

# The General Epistles

Stake Education Class, 14 Nov 2019

Dave LeFevre

## Introduction

---

Letters make up twenty-one of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament. The general epistles are the seven letters from James to Jude. They are called by scholars “general” because they are not written to any specific person (2 and 3 John being the exceptions but still included in this category). For this lesson, we will also include Hebrews, which is also general in its approach (not addressed to a specific group), and thus covering all the traditional non-Pauline letters. Each of the letters is unique in its origins, authorship issues, and doctrines and principles. We’ll go through them in the order we find them in our New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

## Hebrews

---

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, under what circumstances it was composed, or when it was written. It doesn't have the usual address (to and from) that we find in other New Testament letters. Tradition assigns it to Paul, written from Rome during his first imprisonment. This is taken from the authorship 'hints' at the end (Hebrews 13:22-25), which allude to Paul without mentioning his name. However, many note the dramatic stylistic differences between this letter and the others that include Paul's name, including quality of the Greek, vocabulary, style, and grammar. One ancient church leader, Clement of Alexandria, accounted for these differences by recounting that Hebrews was written in "their own language" (presumably Aramaic) and then translated by Luke into Greek. He concludes that it is Luke's writing style in the Greek that we read today.<sup>2</sup> Another early copy of the New Testament places Hebrews immediately after Romans, implying Pauline authorship.<sup>3</sup> Generally, traditional LDS commentators accept Pauline authorship of the epistle or at least Pauline influence (meaning perhaps one of Paul's associates wrote down what Paul said). One main reason some cite is that Joseph Smith appears to have accepted Paul as the author.<sup>4</sup> But that cannot be considered definitive due to the nature of his statements.<sup>5</sup> More recent LDS scholarship is open to the idea of another author, which should in no way negate the doctrinal message of the book.<sup>6</sup>

The date of Hebrews is also unknown, with estimates ranging from 60 to 96 CE. A brilliant discussion of the dating issues and implications was recently given by Matthew Grey, who presents how the author of Hebrews

---

<sup>1</sup> All New Testament scripture quotations are from Thomas Wayment's *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints*, unless otherwise noted. Old Testament quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> See Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 192.

<sup>3</sup> Wayment, *The New Testament*, 401.

<sup>4</sup> *Teachings*, 59; D&C 128:15; for more details, see Ogden, 244-245 and Anderson, *Understanding*, 197-201.

<sup>5</sup> He was not prophetically declaring authorship but simply attributing the book to Paul, as was common in his day.

<sup>6</sup> See Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 446-447; Wayment, *The New Testament*, 401.

was likely responding to the ongoing discussion of the future of Judaism post-destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>7</sup>

Hebrews' main point is that Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. It works to demonstrate that Jesus is superior to all others, including angels, prophets, and the Law of Moses, including Levitical priesthood and rituals. Said Joseph McConkie, "None of the books in the New Testament, the Gospels included, are more Christ centered than Paul's epistle to the Hebrews."<sup>8</sup> Many Old Testament scriptures are quoted, and many Levitical practices are explained in terms of Christological symbolism. Indeed, Hebrews quotes the Old Testament at least thirty-nine times, more than any New Testament book except Romans (fifty-eight times) and Matthew (fifty-seven times). However, like Revelation, it also alludes significantly to Old Testament imagery, language, events, and symbols. To list and discuss them all would require more than an entire paper.<sup>9</sup> The list below includes just the direct quotations:

1:5	2 Samuel 7:14 (1 Chronicles 17:13)	8:5	Exodus 25:40
1:5	Psalms 2:7	8:8–12	Jeremiah 31:31–34
1:6	Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX)	9:20	Exodus 24:8
1:6	Psalms 97:7	10:5–7	Psalms 40:6–8
1:7	Psalms 104:4	10:16–17	Jeremiah 31:33–34
1:8–9	Psalms 45:6–7	10:30	Deuteronomy 32:35–36
1:10–12	Psalms 102:25–27	10:30	Psalms 135:14
1:13	Psalms 110:1	10:37–38	Habakkuk 2:3–4
2:6–8	Psalms 8:4–6	11:18	Genesis 21:12
2:12	Psalms 22:22	11:21	Genesis 47:31
2:13	Isaiah 8:17–18	12:5–6	Proverbs 3:11–12
3:7–11, 15, 18	Psalms 95:7–11	12:12	Isaiah 35:3
4:3	Psalms 95:11	12:20	Exodus 19:12–13
4:4	Genesis 2:2	12:26	Haggai 2:6
4:7	Psalms 95:7–8	12:29	Deuteronomy 4:24
5:5	Psalms 2:7	13:5	Deuteronomy 31:6, 8
5:6	Psalms 110:4	13:5	Joshua 1:5
6:13–14	Genesis 22:16–17	13:6	Psalms 118:6
6:20	Psalms 110:4	13:11–12	Leviticus 16:27
7:17, 21	Psalms 110:4		

## Outline

1. Jesus is Superior (1:1 – 3:6)
  - a. God now speaks by his Son (1:1-4)
  - b. The superiority of the Son (1:5-14)
  - c. Confirmed with signs, wonders, and miracles (2:1-4)
  - d. A merciful and faithful high priest (2:5-18)
  - e. Greater than Moses (3:1-6)

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_EWh9H5Pxc&list=PLXbAVRWvW61YiuIo8xodevEtAPitv9fs3&index=7&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_EWh9H5Pxc&list=PLXbAVRWvW61YiuIo8xodevEtAPitv9fs3&index=7&t=0s).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph F. McConkie, "Jesus Christ, Symbolism, and Salvation (Hebrews)," in Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelations*, 192.

<sup>9</sup> One commentary devotes seventy-five pages to it, with a count of thirty-seven quotations, forty allusions, nine OT summarizations, and thirteen name or topic references. See Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 919-995.

2. Entering into the Rest of God (3:7 – 4:13)
  - a. Warning (3:7-19)
  - b. God's rest (4:1-13)
3. Jesus as High Priest (4:14 – 7:28)
  - a. Jesus the great high priest (4:14 – 5:10)
  - b. You need milk (5:11-14)
  - c. Maturity in faith (6:1-12)
  - d. The promise to Abraham (6:13-20)
  - e. The Melchizedek priesthood (7:1-28)
4. Levitical Sacrifices and Christ's Sacrifice (8:1 – 10:18)
  - a. A better covenant established upon better promises (8:1-13)
  - b. The two sanctuaries (9:1-22)
  - c. Christ put away sin (9:23-28)
  - d. Sacrifices and offerings (10:1-18)
5. Faith and Endurance (10:19 – 12:29)
  - a. A life in Christ (10:19-39)
  - b. Examples of faith (11:1-40)
  - c. Jesus, the architect of our faith (12:1-13)
  - d. Warnings (12:14-29)
6. Service, Obedience, and Greetings (13:1-19)
7. Concluding Remarks (13:20-25)

### Reading: Hebrews 11:31, 35

Hebrews is a lengthy discourse on the greatness of Christ. In the midst of that discourse is a chapter on faith (chapter 11) that provides examples of faith going back to the creation and working through dozens of characters and stories in the Old Testament: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and more. Of note in this recitation are two verses that speak of women.

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not die [“was not destroyed,” BYUNR] with those who were disobedient, because she received the spies in peace (Hebrews 11:31).

Women received their dead who were raised to life, but some were tortured, not accepting release [“having refused deliverance,” BYUNR] so that they might rise again in a better life [“attain a better resurrection,” BYUNR] (Hebrews 11:35).

As is easily noted, most of the people mentioned in this chapter are men, but these mentions of women are notable. As scholar Julie Smith notes, that even though women are sparsely mentioned, “it is surprising how often they appear at these climatic moments of the apex of the story.” She includes stories like Jairus’ wife, the widow of Nain, Mary and Martha at Lazarus’ tomb, Mary Magdalene at the tomb, and more as examples.<sup>10</sup>

The story of Rahab mentioned in v. 31 is well known from Joshua 2:1-21. Rahab took in two Israelite men sent into Jericho to spy out the city. In exchange for her help and secrecy, they promised that she and her family would be safe when the city was attacked if she put a ribbon in the window of her home, which was built into

---

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msuQe-a-yss> for a video of her lecture from the BYU New Testament Commentary Conference on Hebrews, Oct 2019).

the city wall. Joshua 6:22-25 recounts how Joshua sent the same men in to save her and her family once the city walls were breached.

The “women” discussed in v. 35 are not generic women but are perhaps not necessarily obvious from the verse but are evident when you consider the scriptural canon available to the author of Hebrews. There are two stories of women who “received their dead who were raised to life: 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4. First Kings 17 presents the story of Elijah cursing the land with a drought and then hiding in the wilderness next to a brook where ravens bring him bread and meat. But soon the brook dries up and the Lord commands Elijah to go to Zarephath to find a widow. Per the Lord’s instructions, he asks her to feed him. Declaring that she was literally eating her last meal with her son already, she nevertheless gave bread to Elijah as well. Her blessing was that she had flour and oil enough to continue to feed the three of them through the drought. But remarkable as this was, this was not the example of faith mentioned in Hebrews. That happens in 1 Kings 17:17-24, where the boy gets sick and dies, and Elijah prayed and placed himself over the youth three times, at which point he revived. When Elijah delivered her son to her, she declared, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24).

The second story in 2 Kings 4 focuses on a woman who treated Elisha kindly, giving him food and a place to sleep when he passed through their area. As a blessing, he promised her a son, which she bore. One day the child took sick and died. She went to Elisha and he agreed to return to her house where, like Elijah in the previous story, prayed then laid on the child. Soon the child rose up and was returned to his mother.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to “some were tortured” in v. 35 is more challenging to locate for a Latter-day Saint audience, because the story is not in our Bible but is found in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees. In chapter 6, Jews were being forced to watch as Antiochus IV polluted their temple with pagan sacrifices and prostitution, renaming it a temple of Zeus. They were forced to celebrate Greek gods, with the punishment being death for the disobedient. During this persecution, two women who had followed the Law of Moses and circumcised their sons were captured, paraded around as examples, then thrown down from the wall with their babies and killed. Others who had gathered in a cave for Sabbath observance were burned as they worshipped.

The stories are contrasting: the first women were blessed with their dead sons being revived and coming back to life; the second women were killed with their children but willingly submitted to that punishment in the hope of a future resurrection. Thus the women’s stories are at the apex of the conversation about faith—like the center point of a chiasmus, these women turn the list from those who were blessed because of faith to those who suffered for their faith. After mentioning the women who suffered death, others are mentioned who are stoned, cut in two, killed by the sword, were destitute, afflicted, and wandered in deserts and caves. All these were “commended because of their faith” (Hebrews 11:39).

The Hebrews author’s conclusion uses their stories to relate to the suffering of Christians of his day: “For God has provided something better for us so that they would not be made perfect without us” (Hebrews 11:40). In

---

<sup>11</sup> Julie Smith (see link above) notes that, like these two stories, every canonized story of someone being raised from the dead has a female witness. Since women were not legally considered good or even valid witnesses for much if not all of the Bible, this emphasis on the Lord making sure women play this role perhaps says something about how the Lord perceives the importance of women, including the recent change to allow women to witness ordinances in a recent Church policy change.

other words, in spite of their faith, the promised blessing was not immediately available to them as it was to the readers of Hebrews: the promise and hope of resurrection and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

## James

---

These General Epistles are placed at the end of the letters because there has sometimes been controversy associated with their canonicity over the years. James is not listed in the oldest list of what was considered scripture, the Muratorian Fragment. In the third century, Origen, an early church leader, acknowledged James as a disputed book, but quoted it extensively. In the 4th century, the historian Eusebius listed James as disputed, but his peer, Athanasius, accepted it as scripture. Jerome and Augustine both reluctantly accepted it in the 4th century, and from there it was included as scripture. During the Reformation, Luther questioned the value of James with its emphasis on works, calling it “a perfect straw-epistle.”

The book of James was written not by the man of that name in the gospels (meaning, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, who died relatively soon in the post-resurrection period; see Acts 12:2), but rather one of the brothers of Jesus, whose actual name was Jacob but got translated as James by John Wycliff for unknown reasons, and it stuck.<sup>12</sup> The letter was perhaps written as early as the 40s to Jewish Christians who were scattered due to persecution in and around Jerusalem, where Jacob was living. It may have been later but still preceded Matthew and Luke, based on internal evidence.<sup>13</sup> If the first date is correct, James could be the first book of the New Testament written.

Jacob is mentioned in the gospels, but only in a neutral or even negative tone—he doesn't appear to have been a follower of Jesus, his brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 3; 21, 31-32; 6:1-4; John 7:2-5). Yet Jacob was one of the first to see the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7) and soon became an apostle (though it's not clear if he was a member of the Twelve) and the apparent leader of the church in Jerusalem (perhaps something like a stake president or area authority seventy today; see Galatians 1:19 and Acts 15). The New Testament does not record his fate, but Josephus, a Jewish historian of the period, records that he was stoned in 62 CE after the high priest, Ananus II, convened the Sanhedrin and accused him of transgressing the Law.<sup>14</sup>

James' name has most recently been known in the media through the James ossuary, a first century bone box with the inscription "Jacob son of Joseph brother of Jesus." There is some lingering controversy whether this inscription is a forgery, but the publicity around it has brought the discussion about James to the forefront.<sup>15</sup> The Catholic position that James was Jesus' step-brother (Joseph's son but not Mary's) is in keeping with their tradition that Mary remained a virgin. Linguistically, however, the New Testament uses the same term for James' and Jesus' relationship as they do for any brother. The author of Jude is also Jesus' brother.

---

<sup>12</sup> If you have access to translations in any other language, look up the title for this book and you'll discover that it's some form of Jacob. The name could have been changed at any point along the translation journey, but Tyndale and those who worked on the various early English Bibles (Bishops, Geneva, KJV, etc.) all kept it as James. Today some translations use Jacob instead, a trend that will likely grow in time.

<sup>13</sup> Wayment, *The New Testament*, 419; Blumell *et al* note that because James lacks any mention of the Gentile-Jewish Christian controversies of the late 40s and early 50s CE, it was likely written before those dates; see Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 451-452.

<sup>14</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1.

<sup>15</sup> For more details about the ossuary, see Hershel Shanks, *The Brother of Jesus*.

The letter of James is about faith—how trials build it, what its characteristics are, and how it is a power for good. Faith is manifest through our deeds. Both are needed to move toward perfection. When we submit ourselves to the will of God, we then have power to wait for the blessings from the Lord and to serve others. Part of that submission is self-control, especially our words. Jacob warns the Saints against in-fighting and counsels them to make peace.

The Institute manual has an interesting comparison of the text of the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount, showing a remarkable parallel between the two.<sup>16</sup> Jacob, who could have heard the Sermon in person when it was delivered, at least had his brother's teachings in mind when he wrote this letter.

## Outline

1. Opening Address (1:1-8)
2. Enduring Trial (1:9-18)
3. Characteristics of Faith (1:19 – 5:6)
  - a. Quick to listen (1:19-27)
  - b. Do not show partiality (2:1-13)
  - c. Faith without works is dead (2:14-26)
  - d. The tongue is a fire (3:1-12)
  - e. Who is wise? (3:13-18)
  - f. Be humble (4:1-10)
  - g. Do not speak against a brother or sister (4:11-12)
  - h. Boasting (4:13-17)
  - i. Problems with riches (5:1-6)
4. The Power of Faith (5:7-20)
  - a. Be patient (5:7-12)
  - b. Confess your sins (5:13-20)

## Reading: James 3:1-12

James 3:1-12 presents a major theme of the book: taming the tongue. Drawing on teachings in Proverbs 11:9, 12:18 and 18:21, this chapter starts by counseling few to become teachers because “we who teach will received the harsher judgment” (v. 1). The text doesn’t say why teachers (not a priesthood office but someone who teaches the gospel) will be judged more harshly, but given the context, it may have something to do with their opportunity and accountability to speak to others the true words of Christ. Not stumbling in speech is equated to being perfect and symbolic of the ability to “bridle his whole body also” (v. 2). Jacob then uses three metaphors: putting a bit in a horse’s mouth (v. 3); using a small tiller to steer a huge ship (v. 4); and how a small fire can burn down an entire forest (v. 5). He draws the same message from all three: though small, the tongue has a huge impact on our spiritual growth and happiness—it can defile the entire body and “is set on fire by hell” (v. 6), meaning speaking opposed to God’s will can result in burning in hell fire.

Human beings have subdued “every type of animal” (v. 7), but taming the tongue continues even today to be elusive. Both blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth (vv. 9-10). But Jacob asks (with three examples again) if a spring can provide both good and bad water, if a fig tree can produce olives, or if a grape vine can make figs? (vv. 11-12). Cementing his point, he reiterates a fourth metaphoric question—can saltwater

---

<sup>16</sup> *Life and Teachings*, 412-413. Blumell, *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, 452 covers this as well.

suddenly turn fresh? (v. 12). So it is with the words that we speak: if we teach evil in one setting, we cannot truly speak truth in another because we are in direct opposition with ourselves. Mormon made a similar observation, though with a slightly different but related conclusion:

For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil (Moroni 7:11).

## 1 Peter

---

First Peter is, of course, attributed to the chief apostle, Simon Peter, son of Jonah. The date of the letter is not known but was probably written in the early 60s, sent from Rome to Saints in northern Asia Minor. It could be that Peter knew some of these folks from the day of Pentecost as many of the same cities mentioned in Acts 2 are in this region, but the lack of names shows it was addressed broadly to the region. Tradition has it that Peter was crucified in Rome in late 67 or early 68 CE, about the same time Paul was killed there by beheading.

Because of the refined Greek writing (different from 2 Peter), the lack of anything that might be considered autobiographical (e.g., details about Christ's life), and the use of Greek scripture from the Septuagint, some scholars believe 1 Peter was written by someone else. Contrary to the internal evidence, however, early tradition assigns the letter to Peter. The question is impossible to settle without more information. It could be that it was written by someone else in Peter's behalf, with or without his knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Joseph Smith stated: "Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles."<sup>18</sup> Other prophets have said similar things about the value of Peter's writings, including Spencer W. Kimball, Joseph F. Smith, and David O. McKay.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Peter's short letters touch on all three of the missions of the church, to proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead.

### Outline

1. Opening Address (1:1-2)
2. Salvation and Sanctification (1:3 – 2:10)
  - a. The test of faith (1:3-12)
  - b. You shall be holy (1:13-25)
  - c. A royal priesthood (2:1-10)
3. Appropriate Behavior in a Pagan World (2:11 – 3:12)
4. Christian Suffering (3:13 – 5:10)
5. Closing (5:11-14)

### Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Chapters 1 and 2 include five imperatives, this pericope being the final one.<sup>20</sup> Peter admonishes us to set aside "all evil, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander" (v. 1). Like a hungry baby, we should yearn (long for or

---

<sup>17</sup> Wayment, *The New Testament*, 435.

<sup>18</sup> *Teachings*, 301.

<sup>19</sup> Monte S. Nyman, "The Sublime Epistles of Peter," in Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 226.

<sup>20</sup> The others are 1:13 (hope for Christ's return), 1:15 (be holy like God), 1:17 (live in fear of God's judgment), and 1:22 (love one another from a pure heart).



crave) pure, spiritual milk (v. 2). Milk in this verse represents true teachings, the goodness of the Lord, that Saints “have tasted” (v. 3). In contrast, in other NT writings, milk represents gospel basics (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-13).

Peter, whose name given him by Jesus means “rock,” is careful to point out that Jesus is the “living stone,” chosen and honored by God (v. 4). Likewise, he invites us to also be living stones, “a residence of the Spirit to be a holy priesthood” (v. 5). In contrast to priests in the Jewish temple, we “offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5).

In verses 6-8, Peter chains together three OT scriptures—Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; and Isaiah 8:14—to teach a single concept, that Jesus is the foundation of this spiritual temple where our sacrifices are made. Though Jesus was rejected by the Jews, he was chosen by God as the living cornerstone. But to those who rejected him, he is still a stone in the road over which they trip, an offense, because they are disobedient to his word. Thus, their fate is appointed, in contrast to those who believe and receive salvation (v. 2).

Concluding the imperative and calling upon three more OT scriptures (Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 7:6, and Isaiah 43:20-21), Peter declares that those who believe in Christ are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired” (v. 9). The last one is *Laos eis peripoiēsin* in Greek, ‘*am segulla* in Hebrew, meaning ‘special treasure’ or ‘valued property.’ We belong to God and he treats us like a personal treasure (see D&C 60:4). Though before Christ, we were not a people nor had mercy extended to us, we are not “God’s people” and “have received mercy” (v. 10).

## 2 Peter

---

Written just before he died, Peter appears to have written this letter as his farewell. It has the marks of a traditional farewell speech, a final testament recorded to convey the most important thoughts of the author. The letter conveyed the promise of eternal life but also warnings of false teachers and apostasy in the present day and in the years to come. It was possibly written about 67-68 CE, just before Peter’s death at Nero’s hand, where (according to Christian tradition) he was crucified upside down. The other possibility is that it was written from records or memories of Peter’s final teachings and counsel, which could place it later, such as during the persecutions of Domitian (died 18 September 96 CE) who killed and persecuted many Christians.<sup>21</sup>

The letter speaks of the great promises given to Christians, even being “partakers of the divine nature,” and encourages them to make their callings and elections sure, the “more sure word of prophecy.” It reminds its readers that Jesus was foreordained for his mission and is manifest to us. 2 Peter and Jude share many common expressions and phrases, showing an interdependence of the two letters, though scholars debate which borrowed from which letter.<sup>22</sup>

### Outline

1. Greetings (1:1-2)
2. The Virtues of a Christian Life (1:3-11)
3. Peter’s Eyewitness Testimony (1:12-21)

---

<sup>21</sup> Wayment, *The New Testament*, 2 Peter, Author.

<sup>22</sup> The shared verses are: 2 Peter 2:1 (Jude 1:4); 2:4 (6); 2:6 (7); 2:10-11 (7-9); 2:12 (10); 2:13 (12); 2:15 (11); 2:17 (12-13, 16); 3:2 (17); 3:3 (18).



4. False Prophets and Teachers (2:1-22)
5. The Coming of the Lord (3:1-13)
6. Concluding Exhortation (3:14-18)

### Reading: 2 Peter 3:1-13

Besides the insight from the Greek text, there are a number of JST changes in this chapter, as Joseph Smith worked through it carefully. He was likely attuned to the content—the last days and the Second Coming—which drew him in more deeply than most other passages in the General Epistles.

Peter calls on us to remember the “predictive teachings of the holy prophets” (v. 2) relative to the Second Coming. In the last days, scoffers will come ridiculing righteousness and “pursuing their own wicked interests” (v. 3). They will ask the Saints, “Where is the promise of his coming?” The JST makes their intent more explicit: “**Denying the Lord Jesus Christ**, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” Nothing has change, the scoffers cry, “from the beginning of creation” (v. 4). In other words, like the doubters in 3 Nephi 1:5-6, these will say that the time for the coming of Jesus is past. This was a very real charge in Peter’s day. Many believed that Jesus’ return would be very soon, certainly within their lifetimes. But as the years went on with no return, those outside the church could mock and those inside perhaps began to doubt.

Peter responds to both of these groups with a critical teaching: “the heavens existed a long time ago, and the earth was formed by the word of God out of water and by means of water” (v. 5). JST: ““For this they willingly are ignorant of, that of old **the heavens**, and the earth standing **in** the water and **out of** the water, **were created by the word of God**.” The wicked willingly ignore the fact that God created the world by his own word, even Jesus Christ. But that same water was used to destroy the earth in the days of Noah and soon “by the same word,” the heavens and the earth “have been reserved for fire,” a time of judgment and destruction of the wicked (v. 7).

Now comes a concept that has perhaps been applied beyond Peter’s intended meaning: “one day is like a thousand years with the Lord, and a thousand years are like a single day” (v. 8). JST: “But **concerning the coming of the Lord**, beloved, **I would not have you** ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” We speak of this scripture as relating to God’s “time” (if there can be such a thing to a being like the Father) versus man’s time. But the JST change indicates that it is in reference to the last days and the Second Coming, meaning our desire to count the days is impatient to God. “Behold, now it is called today, until the coming of the Son of Man. . . For after today cometh the burning—this is speaking after the manner of the Lord—for verily, I assay, tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble” (D&C 64:23-24).<sup>23</sup>

Peter explains, “The Lord does not delay his promise as some count slowness, but he is patient with you because he does not want any to perish, but rather that all should come to repentance” (v. 9). He assures us that the Second Coming will certainly arrive “as a thief,” causing the heavens to pass away and the elements to “melt with a burning heat,” making manifest everything ever done on the earth (v. 10).

---

<sup>23</sup> Abraham 3:4 also speaks of a day being like a thousand years, but in the context of comparing the revolution of Kolob to that of earth, not specifically comparing God’s time to man.

## 1-3 John

---

John's letters were likely the last things written in the New Testament; most agree that Revelation and even the gospel of John were written before these three epistles. That means the letters could have been written in the 90s or even after the turn of the century. The author of 1 John is not named and in 2 and 3 John, is just called "the elder," but they have traditionally been assigned to John the apostle and revelator. He was dealing with a group of people called the Docetists who, influenced by Greek philosophy that physical bodies were evil, didn't believe that Christ really had a mortal body. It contains some of the same themes from the gospel of John: light and darkness, love, Word of God, etc., showing a possible dependency and thus order of writing. It has been noted that this letter potentially is a commentary on John 17, explaining what it is to know God.

Second and Third John are the shortest letters in the New Testament, and each would have easily fit on a single sheet of papyrus or parchment. Unlike 1 John, 2 and 3 John are addressed to specific people, not just the church at large, but the issues are similar—false teachers coming among the saints and love for each other. Second and Third John are the only two New Testament books with no JST changes.

### Outline

1. The Word of Life (1:1-10)
2. Light (2:1 – 3:10)
  - a. At atoning sacrifice (2:1-6)
  - b. I am writing a new commandment (2:7-17)
  - c. The antichrist is coming (2:18-27)
  - d. The children of God (2:28 – 3:10)
3. Love (3:11 – 5:12)
  - a. Believe in the name of his Son (3:11-24)
  - b. Test the spirits (4:1-6)
  - c. Love one another (4:7-21)
  - d. Born of God (5:1-12)
4. Concluding Remarks (5:13-21)

### Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

1 John has a strong theme of love, including even the name by which he refers to his readers: "Beloved" (v. 7). We should love each other "because love is from God" (v. 7). If love is not in us, then we do not know God, "because God is love" (v. 8). God's love was shown among us by his sending "his only begotten Son into the world" so that we might have eternal life through him (v. 9). This didn't happen because we love him but because he loved us (v. 10), so "we ought to love one another" (v. 11). "No one has seen God at any time," begins verse 12, with the JST adding, "**except them who believe.**" John's point seems to be that we don't need to see God because he abides in us and his love is perfected in us, thereby making himself manifest through his Saints (v. 12). We know that he abides in us when we feel the Spirit, which bears testimony of the Father and the Son (vv. 13-14). He repeats, "God is love" (v. 16), by this, "love is perfected among us so that we have confidence in the day of judgment" (v. 17). He teaches that "perfect love casts out fear," meaning fear of punishment, because if we have the love of God in us, we don't fear punishment from him (v. 18). If we say we

love God but hate others, we are liars (v. 20), because we have this commandment: “the one who loves God should love his brother and sister also” (v. 21).<sup>24</sup>

## Jude

---

The author of Jude is James’ and Jesus’ younger brother, whose name was Judas. His position in the church is not known but he was of sufficient authority to write a letter of direction and have it preserved; Paul is likely referencing him as seeing the Lord in 1 Corinthians 9:5. The purpose of his book was to confront apostasy. It is generally considered to have been written near the same time as 2 Peter (because 2 Peter and Jude use many of the same phrases and examples), a time of intense persecution from the outside and falling away on the inside. Jude quotes two books considered apocryphal today, 1 Enoch and the Testament (or Assumption) of Moses.

Jude encourages his audience to be wary of those among them who are teaching false doctrines, reminding them of others in the scriptures who have sinned and suffered. He offers counsel about dealing with dissenter: prayer, love, and trust in the mercy of Christ.

### Outline

1. Opening Address (1:1-2)
2. Ungodly Have Entered among You (1:3-16)
3. A Christian Response to Dissension (1:17-25)

### Reading: Jude 1:1:3-16

Jude wrote to the Saints to encourage them “to contend for the faith that was once entrusted” to them (v. 3). The Christians of that day were in a fight—at the peril of their lives in some cases. They were contending against outside forces who wanted to attack their faith and apostate forces from the inside (“certain men have secretly slipped in among you,” v. 4) who wanted to change their doctrine, “the grace of our God into unbridled lust” (v. 4).

Jude next gives three examples of destruction: unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness (v. 5; see Numbers 14:20-23); angels who “did not keep their own dominion but rather left behind their own habitation” (v. 6; see Genesis 6:1-4 and 1 Enoch 6-16); and Sodom and Gomorrah which “engaged in sexual improprieties” (v. 7; see Genesis 19). Those who dream of similar evils “defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones” (v. 8; the latter meaning angels of glory).

Jude relates a story about “Michael the archangel,” who was contending with the devil for the body of Moses, but did not inappropriately declare judgment that was not his to render, but instead said, “May the Lord rebuke you” (v. 9; see Zechariah 3:2; also the Testament [or Assumption] of Moses).<sup>25</sup> Jude cites those of his day that “slander everything they do not understand” and who will be destroyed (v. 10).

---

<sup>24</sup> Though not a quotation, the similarity to Matthew 22:37-39, where Jesus taught that the two great commandments were to love God and each other, is clear.

<sup>25</sup> Both texts, the Testament of Moses and the Assumption of Moses, do not today contain this account, but both are fragmentary. Early patristic witnesses attribute this story in Jude to the Assumption of Moses which some scholars believe may be the same as the Testament of Moses. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:923-925,

Jude then gives three examples of error, to parallel those of destruction in vv. 5-8: Cain who murdered (v. 11; see Genesis 4:8); Balaam who prophesied for profit (v. 11; see Numbers 22); and those who died with Korah after rebelling against the Lord (v. 12; see Numbers 16). Wicked individuals among them who would suffer similar punishment were “hidden shoals at your love feasts” (v. 12), referring to rocks hidden from view just under the water that would destroy ships, and the *agape* meals of the early Christians where they came together and shared not only the sacrament but a meal that united them and benefitted the poor among them. The wicked came to these meals without fear, and Jude compared them to shepherds that only cared for themselves, clouds that provided no rain, trees without fruit, waves of the sea that foamed like babbling gossipers, and wandering stars sent to the darkest regions of space.<sup>26</sup>

Jude references “Enoch, the seventh from Adam,” who is known from Genesis 5:18-24. But the quote here referring to “the Lord coming with a myriad [ten thousand]<sup>27</sup> of his holy ones” (v. 14) is from 1 Enoch 1:9. At his coming, all ungodly persons will be judged (v. 15). This group includes “complainers, discontents, who go around pursuing their own desires, who speak extravagant words,” and who put people “in awe [or, flatter them] for their own advantage” (v. 16).

## Further Reading

---

### Abbreviations:

- TWNT – Thomas Wayment’s New Testament for Latter-day Saints
- AT – Author’s translation
- BYUNR – BYU New Rendition
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

Anderson, Richard Lloyd, *Guide to Acts and the Apostles’ Letters*, 3rd ed. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999.

Anderson, Richard Lloyd, *Understanding Paul (Revised Edition)*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007.

Arnold, Clinton E., ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Beale, G. K. and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Blumell, Lincoln H., ed., *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2019.

Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Bruce, F. F., *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

Bruce, F. F., *The Book of the Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.

---

<sup>26</sup> The last is a reference to 1 Enoch 1:9, where God imprisoned star-angels in darkness forever. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:13-14.

<sup>27</sup> It could also mean an infinite number, since 10,000 was the biggest number used in their culture.

- Charlesworth, James H., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.
- Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Fully Revised Fourth Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010.
- Crossan, John Dominic and Jonathan I. Reed, *In Search of Paul*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.
- Draper, Richard D. and Michael D. Rhodes, *Pauls' First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015.
- Faulconer, James E., *Romans 1: Notes & Reflections*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999.
- Findlay, George, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, 4th ed. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1998.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *The Acts of the Apostles*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts and David Petersen, eds., *The New Interpreters Bible: One Volume Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.
- Hall, John F., *New Testament Witnesses of Christ: Peter, John, James, & Paul*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002.
- Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel and Wayment, Thomas A., eds., *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2010.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010.
- Holzapel, Richard Neitzel, Thomas A. Wayment, and Eric D. Huntsman, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2006.
- Hoskisson, Paul Y., ed., *The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Testimony. The 23rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994.
- Huntington, Ray L., Thomas A. Wayment, Jerome M. Perkins, Patty A. Smith, *Go Ye Into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002.
- Judd, Daniel K., Craig J. Ostler, and Richard D. Draper, *The Testimony of John the Beloved: The 27th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998.
- MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005.
- McRay, John, *Archaeology & the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001.
- McRay, John, *Paul: His Life and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Millet, Robert L., ed., *Studies in Scripture: Vol. 6, Acts to Revelation*. Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1987.
- Moore, Beth, *The Beloved Disciple: Following John to the Heart of Jesus*. Nashville, TN: Boardman & Holman Publishers, 2003.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome, *Paul: A Critical Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

- Ogden, D. Kelly and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: Acts Through Revelation*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998.
- Pollock, John, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985.
- Porter, Stanley E., *Paul in Acts*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Sperry, Sidney B., *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979.
- Wayment, Thomas, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.
- Wayment, Thomas A., *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006.
- Wayment, Thomas A., *The New Testament: A New Translation for Latter-day Saints*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018.
- Welch, John & John Hall, *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002.
- Williams, David J., *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Wilson, A. N., *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Witherington, Ben III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.