

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

Along with the pastoral Epistles of Paul, are a collection of letters we call the "General Epistles." These letters were written by other Apostles and church leaders, and as we have them are not addressed to a particular congregation or group, and appear to have been generally circulated among the churches. This does not mean they did not have a particular audience in mind - James and Hebrews are addressed to Jewish believers, and John's Epistles clearly have a specific audience in mind.

James, Jerusalem	45 AD?
Jewish Christians Scattered about	

James 1:27; 2:18

James (probably Jesus' half brother) seems to be addressing Jewish believers scattered by persecution, and appears to have the Judaic Christian Church described in Acts 1 - 12 as its background. It is concerned with **practical religion - true or false** - and stresses faith expressed in works.

	&# AD?
Jewish Christians in Italy??	

Hebrews 1:4, 3:24; 4:14

The Author of Hebrews is not known. Some suggest Paul, but I favor Apollos, perhaps under Paul's supervision while in Corinth. (Acts 18:24 - 28). The language and vocabulary are not like Paul's other letters, and Apollos had both an Alexandrian and Roman background and a powerful preaching ministry suitable to Hebrews' author. The audience is equally unclear and may have been a Jewish house church in Rome (Hebr 13:24). A word of exhortation (sermon?) to a people tempted to go back to Judaism it presents **Jesus as the better way** - God's final word - interpreting much of the Old Testament worship and ritual in that light. There is no going back.

Peter, Rome, Italy	c60-67 AD?
the Christians in five provinces of Asia Minor	

I PETER 5:12
II PETER 3:1

Peter seems to have been in Rome at the time of writing and addresses gentile Christians in five provinces of North East Asia Minor, apparently dispersed by persecution and trials. He focuses them on God's Grace and encourages them to **stand firm** in suffering. The second letter seems to have been written shortly before Peter's anticipated martyrdom. It focuses on **Knowledge strengthening Hope**.

Jude,

c70 AD?

those called by God
and kept by Christ

JUDE 3,4

Jude (possibly Jesus' brother also) wrote this brief letter to warn against false teaching. It is in many ways similar to 2Peter. Challenging those who persist in sin, it is best known for its benediction. Both 2 Peter and Jude have been challenged by the critics as being forgeries, both come down hard on false teaching!

John,

Ephesus?

c90 AD?

my beloved churches

I JOHN 5:12

II JOHN

III JOHN

John wrote these epistles with the same simplicity of language and deep theological depth as he used in his gospel. He seems concerned with a particular false teaching that has arisen in the church. In contrast to these "anti-christs," John presents **tests for knowing** we are in the truth, and **love** God and have **fellowship** with him. The second letter is a strong warning against false teachers, and third contrasts two missionaries one true and one false. Tradition suggests John ministered in Ephesus near the end of his life. All three of these letters seem to have been written at about the same time.

There are also some letters in Acts, and John address individual letters to Seven Churches in Revelation 2& 3 - the Apocalypse was probably to be circulated to each of the Seven.