

MASTERING THE ENGLISH BIBLE

General Epistles



DAVID W. CLOUD

Mastering the English Bible: General Epistles

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Sample

Introduction to *Mastering the English Bible*

Mastering the English Bible is a comprehensive survey of the Old and New Testaments, covering the Bible's full history and every book of the Bible.

It consists of the following 11 segments:

- Old Testament History Genesis to the Silent Years
- Old Testament Job to Psalms
- Old Testament Proverbs
- Old Testament Prophetic Books
- The Gospels
- Acts
- Romans to Corinthians
- Galatians to Thessalonians
- Pastoral Epistles
- General Epistles
- Revelation

Mastering the English Bible is for beginning Bible students as well as for advanced ones. It is for youngsters (teens and above) and oldsters. In fact, the Bible pictures can be used for children. It is for individuals, homes, and churches. It is for preachers, both for those formally educated and informally.

Mastering the English Bible is nearly a complete Bible college curriculum in one course. The aim is to educate the student in **Bible history**, **Bible times** (e.g., Egypt, ancient Babylon, the Hittites, Assyria, neo-Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome), **Bible interpretation** (e.g., context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, defining words, paying attention to details, understanding repetition, interpreting metaphoric language), **Bible doctrine**, **theological terms**, **Bible geography**, **Bible typology** (e.g., the Passover, the Tabernacle, the Levitical Priesthood, the Levitical offerings), **Bible culture**, **Bible biography**, **Bible archaeology**, and **Bible prophecy**, and to teach the fundamentals of the law of Moses, the Gospel, Israel, and the Church. The course aims to give the student a broad comprehension of the Bible as a whole and how that each part fits into the whole.

Mastering the English Bible is very practical. There are extensive lessons on prayer, Christian growth, spiritual warfare, the husband-wife relationship, child training, evangelism, church planting, pastors, deacons, church discipline, the woman's ministry, youth discipleship, the church as a body, spiritual gifts, congregational singing, and much more.

Mastering the English Bible is accompanied by the *Way of Life Pictorial Bible*, which is an extensive series of multimedia PowerPoints packed with 7,500 detailed maps, historical backgrounds, treasures from archaeology, Bible pictures, reconstructive drawings of ancient places, charts, video clips, and other visual aids. Many of these were captured by the author in the best archaeological museums in America and abroad, plus research trips to Israel, Greece, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Europe, and England.

Mastering the English Bible is the textbook, and *The Pictorial Bible* is the multi-media supplement. Both are an essential part of the course.

Mastering the English Bible is more than a Bible course. It is a philosophy that a true New Testament church is a church in which every member is a serious, lifelong Bible student. If this is not the case, the church cannot possibly be what God wants it to be. It cannot even have the congregational singing that God requires. Consider Colossians 3:16, “**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” This is a description of a true New Testament church. It is a church in which the Word of God is dwelling in the members richly, not slightly, dwelling in all wisdom, meaning that the Word of God is getting down into the daily lives and producing practical wisdom for godly Christian living.

To be a serious, lifelong Bible student is necessary to know God (the greatest benefit), to know God’s will, to be prepared for God’s will (priest, ambassador, teacher, soldier, builder of the church, minister of spiritual gifts, and builder of the home); to make wise decisions; to be victorious in spiritual warfare; and to grow in Christ. Philip Henry, father of the Bible commentator Matthew Henry, observed, “All grace grows as love to the word of God grows.”

The goal is that this course will be the foundation for a whole life of Bible study. The student must learn how to carve out time from his schedule so that he makes daily Bible study a habit; he must learn how to *read* the Bible and how to *study* the Bible; he must learn how to apply rules of interpretation and how to use Bible study tools and how to pursue Bible study projects. These things are taught in the Way of Life course *The Effectual Bible Student*.

https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/books/effectual_bible_student.php. This is a basic course. The advanced course is *Understanding the Bible for Yourself*, also available from Way of Life Literature.

Mastering the English Bible is a product of 49 years of serious Bible study and teaching. The author has a passion to help God’s people become effectual Bible students, beginning at the youngest age possible. The church and the home are to work in harmony toward this objective.

Mastering the English Bible also features a syllabus, review questions, tests, test scores, and other teaching tools. These are available to those who purchase the textbooks and register online.

The course syllabus is very important. It explains the course objectives, the requirements, and the student projects, and it gives a weekly timeline of what the student should accomplish and when to take the tests. It is a class schedule that can be used by teachers or by private students. For the larger courses, there are two ‘paces,’ one shorter and one longer.

No shortcut to learning the Bible

- It requires commitment, sacrifice, labor, persistence, and holiness.
- Proverbs 2 likens the pursuit of spiritual wisdom to searching for silver. “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Pr. 2:3-6).
- The effectual student has to carve out time from his daily schedule, learn how to study the Bible, obtain the necessary tools, and work at it day by day for his entire life.

General Epistles Introduction

1. The General Epistles are composed of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude. They are called the General Epistles because they are not addressed to a particular church or group of churches.
2. They have been called the “Hebrew Christian Epistles” but actually only two of them are addressed to Jewish believers. These are James and 1 Peter.
3. They are also called “Catholic Epistles” in the sense that they are of universal application.
4. In the ancient New Testament Greek manuscripts, the General Epistles are commonly grouped together and in ancient versions they are placed between the book of Acts and the book of Revelation. For example, in the Waldensian Romaunt New Testament, the order of books was as follows: The Four Gospels, Paul’s Epistles (Romans to Hebrews), Acts, the General Epistles (James to Jude), and Revelation. (We have examined two of the seven extant Waldensian New Testaments, the one at the Cambridge University Library and the one at Trinity College, Dublin.)
5. We are including Hebrews in this course on General Epistles.

Hebrews

Introduction

Hebrews' Human Author

We are convinced that the apostle Paul is the author of Hebrews, though it is equally true that “the value of no New Testament writing depends on who wrote it” (W. Graham Scroggie).

1. Following are some of the reasons why we believe that Paul wrote the epistle to Hebrews:

The book was attributed to Paul by many ancient writers, beginning only a few decades after the apostles died. “By about AD 150 Pantaenus, the then leading teacher at Alexandria, was referring to it as a generally accredited epistle of Paul--which means that in only seventy years after Paul's death it was generally accepted as his! The point is not merely that Pantaenus himself believed it to be Pauline, but that at so early a date it was *generally* viewed as such” (J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, p. 275). Adam Clarke lists roughly 80 men, councils, and groups between the 2nd and the 11th centuries that believed Paul wrote the book of Hebrews.

A chief evidence that Paul is the author of Hebrews is the reference to Timothy in Heb. 13:23. Timothy was selected by Paul when he was a young man (Ac. 16:1-3) and continued to be his “right hand man” throughout his life. Compare 2 Co. 1:1; Php. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Th. 3:2; Phm. 1:1.

Another evidence is the similarity between things in this epistle and those in Paul's known writings.

- See, for example, the phrase “God of peace” (Heb. 13:20) and compare Ro. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Th. 5:23; 2 Co. 13:11.

- See also the phrase “salute all” (Heb. 13:24) and compare 1 Co. 16:19-21; 2 Co. 13:13; Php. 4:21-22.

- See also “grace be with you all” (Heb. 13:25). This was Paul's salutation. Compare Ro. 16:24; 1 Co. 16:23-24; 2 Co. 13:14; Ga. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Php. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Th. 5:28; 2 Th. 3:17-18; 1 Ti. 6:21; 2 Ti. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Phm. 25.

Another evidence that Paul wrote Hebrews is the location from which the epistle was written (Heb. 13:24). “The writer, therefore, was then in Italy, whither we know Paul was sent a prisoner, and where he resided two years, Acts 28:30; where also he wrote several epistles still remaining” (Adam Clarke).

Another evidence that Paul wrote Hebrews is Peter's statement in 2 Pe. 3:15.

- Peter says that Paul had written to the same people he was addressing, which were the Jews who were scattered abroad. Compare 1 Pe. 1:1 and 2 Pe. 3:1.

- Peter also mentions the difficult things that Paul had written. It appears that Peter is referring specifically to the book of Hebrews.

Another evidence that Paul wrote Hebrews is its apostolic tone. “One thing which impresses itself on my own mind all the way through Hebrews is the tone of apostolic teaching-authority. ... It does not merely word the thinking of a disciple; it delivers the *firm dicta* of an

apostle. ... But if it was written by an apostle, then, as Delitzsch asks: ‘Who could have been its author but Paul?’” (J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, p. 277).

2. Isn't the writing style of Hebrews different from that of Paul's known epistles?

Answer: Much has been made of this point by some Bible teachers, but a man's writing style can change dramatically according to the purpose and subject. There is a vast difference, for example, between the style of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, though we know that the same man was the author of both books.

For an excellent overview of this matter and effective replies to those who deny Paul's authorship see B.H. Carroll's *Interpretation of the English Bible*, which is available in an electronic edition for *SwordSearcher*, for *Bible Analyzer*, and for *Ages Software*, www.ageslibrary.com.

Its Recipients

The book of Hebrews is written to the Jewish believers in Judea and those that were scattered abroad. In Hebrews 10:32-34, the writer describes the persecution these believers had endured from the beginning. Compare Acts 8:1-3; 11:19.

The Time of Its Writing

We can only be sure that Hebrews was written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, because the temple was still in operation when Hebrews was written (Heb. 8:4; 13:10).

Its Connection with the Rest of the Bible

The Bible is one Book that contains 66 individual books. It was conceived by God in heaven (Ps. 119:89) before it was delivered to the holy prophets (2 Pe. 1:21). The Bible is a complete Revelation and must be studied as a whole. To understand Hebrews, it is necessary to be familiar with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, the Psalms, the Gospels, and Paul's Epistles. The student of Hebrews must be familiar with Abraham, Melchizedek, Judah, Levi, Moses, the law of Moses, the tabernacle, the Levitical sacrifices and priesthood, angels, the wilderness wandering, the Holy Spirit, Christ's ascension, and many other things.

This is why we say that every believer should get the equivalent of a Bible School education, and every church should provide this level of education. A Bible Institute course of study is *the beginning point* to be able to understand the Bible and study it effectively, to be the teacher that God says each believer should be (Heb. 5:12-14), and to find God's will in this present life. Way of Life Literature publishes a Bible College curriculum.

The Theme

One of the most important factors in understanding any book of the Bible is to identify its theme and purpose.

Hebrews has a two-fold theme

1. Hebrews is a warning to Jews who had professed faith in Jesus as Christ to continue in that faith and thereby show that they were genuinely saved.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*” (Heb. 2:1-3).

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:12-14).

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb. 4:1).

“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11).

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. 6:11).

“Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:38).

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15).

The Jews who professed faith in Jesus as Christ were in danger of turning back to Judaism because of persecution (Heb. 10:32-35) and the reproach of their fellow Jews (Heb. 13:13). Other Scriptures warn about the danger of trials and persecution. See Lu. 8:13; Ac. 14:22; 2 Ti. 2:12; Jas. 1:2-8; 1 Pe. 4:12. When the evangelist Hyman Appelman (1902-1983) was converted to faith in Jesus at age 23, his Jewish family put massive pressure upon him. His fiancé broke off their engagement. When he refused his father's pleas to return to his Jewish faith, his father said, “When your sides come together from hunger and you come crawling to my door, I will throw you a crust of bread as I would any other dog.” At one point, Appelman was so oppressed and discouraged that he considered suicide.

2. Toward this end, Christ is shown to be superior to all things that Jews put their faith in: the prophets (Heb. 1:1-3), angels (Heb. 1:4 - 2:18), Moses (Heb. 3:1 - 4:13), and the Mosaic law and the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 4:14 - 8:5). Christ is presented as better than all of these things.

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides or Rambam), who is called the greatest Jewish rabbi, taught that Moses is the greatest man and that none will ever excel him. Following is a summary of Maimonides' teaching: “We should believe that he is father of all the prophets who preceded him and will come after him. All of them are beneath him in rank. He is God's chosen (*safw* 'l-Allah) from the entire human species, who apprehended of the Exalted more than any other human apprehended or will apprehend” (Joel Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*). In his *Thirteen Fundamental Principles*, Maimonides taught that “the law of Moses will not be abrogated, and no other law from God will come, nothing will be added to it or detracted from it either in its text or in its interpretation.”

Hebrews key verse is 8:6. “*But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.*”

The word “**better**” is used 13 times in Hebrews. Christ is better than angels (Heb. 1:4), offers a better hope (Heb. 7:19), has a better testament (Heb. 7:22), a better covenant (Heb. 8:6), better promises (Heb. 8:6), better sacrifices (Heb. 9:23), and blood that speaks better things (Heb. 12:24). The believer has a better substance in heaven (Heb. 10:34), a better country (Heb. 11:16), and a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35). Christ is also said to be “more excellent” (Heb. 1:4, 8:6; 11:4), “more perfect” (Heb. 9:11), and “greater” (Heb. 9:11).

Thus, in Hebrews “we see Jesus” (Heb. 2:9) in a special way. It is an expansion on what God said on the Mount of Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mt. 17:5; Mr. 9:7; Lu. 9:35). Hebrews opens the veil and invites us to gaze upon the throne in the holy of holies on high in a unique way.

Some of the names and titles of Christ in the book of Hebrews:

Son (1:2)
 Heir of all things (1:2)
 Firstbegotten (1:6)
 God (1:8)
 Lord (1:10)
 Jesus (2:9)
 Captain of our salvation (2:10)
 Merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17)
 Apostle (3:1)
 Christ Jesus (3:1)
 Son of God (4:14)
 Author of eternal salvation (5:9)
 Forerunner (6:20)
 Surety of a better testament (7:22)
 Intercessor (7:25)
 Mediator of a better covenant (8:6)
 Author and Finisher of our faith (12:2)
 Great Shepherd of the sheep (13:20)

Hebrews and Eternal Security

What about the passages in Hebrews that have been used to teach that the believer can lose his salvation?

1. We know that the writer of Hebrews is not teaching that true believers can lose their salvation, because he plainly states that continuing in and persevering in faith is the EVIDENCE OF one’s salvation rather than the WAY OF salvation.

Consider the following verses very carefully:

Hebrews 3:14 -- *“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.”*

This verse says those who hold their confidence to the end ARE made partakers of Christ. The holding is *the evidence* rather than *the means* of one’s salvation. Being a partaker of Christ is a

Outline of Hebrews

A Better Deliverer--Jesus (Hebrews 1:1 - 5:10)

Christ is better than angels (Heb. 1:4 - 2:18)

Christ is better than Moses (Heb. 3:1 - 4:13)

Christ is better than Aaron (Heb. 4:14 - 5:10)

Parenthetical Exhortations (Heb. 5:11 - 6:20)

A Better Priesthood--Melchisedec (Heb. 7:1-28)

A Better Covenant --Calvary (Hebrews 8:1-13)

A Better Sanctuary--A Heavenly One (Hebrews 9:11-28)

A Better Sacrifice--An Eternal One (Hebrews 10:1-18)

Hebrews 10:19-39 is an exhortation that concludes this section

A Better Principle--Faith (Hebrews 11:1-40)

Concluding Exhortations (Heb. 12:1 - 13:19)

1. Let us run the race (Heb. 12:1-4).

2. Let us endure chastening (Heb. 12:5-13).

3. Let us follow peace and holiness (Heb. 12:14).

4. Let us beware of failing of the grace of God, of bitterness, of fornication, and of profanity (Heb. 12:15-17).

5. Let us remember that we are not under the old covenant but the new (Heb. 12:18-24).

6. Let us not refuse the voice that speaketh from heaven (Heb. 12:25-29).

7. Let us practice hospitality and brotherly love (Heb. 13:1-3).

8. Let us honor marriage and beware of adultery and fornication (Heb. 13:4).

9. Let us beware of covetousness (Heb. 13:5-6).

10. Let us have a right relationship with the church leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24).

11. Let us know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever (Heb. 13:8).

12. Let us avoid strange doctrines (Heb. 13:9).

13. Let us go forth unto Jesus without the camp (Heb. 13:10-14).

14. Let us offer acceptable sacrifices to God (Heb. 13:15-16).

15. Let us pray (Heb. 13:18-19).

The Benediction (Hebrews 13:20-25)

A Better Deliverer (Hebrews 1:1 - 5:10)

This opening section of Hebrews shows, in a most dramatic manner, that Jesus is greater than the angels, Moses, and Aaron the first high priest of the Levitical system. These were the things that the Hebrews gloried in, and it was to these that professing Jews were tempted to return because of the pressures of tribulation.

Jesus is greater than the angels because He is very God. He is greater than Moses inasmuch that He who built and owns the house is greater than he who merely served in it. He is greater than Aaron because He is the reality of which Aaron was merely the type.

This section is interspersed with powerful exhortations and warnings about apostasy.

Introduction (Heb. 1:1-4)

These first four verses form an introduction to the book of Hebrews. It is one long sentence. The major themes are God, God's speaking or God's revelation, and God's Son. The Son is the major theme of the entire book and we will consider Him separately. Here we will consider lessons on God and on God's revelation.

1. The first thing we see in Hebrews is God (Heb. 1:1).

"God" and "Lord" are mentioned 89 times in Hebrews, more than in any other New Testament epistle.

Note some of the great lessons about God in this brief passage:

God exists

- The Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. He is introduced in the first verse of the Bible, and throughout the Bible His existence is taken for granted. "There are courses in seminaries today that try to build up some philosophic system by which the existence of God can be proven. I have been through courses like that, and I know what I'm talking about when I say it is a great waste of time. There is something wrong with you if you can't walk out and look up at the mountains, or go down to the seashore and look at the sea, or look up into the heavens, and recognize that there is a Creator. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork' (Ps. 19:1). It is the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God (see Ps. 14:1)" (J. Vernon McGee).

God speaks (Heb. 1:1-2).

- God wants to reveal Himself to His creation, and He has revealed Himself. God has spoken!
- God is knowable. He can be known because He has revealed Himself and He has made man in His image so that man can understand God's revelation.
- God is knowable by human language. God made man's language, and the first purpose of human language is that man might know God. Before Adam had a wife, he heard God's Word and spoke to God. The Scripture is written in human language and it is capable of communicating "the deep things of God" (1 Co. 2:10-13).
- God can be known only by His revelation. Man cannot know the invisible, infinite God by his own intellect, observation, and research. To attempt to do so is the height of arrogance and folly.
- God speaks fully. He has not shown a mere few things about Himself. He has given a full revelation in the Scripture and in His Son. The Bible is a revelation of "the mind of Christ" (1 Co. 2:16). In Christ, God has revealed "the express image of his person."

God has a Son (Heb. 1:2).

- We will deal with this further in the study on Christ is better than the angels.

God is the Creator of all things (Heb. 1:2).

- The word "worlds" is the Greek *aion* or *eon*, which refers both to the physical world and to the age or time in which God is working out His purposes in the world. *Aion* is often translated "world," but it is also translated "age" (Eph. 2:7; Col. 1:26) and "for ever" (most often referring to God and Christ) (Mt. 6:13; Joh. 12:34; 14:16; Ro. 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; 2 Co. 11:31; Ga. 1:5; Php. 4:20; 1 Ti. 1:17; 2 Ti. 4:18; Heb. 1:8; 5:6; 7:24; 13:8; 1 Pe. 5:11; 2 Pe. 3:18; Jude 1:25; Re. 1:6, 18; 4:9, 10; 5:14; 7:12; 10:6; 15:7). The eternal *aions* also refer to the Word of God. In 1 Pe. 1:23, 25, we are told that the Word of God "liveth and abideth for ever" and "endureth for ever." This is *eis aion*, or into the ages. The eternal torment of

the unsaved is also said to be *eis aion aion* (Re. 14:11; 20:10), into the ages of ages, a most fearful concept. In the following verses, *aion* seems to have the dual meaning of world (physical) and of age (Lu. 1:70; 16:8; 20:34; Ac. 15:18; 1 Co. 2:7-8; 3:18; Eph. 2:2; Ga. 1:4; Eph. 1:21; 3:9; 1 Ti. 6:17; 2 Ti. 4:10; Tit. 2:12). God's ultimate goal of the *aions* is described in Ephesians 1:10, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." The word "time" here is the same concept as "age." Note in Ephesians 1:10 that there are "times," plural. There are past *aions* (Col. 1:26), the present *aion*, and *aions* to come (Eph. 1:21; 2:7; Heb. 6:5). In Eph. 3:21, "world without end" is *aion aion*. In brief, *aion* refers both to the physical universe and to the time universe. *Aion* refers to worlds of matter and to the worlds of time. The physical universe is the realm or sphere in which God's plan for the *aions* take place. The present heaven and earth is the sphere of the past and present ages, while the new heaven and new earth will be the sphere of the ages to come. Christ is maker of the worlds. He is the Creator of all things visible and invisible, present and future. Christ is also called King of the *aions* (1 Ti. 1:17). The "King eternal" is the King *aion*. And the verse ends with honor and glory to this King "for ever and ever," which is *eis aion aion*, literally "into ages ages." This describes *aions* and *aions* of God's eternal purposes and activities, with Christ ruling as King over them.

- This means that God is in control of all things and can be explicitly trusted with everything in our lives. When David said, "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. 31:15), he was saying that everything pertaining to himself is in God's hand. All times are in God's hand. Every era of time and every day and every tiny detail of every era is under God's watchcare and control.

God appoints (Heb. 1:2).

- God has an eternal plan (Eph. 3:11) and every detail of that plan is carried out under His appointment. He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

- He appoints all authority. He "changes the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Da. 2:21). "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:6-7). "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Ro. 13:1).

- God appoints individuals. He forms every man in the womb (Ps. 139). This means that God is in control of my appearance, my abilities; He is in control of the family into which I was born, in what order I was born, etc.

- He appoints the nations, their times, and their boundaries (Ac. 17:26).

- He appoints every gift and calling in the church. "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Co. 12:11).

God is glorious (Heb. 1:3).

- God's glory is His character: His omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, righteousness, justice, love, mercy, grace, kindness, gentleness, patience. "Brightness" is the shining out, like the brightness of the sun. All of God's glorious character is made bright or revealed in Christ.

God is a Person ("express image of his person," Heb. 1:3).

- God is not an impersonal intelligence or power. God thinks, wills, speaks, acts. Man is a person with an individual personality because he is made in God's image.

James

Introduction to James

1. The author of the epistle

The Greek is *Iákobos*, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Jaaqob*, who was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 49). The English equivalent is Jacob, James, or Jake.

James was the half-brother of Jesus (Mr. 6:3).

James was a leader in the church at Jerusalem (Ac. 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Ga. 2:1, 9, 10, 12). It appears that James was highly respected in the church and was considered the senior pastor-elder. In the council in Acts 15, after the others had spoken, James assumed a position like that of a moderator or senior elder. He summarized what had been said, showed that it was in accordance with Scripture, and then gave his opinion as to what should be done. The other elders and apostles agreed and the matter was thus settled (Ac. 15:13-22).

According to Josephus, James was martyred in AD 62. He was brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin by Ananus (Ananias) the high priest at Jerusalem, condemned as a breaker of the law of Moses, and stoned to death.

2. The date and recipients of the epistle

It is addressed “*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*” (Jas. 1:1). This refers to Jewish believers in Christ who were scattered because of persecution (Ac. 8:1).

The epistle has a strong Jewish flavor, fitting for the early period in church history when the center of Christianity was still at Jerusalem where James was a leader.

James is possibly the first of the New Testament epistles. It appears to have been written before Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch to establish Gentile churches and before Paul’s epistles.

For many years the churches were composed almost entirely of converted Jews and Gentile Jewish proselytes. The mother church at Jerusalem was a Jewish church. The 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:41), and the multitudes that were added to the Jerusalem church later, were Jews (Ac. 5:14; 6:7). James is the only New Testament epistle that uses the Greek word *sunagogé* (synagogue) (Jas. 2:2).

Estimated Timeline of the Book of Acts

- 33 Pentecost (Acts 2)
- 35 Saul’s Conversion (Acts 8-9)
- 41 Cornelius’s Conversion (Acts 10)
- 44 Martyrdom of James, John’s brother (Acts 12)
- 45 Paul & Barnabas sent on first missionary journey (Ac. 13-14)
- 51 Jerusalem conference on justification by grace alone (Acts 15)
- 53 Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16-18)
- 58 Paul’s third missionary journey (Acts 18-21)

- 60 Paul's arrest and incarceration at Caesarea Maritima (Acts 22-26)
 62 Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27-28)

3. The theme of the epistle

The main theme of James' epistle is to bring individual believers and the churches into spiritual maturity. The key word is "perfect," which appears six times (Jas. 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). It means mature, complete. The word is defined in James 1:4, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." We see the same definition in 2 Timothy 3:17, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." James is concerned that those who profess Christ go on into spiritual maturity, and the epistle contains many lessons on how this can be accomplished.

The epistle was written because of the low spiritual condition of the Jewish churches of that day. There was unholiness, worldliness, respect of persons, bragging, self-seeking, cursing, fainting under persecution. James is calling God's people to spiritual growth and maturity, to holiness and separation. He is writing to prepare them for the imminent return of Christ.

The following major teachings of the epistle are designed to fulfill the overall theme of bringing the brethren to maturity:

The character of God. James wants the believers to turn their attention to God, to be mindful of Him in their daily lives, to know His character, to draw nigh to Him, to submit to Him, to humble themselves before Him, to be God's friend like Abraham. The epistle is absolutely permeated with teaching about God. We are taught that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are two and yet one, referring to the Trinity (Jas. 1:1); God "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (Jas. 1:5); God requires unwavering faith (Jas. 1:6-7); God has promised a crown of life to them that love him (Jas. 1:12); God cannot be tempted with evil and does not tempt men with evil (Jas. 1:13); God is the author of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17); God is the Father (Jas. 1:17, 27; 3:9); God is the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17); with God is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17); God begets believers by His Word (Jas. 1:18); God sees and is concerned with what men do (Jas. 1:27); God is the judge of every man (Jas. 2:12); there is one God (Jas. 2:19); Abraham was God's friend, which teaches us that God will have men as His friends through redemption (Jas. 2:23); God imparts the fruit of righteousness (Jas. 3:17-18); God is at enmity with the world (Jas. 4:4); God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble (Jas. 4:6); God draws nigh to those who draw nigh to Him (Jas. 4:8); God will lift up those who humble themselves before Him (Jas. 4:10); God is the one lawgiver (Jas. 4:12); God is the one who is able to save and to destroy (Jas. 4:12); God is in control of man's affairs (Jas. 4:15); God is the Lord of Sabaoth who will judge sinners (Jas. 5:4); God is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (Jas. 5:11); God hears and answers the prayer of faith (Jas. 5:15-18).

True faith is evidenced by good works (Jas. 2:14-26). Faith, so-called, that doesn't produce works is not saving faith. This theme is repeated multiple times in James. In chapter one, we learn that those who merely hear the Word of God and do not obey it, and those who seem to be religious but do not live accordingly, are deceived (Jas. 1:22, 26-27). On the authority of this teaching, we can say that multitudes of professing Christians today are deceived. This theme is seen in chapter 3 where James says the man who has true wisdom will "shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (Jas. 3:13). This theme is seen in the reminders that the believer has a law to live by. We are saved by grace without the law but we are saved to keep the

1 Peter

Introduction to 1 Peter

The Author

The author is the apostle Peter (1 Pe. 1:1).

Peter has a special place in God's plan. He is mentioned more than 230 times in Scripture, and many details of his life are given. He was the first disciple called of Christ, first in the list of apostles (Mt. 4:18-19; 10:2), and he held a special place in Christ's earthly ministry. Jesus made Peter's home His base of operation in Galilee. Peter is the only disciple who walked on water (Mt. 14:28-31) and caught a fish with a coin in its mouth (Mt. 17:27). Only Peter and two others witnessed Jesus' transformation on the mountain (Mt. 17:1) and His agony in Gethsemane (Mr. 14:33-34). Peter was one of the two disciples who prepared the Last Supper (Lu. 22:8). Peter was the preacher on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 were saved. Peter ministered great healings (Ac. 5:15; Ac. 9:32-35) and raised Dorcas from the dead (Ac. 9:36-43). He was the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Ac. 10-11).

His given name was Simon Peter (Joh. 1:40). *Simon* means "hearing." *Peter* (Greek *pétros*) means "a stone," such as a stone that can be thrown. It is the masculine of the feminine *petra*, which is a massive rock (Mr. 15:46). He was called *Cephas* by Christ (Joh. 1:42), which is Syriac or Aramaic for stone. Peter is called *Cephas* six times (Joh. 1:42; 1 Co. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Ga. 2:9).

Peter's family operated a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee, based in Capernaum. His father's name is Jona (Joh. 1:42) and his brother is Andrew (Joh. 1:40). James and John were partners with Peter (Lu. 5:10).

We are informed of Peter's call (Mr. 1:16-18; Lu. 5:1-11), his wife and mother-in-law (Mr. 1:29-30), his walk on the water (Mt. 14:28-30), his experience in witnessing the healing of the synagogue ruler's daughter (Mr. 5:36-43), his testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16) and that "we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (Joh. 6:69), his rebuke of Jesus (Mt. 16:22), his rebuke by Jesus (Mt. 16:23), his experience on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-4), his fishing for a coin (Mt. 17:24-27), his boast that he will never deny Jesus (Mt. 26:33-35), his question to Jesus about the end of the age (Mr. 13:3-4), his preparation for the Last Supper (Lu. 22:8), his experience in having his feet washed by Jesus (Joh. 13:4-12), his question at the Supper as to who would deny Jesus (Joh. 13:21-26), his experience in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37), his attack on the high priest's servant (Joh. 18:10-11), his denial of Jesus (Lu. 22:54-62), his experience at the empty tomb (Joh. 20:1-10), his decision to return to fishing (Joh. 21:2-3), his restoration by Christ and the call to feed the sheep (Joh. 21:4-24), his preaching on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:14-38), his healing of the lame man in the temple (Ac. 3:1-14), his witness to the high priest and elders (Ac. 4:1-13), his leadership in the first church (Ac. 5:3-9; 15:7), his healings (Ac. 5:15; Ac. 9:32-35), his raising of Dorcas (Ac. 9:36-43), his preaching to Cornelius (Ac. 10-11), his imprisonment (Ac. 12:3-19), his meeting with Paul (Ga. 1:18-19), and his hypocrisy at Antioch (Ga. 2:11-14).

We see in Peter's epistles the great transformation of this man, which is the fruit of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. He was a rough and tumble fisherman, a Jew who was

comfortable in the Galilee of the Gentiles. In his natural self, he was unwise, spiritually dense, impatient, impulsive, selfish, unscholarly, shortsighted, “this-world centered.” Christ transformed him by regeneration, personal discipling, teaching, reproof, and chastening, and after Pentecost, by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

Peter went through the hard experience of denying Christ in order to be humbled and transformed spiritually for the large ministry to which God had called him (Lu. 22:32).

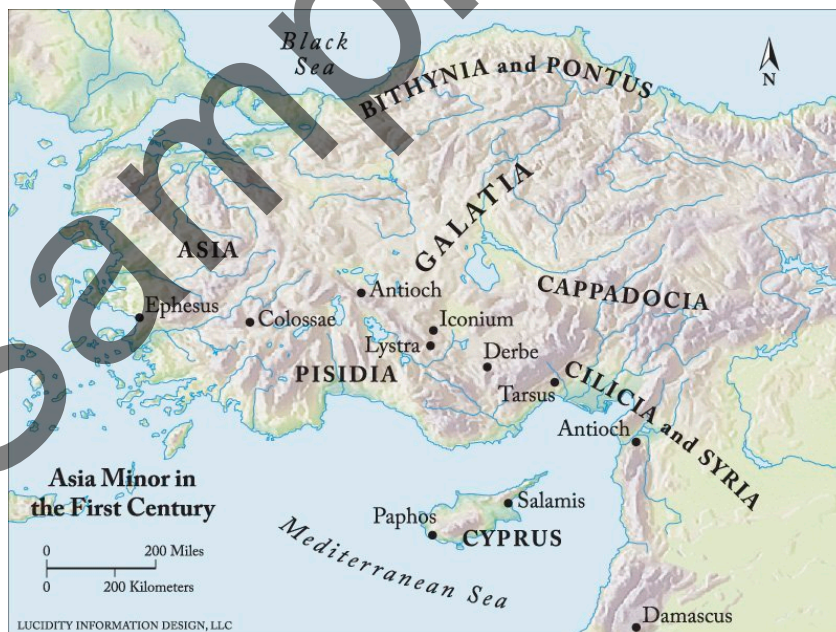
Peter is the apostle of the Jews (Ga. 2:7-8). God chose a humble fisherman who was “unlearned” (Ac. 4:13), meaning that he didn’t have an impressive education, to head up the apostleship to the Jewish converts. Any Jew who comes to God must come through Jesus of Nazareth and must accept the apostleship of the fisherman Peter!

The Addressees

Peter’s epistle is address to the saints scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pe. 1:1-2). Jews from these regions were saved on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:9). And these were regions that were evangelized by Paul and his missionary teams (Ac. 16:6; 18:23; 19:10).

Unlike James, Peter is not writing only to Jews. See 1 Pe. 2:10; 4:3-4. James probably wrote the first New Testament epistle before Paul began his ministry. Peter, though, plainly states that he is writing after Paul had written his epistles (2 Pe. 3:15-16).

Though Peter is not writing to any particular church, he has the church in mind, as we see from his exhortation to the elders in 1 Peter 5:1-4. All of the General Epistles have the New Testament assembly in view. See also James 5:14; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 3 John 1:7-12. Paul has told us that the New Testament assembly is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, and has given the pattern that the saints are to be organized into New Testament assemblies with pastors and deacons. See 1 Ti. 3:15; Tit. 1:5; Ac. 14:23.



The Theme

The theme of 1 Peter is the believer’s position as the elect of God and his life as a pilgrim in this present world.

The believer's position is described in 1 Pe. 1:2-4 and 2:5-10. We are elect (1:2), born again to a living hope (1:3), possess an eternal inheritance (1:4), living stones in a spiritual house (2:5), a holy priesthood (2:5), a royal priesthood (2:9), a holy nation (2:9), a peculiar people (2:9).

The believer's life as a pilgrim in this present world is developed through the entire epistle. Peter describes the redeemed as a holy, pilgrim people who, in this present world, are to show forth God's praises (1 Pe. 2:9-11). All of the instruction in the epistle is related to this theme. In a nutshell, the redeemed pilgrims show forth God's praises by their holy and obedient lives. This is how they shine as lights in a dark world. See 1 Pe. 1:14-16; 2:12; 3:16. It is by a pilgrim lifestyle that the believer is a light in this dark world. It is not by blending in that we are lights; it is by standing out. It is by living according to the precepts of heaven rather than by the ways of this world. Compare Eph. 5:7-13.

The Outline of 1 Peter (for this edition for *Mastering the English Bible*)

The pilgrim's election (1 Pe. 1:2-5)

The pilgrim's trial of faith (1 Pe. 1:6-9)

The pilgrim's relationship with the prophets (1 Pe. 1:10-12)

The pilgrim's call to holiness (1 Pe. 1:13-17)

The pilgrim's redemption (1 Pe. 1:18-21)

The pilgrim's new birth (1 Pe. 1:22-25)

The pilgrim's call to growth (1 Pe. 2:1-3)

The pilgrim's spiritual house (1 Pe. 2:4-10)

The pilgrim's conversation among the Gentiles (1 Pe. 2:11-25)

The pilgrim's marital life (1 Pe. 3:1-7)

The pilgrim's separation (1 Pe. 4:1-6)

The pilgrim's expectation of Christ's return (1 Pe. 4:7)

The pilgrim's ministry to the brethren (1 Pe. 4:8-11)

The pilgrim's spiritual warfare (1 Pe. 5:7-11)

The Pilgrim's Election (1 Pe. 1:2-5)

"*Elect*" is *eklektos*, which is translated "chosen" in 1 Pe. 2:9 (as well as in Mt. 20:16; 22:14; Ro. 16:13; Re. 17:14). It is often used as a description of the saved ("the elect," Mt. 24:22, 24, 31; Lu. 18:7; Ro. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Ti. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; Re. 17:14).

Election is one of the most amazing revelations of Scripture. It should be an ever-increasing source of encouragement and delight for every born again child of God, but the issue is fraught with danger for those who are not content with exactly what the Bible says. Election is not something that the finite human mind can comprehend with any fullness, and there are a thousand questions that cannot be answered. God has told us everything He wants us to know for now, and what He has revealed, we have the capacity to understand. Beyond that, we must heed Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law."

2 Peter

Introduction to 2 Peter

The Author

See the Introduction to 1 Peter.

The Theme

The theme of 2 Peter is spiritual growth and protection in the midst of apostasy.

Peter is exercising the office of a shepherd to feed and protect Christ's sheep in obedience to the commission he was given after his fall (Joh. 21:15-17). Both teaching and warning are necessary, as we see in this epistle, and every pastor must exercise both of these essential ministries. In Colossians 1:28, Paul even puts "warning" before "teaching." Many pastors and people have written to me through the years to say that a "warning ministry" is not scriptural, but that is ridiculous. The New Testament epistles are filled with warnings, including the naming of the names of compromisers and false teachers (1 Ti. 1:19-20; 2 Ti. 2:16-17; 4:10, 14-15). We are commanded to mark false teachers, which refers to knowing who they are and plainly identifying them (Ro. 16:17). "Mark" is the Greek *skopéo*, which means "to spy out, look towards an object, to contemplate, give attention to" (*Complete Word Study Dictionary*). It is translated "take heed" (Lu. 11:35), "look at" (2 Co. 4:18), "consider" (Ga. 6:1). I don't have a "warning ministry"; I have a preaching ministry, but warning is very much a part of it, and the same should be true for every preacher.

Peter warns of the coming of false teachers and scoffers. This is the apostasy or falling away from the faith that is also described by Christ (Mt. 13:24-33), Paul (1 Ti. 4:1-3 and 2 Ti. 3-4), John (1 Jo. 2:18-27 and 4:1-6), and Jude (Jude 1:3-16).

The Outline of 2 Peter

Greeting (2 Pe. 1:1-2)

The Call to Spiritual Growth (2 Pe. 1:3-11)

The Call to Remembrance (2 Pe. 1:12-15)

The Sure Word of Prophecy (2 Pe. 1:16-21)

Warnings about False Teachers (2 Pe. 2:1-22)

Warnings about Last Days Scoffers (2 Pe. 3:1-9)

The Day of the Lord (2 Pe. 3:10-16)

Peter's Commendation of Paul (2 Pe. 3:15-16)

Peter's Concluding Words (2 Pe. 3:17-18)

Greeting (2 Peter 1:1-2)

For a study on this passage, see the *Way of Life Commentary Series, The General Epistles*.

The Call to Spiritual Growth (2 Peter 1:3-11)

The believer has everything in Christ, but he must pursue growth. All of the major factors of spiritual growth are found in this key passage.

Spiritual growth is the product of salvation (2 Pe. 1:3-4).

- To attempt to obey God and to grow spiritually apart from supernatural salvation is an exercise in vanity. Multitudes have tried this. They have become “Christians” by rite of baptism or an empty profession of faith, but they have not been born again, and they try to live the Christian life in an unregenerate condition. It leads either to shipwreck and abandonment of the Christian profession or to self-righteousness, but not to true godliness.
- Salvation is by “*his divine power*” (2 Pe. 1:3). Salvation is a divine miracle from beginning to end, every aspect. Everything is by His divine power: conviction, enlightenment, conversion, sanctification, preservation, and resurrection glorification. There is nothing in which man can glory. The same power that saves is the power for spiritual growth. The believer pursues growth, but he does it by God’s power and resources, not his own.
- Salvation is “*given unto us.*” This appears twice in verses 3 and 4. Salvation and everything about salvation is God’s free gift in Christ.
- Salvation includes “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Pe. 1:3). Nothing is lacking from God’s salvation. See 1 Co. 3:21-23; Eph. 1:3. Note that Peter says we have all things that pertain “*unto life.*” The life in Christ is eternal life (Joh. 3:16; 10:28), and it is life more abundantly (Joh. 10:10). And we have all things that pertain unto “*godliness.*” Godliness is the goal of salvation. The new life in Christ is godly life (Tit. 2:11-14).
- Salvation is “*through the knowledge of him*” (2 Pe. 1:3). Salvation is not religion; it is a personal relationship with God in Christ (Joh. 17:3). It is to *know Him* as Saviour, Lord, King, Father, High Priest, Elder Brother, Shepherd.
- Salvation is a divine call: “*that hath called us.*” Believers are “the called.” See Ro. 1:6; 8:28, 30; 9:24. The call is through the gospel (2 Th. 2:14).
- Salvation is “*to glory and virtue.*” The calling is to *glory*, which is the splendor and wealth of Christ’s eternal kingdom. It is the call to heavenly mansions and the New Jerusalem, the call to a joint-heir with Christ. But the calling is also to *virtue*, which is godliness and righteousness. “Virtue” is the Greek *areté* which is “being pleasing to God, moral excellency, goodness of action.” It refers to Christ’s pure moral character. The true grace of God does not call the sinner to be saved as sort of a ticket to heaven and leave him to continue living more or less as he pleases. The true grace of God is the call to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12).
- Salvation is by “*exceeding great and precious promises.*” These terms emphasize the great value of God’s promises in Christ. “Exceeding great” is *mégistos*, from *megas*, which was brought into the English language in the form of “mega.” “Precious” is *timios*, which means valuable, costly, as a precious stone (1 Co. 3:12; Re. 17:4) and as Christ’s precious blood (1 Pe. 1:19). The promises of God in Scripture are the most valuable thing on earth. When believed, they save the soul for eternity, lead the soul in God’s perfect will, comfort the soul in every situation through this trouble-filled earthly pilgrimage, and bring peace to the soul at the time of death. Great and precious, indeed!
- Salvation is to be “*partakers of the divine nature.*” The divine nature is the nature that is imparted to the believer by the Holy Spirit at salvation. It is to be born of the Spirit (Joh. 3:5-7; 1 Jo. 3:9; 5:18).

1 John

Introduction to 1 John

The Author

John is one of the three disciples (with Peter and Paul) whose lives are put before us prominently in the New Testament Scriptures.

John was the son of Zebedee, a fisherman in Galilee (Mt. 4:21). His mother's name is Salome (compare Mt. 27:56 and Mr. 15:40). She became an earnest follower of Jesus and was present at the cross (Mr. 15:40-41) and at the empty tomb (Mr. 16:1). Zebedee and Salome were of some means as they had hired servants (Mr. 1:20), Salome helped support Jesus (Mr. 15:40-41), and Salome brought expensive spices for Jesus' body (Mr. 16:1). Perhaps their high station explains John's acquaintance with the high priest (Joh. 18:15-16). (It is possible that Salome was the sister of Jesus' mother Mary. This depends on whether John 19:25 refers to three women or four. "It is not clear whether the sister of the mother of Jesus is Salome the mother of the sons of Zebedee or the wife of Clopas," *Robertson's Word Pictures*.)

John was a disciple of John the Baptist (Joh. 1:35-39), as were all of the apostles (Ac. 1:21-22), and he began to follow Jesus when John identified Him as the Lamb of God.

John wrote five of the New Testament books (the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John, and Revelation). He was chosen to write the weightiest of the four Gospels and to reveal the future from the day of the Lord to the New Heaven and the New Earth. Of all of the prophets, only John reveals the seven seals, the 144,000, the Two Witnesses, the global reign of the Antichrist, Mystery Babylon, the marriage supper of the Lamb, and the New Jerusalem.

John was particularly affectionate of Jesus. Five times he calls himself "the disciple that Jesus loved" (Joh. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). He lay on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper (Joh. 13:23). He was the only male disciple that is mentioned as witnessing the crucifixion, and there Jesus assigned Mary, His mother, to John's care (Joh. 19:26).

John had prominence among the twelve. "(1) He is one of the four first called to continuous service (Mt. 4:18; Mr. 1:16-20), and the same four constitute the first group in the four lists of the apostles (Mt. 10:2f; Mr. 3:16f; Lu. 6:41f; Ac. 1:13f). (2) He is one of the inner three specially honored by our Lord to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mr. 5:37; Lu. 8:51), to witness the transfiguration (Mt 17:2; Mr. 9:2; Lu. 9:28), and to witness his agony in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mr. 14:33). (3) He is associated with Peter, the leading apostle, in making ready the last passover (Lu. 22:8), in witnessing the examination of our Lord in the house of Annas (Joh. 18:16), in visiting the tomb of our Lord (Joh. 20:2-8), in the healing of the lame man at the door of the Temple and all the attendant circumstances (Ac. 3-4), in being sent by the other apostles to confer the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit on Philip's Samaritan converts (Ac. 8:14f), in being a reputed pillar in the Jerusalem church (Ga. 2:9). (4) He and his brother James are surnamed 'the sons of thunder' among the twelve (Mr. 3:17). Without any warrant commentators have made this surname a term of reproach by making it an anticipation of a much later event (Lu. 9:51) in which John is rebuked by our Lord. There is no relation between the giving of the surname and the event. As Simon was honored by the surname Peter, so James

and John are honored by the surname 'Boanerges.' The word marks their evident power and energy" (B.H. Carroll).

John and his brother James wanted to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom (Mr. 10:35-39). Their mother also requested this (Mt. 20:20-24).

John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, where he received the Revelation (Re. 1:9). The exile was in the reign of the Emperor Domitian (r. 81-96).

Tradition says that John lived in Ephesus his last years, dying near the end of the first century, in about AD 98.

Clement of Rome (d. 99) and Polycarp (69-159) personally knew John, an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection, and we have their extant letters testifying of this.

The Date

The traditional date of the writing of John's epistles is about AD 85-90. According to Irenaeus, John was overseeing the churches of Asia in the last years of his life. At that time, he was the last surviving apostle.

The Recipients

The epistle is addressed to "*little children*" (1 Jo. 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21). It is a term describing spiritual adoption. It applies only to those who are born again through saving faith in Christ. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Ga. 3:26). It is a term of endearment and affection. This is further reinforced by the use of the term "*beloved*" (1 Jo. 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11).

John is teaching, encouraging, and warning the true brethren in Christ who are pilgrims in a foreign world and are surrounded with dangers. There is the danger of sin (1 Jo. 1:8-10), the danger of the devil (1 Jo. 2:13, 14; 3:8, 10, 12; 5:18), the danger of the world (1 Jo. 2:15-17; 4:4; 5:4, 19), and the danger of antichrists and false teachers (1 Jo. 2:18-27; 4:1-6). John is addressing Christ's people in this present world, who are "as sheep in the midst of wolves" and therefore must be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

While there are clear warnings, the overall tone is of victory. For the saved, there is fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 Jo. 1:2), joy (1 Jo. 1:4), perfect advocacy and propitiation (1 Jo. 2:1-2), forgiveness of sins (1 Jo. 2:12), knowledge of the Father (1 Jo. 2:13), defeat of the wicked one (1 Jo. 2:13-14), eternal life (1 Jo. 2:17; 5:11-13), an unction of wisdom (1 Jo. 2:20, 27), present possession of sonship (1 Jo. 3:1-2), new life (1 Jo. 3:9), having passed from death unto life (1 Jo. 3:14), confidence in prayer (1 Jo. 3:21-22; 5:14-15), victory over the world (1 Jo. 4:4; 5:4-5), God dwelling in him, and he in God (1 Jo. 4:15), perfect love that casts out fear (1 Jo. 4:18), being of God (1 Jo. 5:19), being in Jesus Christ (1 Jo. 5:20).

The Theme

There are two major themes in 1 John, which are also keys to the proper understanding of the epistle.

2:12-14). “John, by addressing a woman, and an honored one at that, and by warning a woman against a plausible antichrist, wanted to put Christian women everywhere on guard” (John Phillips).

The Value of 2 John

Every book and epistle, even the smallest, has its own unique and necessary part in the canon of Scripture. Each is a rare jewel in itself and fits perfectly into the whole to form one magnificent diadem.

While there are other warnings about false teaching and calls to separation elsewhere in the New Testament, there is nothing like 2 John. Here the doctrine is illustrated in the lives of the elect lady and her children, nieces, and nephews.

Of the thousands of personal epistles addressed to individuals that were written by apostles, prophets, pastors, and evangelists in the first century, the Spirit of God superintended three and placed them in the Scripture. These are Paul’s epistle to Philemon and John’s epistles to the elect lady and to Gaius.

The Outline of 2 John

Greeting to the Lady (2 Jo. 1:1-4)

Warning to the Lady (2 Jo. 1:5-11)

Greeting to the Lady (2 John 1:1-4)

This greeting is a model of Christian communication. It is not a mere formula or pious platitudes or empty flattery, as with standard Roman letters of that day. It is Christian love in practice. It is kind, gracious, and edifying. Every word is packed with eternal meaning. John speaks of love, truth, forever, grace, mercy, peace, God the Father, Jesus Christ, rejoicing, commandment.

“The elder”

- John calls himself *presbíteros*, which refers both to age and to position. It is used for elder men and women (1 Ti. 5:1, 2), and it is used for ruling elders (1 Ti. 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:5; Jas. 5:14). John was both. The apostles were elders in the assemblies. Compare 1 Peter 5:1.

- “The elder” is an honorable title, but not pompous. John called himself “elder,” but he didn’t call himself “archbishop” or “metropolitan” or “patriarch” or “pope” or “reverend.” John had gotten over the pursuit of personal greatness that he had exhibited when he and his brother James wanted to sit at Jesus’ right and left hand in the kingdom (Mt. 20:20-28).” “Elder” calls for godly respect and obedience (1 Th. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17), but not for unquestioning loyalty, cringing subservience, or that honor that belongs only to Christ. The “great man” syndrome has been destructive to the cause of Christ whenever it has risen its head, not only among Roman Catholics, but also among Protestants and Baptists.

“The elect lady and her children”

- Is this an actual woman and her children or is it a figurative reference to a church and its members? A case can be made for both interpretations, and conservative commentators are about equally divided in their opinions.

- We are convinced that the best approach is to interpret the elect lady as a woman and then to make an application to the church, if one is so inclined. Support for the elect lady being an actual woman includes the following: (1) This is the most literal and natural interpretation, which is a fundamental rule of Bible interpretation. (2) John said that he expected to see the lady face to face (2 Jo. 1:12), which is also what he said to the individual Gaius (3 Jo. 1:14). (2) The Greek word translated “lady” is *kuria*, which means lady and is so translated in both places where it appears in the King James Bible. (4) John mentions the lady’s “house” (2 Jo. 1:10).

- We read of the lady’s election. This means that she was born again through saving faith in Christ. “**Elect**” is the Greek *eklektós*, which is also translated “chosen” (Mt. 20:16; Ro. 16:13). It is often used as a description of the saved (Mt. 24:22, 24, 31; Lu. 18:7; Ro. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Ti. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; Re. 17:14). Election is according to God’s foreknowledge (1 Pe. 1:2; Ro. 8:29-30). (See the study on 1 Peter in *Highlights in the General Epistles*.) Election is described in Christ’s parable of the wedding banquet (Mt. 22:1-14). The king’s servants are sent “out into the highways” to gather guests for the wedding. This represents the worldwide preaching of the gospel (Mr. 16:15). A man was found in attendance without a wedding garment and was cast into outer darkness. This represents an individual who professes Christ but isn’t born again and clothed in the righteousness of the justified. The parable ends, “For many are called, but few are chosen [*eklektos*]” (Mt. 22:14). The many who are called are those who hear the gospel; the chosen are those who respond in repentance and faith.

- We read of the lady’s “**children**.” Nothing is said about the husband, so he was probably deceased. She had children, and they walked in the truth (2 Jo. 1:4). This must be the goal of every Christian parent. The divine purpose of marriage is to produce “a godly seed” (Mal. 2:15). Children are to be raised up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Proverbs says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pr. 22:6), and, “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Pr. 23:13-14). Godly mothers have great influence on their children. We see this in Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother of Timothy (2 Ti. 1:5; 3:15).

- We read of the lady’s prominence (“**whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth**”). She was loved and honored by the apostle John and by the saints. John uses the Greek *agapáo* (*agape*), which is godly love, the highest love, unselfish love, giving love, John 3:16 love. We are reminded that women of God had an important role in the ministry of Christ and in the early churches. We think of Lydia, the first believer in Philippi (Ac. 16:14-15), Phebe of Cenchrea who was sent on missions by Paul (Ro. 16:1-2), the women who labored with Paul in the gospel (Php. 4:3), Lois and Eunice the grandmother and mother of Timothy (2 Ti. 1:5), and Priscilla, often mentioned in Acts and Paul’s epistles (Ac. 18:2, 18, 26; Ro. 16:3; 1 Co. 16:19). In Romans 16, Paul mentions Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia. The ministry of women is described at length in Titus 2:3-5. (See *Woman and Her Service to God*, available from www.wayoflife.org.)

- We read of the lady’s dangerous situation. It appears that John had visited this lady’s nieces or nephews, children of her sister (2 Jo. 1:13). Learning from them of her situation, he wrote this epistle to exhort her to stand fast in the truth and not to be led astray by false teachers that were proliferating in that region (2 Jo. 1:7-11). Perhaps he was familiar with her generous, welcoming, non-critical character and realized that she would be in danger of entertaining such teachers if not given a strong warning. It is possible that the false teachers had already been invited into her home.

Jude

Introduction to Jude

The Author

The following is from the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*:

Who was this Jude? Three possibilities exist. The author may be either (a) Judas, a half-brother of Christ, or (b) Judas, the apostle, or (c) Judas, a leader in the early church of Jerusalem. This latter Judas was sent to Antioch with Paul, Barnabas, and Silas (Ac. 15:22). His surname was Barsabbas, indicating that he could have been a brother of Joseph Barsabbas, who was one of two “nominees” to replace Judas Iscariot (Ac. 1:23). Thus he would have been known in the church. But little other evidence points to this individual as the author of this epistle.

As to whether he was the Apostle Jude, Jude 1:17 in his letter seems to indicate that he did not consider himself to be an apostle, though modesty could have led him to write as he did. However, the important subject that he wrote about would probably have called for his identifying himself with the other apostles, for authority’s sake, if he really was an apostle.

The most probable identification is that the author Jude was a half-brother of Christ, a son of Joseph and Mary after Jesus. The term ‘servant’ would be fitting, for though at first Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him (Joh. 7:5), yet later they saw the resurrected Christ and were convinced (Ac. 1:14). Among these was Judas, who did not consider himself worthy to call himself a ‘brother’ but just a ‘servant’ of Jesus Christ.

The James referred to by Jude as his brother was thus also a half-brother of the Lord (Mt. 13:55; Mr. 6:3), as well as a leader of the church at Jerusalem (Ac. 15:13), and author of the epistle bearing his name (Jas. 1:1).

B.H. Carroll’s *Interpretation of the English Bible* has a more extended examination of the authorship of Jude, with the same conclusion, as follows. “The conclusion of the author is that the writer of this letter is Jude, a younger half-brother of our Lord, a son of Joseph and Mary, and a full brother of that James who wrote the New Testament letter of that name and was pastor of the church at Jerusalem and whose martyrdom, according to Josephus, was one of the causes of the downfall of Jerusalem.”

The Date

The epistle was written late in the first century when the apostasy was increasing and false teachers were multiplying. Peter said these men would come (“there shall be false teachers among you,” 2 Pe. 2:1), and Jude says they had arrived (“there are certain men crept in unawares,” Jude 1:4). Jude was probably written about the same time as John’s epistles, as John describes the same type of apostates (1 Jo. 2:18-26; 4:1-3; 2 Jo. 1:7-11).

The Recipients

The epistle is written to the saved--“them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1:1).

The Theme

The overall theme is apostasy, or turning from the New Testament faith, and how to deal with it. Jude is a warrior for the truth, and he teaches every believer and every family and every church to be the same. He is a rip-roaring “fundamentalist”! He is compassionate toward the saints (“mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. Beloved ... beloved...”). But he is fierce toward heretics. He isn’t content with preaching “positive truth.” He cares nothing about avoiding controversy. Like the Psalmist, he doesn’t merely love truth, he hates error (Ps. 119:128). He is a contender, a warner, a reprover, a sharp rebuker, plain spoken, even severe in his denunciations. He is in the middle of the fray, just like the prophets of old, like Enoch, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and John the apostle.

This is a sharp rebuke of the spirit of compromise that permeates modern evangelicalism. When I was a young preacher, in about 1980, I wrote to noted evangelical author Warren Wiersbe and asked how he could be associated with *Christianity Today* and its non-critical promotion of heretics. He replied that I should “take off the gloves and pick up a towel.” That’s not Jude type of counsel. With Jude, fighting and serving is not either/or, it is both! Jude was emphatically *not* a modern evangelical, and for the Bible lover, that is all he needs to know about whether or not evangelicalism is the right path.

Another major theme of Jude is God’s judgment on sin and error. The epistle is packed with terrible warnings. The message is that God is to be feared! His judgments are fearful beyond imagination. The language is intended to bring men to repentance. Jude speaks of everlasting chains under darkness (Jude 1:6), the judgment of the great day (Jude 1:6), the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 1:7), the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 1:13), the Lord coming with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all (Jude 1:14-15).

Did Jude Borrow from Peter?

Because of the similarity between 2 Peter 2 and Jude, many commentators believe that one was based on the other, and a lot of effort has been employed in the attempt to determine who wrote first.

Both Peter and Jude mention heretics who deny the Lord (2 Pe. 2:1; Jude 1:4), turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (2 Pe 2:10; Jude 1:4), are crept in (2 Pe. 2:1; Jude 1:4), are covetous (2 Pe. 2:3, 15; Jude 1:11), despise government (2 Pe. 2:10; Jude 1:8), speak great swelling words (2 Pe. 2:18; Jude 1:16). Both Peter and Jude mention Balaam (2 Pe. 2:15; Jude 1:11), sinning angels (2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 1:6), and Sodom (2 Pe. 2:6; Jude 1:7).

Despite the similarities, this line of thought is an exercise in vanity. It could as easily be true, and we believe that it is, that the Spirit of God led both men to describe the heretics in similar ways in order to emphasize certain points by means of repetition.

Actually, the differences between 2 Peter 2 and Jude are greater than the similarities.

If either Peter or Jude borrowed something, we can’t possibly know who borrowed what from whom.

Time devoted to this type of speculation would be much better spent exegeting the words of these epistles, because the only thing that is sure, and the only thing that matters, is that both