

Catholic Letters

Westminster Hall, Christ Presbyterian Church

1

Hebrews: Date, Place, and Author

- Sent to Rome (or Jerusalem?)
- Author?
 - Not Paul—although has been attributed to Paul
 - Educated in Greek rhetoric and Jewish interpretation
 - Not the founder but a prominent community leader
- Dated between 50 and 60–90 CE
 - Clement of Rome cites letter in 96 CE

2

Recipient Community

- Second-generation Christians
- Mix of Jewish and Gentile members
- Educated in Hellenistic rhetoric and Torah argumentation
- Endured abuse, persecution, suffering
- Competing Jewish and Christian practices
- In danger of apostasy, leaving the faith for Jewish traditions surpassed by Christ

3

Style

- A “word of exhortation” or sermon (13:22)
- Alternates exhortation and exposition
- Reinterprets temple rites and Jewish heroes in light of Christ

4

Key Themes

- Christianity is continuous with Judaism (same God) AND supersedes Judaism (in Christ)
- Christology
 - Preexistence, incarnation, sacrificial death, resurrection, return for judgment
- Jesus is High Priest
 - Order of Melchizedek (before hereditary order)
- Sabbath rest
 - Image of salvation (4:1–11)

5

Key Themes

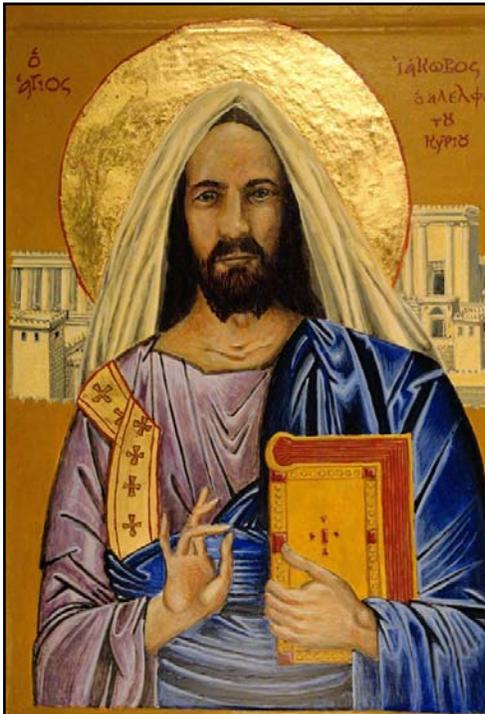
- Pilgrim people
 - Christians are on a journey, like past heroes
 - Tabernacle is presence of God (Exod. 25-27)
- Suffering and shame
 - Public suffering/shame for faith is honored by God
- Warnings against apostasy
 - Those in the faith who leave cannot be restored
 - Do not persist in sin—punishment is greater for Christians who do not change behavior
 - Apostates cannot be restored (12:16–17)

6

Outline

- Prologue: the Son reveals God (1:1–3)
- Superiority of the Son (1:4–4:13)
- Jesus, the High Priest (4:14–10:39)
 - Jesus sympathizes with humanity
 - Jesus serves as a priest like Melchizedek
 - Earthly sanctuary is shadow of heavenly sanctuary
 - Christ's sacrifice > Levite priests' sacrifices
- Cloud of witnesses and suffering (11:1–12:11)
- Mount Zion > Mount Sinai (12:12–29)
- Admonitions, prayers, blessings (13:1–25)

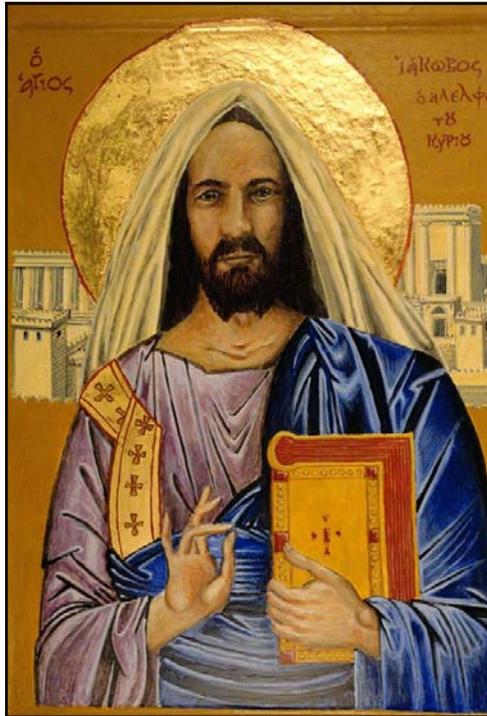
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James: Date, Place, Author

- “From James, to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion” (1:1)
- Is this James one of Jesus’ brothers?
- Genre: Jewish wisdom literature
- Form: a homily?
- Sayings of Jesus, but little mention of him
- Late 40s–50s CE
- Community may have been “scattered” (dispersed) because of local persecution

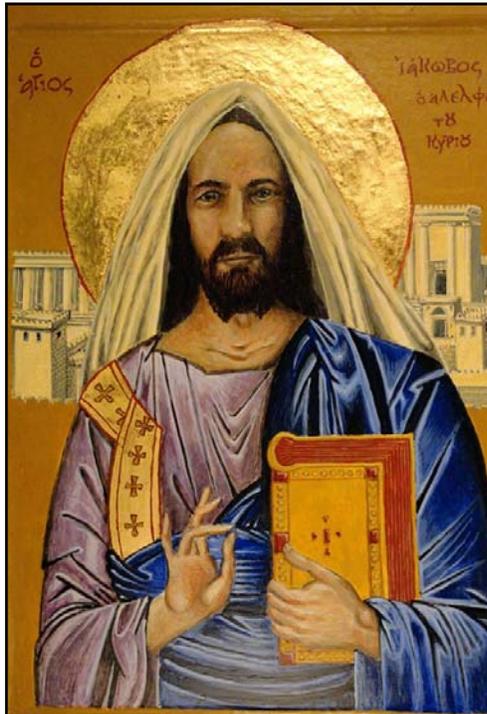
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Outline of James

- Salutation (1:1)
- “Pure religion” loves God and neighbor (1:2–2:13)
 - God is impartial; do not favor the rich
 - God is generous; honor the poor
- Faith without works is dead (2:14–4:10)
 - Teachers have great responsibility in actions
 - Controlled speech and the wayward tongue
 - Two kinds of wisdom—two paths
- Speech, planning, prayer, restoration (4:11–5:20)

9



James: Key Themes

- Trials and temptations
 - Test and perfect our faith
- Wisdom from above
 - Is from the father of lights
 - Do not follow wisdom of the world
- Faith and “works”
 - Demonstrate what you believe by how you live
- Rich and poor
 - Do not discriminate
 - God blesses the poor; God’s people must bless and care for the poor

10

Date and Place of 1 Peter

- If by Peter: written mid 60s from Rome
- If pseudonymous: written any time before 89 CE (Domitian's rule)
- A circular letter
 - To Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia
- To "exiles of the Dispersion"
 - *Dispersion* = Jews living outside Palestine
 - Second-generation, Jewish Christians
 - Educated in Hellenistic rhetoric and Jewish scriptures
 - Cf. James 1:1

11

Theological Themes

- Suffering *for* Christ and *with* Christ
 - Community suffers social ostracism, harassment, abuse
 - No evidence of state persecution in first century
 - The "fiery ordeal" will refine their faith
 - Author encourages community (*parenesis*)
 - They share Christ's suffering (4:13)
- Christians are the new Israel
- Baptism and spiritual growth
- Submission to earthly authorities

12

Outline

- Salutations and blessing of God (1:1–12)
- Live as God’s people (1:13–2:10)
- Exercise honorable conduct (2:11–3:12)
 - Household codes
- Suffering for what is right (3:13–4:19)
 - A blessing
 - Christ’s suffering procured our baptism
 - We share Christ’s sufferings and blessing
- Encouragement and exhortation (5:1–11)
- Closing (5:12–14)

13

2 Peter: Authorship, Date, Place

- Pseudepigraphical (majority view)
 - Minority view: written by Peter in 62–65 CE
- Genre: ancient “testament”
- Hellenistic perspective
 - Not by a Palestinian Jew
- Second-century letter?
 - Assumes knowledge of Paul’s letters (3:15–16)
 - Modeled on the letter of Jude
 - Others argue late first century, 80–100 CE
- Purpose: to warn against false teachers

14

Characterization of the False Teachers

- Members of the community gone astray
- Seek profit
- Use flattery
- Morally lax
- Lure people into licentious behavior
- Scoff at Christ's *parousia*
- Idiosyncratic interpretations of scripture
- Influenced by early Gnosticism?
- Influenced by Epicureanism?

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Theological Themes

- Delayed *parousia*
 - So more people can repent (3:9)
 - According to God's time, not human time
- Judgment is certain
 - Destruction and re-creation
 - Punishment and rescue
- Godliness
 - World is corrupt
 - Right knowledge leads to right living
 - Know the future and remember the past
- How do we define what is right and wrong?

16

Outline

- Salutation and blessing (1:1–2)
- Parting words and testament (1:3–21)
 - God supplies everything we need
 - Live as God’s elected
 - Christ is our prophetic hope
- False prophets and teachers (2:1–22)
 - Long condemned liars
 - Positive examples: Noah and Lot
- Hold fast: Christ is indeed coming! (3:1–13)
- Meanwhile: patience and peace (3:14–18)

17

Date and Place of 1,2,3 John

- Three letters similar to Gospel of John
 - In language, tone, vocabulary and “testimony”
 - Gospel based on testimony of “beloved disciple” and reveals stages of editing
 - Gospel and three letters share a “Johannine” tradition
- Three-letter “packet”
- By “John the elder” in 90s
 - Gospel written 85–90 CE
- Occasion: “conflict and schism” in churches

18

Conflict in the Johannine Letters

- Characterize secessionists as
 - deceivers, liars
 - false prophets
 - antichrists
- Secessionists may claim new revelation
- But Elder calls people back to “tradition”

19

Conflict in the Johannine Letters

- Three letters condemn
 - those who claim to be without sin
 - those who “know God” but disobey commandments
 - those who “love” God but not brothers and sisters
 - those who love world
 - those who deny Jesus’ humanity, or his divinity
- Letters praise
 - those who confess Jesus’ humanity and divinity
 - Jesus’ coming with water and blood

20

Outline: 1 John (theological treatise)

- Prologue: experiencing the word of life (1:1–4)
- Walking in darkness; walking in light (1:5–2:2)
- Loving one another; not loving the world (2:3–17)
- Insiders and outsiders (2:18–3:24)
- Criteria for judging false prophets (4:1–21)
- Victorious faith (5:1–13)
- Exhortation and closing (5:14–21)

21

Outline: 2 John

- The elder to the lady elect and her children (vv. 1–2)
- Faithfulness (vv. 4)
- Love one another; keep commandments (vv. 5–6)
- Guard against deceitful antichrists; do not welcome them (vv. 7–11)
- Future visit and closing (vv. 12–13)

22

Outline: 3 John

- The elder to Gaius and prayer (vv. 1–2)
- Commends Gaius for offering hospitality to missionaries (vv. 3–8)
- Censures Diotrephes for refusing to welcome missionaries (vv. 9–10)
- Commends Demetrius (vv. 11–12)
- Travel plans and closing (vv. 13–15)

23

Jude: Author, Date, and Place

- Murky manuscript tradition
- Jude, one of Jesus' brothers (Matt. 13:55)
- Jesus' brothers believed after Jesus' death
 - Mark 3:21; John 7:1–5; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5
- Pseudepigraphical writing? (80s–90s)
 - Strong command of Greek language is not consistent with Palestinian Jewish peasant
- Authentic? (50s–60s CE)
 - Amanuensis or assimilation to Greek world
 - Use of Hebrew scriptures, not Septuagint

24

Community

- These Jewish Christians are called, beloved, and kept safe (v. 1)
- But also divided by “opponents”
- Opponents
 - Libertine Christians (v. 4)
 - Forgiveness is permission to commit wrongs
 - Abuse believers’ “love feasts”
 - Reject organized authority
 - Follow authority of ecstatic experience
 - Are they Gentiles without Jewish moral codes?

25

Theological Themes

- Judgment is certain and inevitable
 - No call to repentance
 - Instead, Jude pronounces prophetic “woe”
- Apostolic Faith
 - Tradition from apostles is enough
 - Look to eternal life from God
- Use of Jewish Apocryphal writings
 - 1 Enoch
 - Assumption of Moses
 - Legends
 - Together with Hebrew scriptures

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Outline

- Salutation and blessing (vv. 1–2)
- Ungodly people have intruded (vv. 3–10)
 - Jude must write in support of orthodoxy
 - God has punished wicked before and will again
- Prophetic woe against ungodly (vv. 11–16)
- Exhortations and doxology (vv. 17–25)