

Lesson Overview

1 Life Need:

Discuss what the world sees as wise and its dangers.

2 Bible Learning:

Study the differences between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible sheet—The Wisdom of James

3 Bible Application:

Understand how destructive following the world's wisdom can be.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible sheet—Don't Follow the World's Wisdom

4 Life Response:

Daily apply heaven's wisdom and not the world's in your decisions.

Suggested Material:

- Index cards, pens or pencils
- Lyrics for or a video of the hymn 'Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise'



Two Kinds of Wisdom

Earthly Wisdom—James warned against following worldly wisdom and pointed out its destructive results. The person with worldly wisdom is violent, critical, and constantly provoking negativity. This person's spirit is bitter and self-seeking, causes divisions, and is boastful, sensual, and deceptive. This person's mind works against the things of God and possesses no true wisdom at all. He or she is self-centered and working against God.

Wisdom from Heaven—Wisdom is an invisible inner quality. However, wisdom's characteristics manifest themselves in the daily activity of the believer, for all to see. James added the word meekness to the definition of this virtue, possessing humility and gentleness.

Godly wisdom results in pure motives and attitudes. Like the Father, His children should be patient and kind. One scholar called it "sweet reasonableness," extending graciousness and treating others the way you would want to be addressed. It is a decision to willingly look at people and issues from different sides rather than being inflexible. In this wisdom is no sign of harsh, unfair judging. It has no hidden agendas, avoids conflict, and honestly desires the best for others.

Hold On: Jesus Will Return—James encouraged his fellow Christian brothers and sisters to exercise perseverance, especially in light of their present difficulties. When facing persecution and unjust treatment, he said to keep in mind that Jesus is coming back. He will eventually put everything in order. It is like a farmer who plants seeds, knows they are coming up, but cannot see any immediate results. We keep meditating on the sure reality—Jesus is coming back to take His children home. In the meantime, we are loving toward each other. When we are going through a hard time, it is easy to take out frustrations on whoever is standing in our way. However, we must be gentle, patient, and friendly. God shows His love and sustains us throughout hard times. Even in our pain, the Lord will accomplish His plans and purposes. We don't depend on our own reasoning—we know that He will guide us better than we can ourselves.

AS YOUR STUDENTS ARRIVE

Write this question on a board or sheet of newsprint for your students to answer: "What have you learned about wisdom since we've been talking about it?" They might answer that they have seen how we must follow

biblical wisdom and not folly, that we follow His wisdom regardless of what the world thinks, and that the tongue can get us in lots of trouble if we don't control it. This week's lesson wraps up our study of wisdom by showing us again the dangers of following the world's

wisdom rather than God's wisdom.

Link to Last Week: Encourage a few people to share how they built up someone this past week with their heavenly, positive words.

1 Life Need

Discuss what the world sees as wise and its dangers
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Often we take the wrong advice and suffer the consequences. We could instead take good, godly advice and gain the consequences of that action. Following the world's wisdom or heaven's wisdom has consequences whichever we choose.

Read the anecdote in the student books, then ask your students to form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

For Question 1, the world's wisdom is often loud, but at other times it's more subtle, and we listen to it and absorb it more than we think. For example, when you hear the word "retirement," do you *first* picture an overseas cruise, a sunny beach, or a golf course—or do you *first* see yourself volunteering more at a your church or the local elementary school as an "adopted grandparent"? For many things, what first comes to mind is often what the world has told us is the "wise" thing to do ("Take care of yourself first," "You deserve this," etc.).

Question 2 reminds us that living wisely is reflected in who we are as a person and the kinds of choices we make. Do those choices lead to positive outcomes for ourselves and others, or do they lead to envy and conflict?

For Question 3, answers will vary, but the world will tell you, for example, to "Speak your mind" or "Stand your ground" or "Make them pay" when it would be better to listen to others and see all sides of a situation. Many church fights could be avoided if we follow James's advice to check our envy and pride at the door and seek humility instead.

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Two Kinds of Wisdom

A Present-Day Illustration

So what did we decide?" asked J.D.

"It depends on who you ask," replied Quentin. Morris wanted to open the gym for midnight basketball for youth, free of charge. He said he could gather sponsors to support it and provide jerseys and shoes for free!

"Morris has those kind of connections?" asked J.D.

"Yes, and Morris has money of his own," informed Quentin. "He doesn't advertise it much."

"So, what is the problem?" continued J.D.

"Terrance. He's some kind of manager with an athletic shoe company, and he wants his company to make money off the project, thereby giving him an economic advantage at work."

"Doesn't his company give donations and do community work?" asked J.D.

"Yes, they do," said Quentin, "but that's not the proposal he's presented to the board. He wants to make money off this deal and shine to his employer. But Terrance also let it slip that he is using the company name but plans to profit personally."

"What does that mean exactly?" asked J.D.

"I'm not sure, but it doesn't sound good," replied Quentin.

"So, what's the reasoning behind Morris's decision? What does he stand to profit from the deal?" asked J.D.

"Morris made his decision based on doing the most good," said Quentin. "He just wants to bless the young children."

1. How much do you think the world's wisdom influences what you say and do?

2. Why does your character show if you are living a wise life?

3. In your relationships, when have you followed God's wisdom and not the world's and were better off for doing that?

LESSON FOCUS: Beware! The world's wisdom leads to envy, disorder, and judgment.

Bible Learning 2

Study the differences between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world

Read the last paragraph on the sheet and note the photo on the poster.

WISDOM OF THE WORLD

Read James 3:13-16 and discuss the following key ideas:

- James said a wise person reveals his or her wisdom through a life of good deeds and humility.
- Living wisely means you don't boast about yourself or harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart.
- Those things come from earthly, unspiritual wisdom promoted by the devil.
- Where envy and selfish ambition are present, you find disorder and evil at work.

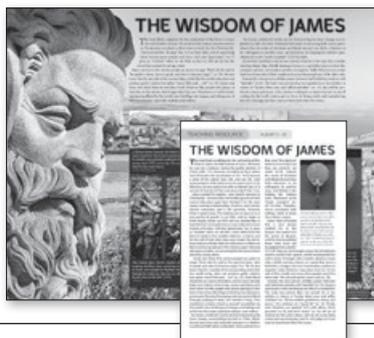
SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

God's people will exhibit His

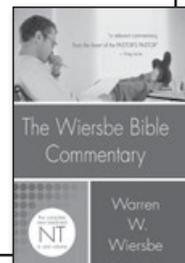
BIBLE EXTRA

Two Kinds of Wisdom

In our last lesson in James, we saw the importance of controlling what we say, whether it is in careful teaching of others, in avoiding boasting, or in shunning hypocrisy. Teaching God's Word faithfully, being humble in our speech, and blessing people instead of cursing them are all signs of one who has the wisdom of God in his/her heart. James continued his treatise on wisdom by stating that wise people with true spiritual insight will demonstrate that wisdom with a godly lifestyle that humbly serves God and others. In so doing, truly wise people display the very heart of our Lord, who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). James then explained that there are two kinds of wisdom: worldly and heavenly.



You can find more commentary on the Scripture passage on pp. 870-873 and pp. 882-885 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.



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Wisdom of the World

James 3:13-16, KJV

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

James 3:13-16, NIV

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James's description of worldly wisdom is not pretty. First, we see that so-called wisdom harbors bitterness, envy, and selfish ambition in the heart. Envy and selfish ambition are the unholy companions of bitterness in the heart of the worldly-wise person. The Greek word here for "envy" is *zelos*, from which we get our English word "zeal," and carries with it the idea of fierce jealousy. When we have *zelos* toward another, we fiercely crave what that person has. This, of course, can lead to disorder in the promotion of selfish desires and ambitions over the interests of others. Those who harbor such attitudes in their hearts have nothing to brag about; rather, they actually deny the truth about how harmful bitter envy and strife can be. Such a heart condition not only negatively impacts relationships with others, but it also can stymie our fellowship and walk with the Lord, thereby leaving us to wander in spiritual darkness.

James then observed that this kind of so-called wisdom does not come from our Lord in heaven. Rather, this way of thinking is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic in nature, meaning it comes right from the "prince of this world," the devil (John 12:31). And sadly, before coming to Christ, we too were willing

wisdom by a lifestyle humbly dedicated to honoring and serving Him. Deeds that come from heavenly wisdom will glorify God and edify others.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

Worldly wisdom includes such

characteristics as bitterness, envy, selfish ambition, boasting, denying the truth, demonic, disorder, and evil practices.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

Worldly wisdom is really the

expression of the devil's influence and evil ways. Jesus called the devil the "prince of this world" (John 12:31), and Paul referred to him as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2, KJV). For now, the devil rules this world system, and the world's so-called wisdom is an extension of his rule.

WISDOM OF HEAVEN

Next read James 3:17-18; 5:7-9 and discuss these important points:

- Heavenly wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, and sincere.
- Those with heavenly wisdom are peacemakers who plant seeds of peace and reap righteousness.
- The Lord is coming soon, and in the meantime we should be patient and stand firm.
- Just as a farmer waits for the land to yield its crop, we should be patient, for the Lord's return could come at any time.

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participants of the worldly ways of the devil.

The thinking and ways of the devil and his world system are certainly deserving of God's wrath because they bring disorder and every possible kind of evil practice. God, who created an orderly universe, is not the cause of all the confusion we see in this world (see 1 Cor. 14:33). And neither is He the source of this world's evil. Apart from Christ, disorder and evil will reign. However, in Christ, believers have the power to let order and righteousness reign by standing against the devil and his evil ways.

4. How do we exhibit godly wisdom?

5. What are some characteristics of earthly or worldly wisdom?

6. What is the source of earthly or worldly wisdom?

Wisdom of Heaven

James 3:17-18; 5:7-9, KJV

3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the

James 3:17-18; 5:7-9, NIV

3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

5:7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹Don't grumble against one another, brothers

BIBLE EXTRA

The Works of the Flesh

The ways of the devil and his worldly wisdom can be very appealing to our sin natures, also known in Scripture as the flesh. In fact, James's description of worldly wisdom—bitterness, envy, strife, selfishness, boasting, denying the truth, confusion, demonic, and evil works—is quite similar to the works of the flesh. Paul told the Galatians that if they lived by the Spirit, they would not fulfill the "works of the flesh" (KJV). And then he stated what they are: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21). By comparing James's worldly wisdom with Paul's works of the flesh, we gain insight into how to live in the light of heavenly wisdom, namely by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

The wisdom from heaven is pure, peace-loving, considerate,

BIBLE EXTRA

The Coming of the Lord

James observed that a great motivation for God's people to live in accord with His wisdom is the truth that our Lord stands at the very door of heaven, ready to return and to execute judgment when the time comes. Though the truth of the Lord's coming judgment is certainly sobering, the promise of His return is also the believer's blessed hope. As the apostle Paul put it, the blessing of our salvation "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13). Believers who understand heavenly wisdom will live rightly in the light of the hope that Jesus will return to set things right.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Beatitudes and Wisdom

It is not a coincidence that heavenly wisdom produces many of the characteristics in God's people that bring the blessings and joy that Jesus described in what we often refer to as the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11). Heavenly wisdom is pure; Jesus said that the pure in heart are blessed because they will see God (vs. 8). God's wisdom is peace-loving; Jesus said that the peacemakers are blessed because they are God's children (vs. 9). Wisdom from heaven is full of mercy; Jesus said that the merciful are blessed because they will receive mercy (vs. 7). Heavenly wisdom is considerate and submissive; Jesus said that the meek are blessed because they will inherit the earth (vs. 5). Godly wisdom is impartial and sincere and will bear the fruit of righteousness; Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed because they will be filled (vs. 6).

submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere. These characteristics stand in stark contrast to the characteristics of earthly wisdom.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

James gave the example of the farmer to illustrate patience. As the farmer plants the crop and patiently waits for God's provision of rain until the crop is ready to harvest, so

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KJV

Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

NIV

and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

After describing how ugly worldly wisdom is, James then painted a beautiful picture of heavenly wisdom, drawing a stark contrast between the two. Instead of the evil of worldly wisdom—which brings bitter envy and selfish ambition,—heavenly wisdom is pure and brings peace and mercy.

Those who pursue the wisdom from heaven will be blessed. Because of these blessings, God's people can be patient with one another, knowing that the time will come when Jesus will return and set all things right. James used the patience of a farmer as an example for the patience we should have. When a farmer plants seeds, there is no expectation that the next morning there will be a fully mature crop ready for harvest. Rather, the farmer understands the need to wait patiently and trusts that God will provide the rains in due season. And after weeks, even months, the crop comes just as anticipated.

Likewise, believers are to stand patiently and firmly, trusting that the Lord will return. In James's day and ours, we can know that the Lord could come at any time. Indeed, patience with one another is very important, for our heavenly Judge is at the very door of heaven, and we will be held accountable for how we treat one another.

7. What are some characteristics of the wisdom from above?

8. What earthly example of patience did James give?

9. Why do we need to be patient with one another?

Wisdom Exemplified

James 5:10-12, KJV

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example

James 5:10-12, NIV

¹⁰Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets

should God's people stand patiently and firmly as we wait for Him to return.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

It is a good display of heavenly wisdom to be patient with one another. We understand that our Lord could

come at any time, and He will hold us accountable for many things, including how patiently we dealt with others.

WISDOM EXEMPLIFIED

Finally, read James 5:10-12 and discuss these summary statements

from the Scripture:

- The prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord are examples to us of patiently suffering affliction.

- Job and others persevered and saw God's compassion and mercy in the end.

- Those who are living wisely don't have to make oaths—they just give a simple yes or no so they won't fall into condemnation for their words.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 10

The prophets of old are good examples of godly patience because they steadfastly continued to proclaim God's message in the face of opposition that caused them all manner of hardship, even death, for their faithfulness.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 11

Despite losing everything for no apparent reason, Job remained faithful to God and refused to say anything against Him. And God blessed Job's faithfulness in the end.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 12

Heavenly-wise people will not make an oath by heaven, earth, or anything else for that matter. Rather, they will stand on their own words, whether yes or no. And if they have lived rightly in the light of the wisdom from heaven, then their godly reputations will elicit trust in the minds of others.

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KJV

of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

Knowing that the Lord could return at any time for us is great motivation to live rightly and patiently in the light of heavenly wisdom. Along with knowing the Lord can return at any moment, another great motivator for living rightly and patiently in heavenly wisdom is the godly example of others. Therefore, James pointed his readers to the patient suffering of the Old Testament prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James specifically named Job as an example of patience and perseverance under trial. Job suffered great loss, but he remained true to the Lord through it all. As a result, God's grace and mercy set everything right in the end for Job.

Our lesson's passage closes with the admonition not to swear by heaven, earth, or anything else. The heavenly-wise person recognizes the potential pitfalls and even condemnation of taking an oath in such a manner.

10. *How are the prophets of old good examples of godly patience?*

11. *How is Job a good example of godly patience?*

12. *What is the proper way for the heavenly-wise person to make a promise?*

NIV

who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

¹²Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

BIBLE EXTRA

Being 'Happy'

"Happy" (vs. 11, KJV; "blessed," NIV) is from the same Greek word James used in 1:12, 25. It means approved, content, or fortunate. We identify as "happy" those "which endure" (KJV). Here the word means patience stretched out over a protracted period of time.

Bible Application 3

Understand how destructive following the world's wisdom can be

Photocopy this page, cut out the boxes, and give instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit to give to the group using it.

• Handout: 'Don't Follow the World's Wisdom'
Read the instructions on the sheet and share your answers with the class.



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GROUP ACTIVITIES

• Discussion Group

Read "Beware!" in the student book and answer **Questions 13, 14, and 15**. Arguments and conflicts characterize our world today. Sadly, many churches are known more for their splits than their witness for the Lord. Peacemaking is becoming a lost art partly because we have adopted the world's ways of solving things: promote yourself, your opinion counts the most, etc. Patient, humble people think of others first, look to the Lord for guidance, and honestly want to hear what other people have to offer.

• The Wise Person I Know

Identify someone in your church who is wise and understanding according to James's list of characteristics in James 3:17. In what ways do the humble works of this person demonstrate the depth of his or her Christian character? How can you emulate this person in your own life?

• The World's Oaths

James warned against taking frivolous oaths. A genuine yes or no should be sufficient for the trustworthy believer (Jas. 5:12). What are some of the things people say to try to make themselves more believable? How can we avoid saying such things? (For example, they might say, "As God is my witness . . ." or "Honest to God . . ." or even curse using the Lord's name.)

Beware!

James said to beware of the "get ahead" and "promote yourself" wisdom that the world gives out. He warns us that envy and selfish ambition come from the devil, not from God. James also said that when we are focused only on personal advancement, we may not be concerned with the issues of ethics. Moral boundaries become obstacles in the way of our success.

In contrast to devilish, earthly wisdom, heavenly wisdom is always morally pure, promotes peace, and produces good fruit.

To grow in spiritual maturity, we must have this wisdom that comes from heaven. Righteous living is impossible without it, and our churches suffer when we don't have this wisdom. Without it, we get envy and selfish ambition as well as disorder and chaos in any fellowship of believers. Heavenly-wise people bring peace to situations and help build up the Body of Christ. They refuse to participate in destructive arguments or follow those who do. They ask others about their preferences rather than always promoting their own. They show respect for others, especially those in authority, and they are always willing to listen to both sides of the story. They always tell the truth, even when it is uncomfortable to do so, but they don't do so with the intent of hurting others or uplifting themselves.

Those with heavenly wisdom have a high tolerance for the weaknesses of others; they don't regularly criticize and belittle others. They are known for their patience and perseverance, not for jumping to conclusions. Other people will stand and testify to the positive impact these righteous people have had in their lives, and our churches will thrive as more people decide to follow the ways of heaven rather than the ways of the world.

13. *Why is peacemaking so important in everyday life and in church life?*

14. *When have you seen "get ahead" and "promote yourself" wisdom create problems at work, at home, or at church?*

15. *How much heavenly wisdom would you say your church has most of the time?*

4 Life Response

Daily apply heaven's wisdom and not the world's in your decisions
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Ask your students to read, "Look Up for Wisdom" and do the exercise there. They may write their statement either in the student book or on an index card they can take with them to post where they will see it every day. Encourage them each day to write the

decisions they make that reflect their seeking God's wisdom in situations. Some of those decisions will be things they do such as work on improving a close relationship. Other decisions will be things they decide not to do such as saying their opinion is the only right one and not listening to other people, thus promoting conflict.

End the lesson in prayer, asking God to help us seek Him for our decisions and not the world's wisdom that leads to envy, disorder, and judgment. You may instead decide to end by singing the hymn, "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise."

When the students are dismissed, distribute copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Send *Lesson Leaflet* to people who could not be with you today.

Next week we begin a new quarter focusing on how to love one another. Before next week, read Genesis 37, focusing on verses 2-11 and 24-28. Ask your students to think about how jealousy can ruin relationships.

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Look Up for Wisdom

Every day, minute, and second ungodly things are happening around us. When we look down or around, we only find envy, disorder, selfish ambition, and conflict. We need the wisdom of God to direct us and keep us on the right track. If we don't seek heaven's wisdom, we will surely serve the world's wisdom. As James says, all good gifts come from God in heaven (1:17); therefore, we must look up to find the wisest way to live.

► Write here or on an index card, "I look up for wisdom." As you make decisions this coming week, make that your pledge, and write on the card or here decisions you make that reflect your seeking God for the wise choice.

KEY VERSE

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. —James 3:17, KJV

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. —James 3:17, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 31 through September 6

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 30:22-24; 35:16-20—Rachel, Mother of Joseph and Benjamin.
- Tues.** Genesis 37:12-17—Joseph Checks on Brothers at Dothan.
- Wed.** Genesis 37:29-36—Jacob Convinced that Joseph Is Dead.
- Thurs.** Genesis 40:14-27, 33-40—From Slave to Ruler of Egypt.
- Fri.** Acts 7:9-15—Jacob Lives with Joseph in Egypt.
- Sat.** James 4:1-7—Caution, Disputes May Lead to Violence.
- Sun.** Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24, 28—Jealousy Divides Families.