

# BIBLE OVERVIEW - NEW TESTAMENT 5

## The General Letters: Hebrews to Jude

Addressed to more general and less precisely defined audience than Paul's letters.

### HEBREWS

'Not a letter, but an epistle' (Adolf Deissman)

Writer – Barnabus? Apollos? Priscilla? Paul?

Date – probably before AD 70

Recipients – reluctant Christians

- Drifting (2.1)
- Immature (5.13)
- Wavering (10.23)
- Marking time (12.1)

Because of...

- Lethargy (2.1; 12.1)
- Cruelty (12.4)
- Perplexity (13.9)

Therefore...

danger of potential apostasy (6.1-8)

Were they Hebrew or Gentile Christians? Where did they live?

### *Framework*

A 'word of exhortation' ('message of encouragement' GNB) – 13.22.

A series of exhortations+warnings interspersed with teaching.

### *1. Warnings+Exhortations*

- First: **2.1-4**  
W – against neglecting so great salvation  
E – to pay closer attention to what we have heard
- Second: **3.7-4.11**  
W – against failing to enter God's promised rest  
E – to strive to enter that rest
- Third: **5.11-6.12**  
W – against spiritual immaturity  
E – to go on to maturity
- Fourth: **10.19-39**  
W – against spurning the Son of God  
E – to draw near in faith and hope
- Fifth: **12.12-17**  
W – against failing to obtain the grace of God  
E – to keep moving!

## 2. *Teaching concerning the superiority of Jesus*

He is superior to...

- The Prophets (1.1-3)
- The Angels (1.4-2.18)
- Moses (3.1-4.13)
- Aaron (4.14-10.18)
- A high priest of a superior order (4.14-7.18)
- A high priest with a superior ministry ((8.1-10.18)
- He is superior as the New and Living Way (10.19-12.29)

## 3. Conclusion (13.1-25)

### **JAMES**

Who was James?

Not the apostle James – he'd died in AD 44. Probably James the brother of Jesus.

To whom did he write this letter?

'To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations' (1.1).

Date – sometime between the late 40s and early 60s.

#### *Outline*

- Introduction (1.1)
- Faith and wisdom (1.2-8)
- Poverty and wealth (1.9-11)
- Testing and tempting (1.12-18)
- Hearing and doing (1.19-27)
- Warning against discrimination (2.1-13)
- Faith and works (2.14-26)
- The Christian and the tongue (3.1-18)
- The Christian and the world (4.1-5.6)
- Various instructions (5.7-20)

'The Proverbs of the New Testament'

James uses faith in a wider sense than Paul.

### **1 PETER**

Who is the writer?

Peter – the leader of the apostles; his name comes first in every list of the disciples.

To whom did he write?

Christians in five Roman provinces (1.1) in modern Turkey north of the Taurus mountains. These churches composed of Jews and Gentiles (1.14,18; 2.9-10; 4.3-4).

When and where?

He wrote in 'Babylon' (5.13) – a codename for Rome – between AD 62 and 64

Why?

His audience had already suffered unofficial and sporadic persecution (1.6; 4.12-19) and Peter wrote the letter because he anticipated even greater suffering to come (Nero?).

Keynote: *Be glad... even though... sad* (1.6 GNB)

#### Outline

- Introduction (1.1-2)
- Praise to God for the gift of a Living Hope (1.3-12)
- Exhortation to holy living (1.13-2.10)
- The responsibility of Christians in time of suffering (2.11-4.19)
- Christian humility and service (5.1-11)
- Conclusion (5.12-14)

## 2 PETER

The writer?

Peter towards the end of his life (1.12-15), probably between AD 65 and 68.

The addressees?

Not made clear

Why?

The rise of false teaching in the church. This was an early form of Gnosticism (from Gk *gnosis*, knowledge). A key word in the letter is 'knowledge'.

#### Outline

- Introduction (1.1-2)
- The Christian calling (1.3-21)
- False teachers (2.1-22)
- The fact of Christ's Second Coming (3.1-18)

1 Peter cf 2 Peter

1 Peter about what do when persecution comes. The enemy without.

2 Peter about what do when false teachers take over the church. The enemy within.

## THE LETTERS OF JOHN

1 John lacks the key distinguishing literary features of a letter. It's more sermon than letter. But repeated emphasis that the teaching is given in writing (1.4; 2.7-26; 5.13)

John who?

Author not mentioned in 1 John, and refers to himself as 'the Elder' in 2 and 3 John. Tradition has identified the author of all three letters as the apostle John.

Background

Antichrists (i.e. 'enemies of Christ') were trying to lead astray the recipients' churches - traditionally believed to be in Ephesus and surrounding cities. These 'false prophets' (4.1) were probably forerunners of the Gnostics. They claimed to have a special knowledge of God. They denied that 'Jesus Christ had a truly human body' (4.2-3 GNB). According to them Jesus only appeared to be human; he only seemed to die. John wrote this letter sometime between AD 85 and 95 to counteract this teaching.

### *Outline of 1 John*

- The Word that gives Life (1.1-4)
- Light and darkness (1.5-2.29) [including the New Commandment and Antichrist]
- Children of God and children of the devil (3.1-10)
- God's love and our love (3.11-24)
- Truth and error (4.1-6)
- Love one another (4.7-21)
- Victory over the world (5.1-21)

### *Contents of 2 John*

Written by 'the elder' (or 'the church leader' CEV). The addressee is 'the chosen lady and her children' (v 1) – a figurative description of a local church?

Similarities of language and theme with 1 John and the Fourth Gospel. John writes about the importance of love. Truth and love must go hand in hand. We must believe that Christ was truly human, and we must love one another.

### *Contents of 3 John*

Written by 'the elder' to a church leader named Gaius, who had welcomed itinerant preachers travelling to his area. Another leader (Diotrophes) was disregarding 'the elder' and refusing to welcome the visiting preachers. John commends Gaius for obeying the truth and stresses the importance of Christians working together.

## **JUDE**

Who is Jude?

His name = 'Judah' in Hebrew and 'Judas' in Greek. Probably a brother of Jesus and James (Matthew 13.55; Mark 6.3).

Why?

The church (identity unknown) addressed had been infiltrated by false teachers who distorted the grace of God by claiming that it gave believers licence to commit blatant immorality (including homosexual practices) since their sins had already been forgiven.

Verses 3-16 are very similar to 2 Peter 2.1-22.

### *Features of Jude*

- Hard-hitting. See vv 4, 12-13
- Historical allusions. See vv. 5, 7, 11.
- Awareness of angels. See vv 6 and 9. cf Hebrews 1.14.
- Edifying (v. 20). We are to build ourselves up by praying (v 20), keeping ourselves in the love of God (v 21) and waiting for eternal life (v 21).
- Optimistic (vv. 24-25). A beautiful and moving doxology.