

41. James's illustration is from the agricultural economy of the first century A.D. Farmers understood the vagaries of each season's weather—some years' climate included early and late rains along with plenty of sunshine while others have too much rain, not enough rain, cloudy days, strong winds and occasional drought.
42. To orient to these idiosyncrasies, the farmers must have a relaxed attitude knowing there are good years, bad years, and others somewhere in between.
43. Therefore, the logistics of human survival in an agricultural economy, which is the context of *The Letter of James*: Chapter 5, provide farmers with a variety of circumstances entering each year's growing season.
44. Weather in countries east of the Mediterranean Sea has its impact on the nation of Israel and an understanding of its climate's idiosyncrasies is important to our study. Here are some excerpts on this subject from the article, "Palestine," an area at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea sometimes referred to as the Holy Land. Our emphasis is on the area's:

Climate: The marginal character of Palestine is first and foremost a fact of climate. It is a product of the interplay between continental and maritime influences, in a small but mountainous area bordered on three sides by landmasses and on the fourth by the [Mediterranean] Sea. The situation is then rendered more complex by the interlocking of sea and land in the Middle East; the Persian Gulf especially in summer, and the Mediterranean itself acts in some climatic senses more like a large lake than an ocean. As a result, the main source areas of the air masses that affect Palestine are the Indian Ocean and Asia Minor, but air from these regions reaches Palestine along circuitous routes and is considerably changed in character by the time it arrives. (4:576)

A. Summer Conditions. In summer, a trough of low pressure lies over the Persian Gulf and a smaller low is to be found in a direct East-West line with this, over Cyprus. These lows draw in from the Indian Ocean monsoon air; it flows over Mesopotamia, and tends to circle round Cyprus, arriving back over the Palestine coast from the West. Such moisture as it had at its source is long since shed, and it is this air that dominates over Palestine in summer, yielding a little cloud and dew but virtually not a drop of rain between June and September. Rarely does cooler air from northern latitudes succeed in reaching the area in these summer months; the only variations occur when continental air from Africa and Arabia is drawn northwards, intensifying the heat.



These inflows of desert air are ... known by the name of *sirocco* (*sherákō*) applied to the hot desert wind, or in Egypt as *khamsin* (*kam-sén*), and in the Levant sometimes as *shlouq*. They make life almost intolerable while they last, with relative humidity very low and clouds of dust and grit filling the stifling air. (4:576–77)

C. Temperatures. Palestine lies between 30° and 33° North Latitude. Summer temperatures are therefore likely to be high but modified locally by elevation and distance from the sea. In fact, the relief of the country is broken enough to provide some striking local variations in temperature. The daily range in summer is small, but the relative humidity is high. Further from the coast in summer, the effect of the sea breeze is lost, and while relative humidity falls to very low levels the daily range of temperature is greater, making the temperature somewhat more bearable. In the mountains, temperatures fall off with increasing elevation, but at Jerusalem the average daily temperature in August is still over 75°F, despite the 2,500-foot elevation.

D. Rainfall. Rain is the most principal factor in Palestine's climate; not only in amount, but in season of occurrence, its regime dominates life in the land.

Rain-bearing winds reach the Levant from the southwest. They are charged with moisture by their passage across the Mediterranean, and those reaching the northern Levant have had a longer fetch over the sea than those that merely “cut the corner” from Egypt to Philistia. Consequently, it is generally true that rainfall declines from North to South throughout the Levant. Equally, it follows that the amount diminishes as one leaves the coast behind, so that there would be, over the level surface, a regular transition from, for example, forty inches of rainfall annually on the coast, through a steppe region with twenty or fifteen inches, to desert where the rainfall in a given year may be two inches or zero. (4:577)

Rainfall, however, is not the result simply of distance from the sea but of relief. The mountains of the Levant lie across the path of the rain bearing southwesterlies, obliging them to rise and to precipitate their moisture. Especially during the second half of the rainy season (i.e., the spring), this relief factor is important in determining the amount of rain that falls, at least on the westward slopes of the hills. On the east side there is likely to be a “rain shadow”; the winds have deposited their moisture on the west facing slopes and are drying out as they descend the east side of the mountains.



This situation accounts for the tongue of desert that protrudes north up the Jordan Rift, and it intensifies the change to desert conditions that takes place on the east side of the mountains of Eden, which themselves receive fifteen to twenty inches. It equally works to the advantage of a few areas: Báshan, lying east of Galilee, receives a rainfall high enough to have made it fertile and prosperous as a granary of the Roman empire because between it and the sea lies the Plain of Esdraélon and the relatively low region of Lower Galilee, and the rain-bearing winds from the sea can pass over these low elevations without losing all their moisture.

Undoubtedly the most significant factor in Palestine's rainfall is its concentration in the Mediterranean climates, and it is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Finally in winter, the precipitation is not immediately claimed by evaporation under a scorching summer sun; it has a chance to soak into the earth and to charge springs and wells. The fact that it falls in winter also means that there is no precipitation in the growing season, when it is most needed. Mediterranean farmers historically, therefore, either have had to rely on snow-melt from the mountains (e.g., the Alps) for their summer moisture, or else must resort to storage of winter rainwater and irrigation in summer.


The dry season in Palestine is clearly defined. Between mid-June and mid-September, it is virtually certain that no rain will fall. The blocking effect of a high-pressure area in the western Mediterranean ensures the undisturbed dominance in this period of dry and stable air that has crossed from the Persian Gulf and remained well warmed over the landlocked Mediterranean. Consequently, summer conditions are highly predictable. The long-term means for Jerusalem shows negligible rainfall recorded in June, July, August, and September.

For the farmer everything depends on the rains falling in the other seven or eight months of the year. The replacement of the dry monsoon air of summer by moister air from the west starts, hesitantly, in September, when a few showers may fall. It is not until October that thunderstorms herald the inward movement of maritime air from the west, nor does this moist air achieve anything like the same dominance over Palestine as does the summer air mass. Indeed, the "take-over" may be delayed, which is dangerous when it occurs.


Delay holds up farm work, especially plowing, and reduces the period during which the rains can recharge the springs and wells from which the population has drawn its summer water supply. It is therefore not surprising that the Bible pictures the farmer as waiting for the “early” rain (James 5:7); that is, for the onset of the rainy season to relieve the drought of summer. He is almost certain that the later the start of the rains, the smaller his harvest will be the following year. (4:579)

After the onset of the rains in October, there may be another pause, and then the winter months are all wet. Eighty-four percent of the annual precipitation at Tel Aviv occurs in the months November through February; in the mountains of Judea the figure is seventy-seven to eighty percent. On the coast, December is the wettest month. March is often the wettest month in Trans-Jordan. The rains come in with the depressions from the west; they are irregular in occurrence, and normally last for a day or two, after which there is a dry and finer period. This sequence is repeated at weekly or ten-day intervals throughout the rainy period. Rains usually are heavy and brief, rather than gentle and prolonged; they are produced by the movement of unstable air over a highly differentiated land surface.

By March, on the coast, and April, further inland, the rains begin to taper off. As this is the season of intense activity on the land, and the only part of the rainy season with rising temperatures and subsequent plant growth, the importance of these late (or latter) rains is very great. A dry spring will reduce the volume of the harvest and increase the danger of late frosts. Since the following months, as the farmer knows, are going to be completely dry, the longer the rains continue, the better he is likely to be pleased.

As, therefore, the rains between November and February are assured, even though their total may be uncertain, the incidence of rainfall in October and March is highly uncertain, and consequently becomes a matter of prayer to God and patient acceptance of what He is pleased to send. (4:579–80) 

45. The study above is necessary to understand the environment in which the nation of Israel is located geographically and as a result what kind of annual impact its location on the planet and its history.

 J. H. Paterson, “Palestine,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 576–577, 579-580.



46. In our study of *The Letter of James*: Chapter Five, tends to emphasize the impact the other races of people have on the Jews. Yet, there is also an impact from their own geography.
47. Israel's geography is so positioned that its agrarian economy must also be recognized. It is not unusual for every location on the earth to have weather-related issues that impact its economy.
48. The article above points out those typical of Israel. Further, these weather issues vary and therefore there are good years for harvests but also poor ones for which the farmers must be alert and prepared.
49. Wise farmers systematically adjust, not only for the current crops, but also, if necessary, to prepare for the following year's potentially beastly weather.
50. This issue is addressed in the seventh verse of chapter five:

James 5:7 Therefore be patient [μακροθυμέω (*makrothuméō*)], brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. (NASB)

1. Note that the Jews have been taught to be patient “until the coming of the Lord.” In A.D. 45, the Jewish people were first informed by James that the next dispensation in the divine agenda would be the Rapture of the church.
2. Since the Rapture is eminent, then it may always be anticipated but upon which never to rely. The prophecy of the Rapture was first revealed to James, but its arrival will always remain a mystery.
3. Yet, one's anticipation must not allow a believer to assume it will occur in his lifetime. Since the Rapture is “next on the prophetic agenda,” does not also reveal when it will occur. There is no subsequent prophecy that forecasts the time, month, day, and year but only that it is, “Next”!
4. Therefore, one's understanding of the event may conclude it is imminent but with no clue about when to expect its arrival. The same is true in the present days of the twenty-first century. It thus remains a mystery.
5. As a result, both then and now, believers must make decisions based on the erratic history typical of the ups and downs common to a fallen planet and the winds, fronts, temperatures, and their correlations common to the vicissitudes of the global weather system. To do this effectively, the person must anticipate the possibility of a cold, prolonged, and wind-chilled winter.
6. When a mild winter occasionally occurs and accompanied by lots of rain and snow is why people often squirrel away water for droughts that will inevitably occur in the future.

