

Walking Through the Word

Jesus, Paul and the Church (Week 26)

Story: **Letters to the Churches** [E: The New Testament Letters (560-564), John on the Isle of Patmos (565-568); New Testament: General Epistles and Prophecy (619-620); see also New Testament: Pauline Epistles: Hebrews (only end of 619)]

Location: **Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, Revelation**

Bios & definitions

epistle: a long, formal letter, intended to provide instruction; from the Greek *epistolé* meaning a message or letter, typically more formal like a “treatise” than an informal piece of correspondence

Hebrews: this letter is one of the most controversial in terms of authorship, the time and location in which it was written, and a specific audience

authorship: though in early days this letter was attributed to the apostle Paul, and the teaching within Hebrews does not contradict Paul's other teaching, there are not the typical evidences of Paul's hand on this work (e.g. author does not identify himself (whereas Paul usually did); there is indication that the author was neither with Jesus or encountered Jesus in his lifetime (see 2:3), but Paul had (Gal 1:11-12); and the writing style of this author is very dissimilar to Paul's hand)

The text points to the author as a Hebrew Christian who knew very well the Old Testament; the text also points to an individual who had some authority among the church – likely a well-regarded apostle; some have argued that a better choice for author might be either Barnabas – a companion to Paul during the first “missionary journey” (Acts 13:1-4) and the first to vouch for Paul's conversion (Acts 9:26-27) – or Apollos, a Christian noted for being “eloquent... and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), also associated with Paul during his missionary days, particularly in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12, 3:4-6)

date: probably before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. This is likely due to the fact that there is no reference to the temple being destroyed and the religious ceremonies and sacrifices are mentioned in the book.

KEY IDEAS: Christ had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Christ is sufficient for all of our needs and due to Him and His sacrifice we have direct access to the Father. Hebrews also contains the “Faith chapter” of the Bible.

James : this letter is short, sweet and to the point. It is a great book that supplies practical advice and wisdom for living the Christian life. It was written by James, Jesus’ brother likely in AD 49, prior to the Jerusalem Council held in AD 50. Notably, James argues in his letter that the Christian life, void of obedient service to the Lord, is empty: “Faith without works is dead” (2:17, 26).

KEY IDEAS: teaching some general characteristic of the Christian life (1:1-27). James encourages us to act “justly” in public (2:1-13). Then he compares faith and its fruit, action in chapter 2:14-26. James talks about controlling the tongue (3:1-12). He encourages us to turn from evil and obey God (4:1-12). Finally, he lays out guidelines for leadership and the Christian life (5:7-20).

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1 Peter – the first of Peter's letters written to offer encouragement to suffering Christians. Both this letter, and the following 2 Peter, are “journeyman’s letters,” written as if to a pilgrim heading to another city.

NOTE: This book was written by Peter about AD 62-64, possibly from Rome. Peter thanks God for the plan of salvation revealed in its fullness by Christ and challenges the reader to live a holy life and to respect and trust God and to be more like Christ all in chapter one. Peter tells the reader how to handle persecution and suffering the middle chapters. He goes on to give instruction on how we should live in relation to one another and to God.

2 Peter – this letter of Peter came a few years after (written about AD 67) his first and was written to warn Christians about false teachers and to encourage them to grow in the knowledge of Christ and in their faith.

KEY IDEAS: Peter points the reader to the importance of studying and living out scripture. He encourages them to remain faithful and not grow stagnant. He moves on in the second chapter to focus on warning the reader about false teachers and the dangers of listening to their message rather than to God’s, the unchanging truth of the Gospel. Peter concludes this letter talking about Christ’s return and the importance of wholesome thinking and living a life worthy of His calling.

1 John – written to address false teachings and encourage Christians in their faith.

KEY IDEAS: The apostle John wrote this book, likely between AD 85 and 90 from Ephesus. John is known as the apostle of love and love is a key theme in this book. John makes some starkly contrasting comparisons between the life of the believer and the life of someone who has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He begins comparing God to light and the world to darkness in chapter one. He moves on to the concept of God being love in chapter 3. He then teaches that God is life in chapter 5. Without God we do not have life, at least the fullness of life that can only come through Christ Jesus.

2 John – one of several letters from John written to emphasize truth and love – the basics to following Christ. (AD 90, from Ephesus)

KEY IDEAS: one of the most powerful and compact books of the Bible. Its teaching on love is profound and difficult to comprehend in our world where love is a word that is more often spoken than lived out. It will take only a few minutes to read, but its message can last a lifetime.

3 John – another of John's letters to a friend, Gaius.

KEY IDEAS: This letter was written to John’s friend to thank him for his hospitality and encourage him in the Faith. Gaius was a prominent Christian in one of the churches familiar to John. This letter teaches us how we, as Christians, should respond to and treat other brothers and sisters in the faith.

Jude – a letter written to warn against false teachings and to encourage Christians to keep their faith strong.

Note: This letter was authored by Jude, the brother of James and Jesus. It was written about AD 65 and still serves to motivate Christians everywhere to action. Jude’s writing addressed an issue that was taught openly in its day – teachers saying that Christians could do as they pleased without fear of God’s punishment. This message is not often spoken today, but many times people live like it is true today. This letter serves as a warning against living a nominal Christian life and encourages us to be sold out for Christ.

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Revelation – the final book of the Bible. Revelation was written by John to the seven churches in Asia to focus on the eternal reward awaiting them amid a season of great persecution and trial. It was written about AD 95 from Patmos. Most of it is symbolic in nature.

KEY IDEAS: This is a book of prophecy. It contains the promise of Christ winning the battle over the Enemy and reigning victoriously forever. Revelation is a book of hope and not a doomsday prophecy like some would paint its picture. John received this revelation directly from God (1:1-20). John records specific messages from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (2:1-3:22). From here, the scene shifts to a series of dramatic images that burst into view before John's eyes. These images portray the rise of evil – culminating in the antichrist (4:1-18:24). Next follows John recounting the triumph of the King of kings, the wedding of the Lamb, the final judgment, and the coming of the new Jerusalem (19:1-22:5). Revelation concludes with the promise of Christ's soon return (22:6-21), and John breathes a prayer that has been echoed through the centuries, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20). Maranatha.

¹ Source: [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#)

² Source: [Life Application Study Bible](#)