

# An In-Depth Study of the Letter of James

## [Part 8]

**James 5:1-3** [NIV] *“Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. **Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded.** Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”*

All through this passage of scripture the words are vivid, pictorial and very carefully chosen by James.

The Christian Bible **does not** condemn wealth as such, but in the letter, **James strenuously insists on the responsibility of wealth, and the perils that face a person who is surrounded with this world’s goods.**

In the Middle East at the time that James wrote this letter there were three main sources of wealth, and James selects a word for decay for each of them.

- a) **Corn and grain** – the word translated “rotted” is “*sēpō*” – indicating a process of rotting to the point of destruction. For an agricultural-based society this was drastic.
- b) **Clothes** – in the Middle East garments were the outward sign of wealth, worn on special feast days.

**Genesis 45:22** [King James] *“To all of them he gave each man **changes of raiment**; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment.”*

The wealthy Joseph, whom the pharaoh of Egypt had made his “*right-hand man*”, gave to his brothers changes of garments.

**Acts 20:33** [King James] *“I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or **apparel.**”*

Paul stated that he had **not** coveted any person’s apparel, referring to his special feast or special occasion garments.

**James warns that they will be despoiled by moths.**

- c) **Gold and silver** – the point is that gold and silver do **not** naturally rust yet the word used by James is “*katiōō*” which means to rust or corrode.

**James is proclaiming the worthlessness of riches, and that even gold as the basis of all present-day money, will be worthless at Christ’s return and in His Kingdom.**

James is warning that even the most precious and the most apparently indestructible things are doomed to decay and dissolution.

**This corrosion of gold and silver is proof of impermanence and the ultimate valuelessness of all earthly things.**

This is more than a physical warning for it depicts the terrible cancer that a desire for wealth can in the end cause rich people to howl with frantic terror as they face their Creator God on that day of judgement every human being will face.

**1 Timothy 6:10** [NIV] *“For **the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

The desire for wealth can cause a person to be tempted and to fall into many sins, for which they will have to give account to their Creator God.

**James is also pointing towards the spiritual decay and delusion that wealth can bring to a person.**

**James 5:4-5** [NIV] *“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. **You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.**”*

Too often in the scramble for personal wealth, other people are trodden down or cheated to the point of poverty.

**Amos 5:11-12** [NIV] *“**You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.**”*

Amos was a prophet of God who highlighted the oppression of the poor by the rich, his book has been called *“the cry for social justice.”*

**Amos 8:4-7** [NIV] *“Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?” — **skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done.”**”*

God will **not** forget this oppression of the rich over the poor.

**Isaiah 5:8** [NIV] *“**Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.**”*

**God is not pleased with property developers and large-scale monoculture, that take people away from His physical creation, and destroy the livelihoods of smallholders and small businesses.**

**Scriptures in the Christian Bible indicate that this process will be reversed.**

**Zephaniah 3:6** [NIV] *“I have cut off nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no-one passing through. **Their cities are destroyed; no-one will be left, no-one at all.**”*

**Cities will be laid waste.**

**Zechariah 3:10** [NIV] *“**In that day each of you will invite his neighbour to sit under his vine and fig-tree,**’ declares the LORD Almighty.”*

**Each family will have their own smallholding.**

[See our articles on future agriculture on this website]

Too often the selfish rich have gained their wealth by injustice.

The Christian Bible preaches that every labourer is worthy of their hire. [**Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18**]

The “*day labourer*” in Israel always lived on the very verge of starvation, their wage was small, and it was impossible for them to save anything for times of unemployment. [**Matthew 20:1-15**]

If a wage was withheld from this “*day labourer*” for just one day, then literally he and his family would not eat, this was one of the thoughts behind the parable given by Jesus Christ referred to above.

The Christian Bible again and again insists on prompt payment of the wages to the hired labourer.

**[Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Leviticus 19:13; Proverbs 3:27-28; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5]**

**Many laws in the Christian Bible are nothing less than the charter for the working man.**

**James likens these selfish rich people to fattened cattle that are on their way to be slaughtered for others to feast on.**

**James 5:6** [NIV] “*You have condemned and **murdered innocent men**, who were not opposing you.*”

This comment of James could be referring to poor people who died of starvation due to lack of work and no “*social services*” in his day.

It could also be referring to the prophets and ultimately Jesus Christ.

**Acts 7:51-52** [NIV] “*You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! **Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him,***”

It was the rich who killed the prophets who exposed their evil treatment of the poor, and in the end Jesus Christ who came to save them from the end result of their selfish greed.

**1 Peter 2:21-23** [NIV] “*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, **he did not retaliate**; when he suffered, **he made no threats**. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*”

Jesus Christ offered **no** resistance to those who crucified Him. **[Isaiah 53:7]**

It may well be that Jesus is saying that in their oppression of the poor the selfish rich are crucifying Jesus Christ again.

**To live selfishly is to pierce the body of Jesus Christ on the cross once more.**

Paul was told by Jesus Christ that his persecution of the Christians, most the poor who had fled Jerusalem, was persecuting Him. **[Acts 9:1-5]**

**James 5:7-9** [NIV] “***Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!***”

**The early Church lived in the expectation of the immediate Second Coming of Jesus Christ.**

For the farmer the autumn rains were important, for without them the grain would not germinate at all.

The spring rains were needed to cause the grain to mature into a bountiful crop.

**The farmer needed patience to wait for nature to do the work of growing and maturing the crop.**

**In the same way the Christian needs to be patient for the consummation of their Christian life at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18]**

**This immediate expectation of the return of Jesus Christ is just as valid for Christians today.**

That day will be our first awareness of existence after our physical death and our resurrection at Christ's return. [**Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Isaiah 38:18-19; John 5:25**]

James reminds us that during this period of waiting we are **not** to be idle but to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, developing godly character, and through us in acts of love and compassion towards other human beings. [**Galatians 5:22-23; John 7:38-39**]

**Mark 13:29** [NIV] “*Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.*”

Jesus Christ used the same phrase for the nearness of His return as Judge.

**Matthew 24:33** [NIV] “*Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.*”

The use of this phrase “*at the door*” is linked to the generation that would experience the events that will lead up to the return of Jesus Christ.

I feel we need to insert in this study at this point certain teachings in the New Testament about the Second Coming.

This will help us to confirm our faith in Jesus Christ and help us in this period of waiting.

In the New Testament three different words are used in conjunction with Jesus Christ's Second Coming.

a) The Greek word “*parousia*” an ordinary word for someone's presence or arrival.

In particular it was used in the conjunction with the invasion of a country by an army.

Also specially used of a visit of a king or governor to a province of his empire.

So when this word is used of Jesus Christ it means that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, is the final invasion of the earth by its Creator and ultimate Ruler.

[This word is used in **Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 John 2:28; 2 Peter 1:16; 2 Peter 3:4**]

b) The Greek word “*ēpiphaneia*”; this was used of the appearance of God to His worshipper.

When applied to Jesus Christ, His Second Coming will be His appearing to His people who are waiting for Him but also those who are disregarding Him or rebelling against Him.

[This word is used in **Titus 2:13; 2 Timothy 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:9**]

c) The Greek word “*apokalupsis*” meaning unveiling or to lay bare.

When applied to Jesus Christ it means the full unveiling of the power and perfection of our Creator God for all human beings to eventually see and experience.

These three words give us a great picture of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the mounting of His eternal throne on earth and God then directing the world in full glory and power.

## **What then does the Christian Bible teach us about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to this earth?**

### **No human being knows the day or the hour of Jesus Christ's return.**

**Matthew 24:36** [NIV] *“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

Not even the angels, both good and bad, know the date of Jesus Christ's return, for the final decision is with God the Father.

**Mark 13:32-33** [NIV] *“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.**”*

### **But we need to be constantly ready for that return.**

Remember the parable of the ten virgins, half of them were unprepared, lacking oil in their lamps, depicting the lack of the Holy Spirit working in and through their lives as a light to those who live in the darkness of Satan's deception. [Matthew 25:1-13]

### **This basic fact makes one thing very clear.**

**Human speculation about the time of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not only useless but is actively blasphemous.**

**For this knowledge resides only in the mind of God the Father.**

### **The Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be sudden as a flash of lightning is or a thief is in the night.**

**Matthew 24:26-27, 37-39** [NIV] *“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. **For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**” ... “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”*

The Greek word translated “lightning” is “*astrapē*” which refers to the daily appearing of the sun in the sky, but the root word refers to the sudden flash of lightning.

### **This also indicates that it will be an event that all of humanity will experience.**

It is **not** something that is done in secret.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-3** [NIV] *“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** While people are saying, “Peace and safety”, destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”*

**The early apostles did not preach about times and dates of Christ's return for it would be sudden.**

**Coming without a last minute warning, in an unexpected moment.**

**2 Peter 3:10** [NIV] *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*

**Not an event humans will be able to ignore.**

**Because of this suddenness of the return of Jesus Christ certain duties are urged on Christians.**

**Christians must always be watchful.**

**1 Peter 4:7-11** [NIV] *“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

**The Christian must be watching constantly their lifestyles and conduct, to ensure that it is fulfilling the reason we have been called at this time, to be a living witness to the love and faithfulness of our Saviour.**

**2 Peter 3:11-12** [NIV] *“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”*

There is a phrase in these verses which is very important but is easily overlooked.

*“Speed its coming.”* To me this indicates that each of us can either speed or delay, personally the very return of Jesus Christ.

**Scripture indicates that there will be a certain number of people from each generation who will be among the “firstfruits” of God’s family, who will be teachers and rulers of the vast majority who have remained blinded by Satan all their lives.**

**God the Father knows the number and if you and I are among them in our generation, our Christian conduct and preparation could speed or delay Christ’s return to set up the work of the “firstfruits” to teach and rule.**

**For every generation such knowledge should spur us on to being fully prepared for Christ’s return.**

**2 Peter 3:3-6** [NIV] *“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.”*

We must **not** have this attitude of mind as true Christians.

**Noah’s flood needs to be a warning to us that God’s patience with human rebellion will eventually run out, and God will start again with a small number of people to build His Kingdom [family]. [Matthew 24:37-39]**

**Colossians 3:1-10** [NIV] *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on*

**earthly things.** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you one lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

**Paul is here listing the characteristics of the new life we should be living in preparation for Christ’s return.**

**Colossians 3:12-17 [NIV]** *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**”*

This may be a long list of virtues that should be in every true Christian but a list that we should all read, study and apply constantly.

**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 [NIV]** *“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. **May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**”*

**Only if we are allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us to produce these virtues will we become part of all those in the past who have been made holy by God and will be resurrected to be with Jesus Christ at His return. [1 Corinthians 15:22-23]**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [NIV]** *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. **We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.**”*

This resurrection is of all Christians past and present and all who have died before Jesus Christ’s first coming, who had the Holy Spirit working in and through them.

After first joining the returning Jesus Christ in the clouds, eventually, after all the pre-Christ events in Matthew chapter 24 and Revelation have taken place, all will descend to the earth. [**Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9-11**]

**The Second Coming of Jesus Christ shows us that this whole creation of human beings by God was not without purpose and plan.**

**This one divine event is one towards which the whole of human history is moving.**

**Genesis 1:26-27 [NIV]** *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

Christ’s return is a major step towards the fulfilment of God the Father’s original purpose, to create a people who will be not only in His “*image*” but also in His “*likeness*,” His very character.

**Only to such a group of people God can safely offer eternal life.**

Each one of us Christians needs to ask, am I at this moment ready for this pivotal event in human history?

**We could leave such preparation until it is too late!**

**1 John 2:28 [NIV]** *“And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.”*

We must be “*in Him*,” Jesus Christ, by allowing His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to work in and through us on a daily basis.