

XII. Until He Comes

March 9/11/12, 2020

James 5:7-12

OT: Ps. 37:1-10; Job 1:20-22; Jer. 38:1-13

NT: Mt. 5:33-37; 26:36-44

Aim: To endure patiently the trials and tribulations of this life, to practice radical truthfulness in our speech, and to wait with eager expectation for the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A. Patient Endurance (James 5:7-11)

Moo: In the first two paragraphs of this general section of the letter, James castigates people for arrogance and for abusing wealth and power. Overly self-confident Christian businesspeople are probably in view in 4:13-17, whereas the non-Christian rich are James's target in 5:1-6. But both paragraphs lack James's customary address to his readers, 'brothers.' This changes in 5:7-11 (vv. 7, 9, 10). James thereby signals his intention to focus explicitly on the attitudes that God's people need to adopt in light of a biblical perspective on this world and the coming judgment

Morgan: The tone of the epistle changes again with this paragraph. In 5:1-6 the apostle spoke as a prophet and denounced the sin of the wicked oppressors; here, he speaks with the voice of a pastor as he offers sympathy, support, and encouragement to the community of faith. The rest of the epistle is concerned with...essential exhortations on how to live 'until then.'

MacArthur: In the first six verses of chapter 5, James sharply rebuked the wicked rich people who abused the righteous poor. In verses 7-11 he shifts his focus from the persecutors to the persecuted, moving from condemning the faithless, abusive rich to comforting the faithful, abused poor. James also instructs the suffering poor as to what attitude they are to have in the midst of persecution. The theme of this section is defining how to be patient in trials.

Morgan: This paragraph is the third time James discusses the matter of trials and tribulations that come upon the believer. His treatment of this subject is not as much circular as it is spiral in nature, because each time he revisits the topic he lifts us to a higher plane. The first time we see the matter of trials and difficulties is in 1:2-8m where the apostle teaches us that such vicissitudes are helpful in the development of our faith. The second time the subject appears in 1:13-18, where he helps us distinguish between trials and testings on the one hand and temptation to evil on the other. Now, as James deals with the trials of injustice and oppression that his readers were experiencing, he instructs them to endure it with patience, counting on God to rectify the wrong.

1. Exhortations to Patience (5:7-9)

Hughes: Three great words in the New Testament refer to the Lord's second coming. *Epiphania* means an appearing or a showing or a manifestation of Christ. Another great word is *apokalupsis*, which means an unveiling, a laying bare, a revelation, and refers to the full display of Christ's power and glory. The third word, the one for the Lord's 'coming' in verses 7&8 of our text, is *parousia*, which emphasizes Christ's physical presence, literally meaning 'being alongside of.' It is used in this way fifteen times in the New Testament in reference to Christ's return, denoting 'the physical arrival of a ruler.' The significance of the word as James uses it here is that *His suffering people longed for the presence of Christ their King*. They knew that when Jesus came to be *with* them, everything would be all right.

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a) *Anticipate the Lord's Coming (5:7)*

(1) Patient Brothers (5:7a)

⁷*Be patient, therefore, brothers...*

(a) *Context*

Moo: The *then* (Gk. *oun*, ‘therefore,’) shows that James views his admonition to believers (*brothers*, or ‘fellow members of the family of God’) as a logical consequence of his denunciations of the wicked rich in 5:1-6. These rich people, James has made clear, while prospering in this life, face a certain prospect of condemnation on the day of judgment (‘the day of slaughter’ [v. 5]). Because of that prospect, believers who suffer at the hands of the ‘rich’ should *be patient...until the Lord's coming*.

Dorani: We need patience when we face significant evils.... He begins, ‘Be patient, therefore, brothers.’ James says, ‘therefore,’ because the need for patience follows what he just said in 5:1-6. In the previous passage, James accosts the rich who hoard wealth (5:2-3), defraud laborers their wages (5:4), live in self-indulgent luxury (5:5), and rob the poor of life itself (5:6). James tells the rich to weep, since God hears the cries of the oppressed and brings the wicked to account (5:1, 4-5). Now he tells poor Christians to be patient, for the Lord will judge the wicked in *His* time—and His time may be later than we please (cp. Ps. 37:1-10; Pr. 20:22; Job 1:21; 2:10).

(b) *Command*

Moo: Until this day comes, James urges his readers to adopt an attitude of patience.... The call for ‘patience’ or ‘endurance’ is the theme of these verses. ‘Patience’ (from the root *makrothym-*) can sometimes be distinguished from ‘endurance’ (from the root *hypomon-*), the former denoting the long-suffering attitude we are to adopt toward other people (1 Cor. 13:4; Eph. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:14), the latter connoting the strong, determined fortitude with which we need to face difficult circumstances (Rom. 8:25; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Th. 1:4). Or, to put it simply, we are *patient* with other people and *endure* difficulties. But this distinction does not appear to apply very neatly to James’s use of these two word-groups in this paragraph. For the ‘patience’ (*makrothymia*) of the prophets in v. 10 seems to be equivalent to the ‘perseverance’ (*hypomonē*) of Job in v. 11.

MacArthur: James exhorted his readers to ‘be patient’ in the midst of their persecution. ‘Patient’ is from *makrothumeō*, a compound word from *makros*, ‘long’, and *thumos*, ‘anger’; in modern English vernacular ‘long-tempered’ (cp. Ex. 34:6; Ps. 85:15; Pr. 15:18; 16:42; Rom. 2:4). It is a different word from the one translated ‘endurance’ in James 1:3-4. That word, *hypomonē*, refers to patiently enduring trying circumstances; *makrothumeō* refers to patiently enduring difficult people (cp. Mt. 18:26, 29; 1 Th. 5:14). Both are essential; patience with people is just as important as patience in difficult circumstances. Patience is the righteous standard God expects all believers to conform to no matter what trial they face. Thus, patience under persecution becomes another test of genuine saving faith for James. He also exhorts true Christians to remain patient no matter how severe or relentless their sufferings.

Dorani: ‘Be patient’ translates the Greek word *makrothymeō*, which James uses three times in 5:7-8. (He uses the companion noun *makrothymia*, ‘patience,’ in 5:10). Patience is a passive virtue; it waits.... Patience, in this sense of the word, is the equivalent of forbearance or longsuffering.

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Morgan: ‘Be patient’ describes a person slow to anger, not a hot head, but one with a long fuse. It is different from the word ‘endurance’ in 1:3-4.... The word is found only rarely in secular Greek, ‘for it is a virtue that does not flourish readily in the heart of natural man.’

Moo: The attitude that James calls on us to adopt, here, then, includes resignation in the face of suffering along with confident expectation of a day when the fortunes of this life will be reversed. And negatively, James is probably also implicitly forbidding his readers from taking vengeance on their oppressors.

(2) Parousia (5:7b)

...until the coming of the Lord.

Moo: The word ‘coming’ translates the Gk. *Parousia*, which means basically ‘presence’ (see 1 Cor. 16:7; 2 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:12). It was applied in secular Greek to the ‘arrival’ of a king or dignitary. It is probably from this background that the technical sense of the word in the NT developed, for the early Christians consistently used the word to refer to the ‘coming’ of Jesus at the end of history to judge the wicked (e.g., Mt. 24:37, 39; 2 Th. 2:8) and deliver the saints (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23).

MacArthur: Three times in this section (vv. 7, 8, 9) James refers to the believer’s great hope, the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.... *Parousia* (‘coming’) is an important New Testament eschatological term. It is the most commonly used term in the New Testament epistles for the second coming of Jesus Christ (cp. 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Th. 2:1, 8; 2 Pe. 1:16; 3:4; 1 Jn. 2:28; cp. Mt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39). *Parousia* refers to more than just coming; it includes the idea of ‘presence.’ Perhaps the best English translation would be ‘arrival.’ The church’s great hope is the arrival of Jesus Christ when He comes to bless His people with His presence.

Morgan: Three times in this section (vv. 7, 8, 9) James points out to the believers their great hope in the second coming of the Lord Jesus.... The ‘coming’ of the Lord is His *Parousia*, an important New Testament eschatological term. It is commonly used for the second coming of Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Th. 2:1, 8; 2 Pe. 1:16; 3:4; 1 Jn. 2:28). The reference is not just to the Lord’s ‘coming’ but also to His very presence the hope of the church (Titus 2:11-13).... James gives us three concrete examples of such long-suffering endurance: the patient farmer (v. 7), the persistent prophets (v. 10), and the patriarch Job (v. 11).

Dorani: All people should prepare themselves for Jesus’ return. Scripture never promotes the question, *when* will Christ return? It always promotes the question, *will you be ready* when He returns? The rich, who live in self-indulgent luxury, are fools because they forget the day of reckoning (Lk. 12:13-21). The family of God waits patiently for that day.

(3) Patient Farmer (5:7cd)

(a) Precious Fruit (5:7c)

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth...

Moo: James now adduces an example of the attitude he has just described (as in 3:4 and 5, the illustration is introduced with *idou*, ‘see’). The farmer who prepares a field, sows seed, and then waits for a crop is a very natural illustration of patience (see also 1 Cor. 9:7, 10; 2 Tim. 2:6). He can do little to effect the outcome but must wait and pray for the right rain at the right time.

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Morgan: Knowing how difficult it is to be patient, he prefaces it with ‘behold’ (*idou*) to draw special attention to the illustrations that follow.... The word [farmer] here describes an independent landowner or tenant farmer rather than a day laborer. He plants his field and anticipates the yield, but he knows there must be an interval of time before his crops come to fruition. ‘Waits for’ translates *ekdechetai*, a compound word that means eager anticipation, as in Acts 17:16 and Philippians 3:20. ‘Fruit’ is from the common word *karpos*. It is ‘precious’ (*timion*, meaning honorable or valuable) because it requires hard work and because, in part, life is sustained by it. The farmer recognizes that the fruit is not merely the result of his own labors, but that outside forces from God must contribute – sun, rain, fair weather. Likewise, the believer realizes that the spiritual harvest we anticipate is also dependent upon the intervention of God in our affairs.

MacArthur: To further reinforce his point that believers need to wait patiently for the second coming, James described a familiar scene using a simple, straightforward illustration.... The farmer would have been a tenant farmer or small landowner. Having planted his crops, he waits expectantly for ‘the precious produce of the soil’—the crops—to come in. That depends on something outside of his control, God’s providentially bringing together all the elements needed for the crops to grow. Those crops are ‘precious’ or valuable to him because he depends on them for his existence. All he can do is be ‘patient’ (from *makrothumeō*, the same word used earlier in the verse) as he waits eagerly for the crops to come in.

(b) *Providential Rain (5:7d)*

...being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

MacArthur: James’s reference to ‘the early and late rains’ shows just how long farmers had to patiently wait. The early rains in Palestine arrive at the time of the fall planting season (October and November), the late rains just before harvesttime (March and April).

Morgan: The adjective ‘early’ (*proimon*) occurs only here in the New Testament. James refers to what is called in Palestine the ‘early’ rains that fall late October and early November. This rain is vital to the farmer to soften the soil and prepare it for planting. The ‘latter’ rains fall late April into May. These rains, accompanied by warmer weather, help to mature the crops. The more and longer the latter rains, the more the potential yield.

Moo: In Palestine, the farmer was particularly dependent on the rain that came in late autumn and early spring. See, for example, Dt. 11:14, where God, in response to His people’s obedience, promises ‘then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine, and oil.’ This is almost certainly the background for James’s imagery in this verse.... Every reference to ‘early and later rains’ in the OT occurs in a context affirming the faithfulness of the Lord (Dt. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1). James’s readers, being biblically literate, would have detected in the language of this verse an ‘echo’ of this broader biblical theme and been thereby given a further reinforcement of the confidence they could place in the coming of the Lord to judge their enemies and deliver them.

Hughes: The ‘early’ rains come in late October and early November in Palestine. Farmers still eagerly await these because they aid planting and make seed germination possible. Heavy rains come in December through February. And finally the spring rains come in April and May. These rains represent a *process* apart from which there can be no harvest. All farmers must

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patiently submit to this process. To fight against it, to bite their nails, to insist they must have fruit in the middle of the process, is futile.... In submitting to God's process, they will inevitably undergo stressful times when it appears the rains will never come. But these times can be spiritually beneficial to them as they call upon their faithful God.

b) *Expect the Lord's Coming (5:8)*

(1) Patience (5:8a)

⁸*You also, be patient.*

MacArthur: Applying the analogy to his readers, James exhorted them, 'you too be patient.' Just as a farmer waits patiently through the entire growing season for his crop, so also are believers to wait patiently for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Morgan: James now applies the illustration with directness and power.... He reiterates the same command with which he began verse 7, 'Just like the farmer, you also be patient.' Nature has taught the farmer this secret, and James wants his readers to realize it as well.

Dorani: Since the Lord is returning, since the family of God waits on Him as surely as the farmer waits upon the rain, a way of living emerges.... First, James repeats, the wise believer is patient.

Hughes: James apparently understands that patience won't come easily to his harried church, so he repeats his command.

(2) Perseverance (5:8b)

Establish your hearts...

Moo: James reiterates his call for patience, in imitation of the farmer (*too*), and adds to it an exhortation to *stand firm*. This NIV rendering is a bit paraphrastic, a literally translation of the Greek being 'strengthen your hearts' (cp. NASB; NRSV).... What is commanded, then, is firm adherence to the faith in the midst of temptations and trials. As they wait patiently for their Lord to return, believers need to fortify themselves for the struggle against sin and with difficult circumstances.

MacArthur: James further exhorted his readers to 'strengthen' their 'hearts.' 'Strengthen' is from *stērizō*, a word meaning 'to make fast', 'to establish', or 'to confirm.' In Luke 9:51 this term is used to describe Jesus' resolute determination to go to Jerusalem, although He knew He faced death when He arrived there. It is a word denoting resoluteness, firm courage, an attitude of commitment to stay the course no matter how severe the trial. *Stērizō* derives from a root word meaning 'to cause to stand,' or 'to prop up.' James urges those about to collapse under the weight of persecution to prop themselves up with the hope of the Savior's return.

Morgan: 'Establish' is from *stērizō*, to support or make stable (as in Lk. 22:32 and 1 Th. 3:13). God strengthens us, but we are also active and responsible. God's intention is to produce in us the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), and one key way that happens is through the crucible of trials and suffering. Instead of growing impatient with the Lord and others, we must yield to Him. We can stand this way only if our hearts are firmly established in the Word and prayer.

Dorani: Second, James tells his brothers to 'stand firm' (NIV) or (more literally) 'strengthen your hearts' (NRSV). This term is a bit more active (the Greek is *stērizō*). It has the sense of

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steely resolve.... Soldiers stand firm when they stay ready for battle. We stand firm when someone voices a passionate or even angry opinion on our direction and we neither succumb to his bluster nor return anger for anger.... Luke 9:51 uses it to describe Jesus who ‘*set his face to go to Jerusalem*’ (ESV).... Nothing would stop Him in his resolve, and nothing should keep us from completing godly resolutions.

(3) Parousia (5:8c)

...for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Doriani: Our passage says we should be patient and stay strong because the coming of the Lord is near (5:7-8).... James 1 spurred disciples to endure by asking that we consider our eternal reward. If a believer stands in the test, ‘he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him’ (1:12). James 5 instructs believers to be patience and persevere ‘because the Lord’s coming is near ... The Judge is standing at the door’ (5:8-9).

Moo: In v. 7, James urged believers to *be patient* in view of the *fact* of the Lord’s coming. Now he bases his exhortation to patience and spiritual firmness on the *nearness* of the Lord’s coming. The verb James uses, *engizō*, (‘is near’), occurs elsewhere in the NT in similar eschatological contexts. Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of His ministry that ‘the kingdom of God is near’ (Mk. 1:15; cp. also Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Lk. 10:9, 11); and Paul (Rom. 13:12) and Peter (1 Pe. 4:7), like James, reiterate the ‘nearness’ of the end events.... What is crucial is to understand this ‘nearness’ in the appropriate temporal framework: salvation history. With the death and resurrection of Jesus and pouring out of the Spirit, the ‘last days’ have been inaugurated. This final age of salvation will find its climax in the return of Christ in glory. But – and here is the crucial point – the length of this age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the ‘last days’ would last (cp. Mk. 13:32). What this means is that the return of Christ, as the next event in the salvation-historical timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, ‘near,’ or ‘imminent.’ Every generation of Christians lives (or should live!) with the consciousness that the *Parousia* could occur at any time and that one needs to make decisions and choose values based on that realization. So it was a true in James’s day as it is in ours; we need to *be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.*

Morgan: The command to make our hearts stable is followed by an explanation: be stable in your faith *because* of the blessed hope of the Lord’s near return. ‘Is at hand’ translates *eggizō* and it is in the perfect tense, which means literally, ‘the Lord’s coming has drawn near and remains near.’

MacArthur: James emphasizes imminency by reminding his readers of the hope that ‘the coming of the Lord is near.’ The verb translated ‘near’ (*eggizō*) means ‘to draw near,’ ‘to approach,’ or ‘to come close.’ The return of Christ is the next event on God’s prophetic calendar and could happen at any moment.... That reality has always been the church’s hope.

Hughes: Brothers and sisters, the coming of Christ is *near*. The ultimate epiphany is just around the corner. If we think otherwise, we tragically impoverish our souls. Most Christians think little of Christ’s return, or if they do think about the day they will see Christ, they associate it with the day of their death. This is a proper hope, but death is not a pleasant thing, and thus the expectation of seeing Christ is mixed with a certain fear of the dark veil. But it is not so with His second coming. It is all joy! And that singular joy is meant to be a boon to our souls. The Scriptures say His coming is near, and we are not only to believe this, but to embrace it!

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c) *Prepare for the Lord's Coming (5:9)*

MacArthur: James depicts the Lord Jesus Christ as the Judge about to enter the judgment hall. This is the flip side of his first point. The hope of the Second Coming does provide comfort in trials. However, the sobering reality that Christ will return to 'judge the living and the dead' (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pe. 4:5; cp. Acts 10:42) cautions those tempted to complain amidst their trials.

(1) Patience (5:9a)

⁹*Do not grumble against one another, brothers....*

Moo: At first glance, this verse does not have much in common with its context, beyond sharing an emphasis on the imminence of judgment.... In a general way, of course, James's prohibition of 'grumbling' against one another fits with one of the most persistent motifs of the letter; the problem of sinful speech (cp. 1:27; 3:1-12; and esp. 4:11-12). But grumbling against those who are close to us is particularly likely to occur when we are under pressure or facing difficult circumstances.... So it would be quite natural if James's readers, under the pressure of poverty and persecution (cp. 5:1-6), would turn their frustrations on one another. Moreover, the exhortation to be patient with the circumstances of suffering that the readers face could easily evoke the need for patience with fellow community members as well.... The word *grumble* translates a Greek word (*stenazō*) that elsewhere in the Bible occurs absolutely, usually with the meaning 'groan' or 'sigh.' ... And the word typically connotes an expression of frustration from the people of God who are suffering oppression or even judgement (e.g., Ex. 2:23).... James clearly uses the verb to describe groaning or complaining against (*kata*) fellow community members. But the biblical use of the word again adds a nuance to this word, implying that the groans are the result of oppression.

Morgan: Christian patience puts a restraint upon our grumbling against each other. Grumbling (*stenazō*, to sigh or groan due to unpleasant circumstances) is never more prevalent than when things are difficult in some way or other.

MacArthur: Living with difficult circumstances can cause believers to become frustrated, lose patience, and 'complain...against one another,' especially against those who appear to be suffering less than they are or who seem to be adding to their trouble. *Stenazō* ('complain') also means 'to groan within oneself,' or 'to sigh.' It describes an attitude that is internal and unexpressed (cp. Mk. 7:34; Rom. 8:23). It is a bitter, resentful spirit that manifests itself in one's relationships with others.

Dorani: Third, we do not grumble against one another. The word James chooses for 'grumble' (*stenazō*) ordinarily means 'groan' or 'sigh,' especially from oppression. For example, Israel *groaned* to God during their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 2:23). When James adds 'against each other,' it is clear that he forbids grumbling, not groaning (we groan inwardly; we grumble outwardly—'against each other'). By choosing this term, James intimates that the grumbling may be caused by oppression. James is perceptive. The pressures that lead to his call for patience (5:7-8) also create internal tension, and it is our sad tendency to speak in anger and haste when under pressure.

Hughes: Finally, James commands that positive waiting for Christ be matched by positive relationships with other waiting believers.... It is one thing to get along with other believers when things are going well. It is quite another when we are all under stress.... James was writing to people in such a miserable state that they were easily at each other's throats. Close

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pressures had made them jumpy and quick to take offense. This had to stop. So James focused the imminency of Christ's return on the problem.

(2) Prohibition (5:9b)

...so that you may not be judged...

Moo: As he did in 4:11-12, James connects the need to refrain from critical speech with judgment. In the former passage, however, he likened critical speech to judgment; here he warns that criticism of one another places a person in danger of judgment. This warning is similar to, and may be influenced by, Jesus' well-known prohibition: 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged' (Mt. 7:1).

Morgan: As we have seen earlier when dealing with slander (4:11, 12), grumbling is a form of judging. When we grumble, we are declaring that someone has either not done something that he ought to have done, or that he has done something wrong. When we grumble, therefore, we judge. If, however, we exercise patience and develop Christian stability – with our eyes on the Lord's return – we appreciate that His return will herald the Day of Judgment. We must, therefore, leave all judgment to Him.

Dorani: James adds that we must not grumble against our brothers 'or you will be judged.' This reminds us of his earlier warning against judging. We have no right to judge, for God is Judge (4:11-12). It also sounds like Jesus, who said, 'Do not Judge, or you too will be judged' (Mt. 7:1).

MacArthur: James then gave his readers a simple but powerful motive for avoiding such bitter complaining: 'so that' they themselves 'may not be judged.' ... Those who do not know the Lord will face final judgment and its resulting sentence to eternal damnation. But even believers will be judged (cp. 1 Cor. 3:13-15)... The *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ is thus both a time of hope and a time of judgment on our works for the purpose of eternal reward. It will not be a judgment on believer's sins, since that has already taken place at the Cross (Rom. 8:1, 31-34).

(3) Parousia (5:9c)

...behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Moo: To reinforce his warning, James reminds his readers again that this judgment is imminent: *the judge is standing at the door!* ... We should note the striking shift in application of *Parousia* language in these verses. James begins by alluding to the *Parousia* as a time of judgment on the wicked in order to comfort and encourage struggling believers; but he then reminds those same believers that the *Parousia* will also include a serious assessment of their own spiritual state and behavior.

Morgan: He is well-equipped to judge, and He is ready to judge—in fact, He is 'standing at the door!' The emphasis with this use of 'at the door' is that of nearness, as in Mark 13:29 and Acts 5:9... God the Father has fixed a day on which He will judge the whole world in justice by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge whom He has appointed (Acts 17:31). Part of the Father's honoring the Son is His appointment as the Judge of all men and women. Few take grumbling seriously. But God does, and so does every Christian whose focus is on the Lord's coming.

Dorani: But we must notice a certain twist. So far, James has referred to Christ's return to encourage believers to stand firm under duress. But now he bids us to remember the coming

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judgment whenever we would grumble against each other. Christians will not face God's *wrath* on judgment day, but we will face God's *assessment* of every word and every deed (Mt. 12:34-37; 2 Cor. 5:10)... The nearness of the eschatological day is not just an impetus to look forward to the judgment of 'sinners,' it is also a warning to examine one's own behavior so that when the one whose footsteps are nearing finally knocks on the door, one may be prepared to open, for open one must, either for blessing or judgment.'

MacArthur: Further emphasizing the imminency of Christ's return to judge our works, James warned, 'behold, the Judge is depicted as ready to throw open the door and burst onto the judgment scene. He will make that dramatic entrance at His *Parousia*.

Hughes: For Christ's imminent return meant that Christ, the great Judge of all, was right at the door.... This is a dramatic image. The Son of God, to whom is committed the judgment of the world, is at the doors of the judgment hall, ready to throw them wide open as He strides to the judgment seat.

d) Summary

Hughes: The layers of application in this passage are many, but the primary one for us who live in the affluent West today is this: we must believe and embrace the truth that 'the coming of the Lord is at hand' (v. 8)... We must live in daily expectancy.

2. Examples of Patience (5:10-11)

Moo: In vv. 10-11, James returns to the topic of vv. 7-8, as he reinforces and illustrates his exhortation to patience under duress. Reference to the fortitude of martyrs as a model for others to imitate became very popular in the wake of the Maccabean Revolt in the early to middle second century BC. The refusal of pious Jews to renounce their faith at the insistence of the pagan king Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Empire was celebrated in books such as 2 Maccabees. James, like the author of Hebrews (see chapter 11, especially vv. 35-37) at a slightly later date, adopts this martyrological tradition to encourage strength under trial in his own day. We find in James, however, only a snippet of this kind of tradition as he briefly refers to the prophets (v. 10) and Job (v. 11).

Dorani: Again, he bids us suffer evil and oppression with patience, but now, instead of adding reasons for patience, he adds examples of patience.... James cites the prophets and Job, for they exemplify patience and perseverance (5:10-11).

a) Persistent Prophets (5:10-11a)

(1) Suffering and Patience (5:10a)

¹⁰*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers...*

Moo: The Greek word translated 'example' (*hypodeigma*) reflects the Maccabean tradition we have mentioned above, being used three times in the literature to refer to the heroic faith of the Jewish martyrs (2 Macc. 6:28, 31; 4 Macc. 17:230. It often refers to something or someone that spurs others to imitation (in the NT see, in a positive sense, Jn. 13:15; and, in a negative sense, Heb. 4:11; 2 Pe. 2:6; cp. also Heb. 8:5; 9:23). The NIV's *patience in the face of suffering* translates a difficult Greek phrase. In the Greek, the word order is reversed and the two terms are coordinated: literally, 'suffering (*kakopatheia*) and patience (*hypomonēs*)' (NASB; NRSV)... Most contemporary English versions follow the NIC in taking the two words as

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mutually interpreting (hendiadys is the grammatical term): ‘suffering that is qualified by patience’; for example, ‘patience under ill-treatment’ (REB). But the grammar, while allowing this rendering, does not favor it.... We tentatively opt, then, for the rendering ‘example of suffering and patience.’

MacArthur: To further encourage believers to endure unjust suffering, James pointed out the example of the prophets who had endured ‘suffering’ with patience.’ ‘Suffering’ is from *kakopatheia*, a compound word from *kakos* (‘evil’) and *pathos* (‘to suffer’); ‘patience’ translates *makrothumia*, which refers to patience with people.

Morgan: Again, the apostle addresses his Christian brothers and sisters affectionately, warning to reinforce his plea to them to remember Christ’s Lordship, His promise to judge evil, and their need to remain patient in the midst of suffering and oppression. He uses the prophets of old as an example of patience because the Old Testament prophets and these New Testament believers shared the common experience of being wronged and abused for their faith.

(2) Specific Examples of Prophets (5:10b)

...take the prophets...

Morgan: The prophets showed peerless patience and faithfulness despite the suffering they endured (see Heb. 11). Elijah was hounded and hated (1 Kgs. 18:10, 17). Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern with the threat of starving to death (Jer. 38:1-13). Amos was falsely accused of raising a conspiracy and was told to go back to where he had come from (Amos 7:10-13). Once more James reflects the Sermon on the Mount (cp. Mt. 5:11-12).

Hughes: Perhaps at the top of his list was Jeremiah, who because of his unrelenting faithfulness in preaching God’s Word was cast into an empty water cistern where he was left to sink in the cold mud (Jer. 38:4-13).... Courageous Micaiah withstood the lying prophets before King Ahab, delivering the true prophecy of the downfall of the kingdom. For this he was slapped around, thrown in prison, and fed only bread and water (1 Kgs. 22:24-27). And so it was for Moses, with his grumbling detractors; and David, fleeing Saul; Elijah on Mount Carmel; and Daniel in the lion’s den.

Moo: James, of course, does not tell us what specific prophets he has in mind. But we naturally think of Jeremiah, who suffered so much at the hands of both pagan kings and, especially, his own people, in faithfulness to the message that God had given him to deliver.

Hughes: By New Testament times the persecution of the prophets was proverbial, being referenced in at least eleven passages (Mt. 5:12; 21:35-36; 22:6; 23:29-37; Lk. 13:33; Acts 7:51-52; Rom. 11:3; 1 Th. 2:15; Heb. 11:32-38; Rev. 16:6; 18:24). In Stephen’s sermon, which led to his own martyrdom, he shouted, ‘Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?’ (Acts 7:52).

Dorani: When they had to rebuke Israel for sin, the prophets’ God-given message was often repugnant to their audience (cp. Is. 6:9-10; 30:10).... Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Amos...saw the people ignore their prophecies while Israel’s leaders were often hostile. Yet, they bore that hostility with patience. More than that, they *endured*, that is, they continued to prophesy. They continued to denounce covenant infidelity and evil deeds, even if they never saw the judgment they predicted. Still we count them blessed because they heard and proclaimed God’s very words. They show us how to endure.

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(3) Speaking in the Lord's Name (5:10c)

...who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Moo: In any case, James wants us to know that the prophets suffered in the cause of their God; they *spoke in the name of the Lord*. Doing God's will, James is suggesting, will often lead to suffering. What is needed is a willingness to bear up under the suffering, maintaining the spiritual integrity and waiting patiently for the Lord Himself to intervene to transform the situation. It may also be that James cites the prophets because they were people who not only suffered injustice but spoke out against it as well. Christians need to learn to suffer patiently as they await the Lord's vindication. But this is not to say that they cannot speak out against evil.

Morgan: These prophets 'spoke in the name of the Lord.' Their words, reputations, and even their lives were directly related to God's redemptive purpose.

MacArthur: The prophets (the Old Testament prophets, including John the Baptist), serve as a fitting 'example' of those who patiently endured evil treatment from people because they 'spoke in the name of the Lord.'

Hughes: James' point is that the prophets suffered not because they did anything wrong, but because they were doing *right*, for they 'spoke in the name of the Lord.' And as these righteous suffered, they did it with class, with brave endurance.

(4) Steadfast and Blessed (5:11a)

¹¹*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.*

Morgan: By drawing attention to these men of old, James encourages his readers to adopt the same kind of faith and long-suffering they exhibited. With this phrase James summarizes the general example of the prophets and prepares for the specific example of endurance provided by Job. This occurrence of 'behold' is the last in the epistle; the author once again calls special attention to these models of steadfast endurance. 'We call them blessed' (*makarizomen*, the verb form of the adjective used in the Beatitudes) shows that James numbers himself with his readers in expression admiration for the virtue found in the Old Testament heroes.

Hughes: Those who have persevered to death, or more commonly through the multiple trials that come to committed believers over the long span of life, are called 'blessed.' Notice that it says 'blessed,' not 'happy' (as the RSV has it), for what is meant here is not the *subjective*, emotional state of happiness, but the *objective*, unalterable approval and reward of God. The smile of God rests upon such a life.

Moo: Despite the tendency observed in some modern translations (e.g., REB, TEB), to be 'blessed' is not the same as to be 'happy.' The latter speaks to the state of our emotions; the former to the objective state of our relationship with God. Only here and in Luke 1:49 does the verbal form 'called blessed' (Gk. *makarizō*) occurring in the NT; but the adjective 'blessed' (*Makarios*) and the noun 'blessing' (*makarismos*) are, of course, very common. James's pronouncement of blessing here on those who persevere sounds very similar to what he has said toward the beginning of the letter (1:12).

Dorani: Third, James blesses those who persevere in 5:11. 'Persevere' translates the verb *hypomenō*; the noun 'perseverance' translates the companion noun *hypomonē*. They describe the more active side of patience. Perseverance is resolve or determination to continue on the right course, despite difficulty.... James has praised patience before. Indeed, James 5:11 partially

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repeats 1:12: ‘As you know, we considered blessed those who have persevered’ (5:11) sounds like, ‘Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial’ (1:12).

MacArthur: It is common general knowledge that God has ‘blessed’ those who have so ‘endured.’ ‘Endured’ translates a form of the verb *hupomenō*, which is related to the noun translated ‘endurance’ in 1:3-4. As noted earlier...that word refers to patiently enduring difficult circumstances. People who endure are the objects of divine favor.

Morgan: ‘Them...who endured’ (*tous hupomeinantes*) denotes a class of sufferers who persevered and successfully completed their test of faith. They stood bravely under the siege of trials without losing heart and so faithfully endured to the end. The word here is different from ‘patience’ used in verse 10; it is the term used in 1:3-4 for describing the role of endurance in developing Christian character.

Moo: James’s shift from the vocabulary of ‘patience’ (*makrothymeō* and *makrothymia*) in vv. 7-10 to ‘endurance’ (*hypomonē*) in v. 11 may simply reflect the influence of 1:12 on James’s language. But it is of course tempting to see more significance in the shift. Some think that James had used ‘patience’ to speak mainly of the believer’s response to other people, while he uses ‘endurance’ to refer to the need to ‘bear up under’ the trial.... While this particular distinction has some lexical basis, we are not persuaded that this distinction...really makes sense of the sequence of these verses.... The ‘blessing’ here in v. 11, then, brings to a pinnacle the paragraph as a whole, providing the ultimate encouragement for the attitude of ‘patient fortitude’ that James is exhorting his readers to adopt in the face of their suffering.

b) Patriarch Job (5:11bcd)

(1) Job’s Patience (5:11b)

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job...

MacArthur: The incredible story of the ‘endurance of Job’ amid his trials was one of the most popular stories in Jewish history. Job endured unimaginable, unexplained suffering—the fierce attacks of Satan, the loss of his children his wealth, his health, his reputation, and worst of all, his sense of God’s presence. It is true that Job vocalized his misery (3:1-11)m, bemoaned the fallacious counsel of his misguided, would-be comforters (16:2ff.), and cried out in confusion to God (7:11-16). Yet’ through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God’ (Job. 1:22; cp. 2:10). Job’s triumphant statement, ‘Though He slay me, I will hope in Him’ (13:15) exemplifies his patient acceptance of his trials (cp. 1:21; 19:25-27).

Dorioni: James offers *Job* as a second model of patience.... The biblical record makes us wonder if James could have found a better exemplar. After all, Job lamented the day of his birth, insisted upon his innocence, disputed with his friends, complained that he deserved none of his woes, and virtually demanded that God explain his suffering. How then is Job patient? Whether Job was perfectly patient or not, some Jewish teaching of the time, recorded in a book called *The Testament of Job*, stressed that Job was steadfast and persevered. James may be alluding to a teaching his people had heard. More importantly, James persevered. He lost all his wealth, his children perished, and his wife vilified him, but he never deserted the Lord.

Morgan: James now moves to present the patriarch Job as a specific example of this steadfast endurance in the face of affliction.... This is the only place in the New Testament where the patriarch is mentioned directly. But the early Christian community was familiar with him.... The

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endurance or patience of Job, though a common colloquial expression, is not necessarily the picture we derive of him when reading the Book. His impassioned outburst against the shallow platitudes of his so-called comforters (Job 3:1, 11; 16:2) or his distressed protests to God (7:11-16; 10:18; 23:2; 30:20-23) demonstrate that he was not a model of Stoic impassibility. But the term James uses here, once again, is not patience, as in verse 10, but ‘endurance, steadfastness.’ In spite of all his unexplained sufferings, Job is a stellar model of endurance under tremendous suffering, and under it all he remained unswervingly devoted to the Lord (1:21; 2:10; 16:9-21; 19:25-27).

Moo: James adds one more example of ‘perseverance’ under trial before he leaves the topic. And the example is a curious one: Job. Few of us would single out Job as a model of faithful endurance in the midst of suffering. The canonical book rather pictures Job as a bit self-righteous, overly insistent on getting an explanation for his unjust sufferings from the Lord. The LXX does a little to change this picture, using the verb ‘persevere’ (*hypomenō*) three times with reference to Job.... However, in [*The Testament of Job*], which presents Job as pronouncing a blessing on his children, Job proclaims that he is ‘fully engaged in endurance’ (1:5) and encourages his children to be ‘patient’; for ‘patience is better than anything’ (27:6-7; cp. 26:5). The date of this book is not certain and it may have undergone editing by Christian scribes. But it probably comes from about the same time period as James and may at the least attest a Jewish tradition about Job’s perseverance that James may also be picking up on. But we must also point out that James’s singling out of Job’s perseverance is not an unwarranted inference from the canonical book itself. For although Job did complain bitterly about God’s treatment of him, he never abandoned his faith. In the midst of his incomprehension, he clung to God and continued to hope in him (see 1:21; 2:10; 16:19-21; 19:25-27). As Barclay says, ‘Job’s is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished.’

Hughes: The examples of the prophets ought to be enough, but James adds the greater example of Job the greatest man of the East.... Critics have long noted that in the impassioned exchange between Job and his friends, Job says things that do not fit the phrase ‘the steadfastness [patience] of Job.’ In response, the word is better translated ‘perseverance,’ which has the idea of endurance or dogged perseverance.... Though Job cried and complained, he refused to renounce God. Rather he said, ‘I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faint within me!’ (Job. 19:25-27). Job refused to surrender his integrity as his wife had urged him to do . He was still blameless and upright. He never ceased believing in God.

(2) The Lord’s Purpose (5:11c)

...and you have seen the purpose of the Lord...

Moo: A literal rendering of these words would be ‘you have seen the *telos* of the Lord.’ The word *telos* can mean either ‘purpose’ or ‘end,’ and each of these meanings can be related to the word ‘Lord’ (*kyriou*, a genitive) in a couple of different ways. The main possibilities are: 1) With the meaning ‘end’: ... the ‘end’ that the Lord brought about in Job’s situation, that is, the restoration of his fortune at the end of the book (NIV; REB; NLT; see TEV: ‘you see how the Lord provided for Job in the end’). 2) With the meaning ‘purpose: the ‘purpose’ of refining Job that the Lord had in allowing His trials to come upon him (see NJB: you have seen ‘the Lord’s

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purpose”; cp. also NASB; NSRV)... Both interpretations also fit the contexts of Job and of James.

Doriani: There is a little uncertainty about the proper translation of James 5:11, hence doubt about the precise lesson Job instills. The ESV (resembling most translations) says, ‘You have seen *the purpose of the Lord.*’ The NIV renders the key phrase ‘You...have seen *what the Lord finally brought about.*’ The key Greek phrase is *telos kyriou*, which can mean ‘the end of the Lord’ or ‘the result of the Lord.’ ... Both options fit the conclusions of Job, both are true, and both suit James’s goal of comforting and encouraging his readers. The Lord vindicates His people, then and now. As He does, they more clearly see who He is.

(a) End Purpose

Doriani: If James refers to the Lord’s *purpose* or result, it means God intended Job’s suffering to demonstrate His power and goodness, despite adversity.

Morgan: A strong element of encouragement is given by ‘the final purpose (*telos*) of the Lord’ in Job’s case. In the end, God revealed His purpose and showed that Romans 8:28 is true for the child of God.

MacArthur: ‘The outcome’ or purpose ‘of the Lord’s dealings’ with Job provides hope for all who patiently endure suffering. There were at least four important divine purposes for Job’s suffering: 1) to test his faith and prove it genuine; 2) to thwart Satan’s attempt to destroy that faith; 3) to strengthen Job’s faith and enable him to see God more clearly; and 4) to increase Job’s blessedness. All these purposes were realized because despite all his trials, Job remained loyal to God.

Moo: In Job 42:5-6, Job confesses that he has finally learned his lesson about the majesty and sovereign goodness of God; and a reference to the ‘purpose that God has in suffering would certainly be an important source of comfort to James’s readers.

(b) End Result

Moo: On the other hand, the restorative ‘end’ of Job’s story is of course prominent in the canonical book and would be of equal comfort to James’s readers. Your present suffering, James would be saying, is not the ‘end’ of the story; God will transform your situation for God when Christ is revealed in glory. This latter interpretation should probably be adopted.... It also provides a natural lead-in to the final clause of the verse.

Doriani: If it means what the Lord brought about, then James wants us to think of the end of Job’s story, for the Lord restored Job’s health and prosperity and gave him a new family. On this view, James encourages us to see that we will be vindicated in the end when we face troubles.

Hughes: Job’s perseverance is a real-life example meant to help us persevere in real life. So is the real ending (literally ‘the end of the Lord,’ which our text translates as ‘the purpose of the Lord’). Job had come to the end of his words in great bitterness. But the end for Job was very different than some might expect, for God loaded Job down with blessings supernal.

(3) The Lord’s Patience (5:11d)

...how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

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Moo: The good end that God brought about in Job's situation shows that *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy*. Of course, James does not mean that patience in suffering will always be rewarded by material prosperity; too many examples in both the OT and NT prove this to be wrong. But James does seek to encourage our faithful, patient endurance of affliction by reminding us of the blessing that we receive for such faithfulness from our merciful and compassionate God.

Morgan: Job learned two things about God through the crucible of all he suffered. *First*, God is 'very compassionate.' This is a compound word found only here in the New Testament and coined by James. It consists of the adjective 'many or much' and 'compassion,' a noun used in Matthew 9:36, where Jesus had 'compassion on the multitudes.' But God is, *second*, 'merciful' toward us. This is the common word in the New Testament for God's benevolent dealing with His people (Lk. 1:78; Rom. 9:16; 11:30, 32; 12:1; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pe. 1:3; 2:10). Any trial or suffering experienced by the child of God can be patiently endured by anticipating that He will indeed cause all things to work together for good (Rom. 8:28). The suffering of one of God's own elicits His mercy and compassion,

MacArthur: Fittingly James closed his exhortation to patiently endure trials with a reminder of the character of God. It is not uncommon for those in the midst of severe trials to, like Job, question whether God really cares about them. But in all their trials, believers can take comfort in the indisputable truth that 'the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.' That is the clear testimony of the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 33:18-19; 34:6; Num. 14:18; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 8:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Is. 30:18; Lam. 3:22-23; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2). 'Full of compassion' translates *polusplagchnos*, a word used only here in the New Testament and perhaps coined by James himself. It literally means 'many-bowelled,' reflecting the Hebrew idiom which spoke of the bowels or stomach as the seat of emotions. To say that God is 'many-bowelled' is to affirm that He has an enormous capacity for compassion. That God is 'merciful' is the unmistakable teaching of Scripture (cp. Ps. 86:15; Ez. 39:25; Lk. 1:78; Rom. 9:16; 11:30, 32; 12:1; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pe. 1:3; 2:10).

Dorani: The reason for optimism in adversity is this: 'The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.' Compassion and mercy are more than synonyms for love. The terms convey the visceral feelings, the deep-seated emotional feeling of love.

Hughes: James' concluding phrase ties the bow perfectly: 'the Lord is compassionate and merciful.' We must not allow ourselves to be persuaded by men or devils to think ill of God—that God is cold. He has a father's heart, even when He allows darkness to come. God cannot be unkind to His children.... James coined a new word to say the Lord is 'compassionate.' Other ways of saying this are, 'very, very compassionate,' or 'full of tender compassion.' To this compassion James couples 'merciful.' God is full of compassion as He cares for us in our misery, and He is full of mercy as He forgives our sins. All of which says to those who are undergoing hardships: God is good.

3. Summary

Hughes: What an encouragement to know that God does not expect stoic perseverance in the midst of trials. He knows we are clay. He understands tears. He accepts our questions. But He does demand that we recognize our finiteness and acknowledge there are processes at work beyond our comprehension. A plan far bigger than us is moving toward completion. And God demands that we, like Job, hold on to our faith and hope in God.

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Doriani: This passage offers us many reasons to persevere in the faith. It comforts us in several ways. First, it shows us the Lord. He is near. He is the judge and comes to set all things right. Second, it reminds us of Job and the prophets, who persevered to the end in great adversity. Yet above all, James takes us to the fatherly heart of God. He abounds in love and He is sovereign still. Knowing this, whatever our troubles, we can endure. We can persevere to the end and know the full blessing of God.

Morgan: The patient farmer, the persistent prophets, and the patriarch Job all speak eloquently of the virtue of steadfast spiritual endurance. In today's culture, enormous value is placed on physical endurance, but does our generation place a similar premium on spiritual endurance? Hardly. James urges a spiritual 'ironman' kind of faith.

Hughes: Are times hard? Are you feeling alienated from God? If so, consider James's examples—the perseverance of the prophets and the perseverance of Job. If we persevere we will be 'blessed,' for we will draw near to Him and we will see Him as never before, and our end is sure to be good.

B. Practice Truthfulness (James 5:12)

¹²*But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

1. Introduction

a) Context

Moo: The debate about the flow of James's argument, intense at the beginning of the letter, surfaces here again.... How does the prohibition of vows in v. 12 fit into the context? Does it go with the verse before it or after it? Or is it simply an isolated saying? ...

Morgan: How to divide the epistle at this point is unclear. Does verse 12 constitute a new thought with James or is it a postscript to his exhortation to patience amidst suffering? Commentators are divided, though the majority thinks that verse 12 is a separate and new subject. Still, there are others who see a connection between it and the section on patience.

Doriani: Students of James puzzle over the place of this verse in the structure of the epistle. Its connection to the rest of chapter 5 is a challenge. From Martin Luther to Martin Dibelius and beyond, theologians who question the structural cohesiveness of James cite 5:12 as a prime example of its tendency to drop disjointed aphorisms into the text.... Why is this teaching *here*? ... Some say it is simply another sign of James's concern about the proper use of the tongue, with no clear connection to the rest of the epistles. Others see 5:12 as a final word on the proper response to trials.... The warning against vows is...part of James's call to patience and restrain in speech as in other daily behavior. Still others see it as a genuine transition to James's final section.

b) Content

Moo: The phrase *above all* in v. 12 marks the beginning of the epistolary conclusion. James wraps up his letter by touching on three issues that he considers critical for the community. And each of them involves speech. First, in the last reprise of a key motif of the letter, James prohibits the wrong kind of speech – in this case, the taking of frivolous vows (v. 12). Second, James encourages mutual prayer for both physical and spiritual needs (vv. 13-18). And, finally,

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he exhorts his readers to take the teaching of the letter and apply it to those of their number who might be sinning in any of the matters that he has touched on (vv. 19-20).

MacArthur: The custom of swearing oaths was a major part of life in biblical times. It had become an issue in the church, particularly the predominantly Jewish congregations to which James wrote. Since swearing oaths was an integral part of Jewish culture, Jewish believers brought that practice into the church. But such oath taken is unnecessary among Christians, whose speech is to be honest (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9), and whose lives are to demonstrate integrity and credibility. For believers, a simple yes or no should suffice because they are faithful to keep their word.

Hughes: James' teaching is a radical call to radical truthfulness.... If heeded, this call will set us apart from the rest of the world, and even get us in trouble at times. But radical truthfulness will also bring power to our lives and grace to a confused world.

2. Distinction (5:12a)

¹²*But above all, my brothers...*

a) Importance

MacArthur: The phrase 'but above all' indicates the distinction between the exhortation that follows and the others in the epistle and sets it in the primary place. The Greek particle *de* ('but') marks a transition from the preceding passage that discusses facing trials patiently (5:7-11). Since there is no contrast with the preceding section it is best to translate *de* 'now,' or 'and,' recognizing that it introduces a new subject. That new subject is not totally divorced from the preceding context, since verse 12, like verse 9, refers to the coming judgment.... James's reference to his readers as 'brethren' shows that his attitude was not one of condescension, but compassion. He identified with them as one who also needed to guard his own mouth and speak the truth. For him, too, the matter of honest speech was of utmost importance.

Morgan: What makes the contextual ambiguity even more maddening is the emphasis the author places on it. 'But' (*de*) is a strong connective and can denote either continuance of what precedes (with a translation of 'now' or 'for') or it may introduce a new idea ('but, on the other hand'). The command in this verse is the first of several that brings the epistle to a close (a common practice in New Testament books, as in 1 Th. 5:11-27). 'Above all' (*pro pantōn*) sets this admonition apart as pre-eminent and pervasive. James is especially concerned about this particular fault perhaps because some recent incident had brought home to him how urgently the counsel is needed and he can be so insistent because of their common spiritual heritage ('my brethren').

Moo: The *above all* might...suggest that the taking of vows is similar to, but more serious, sin of speech than grumbling against one another (v. 9). Or it might indicate James's belief that the taking of vows is one of the worst manifestations of impatience. But the connection between taking vows and persecution is not very obvious.... Can James really mean that the prohibition of oaths is more important thing he wants to say in the letter? More important than doing the word, than obeying the love command, than submitting to God's grace in Christ? Surely not.

b) Introduction

Moo: The difficulty of making sense of *above all* as an indicator of relative importance is one of the most important reasons to consider the possibility that the phrase has a purely, or at least

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primarily, literary function.... While taking the phrase as a literary marker that signals the beginning of the conclusion of the letter, we can probably not remove all contextual significance from the phrase. James wants to highlight this prohibition – probably because he sees it as getting at the ultimate issue of personal integrity.

Doriani: The phrase, ‘above all’ in James 5:12 is a literary convention meant to introduce final remarks. The topic, once again, is speech and the need to use the tongue to build community solidarity. Plain honest is the first necessity (5:12), followed by prayer, confession of sin, and efforts to win straying brothers (5:13-20). We probably ought to admit our uncertainty as to which explanation is best. Regardless, it is clearly possible to regard our text as a hinge. It is the final word on endurance and the first word on the conclusion.

3. The Restriction (5:12b)

...do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath...

a) James’s Teaching on Oath-Taking

Moo: When James says *Do not swear*, it is not coarse or vulgar speech he prohibits but involving God’s name to guarantee the reliability of what a person says. A person may not take an oath to reinforce the truth of something he has said or to bind himself to a future course of conduct. The verb James uses here (*omnyō*) has this sense throughout the LXX and the NT (see, e.g., Mk. 6:23; Acts 2:30; Rev. 10:6).

Morgan: The Holy Spirit through James restricts the sin of swearing. This word (*omnuete*) does not refer (as it does so often in English) to cursing and illicit speech with the use of ‘four-letter’ words. Rather it refers to taking oaths.

MacArthur: The specific speech-related issue James focused his attention on is that of swearing. In this context, to ‘swear’ does not mean (as it often does in English) to use illicit speech, dirty talk, double entendre, filthy jokes or four-letter words—the type of unwholesome, non-edifying speech the apostle Paul forbids in Ephesians 4:29 (cp. Eph. 5:4). Instead, it refers to the taking of oaths.

b) Jesus’ Teaching on Oath-Taking

Doriani: As he often does, James has meditated on a teaching of Jesus and made it his own (Mt. 5:34-37).... Although the wording differs at several points, James and Jesus see oaths the same way. Oaths are a convention designed to limit lying and deceit.

Moo: Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:34-37 is particularly important in understanding James’ teaching, because it looks as if James is consciously reproducing that tradition.... Jesus in Matthew is saying the same thing as James: our truthfulness should be so consistent and dependable that we need no oath to support it: a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ should suffice. Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete.

Morgan: These words constitute James’s final quotation from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:33-37).... Our Lord attacked the Jewish custom of oath-taking in its attempt to avoid the misuse of God's name, which explains the references to swearing by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, or even one’s own head.

Hughes: James took this teaching directly from the lips of his elder brother Jesus, who had said virtually the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount when He gave His fourth example of radical

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kingdom righteousness (Mt. 5:33-37)... The situation was utterly fantastic, so James gave them a piece of Jesus' mind: 'But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath.'

c) OT Law Permitted Oath-Taking

Hughes: From Christ's summary statement and the rest of the Old Testament, we understand two things about the swearing of vows and oaths in Old Testament times. First, *they were encouraged*.... Not only were godly people encouraged to make vows, they were admonished to do so—in God's name! (see Dt. 10:20). God even taught through the prophet Jeremiah that swearing in God's name was a sign of spiritual vitality (Jer. 12:16)... Secondly, *making a vow and not keeping it was discouraged*. Moses's writings repeatedly emphasized this (cp. Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Dt. 23:21)... In the Old Testament, vows were assumed to be part of a committed life. But once made, they were not to be broken under any circumstances.

Doriani: In Old Testament times, Israelites guaranteed their veracity by swearing to it in God's name. They invoked Him as a witness, and as Judge if they lied.... The relevant laws [include]: Num. 30:2; Dt. 23:21; Lev. 19:12).

Moo: Oaths, as we may also call them, are by no means consistently forbidden in Scripture. God Himself takes oaths to guarantee the fulfillment of what He has promised (see, e.g., Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; 7:21). The OT law did not prohibit oaths but demanded that a person be true to the oath he had taken (e.g., Lev. 19:12).

d) Jewish Abuse of Oath-Taking

MacArthur: The Jews of James's day had developed a complex system of swearing oaths, the influences of which Jewish Christians brought with them into the church. It is against the abuses of that system that James wrote. The Jewish system of swearing oaths had its roots in the Old Testament. In a time when written contracts did not exist, oaths served to bind agreements between people. To take an oath was to attest that what one said was true, to call God to witness to that, and to invoke His punishment if one's word was violated. To call God to witness to the truth of one's promise and to invoke His punishment if one defaulted on that promise was a very serious matter.

Morgan: The original purpose of an oath lay in guaranteeing a person's word. Calling upon God frequently provided a higher court of appeal. The formula of oaths originally had the character of conditionally cursing oneself if the statement proved to be false. Unfortunately, this sometimes led to God's name for the purpose of adding emphasis in the swearing of an oath.

Doriani: By the time of Jesus and James, a perversion of oaths had arisen. Instead of calling on God to assure honesty, people took oaths to avoid God's punishment for dishonest speech. Rabbis artificially distinguished vows that invoke God's name, and are binding, from those that do not, and are not binding.

MacArthur: Rabbinic teaching held that only vows to the Lord were binding. In their thinking, God was only party to an oath if His name were invoked. All other oaths, the taught, could be (and were intended to be) violated without committing perjury—much as people in our culture invalidate their vows by saying, 'I had my fingers crossed.' Attempting to deceive others, many Jews would swear by heaven, Jerusalem, the temple, the altar in the temple, the veil in the temple, their own heads, etc.—anything but the name of the Lord.

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Hughes: The problem was, by New Testament times traditional, Biblical teaching had come under amazing abuse. For example, some rabbis had begun to teach that an oath was not binding if it omitted God's name or did not imply it. Therefore, if you swore by your own life or someone else's life or the life of the king (as Abner did in 1 Samuel 17:55) or by your health (Ps. 15:4) or by some object, but avoided mentioning or alluding to the name of God, you were not bound.... In effect, the swearing of oaths had degenerated to a system that indicated when a man could lie and when not. The results were disgraceful. There was an undying epidemic of frivolous swearing. Oaths were continually mingled with everyday speech: 'By your life'—'By my beard'—'May I never see the comfort of Israel if...'. There was a trivialization of everyday language and a devaluation of integrity. Evasive swearing became a fine art. The height of accomplishment was, while lying, to convince another you were telling the truth by bringing some person or eminent object into reference.... The use of oaths was like children's 'I had my fingers crossed!'

e) *Heaven and Earth in Oath-Taking*

Doriani: Whatever we swear by, Jesus said, it refers to God, for He created heaven and earth. If we swear by heaven or by earth (Mt. 5:34), we invoke God, for He created them both. All oaths call God to witness, for He created and sustains all things.

Hughes: Jesus and James rule out making vows using any references to people or objects as backup. The reason for this is, *God stands behind everything*. The entire creation is God's and you and I cannot call up a part of it without ultimately referring to Him. Matthew 23:16-22 records Jesus' frightening woe to anyone who imagines otherwise.... All oath-taking that calls into witness people or items of God's created order actually calls God's name as witness, and it is a grievous sin to do so. If there is anything in our speech that even approaches swearing by something else we must drop it at once.

MacArthur: Such evasive swearing was intended to hide their lying hearts. In Matthew 23:16-22, Jesus condemned the Jewish religious leaders for this hypocritical practice.... Swearing by anything in God's dominion, Jesus declared, brings Him into the transaction. Despite what the hypocritical deceivers may have thought our intended, God regarded their oaths as binding—and judged them for not keeping them.

f) *Is All Oath-Taking Prohibited?*

Moo: But does James (and Jesus before him) intend to prohibit *all* oaths? Many Christians in the Anabaptist tradition have concluded that this is the case and have refused by consequence to take oaths in the courtroom or anywhere else. However, it is doubtful that James intends to address the question of official oaths – oaths that others ask us to take for legal purposes.

Hughes: What are the implications of this radical teaching for our lives? Are we never to take personal oaths? What about the public oaths we are asked to take in court? Some—for example, the Reformation's Anabaptists and later the Moravians and Quakers—have taken this as a prohibition against taking oaths in any circumstances.... [However], the contexts of Jesus' original teaching argue against this understanding because Jesus' examples of oath-taking abuses come from everyday common speech.

g) *Some Oath-Taking Is Permitted*

MacArthur: In light of the biblical evidence, James's command 'do not swear' must not be viewed as a blanket prohibition of all oath taking. Oaths were permitted on serious occasions, but

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only in the name of God. James, therefore, does not forbid swearing in the name of the Lord, but ‘by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.’ The source of James’s prohibition is our Lord’s teaching regarding oaths in Matthew 5:33-37.

MacArthur: The Bible does not forbid taking oaths, acknowledging that in a world filled with liars there are times when they are necessary. Certainly, it is not wrong to take an oath when testifying in court, being ordained, or getting married. Oaths are wrong when they are misused with intend to deceive others, or when taken rashly or flippantly. The Bible gives examples of godly men who took oaths, lists God’s commands that oaths be taken, and records instances of God Himself taking oaths.

Hughes: How does this translate into life? Oath-taking is permitted, but it is not encouraged. In civil life, as in a courtroom, oath-taking is permitted. And when one is put under oath, he or she is not sinning against Christ’s teaching. Also, on rare occasions such a practice may be necessary, as it was for Paul. This said, oaths are not to be a part of everyday conversation. Christians simply should not need such devices. They should be known to be people of truth.

Doriani: We rarely use oaths or vows today. We reserve them for formal situations, such as testifying in court or taking office. Today, we use other conventions to restrain false speech when truth-telling is essential. We promise in personal settings and sign contracts in economic settings. Whether we consider oaths or similar conventions—such as vows or promises—truthful speech is the issue.... Sadly, it may be necessary to give assurances of our honesty for the benefit of people who do not know us. For example, a legal office, functioning in a legal situation, may ask that we swear to give honest testimony. It seems permissible to accede to that request.

h) Biblical Examples of Oath-Taking

Hughes: Even more decisive is the fact that Jesus honored the official oath put upon Him by Caiaphas before the Sanhedrin by answering, as recorded in Matthew 26:63-64a.... In addition to Jesus’ clear example, we have the repeated examples of Paul swearing that he was telling the truth (2 Cor. 1:23; Rom. 1:9-10a).... Paul would never have called God a witness that he was telling the truth if he thought it was wrong.

Doriani: Along that line, Scripture records cases where God takes oaths for the sake of those who do not know He is reliable. [One hint that oaths are dubious is that most New Testament oaths are rash (Mt. 14:7; 23:16-18; 26:72; Acts 23:12-21).] Similarly, Jesus spoke under oath at His trial (Mt. 26:63-64). Paul also took vows, calling God as his witness (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Th. 2:10). Still, once we survey Scripture and note the exceptional cases, we must return to the basic principle. James says we must not swear by any created thing, lest we be condemned, whether for violating oaths or for being so unreliable that we need to take oaths in the first place.

4. Instruction (5:12c)

...but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no...

Moo: As the exhortation to let our ‘yes’ and ‘no’ suffice for themselves suggests, the issues seems to have been the voluntary oath – the oath taken to insure the truthfulness of what one had affirmed or promised. Christians committed to integrity in speech and personal relationships should never require an oath.

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MacArthur: Reiterating Jesus' words (cp. Mt. 5:37), James calls for simple, straightforward, honest speech. Christians are to be those whose 'yes' means 'yes' and whose 'no' means 'no.' People of integrity have no need to swear elaborate oaths to convince others of their truthfulness. Nor would they swear falsely to deceive people.... Neither Jesus nor James prohibited swearing oaths under special circumstances. But under normal circumstances they are superfluous for the believer, who is marked by honest.

Hughes: The righteous man or woman must not make a practice of swearing that he or she is telling the truth. Jesus and James ask for a radical truthfulness that supersedes the requirements of the Law—a radical truthfulness that does not need oaths. Oath-taking is popular because people are liars. It's that simple.... Jesus and James are telling us we must never use 'big guns' like 'on my mother's grave' or 'as God is my witness.' Everyday speech and pulpit speech and courtroom speech are all to be the same—radically true!

Doriani: James flatly prohibits the use of oaths because even the honest use of oaths testifies that something is amiss in the community. If believers reliably told one another the truth, what need would there be of oaths to guarantee truth-telling? If I must take towering oaths to buttress my speech, I admit paradoxically that my speech is unreliable without such support. The greater the weight of a man's oaths in the short run, the greater the doubt about his veracity in the long run. Instead, we should tell the truth so consistently that oaths become superfluous, a waste of words.

5. Motivation (5:12d)

...so that you may not fall under condemnation.

MacArthur: As motivation against swearing false oaths, James points out the consequences of violating them. Those who do so, he warns, will 'fall under judgment.' The Mosaic Law warned, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain' (Ex. 20:7). One way of taking God's name in vain is to swear falsely.

Morgan: Those who indiscreetly swear idle oaths will 'fall under judgment.' To say 'yes' and mean it or to say 'no' and not mean it is a matter of integrity of heart rather than the mere formula of words. In this way James brings the argument full circle to remind us that we should be people without double minds, wholehearted with God and man.... We practice a devotion to the truth with our lips because the truth dwells in us,

MacArthur: The 'judgment' James has in mind here is not God's chastening of believers. *Krisis* ('judgment') is never used in the New Testament to refer to believers' chastening (a different word, *paideuō* is used; cp. 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:6-7). James used *krisis* in 2:13 to describe God's merciless sentencing to hell of those whose lack of mercy reveals their unregenerate hearts.... The sobering warning he gives in verse 12 is that those who continue to blaspheme God's holy name through lying oaths face eternal damnation; thus, this is another test of living faith. Those who lives are characterized by a pattern of lying give evidence of having an unregenerate heart.

For next time: Read James 5:13-20.