

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Survey of the Bible Series – The Epistle of James

(SB_James_Lsn5)

Outline of James

SALUTATION (1:1)

PROLOGUE – RESPOND PROPERLY TO TRIALS (1:2-18)

- Embrace trials (1:2-11)
- Do not blame God (1:12-18)

THEME – BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO WRATH (1:19-20)

BODY OF THE LETTER: CULTIVATING THE BEHAVIOR (1:21-5:6)

- Be Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - Involves more than listening; involves good works (1:21-27)
 - Demonstrated by impartiality in treatment of others (2:1-13)
 - Demonstrated by the combination of faith and good works (2:14-26)
- Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - Control the tongue (3:1-12)
 - Conduct demonstrates wisdom (3:13-18)
- Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)
 - Wrath is created by worldliness (4:1-5)
 - Wrath is cured by humility (4:6-5:6)
 - Humility is demonstrated by repentance from sin (4:6-10)
 - Humility is demonstrated by restraint in speech (4:11-12)
 - Humility is demonstrated by reluctance to boast (4:13-5:6)

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

- Perseverance will be properly rewarded (5:7-11)
- Perseverance is empowered through prayer (5:12-20)

**The sections highlighted in yellow are the sections covered in previous lessons. The sections highlighted in blue are the sections to be addressed in this lesson.

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

Perseverance Will Be Properly Rewarded (5:7-11)

7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, 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 at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, 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 Behold, 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.

The word "then" (*oun*) suggests that the oppression of the righteous poor described in vv. 1-6 is what gives rise to the call for patience in vv. 7-11. In the former section James warns the oppressing rich of coming judgment; in the latter section he encourages the oppressed poor to "be patient." This exhortation concerning patience is built around three illustrations: the farmer (vv. 7-9); the prophets (v. 10); and Job (v. 11). So James calls for a patience toward the rich oppressors that will last "until the Lord's coming."¹

Stenazete, translated "grumble," commonly means "to sigh," "to groan." It speaks of inner distress more than open complaint. What is forbidden is not the loud and bitter denunciation of others but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a groan or a sigh.²

We could examine any number of examples from the prophets that would illustrate James' who exhibited long-suffering patience *makrothumia*. The writer of Hebrews provides an extensive, but not all-inclusive, list in Hebrews 11 (note especially 11:32ff).

One of the most interesting things about this passage is James' frequent reference to the coming of the Lord and of the imminent judgment associated with the Lord's coming. The Jewish believers and their leaders such as James, Peter and John in the Jerusalem church would have been expecting Jesus' Coming as the Messiah to establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace. As of this point in those early years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, the understanding of eschatological issues was most definitely shaped by a Jewish race/nation of Israel paradigm derived from the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul may have been saved, but he had not yet been appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles and had not received and communicated the mystery doctrines of the new dispensation.

James' ministry and writing was definitely set within the Transition Period and it is vital that we understand the historical context; otherwise, we will inappropriately extend the Jewish aspects of James' teaching to the new dispensation.³ For instance, to James, the impending return of the Lord was most likely a reference to the Lord's 2nd Advent. However, we know from Paul's teaching that there will first be a separate coming of Jesus in the clouds prior to His coming to the earth to establish His messianic reign (1 Thess 4:13-18). The latter is distinctly Pauline in nature and there is no evidence that James or any of the other Jewish leaders of the early church understood this distinction.⁴

Jewish society was an agrarian society and was very familiar with the weather cycle and its impact upon crop yields. The early rains came in the Fall right around the time of planting and if the timing was good, farmers would have planted their crops and the appropriate amount of rainfall would occur right after planting so that the crops were properly established. The late rains came in the Spring, prior to the harvest and resulted in the crops' production of their fruit. (It was too hot and dry during the summer for crops to grow in that region for the most part). Farmers

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1989-1998), electronic version.

² Ibid.

³ For better development of the subject of the Transition Period, refer to my notes from our study of the book of Acts – specifically "SB_Acts13A_The Transition Period."

⁴ It could be speculated that James was simply overlooking the Rapture in light of the fact that the 2nd Advent would soon follow and thereby acknowledging that many of his Jewish congregants would be part of the events associated with the 2nd Advent; however, to take such a position would be more of a case of eisegesis or reading into Scripture rather than allowing Scripture and the historical context to drive the interpretation.

needed to be patient and careful to not plant too late or harvest too early, otherwise they would not get the advantage of the early and late rains.

In the same manner, James exhorts his readers and congregants to allow their patient expectation of the Lord's return to be reflected in patient behavior toward each other. Why? Because when the Lord returns, there will be a judgment in association with the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. The sheep (Gentile believers) are separated from the goats (Gentile unbelievers) per Matthew 25:31-46 and Jews will also be judged – believers separated from unbelievers (see Ezek 20:33-38). Jewish believers will also be judged for the purpose of the assignment of their inheritance in the kingdom and that judgment will be according to standards that include principles that James has taught (see James 2:12-13 cf. 4:11-12).

If there ever was an example to the Jewish believer of James' day (and to us as well) of perseverance (as distinct from patience endurance – see below) in the midst of testing, it was to be found in Job. James encourages his readers to remember how Job was rewarded in the end for his faithfulness. In spite of how things may appear when we are undergoing testing and tribulation in this life, the Lord is full of mercy and compassion. Our faithful endurance and perseverance in testing will receive an ample reward – more than we can ever imagine or think.

In 5:7-10 the plea is for patience (*makrothymia*), the self-restraint that does not retaliate; but here in 5:11 it is *hypomone*, perseverance in difficult circumstances.

It is significant that James does not speak of Job's patience for despite the popular phrase "the patience of Job," he hardly exemplified that quality (cf. Job 12:2; 13:3-4; 16:2). He was, however, an outstanding example of perseverance in the most trying situations (cf. Job 1:21-22; 2:10; 13:15; 19:25-27). His experience also was proof that "the Lord is full of compassion and mercy," as we see in "what the Lord finally brought about" for him. Because Job persevered, God gave him "twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10-17). To sum up, in James 5:7-11 the author is urging his readers not to fight back but to exercise long-suffering patience toward the rich who oppress them; and he is calling for stout-hearted perseverance in the trying circumstances that confront them.⁵

Perseverance is Empowered Through Prayer (5:12-20)

12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; **15** and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. **16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. **18** And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

⁵ Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,
20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his
soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.⁶

In verse 12, the Greek construction indicates that the use of oaths in everyday conversation was a practice that needed to be discontinued as it was getting out of hand. James' instruction is reminiscent of Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:34-37. It should be obvious from both of these passages that the instruction was in regard to a practice that was prevalent in 1st Century Jewish culture – the casual use of oaths in informal conversation – not oaths in a formal court of law. Such a position is contrary to the whole of Scripture on the subject. God Himself is said to have taken an oath (Psa 110:4) and Paul sometimes called God to witness (2 Cor 1:21; Gal 1:20). James' point – the believer's life and testimony should be such that no oath is needed and his or her word is as good as gold. If the believer is constantly having to swear by something trustworthy, it begins to reflect very poorly upon the character of the believer.

The remainder of this passage falls into two sections and James addresses the subject of prayer. Verses 13-16 constitute a call for prayer in every circumstance of life; vv. 17-18 illustrate the effectiveness of sincere prayer.

One circumstance that calls for prayer is the experience of being "in trouble." Here James has used the verb form (*kakopathe*) of the noun *kakopatheias*, which he employed in v. 10 to describe the trouble experienced by the prophets. When such an experience comes, the Christian needs patience. He is not to grumble in bitter disgust (v. 9), nor is he to express himself in oaths (v. 12). Instead, "he should pray." Patience comes from God, and prayer is an effective way to obtain it. James also urges anyone who is in good spirits to "sing songs of praise." This too is prayer.⁷

On the other hand, sickness is a circumstance where prayer is needed and James provides specific instructions. Some have interpreted James' instruction here to be a reference to discouragement and depression.⁸ The Greek words for sick (vv. 14, 15) and healed (v. 16) allow this interpretation, the context influences me to believe James was referring to physical ailments – maybe even those that were related to depression and/or discouragement. However, there is nothing in the context that would necessarily limit the healing to only the psychological.

James is not endorsing the Roman Catholic practice known as extreme unction in these verses – the practice of anointing someone with oil at death to gain merit with God for so doing. Rather James is providing some specific guidance for Jewish believers within the context of their historical circumstances.

The sick person "should call for the elders of the church." In [Titus 1:5, 7](#) and [Acts 20:17, 28](#) elders and bishops (or overseers) are equated. In [Acts 20:28](#) the elders are instructed to shepherd (*poimainein*) the church of God; that is, to do

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁷ Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

⁸ See Daniel R. Hayden, "Calling the Elders to Pray," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):258-66 and J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 834-35.

the work of an overseer or pastor. That "elder," "bishop," "pastor" refer to the same office is also suggested in [1 Peter 5:1-4](#). Thus, the sick person is to call the pastors of the church "to pray over him and anoint him with oil." Prayer is the more significant of the two ministries performed by the elders. "Pray" is the main verb, while "anoint" is a participle. Moreover, the overall emphasis of the paragraph is on prayer. So the anointing is a secondary action. There are a number of reasons for understanding this application of oil as medicinal rather than sacramental. The word *aleipsantes* ("anoint") is not the usual word for sacramental or ritualistic anointing. James could have used the verb *chrío* if that had been what he had in mind. The distinction is still observed in modern Greek, with *aleipho* meaning "to daub," "to smear," and *chrío* meaning "to anoint." Furthermore, it is a well-documented fact that oil was one of the most common medicines of biblical times. See [Isaiah 1:6](#) and [Luke 10:34](#).⁹

The prayer that is prayed should not be half-hearted, but an expression of belief and trust (cf. Jas 1:6). In 5:17-18, Elijah is offered as an example. When believers recognize sinful attitudes and wrongful behavior and turn to the Lord, the result is forgiveness and restoration and, in specific cases in which sickness is the result of a particular sin, there can be physical healing. The condition that James highlights throughout his letter that is the hinge upon which such results occur – the earnest prayer of the repentant.

With regard to the last few verses of this epistle, I find Dr. Thomas Constable's comments instructive and helpful.

The soul saved from death is that of the backslider to whom also belongs the multitude of sins. We should probably understand the "soul" to represent the whole person here as well as elsewhere in James' epistle (cf. 1:21).²²⁶ Death represents the temporal destruction of the person, not his or her eternal damnation (cf. 1 Cor. 15:30; 1 John 5:16). The repentance of the reclaimed sinning believer results in the forgiveness (covering) of his or her sins. This description of forgiveness harks back to Old Testament usage where the biblical writers described sin as covered when forgiven. Such usage was understandable for James who was a Jewish believer writing to other Jews primarily (1:1; cf. Matt. 7:1-5; Gal. 6:1-5). His description does not contradict other New Testament revelation concerning forgiveness.¹⁰

Once again in this passage, James encourages his Jewish audience of believers to weigh their actions in light of the judgment to which their lives will be subjected. James has given clear instructions about how to achieve practical holiness and spiritual maturity. His pointed exhortations were designed to stab the consciences and stir the souls of his beloved Jewish brothers. Stand with confidence, serve with compassion, speak with care, submit with contrition, and share with concern. A believer should be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, say what God wants him to say, sense what God wants him to sense, and share what God wants him to share. Spiritual maturity involves every aspect of life.¹¹

⁹ Gaebelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

¹⁰ Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of James," www.soniclight.com

¹¹ J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 835.