices. In the second century this image of Christ took on major proportions in admonishing Christians to avoid violent retaliation to persecution.

⁵¹“He does not resist you: this final clause in James' charges is problematic. The problem is in deciding whether it is a question or a statement. Most of the recent translations render it as a statement. However, some consider the statement as an anticlimax and therefore have rendered it as a rhetorical question, ‘Does he not resist you?’ with the expected answer to it ‘Yes, he does resist you.’” [I-Jin Loh and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 176.]

⁵²“Since the verb can mean either legal or military resistance (LSJ, 164; MM, 49), it seems more likely in the light of its climactic position and passages such as Rev. 6:9–11 that one should read this as a question, as Hort did in the WH text: ‘Does he not

the best option or not. The simple declaration alluding to the stance taken by Jesus and being followed by the abused workers is the easier and better understanding.

For James' Jewish Christian readers in the Diaspora these would be both encouraging words that brought hope for justice from a just and holy God in the same tradition as their Jewish religious heritage from the Old Testament prophets had declared. But these words would also be challenging, but human instinct in the face of abuse is to strike back. They regularly were hearing appeals in the Diaspora synagogues for support of the resistance to the Romans back home in Palestine. By the late 50s when this document was composed and began circulation among the Diaspora Christian communities, this appeal increasingly was for volunteer fighters to return to the homeland and help throw out the Romans. Reports coming to them from their Christian brothers back home about the abuses being suffered at the hands of the greedy Jewish aristocracy put even more pressure on them to do something to correct these wrongs. But James seeks to reassure them that a holy God is still reigning and in control. And they must turn to Him for direction in these troubled times.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What lessons can we learn from 5:1-6? There are many that need to be learned. One of the more important ones concerns the danger of pursuing wealth. The sordid picture that James paints about the rich land owners of the first century is duplicated hundreds of times in modern materialistic western societies. The temptation to Christians and churches to get caught up in this suicidal quest for things is great. Witness the problems with church indebtedness and the financial problems plaguing many believers today. When raw materialistic quests become dominate, crime and violence automatically sky rocket. And this quest is never ending, for we never ever get enough 'things' to completely satisfy our desires. So many societies today are plagued by corruption and injustice, mostly due to this insatiable desire for more. God's people need to re-learn a simple life style with the will of God as the anchor point around which all of life revolves every day.

Closely related to this is the lesson of accountability from God. James pointedly stresses the Judgment of God falling on the abusive wealthy in this passage. It is both a temporal judgment and an eternal judgment. The rich he targeted suffered horrific destruction from the Romans within barely over decade after the writing of these words with the estimated killing of over a million Jewish people in the First Jewish War of 66-70 AD. But worse than this was the eternal fate awaiting these wealthy land owners on the Day of Final Judgment. There is no loophole around accountability before a holy God! Either then or now. In echoing the voices of the Old Testament prophets, James reminds us that the same God who punished the evil wealthy in ancient Israel would punish these same kind of people in his day, and this truth would never be changed at all.

Finally, we can learn from this text the principle of complete confidence in the justice of a holy God. When it seems that evil reigns supremely, James reminds us that no force in this world overrides God and His principles of justice. When we suffer victimization from injustices in our world, we can find hope and encouragement here that wrongs will be righted and injustices will be punished. Thus we must wait on the God who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." This is not easy, because it goes against human nature. But Jesus left us a clear example, and unmistakable instruction, that James appeals to:

11 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

10 μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. 11 μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν [ψευδόμενοι] ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. 12 χαίrete καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

resist you?" Yes, he does; by calling for justice before God's throne. The just one died quietly (from starvation or outright murder), but he still speaks. They have killed the poor righteous Christians, but their voice is now still resisting them (the language may recall God's act in 4:6), like the wages still crying out. The eschatological day is here. This cry of doom prepares one for the following comfort addressed to the suffering Christians." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 180.]

1. What is your attitude toward wealth accumulation?

2. What dangers are present in wealth?

3. How certain is the promise of God's judging the wealthy?

4. How should believers handle wealth accumulation?

5. How should believers respond to injustices?

6. How easy is it for you to trust the justice of God?