

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”**  
**July 10, 2016**

**1 Samuel 17:1–58.** David’s triumph over Goliath.

**James 5:1–12.** Warnings and promises.

**Psalms 119:153–176.** Virtue and fellowship with God.

**COMMENTS:**

**1 Samuel 17:1–58.** In verses **1-27**, we see qualities that made David a man of God.

David was a man who truly lived for God as his good, a good that overshadowed all other temporal goods. **17:4:** Goliath is described as standing nine feet, nine inches tall, wearing a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds and carrying a spear that weighed 15 pounds. He was a formidable opponent indeed. He had presented himself to the army of Israel each morning and evening for forty days, and apparently David arrived on the final day (**17:16**). In the providence of God, Jesse chose just the right day to send David to the battlefield to carry food supplies to his three brothers and their commanding officer (**17–18**). Unlike modern armies, soldiers in ancient armies had to provide their own rations and help provide for others. David was up very early that day and heard the morning challenge that Goliath gave to Saul and his army. If the Israelites could provide a champion who was able to defeat Goliath, the Philistines would submit to the Jews and be their servants, but if not, the Israelites must consider themselves defeated and become the servants of the Philistines (**8–9**). Unfortunately, nobody in the Jewish army volunteered, including King Saul, who stood head and shoulders above his men. Since Israel had come to a crisis in this confrontation, Saul made a generous offer to the man who would silence Goliath: he would marry one of the king’s daughters, receive great riches from the king, and take his father’s house off the tax rolls. Saul hoped that somebody would be tempted by the offer and try to defeat Goliath. David’s response to Goliath’s arrogant speech was that of total disgust. Who was this uncircumcised Philistine to blaspheme the name of the God of Israel? Keep in mind that David was too young to serve in the army, but he was acting as though anybody in the camp who had faith in Jehovah could challenge Goliath and defeat him! But all he saw were men fleeing from the field at the very sight of the giant, and even King Saul was terrified (**11, 24**). God had brought David to the camp for such a time as this, and he was ready to accept the challenge. **17:28-39:** Often when you do the right thing, there’s somebody around to discourage you, and often it begins in your own home. David’s eldest brother, Eliab, became angry when he heard that David was inquiring about Saul’s offer and he ridiculed him (**28–30**). *“We’re soldiers and all you are is a shepherd boy! You came to see the battle! Go home and take care of your little flock and leave the fighting to us!”* Of course, the fact that there had been no battle didn’t embarrass Eliab, and he also forgot that David had originally come in order to deliver food for him, Abinadab, and Shammah. It is not unusual for men of God to receive opposition from their own families: *“A man’s foes shall be they of his own household,”* promised Jesus (Matt. 10:36), and that promise was true in David’s life. It was also true in the life of Joseph, whose brothers hated him, lied about him, and sold him for a slave. Moses was criticized by his own brother and sister (Num. 12), and our Lord’s earthly family at one time misunderstood Him and opposed His ministry (Mark 3:31–35; John 7:1–10). But David didn’t allow Eliab’s harsh words to discourage him, for he knew that God could help him defeat the giant. But King Saul wasn’t any more help,

either in what he said or what he advised. “*You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth*” (17:33). David had experienced the power of God in his own life and he knew that the Lord could turn weakness into power. While caring for the sheep, David had killed a lion and a bear, and he knew that the Lord could deliver him out of the hand of Goliath. It’s as though he sees Goliath as just another animal attacking God’s flock! Saul knew nothing personally about this wonderful power of God, so he advised David to wear his armor. Saul didn’t have the faith to believe that God could do something new, so he suggested the old-fashioned time-honored method of warfare. King Saul was a grown man and a large one at that, and David was only a teenager, so imagine what the armor looked like on David’s body! David’s encouragement came from God, and this is one of the secrets of his life: “*But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God*” (1 Sam. 30:6). In spite of criticism and in spite of discouraging counsel and bad advice, David trusted the Lord his God, and God rewarded his faith. It’s unfortunate that this dramatic account is considered primarily a children’s story or the basis for an allegory about defeating the “giants” in our lives. While there are many applications of a Bible passage, there is only one basic interpretation, and the interpretation here is that David did what he did for the glory of God. David came to the contest in the name of the Lord, the God of the armies of Israel, and he wanted Goliath, the Philistine army, and all the earth to know that the true and living God was Israel’s God (46). Goliath had ridiculed Israel’s God and blasphemed His name, but David was about to set the record straight. David saw this as a contest between the true God of Israel and the false gods of the Philistines. It was not Saul’s victory (1 Sam. 17:55–58). When Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost (14:1–23), Saul was a spectator, and his bad decisions almost cost them a victory; and once again, Saul merely watched as David defeated the enemy single-handed. This would be Saul’s pattern of leadership to the tragic end of his life. What a loser believer!

**James 5:1–12.** Due to rampant problems of the evil of materialism and unethical capitalism (where *all* that matters is how much money one can make) in contemporary Christianity, I have decided to provide a bit more detail than usual in these comments. In light of the materialism and favoritism James has addressed, he now provides a solid and emphatic reminder of the transience of all human wealth in language reminiscent of OT prophecy. His words are designed to awaken his readers by means of a crisp announcement about the eschatological doom of all human wealth. Looking outward at the world, then, James in prophet-like fashion announces miseries for the rich, which ought to bring them to tears and lamentation. **5:2–3:** The sorrow appropriate to the rich is now traced to the ultimate doom of all human wealth. As is often true in prophetic pronouncements, a judgment yet future is presented as a *fait accompli*, and James sees human riches as already corrupted, costly garments as already moth-eaten, and earthly gold and silver as already corroded. But then, he surprisingly adds, *their corrosion ... will eat your flesh like fire*. While James is likely referring to the eschatological judgment on human wealth at the end of the Tribulation, he wants the rich brethren to recognize that whether they see the last days or not, all their wealth will burn. Therefore, they should not be materialistic or greedy, and must refrain from showing favoritism. The accumulation of useless wealth will stand as a witness against the rich of the world since they are so foolish as to have heaped up treasure in the last days. **5:4:** Justice will thus overtake unscrupulous wealthy men of this world. Throughout history, and not only in James’s day, men of wealth have often been guilty of holding back the wages of the laborers who mowed their fields. *This does not mean they did not pay them, but rather that they fraudulently paid them less than was right* (unethical capitalism). These wages are here

personified by James as accusers of the rich who cry out to God for vengeance. Moreover, these cries are heard (and will be avenged) by the Lord of Sabaoth, that is, by “*the Lord of Hosts*” (Armies). Here too the reference to the Second Advent seems plain, since Jesus will return to execute judgment (Rev 19:14). This shows that capitalism as a system of ethics, as in “it is all about the buck” (as historically illustrated in the practice of slavery) is condemned by God on a universal basis—not just for Christians. **5:5–6:** In ancient times it was apparently customary for men of wealth to hold a feast when they sheared their sheep and slaughtered some of them to provide meat for their festive table. The behavior of rich men, says James, has been like that. They have lived in pleasure and luxury fattening their own hearts as in a day of slaughter. The metaphor is vivid. Rich men are portrayed as enjoying a continual feast day, bloating their own hearts with the delights and enjoyments which are theirs in abundance. Tragically, however, their day of slaughter was not confined to the killing of sheep. They also had other victims: *you have condemned, you have murdered the just man; he does not resist you. The hands of the rich, therefore, were stained with fraud (5:4) and murder (6).* Righteous men, who did not resist injustice, had perished in persecutions instigated by people of wealth. The guilt of the rich is enormous. Strikingly, James’s prophetic oracle abruptly halts on this note of condemnation. The rhetorical impact of this sudden conclusion, however, is effective. It is as though James is pointing to the murder of just men as the final and climactic charge against the rich, which justifies everything he has foreseen for them by way of ultimate catastrophe. **5:7:** These believers need *to be patient until the coming of the Lord.* Troubles can often heighten one’s anticipation of Christ’s return, but if believers view His return only in terms of their own pressing situations, they will be tempted to be impatient instead of patient. **5:8:** Whether one thinks of the human farmer or the divine One, James’s readers can find grounds to also be patient and establish their hearts, since the coming of the Lord is at hand. In affirming this fact, however, James (like other NT writers) has been thought to be mistaken. How, it is asked, can the coming of the Lord have been at hand in James’s day when almost two thousand years have passed without it having taken place? This objection is already countered by Peter in 2 Pet 3:3–9. There are a number of answers to this objection which arises from skepticism, but the one that is most suitable in this context is this: the coming of the Lord is always at hand precisely because believers are not separated from it by any known event at all. This points to the validity of the doctrine of the Rapture. Throughout the entirety of more than twenty centuries it has always had this character so that a believer could well say, “*It may be today.*” **5:9:** If their hearts are indeed established in this expectation, the readers will not *grumble* against one another. The word grumble (στενάζετε) has the idea of “to groan” or “to sigh.” In view of the wars and fights that James had earlier reproved (4:1–3), this verb sounds relatively mild by comparison. James graciously assumes that his call to repentance (4:7–12) will be heeded, and that the churches will enjoy greater internal harmony and peace. However, Realism and true virtue called for him to caution against even the most subdued complaints of Christians against one another. Even if it was only a “groan” or a “sigh,” they should avoid it, since the Lord’s coming could take place at any time. The sense of imminency of the Savior’s return is captured in the striking metaphor, *Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!* The readers are thereby likened to a group of litigants, or defendants, standing within a courtroom. Total silence is required out of respect for the judge who is just outside the courtroom door and about to step inside to take his place on the judgment seat. Like a Roman lictor announcing a judge’s impending entry, as it were, James cries “Quiet!” His Christian readers must fully silence their complaints against each other in the realization that their Lord and Judge can at any moment appear and sit down on the Judgment Seat of Christ in

order to assess their lives. They must therefore be careful that He does not find them nurturing a complaining spirit against their fellow believers. **5:10:** Do the readers need any additional reasons for patiently holding out to the end? If so, they can take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord as their models. James makes a smooth transition from an admonition based on prophecy of the Rapture to an admonition based on the prophets themselves. Servants of the Lord like Daniel and Jeremiah, knew something about suffering and patience. The word translated “*suffering*” (κακοπαθείας) carries overtones of endurance under hardship or suffering. Thus it differs somewhat from patience (μακροθυμίας), which signifies control of one’s temper or emotions, that is, having what is popularly called a “long (makro-) fuse.” The readers have been told to “be patient until the coming of the Lord” (7–8) and to control their temper toward each other (v 9). The prophets of old exhibited this trait of self-control while they bore up under many serious trials. **5:11.** But despite their sufferings, James is saying, believers look back at the prophets with admiration and respect for their endurance. Indeed, they take the same attitude toward all who bear up well under testing: we count them blessed who endure. The readers could certainly say this about Job, for example, whose perseverance (ὑπομένοντας) under trial was justly celebrated among those who honored the OT. The readers had also seen (in the well-known biblical story) the end intended by the Lord. The reference in the word end is clearly to the conclusion of the Book of Job, where it is stated that “the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12). Since Job ended his days with much more than he started with, the readers could see for themselves that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. The implication of this, surely, is that the readers may expect to be “compensated” for whatever they endured (or lost) under the trials God sent their way—provided, of course, that they acquitted themselves well as did Job and the prophets. But the general language James uses simply states that God is truly compassionate and merciful toward those who endure well. The readers would have no grounds for saying that their compensation must be made in material terms, as was Job’s. Rather, the spiritual benefits of trials are likely to be uppermost in James’s mind (1:1–12). However, in a context that so strongly points toward the coming of the Judge (7–10), it is natural to think that James also has in mind the rewards that will be dispensed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Suffice it to say, James believed strongly that endurance under trial would be amply rewarded by a compassionate and merciful Lord. **5:12:** He wants them to avoid oaths. Above all (Πρὸ πάντων) is for emphasis, not to elevate this command above every other. It is precisely when people are under stress (trials) that they are inclined to use language that is inappropriate, like swearing an oath. Oaths taken to establish one’s veracity in communication with others implies that one’s normal affirmations are inadequate. The readers therefore should abstain from this kind of oath-taking. They should not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, as also the Lord Himself had taught (Matt 5:34). Instead, they should be people of their word, whose simple affirmations and denials, “Yes” and “No,” were sufficient, requiring no further validation such as an oath might appear to give. The oath-taker falls too easily into hypocrisy since it gives him the opportunity to tell lies under cover of a solemn claim to truthfulness. Peter had fallen into precisely this kind of hypocrisy in his denials of the Lord. James’s wisdom amounts to this: a believer should never need to use an oath to prove that “this time I really mean it!” Instead he should always “really mean it.” In this way he can avoid the trap of oath-taking, which easily allows him to plunge into hypocritical communication. Thus, once again we see the crucial need for virtue for the spiritual life.

**Psalm 119:153–176.** Verses **153-160** is the *Resh* section—the first letter in each sentence begins with the Hebrew letter *Resh*. Note the repetition of asking God to “revive” him as he faces various trials (**153-155**). Note the basis of this request: “according to God’s Word” and God’s gracious attributes, like lovingkindness (grace). Verses **161-168** contains the *Shin* section. This completes this psalm of the Word of God with a beautiful description of virtue, the Word of God, and terminating in conscious fellowship with God: **166-168: LORD, I hope for Your salvation, And I do Your commandments.** <sup>167</sup> *My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly.* <sup>168</sup> *I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You* (כָּל-דַּרְכֵי נַגִּידָה).

*Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

*Pastor Don*