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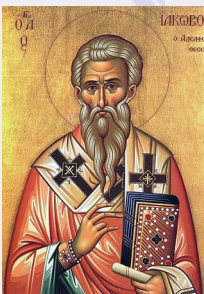
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What do you say to people being abused and treated unjustly? We read almost daily of wives and children being horribly abused. Minimum wage workers being cheated out of the wages due them. On and on the stories come in the newspaper, on TV news and in a growing number of media outlets. We feel outrage and demand that the authorities take punitive action against the abusers. Our courts function in part to extract retribution on such folk in behalf of the victims. Our society is designed both to prevent and to correct such injustices.

But what if you were absolutely helpless to do anything to correct these wrongs? The government and the courts were in the hip pocket of the abusers? They were "legitimizing" the abuses of these helpless people. To appeal to them would guarantee your own execution. Add to this the fact that already armed revolt was breaking out by many of these victims in a vicious guerrilla warfare that would cost the lives of thousands of people before it was crushed by the authorities. In fact, it would take your life not too long after you tried to help these victimized people.

Now, what do you do? This was the dilemma facing James. He preached the message of 5:1-11 many times in his leadership role of Christians in Jerusalem as he courageously spoke out against what powerfully wealthy Jews were doing to peasants living in Galilee. When excerpts of his preaching were stitched together into written expression either shortly before his own martyrdom in AD 62 or else shortly after it, this theme in James' preaching ministry was considered quite important to preserve and quite relevant to Jewish Christian communities living in the increasingly turbulent world of the Roman empire during the mid part of the first Christian century.



I. Context

The background material from [previous studies of James](#) will be incorporated into this study with new material being developed only as relevant to this particular study.

a. Historical

External History. The external history has to focus on the only clearly letter aspect of the entire book in 1:1 - "[James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.](#)"

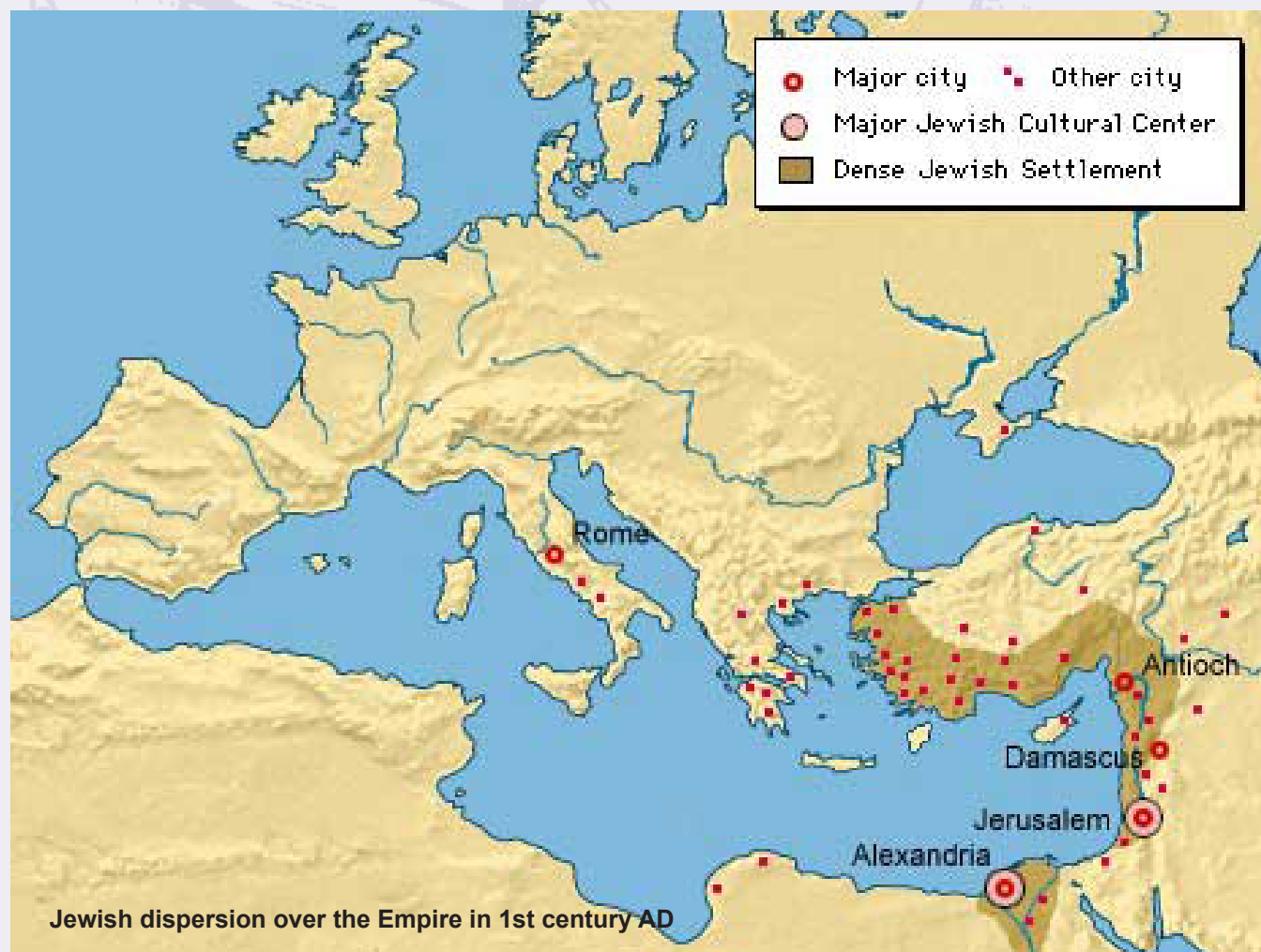
The document identifies itself in the letter Prae-scriptio (1:1) as coming from James. He identifies

himself as a servant of God and of Christ. Early church tradition identified this James as the brother of Jesus and of Jude. Several Christian leaders by the name of [James](#) surface in the New Testament. Among the Twelve apostles there was James the brother of John and their father was Zebedee. Also there was James, son of Alphaeus. There was a

James whose mother was Mary; this could possibly be Alphaeus' son but the text isn't clear (Mt. 27:56). According to Mk. 6:3, Jesus was "the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas [=Jude] and Simon," as well as some unnamed sisters. This James also became the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem by the 50s of the first century. At the Jerusalem council meeting in AD 48 ([Acts 15](#)), James, the elder, stands as the spokesman for the various house church leaders in and around Jerusalem, while Peter spoke at that meeting representing the apostles. One of the literary links between the letter of James and the Act 15 James is the construction of the Praescriptio part of the two letters. In Acts 15:23-29 the letter composed by James to be sent to the church at Antioch begins in the Praescriptio with "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, *greetings*." The common link is the identical Salutatio ("greetings") of both letters. The single Greek word *χαίρειν* (*chairein*) is the traditional Greek letter Salutatio, but is found only three times in the entire New Testament. Two of these connect

the same James to the two letters.

Early in the second century the title James the Just begins showing up (Gospel of Thomas log. 12; Gospel according to the Hebrews). This terminology became the standard way of referring to this James. At the beginning of the 200s, the Clementine Recognitions ([1.43-72](#)) contains one of the most detailed accounts of early church tradition about James the Just. The common tradition is that James was martyred by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem about AD 62 out of jealousy stemming from the intense piety of James that was attracting hundreds of Jews in Jerusalem to Christian faith (cf. Hegeppus, *Memoranda*, as quoted by Eusebius, *Church History*, 2.23.11). The Jewish historian Josephus records this account of the death of James: "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananis II, the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned..." (*Antiquities*



of the Jews, 20.200).

But this early church tradition about James did not guarantee a quick adoption of the book of James into the canon of the New Testament. Uncertainty over whether the James of Acts 15 was the same person mentioned in Jas. 1:1 persisted until the middle 300s when the link between the two finally prevailed and the book of James found a secure place in the canon of the NT at the head of the seven general letters section (Jas - Jude). This was more widely adopted in western (Roman Catholic) Christianity than in the eastern (Orthodox) branch of Christianity. Then with the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s questions about James arose again, in part driven by a view that 2:14-26 flatly contradicted the view of salvation advocated by Paul (salvation by grace through faith in Paul versus salvation by faith and works in James). Martin Luther resolved this issue by adopting the idea of the canon first found in the church father Origen in the early 200s. James, along with some other NT documents, were relegated to a secondary status and moved to an appendix position at the end of Luther's translation. Luther's idea of a "canon within the canon" is still debated in scholarly circles, although the revisions of Luther's German translation removed the appendix status of James in the 1904 revision.

Assuming the accuracy of the church tradition that links the Acts 15 and Letter of James to the Lord's brother, when was this material put together? And under what circumstances? Although various proposals can be found, I have been convinced for a long time that the material came together sometime from the end of the 50s to the middle 60s. As has been widely recognized for several centuries, the book of James has only an appearance of a letter. In fact, 1:1 (the Praescriptio) is the only identifiable letter aspect in the entire document. If not a letter, then what is it? It stands in the tradition of an ancient Jewish homily (see below under Literary Genre). As such, the material represents, most likely, segments of James' preaching to the Christian community in Jerusalem that have been brought together in a single document. This was done by disciples of James either shortly before or soon after his mar-



tyrdom in AD 62 as a way of preserving the amazing ministry of this Christian leader. The document is then distributed as a tractate with an epistolary introduction (1:1). The material was collected into a single document by disciples of James and targeted primarily to Jewish Christians located in Christian communities scattered over the eastern Mediterranean world as the storm clouds of the Zealot revolt in Palestine in the 60s began casting uncertainty over the continued existence of the Jewish people in Palestine. About two decades before, Stephen's martyrdom had brought about a scattering of the Christian community from Jerusalem from persecution (Acts 11:19-20) and then later Herod came close to killing Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-19). It didn't take a rocket scientist's intellect to figure out that when the explosion came between the Jews and the Romans, the Jewish Christians would be caught in the cross fire and would be the first casualties of that explosion.

One of the aims of this document is shared with the Gospel of Matthew: to set forth the legitimate claims of Christianity to Jewish Christians as a religious commitment blessed by God and standing in the great Jewish tradition of relationship with God being interconnected to relationships with others. Thus, many parallels between principles advocated in James and by Jesus in Matthew's gospel can be detected; more than with any of the other gospel accounts.

Internal History. A number of place markers especially surface inside 5:1-11. Some time markers are present as well. In the first section, vv. 1-6, the an allusion to wealthy landowners abusing Jewish peasant farmers shows up (vv. 3-4). The Jewish historian, [Flavius Josephus](#) in his [Antiquities of the Jews](#) and the [Wars of the Jews](#) mentions a pattern of abuse of Jewish peasants in lower Galilee ([see map](#) on previous page) during the mid-first century. At first, this came from Jewish aristocrats in Jerusalem, mostly in cahoots with Sadducees, but then Roman aristocrats joined the process. The motivation was the enormously rich farm land in this region and the money that could be made from taking over control of the land, even whose ownership by the small farmers traced back to Joshua and the initial division of the land centuries before. The unrest created by this eventually led to an armed guerrilla revolt by these peasant farmers in the 50s and 60s. This fed into the [First Jewish War](#) (66-73) against the Romans that ended in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Titus in AD 70. To be sure, abuse of peasants by wealthy aristocrats had been a frequent problem that came under severe condemnation as far back as Amos in the eight century B.C.E. In my opinion, this prophetic model provided James both the contours and the spiritual

authority for condemning the wealthy in his day. He saw them coming under the same divine wrath brought down on their ancestors in the days of Amos, Isaiah etc.

The other major space / time marker is the eschatological end when God's wrath would be poured out on the wealthy.

In the first six verses, it is described or alluded to with a series of expressions:



v. 1 the miseries coming upon you
ἐπὶ ταῖς τάλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομένας

v. 3 their rust will stand as a witness against you
ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται

it will eat your flesh like fire.
καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ.

You have laid up treasure for the last days.
ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.

v. 4 the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα κυρίου
Σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.

v. 5 you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.
ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς

In the second section, vv. 6-11, the eschatological specification becomes clearer:

v. 7 until the coming of the Lord.
ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου.

v. 8 the coming of the Lord is near.
ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν.

v. 9 See, the Judge is standing at the doors!
ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν.

In this, James links the return of Christ at the end of time to divine wrath being poured out on these wealthy landowners. Additionally, this return of Christ was the hope for rectification of wrongs done to

those suffering at the hands of these aristocrats. Using the language of Jesus (*is near*) and Paul (*the coming of the Lord*), James reflects a common conviction in apostolic Christianity that the return of Christ was not long off from their time. The verb used here ἤγγικεν ("is near") has a twofold thrust with the meanings of "shortly to arrive" and "could arrive at any moment."

The first expects the event to take place very soon, while the second underscores

that the event could take place at any moment. Thus early Christianity lived with the expectancy that Jesus' second coming would occur within their life time, but also with the awareness that it could occur at any moment, soon or later. As Jesus stressed emphatically in Matthew's account, the key for be-

lievers is to be watchful so that we don't get caught unprepared (Mt. 24:44): "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Thus, for James the horrible injustices of the present from these evil aristocrats would await the judgment of a just and holy God.

b. Literary

Genre. The question of the genre of the book of James will impact the interpretive approach to its contents. Although James is traditionally classified as an ancient letter, it bears hardly any resemblance to an ancient letter past the first verse (1:1). The introductory epistolary Praescriptio (1:1) does have strong tones of an ancient Greek letter, but nothing else beyond that part does. The dominating tone of the contents, that reflect high frequency of admonitions containing broad generalized demands, push the document toward a pattern found in the existing ancient Jewish homily type documents. At this point James shares in common the same essential literary form with Hebrews which identifies itself as a Jewish homily in 13:22 ("word of exhortation"; ὁ λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως). Both documents are also targeting Jewish Christian readers.

Literary Context. It is this literary genre that gives James a very distinctive literary structure. Modern western interpreters struggle over grasping the thought flow internally in the document, because it follows a pattern somewhat like Proverbs in the Old Testament. The Jewish wisdom literary tone of the contents structures the contents in a very loose, almost miscellaneous pattern of expression. Two or three themes repeatedly pop to the surface like a dolphin swimming out to sea as one moves through the contents. But these reoccurring topics are the nearest thing to a progressive thought flow that can be legitimately observed in the book. One of the easiest motifs to detect is "hearing and/or speaking" in 1:19-27; 2:3; 12, 16, 18; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:12. True wisdom is prominent in 1:5-8 and 3:13-18. Authentic religious commitment with an emphasis on concrete expression in actions surfaces several times (1:9-12, 22-27; 2:12, 14-26; 4:1-10, 13-17; 5:7-11). Because of this internal arrangement of materials, I proposed years ago in a publication [an outline](#) of James (see the outline at the end of this material) that attempts to address these distinctive arrangements of materials.



Our passage, 5:1-11, incorporates two pericopes that have a significant connection to each other, as is detailed in the [Summary of Rhetorical Structure](#) section of the internet version of this study. A summation of this will be provided in the next section under **Literary Structure**.

In addition, 5:1-6 has an important connection to the immediately preceding pericope of 4:13-17. The main connecting link is the common idiomatic direct address form. James 5:1 is Ἄγε νῦν, οἱ πλούσιοι and 4:13 is Ἄγε νῦν, οἱ λέγοντες. These two are the only instances of such direct address in the entire document and they occur back to back. Importantly, on either side, the pericopes (in 4:11-12 and 5:7-11) contain the vocative form ἀδελφοί ("brothers"). This is the dominant way in which a new pericope is introduced throughout the book of James.

This unusual construction doesn't show up elsewhere in the New Testament, nor in the LXX for that matter, although the imperative Ἄγε as an interjection does occur in the LXX.

Its significance here is debated, but in my opinion the most natural understanding within the contextual pattern of direct address forms is to see James here preaching beyond his immediate readers, the Jewish Christian communities outside Palestine scattered in the Diaspora of the Jews ([see map](#) on page two). He targets the Jewish merchants (4:13-17) and the wealthy land owners (5:1-6), both of whom lay beyond the Christian community. Both these groups were frequent targets of the OT prophets beginning with Amos. James sees these groups in his day as reflecting the same godlessness that the prophets condemned centuries before. By repeating much of the prophetic condemnation of these groups, James seeks to reiterate the divine wrath upon these individuals in his day. What held true in the days of the prophets remained true in his day. As such, the godlessness of the Jewish merchant becomes a warning against Christians falling into the same trap. The condem-

nation of the godless, abusing landowner becomes an affirmation of the justice of a holy God who takes vengeance upon those abusing His people. That was as true for James as it was for Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah et al. centuries before. And it remains just as true in our day as well.

II. Message

Literary Structure. A detailed presentation in [visual diagram of the Greek text](#) and analysis of the [Rhetorical Structure](#) of the text can be found in the internet version of this study. We will summarize that material here as the basis for the organizing structure of our study.

Very clearly, verses 1-11 divide into well defined pericopes. Verses 1-6 comprise the first and verses 7-11 the second. The connecting link between them has already been touched on but will be explored in greater detail in the exegesis below.

James pronounces God's doom on the wealthy of his day in the first section. Then he turns to those Christians who were being victimized by these wealthy people to appeal for patient trust in a just God to rectify the wrongs they were suffering. In our country, we can hardly grasp the helplessness of the situation these believers existed in humanly speaking. Perhaps in some hot spots around the world, other Christians like those left in Bagdad have a better understanding of what these early believers were facing. We can only examine it theoretically in the hope of never having to undergo what they experienced.

a. God's wrath on the wealthy, vv. 1-6

Greek NT

<5:1> Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλου-
ῖοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζον-
τες ἐπὶ ταῖς τλαιπωρίαις
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
ὑμῶν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται
τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ.
ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχά-
ταις ἡμέραις. <5:4> ἰδοὺ
ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν
τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας
ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ'
ὑμῶν κράζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ
τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὦτα
κυρίου Σαβαώθ εἰσεληλυ-
ῖθασιν. <5:5> ἐτρυφήσατε
ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπατ-
αλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς
καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
σφαγῆς, <5:6> κατεδικά-
σατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δι-
καιον, οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται
ὑμῶν.

NASB

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

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.

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.

Notes:

The internal structure of these verses, while complex, is understandable. The core structure is twofold. Using the language of the OT prophetic “Day of the Lord” James pronounces God’s doom on these wealthy land owners of his day. The remainder, vv. 2-6, is largely built around providing a justification for such a pronouncement.

James echoes the OT condemnation of injustice against the poor by the wealthy, as Ralph Martin (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) describes:

κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις, “Weep and howl in view of the miseries that are coming your way.” The use of κλαίειν (“to wail”; “the proper response to disaster,” so Davids, 175) and ὀλολύζειν (“to howl”; a word whose sound is associated with its meaning, as in English) is reminiscent of the prophets’ idiom and their cry against the heathen nations. James calls on the rich to wail (Lam 1:1–2; Isa 15:2–3, 5; Jer 9:1; 13:17) and howl (twenty-one times in LXX, all in the OT prophets; a *hapax legomenon* in the NT), for they are doomed (see Amos 8:3; Isa 13:6; 14:31; Jer 31:20, 31; Ezek 21:12; Hos 7:14; cf. Heidland, TDNT 5:173–74). Some of these prophetic oracles combine the call to repentance with a reminder of the impending “Day of Yahweh,” e.g., Isa 13:6: ὀλολύζετε ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου; Amos 8:3, 9: καὶ ἔσται ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ κυρίου ὁ θεός...

James saw in the horrific abuses and exorbitant lifestyle of these people a basis for them to anticipate “miseries” (ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις) ahead when the Day of the Lord fell on them. Rev. 6:12-17 provides an even more graphic depiction of that day:

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and

rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Whether popular or not in contemporary Christian circles, biblical based Christianity cannot escape the awesome reality of overwhelming judgment connected with the return of Christ at the close of human history. Anchored deeply in OT religious conviction regarding the Day of the Lord, James saw the ultimate fulfillment of that biblical principle in the coming of the Lord at the close of time. His deep belief in the justice and holiness of God gave him insight to see the application of the prophets’ pronouncement of divine wrath on the wealthy who abused the poor to this very similar situation happening in his own day. The very character of God as holy and just demands such action, especially as wealth and power is used to harm those who are helpless to defend themselves. In this same Revelation passage (6:9-11), this cry for justice is what provokes the outpouring of God’s wrath:

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; 10 they cried out with a loud voice, “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” 11 They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

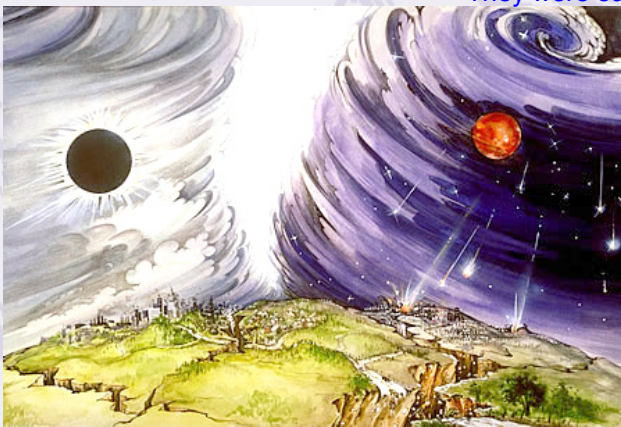
It is this principle of “sinfulness >>>> divine punishment” that provides James the foundational structure for his case against these wealthy individuals in verses 2 through 6. He lays out four areas of accusation of guilt against these people. For a more detailed

account see the charting of this in the [Rhetorical Structure section](#) in the internet version of this study.

These four areas are:

1. Their dependence of ancient symbols of wealth: vv. 2-3a.
2. The fraudulent means of gaining this wealth, v. 4.
3. Their luxuriant, immoral lifestyle, v. 5.
4. Their use of the court system to squelch protest, v. 6.

In each section James makes charges and then



pronounces God's punishment on them. He interlaces these four charges with 1 and 3 closely linked, as well as 2 and 4. They can be charted out as follows:

1. Dependence on symbols of wealth: food, clothing, and money:

Charge:

- a. "Your riches have rotted,
- b. and your clothes are moth-eaten.
- c. Your gold and silver have rusted,"

ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν
καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν,
ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται

Judgment:

- a. "their rust will be evidence against you,
- b. and it will eat your flesh like fire.
- c. You have laid up treasure for the last days."

ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται
καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ.
ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.

2. Evil means of gaining wealth

Charge:

- a. "the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out,"

ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς
χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν
κράζει,

Judgment:

- a. "and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts."

καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα κυρίου
Σαβαώθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.

3. Immoral lifestyle

Charge

- a. "You have lived on the earth in luxury and
- b. you have lived in pleasure;"

ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε,

Judgment:

- a. "you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."

ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
σφαγῆς

4. Use of courts against peasant protests

Charge:

- a. "You have condemned and
- b. put to death the righteous man;"

κατεδικάσατε,
ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον,

Judgment:

- a. "he does not resist you."

οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν.

These people centered their values on the accumu-

lation of material wealth, and were willing to resort even to violence in order to acquire it. They then used it to support an immoral lifestyle rather than to benefit the world around them. James interlinks this bundle of charges and pronouncements of eschatological divine wrath in a tightly knit package.

Then at the end (4. a.) he tosses out a surprise. Instead of pronouncing God's punishment on the wealthy, he unexpectedly switches to the non-violent response of the Just One to the horrific abuse.

Let's take a quick look at each of the accusations.

1. Dependence on symbols of wealth: food, clothing, and money (vv. 2-3). In the ancient world, as well as in our day to a certain degree, the status symbols of wealth basically were stored grain (food), extensive robes made of expensive cloth, and accumulations of gold and silver. In the OT the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon prompted his pompous display of these items to her (2 Chron. 9:3-4): "When the queen of Sheba had observed the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his valets, and their clothing, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit left in her."

These wealthy people were very much in a typical pattern of depending on these material things as the basis of their existence. Wealthy people are referred to two other times in this letter: 1:10 and 2:6-7. Clearly in 2:6-7 they are outside the Christian community and are hostile toward Christianity. The reference in 1:10 is debated but the evidence there favors the rich man as inside the community of believers and one who has suffered the loss of his wealth. This James sees as a blessing.

Wealthy people in the first century world possessed all the power. They ran the government in Rome. Among Jews, their ranks exclusively supplied the Sadducees who controlled the temple and the semblance of Jewish government of that time. Jewish peasants, who comprised more than 80% of the population were pretty much at their mercy. Jack Pastor, "Judea under Direct Roman Rule," [Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine](#), 136ff., details some of the horrendous abuses that Jewish aristocracy imposed on the populace in cahoots with Roman governmental officials. Josephus provides graphic details of many instances of such abuse.

In making his charge and pronouncing punishment, James makes use of an ironic play on verb tense in the Greek that is impossible to preserve in

English. The Greek perfect tense verb form is used for the first three verbs, "...stands rotten, ...stands moth-eaten, ...stands rusted." These verbs are positioned over against future tense verbs, "...will be evidence, ...will devour your flesh," and the climatic "have stored up in the last days." The rich would possibly have responded, "James, you don't know what you're talking about. My food is in good shape, my clothes have no damage, and I have lots of money in store to keep me going indefinitely." But James pronouncement of worthlessness of these items is measured against the backdrop of the coming eschatological judgment. In that day these things would turn on their wealthy possessors and feed the fires of eternal damnation against them. Measured against this backdrop, not only were they now worthless, they were piles of eternal fuel stored up for igniting at the day of judgment.

Did James blanketly condemn wealth? Some commentators are so convinced. But the preceding pericope, 4:13-17, that is closely linked to 5:1-6, provides some insight here. There James condemns the making of money by merchants who completely leave God out of their business plans. When God is left out, and the accumulation of wealth is the stack pole around which everything revolves, wealth and the wealthy are condemned as evil and deserving God's wrath. This is particularly true when such drive runs roughshod over God's people and others who are helpless to defend themselves against the power and injustices of wealth, as 2:6-7 and 5:1-6 argue. In such instances, the wealthy person should count himself blessed of God when his wealth is suddenly taken from him (ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ, 1:10). In such loss, he is forced to focus on the spiritual values that endure through out eternity and turn away from those that don't last.

2. Evil means of gaining wealth (v. 4). Here James jumps into the unjust displacing of Jewish peasant farmers in Galilee during the middle of the first Christian century. Living in Jerusalem during this time, he became acutely aware of this horrible abuse taking place. The Sadducees who controlled the temple were a part of the Jewish aristocracy who were behind this movement. To control the court system to prevent protest was no problem. To control prices for goods was easy. The grains produced in lower Galilee in a typical year were sufficient to feed the entire eastern Mediterranean Sea region. A ton of money was to be made if one controlled this market. The peasant farmers, who could normally make a reasonably living for their family on one to five



acres of land were totally dependent on the land as their source of living. By driving down prices, these farmers who then had to borrow to have funds for planting etc. each year, were bankrupted. Gradually, their land would be sold to these wealthy aristocrats who would then lease the land back to these farmers to work it. This turned the farmer into a functional slave of the aristocratic landowner.

James plugs into this process with charges that these workers who planted and harvested the land were not being paid their due wages. Having unjustly taken over ownership of the land, the wealthy were not willing even to pay these peasants their rightful wages for all their work. Greed for money drove them even to this disgusting level.

In pronouncing punishment James notes that God, the Lord of hosts (κυρίου Σαβαώθ), had taken notice of these abuses. This OT characterization of God is to underscore his unlimited and unchallenged power. To these poor workers the wealthy seemed to have all the power. But James sees a much greater power in God who is passionately committed to justice and fair treatment. As Isaiah used this reference to God some 61 times, God as the Lord Sabaoth means God is ready to bring down punishment on evil doers. In Isa 5:8-9, the prophet condemns virtually the same thing that James is here condemning:

8 Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! 9 The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.

3. Immoral lifestyle (v. 5). James resumes his condemnation of their lifestyle, first introduce in vv.

2-3 (cf. 1. above). Two charges are leveled and followed by one of the most graphic pronouncements of punishment found anywhere in the Bible.

ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε. This graphic picture finds condemnation elsewhere in Jewish - Christian writings, as Peter Davids (NIGTC, Logos Systems) notes:

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.

Then James "lowers the boom" in his third characterization: ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς. The Message catches the basic sense with its rendering: "But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse." This luxuriant self-centered lifestyle amounts, when viewed eschatologically, as nothing more than storing up fuel to be ignited on the day of God's wrath (cf. v. 3). Here the agricultural image is used of nourishing up an animal for slaughter when it is properly fattened. Ancient Jews living around sheep and goats could graphically understand such a dramatic picture.

4. Use of courts against peasant protests (v. 6). In this fourth accusation James turns back to the second one, but with more general reference and also with implications of using the legal system of that day to buttress their abuse of the poor. He levels two accusations against the wealthy: κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον. I. Loh and H. Hatton (Translator's Handbook, Logos Systems), provide a helpful depiction:

James now makes his final charge against the rich, which serves as a transition to the next subject matter. The charge here reaches the high point of the list in the words condemned and killed. The verb "to condemn" is a judicial term. In this context it suggests that the rich abuse the legal system for their own gain. They not

only accumulate wealth for themselves through illegal means, but they also exploit the poor to the point of condemning them by perverting the legal processes. Condemned may also be expressed as "declared to be guilty." However, it is more likely that the rich took poor people into court to be condemned by a judge. The rich did not do the condemning themselves.

These wealthy landowners unhesitatingly used the court system to defraud the peasants of their land. They were willing to have these peasants executed if they protested. Why? The wealthy controlled the legal system totally. Bribery was rampant; political appointment of judges under the control of the wealthy was normative.

Interestingly, and with a certain twist, James identifies these defrauded peasants as τὸν δίκαιον (the just, or the Just One). This double meaning of the term has troubled commentators, but in my opinion



it represents a beautiful strategy of James. It represents the same idea that Luke records in Paul's conversion in Acts 9:5. When Paul responded to the Voice asking him why he was persecuting Jesus, Paul asked who was speaking. The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." To persecute God's people was to persecute Jesus himself. Early Christianity recognized just how closely Jesus identified himself with his disciples. Paul will later depict this with the analogy of the church as nothing less than

Christ's body.

Who then is τὸν δίκαιον? At one level the just one are the believers among the defrauded peasant farmers. They are the just. But at another level this one is Jesus as the Just One who is deeply identified with these suffering believers. For the wealthy to abuse these peasants is nothing less than to abuse Jesus himself. In early Christianity, Jesus has this semi-title as is reflected in Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:1, 29; 3:7. Isaiah 53:11 may be in the background of this: "The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." But in using this expression, James identifies Jesus, the suffering Servant of God, with those who suffer at the hands of the wicked landowners abusing His people.

In the established pattern of charge / judgment here in James, we have come to expect a statement

of divine judgment in the second part of this fourth unit. Instead, we encounter the statement: οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν (“he does not resist you”). Surprising to say the least. Because no punctuation marks existed in the original text, some are convinced that this sentence should be taken as a question rather than as a declaration. This would create the translation, given the nature of the Greek construction for interrogative sentences constructed like this, “he resists you, does he not?” The context, especially in vv. 7-11, argue vigorously against such an understanding. Also, such understanding entirely misses James’ point for believers throughout vv. 1-11. Resistance, in particular armed resistance, in this situation was anti-Christian and the very thing James was urging his readers to avoid. Such an option was being increasingly adopted in the peasant revolt emerging throughout Galilee during this period. For James, Christians could have no legitimate part in such action.

What significance is there in this image of Jesus passively accepting the injustice handed him by the Romans and by the Jewish religious leaders? 1 Peter 2:19-23 provides an important answer:

19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23 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.

Christ left an example for believers to follow. James was a part of the tradition in apostolic Christianity that saw in Jesus’ trial and death not only atonement for our sins but also an inspiring example of entrusting one’s self into God’s hand when injustice and abuse were dished out because of following God’s will.

What’s the connection of all this to us today? Several things come to mind. First, material accumulation is never ever a worthy anchor point to human existence. The way that God made us de-

mands something deeper and more profound to life than just accumulating things. To settle for a greasy hamburger when God sets filet mignon steak before us is to make a huge mistake. Packaged with the greasy hamburger called materialism is greed, self indulgence, and a tendency to run rough shod over anyone who gets in the way of that accumulation. At minimal such orientation sets one against God and guarantees divine wrath.

The holy God of justice and righteousness demands just and righteous ways in how we treat others. To reject this brings His anger and wrath, which is as certain as the rising of the morning sun.

Although James doesn’t mention it, the chances are likely that these wealthy Jews covered their actions with the phoney theology current in that day. It asserted that wealth meant God was blessing, and God only blesses those whom He approves. Given the reality of the Sadducean connection to these people one can be confident that such claims were made to justify what they were doing. To use God to cover sin is disgusting and spiritual suicide!

The negative example of the wealthy suggests that evil actions and excessive lifestyle tend to go hand in hand. Their life was defined by food, clothing, and money. It provided them their excessive, immoral lifestyle. Their abuse of the poor, even to having them murdered, was inextricably bound to this lifestyle. That is just as true today as it was in the first century.

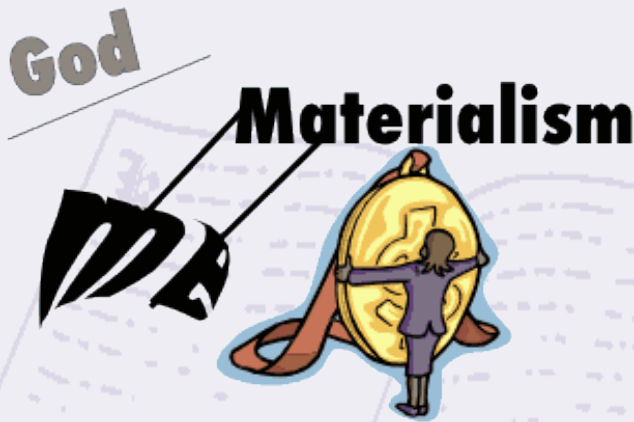
The most challenging part is how Christians should respond to injustices being dumped on them. James advocated that his readers find insight in the example of Jesus during his trial and execution. Does this apply one-on-one to us today? If so, then we are left with the question of civil disobedience in our society? With non-violent protest? Even more with the tension between God seeking justice and

what we should do? Here the huge chasm between then and now plays a role in the interpretive process. American democratic society provides legal and other structures for addressing injustices. And any citizen has access to these. The believers that James was writing to possessed none of these things. For them, the options were trusting a just



God, or resorting to armed revolt. Thankfully, we have many more options. Were we to be in this first century situation with these two options, then James contention that trusting God is the only option would apply exactly.

If these verses say anything to us, they remind us



of choices. Wealth is no worthy choice. God is the only sensible option. But just as many in the first century world were blinded to this, so are vast numbers of people in our world. Sadly, many Christians are trapped by such.

b. Trusting in the justice of God, vv. 7-11

Greek NT

<5:7> Μακροθυμήσατε οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου. ἰδοὺ ὁ γεωργὸς ἐκδέχεται τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς μακροθυμῶν ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἕως λάβῃ πρόϊμον καὶ ὄψιμον. <5:8> μακροθυμήσατε καὶ ὑμεῖς, στηρίζατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν. <5:9> μὴ στενάζετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ' ἀλλήλων ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε· ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν. <5:10> ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε, ἀδελφοί, τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας τοὺς προφήτας οἱ ἐλάλησαν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου. <5:11> ἰδοὺ μακαρίζομεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας· τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰὼβ ἠκούσατε καὶ τὸ τέλος κυρίου εἶδετε, ὅτι πολὺσπλαγχνὸς ἐστὶν ὁ κύριος καὶ οἰκτίρμων.

NASB

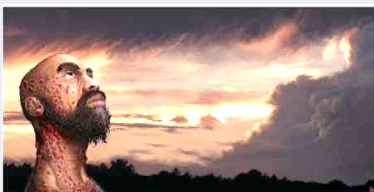
7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

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.

NLT

7 Dear brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. 8 You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door! 10 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy.



Job's Patience of Job

Notes:

These verses are linked to vv. 1-6 overtly by the inferential conjunction οὖν (“therefore”). What James says in vv. 7-11 is implied in vv. 1-6. Interpretively this means that in light of God’s commitment to punish the wealthy for their abuses of the poor, James’ Christian readers (ἀδελφοί) can trust God to keep His commitment and thus find the needed patience to wait on the Lord’s judgment. Thus, many of the peasant farmers suffering abuse in Galilee were Christians. And James’ original preaching was targeting them. This written material was preserved because it possessed application reaching way beyond these Galilean believers.

The internal thought structure of vv. 7-11 revolves around two key concepts. First, a series of admonitions encouraging the readers to patiently endure their suffering. These are reinforced by selected examples from James’ own day and from the OT.

The admonitions are as follows:

1. **Be patient (v. 7)**
Μακροθυμήσατε
2. **You also must be patient. (v. 8)**
μακροθυμήσατε καὶ ὑμεῖς,
3. **Strengthen your hearts (v. 8)**
στηρίξατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν
4. **Do not grumble against one another (v. 9)**
μὴ στεναίξετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ’ ἀλλήλων

The examples are:

1. **Farmers**
The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. (v. 7)
2. **Judge**
See, the Judge is standing at the doors! (v. 9)
ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν.
3. **OT prophets**
As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets (v. 10)
ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε, ἀδελφοί, τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας τοὺς προφῆτας
4. **Job**
You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (v. 11)
τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰὼβ ἠκούσατε καὶ τὸ τέλος κυρίου εἶδετε, ὅτι πολὺσπλαγχνός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος καὶ οἰκτίμων.

The bundle of admonitions focus on patient endurance, with μακροθυμέω as the key concept. Uniformly across most English translations this is expressed as “be patient...” As the use of LXX lan-



guage for Job and the prophets makes clear, James doesn’t see much, if any real difference between μακροθυμέω and ὑπομένω which he uses in vv. 10-11. This patient waiting extends to “until the coming of the Lord” (ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου), which James sees as near (ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν).

The expectancy of the Lord’s return is both encouraging and a warning. We are to be patient until it takes place in the expectancy that wrongs will be rectified. The element of warning in this return (cf. v. 8) is that we don’t have much time to strengthen our hearts. Additionally, this return means that the Heavenly Judge is prepared to burst through the doors to set up His court of judgment.

The examples are very appropriate to James’ situation. **First**, there is the typical Galilean farmer who depends on the fall and spring rains to bring his crops to harvest day. Since he has no control over the rains, the farmer must patiently wait for God to send the rain. **Next**, God is the Judge ready to burst through the doors to set up judgment. By standing just outside the doors, he also knows everything being said and done as well. **Third**, the OT prophets stand as a scriptural witness to patient endurance of evil and of long suffering in the face of harm. **Finally**, the endurance by Job of his hard circumstances is offered. The positive outcome of spiritual blessing from a compassionate and merciful God is highlighted.

Thus James reached out to the peasant farmer who was a believer in the oral preaching stage of this material. But the recorders of James’ preaching were convinced that Jewish believers elsewhere in the empire who were suffering injustices could benefit from these words as well.

And we can still benefit from them today. The idea of patience in James’ language is not a passive bracing of one’s self for what ever may happen. Rather, it is an aggressive meeting adversity head on based on deep confidence in a just God who will sustain us during times of trial. And who will rectify the injustices poured out on us by evil people. We can find inspiration in these examples of faithful people around us and those in the pages of scripture. But more than anything, our patience is grounded in our trust of a just God whose power far transcends that of the evil around us. May we take heed to the admonitions coming from this Christian leader James!

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT
of James¹¹

HEADING:	STATEMENT:	REFERENCE:
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
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
Perservering 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

¹¹Taken 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 on James in either Greek or English text. The pericopes grouped together represent passages with closer thought links.

Greek NT

<5:1> Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλου-
ῖοι, κλαύσατε ὁλολύζον-
τες 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 ἐσχά-
ταις ἡμέραις. <5:4> ἰδοὺ
ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν
τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας
ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ'
ὑμῶν κράζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ
τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα
κυρίου Σαβαῶθ εἰσεληλυ-
ῖθασιν. <5:5> ἐτρυφήσατε
ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπα-
τήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς
καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
σφαγῆς, <5:6> κατεδικά-
σατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δι-
καιον, οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται
ὑμῖν.

<5:7> Μακροθυμήσατε
οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἕως τῆς
παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου.
ἰδοὺ ὁ γεωργὸς ἐκδέχε-
ται τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν
τῆς γῆς μακροθυμῶν ἐπ'
αὐτῷ ἕως λάβῃ πρόϊμον
καὶ ὄψιμον. <5:8> μακ-
ροθυμήσατε καὶ ὑμεῖς,
στηρίζατε τὰς καρδίας
ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ
κυρίου ἤγγικεν. <5:9> μὴ
στενάζετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ'
ἀλλήλων ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε·
ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν
θυρῶν ἔστηκεν. <5:10>
ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε, ἀδελ-
φοί, τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ
τῆς μακροθυμίας τοῦς
προφήτας οἱ ἐλάλησαν
ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου.
<5:11> ἰδοὺ μακαρίζο-

NASB

1 Come now, you
rich, weep and howl
for your miseries which
are coming upon you.
2 Your riches have rot-
ted and your garments
have become moth-
eaten. 3 Your gold and
your silver have rusted;
and their rust will be
a witness against you
and will consume your
flesh like fire. It is in the
last days that you have
stored up your treasure!
4 Behold, the pay of the
laborers who mowed
your fields, and which
has been withheld by
you, cries out against
you; and the outcry of
those who did the har-
vesting has reached the
ears of the Lord of Sa-
bath. You have lived
luxuriously on the earth
and led a life of wanton
pleasure; you have fat-
tened your hearts in a
day of slaughter. 6 You
have condemned and
put to death the righ-
teous man; he does not
resist you.

7 Therefore be pa-
tient, brethren, until the
coming of the Lord. The
farmer waits for the pre-
cious produce of the soil,
being patient about it,
until it gets the early and
late rains. 8 You too be
patient; strengthen your
hearts, for the coming of
the Lord is near. 9 Do
not complain, brethren,
against one another, so
that you yourselves may
not be judged; behold,
the Judge is standing
right at the door. 10 As

NRSV

1 Come now, you
rich people, weep and
wail for the miseries
that are coming to you.
2 Your riches have rot-
ted, 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 fat-
tened your hearts in a
day of slaughter. 6 You
have condemned and
murdered the righteous
one, who does not resist
you.

7 Be patient, there-
fore, 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 pa-
tient. Strengthen your
hearts, for the coming of
the Lord is near. 9 Be-
loved, 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 suf-
fering and patience, be-
loved, take the prophets
who spoke in the name

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 cheat-
ed 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.

7 Dear brothers and
sisters, you must be pa-
tient as you wait for the
Lord's return. Consider
the farmers who eagerly
look for the rains in the
fall and in the spring.
They patiently wait for
the precious harvest to
ripen. 8 You, too, must
be patient. And take
courage, for the com-
ing of the Lord is near.
9 Don't grumble about

μεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας·
τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰὼβ ἠκού-
σατε καὶ τὸ τέλος κυρίου
εἶδετε, ὅτι πολὺσπλαγ-
χνός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος καὶ
οἰκτίρων.

an example, brethren, of
suffering and patience,
take the prophets who
spoke in the name of
the Lord. 11 We count
those blessed who en-
dured. You have heard
of the endurance of Job
and have seen the out-
come of the Lord's deal-
ings, that the Lord is full
of compassion and is
merciful.

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 pur-
pose of the Lord, how
the Lord is compassion-
ate and merciful.

each other, my broth-
ers and sisters, or God
will judge you. For
look! The great Judge
is coming. He is stand-
ing at the door! 10 For
examples of patience in
suffering, dear brothers
and sisters, look at the
prophets who spoke in
the name of the Lord. 11
We give great honor to
those who endure un-
der suffering. Job is an
example of a man who
endured patiently. From
his experience we see
how the Lord's plan fi-
nally ended in good, for
he is full of tenderness
and mercy.

^{5:1}
 147 Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι,
 κλαύσατε
 ὀλολύζοντες
 ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις
 148 ^{5:2} ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν
 καὶ
 149 τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν,
 150 ^{5:3} ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται
 καὶ
 εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν
 151 ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν...ἔσται
 καὶ
 152 φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν
 ὡς πῦρ.
 153 ἐθησαυρίσατε
 ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.
^{5:4}
 154 ἰδοὺ
 ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν...κράζει,
 τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν
 ὁ ἀπεστερημένος
 ἀφ' ὑμῶν
 καὶ
 εἰς τὰ ὄτα κυρίου Σαβαώθ
 155 αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θηρισάντων...εἰσεληλύθασιν.
 156 ^{5:5} ἐτρυφήσατε
 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
 καὶ
 157 ἐσπαταλήσατε,
 158 ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν
 ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς,
 159 ^{5:6} κατεδικάσατε,
 160 ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον,
 161 οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν.
^{5:7}
 162 οὖν
 Μακροθυμήσατε
 ἀδελφοί,
 ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου.
 ἰδοὺ

163 ὁ γεωργὸς ἐκδέχεται τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς
μακροθυμῶν
ἐπ' αὐτῷ
ἕως λάβῃ πρόϊμον καὶ ὄψιμον.

164 ^{5:8} μακροθυμήσατε... ὑμεῖς,
καὶ

165 στηρίξατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν,
ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν.

166 ^{5:9} μὴ στενάζετε,
ἀδελφοί,
κατ' ἀλλήλων
ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε·

ἰδοὺ

πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν

167 ὁ κριτῆς... ἔστηκεν.

168 ^{5:10} ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε,
ἀδελφοί,
τῆς κακοπαθείας
καὶ
τῆς μακροθυμίας
τοὺς προφῆτας
οἱ ἐλάλησαν
ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου.

^{5:11} ἰδοὺ

169 μακαρίζομεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας·

170 τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰαβ ἠκούσατε
καὶ

171 τὸ τέλος κυρίου εἶδετε,
ὅτι πολὺσπλαγχνός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος
καὶ
οἰκτίρμων.

Semantic Diagram

ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι

A-----		147	1	Aor	Act	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεις)		

	i-----	148		Perf	Act		Ind	3	S	ὁ πλούτος	Charge
		καὶ									
	a--ii-----	149		Perf	Act		Ind	3	S	τὰ ἰμάτια	Charge

	iii-----	150		Perf	Pass		Ind	3	S	ὁ χρυσός-ἄργυρος	Charge
1--		καὶ									
	i-----	151		Fut	---		Ind	3	S	ὁ ἰός	Judgment
		καὶ									
	b--ii-----	152		Fut	Dep		Ind	3	S	(- ---)	Judgment
I--		---									
	iii-----	153		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Judgment
		ἰδοῦ									
	a-----	154		Pres	Act		Ind	3	S	ὁ μισθός	Charge
2--		καὶ									
	b-----	155		Pluper	Act		Ind	3	P	αἰ βοαὶ	Judgment
B--		---									
	i-----	156		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Charge
	a--	καὶ									
3--	ii-----	157		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Charge

	b-----	158		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Judgment

	i-----	159		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Charge
	a--	---									
4--	ii-----	160		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Charge

	b-----	161		Pres	Mid		Ind	3	S	(ὁ δίκαιος)	Judgment
		οὖν									
1--	---	162		1 Aor	Act	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Command+	
A--		ἰδοῦ									
	2--	163		Pres	Dep		Ind	3	S	ὁ γεωργός	Example

	i-----	164		1 Aor	Act	Imp+	2	P	ὕμεις	Command+	
	a--	---									
II--	ii-----	165		1 Aor	Act	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Command+	
1--		---									
	i-----	166		Pres	Act	Imp-	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Command-	
	b--	ἰδοῦ									
	ii-----	167		Perf	Act		Ind	3	S	ὁ κριτῆς	Warning
B--		---									
	i-----	168		Pres	Act	Imp+	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Command+	
	a--	ἰδοῦ									
	ii-----	169		Pres	Act		Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)	Example
2--		---									
	i-----	170		1 Aor	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Example
	b--	καὶ									
	ii-----	171		Perf	Act		Ind	2	P	(ὕμεις)	Example

Summary of Rhetorical Structure

Quite clearly the passage divides itself into two well defined sections: vv. 1-6 (statements 147-161) and vv. 7-11 (162-171). In fact, down through the centuries of interpretive history this understood break point has been so well defined that a disconnect between these two pericopes has lead to blurred understanding of the text, particularly of vv. 1-6.

Although the direct address in verses 1 ("Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι") and 7 (ἀδελφοί) seems at first to support this distancing of the two units from one another, careful analysis argues rather for a close linking of the two units. James issues his dire pronouncements of doom on the non-Christian oppressors of the Jewish peasants in the first section following the model of the prophetic example of Amos and others subsequent OT prophets. But these oppressors were not present in the Christian communities when this letter was first read, and most likely never heard any of what James said.

Who then was James directly targeting with this pronouncement of doom? His Christian readers, whom he calls "brothers" in the second section beginning in verse seven. By pronouncing God's wrath on the abusive land owners he provided reassurance to his Christian readers that injustices and wrongs would be rectified by a just God. Most likely, in James' original sermon materials, from which these words are derived, James spoke to Christians who were peasants and many who, as such, lived and struggled in the Roman province of Galilee under this oppression. By the middle to late 50s unrest and anger over these abuses from Jewish aristocracy based mainly in Jerusalem was fomenting into the Zealot Revolt that exploded into massive rebellion toward the end of the 50s and the early 60s. Christian peasants watched as neighbors and friends were sucked into the peasant revolt that resorted to armed resistance and guerrilla warfare tactics to retake their ancestral lands and through out the Romans who had allowed their Jewish cohorts in Jerusalem to steal their land and turn them into tenant farmer that amounted to little more than slavery. They were facing increasing pressure to join this armed rebellion. James' preaching had attempted to provide these folks with an alternative, and to remind them that for Christians physical violence is never an option. The example of Jesus clearly nixed such approaches.

Thus James' point was to pronounce God's wrath in coming judgement upon these abuses of Christians (vv. 1-6) as a reassurance of God's holy and just character, and then to directly admonish them to patient endurance in vv. 7-11 trusting God to rectify the wrongs in His own time and way.

In the first section, James begins with a pronouncement of doom on the wealthy (statement 147 in v. 1). The eschatological coming of God's wrath will spell damnation for these wealthy individuals. James, following the tone and using some of the language of Amos, calls for these people to begin screaming in terror as they anticipate what awaits them. One important note: in the pattern of the eighth century prophets, James isn't calling these people to repentance. The opportunity for that has already passed. Rather, it is a call for them to brace themselves for their destruction.

The remainder of this sections (statements 148-161 in vv. 2-6) constitutes the case supporting his pronouncement of doom. The structure of his arguments revolve around a repeated pattern of accusation of guilt followed by pronouncement of divine judgment, which amplifies the pronouncement in verse 1.

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

This table charts the pattern with the numbers going back to the core statement numbering in the block diagram. Four areas of lifestyle are condemned and serve as the basis for James' pronouncement of divine wrath. (1) Their lifestyle in general as represented by classic symbols of wealth: food, clothing, and money. (2) Their defrauding of the peasant workers who did the harvesting work on their farms. (3) Their extravagant manner of luxuriant living. (4) Their use of the court system to crush protest against their cheating of the farm workers. Clearly sections (1) and (3) are related to lifestyle. And (2) and (4) focus on unjust treatment of workers in order to support that lifestyle.

The ironic twist comes in the "pronouncement of judgement" section in the fourth section (statement 161). Instead, of following the preceding pattern of calling down God's wrath on these wealthy individuals, James surprises his readers with a switch to a non-violent reaction by both the workers and the Lord. The "just one" simultaneously reaches back to the suffering of Jesus in identification with the suffering of the believers who were being victimized by these wealthy land owners. This begins a transition to vv. 7-11, where he speaks directly to his Christian readers undergoing such abuses.

The language directed formally to the wealthy land owners has served to announce the justice of God in punishing evil. Although they controlled the court systems and the government, God was keeping record of their actions and lifestyle. Their abuses would not go unpunished. To the contrary, the pouring out of God's wrath at the eschatological end would be unbelievably severe. So much so that these people were called upon to begin screaming in stark terror now, before it even happened. The day of repentance had passed, and they needed to brace themselves to face a far superior power that their could not control nor bribe.

Such words, of course, would never reach the ears of these people. But the value of James' words were for encouraging the victimized peasants, especially the believers among them. Justice and righteousness would prevail no matter how remote this may have seemed.

The example of Jesus, "the just one," stands as the model. What does this imply (οὖν)? Verses 7-11 answer that question at length. James turns directly to his Christian readers (ἀδελφοί) with a series of admonitions buttressed by classic examples. The rhetorical structure here is not as clearly defined as in the first section, and somewhat "floats" with admonitions and examples swirling together. The admonitions are statements 162, 164, 165, 166, 168. The examples are "farmers" (#163), "prophets" (168-169), "Job" (170-171). The "judge" example (statement 167) serves as a warning, while the others set standards to be followed.

The admonitions revolve around two central ideas: (1) endurance and (2) no grumbling. Primary is the admonition to endure the abuses being inflicted on them (μακροθυμήσατε in statements 162 and 164). The concept is patient endurance of something hostile. But as his example of Job (#169-170) suggests, James doesn't have something much different in mind with this verb than is often suggested by the alternative terms ὑπομένω and the noun derivative ὑπομονή. The context of their application to the suffering Christians provides more precise definition as well.

The concept of enduring suffering is supplemented with the admonition to "strengthen the heart" (στηρίξατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν in statement 165). With the ancient figurative use of "heart" as the volitional part of us, the admonition moves along the lines of "stiffen your resolve." This should be seen as complementing the posture of enduring; the combination of outward / inward rounds out the picture.

Eschatological expectation plays an important role in this. In verse 7 (statement 161) it defines the duration of the endurance: ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ("until the coming of the Lord). In verse 8b (statement 165), it provides the basis for the admonition: ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν ("because the coming of the Lord is near"). Thus how long must we endure becomes not long.

This first set of admonitions focuses on believers receiving abuse from hostile individuals. The second set (#166) focuses on believers not abusing one another, perhaps as a consequence of being abused. This possible "psychology" of James' admonition to the believers to stop grumbling against one another is debated among modern scholars, but does find a basis in the same tendency of the children of Israel during the Exodus. James uses some of that language from the LXX, thus lending support to this interpretative approach. The admonition is strengthened by the exceptive clause "lest you be judged." Destructive criticism of fellow believers will bring God's punishment. This is further underscored by the illustration that the Judge stands just outside the door, either ready to come in or close enough to hear what is being

said. Probably both aspects of the analogy are intended.

Three examples become inspiration for enduring suffering. These help flesh out James' definition of μακροθυμία and of ὑπομονή. First, comes that of the farmer (ὁ γεωργός in statement #163). Since James is targeting Christians who are working the land as peasant γεωργοί, this example comes quite naturally. The point is their "enduring" the uncertainty of the fall rains which get the barley seeds started (early rains) and the late spring rains (later rains) which produce the harvest in May - June. They are looking for the harvest (τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς) during a time when they have absolutely no control over the situation. For ancient Jews this meant trusting God to bring the necessary rain for harvest.

The OT prophets become the second example τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας ("of suffering evil and of endurance"). In their faithful service to God, οἱ ἐλάλησαν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου ("who spoke in the name of the Lord"), they were victimized for obeying God. No individual prophet is named, but anyone familiar with the OT, as James' Jewish Christian readers were, would have immediately identified several prophets as in view.

The final classic inspiring example is that of Job (statements 170-171). This text is the origin of the often repeated phrase "the patience of Job." James reminds his readers of having heard about Job. His main point is his final one: God blessed Job for remaining faithful through all his suffering.

Thus James through a series of admonitions to steadfastness and reinforcing examples amplifies his identification of the victimized Christian peasants with Jesus, "the Just One." Just as the Lord suffered without retaliation the abuses of the Romans and Jewish leaders during his mock trial, these Christian farmers should resist the tug of their neighbors to join the Zealot revolution in armed revolt against the same two groups of people. Jesus offers a better way.