

# General Epistles



## Scripture

**Hebrews 4:14-15** • Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** • Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sins that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**James 1:2-4** • Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

**James 4:7-10** • Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

**1 Peter 5:6-7** • Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**1 John 4:10** • This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

**Jude 24-25** • To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

## Hebrews

Who wrote Hebrews?

What did the author of Hebrews add to the understanding of Jesus?

Who was Melchizedek and why is he so important to the author of Hebrews?

What does Christ's eternal priesthood mean for us?

## **James**

Who was James?

How do you resolve the apparent tensions between Paul's and James' understanding of justification?

What is the particular use of Abraham to which both appeal?

What is faith according to Paul and according to James?

What does Paul mean when he writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”?

And how might James explain the same reality to which Paul is pointing to in Ephesians 2:8-9?

## **Peter**

How did Peter’s Jewish background influence his understanding of Christianity?

What, according to Peter, is the Christian perspective of suffering?

## **John**

Why did John write First John?

What did Gnosticism teach?

How does John directly refute Gnosticism in his letter?

What does he offer believers (through the gospel) that Gnosticism could not offer them?

## **Jude**

What noncanonical books did Jude quote from in his letter?

## I John 4:7-21 | No Love Translation

Dear friends, let us lay down our lives for one another, for self-sacrifice comes from God. Everyone who doesn't demand his rights has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not lay down his life but clings to his rights does not know God, because God is the very definition of self-sacrifice. This is how God showed his willingness to lay down his life among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is self-sacrifice: not that we died for God, but that he died for us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so laid down his life for us, we also ought to lay down our lives for one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we surrender our rights for the sake of one another, God lives in us and his sacrifice is made complete in us.

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the sacrifice God has made for us.

God is self-sacrifice. Whoever lives in self-sacrifice by surrendering his rights and even his very life lives in God, and God in him. In this way, the lifestyle of laying down our lives for one another is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in dying to yourself. But perfect sacrifice drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in self-sacrifice.

We lay down our lives and surrender our rights for others because he first laid down his life and surrendered his rights for us. If anyone says, "I would die for God," yet wouldn't give up anything for his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not lay down his life for his brother, whom he has seen, cannot lay down his life for God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever sacrifices everything for God must also sacrifice everything for his brother.

## Hebrews | Outline

**1-4 | superior** | The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (1:3a)

The author of Hebrews comes out of the gate link gangbusters, immediately drawing heavenly portraits of Christ, exclaiming his greatness that far surpasses the glory of angels. He proves his point again and again, like a prizefighter determined to knock out his opponent in the first thirty seconds of the fight, with quote upon quote from the Old Testament.

From there he brings Jesus to earth, proclaiming that this great Son, greater than the angels, became a little lower than the angels by taking on human flesh, and paying the ultimate sacrifice. And again, more blows from the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah.

Now he claims this Jesus is greater than the greatest of men—Moses. He has far surpassed Moses and his servant Joshua, who led the people into the promised land and gave them rest from the warring and wandering. The rest that Jesus gives—a true Sabbath—is greater even than the occupation of the promised land brought about by Joshua.

**5-10 | priest** | You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. (5:6b)

The bulk of the letter is absorbed in the declaration that Jesus is the perfect high priest who intercedes in the heavens for all who call upon him in faith. The central figure of this discussion is Melchizedek, the former king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of El Elyon (God Most High). Melchizedek set the standard for the coming Messiah in that he was both priest and king. Jesus, the author writes, fulfills the prophecy of Melchizedek and has become both king of the universe and priest for all who call upon his name. Jesus' priesthood is eternal, and he is the initiator of the new covenant prophesied about in Jeremiah 31. He is both sacrificial lamb and covenant priest. He offers his own blood on behalf of the faithful, constantly interceding for them at the throne of God the Father. Because Jesus' priesthood is eternal, and because he does not change but lives forever, the author calls his readers to persevere through all trials and tribulations.

**11-13 | faith** | Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (11:1)

Hebrews 11 is one of the most famous chapters in the New Testament with its litany of heroes of the faith. The point is that all of these men and women looked forward to the fulfillment of the promises of God, but they did not live to see them. We, however, have been so blessed, because we live in the time after Christ has come. The call to those who live after Christ's resurrection is to persevere on behalf of those who have gone before us.

## James | Outline

**1-5 | deeds** | I will show you my faith by what I do. (2:18c)

James is an interesting book because of the amount of issues it tackles in such a short space. He begins by addressing the trials and temptations that believers face, and calls them to persevere in the face of them. He moves on to address obedience to the Scriptures, and then he exhorts his readers to flee from all forms of favoritism and prejudice. After that he contrasts faith and deeds, concluding that faith without deeds is dead. Next he tackles the tongue, then wisdom, then submission to God. Finally, he concludes with a series of brief exhortations on several other subjects! James truly says a lot in a very short space.

## 1 Peter | Outline

**1-5 | holy** | But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (2:9)

Though not quite as sweeping as James, Peter manages to cover a lot of ground with just a little bit of paper in his first epistle. He begins with a glorious prayer to God, praising him for the hope believers have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He goes on to call believers to holiness, reminding them that they are a chosen people who are fulfilling the ancient calling of Israel through faith in Christ. He goes on to talk about submission to authority and the proper order of life in the home. After urging his readers to persevere through their sufferings he calls the shepherds of God's people to humility.

## 2 Peter | Outline

**1-3 | destruction** | In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. (2:3)

In his second epistle Peter rails against false teachers who are infiltrating the people of God, and bringing judgment upon all who follow their heresies. He declares that their judgment and destruction are coming, and urges the believers to avoid such blasphemers and scoffers.

## 1 John | Outline

**1-5 | agape** | This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (4:10)

The last living apostle, John sees the seeds of the Gnostic heresy being planted throughout the church. He attacks it with his own personal testimony—that he himself has seen Jesus, has heard him, has touched him. He destroys Gnostic arguments at every turn, claiming that one cannot claim to be in the light and walk in the darkness. He calls his readers to love another, something that the Gnostics cannot and will not call someone to do. He bases the brotherly love of Christians on the overwhelming love of God, which came first and showed us, through the cross, what real love is. In his concluding remarks he lays out the true knowledge that is available to us in Christ—knowledge of which the Gnostics (from the Greek word for knowledge) are completely ignorant.

## 2 John | Outline

**1 | love** | As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. (6b)

This brief letter is an encouragement to walk in love.

## 3 John | Outline

**1 | truth** | I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (4)

This brief letter is an encouragement to walk in the truth.

## Jude | Outline

**1 | contend** | I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. (3b)

This is a letter to Christians, urging them to fight for the faith against godless men who have infiltrated the ranks of the faithful.

