

## Introduction to James

### Author, Date and Recipients

This letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus ([Matt. 13:55](#); [Gal. 1:19](#)) and leader of the Jerusalem church ([Acts 15](#)). It was probably written about AD 40–45 to Jewish Christians living outside Palestine who were suffering persecution and living in poverty.

### The Gospel in James

James is a beloved epistle, eminently practical and full of vivid exhortations to godly living. The author presents profound counsel on numerous essentials: trials, poverty, riches, justice, speech, worldliness, and prayer. His clarity and prophetic urgency call readers to action, but his assessment of our failures is almost too penetrating, as it exposes our inability to perform what he commands—driving us to the ever-present refuge of the gospel. Yet at the same time James stirs us to action, to the obedience that is a hallmark not of bare external conformity but of living faith: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only” ([1:22](#)).

Since James demands what readers cannot render, we struggle to resolve the tension between those demands and our inability to attain them. We might expect James to discuss justification here, but he never mentions that or the cross, resurrection, or atonement. Indeed, the absence of these elements has prompted some to doubt the canonicity of James. Further, while he uses Jesus’ name twice ([1:1](#); [2:1](#)), both are passing references, not expositions of his life and saving work.

With 59 commands in 108 verses, James declares King Jesus’ royal law ([2:8](#)). He insists that obedience is a prime mark of true religion: “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” ([2:10](#); cf. [3:1](#); [4:17](#)). The hasty reader could therefore miss the gospel in James. If James merely commands, his clarity is a burden and his commands ultimately condemn.

We will begin to understand the gospel intentions of the book by noting that [James 1:26–27](#) structures the book when he declares that “anyone [who] thinks he is religious” will show it in three ways. He will “bridle his tongue,” watch over “orphans and widows in their affliction,” and keep himself “unstained” by the world. Remarkably, James next demonstrates that everyone fails to meet these standards. We must control the tongue, yet no one can tame the tongue ([3:8](#)). We must care for the needy—orphans and widows—yet we’re willing to *wish them well and do nothing* ([2:15–17](#)). We must avoid the pollution of the world, yet our envy and quarrels prove our worldliness ([4:1–4](#)).

## Q4 | Week 11: December 12-17

### Weekly Overview

If no one has true religion, then all are liable to judgment. Still, James says “mercy triumphs over judgment” ([2:13](#); [5:11](#)). The climax of the epistle, [James 4:6](#), explains *how* mercy triumphs. No one controls the tongue, cares for the needy, or stays unstained, but God “gives more grace. Therefore it says ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” Here “it” means all Scripture, which attests to God’s grace for the humble. James reinforces the lesson in [4:10](#), commanding, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” That is the gospel according to James: No one is obedient, no one consistently demonstrates true religion. Therefore, the Father who gives good gifts ([1:5](#), [17](#)) gives the supreme gift of saving grace to the humble.

Further, the wisdom to understand such grace is from above ([1:17-18](#)), as God grants needed understanding generously and without reproach to whomever asks ([1:5](#)). We therefore understand that, though none can meet God’s requirements, he grants the wisdom needed to navigate this world and the next to all who simply have faith to ask his aid ([1:6](#))—this is undeniable grace.

### Outline

- Greeting ([1:1](#))
- The Testing of Faith ([1:2-18](#))
- Hearing and Doing the Word ([1:19-27](#))
- The Sin of Favoritism ([2:1-13](#))
- Faith without Works Is Dead ([2:14-26](#))
- The Sin of Dissension in the Community ([3:1-4:12](#))
- The Sins of the Wealthy ([4:13-5:12](#))
- The Prayer of Faith ([5:13-18](#))
- Concluding Admonition ([5:19-20](#))

## Introduction to 1 Peter

### Author, Date and Recipients

The apostle Peter wrote this letter ([1:1](#)). He was once a fisherman but now was an apostle, having been “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” ([5:1](#)). He probably wrote the letter from Rome ([5:13](#); “Babylon” probably refers to Rome) around AD 62–63, during Nero’s reign. The letter is addressed to Christians scattered throughout what is modern-day Turkey (see [1:1](#)).

### The Gospel in 1 Peter

Hardship and holiness: these are the twin themes of Peter’s first epistle, written to a church composed of Gentile converts from licentious hedonism on the one hand and Jewish converts with Old Testament traditions on the other hand. Together they experienced an alien and exile status in a hostile world. Persecution against and oppression of the church of Jesus Christ had already begun, and Peter writes to encourage this “mixed bag” of believers with dear but easily forgotten truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Peter provides this encouragement through a combination of proclamation and exhortation, and curiously, one of the proclamations is that suffering is inevitable for followers of Jesus. Such brutal facts may be difficult to take initially. But as trials come, the understanding that such suffering can be the mark and measure of faithfulness helps these early Christians to see that affliction is one more means of Christlikeness and, indeed, one more avenue of true joy. Peter’s words on holiness and hardship are inextricably connected. Because of the way the Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ, Peter not only sees holiness as necessary for enduring hardship; he sees hardship as a way the Spirit makes us holy.

Peter is gracious to apply these truths generally at first, and then gradually more specifically to the practical challenges of everyday life. The connection between hardship and holiness is applicable for Christian citizenship ([2:13–25](#)), Christian families ([3:1–7](#)), and Christian churches ([5:1–11](#)).

From Peter’s instructions, believers in Jesus are trained in seeing the role and even the value of suffering. Christians learn that hardship is not outside God’s sovereign will and is used by God to fashion us according to Christ’s image. Authentic holiness in this adversity-filled life is possible through the power of the Spirit in the gospel, and indeed it is this very adversity that trains us for godliness. Through it all, however, we remember that the hardships of the world are temporary blips on the radar of the joyful life of eternal glory that begins when our flesh gives way and we go to be with the Lord. And one day, Christ will return to avenge our persecution and vindicate our suffering.

### Outline

- Opening ([1:1-2](#))
- Called to Salvation as Exiles ([1:3-2:12](#))
- Living as Strangers to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World ([2:13-4:11](#))
- Enduring Suffering ([4:12-5:11](#))
- Concluding Words ([5:12-14](#))

## Introduction to 2 Peter

### Author, Date and Recipients

Peter identifies himself as an “apostle of Jesus Christ” ([1:1](#)). He specifically mentions that he was an eyewitness of the transfiguration ([1:16-18](#); see [Matt. 17:1-8](#)). Peter probably wrote this letter from prison in Rome (see [2 Pet. 1:12-15](#)) not too long before his death by execution, sometime during AD 64-67. It is difficult to identify with certainty the churches Peter addresses.

### The Gospel in 2 Peter

In his first letter, the apostle Peter writes largely about the relationship between holiness and hardship. In this letter, a follow-up to the previous one ([3:1](#)), he writes about the relationship between holiness and heresy—a “hardship” in its own right in the early church as well as in the church today. Similar to Paul in his letter to the Galatians, or Jude (who likely used [2 Peter](#) as a reference point), Peter provides an abundant and unequivocal warning to believers about those who will infiltrate the church and teach seductive blasphemy. He cautions that some will even use the words of Scripture to support their perverted doctrines and lives ([3:16](#)).

Peter urges resistance to such distortions of grace. He reminds us about the importance of accurate knowledge of the truth ([1:2, 3, 5-6, 8, 12; 2:2, 20; 3:18](#)). And he shows us once more, as throughout the New Testament, that the faithfulness needed to combat such wickedness requires: an experience of God’s powerful grace in the gospel ([1:1-20](#)); a diligence in repentant living ([1:5-8; 3:14](#)); a sober-minded awareness of and resistance to heresy ([2:1-22; 3:1-4, 15-17](#)); and a hopeful expectation of God’s patience and faithfulness ([3:8-18](#)).

### Outline

- Initial Greeting ([1:1-2](#))
- God’s Grace in Christ Is the Source of Godly Living ([1:3-11](#))
- Peter’s Reminder to the Churches ([1:12-21](#))
- Evaluation of False Teachers ([2:1-22](#))
- The Day of the Lord Will Surely Come ([3:1-13](#))
- Concluding Encouragements ([3:14-18](#))

## Introduction to Jude

### Author, Date and Recipients

This book was written by Jude, the brother of James and Jesus (see [Matt. 13:55](#); [Mark 6:3](#); in Greek, “Judas” is the same as “Jude”). Jude was probably written in the mid-60s AD. Jude’s audience was probably Jewish Christians, or a mixture including Gentile Christians who were familiar with Jewish traditions.

### The Gospel in Jude

Where is the gospel in Jude’s epistle? In such a compact space, we actually receive a potent portrait of the gospel.

First and most pervasively, Jude displays the “photo negative” of the gospel, giving us a vivid and dark picture of those who twist the lavish grace of the gospel into a license to sin (e.g., vv. [12–13](#)). Jude piles on the metaphors throughout his letter, making it abundantly clear that false teaching smuggles death into a church. And yet, by contrast, this bleak picture still reveals the reality of the good news of God’s glory in Christ’s atoning work.

Made in God’s image to reflect his glory, we were created as mirrors at 45-degree angles, meant to reflect out to the world the unhindered radiance of God’s glory. But in disobedience, we turn around to face the ground. And when you turn a mirror upside down, it does not reflect a light but casts a shadow on the ground. In the same way, we sinners tend to focus upon the shadow of self-centered, worldly priorities rather than on the glory emanating from God himself. Jude invites us to worship this God—“him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (v. [24](#)).

Second, Jude’s persistent admonition to avoid false teachers, though sobering, is itself a gift of God’s grace. God is loving us by warning us against false teaching. As our Father, God wants his people to be healthy, joyful witnesses to the gospel. He therefore instructs us—scathingly, at times, as in Jude’s letter—out of his great love for us.

Third and finally, Jude reminds us of God’s saving work in Christ that echoes across all of human history. Jude startlingly remarks in verse [5](#) that it was Jesus who brought God’s people out of Egypt—centuries before the incarnation! Whatever Jude meant to convey here, at the least he is reminding us that Christ’s saving work is not an isolated and disconnected historical event. Rather, Christ’s work of redemption is the climax to all of God’s mighty deeds on behalf of his people.

### Outline

- Initial Greeting (vv. [1-2](#))
- Jude's Appeal: Contend for the Faith (vv. [3-4](#))
- The Immoral Character and Resulting Judgment of the False Teachers (vv. [5-16](#))
- Concluding Exhortations (vv. [17-25](#))

## Introduction to 1-3 John

### Author, Date and Recipients

John the son of Zebedee wrote these three letters, probably no later than the 90s AD. He wrote from Ephesus (in present-day western Turkey), perhaps to churches like those mentioned in [Revelation 2:8-3:22](#). John also wrote the Fourth Gospel and the book of [Revelation](#).

### The Gospel in 1-3 John

The word “gospel” never appears in the letters of John. Yet it is hard to imagine a book more intimately connected to the gospel of saving grace in Christ Jesus than John’s first letter, and in each of his other two letters John deals with a practical issue arising directly out of a care for the integrity of the gospel in the life of the church.

In [1 John](#) the themes of fellowshiping with God ([1:3, 6; 2:6, 13; 3:1-2](#)), genuinely believing in the unique person and work of Jesus ([2:1-2, 22-24; 4:2-3, 10, 14-15; 5:1, 5-6](#)), walking in the light ([1:7; 2:9-11](#)), practicing righteousness ([2:4; 3:7-10; 5:3](#)), loving other Christians ([2:10; 3:11-17, 23; 4:7, 11, 20-21](#)), and especially, being assured of eternal life ([2:3, 5; 3:10, 14, 19, 24; 4:17; 5:13, 20](#)) are all deeply rooted in gospel reality, especially its transformative power.

John writes his first letter to “you who believe in the name of the Son of God” so “that you may know that you have eternal life” ([5:13](#)). Two purposes are contained here: (1) that professing believers might test themselves to see the genuineness of their faith; and (2) that true believers would be assured of their right standing with God. In these purposes John helps all *professing* believers avoid a dangerous presumption and he helps all *genuine* believers avoid a debilitating uncertainty.

The bulk of John’s first letter is taken up with three tests of genuine faith: (1) the moral test—do you obey God’s commands? (2) the doctrinal test—do you believe Jesus is the Son of God? (3) the love test—do you love God and his children? Early in the letter these tests appear distinctly, but as John proceeds they are increasingly intertwined into a unified picture of the truly gospel-transformed life.

In his second letter John reiterates the same themes of truth, obedience, and love. But now he especially addresses the church regarding the danger of false teaching, and in particular teaching that denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (v. [7](#)). From the opening verse his emphasis is on “the truth” (vv. [1-4](#)), and he clearly instructs the church to have nothing to do with those who have departed from the truth of the gospel (vv. [10-11](#)). Agreement regarding Christ’s person and work is necessary for church fellowship.



John's third letter is, to a large degree, addressing the opposite side of the issue raised in his second letter. Here the exhortation has to do with how to respond to faithful ministers of the gospel (as opposed to how to respond to the false teachers addressed in his second letter). John again emphasizes the priority of truth for the health of the church (vv. [3-4](#)), but then proceeds to commend Gaius (and presumably those in fellowship with him) for actively supporting those in gospel ministry, and he encourages all believers to do the same (v. [8](#)).

## Outline

### 1 John Outline

- God Is Light and Christ Is the Way ([1:1-2:6](#))
- The Unchanging Commandment in a Changing World ([2:7-17](#))
- Overcoming the Antichrist by Confessing the Son ([2:18-3:10](#))
- Overcoming Evil by Listening to the Apostle ([3:11-4:6](#))
- The Assurance of God through the Love of God ([4:7-21](#))
- Faith in the Son as the Way to Life ([5:1-12](#))
- Final Call to Faith and Understanding ([5:13-21](#))

### 2 John Outline

- Greeting: The Elder's Love (vv. [1-3](#))
- The Elder's Joy and Request (vv. [4-6](#))
- The Elder's Concern (vv. [7-8](#))
- The Elder's Warning (vv. [9-11](#))
- Closing: The Elder's Farewell (vv. [12-13](#))

### 3 John Outline

- Greeting: The Elder's Joy at Gaius's Faithfulness (vv. [1-4](#))
- Praise for Gaius's Support for Traveling Christian Workers (vv. [5-8](#))
- Concern about Diotrephes (vv. [9-10](#))
- Advice and Commendation of Demetrius (vv. [11-12](#))
- Closing: A Promise to Visit (vv. [13-15](#))

## Introduction to Revelation

### Author, Date and Recipients

Jesus Christ is the divine author of this “revelation” ([1:1](#)). He describes coming events to his servant John. John, son of Zebedee, was the “beloved disciple” who also wrote the Fourth Gospel and 1, 2 and [3 John](#). Most scholars believe John recorded these visions while imprisoned on the island of Patmos in the mid-90s AD.

### Audience

The book of [Revelation](#) is addressed to the seven churches named in [1:11](#), and John presents the risen Christ addressing each church in [Revelation 2-3](#). Each letter to a particular church, however, ends with the words “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” ([2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22](#)), so with the number seven pointing to completion and with each letter calling all the churches to hear, in addressing seven churches John writes representatively to all churches. In their culture, the churches seem to be small, insignificant, and struggling against mounting persecution from the Roman Empire. John shows them the world as it really is.

### The Gospel in Revelation

John has built the unique application of the gospel he provides in [Revelation](#) into the very structure of the book.

The opening ([1:1-8](#)) and closing ([22:6-21](#)) reveal things as they are and promise that Jesus is coming soon. Then the letters to the seven churches in the world ([1:9-3:22](#)) are matched by the concluding depiction of the church in glory in the new heaven and earth ([21:1-22:5](#)). In the midst of his tribulation and the struggles of the churches, John is given a throne-room vision that includes Christ conquering and opening the scroll ([4:1-6:17](#)). This is matched near the end of the book by his vision of Christ returning to conquer, set up his thousand-year kingdom, then open the scrolls for judgment ([19:11-20:15](#)). John’s vision of the sealing of the 144,000 saints and the trumpets that bring plagues ([7:1-9:21](#)) is paralleled by his vision of the redemption of the 144,000 and the outpouring of the bowls of wrath ([14:1-19:10](#)). John is attested as a true prophet as he eats the scroll like Ezekiel ([10:1-11](#)), and the churches are warned against the deception of the false prophet ([13:11-18](#)).

The two complementary accounts of Satan’s war on the church as it proclaims the gospel ([11:1-14; 12:1-13:10](#)) frame the centerpiece of the book, in which “the kingdom of the world” becomes “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” at the blast of the seventh trumpet ([11:15-19](#)). This structure proclaims that Christ is Lord, so that though Satan is persecuting the churches and

though they are small and beleaguered, they will yet hold fast the word of God and testimony of Jesus, with the expectation that their patient endurance will be rewarded.

Gospel faith makes people right with God and produces gospel faithfulness, which reaps gospel reward. The book of [Revelation](#) is a triumphant vision of God's final victory over all the forces of evil in the world. This final victory is secured because of the blood of the Lamb that purifies God's people for his ultimate reign. Revelation is filled with the gracious purposes of God, to strengthen his people.

### Outline

- Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Opening ([1:1-8](#))
- John's Vision on the Lord's Day ([1:9-22:5](#))
  - Jesus and the letters ([1:9-3:22](#))
  - The throne and the judgments ([4:1-16:21](#))
    1. The throne room vision ([4:1-5:14](#))
    2. Six seals ([6:1-17](#))
    3. The sealing of the saints and their worship ([7:1-17](#))
    4. The seventh seal ([8:1-5](#))
    5. Six trumpets ([8:6-9:21](#))
    6. Prophetic witness ([10:1-11:14](#))
    7. The seventh trumpet ([11:15-19](#))
    8. Conflict between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent ([12:1-14:20](#))
    9. Seven bowls ([15:1-16:21](#))
  - The harlot, the king, and the bride ([17:1-22:5](#))
- Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Closing ([22:6-21](#))