

S E S S I O N S I X

**FINAL EXHORTATIONS FOR THE RICH
AND THOSE WHO SUFFER***James 4:13—5:20***I. INTRODUCTION**

In the preceding major section of the book, the primary thrust was a rebuke against those in the church community who were criticizing and slandering others while at the same time promoting themselves in pride in hopes of being recognized as "teachers." James accused them of operating out of worldly wisdom and called them to humility and repentance, because they were causing conflicts and quarrels among the believers.

Chapter 4:13 begins a new major section to the book with two primary concerns. The material in 4:13—5:6 is directed at those who were engaged in making money and who were motivated by greed. The final section in 5:7-20 is directed once again to those who were suffering. So, the book begins and ends with the thought of suffering and trials. There is a relationship, however, between these two final sections: certain rich people were profiteering by abusing Christians and causing them much suffering. When James calls for *patience* in 5:7, he is giving counsel to the believers who suffered at the hands of the inconsiderate rich.

II. A REBUKE OF THOSE WHO ABUSED WEALTH (4:13—5:6)

The material in 4:13—5:6 should properly be regarded as a subunit, despite the chapter break before 5:1. There are two paragraphs to this subunit (4:13-17 and 5:1-6) which have close connections.

- 1) Both paragraphs begin with the same words "Come now" (ἄγε νῦν), the only time that James uses this stylistic feature
- 2) Both paragraphs have a related theme—that of materialistic wealth

A. A Rebuke for Presumptuousness in Business Matters (4:13-17)**1. Attitude Problem**

One should recognize that success in business (or any other aspect of life) is not merely a matter of careful planning and hard work. There must be the faith element in which a person recognizes that the Lord God is sovereign over everything . . . even the small details of life. One's attitude should be that of complete dependence upon the Lord. So, prayer should be involved, and one should speak and act in such a way that reflects that they rely on the Lord for success, not just themselves. Note, however, that this passage is not a

condemnation of planning and good management, but rather the danger of leaving the Lord out.

2. "If the Lord wills" – vs 15 (cf. Acts 18:21; 1 Cor 4:19)

We don't always know what the Lord's will is. This speaks solidly against the "name it and claim it" philosophy.

3. The Underlying Principle to vs 15

No matter what we do, whether it is financial deals or anything else, we should reflect an attitude of absolute dependence on God as sovereign over every detail of our lives.

4. Good Advice for our Lives

There is a tendency that comes from the *flesh* to operate independently of God. But we must resist this, knowing that our confidence is in the Lord (Ps 33:16-18). Application to seminary studies.

B. A Rebuke for Greed and Abusing Others to Selfishly Profit (5:1-6)

1. Selfish Greed Condemned (5:1-3)

- a. Recall the earlier references to the rich (1:10-11; 2:6-7)

- b. Clarification about the "last days" (5:3)

This expression is often used in a broad way to speak of the whole epic of time of the messianic era when the New Covenant has been inaugurated and the Spirit has been poured out (Heb 1:2; 1 Pet 1:20; cf. Acts 2:17). But "the day of the Lord" has not yet come (2 Thes 2:2). Point—with the full disclosure of the Lord Jesus in this era, such behavior is inexcusable.

- c. The problem with money is not the amount that we have, but the tendency it has to become the central focus and primary concern of our life. (1) We can easily lose sight of spiritual values by inordinately focusing on money. (2) It can also consume our time, so that we have no time left for serving the Lord. (3) Finally, we can easily get so caught up in accumulating money that we lose the desire to give generously.

- d. Thought Questions:

- (1) Would you feel more secure in life if you had more money? If you say "yes," then your security is not really 100% in the Lord.

- (2) Are you waiting until you have more money before you begin giving liberally to the Lord?

- (3) When you give to the Lord, do you do so cheerfully? (2 Cor 9:6-8)

2. Exploitation of Others Condemned (5:4-6)
 - a. This is probably aimed at those unsaved rich who were taking advantage of the poor and less fortunate Christians to enrich themselves (note mention of "the righteous man" in 5:6).
 - b. "the Lord of Sabaoth" (5:4)
This is an OT expression that a Jewish Christian audience would readily recognize. This Greek expression (κυρίου σαβαώθ) occurs 18x in the LXX, 17 of which are in Isaiah. Often translates the phrase "Lord of Hosts." Note esp. Isa 2:12—where it speaks in a judgment/revenge context. This would suggest that James uses the phrase to warn the abusers that the Lord is going to revenge for His children by bringing the abusers into judgment.
 - c. "a day of slaughter" (5:5)
May refer to the feast held during sheep-shearing season (1 Sam 25:4-8).

III. FINAL EXHORTATIONS PERTAINING TO TRIALS AND SUFFERING (5:7-20)

Transition: the thought of the righteous suffering at the hands of the abusing rich naturally leads James to provide some counsel as to the proper way to react. Since trials are from the Lord in order to develop our character, the godly response is not one of retaliation (vengeance belongs to the Lord).

Structural Unity: Notice the frequent usage of the term "brethren" in vv 7-12, in contrast to a complete absence in 4:13—5:6, and only once again in 5:19. Also, the motif of "judgment" in 5:9 and 5:12 unifies these verses as a coherent paragraph.

- A. Godly Counsel On How to React to Suffering (5:7-12)
 1. Since wrongs will be rectified by the Lord's return, believers should *focus* on this event and thus be patient (5:7-8).
 - a. An Illustration for Patience: Early and Late Rains
Since most of these Christians were probably those who worked in the fields (note 5:4), James uses an illustration they could easily identify with to reinforce his call for patience.
 - b. How can James say "the coming of the Lord is at hand"?
He uses the Greek verb ἐγγίζω, translated "at hand" in relation to the kingdom (Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). The main idea is that it is ready to happen, not that it will necessarily happen soon as we reckon time (2 Pet 3:9 should be kept in mind). We are all to live as though the Lord's return could happen at any time. When the Lord does come, injustices will be righted and those who have been faithful to the Lord will be made rich (kingdom riches).
 2. Complaining Must Be Avoided (5:9)

Since James used the phrase "against one another," he probably has in mind complaining against fellow believers. In times of trial and suffering, it is easy for the sin of "complaining" to creep in. James warns them that this could be held against them at the judgment seat of Christ. [This may mean that patiently enduring trials without complaining will bring reward, whereas complaining may negate the reward one might have otherwise had].

3. Godly Examples of Patiently Enduring Suffering (5:10-11)

These verses are probably meant to be a contrast to vs 9. Now we are reminded of the positive side—the Lord's good rewards. Note particularly Job's case—we can be assured that the Lord will one day make our trials worthwhile. He is a God who generously blesses, so we know we have a lot to look forward to.

4. We Have An Obligation to Be Truthful to Others (5:12)

a. This has to do with "swearing an oath" (Lev 19:12; Num 30:2)

In the OT, it was not wrong to give an oath, and even to swear truthfulness based on the Lord's name.

b. Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:33-37)

Why a change? Because this had been so abused by the Jews (see the Mishnah, Tractate *שבועות* [Oaths] in vol. 4, *Nezikin*). They had created technicalities for getting out of an oath, and thus not having to fulfill their word. This was wrong—people ought to be able to depend on our word. Yes should mean yes, and no should mean no.

c. Why is this placed here? How does it relate to the context?

Possibly because of the rich in 5:4-6 who were not keeping their word to those who worked for them. Believers are not to be like that, but are to be people who keep their word.

B. Counsel When Suffering Comes in the Form of Sickness (5:13-20)

1. The Procedure for Helping the Sick (5:13-16a)

a. Note: it is the sick person who has the responsibility to call for the elders.

b. Note that "elders" is in the plural—local churches should be governed by qualified elders.

c. Literal oil is probably meant, but it is just a symbol. If there is healing, it is due to the prayer offered in faith, not the oil.

- d. Verse 15 suggests that part of the purpose in this is to determine if the person has been made sick by the Lord due to sin in their life [but not all sickness is due to sin—note the word "if"]. This probably explains why the sick person has the responsibility to call for the elders—he must be ready to face up to and deal with any sins he has committed. This verse should not be abused—ordinarily, we should not go around confessing our sins to fellow Christians. Confession should be between the believer and the Lord.

Note: An alternative interpretation is that literal sickness is not being discussed at all. Consider the following comments from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary; New Testament* (p 834):

The heart of the problem lies in just what James meant when he referred to the “sick.” Actually there is no reason to consider “sick” as referring exclusively to physical illness. The word *asthenei* literally means “to be weak.” Though it is used in the Gospels for physical maladies, it is generally used in Acts and the Epistles to refer to a weak faith or a weak conscience (cf. Acts 20:35; Rom. 6:19; 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:9-12). That it should be considered “weak” in this verse is clear in that another Greek word (*kamnonta*) in James 5:15, translated sick person, literally means “to be weary.” The only other use in the New Testament (Heb. 12:3) of that word clearly emphasizes this same meaning.

James was not referring to the bedfast, the diseased, or the ill. Instead he wrote to those who had grown weary, who had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of suffering. These are the ones who should call for the help of the elders of the church.

Despite these comments, most modern Bible translations still adopt the view that James is speaking here of physical illness. Douglas Moo (*The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, p 237) defends the traditional view of physical illness:

When *astheneō* refers to spiritual weakness, this meaning is made clear by a qualifier (“in conscience” in 1 Cor. 8:7; “in faith” in Rom. 14:1,2) or by the context. More importantly, in the NT material that has exercised the greatest influence on James’s vocabulary and theology (the Gospels), *astheneō* always denotes physical illness (Matt. 10:8; 25:36,39; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40; John 4:46; 5:3,7; 6:2; 11:1,2,3,6). The same is true of the cluster of terms and concepts that we find here. The verb “save” is frequently used in the Gospels to denote the restoration of those who are ill (see the notes on v. 15); as is, as we might expect, the verb “heal” (v. 16). But perhaps the most striking parallel comes with the reference to “anointing with oil.” Only once else in the NT is the practice mentioned, and then as a means of physical healing (Mark 6:13).

2. The Effectiveness of Prayer Illustrated (5:16b-18)
3. The Value of Helping a Fellow-Believer Turn From Sin (5:19-20)

These verses are related to the preceding, since the healing mentioned above might be related to dealing with sin. But there may be other cases where sickness is not involved. Either way, helping fellow-believers out of sin is very valuable. This will help *deliver* his soul from death (recall chap one and the "death syndrome" that results when temptation leads to sin).