

WHEN RICH OPPRESSORS WEEP AND HOWL

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The poor will not always be forgotten, neither will wealthy persons who oppress and exploit the poor escape the vengeance of God.

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A Bible Study on Economic Justice for Small Discussion Groups

by Jim Jordal

CONTENT: READ ALOUD: JAMES 4:13 through 5:1-6

BACKGROUND: James addressed this epistle, not to a particular church, but to Israelite Christians of the dispersion, and thereby to Christians in general. The aim is to reclaim Christians from their worldliness back to their roots in Old Testament law and the teachings of Christ. This particular section concerns itself with fair and ethical business practices that avoid oppression or exploitation of workers in any form.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What four specific charges does James level against these rich people? (see verses 3,4,5,6)
2. What penalties does James pronounce upon these rich oppressors?
3. What definition of sin appears in James 4:17? What does it mean?
4. List as many oppressive and/or exploitative practices of modern business as you can.

5. Do these practices affect all income groups equally? Why, or why not.
6. Which of these practices disproportionately affect the poor? Why?
7. Which of these forbidden economic practices especially tempt Christians?
8. What justification might Christians likely give for using these practices?
9. Under what historic or economic conditions might the oppressive rich "weep and howl"?

PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- God considers it sin when we fail to act in favor of what we know to be His will.
- Unfortunately, Christians often practice economic oppression.
- God hears the cry of the poor and afflicted in society.
- Lives lived in wanton pleasure at the expense of others are abominations to the Lord.
- God favors fair wages and honest dealing with employees.
- Oppression often is the same thing in God's eyes as killing someone.
- God promises eventual retribution on wealthy oppressors and cheaters.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

I Tim. 6:17-19; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15; 2 Thess. 1:7-10 Matt. 13:39-43.