

JAMES 5:1-6 | THE RICH, AT THE END OF THE KINGDOM OFFER

VERSE 1 –

For the phrase **Go to now**, see note on James 4:13. James calls on the **rich men** among the Jewish tribes (for that is his audience) to **weep and howl** because of the **miseries that shall come upon you**.

Most evangelical teaching will use these verses as some sort of universal condemnation of the Christian rich, as if riches are forbidden in the Christian faith. Yet such a message is not well-received in evangelical audiences, and so the message will be twisted into a warning to “people richer than we are.”

I personally find only one thing to do with this verse (and its context): *assign it to Jews living in the days of the Kingdom offer*. Such days are now past but are to come again after the rapture. When the Messianic Kingdom is being offered, the pursuit of personal riches by any Jew will display a greed and selfish spirit which rejects all things spiritual. Indeed, for this man or woman, **miseries...shall come....**

VERSES 2-3 –

Is it true today that rich men have corrupted riches or moth-eaten garments (figuratively speaking)? Such a condemnation of the rich is never seen in Scripture, except in like circumstance. In Matthew 6:19, Jesus gives a similar warning, though without the condemnation.

It is of great interest that James said that their **gold and silver is cankered**. The underlying Greek is *κατιώω* [katioo]. This is the same word from which we get the English word *cathode*. A cathode is something which *receives* electrons (such as the positive end of a battery). Anything which receives electrons is, by its nature, an oxidizing agent, and thus a corrosive agent. In the English word *canker*, the Oxford English Dictionary gives the first definition as, “A destructive or corrosive agent.” (“canker, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2022. Web. 15 September 2022.)

In this case, the gold has become **rust** (Greek *ιός* [ios], from which we get *ion*, a molecule with an electrical charge (either positive or negative)).

What is so interesting about this is that Gold is commonly known to be *inert*, refusing to give up its electrons and thus refusing to tarnish or rust. That is, refusing to *ionize* a nearby particle. “Gold rust” is almost impossible to create. Yet James claimed Gold rust!

Was James unaware? No! James was *inspired*. We know today that *gold oxide* (gold rust) *does exist*. It is not impossible for Gold to oxidize (lose its electrons to another atom or molecule. It is just *very rare*. Furthermore, James says that this *gold oxide* will **eat your flesh as it were fire**. And it just so happens that one of the few dangers with gold oxide is *skin corrosion*.¹

¹ (see <https://www.alfa.com/en/msds/?language=EN&subformat=AGHS&sku=12161>).

The problem with these **rich men** (v. 1) is that they **have heaped treasure together for the last days**. And the last days *have no need of physical treasure*.

I believe that James thought he was in **the last days**, for what else could he have thought? There was no Pauline revelation yet given, thus he knew nothing about the delay caused by the new dispensation.

VERSE 4 –

The rich men were committing **fraud** with the laborers, and the fraud itself **crieth** in addition to **the cries of them which have reaped** and not been paid. While the fraud is literal, the cries are spoken of in a spiritual sense. But these cries **are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth**. This is the only time a New Testament writer uses this title (though Paul quotes it from Isaiah in Romans 9:29). The word **sabaoth** is Hebrew, transliterated into Greek and now into English. In the Hebrew Scriptures it is translated **LORD of hosts** (as in Is. 1:9). The use of the Hebrew word without translation reminds us of the Jewish nature of the audience.

VERSE 5 –

James warns the **rich men** (v. 1) of their folly. Though they **have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton**. The English word **wanton** means “unable to be disciplined.” But all this was **as in a day of slaughter**.

This phrase is important and tarnished in the so-called “Critical Text” of the New Testament, which removes the word **as**. Doing so removes some of the sting of the passage. To “have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” (NASB) is ill-advised. But to have done so **as in a day of slaughter** is to have *fattened yourself like a sheep headed to the slaughter*. James, with amazing strength of character, tells his countrymen that they are *cattle in the feed yard, gorging themselves at the trough, unknowingly bringing about their slaughter*.

VERSE 6 –

This is the greatest condemnation of the entire passage, and the most direct accusation given to the rich, yet most often missed in the popular pragmatic application approach to Scripture. When James said that they **killed the just**, he uses the singular, not the plural. I am convinced that James is accusing them of condemning and killing *their Messiah*. If James was talking in general terms, he surely would not have used the singular term, **the just**.

This interpretation aligns perfectly with Peter’s accusation in Acts 3:14. Note also Acts 22:14, Romans 3:26, and 1 John 2:1, where the word is translated **the righteous**).

While they did this Jesus was **as a lamb to the slaughter** and **openeth not his mouth** (Is. 53:7). And even in James’ day, **he doth not resist you**. However, in just a few verses James would say that **the coming of the Lord draweth nigh** (v. 8).