

New Testament Survey

Unit 317 – Foundations 3

Week 5 – Session 1
General Epistles
(Peter and Jude)



A. Introduction to 1 Peter

Authorship:

The address claims that the work derives from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is balanced by his modest inclusion of himself with the elders (5:1). He also claims in this same verse to be an eyewitness to the death of Jesus. When compared with Luke's record of Peter's speeches in Acts, a number of similarities arise:

- Christ is the stone rejected by the builders;
- The 'name' of Christ receives prominence;
- The Christ-event is seen as the fulfilment of prophetic testimony.

The epistle centres on matters central to Peter's own experience as a disciple of Jesus: the severity of testing, emphasis on sheep and shepherding, humility, and suffering (the sufferings of Christ our example). Some dispute Peter's authorship on the grounds that the Greek in the first epistle is far better than that in the second but this could simply mean that he used a different scribe. Silas (or Silvanus) was most likely the scribe for 1 Peter (5:12).

Recipients:

These are specified as 'strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, i.e. the major part of Asia Minor north of the Taurus Mountains. This was the area of Paul's labour. Peter does not appear to know the readers personally, although the letter is remarkably warm and sympathetic. These may have been primarily Jewish Christians, hence Peter's interest. The work claims to have been written from Babylon. Since Babylon in Mesopotamia was mainly uninhabited at the time, and there is no tradition of Peter ever being there, it is perhaps an allusion, as in the book of Revelation, to the city of Rome. It is known that Peter ended his life there.

Themes and Contents:

There are three major themes:

1. **Suffering for faith in Jesus Christ**, and how to bear it triumphantly.
 - there is no indication that such suffering is meritorious;
 - nor is it inevitable (1:6)
 - It is regulated by the will of God (4:19)
 - It is not to be seen as abnormal when it comes (4:12)
 - it is not a mark of divine displeasure (3:18; 4:1)
 - To share in his sufferings is a privilege and joy (4:13-14).
2. **The effect of Christian testimony on unbelieving society** is emphasised.
 - Right conduct will offset prejudice (2:12)
 - it will disarm ignorance (2:15)
 - It is more potent than discussion or argument (3:1)
 - it will put to shame those who revile the saints (3:16)
 - it will testify against those who belittle it (4:4-5).

3. **Good works**, although important, are not seen in the Jewish sense, as directed to certain deserving groups (E.G. poor and oppressed), and are not considered meritorious. In the Greek sense, they **are seen as logically correct**, to be directed to sectors of society such as government, master, slaves, etc.

Contents:

1:1-2	Address
1:3-5	Salvation a glorious heavenly inheritance
1:6-9	It is a life of faith and love subjected to severe testing
1:10-12	It is the theme of the OT prophets
1:13-21	A plea for holiness...
1:22-25	...and mutual love as a product of regeneration
2:1-3	Readers are growing infants, feeding on the word as on milk
2:4-10	They are living stones built upon the risen Christ
2:11-12	They are pilgrims who should be blameless before men
2:13-17	They are to be submissive to governmental authority
2:18-25	Slaves should follow Christ's example of submission
3:1-6	Wives should humbly submit to their husbands
3:7	Husbands to deal considerately and gently with their wives
3:8-12	Love and tenderness should govern believers' attitudes
3:13-22	If this should nevertheless bring persecution, God will vindicate as he did Christ
4:1-6	Give up all old sins
4:7-11	Replace them with prayer, hospitality and Christian service
4:12-19	Be prepared to suffer according to God's will
5:1-5	Leaders are to care for the flock with humility
5:6-11	All saints must find their strength in God as they resist evil
5:12-14	Greetings

B. Introduction to 2 Peter

Author:

The work claims to be the work of Peter. It is very different from his first epistle and very similar to Jude. Internal evidence to support Peter's authorship is a direct claim (1:1), the author was at the transfiguration (1:16-18) and reference is made to the fact that this is a second epistle (3:1).

Recipients:

2 Peter 3:1 makes it clear that as a 'second' epistle it is directed to the same readers as the first, i.e. the believers of Asia Minor's Roman provinces.

Contents:

1:1-2	Salutation, introducing the theme: knowledge
1:3-11	The need to cultivate this knowledge
1:12-21	Writer bases authority on presence at Transfiguration
2:1-9	God will judge false prophets and teachers and he will deliver his faithful people
2:10-22	An unflattering description of the false teachers
3:1-4	Warning against those deriding the truth of Christ's return
3:5-13	The old world was destroyed by water. This one will be destroyed by fire, making way for a new heaven and a new earth
3:14-18	Be diligent in pursuing godliness; Grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ

C. Introduction to Jude

Author:

This Jude distinguishes between himself and the apostles (17, 18), and calls himself the brother of James. Therefore, he was not that Jude who was one of the twelve (i.e. the son of James - Luke 6:16). The unqualified use of 'James' points to James, the brother of the Lord. Jude would thus have been another half-brother of Jesus, as listed in Mark 6:3, Matt 13:55. Little is known of Jude. Paul refers to him as an itinerant missionary, who travelled with his wife accompanying him. Later tradition asserts that his two grandsons were spared by the emperor Domitian, who had wanted to destroy all the family of David, as possible

revolutionaries against the Roman state. On discovering they were hard-working farmers, waiting only for a spiritual kingdom, he let them off.

There is no indication of who the readers were. It can be deduced from verse 2 that Jude was well-acquainted with them, since he had intended to write a longer letter to them, and now found himself forced to rush off an emergency document.

Outline:

- Salutation (1-2)
- Reason for writing (3-4)
- God's Judgment in the Past (5-7)
- Warning against False Teachers (8-16)
- A call to persevere (17-23)
- Doxology (24-25)

Content:

The sole reason for the writing of this letter was the activity of various false teachers. These are described as devoid of spiritual life, twice-dead, whose doom is sure. These men are antinomian (against any form of law and decency): they boast of their immorality, and encourage it in others. Perhaps this was done on the basis of Gnostic dualism, which denied any meaningful relationship between the flesh and the spirit. They had a contemptuous disregard for heavenly beings. They were intractable and irresponsible, a menace to decorum and godliness. Jude reminds the readers that God punishes such people. He quotes from the apocryphal book of Enoch to illustrate this. He reminds them that others have warned of such men, notably the apostles.

Conclusion

Jude urges them to both protect themselves by concentrating on the only genuine means of grace, Jesus Christ, and by separation from such as follow the false teaching; and to attempt to salvage those who have been taken in by it.

Memory Verse

Jude 24, 25

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen”.

New Testament Survey

Unit 317 – Foundations 3

Week 5 – Session 1
General Epistles
(James and Hebrews)



A. The Epistle of James

Authorship:

The only name given in the text is James, without any further qualifier. This is the format generally used for James, the brother of Jesus, the oldest of Jesus' half-brothers (Mark 6:3).

He rejected the Messianic status of Jesus, but was convinced by the resurrection (Acts 1:14, I Cor. 15:7). He is referred to in Galatians by Paul (1:19, 2:9,12). According to Acts 15 he appears to be the head of the Jerusalem church, and spokesman of the apostolic council. Peter refers to him in particular already in Acts 12:17: 'Go and show these things to James, and to the brethren'.

According to second-century tradition, James lived the life of a perpetual Nazarite. He spent so much time in prayer in the temple that the Jewish leaders accepted him. When they asked him to address the people, to turn them away from Jesus, he used the opportunity for Christian witness. Enraged, they threw him from the battlements. He lived long enough to pray for Israel, before being dispatched by a blow from a laundryman's club.

Readers:

These are indicated in the address as 'the twelve tribes which are in dispersion'. The subject matter makes it clear that the intended readers are Jews, although not whether they are necessarily Christian. Since they are referred to as the dispersion, non-Palestinian Jews were probably intended. If the writer was James, the brother of Jesus, it seems most likely that they were Christian Jews.

Contents:

The work does not contain many long, coherent sections, but rather deals with a number of matters, many in an almost abrupt and pithy way.

1:1	Address
1:2-18	Endure testing and temptation with the help of believing prayer
1:19-27	True religion (hearers and doers)
2:1-13	The dangers of showing partiality
2:14-26	Faith and works
3:1-12	The problem of the tongue
3:13-18	Heavenly wisdom
4:1-10	The evil of worldliness

4:11-12	The sin of judging others
4:13-17	Self-will versus God's will
5:1-6	Warning to the unrighteous rich
5:7-11	Be patient, the Lord will return
5:12	Do not swear an oath
5:13-18	Healing through prayer
5:19-20	Restoration of an erring brother

Characteristics:

1. The work has an **authoritative tone, without being autocratic**. Almost every verse contains an imperative, but the writer still refers to the readers as 'brethren'.
2. There is **little doctrine**. There is no reference to redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. The epistle is **eminently practical**. The underlying theme is 'being not just hearers, but doers, of the word'.
4. It is **largely impersonal**: there is no reference to any particular relationship between writer and readers. Perhaps an encyclical from head-office?
5. There is an **appreciation of nature** in this book, more so than in any work of Paul (sea, storm, ship, etc.)
6. The teaching is structured **similarly to that of Jesus himself**: James may say less about Jesus than any other NT author, but he also writes more like Jesus sounded.
7. James may be categorised as **Wisdom literature**, although it differs from Old Testament and apocryphal Wisdom literature in its focus on the end-times.
8. The **Greek is of a high quality**, comparable to Hebrews and 1 Peter.

B. The Epistle to the Hebrews

Authorship:

As far as the text is concerned, this is an anonymous epistle. It is not anonymous, however, in the sense that the readers did not know the author. He asks for prayer

for himself (13:19) so as to be able to visit them, and refers to Timothy, hoping to bring him with him (13:23).

It was clearly written by a Jew to other Jews and yet uses the best Greek by far in all of the New Testament. The Received Text (used for the King James Version) carried with it the tradition of the Eastern Church that **Paul** was the author of this epistle. This is difficult to confirm though as it does not read like any other letter written by Paul.

Martin Luther suggested **Apollos** as the writer. The high-class Greek and abundant Old Testament quotations coincide well with the information we have concerning Apollos as an eloquent man, well versed in the Scriptures.

Priscilla and / or Aquila have been suggested by some, although there is no external testimony to support this at all. Whether a woman associated with Paul would set herself up as the author of authoritative teaching is also doubtful.

Even if the author is not one of the 'great names', the work is of such a nature that it coincides at all major points with accepted Christian doctrine.

Date of writing:

Traditionally believed to be between 65 and 70 A.D. although this is hard to substantiate.

Form / Genre:

Although the ending contains personal allusions and matters, the highly doctrinal and formal beginning makes it difficult to consider this work an **epistle or letter**, as generally understood. Some elements make it appear to be a **doctrinal essay** in the same vein as Romans.

The writer calls it a **word of exhortation** (13:22). Some have suggested from this that it is in essence a transcript of a sermon, or series of sermons. The wording of 11:32 appears to support this: 'time would fail me to tell'. Perhaps the author sent one of his sermons to his readers, with personal details appended, giving it something of the form of a letter.

Recipients:

There can be little doubt that this work was directed to Christians of a Hebrew background. Where they lived and what their condition was is not readily evident. It is interesting to note that the main theological argument centres on the tabernacle and not the temple. Since the latter was more closely linked to the Jewish nationalistic hopes of Palestine, it seems improbable that the readers were from that area. Hebrew Christians of the dispersion were probably intended.

The purpose of the writing is to affirm Jesus as supreme over Judaism and the ultimate culmination and therefore fulfilment of the covenantal promises of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah and the realisation of all the hopes and dreams of Israel and not only Israel but the whole world.

Contents:**Chapter 1 +2**

- 1:1-3 Jesus is superior to the prophets
 1:4 - 2:18 He is also superior to the angels...

Chapter 3 +4

- 3:1 - 4:13 ...and to Moses and Aaron
 4:14-16 Cling to Christ for the help he alone can give.

Chapter 5-10

- 5:1 - 7:28 The priesthood of Christ is superior to the Aaronic order, being patterned upon that of Melchizedek (eternal existence).
 8:1-13 This priesthood of Jesus is exercised under a new covenant
 9:1-10 in a new, heavenly sanctuary
 9:11-14 in terms of a new and better ministry
 9:15-28 which offers an eternal inheritance
 10:1-18 based on the ultimate sacrifice of final efficacy.

Chapter 11-13

10:19 – 13:25 practical implications:

- press on with renewed faith;
- don't despise divine discipline;
- produce fruits of peace and sanctification;
- maintain the virtues of separation and steadfast obedience.

Characteristics:

1. It has a **high literary quality**: careful construction, elegant diction (even in translation this is obvious).
2. It is **saturated in Old Testament references**, not merely as confirmation of propositions (inductive), but as the exegetical groundwork (deductive).
3. The **Old Testament cultus** (the formal religion of the Old Testament, centred on the tabernacle and the Temple i.e. the ceremonial worship of Israel) is used as starkly contrasting background for the achievements and

pre-eminence of Christ. The tabernacle cultus is referred to, more than the temple.

4. The finality and validity of the new covenant order is supported by the fact that even in the Old Testament **there was change and renewal in the old order**. It was pronounced as obsolete by the later prophets, E. G. Jeremiah 31.
5. There **is a rich and varied Christology**. More than twenty titles are used for Christ; his office as priest-king is stressed, and his deity-humanity highlighted.
6. There are five warnings included in the work:
 - do not neglect salvation (2:1-4)
 - do not harden your hearts (3:7-4:13)
 - do not backslide (5:11-6:20)
 - do not sin again, wilfully (10:26-39)
 - do not forget God's ability to punish evil (12:15-29)
7. Practical teaching is centred on three elements:
 - draw near in worship and confidence;
 - go on to perfection in obedience to a living God;
 - go forth in fellowship with the rejected Christ.

Conclusion

Hebrews shows us that the Bible is not a collection of unrelated stories, but is rather one unified story—the story of redemption through Jesus Christ. Simply put, the book of Hebrews helps us unlock the glorious tapestry of God's progressive revelation. Hebrews helps us unfold the mystery of seeing Jesus Christ throughout the Old Testament. The unfolding storyline of the Bible is that the eternal kingdom of God is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, because it's rooted in Jesus Christ, who holds all things together.

Memory Verse

Hebrews 1:1-2

“Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. ² And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe”.