

# Getting Ready for the Harvest



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 6

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** James 5:7–12; Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 3:13; Luke 7:39–50; Colossians 4:6.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “You too must be patient. You must stand firm. The Lord will soon come back” (James 5:8, NIV).

**IN GREEK AND ROMAN TIMES** (as in some places still today), many activities took place to prepare for the coming of a visiting dignitary (important person). Streets were cleared. Shop windows were cleaned. Flowers were planted. And crime prevention was increased. People worked hard to make sure the place looked perfect when the visitor arrived.

The Greek word *parousia* is used throughout the New Testament for Christ’s “coming.” It also is used in James 5:7, 8. *Parousia* means the arrival of a king or dignitary. If people work hard for the arrival of earthly rulers, should we not work hard in making our *hearts* ready for the coming of our Lord and Savior?

But how do we prepare when we do not know “of that day and hour” (Matthew 24:36)? What does it mean to be “patient” and to “establish [make strong]” our hearts? What about the idea of the “early and latter rain” (James 5:7)? In the verses for this week, the theme seems to be about the end of time. But the basic message is important for believers at any time. Throughout our history and even now, we face trials and suffering that require us to stand firm in the faith, as the prophets (special messengers) of old did.

## WAITING FOR “RAIN” (James 5:7)

Farmers are very dependent on the weather to grow their crops and to earn a living. If the weather is too dry or too wet, too cold or too hot, their crops may be spoiled. In drier countries, such as Israel, the chance of raising a good crop is even less. And plenty of rain at the proper times is more important.

The early rain falls in October or November. It wets the ground and prepares it for planting and early growth. The latter rain, around March or April, ripens the crops for harvest.

**Read James 5:7. (Compare<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 5:24; Jeremiah 14:22; and Joel 2:23.) What point do the Old Testament verses make about the rain? Why do you think James uses this image (word-picture) in connection with the coming of the Lord? Read also Hosea 6:1–3 and Joel 2:28, 29.**

“The Hebrew prophets use the example of the early and the latter rain, which falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest. By doing this, the prophets foretold [tell before something happens] the great blessing of spiritual grace<sup>2</sup> upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles [teachers and leaders] was the beginning of the early rain. And glorious was the result. . . . But near the close of earth’s harvest, the special outpouring of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is compared to the falling of the latter rain. And Christians are to pray to the Lord for this added power during ‘the time of the latter rain.’ ”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, page 212.

Jesus speaks of the “harvest” as “the end of the world” (Matthew 13:39). Mark 4:26–29 gives much the same picture as that of James 5:7. The farmer *waits* for the grain to ripen: “ ‘First the stalk comes up. Then the head appears. Finally, the full grain appears in the head. Before long the grain ripens. So the farmer cuts it down, because the harvest is ready’ ” (verses 28, 29, NIV). Only at harvesttime is it possible to tell the difference between the wheat and the tares (weeds) (Matthew 13:28–30; compare Malachi 3:17, 18).

**We can tell the difference between the wheat and the tares only at harvesttime. What should this tell us about how we must live out our faith now, before the harvest?**

## DEFINITIONS

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.
2. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

## HOW NEAR IS “NEAR”? (James 5:8)



Our hearts are to be so close to God that they cannot turn from Him.

James 5:8 supports the idea that Christ’s coming is “at hand” or “near.” But, after nearly two thousand years, how are we to understand this promise?

Jesus described the coming kingdom (Matthew 4:17; Matthew 10:7; Matthew 24:33) through parables.<sup>3</sup> They teach us about “heavenly things” so that we can understand them better. A close study of these parables shows that the kingdom has two parts: a present, spiritual reality on earth and a glorious (wonderful) reality still to come in heaven. All the apostles put their hope in the *soon* coming of Jesus (Romans 13:11; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:9). But they never were able to tell exactly when that would be. Like us, they wanted to know when. But Jesus explained that this information was not best for them to know (Acts 1:6, 7). After all, how active would they be in sharing the gospel with the world if they had known that the work would not be finished for almost two thousand years—and counting?

**What does James mean when he says “establish [make strong] your hearts” (James 5:8, NKJV)? Why do you think the awaited fruit is called “precious”<sup>4</sup> (*timios* in Greek; verse 7, NKJV)? (Read 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:19; and 1 Corinthians 3:12.)**

The word *establish* (*stērizō*) means to “fix firmly” or “make stronger.” Our hearts are to be so connected to the Lord that they cannot turn from Him, no matter what pressures are brought against them. Becoming settled in the truth (2 Peter 1:12) means not falling when tempted, being patient during hardship, and suffering for our faith (Acts 14:22). They all contribute to this work of fixing us firmly in Christ.

Spiritual growth is not always easy. But it bears (gives) “precious fruit.” Believers, saved by “the precious [*timios*] blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19, NKJV), are of unlimited value to the heavenly “Farmer [God].” The word *timios* is also used to describe the “precious stones [jewels]” that are symbols for the believers who are “built” on Christ. Christ is the “foundation” stone of God’s spiritual temple (1 Corinthians 3:11, 12).

**“But each person’s work will be shown for what it is. On judgment day it will be brought to light. It will be put through fire. The fire will test how good everyone’s work is” (1 Corinthians 3:13, NIV). What works do you have?**

## DEFINITIONS

3. parables—very short stories that teach a lesson or a truth.

4. precious—important; valuable.

**GRUMBLING (COMPLAINING), GROANING,  
AND GROWING (James 5:9)**

When is the Second Coming? Why are we *still* here? It is not surprising that now, in the twenty-first century, we have people who doubt and laugh at us. In the history of the church, this is nothing new. The most dangerous threats to Israel throughout its history came not from their enemies. Instead, they came from within their own religious groups and from within their own hearts. In the same way, as the coming of the Lord nears, “we have far more to fear from our enemies within the church than from the outside. . . . Unbelief, doubts, and darkness within our church encourage evil angels to do their work. And they open the way for Satan to succeed in his work among people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, page 156.

**So, James 5:9 warns us, “Brothers and sisters, don’t [do not] find fault with one another. If you do, you will be judged. And the Judge is standing at the door!” (NlrV). What complaints against others, or even against the church, have you had (and maybe at times for good reasons too)? The question is, How have you handled yourself? Have you acted humbly and been forgiving as you have been forgiven by God (read Luke 7:39–50), or do you follow worldly thinking? Be honest with yourself!**

From what we have read earlier in this letter, it seems that there were serious challenges among the believers. Consistently, James leads us to perfect answers to these problems: faith (James 1:3, 6), “the implanted word” (James 1:21, NKJV), beholding (obeying) “the law of liberty” (James 1:25; James 2:12, NKJV), faithfulness and godly wisdom (James 3:13, 17), grace (James 4:6), and clean hands and a pure heart (James 4:8). He also encourages us to continue doing good work for God (James 2:14–26). This includes visiting the ill and forgotten (James 1:27), showing mercy (James 2:13), and sowing peace (James 3:18).

We are responsible to God. God is the Lord who is the Judge and who will give to everyone rewards according to his or her work.

**As we wait for the Lord’s return, what are positive ways you can encourage and uplift others? Why is it important that you do so?**

## MODELS OF PATIENT ENDURANCE

(James 5:10, 11)

**Read James 5:10, 11. In what ways are Job and the prophets the same? Why do you think these examples are important? What personal lessons can we learn from these stories that would help us when we have troubles?**

The prophets of Israel were faithful in preaching the word of the Lord. Hebrews praises the prophets' faithfulness to God. They "stopped the mouths of lions [Daniel], escaped destruction by fire [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], escaped the edge of the sword [Elijah and Elisha], . . . had . . . imprisonment [Jeremiah and Micaiah], . . . [were] stoned [Zechariah, son of Jehoiada], . . . sawn asunder<sup>5</sup> [Isaiah] . . . [and were] killed with the sword [read 1 Kings 19:10]" (Hebrews 11:33–37). Of course, Job's sufferings are also well known. Job also shows his patience under the fire of criticism from his own wife and the censure (insults) of those who came to "suffer" with him. What set these heroes of faith and many others apart from the normal or average follower of God? James lists their qualities (good points of a person's character): patience, faithfulness, and, above all, hope and trust in God.

One of the good points is "patience" (*makrothymias*), also translated as "longsuffering" or "forbearance [patience]." It means the ability to stand up under difficult situations and troubles and to go through whatever life (or the devil!) throws at us. The prophets went through all their suffering for the word of God *patiently* (James 5:10). The word *patient* is often used in the New Testament. Included is a verse in Hebrews that talks about Abraham, who waited "patiently" during his many years of travel for God to fulfill His promise to give him a son (Hebrews 6:12, 15).

But endurance (*hypomonē*) focuses on the end goal and looks forward to the finish line. Job is a very good example of endurance. Job suffered much but remained faithful.

**What are you struggling with now? What have you prayed for that has not yet come? How often have you even felt a sense of hopelessness? Think through the troubles of some of the Bible characters (heroes) listed above (or others). And imagine how helpless they must have felt at times. What can you learn from their suffering that could help you work through your own?**

## DEFINITIONS

5. sawn asunder—cut apart by a saw.

## TRANSPARENT (CLEAR) AS THE SUNLIGHT (James 5:12)

Read James 5:12. Bible thinkers have puzzled over why James seems to make such a big issue out of swearing solemn oaths.<sup>6</sup> Even if the plan were to not permit all speech of this kind, why would he write that it was more important than other things he wrote in this chapter or perhaps in the entire letter? Is it really that big of an issue?

We need to remember what we have seen throughout our study of this letter: that James is not satisfied with a “half-hearted faith.” James is so gospel-minded that he sets standards too high for us to reach without God’s forgiving and empowering grace. Our words show what is in our hearts: “ ‘How can you who are evil say anything good? Your mouths say everything that is in your hearts’ ” (Matthew 12:34, NIV). The letter of James is filled with the thinking of Jesus, who says: “ ‘Do not make any promises like that at all. Do not make them in the name of heaven. That is God’s throne. Do not make them in the name of the earth. That is the stool for God’s feet. Do not make them in the name of Jerusalem. That is the city of the Great King’ ” (Matthew 5:34, 35, NIV). Some people even swear by the hairs of their head to guarantee their words (verse 36). But Jesus said all of this was evil: “ ‘Let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No” ’ ” (Matthew 5:37, NKJV).

“Everything that Christians do should be as transparent [clear] as the sunlight. Truth is of God. All kinds of lying are of Satan.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pages 66, 68. Clearly, Christ was not saying that we cannot make oaths to judges. This is because He Himself was put under oath by the high priest. And He did not refuse to answer. He did not even criticize how His trial was held, even when many rules of the court were not followed (Matthew 26:63, 64).

There are several things we need to remember when speaking the truth. First, we seldom even know *all* the truth, even about ourselves. So, we must be humble. Second, when we do speak the truth, it should always be in love.

**Read Ephesians 4:15, 29 and Colossians 4:6. Think prayerfully about the powerful message of these verses. Think how different (and better!) your life would be if you were, through God’s grace, to strictly follow these instructions.**



**Everything Christians do should be as clear as the sunlight.**

### DEFINITIONS

6. swearing oaths—making promises we should not make and may not be able to keep.



**Nothing is more helpless but still more powerful than the one who feels he is nothing but depends fully on God.**



**Times of trouble will come, but go forward.**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read what Ellen G. White wrote about the experiences of Elijah and Job when they were tested and what it means for us in the last days in “From Jezreel to Horeb,” pages 155–166; “ ‘What Doest Thou Here?’ ” pages 167–176; “ ‘In the Spirit and Power of Elias,’ ” pages 177–189, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God’s work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their difficult times. Nothing is clearly more helpless, but still more powerful, than the person who feels he is nothing, but depends fully on God. . . .

“Times of trouble will come, but go forward. This will make your faith stronger and fit you for service. The records of Bible history are written so that we may read and wonder. They also show us that the same faith which worked for God’s servants of old may work for us too.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 174, 175.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We all know the parable about the wheat and the tares (weeds) growing together until the harvest (Matthew 13). But what does that mean in connection with church discipline? What does that mean in dealing with stubborn rebellion (going against God) or backsliding (returning to evil) among the believers? Are we just to sit by and do nothing, saying that it will all be taken care of when the Lord returns? Clearly not! How are we to deal with the tares that seem to be choking the wheat?
- ② Temptations and trials (troubles) come to all of us. What promises from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White have been comforting to you and have helped you to remain strong in your faith? What Bible characters have been most meaningful to you in difficulties when you look to the future?
- ③ James tells us to “grudge [complain] not one against another” (James 5:9). But people, even other Christians, can do things that bother us. How can we learn to love, to forgive, to continue, and to rise above many of the “small” things in life that can make us moody, angry, and, really, bad witnesses?