



The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 12
James 5:1-6

Study By
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Greek NT

<5:1> Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις <5:2> ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, <5:3> 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. <5:4> ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ᾧτα κυρίου Σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν. <5:5> ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς, <5:6> κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον, οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν.

Die Gute Nachricht Bibel

1 Und nun zu euch, ihr Reichen! Weint und jammert über das Elend, das euch erwartet am Tag, an dem Gott Gericht hält! 2 Eure Reichtümer werden dann verfault sein, eure Kleider von den Motten zerfressen, 3 und eure Schätze verrostet. Und dieser Rost wird euch anklagen und euer Fleisch wie Feuer verzehren. Ihr habt in den letzten Tagen der Welt Reichtümer angehäuft. 4 Ihr habt den Leuten, die auf euren Feldern gearbeitet und eure Ernte eingebracht haben, den verdienten Lohn vorenthalten. Das schreit zum Himmel! Ihre Klage ist bis zu den Ohren des Herrn, des Herrschers der Welt, gedrungen. 5 Euer Leben auf der Erde war mit Luxus und Vergnügen ausgefüllt. Während der Schlachttag schon vor der Tür stand, habt ihr euch noch gemästet. 6 Ihr habt den Schuldlosen verurteilt und umgebracht, der sich nicht gegen euch gewehrt hat!

NRSV

1 Come now, you men of wealth, give yourselves to weeping and crying because of the bitter troubles which are coming to you. 2 Your wealth is unclean and insects have made holes in your clothing. 3 Your gold and your silver are wasted and their waste will be a witness against you, burning into your flesh. You have put by your store in the last days. 4 See, the money which you falsely kept back from the workers cutting the grass in your field, is crying out against you; and the cries of those who took in your grain have come to the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have been living delicately on earth and have taken your pleasure; you have made your hearts fat for a day of destruction. 6 You have given your decision against the upright man and have put him to death. He puts up no fight against you.

NLT

5:1 Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. 5:2 Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. 5:3 Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell.¹⁵ This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. 5:4 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. 5:5 You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. 5:6 You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.

FOOTNOTES:

F15: Or will eat your flesh like fire.

The Study of the Text:¹

Context of our passage:

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
 Of James²

| | | |
|---------------------|-------|----------|
| 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 |

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 applicational 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.

²Taken 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.

| | | |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|
| Faith and Partiality | 38-55 | 2.1-13 |
| Faith and Works | 56-72 | 2.14-26 |
| 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 |

Literary and Historical Settings:

1. The connection of 5:1-6 to 4:13-17 was explored in the previous lesson. Summarize that discussion here.
2. Compare the contents of 5:1-6 and 5:7-11. What possible connection exists between these two passages?

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| <p>James 5:1-6 (NRSV). 1 Come now, you men of wealth, give yourselves to weeping and crying because of the bitter troubles which are coming to you. 2 Your wealth is unclean and insects have made holes in your clothing. 3 Your gold and your silver are wasted and their waste will be a witness against you, burning into your flesh. You have put by your store in the last days. 4 See, the money which you falsely kept back from the workers cutting the grass in your field, is crying out against you; and the cries of those who took in your grain have come to the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have been living delicately on earth and have taken your pleasure; you have made your hearts fat for a day of destruction. 6 You have given your decision against the upright man and have put him to death. He puts up no fight against you.</p> | <p>James 5:7-11 (NRSV). 7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.</p> |
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Pay close attention to 5:6 and 5:7. Here is where the connection between the two passages is basically established. Can you identify what it is? Two signals in 5:7 especially point to that connection. What are they?

3. What view of riches and the wealthy surfaces in the book of James? Review question 6 in Lesson 02 where this question was first explored. Summarize that discussion here as it relates to 5:1-6. Compare the references to the wealthy inside the book of James.

1:9-11 (NRSV). 9 Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, 10 and **the rich** in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

2:1-4 (NRSV). 1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if **a person with gold rings and in fine clothes** comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of **the one wearing the fine clothes** and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

2:5-7 (NRSV). 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not **the rich who oppress you**? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

5:1-6 (NRSV). 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.

Exegesis of the Text:

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

- 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.**
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.**
- 154 ^{5.4} Behold,
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.**
- 156 ^{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.**
- 159 ^{5.6} **You have condemned,**
160 **You have murdered the just one.**
161 **He does not resist you.**

Summary of Rhetorical Structure:

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.

Acknowledgement 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 on James with me.

Exegesis questions:

1) Compare James 5:1-6 to Luke 6:24-25, 12:13-21, 16:19-31, 18:18-30 in the teaching of Jesus. What is the perspective on the rich in Jesus' teaching as set forth by Luke? How does it compare to James?

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| <p>James 5:1-6 (NRSV). 1 Come now, you men of wealth, give yourselves to weeping and crying because of the bitter troubles which are coming to you. 2 Your wealth is unclean and insects have made holes in your clothing. 3 Your gold and your silver are wasted and their waste will be a witness against you, burning into your flesh. You have put by your store in the last days. 4 See, the money which you falsely kept back from the workers cutting the grass in your field, is crying out against you; and the cries of those who took in your grain have come to the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have been living delicately on earth and have taken your pleasure; you have made your hearts fat for a day of destruction. 6 You have given your decision against the upright man and have put him to death. He puts up no fight against you.</p> | <p>Luke 6:24-25 (NRSV). 24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.</p> | <p>L u k e 1 2 : 1 3 - 2 1 (NRSV). 13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."</p> | <p>Luke 16:19-31 (NRSV). 19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." 25 But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." 27 He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house — 28 for I have five brothers — that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." 29 Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." 30 He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." 31 He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."</p> | <p>Luke 18:18-30 (NRSV). 18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 20 You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother." 21 He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." 23 But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 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." 26 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27 He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." 28 Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." 29 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."</p> |
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What is the consistent emphasis in Luke's presentation of the teaching of Jesus about wealth?

How does this compare to the view of James here in 5:1-6?

2) Compare 5:1-6 to 1 Tim. 6:6-10 in the teaching of Paul. What is the perspective on the rich in Paul's teaching? How does it compare to James?

James 5:1-6 (NRSV). 1 Come now, you men of wealth, give yourselves to weeping and crying because of the bitter troubles which are coming to you. 2 Your wealth is unclean and insects have made holes in your clothing. 3 Your gold and your silver are wasted and their waste will be a witness against you, burning into your flesh. You have put by your store in the last days. 4 See, the money which you falsely kept back from the workers cutting the grass in your field, is crying out against you; and the cries of those who took in your grain have come to the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have been living delicately on earth and have taken your pleasure; you have made your hearts fat for a day of destruction. 6 You have given your decision against the upright man and have put him to death. He puts up no fight against you.

1 Tim. 6:6-10 (NRSV). 6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

3) Compare 5:1-6 to Amos 8:1-14 in the teaching of the OT prophet Amos, who represents the OT prophets. What is Amos' perspective on the rich? How does it compare to James?

James 5:1-6 (NRSV). 1 Come now, you men of wealth, give yourselves to weeping and crying because of the bitter troubles which are coming to you. 2 Your wealth is unclean and insects have made holes in your clothing. 3 Your gold and your silver are wasted and their waste will be a witness against you, burning into your flesh. You have put by your store in the last days. 4 See, the money which you falsely kept back from the workers cutting the grass in your field, is crying out against you; and the cries of those who took in your grain have come to the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have been living delicately on earth and have taken your pleasure; you have made your hearts fat for a day of destruction. 6 You have given your decision against the upright man and have put him to death. He puts up no fight against you.

Amos 8:1-14 (NRSV). 1 This is what the Lord God showed me — a basket of summer fruit. 2 He said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the Lord said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. 3 The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," says the Lord God; "the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!"

4 Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, 5 saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, 6 buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." 7 The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. 8 Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? 9 On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. 10 I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.

11 The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. 13 In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. 14 Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, "As your god lives, O Dan," and, "As the way of Beer-sheba lives" — they shall fall, and never rise again.



4) Identify the specific scripture text location of the two motifs in the four sets of defense in 5:2-6.

| Four Sets of Arguments: | Accusation of Guilt. Which statements does this show up in? | Pronouncement of Judgment. Which statements does this show up in? |
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| 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) | | |

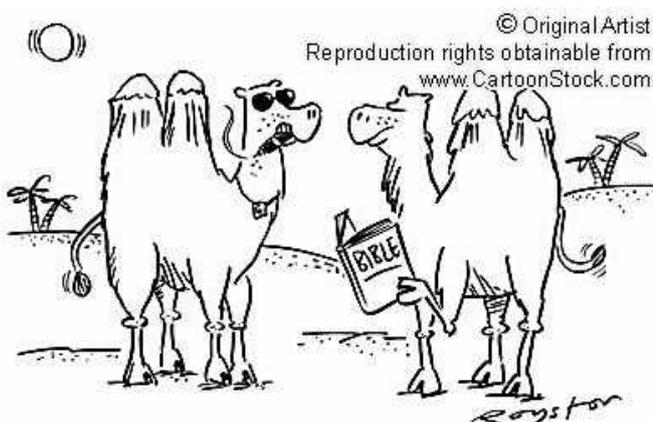
5) In the four sets of arguments in the defense section two sets have primarily to do with attitude and posture, while two sets primarily focus upon actions. Can you identify which sets belong to each emphasis?

Attitude:

Actions:

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) How do you view wealth?
- 2) How real is the awareness of impending divine judgment of your life?
- 3) As an Christian employer, how well do you treat your employees?
- 4) As an Christian employee, how well to you respond to injustices on the job?
- 5) How much does the model of Jesus influence your daily living?



"Where does it stand on rich camels?"