



Hebrews & Catholic Epistles

Catholic Bible Institute in the Diocese of Orange

March 18, 2017

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8:45 Opening Prayer / Initial Announcements

9:00 Presentation 1 – “Catholic Epistles” & “Hebrews”

Overview: Definitions, Literary Genres, Authors, Dates

Use of the Catholic Epistles in the *Lectionary for Mass*

The So-Called “Letter to the Hebrews”

Christ as Victim and High Priest

Definition and Models of “Faith”

Group Discussions: *Who, for you, are the best biblical examples of faith/believing? Why?*

10:15 Break

10:30 Presentation 2 – The Letters of James & Jude

Overview of Jude, esp. its use of Scripture

Authorship, Authenticity, Dating of James

Literary Genre & Contents of James

Contrasts between James and Paul on Faith & Works

Group Discussions: *How could you most convincingly explain to someone that Paul and James do NOT contradict each other in their teachings about Christian faith and ethics?*

12:00 Lunch Break

1:00 Presentation 3 – The First and Second Epistles of Peter

Authorship, Authenticity, Dating

Literary Genres & Contents

Overview of 1 Peter, esp. the role of suffering

Overview of 2 Peter, esp. teachings on eschatology

Group Discussions: *What parts of 1 or 2 Peter would you add to the Lectionary? Why?*

2:15 Break

2:30 Presentation 4 – The Three Johannine Epistles

Authorship, Authenticity, Dating

Literary Genres & Contents

Overview of 1 John

Overview of 2 & 3 John

Q & A

3:50 Closing Prayer & Announcements

4:00 Clean-up & Departure



“Catholic Epistles” used as Second Readings on Sundays in the *Lectionary for Mass*

Ordinary Time: selections from James & Hebrews (Years B & C)
Season of Advent: one reading each from Hebrews, James, 2 Peter
Christmas Season: four passages from Hebrews & 1 John (optional)
Season of Lent: one reading each from Hebrews & 1 Peter (Year B)

Easter Triduum: a reading from Hebrews on Good Friday (each year)
Easter Season: semi-continuous from 1 Peter (Year A) & 1 John (Year B)
Solemnities: Heb on Corpus Christi; 1 John on Sacred Heart & All Saints
Catholic Epistles never read on Sundays: 2 John, 3 John, Jude

Reading	Sunday or Major Feast	Reading	Sunday or Major Feast
Heb 2:9-11	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 27	1 Pet 1:3-9	A: 2 nd Sunday of Easter
Heb 4:12-13	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 28	1 Pet 1:17-21	A: 3 rd Sunday of Easter
Heb 4:14-16	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 29	1 Pet 2:4-9	A: 5 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 5:1-6	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 30	1 Pet 2:20b-25	A: 4 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 7:23-28	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 31	1 Pet 3:15-18	A: 6 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 9:24-28	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 32	1 Pet 3:18-22	B: 1 st Sunday of Lent
Heb 10:11-14, 18	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 33	1 Pet 4:13-16	A: 7 th Sunday of Easter (if not Ascension)
Heb 11:1-2, 8-19	C: Ordinary Time, Sunday 19		
Heb 12:1-4	C: Ordinary Time, Sunday 20	2 Pet 3:8-14	B: 2 nd Sunday of Advent
Heb 12:5-7, 11-13	C: Ordinary Time, Sunday 21		
Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a	C: Ordinary Time, Sunday 22	1 John 2:1-5a	B: 3 rd Sunday of Easter
		1 John 3:1-2	B: 4 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 1:1-6	ABC: Christmas: Mass during the Day	1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 (<i>opt.</i>)	C <i>opt.</i> Sunday after Christmas: Holy Family
Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9	ABC: Good Friday	1 John 3:1-3	ABC: Nov. 1: Solemnity of All Saints
Heb 5:7-9	B: 5 th Sunday of Lent	1 John 3:18-24	B: 5 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 9:11-15	B: Sunday after Trinity: Body & Blood of Christ	1 John 4:7-10	B: 6 th Sunday of Easter
Heb 9:24-28; 10:19-23 (<i>opt.</i>)	C <i>opt.</i> Ascension of the Lord	1 John 4:7-16	A: Fri. after 2 nd Sun. after Pentecost: Sacred Heart
Heb 10:5-10	C: 4 th Sunday of Advent	1 John 4:11-16	B: 7 th Sunday of Easter (if not Ascension)
Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 (<i>opt.</i>)	B <i>opt.</i> Sunday after Christmas: Holy Family	1 John 5:1-6	B: 2 nd Sunday of Easter
		1 John 5:1-9 (<i>opt.</i>)	B <i>opt.</i> Sunday after Jan. 6: Baptism of the Lord
Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 22		
Jas 2:1-5	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 23	[2 John 4-9]	[never Sun.; only Friday, Week 32, Year II]
Jas 2:14-18	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 24		
Jas 3:16—4:3	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 25	[3 John 5-8]	[never Sun.; only Saturday, Week 32, Year II]
Jas 5:1-6	B: Ordinary Time, Sunday 26		
Jas 5:7-10	A: 3 rd Sunday of Advent	[Jude 17, 20b-25]	[never Sun.; only Saturday, Week 8, Year II]

An Overview of “Hebrews” and the Seven “Catholic Epistles” (General Letters) of the NT

Canonical Name: The Epistle (or Letter) to the Hebrews (Hebrews or Heb)
Attributed Author: none attributed – anonymous writing!
Named Recipients: “Hebrews” are *not* explicitly named; but they were definitely people familiar with Jewish rituals
Date: possibly 60’s, more likely 80’s
Where From: unknown; possibly Rome (see mention of greetings from “those from Italy” – 13:24b)
Authenticity: the work itself does not even claim to be by Paul, but the mention of “our brother Timothy” (13:23) has led some people to assume incorrectly that Paul wrote it
Unity & Integrity: not disputed; a single writing
Literary Genre: not really a letter, but an *exegetical sermon* of exhortation (with an epistolary conclusion only)
Language: very sophisticated literary Greek
Purpose: shows how we have access to God through Christ; so we must live according to Christ’s example

Canonical Name: The Epistle (or Letter) of James (James or Jas)
Attributed Author: “James, a servant/slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1a); this is “James of Jerusalem,” also called the “brother of the Lord” (see Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19)
Named Recipients: “to the Twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (1:1b); i.e. Jewish-Christians in the “Diaspora”
Date: 50’s or early 60’s if authentic (before James’ death in 62 CE); 80’s or 90’s if not by James
Where From: probably Jerusalem or elsewhere in Palestine, due to its strong connections with Judaism
Authenticity: disputed; many scholars think it was written by an anonymous Jewish-Christian who admired James; but it could be written by James himself, a leader in the early church in Jerusalem
Unity & Integrity: not really disputed today
Literary Genre: starts as an *encyclical* or “circular letter”; actually more like a homily or Jewish “wisdom literature”
Language: fairly elegant Greek
Purpose: stresses *ethics* of Christian living; also corrects a misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching (2:14-26)

Canonical Name: The First Letter (or Epistle) of Peter (1 Peter or 1 Pt)
Attributed Author: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1a)
Named Recipients: “to the exiles of the dispersion...” in several Roman provinces of northern Asia Minor (1:1b-2)
Where From: definitely Rome, whether by Peter or not (see 5:13, where “Babylon” is a code name for Rome)
Date: if by Peter, then early 60’s; otherwise, from the 70’s or 80’s
Authenticity: possibly by Peter, but writing through a scribe; more likely pseudonymous, by a disciple of Peter
Unity: some scholars see 4:12-5:11 as a later addition, after some persecution has started
Integrity: a single writing, but possibly incorporating older hymns or statements of faith
Literary Genre: an encyclical letter, intended for several different churches at the same time
Language: Greek
Purpose: argues that Christians are not a threat to Roman social order, since they live ethically

Canonical Name: The Second Epistle (or Letter) of Peter (2 Peter or 2 Pt)
Attributed Author: “Simeon Peter, a servant/slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1a)
Named Recipients: “to those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1b); intended for a group of Gentile Christians, possibly in Asia
Date: almost certainly the last NT work written, as late as the 120’s
Where From: unknown; possibly Rome
Authenticity: almost certainly pseudonymous, by someone who admired Peter and appeals to his authority
Unity & Integrity: not seriously disputed; a single letter
Literary Genre: a “Testament,” but in the form of a letter
Language: Greek
Purpose: stresses apostolic teaching, ethical teachings, Christian hope

Canonical Name: **The First Epistle (or Letter) of John** (1 John or 1 Jn)
Attributed Author: none attributed – an anonymous writing!
Named Recipients: none mentioned – but intended for one part of the Johannine community after it was divided
Date: around 100 CE; some time after the Gospel according to John was written
Where From: probably Ephesus, as traditionally maintained; but possibly from elsewhere
Authenticity: by someone in the “Johannine School”, but probably *not* by the same author as the Fourth Gospel, *nor* by “John, son of Zebedee,” one of the original twelve apostles mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels
Unity: not seriously disputed
Integrity: one addition: 5:6-8 was inserted in the 3rd or 4th centuries
Literary Genre: not really a “letter”; more like a theological treatise or biblical sermon (“homily”)
Language: a Greek with similar vocabulary but a somewhat different style from the Fourth Gospel
Purpose: to exhort readers to “remain” with traditional Christian teachings about Jesus and to love one another; to warn them against errors associated with false interpretations of the Fourth Gospel

Canonical Name: **The Second Letter (or Epistle) of John** (2 John or 2 Jn)
Attributed Author: “The elder” (v. 1a); probably *not* the same author as the Fourth Gospel
Named Recipients: “to the elect lady and her children whom I love in the truth...” (v. 1b-2), with more about “truth”; some part of the Johannine church after it has undergone a schism or division
Date & Place: same as 1 John
Authenticity: by the same author of the “Johannine school” who wrote 3 John, and probably also 1 John
Unity & Integrity: not disputed
Literary Genre: a real letter
Language: the same Greek style as 1 John and 3 John
Purpose: to warn the community against false teachers or “deceivers” (v. 7)

Canonical Name: **The Third Letter (or Epistle) of John** (3 John or 3 Jn)
Attributed Author: “The elder” (v. 1a)
Named Recipients: “to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth” (v. 1b); a leader of some Johannine church
Date & Place: same as 1 & 2 John; possibly sent together at the same time
Authenticity: by the same author as 2 John
Unity & Integrity: not disputed
Literary Genre: a real, personal letter
Language: the same Greek style as 1 John and 2 John
Purpose: to praise Gaius for his hospitality, and to attack a rival Christian leader named Diotrephes

Canonical Name: **The Letter (or Epistle) of Jude** (Jude)
Attributed Author: “Jude, a servant/slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (v. 1a; see Mark 6:3)
Named Recipients: “to those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ” (v. 1b); Jewish-Christians in some unknown area, possibly in or near Palestine
Date: unknown; as early as the 50’s if authentic; or as late as the 90’s if not by Jude
Where From: probably Jerusalem or nearby in Palestine; possibly Alexandria
Authenticity: disputed; too short to determine, but quite possibly by this early Christian missionary leader
Unity & Integrity: definitely a single letter
Literary Genre: a letter of exhortation and encouragement, incorporating some apocalyptic ideas
Language: common Greek
Purpose: to warn the readers against false teachings/teachers and to exhort them to live moral lives

The “Epistle” to the “Hebrews”

The 19th book of the NT is not really a letter (except for the ending), but more like a biblical treatise or a homily (a sermon based on scripture). Moreover, it does not explicitly address any “Hebrews” (a title not attached until the 2nd century). Still, the work known as “Hebrews” was one of the most influential early Christian writings, especially in showing how Christianity began understanding itself as separate from and superior to Judaism.

Outlines of Hebrews:

Thematic Contents (R. Brown)	Structural Analysis (A. Vanhoye)
Introduction (1:1-3)	Introduction (1:1-4)
Superiority of Jesus as God’s Son (1:4—4:13)	
Over the angels (1:4—2:18)	A. The name superior to the angels (1:5—2:18; on Eschatology)
Over Moses (3:1—4:13)	B. Jesus faithful and compassionate (3:1—5:10; on Ecclesiology)
Superiority of Jesus’ priesthood (4:14—7:28)	C. The central exposition (5:11—10:39; on Sacrifice)
Superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice and ministry in the heavenly tabernacle inaugurating a new covenant (8:1—10:18)	B’. Faith and endurance (11:1—12:13; on Ecclesiology)
Faith and endurance: based on Jesus’ priestly work (10:19—12:29)	A’. The peaceful fruit of justice (12:14—13:19; on Eschatology)
Exhortation to profit from Jesus’ sacrifice (10:19-39)	
OT Examples of Faith (11:1-40)	
Example of Jesus’ suffering and discipline (12:1-13)	
Warning against disobedience; OT examples (12:14-29)	
Injunctions about practice (13:1-19)	
Conclusion: blessings and greetings (13:20-25)	Conclusion (13:20-25)

Faith: Definition and Role Models (Heb 11–12):

- *Def.*: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (11:1; NRSV)
- *Effects*: “Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” (11:2-3)
- *Ancestors in Faith* (“By faith...”):
 - Abel, Enoch, Noah (11:4-7); **Abraham** (11:8-12, 17-19); Isaac, Jacob, Joseph (11:20-22)
 - **Moses** (11:23-28); The Israelites at the Red Sea & Rahab at Jericho (11:29-31)
 - **Many others**: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, Prophets, Women, etc. (11:32-38)
 - All these died *without* having received the promises! (11:13-16; 11:39-41)
 - Thus, they function as a “great cloud of witnesses” for us also to persevere in faith (12:1-29)
- **Jesus**: “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (12:2-3)

The Purpose of Hebrews: Exhorting Christians to Persevere in the Faith:

Most of this book seems like a theological treatise, with heavy use of biblical quotations and interpretations but with only a few scattered words of exhortation:

2:1 3:7-11 (quoting Ps 95:7-11) 3:12-14 4:1, 11 4:14, 16 5:11-12
 6:1 6:11-12 10:19-25 10:32, 35-39 (citing Isa 26:20; Hab 2:3-4) 11:6

In contrast, the last two chapters are filled with many explicit exhortations directed at the Christian readers. **Heb 12-13** contains about *thirty* exhortations, esp. calling for endurance in suffering, steadfastness in faith, harmony among believers, mutual love, care for prisoners, hospitality to strangers, morality in sexual relationships, respect and obedience for leaders, sharing of goods, prayer for one another, praise of God, etc.

The Christology of Hebrews:

- Sometimes he is named “**Jesus**” (14x), but more often the “**Son**” (24x) or “**Christ**” (12x; 3x JC)
 - Jesus is called an “*apostle*” (i.e., a messenger from God), only here in the entire NT (3:1)
- Jesus is **superior to all** other beings:
 - The Son is superior to the OT *prophets* (1:1-3); and superior to the *angels* (1:4-14; 2:5-18)
 - Jesus is greater than *Moses* (3:1-6); and greater than *Joshua* (4:1-11)
 - Jesus is a “great high priest,” greater than *Aaron* and *Jewish high priests* (4:14—5:10; 7:1—10:18)

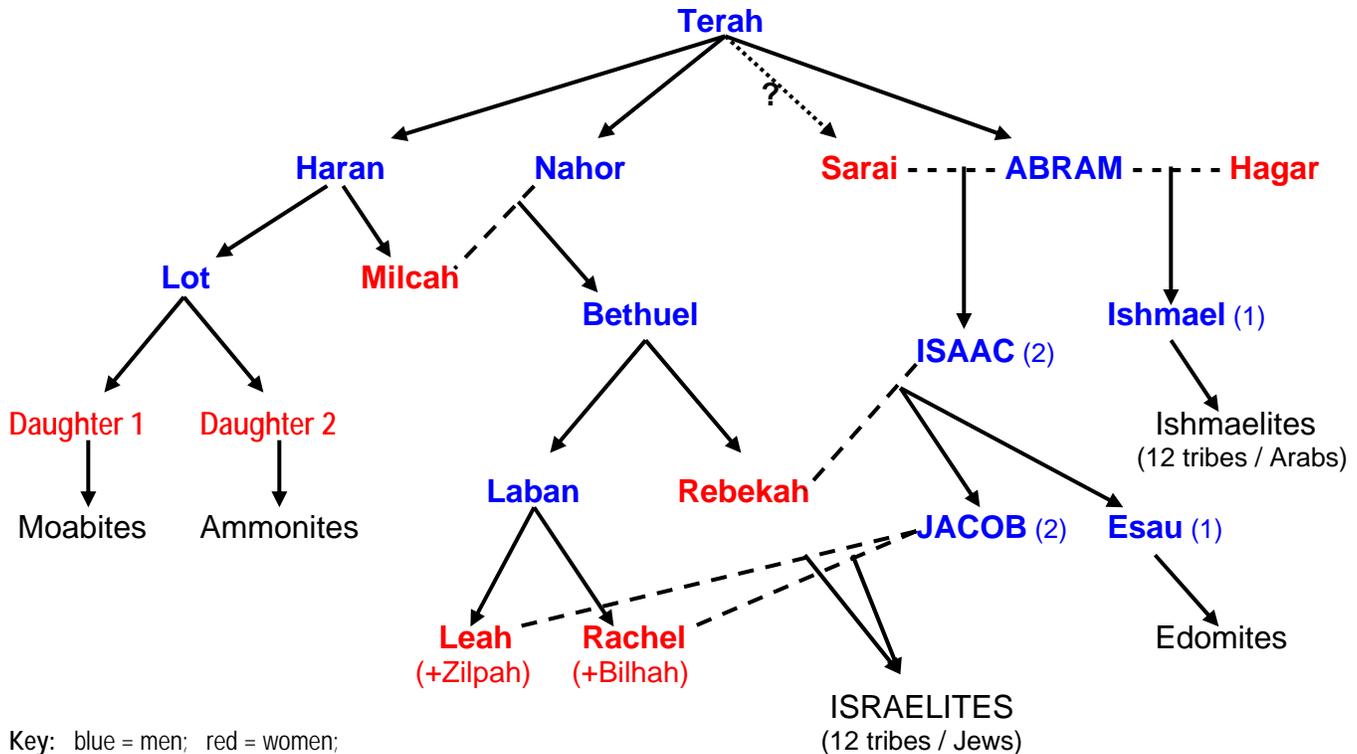
Jesus, the Great High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek:

- **Jesus** could normally not be considered a “priest” in ancient Judaism at all (8:4):
 - Jesus was a member of the *tribe of Judah*, while all Jewish priests had to belong to the *tribe of Levi* (Heb 7:11-14; see a chart of the Twelve Tribes of Israel).
 - Yet Jesus is called a high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17; cf. Ps 110:4), which is contrasted to and considered greater than the “order of Aaron” (Heb 7:11).
- Who is/was **Melchizedek**?
 - A person who encountered Abraham only once, in a very brief story of the OT (Gen 14:17-20).
 - He is said to be “**King of Salem**” (i.e., the city of *Jeru-salem*! see Gen 14:18; Heb 7:1-2).
 - Etymologically, the two parts of his name (*melchi* + *zedek*) mean “king of righteousness” (Heb 7:2).
 - But since “Salem” or “*shalom*” means “peace,” he is also called “king of peace” (Heb 7:2).
 - He is called a “**priest of God Most High**” (Heb. *El Elyon*; Gen 14:18; 7:1).
 - *Note:* he is not a Jewish priest, since he lived prior to the establishment of any priesthood in Israel.
 - He has no genealogy or descendants in the OT; so he is considered “a priest forever” (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:3).
 - In the OT story, he offers Abraham **bread and wine**, rather than sacrificing any animals (Gen 14:18)
 - This is later interpreted as a foreshadowing of the Christian Eucharist.
 - He also **blesses Abraham** with a prayer addressed to “God Most High” (Gen 14:19-20; Heb 7:1)
 - In turn, Abraham gives him a tithe (10%) of everything he has (Gen 14:20).
- According to **Hebrews**, this encounter shows that Abraham recognizes the superiority of Melchizedek:
 - The inferior is blessed by the superior; inferior offers tithe to superior, not *vice versa* (Heb 7:2).
 - Older is better; thus Melchizedek’s priesthood must be superior to that of Levi and Aaron (7:4-10), descendants of Abraham who lived generations later.
 - Thus, the priesthood of Jesus, a new and different type “according to the order of Melchizedek,” is superior to the Jewish priesthood, which is based on the tribe of Levi and the order of Aaron.

The Priestly Ministry of Jesus:

Jewish High Priests and Sacrifices	Jesus as High Priest and Perfect Sacrifice
are called by God, chosen from among mortals, like Aaron was (5:1, 4)	was appointed high priest by God, as God’s own Son (4:14; 5:5)
can be compassionate with people, since they too are weak & sinful (5:2)	can sympathize with human weakness, since he was tempted/tested as we are, although without sinning himself (4:15)
offer sacrifices for their own sins & those of others (5:3; 7:27-28; 9:7, 9)	offers sacrifices and prayers only for others, not for himself, since he is sinless and perfect (5:15; 7:26-28; 9:14)
are priests in the order of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi (5:4; 7:11)	is priest forever, “acc. to the order of Melchizedek” (5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 17, 24)
have an imperfect (levitical) priesthood, inferior to Melchizedek’s (7:1-11)	is priest of a new order (Melchizedek’s) that replaces the levitical (7:11-19)
take office without an oath (7:20)	has his priesthood confirmed with an oath from God (7:21; cf. Ps 110:4)
all eventually die, so there must be many priests and high priests (7:23)	is the only permanent high priest, since he lives forever (7:16-17, 24-25)
offer sacrifices day after day, year after year (7:27; 9:6; 10:1, 11)	offered himself as a sacrifice once for all (7:27; 9:12, 14, 26; 10:10, 14)
hold office on earth, according to the law (8:4)	has passed through the heavens; is seated by God’s throne (8:1; cf. 4:14)
worship in an earthly sanctuary, a shadow of the heavenly one (8:5; 9:1)	ministers in the heavenly tabernacle set up by God (8:2, 9:11, 24)
follow the first covenant, the old covenant, given through Moses (8:7, 9)	is the “mediator of a better covenant,” a new covenant (8:6-13; 9:15-28)
enter the innermost “Holy of Holies” once a year (9:7)	enters only once into the greater and perfect tabernacle (9:11-28; 10:10)
offer the blood of goats and calves (9:7, 13, 19, 25)	offers his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (9:12; 10:19)
their sacrifices are imperfect, since they use animals (9:23; 10:4)	his sacrifice is perfect, since he is perfect/sinless (7:26, 28; 9:14)

Family of Abraham



Terah: from Ur of the Chaldeans; has 3 sons; wife not named (Gen 11:26-32; cf. Luke 3:34).

Haran: dies in Ur before his father dies; wife not named; son Lot, daughters Milcah & Iscah (11:27-28).

Nahor: marries **Milcah**, daughter of his brother Haran (11:29); have 8 sons, incl. Bethuel (22:20-24).

Abram: main character of Gen 12–25; recipient of God’s promises; name changed to **ABRAHAM** (17:5); sons Ishmael (by Hagar) and Isaac (by Sarah); after Sarah’s death, takes another wife, **Keturah**, who has 6 sons (25:1-4), including Midian, ancestor of the **Midianites** (37:28-36).

Lot: son of Haran, thus nephew of Abram, who takes care of him (11:27–14:16; 18:17–19:29); wife and two daughters never named; widowed daughters sleep with their father and bear sons, who become ancestors of the **Moabites** and **Ammonites** (19:30-38).

Sarai: Abram’s wife, thus Terah’s daughter-in-law (11:29-31); Abram also calls her his “sister,” which seems deceptive in one story (12:10-20); but in another story Abram insists she really is his half-sister (his father’s daughter by another wife; 20:1-18); originally childless, but in old age has a son, Isaac (16:1–21:7); name changed to **SARAH** (17:15); dies and is buried in Hebron (23:1-20).

Hagar: Sarah’s Egyptian slave-girl; mother of Abram’s first son, Ishmael; much conflict with Sarah after his birth; even more after the birth of Sarah’s son, Isaac (16:1–21:21).

Ishmael: first-born son of Abraham, by Hagar (16:1–17:27); wife or wives never named, but has 12 sons (25:12-16), the ancestors of 12 tribes of **Ishmaelites** (37:25-28).

Isaac: second son of Abraham, by wife Sarah, despite her old age (17:15-21; 21:1–35:29); marries Rebekah, who has twin sons, Esau & Jacob.

Bethuel: youngest son of Nahor & Milcah; wife unnamed; father of Rebekah (22:23) and Laban (24:29).

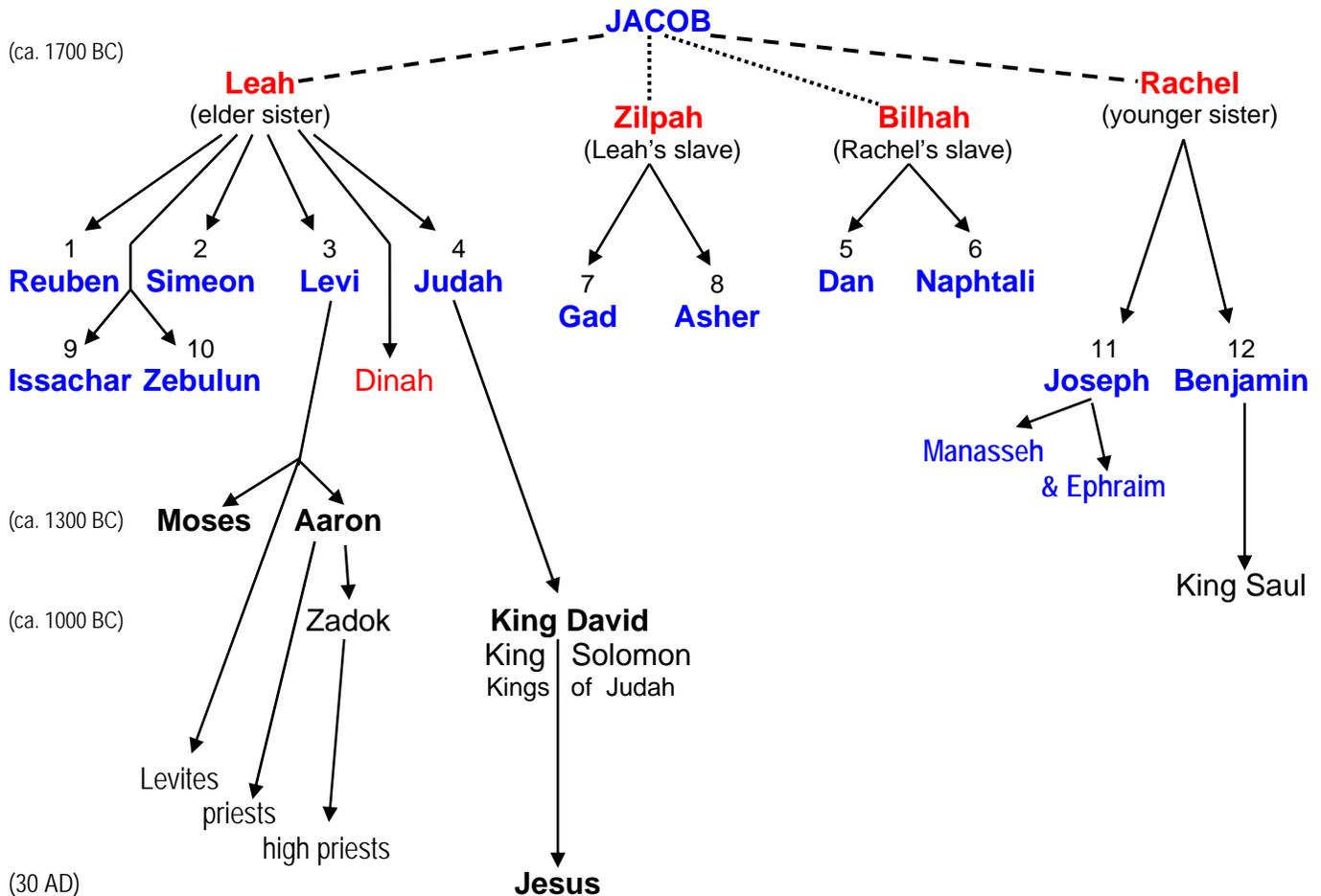
Rebekah: daughter of Bethuel (22:23); becomes wife of Isaac (24:15–25:20); favors their younger son.

Laban: son of Bethuel, brother of Rebekah; has extensive interactions with Jacob (24:29–31:55).

Esau: elder twin son of Isaac & Rebekah (25:25); names of wives differ in two traditions (26:34 & 28:9 vs. 36:2-3); one is a daughter of Ishmael; his sons are ancestors of the **Edomites** (36:1-43).

Jacob: younger twin son of Isaac & Rebekah (25:26); conflicts with Esau (25:27–27:46); marries Leah and Rachel, daughters of his uncle Laban (27:43–29:30); name changed to **ISRAEL** (32:28); has 12 sons (w/ 2 wives + 2 slave-girls), ancestors of the **Israelites** or “12 Tribes of Israel” (29:31–49:33).

Sons of Jacob / Tribes of Israel



In the **Hebrew Bible**, the Israelites are described as descendants of the *twelve sons of Jacob* (whose name was changed to *Israel* in Gen 32:28), the *son of Isaac*, the *son of Abraham*. The phrase "Twelve Tribes of Israel" (or simply "Twelve Tribes") sometimes occurs in the Bible (OT & NT) without any individual names being listed (Gen 49:28; Exod 24:4; 28:21; 39:14; Ezek 47:13; Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Acts 26:7; and Rev 21:12; cf. also "Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion" in James 1:1).

The Bible also contains two dozen listings of the twelve sons of Jacob and/or tribes of Israel (Gen 29:31–30:24; 35:22–26; 46:8–27; 49:1–27; Exod 1:1–5; Num 1:5–15; 1:20–54; 2:3–29; 7:1–88; 10:11–28; 13:4–15; 26:5–50; 34:19–28; Deut 27:12–13; 33:1–29; Josh 13–19; 21:4–8; 1 Chr 2:1–2; 2–7; 12:24–38; 27:16–22; Ezek 48:1–29; 48:30–34; cf. Rev 7:5–8). Some are very brief lists, while others are spread out over several paragraphs or chapters that discuss the distribution of the land or name representatives of each tribe. Surprisingly, each listing is slightly different from all the others, either in the order of the names mentioned or even in the specific names used (e.g., the two sons of Joseph are sometimes listed along with or instead of their father; and sometimes a name is omitted for various reasons). A few texts actually have more than 12 names! Close analysis shows several principles for the ordering and various reasons for the omission or substitution of some names, as explained on <http://www.catholic-resources.org/Bible/History-12Tribes.htm>.

Jacob's twelve sons are first mentioned in the order of their births, in Genesis 29:31–30:24 & 35:16–20.

- **Leah** (elder wife): 1) **Reuben**, 2) **Simeon**, 3) **Levi**, 4) **Judah**; later also 9) **Issachar**, 10) **Zebulun**
- **Bilhah** (Rachel's slave): 5) **Dan**, 6) **Naphtali**
- **Zilpah** (Leah's slave): 7) **Gad**, 8) **Asher**
- **Rachel** (younger wife): 11) **Joseph**, 12) **Benjamin**

Manasseh & Ephraim – sons of Joseph, whose descendants figure prominently in the later history of Israel

Moses and Aaron – leaders of the Israelites at the time of their migration out of Egypt and wandering in the Sinai desert

Kings David & Solomon – the two greatest rulers of the united Kingdom of Israel, from about 1100 to 930 BCE

Tribe of Levi – becomes known as the "priestly tribe," since all cultic & temple officials had to belong to this tribe

Tribe of Judah – becomes known as the "royal tribe," since all later Kings of Judah were descendants of King David

Priesthood in the Bible



Definitions:

- **Priests** – Heb. *kohen*; Gk. *hiereus* = “cultic officials, who offer sacrifices, serve in temples”
 - Some type of “priests” are found in almost all religions, not just Judaism and Christianity.
- **Presbyters / Elders** – Heb. *zaqen*; Gk. *presbyteros* = “older men, local community leaders”
 - Related words in English include *presider*, *to preside*, *president*, etc.
- **Holy / Sacred** – Heb. *qadosh*; Gk *hagios* = “set apart, dedicated to God” (vs. secular, common)
- **Sacrifice** – Heb. *zebach*; Gk. *thusia* = “offerings to God” (animals, grains, fruits; later spiritualized)
- **Eucharist** – Gk. *eucharistia* = “thanksgiving” (at first a ritual meal, later seen more as a sacrifice)

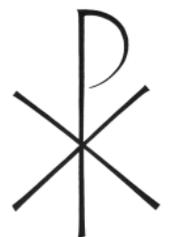
Historical Developments:

- In the OT, “**elders**” were senior tribal leaders, who ran local government and administered justice (Exod 18:13-17; 24:1-11; Num 11:16-30; Judg 21:16-24; 1 Sam 8:1-9, etc.).
- In the NT, “**elders**” first refers to the Jewish leaders (Mark 8:31; Matt 21:23; Luke 7:3; 22:26; Acts 4:5); later it also refers to Christian community leaders (Acts 11:30; 15:2; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1).
- In the OT, the roles and functions of “**priests**” change and develop over the centuries:
 - In the patriarchal era, the heads of Israelite families offered sacrifices in many places (Gen 31:54), while “priests” served in the established temples of other nations (Gen 41:45; 47:22; Exod 2:16; 18:1).
 - During the Exodus, a special priestly class developed from the sons of Aaron, in the tribe of Levi (see Exod 28ff; also Lev and Num); they built and served in various shrines, esp. at Shiloh and Bethel.
 - All men of the tribe of Levi were priests, while no Israelite from the other eleven tribes could be; over time, distinctions arise between the “priests” (sons of Aaron) and other “Levites” (assistants).
 - The Temple of Jerusalem is built under King Solomon in the 10th cent. BC (1 Kings 6), but not until the 7th cent. is all worship is centralized there and other cultic sites destroyed (2 Kings 23).
 - After the first temple is destroyed in 587 BC (2 Kings 25), priests can no longer offer any sacrifices; but during the Babylonian Exile, priestly writers are influential in compiling the Hebrew Bible.
 - After the exile, the temple is rebuilt, sacrifices resume, and priests become more numerous and powerful; in much of the Hellenistic period, the Jerusalem “high priest” was the *de facto* head of government.
 - Throughout history, Israelite/Jewish priests were married and had families; most had other occupations, serving in the temple for only short periods each year; only the “chief priests” served full-time.
- In the NT, the word “**priests**” refers mostly to Jewish priests (in the Jerusalem Temple)
 - No Christians are ever called “priests” in the entire NT; but many other titles are used for church leaders: initially apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, etc. (1 Cor 12:28-30; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 2:20; 4:11-13); later also bishops, deacons, presbyters, widows, etc. (Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3 & 5; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5).
 - Only in the Epistle to the Hebrews is Jesus himself called the “great high priest,” even though he is from the tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi.
 - Priestly language is applied to the Christian community: “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a *holy priesthood*, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:5, 9; cf. Exod 19:6).
 - Only later (2nd cent.) is the term “priest” applied to *individual* Christian leaders, esp. as the Eucharist is not just a community meal (Acts 2:42-47), but considered more and more as a sacrifice (1 Cor 11:17-34).
 - For many centuries, most Christian leaders were married and worked in other occupations; celibacy was encouraged (see 1 Cor 7) but optional (see 1 Tim 3; Titus 1), and was not required until the 12th century.

Priesthood in the Church:

To understand priesthood today, one must apply the **both/and** approach of theology:

- The Church values **both** the “priesthood of all people” **and** the “ministerial priesthood.”
- The call to “be holy” applies **both** to ordained clergy **and** to all Catholic/Christian laity.
- Ordained priests function **both** as “community elders” **and** as “sacrificial ministers.”
- The Mass is **both** a “communal meal” (table, bread) **and** a “ritual sacrifice” (altar, host).
- Jesus is our one & only priest/sacrifice **and** Christians participate in the priesthood of Christ.



The Letter of Jude

An Outline of the Letter of Jude:

Letter Opening (vv. 1-2)

Letter Body (vv. 3-23):

3-4: *Occasion and Theme*: "Contend for the faith" against "ungodly intruders"

5-7: Three examples of the punishment of unbelief and disobedience: Israelites, angels, Sodom & Gomorrah

8-10: Three charges against the "dreamers": they defile the flesh, reject authority, slander the angels

11: Three more biblical examples of people who cause sin, error, and rebellion: Cain, Balaam, Korah

12-13: Polemic descriptions of the ungodly: waterless clouds, fruitless trees, wild waves, wandering stars

14-15: Prophecies of Enoch against those who are ungodly in deed and speech

16: More accusations against the "malcontents": grumbling, lust, boasting, flattery

17-18: Predictions of Jesus' Apostles against the ungodly: scoffers who indulge their lusts

19: These people are worldly, devoid of Spirit, and cause divisions

20-23: Appeal to the "beloved" to build themselves up and help others: with faith, prayer, love, mercy, etc.

Concluding Doxology (vv. 24-25)

Main Issues with Jude:

Authorship/Authenticity:

- This letter is attributed to "Jude" (*Ioudas* or "Judas" in Greek), the "slave/servant" of Jesus and "brother" of James (v. 1).
 - The name was very popular among first-century Jews, since it is a variation of the name "Judah," one of the 12 sons of Jacob. Several people are named "Jude/Judas" in the NT; so which one is meant here?
 - Certainly *not* "Judas Iscariot" (Matt 27:3-10; Acts 1:16-20); probably *not* the "apostle" Jude/Judas, the son of James (named in Luke 6:16, Acts 1:16 only); probably *not* the "prophet" Judas (a.k.a. Barsabas; Acts 15:22-33).
 - Most likely it is the Judas named in the Gospels along with James and two others as "brothers" of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55); their families became prominent leaders of Christians in Palestine (Eusebius, *EH* 1.7.14; 3.19-20).
- Many scholars have doubted that it was really written early and/or by someone so close to Jesus;
 - They propose that it was more likely written pseudepigraphically in the late first or early second century.
- However, more recent studies suggest that the letter might well be authentic and early (from the 50's?).

Use of Scripture and Non-Biblical Texts:

- The Letter of Jude never directly quotes from the Old Testament, but it alludes to several OT characters:
 - v. 5: the Israelites in the desert, who died in the wilderness due to their faithlessness (Num 14:1-35)
 - v. 6: the angels (or "sons of God"), who mated with mortal women (Gen 6:1-4; as interpreted by 1 Enoch 6-19)
 - v. 7: people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who wanted sexual relations with the angels visiting Lot (Gen 19:4-11)
 - v. 11: Cain, who slew his brother Abel (Gen 4:1-16); Balaam, who led Israel into apostasy (Num 25:1-4; 31:16); and Korah, who led a rebellion against Moses (Num 16:1-35)
- It also quotes from some and alludes to some non-biblical ancient Jewish sources:
 - the apocryphal "1 Enoch" is alluded to in v. 6, and directly quoted in vv. 14-15
 - the apocryphal "Assumption of Moses" is quoted in v. 9, and may have influenced the polemic of v. 16
- Finally, it quotes from some "predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," namely: "In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts" (vv. 17-18).

Rhetorical Techniques:

- The Letter of Jude not only quotes and alludes to popular ancient Jewish literature (both canonical and non-canonical), but it also uses several interesting rhetorical techniques, including parallelisms and triadic (three-fold) illustrations:
 - Direct accusations against the "ungodly": socially, morally, and theologically.
 - Harshly polemical descriptions of the ungodly (vv. 12-13): describing them with various metaphorical images.
 - Direct appeals to the recipients of this letter (vv. 3, 17, 20-23).
 - Encouragement, prayers, and blessings for the recipients of the letter (vv. 1-2, 24-25).

The Epistle of James

Some Outlines:

R. E. Brown (<i>Introduction to the NT</i> , p. 726)	J. W. Thompson (<i>HarperCollins Bible Dict.</i> , p. 481)
Greetings (Opening Formula; 1:1) The role of trials and temptations (1:2-18) Words and deeds (1:19-27) Partiality toward the rich (2:1-9) Keeping the whole law (2:10-13) Faith and good works (2:14-26) Power of the tongue (3:1-12) Wisdom from above (3:13-18) Desires as the cause of division (4:1-10) Judging one another as judging the Law (4:11-12) Further arrogant behavior (4:13-17) Warning to the rich (5:1-6) Patience till the coming of the Lord (5:7-11) Admonitions on behavior within the community (5:12-20)	I. Epistolary introduction (1:1) II. Introduction of major themes (1:2-27) A. Enduring trials (1:2-4, 12-15) B. Prayer and divine wisdom (1:5-8) C. Rich and poor (1:9-11) D. Wisdom from above (1:16-18) E. The use of the tongue (1:19-21) F. Doers of the word (1:22-27) III. Development of major themes (2:1—5:20) A. Rich and poor in the assembly (2:1-13) B. Doers of the word (2:14-26) C. The use of the tongue (3:1-12) D. Prayer and divine wisdom (3:13—4:10) E. Doers of the law and judging one's brother (4:11-12) F. Rich and poor and the pursuit of wealth (4:13—5:6) G. Endurance of trials (5:7-11) H. On swearing (5:12) I. Prayer and faith (5:13-18) J. The recovery of a brother (5:19-20)

Note: This “letter” does **not** have a standard epistolary ending, but ends abruptly!

Author and Authorship:

Who is “James”?

- A. The name “**James**” is the English equivalent of the Greek *Iakobus*, thus is a variation of “Jacob.”
 - The original “Jacob” of the Old Testament was the grandson of Abraham (Gen 25:19—36:43)
 - Jacob’s twelve sons (Gen 29:31—30:24; 35:16-18) became patriarchs of the “Twelve Tribes of Israel.”
 - Thus, you can imagine how popular this name was among Jews of every generation.
- B. There are several men named “Jacob/James” in the New Testament:
 1. **James, son of Zebedee, brother of John** – one of the first four disciples of Jesus (Mark 1:19-20; Matt 4:21-22); one of the twelve “apostles” (Mark 3:17; Matt 10:2); actually one of the three or four closest to Jesus throughout his public ministry (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33; & pars.); killed by King Herod Agrippa I around 40 CE (Acts 12:2).
 2. **James, son of Alphaeus** – another of the 12 apostles (Mark 3:18 & par.); little else is known about him.
 3. **James, father of Judas** – the father of yet another apostle (acc. to Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13).
 4. **James, “brother” of the Lord** – listed first among the four “brothers” of Jesus mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55; cf. Mark ; Matt 12:46-50); he later becomes the leader of the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9); Paul calls him an “apostle” (Gal 1:19), although there are some tensions between Paul and some “people from James” who insist that non-Jewish Christians must be circumcised (Gal 2:12).

Is this Letter Authentic? – Was it actually written by James, the Brother of the Lord, or by someone else?

- The **author of the epistle** simply identifies himself as “*James, a servant/slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1:1).
- Christian tradition and biblical scholars generally agree that this is James #4 above.
- But some scholars suggest it was pseudepigraphic (written by someone else, after James’ death).

Main Themes:

A) Faith and Good Works: James vs. Paul?

Common but incorrect interpretation, leading to an *apparent* but *false* contradiction between Paul and James:

- **Paul:** Justification by our faith in Jesus alone, not by our good works (see Gal 2:15-3:14 & Rom 3:21-4:25)
- **James:** Justification by our good works, not by our faith alone (see James 2:14-26)

Errors with these interpretations:

1. Paul is *not* talking about "good works"; for him, "works of the Law" = circumcision, sacrificial rituals, dietary rules, etc.
For James, "works" are acts of charity: care for widows, orphans, the poor, love of neighbor, etc. (1:27; 2:8; 2:15-16)
2. Paul is *not* opposed to "good works"; they are a necessary *consequence* (but not the foundation) of Christian life.
James is *not* opposed to faith; he presupposes it, but stresses that authentic faith must be put into action.
3. Paul is *not* talking primarily about people's "faith *in* Jesus"; he means the "*faith of Jesus*" in God; *our* faith is secondary.
James does mean *people's* faith, primarily believing in God (2:23) but also believing in Jesus (2:1).
4. Paul did *not* write the word "alone" in Rom 3:28; Luther was the first one who added that word in his translation.
James does *not* write "by works alone," but writes "not by faith alone"; he stresses that *both* have to go together.

Summary Chart:

	<i>Foundation of Justification / Reason for Salvation:</i>	<i>Consequences for People / Results of Being Saved:</i>
Paul:	the "Faith <i>of</i> Jesus"; not the "Works of the Law" (i.e., <i>Jesus'</i> trust in God; <i>his</i> death on the cross)	1) Our faith/trust <i>in</i> Jesus 2) Our ethical living, loving others
James:	God <i>gave us birth</i> by the word of truth (1:18) God <i>chose the poor</i> to be heirs of the kingdom (2:5)	1) Our faith in Jesus, <i>and</i> 2) Our works of charity (<i>both</i> are necessary, 2:14-26)

B) Ethical Teachings of Jesus - Parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount:

James	Teaching	cf. Matthew
1:2	Be joyful in the midst of various trials	5:11-12
1:4	Be perfect, complete, and lack nothing	5:48
1:5	Ask from God, who gives generously	7:7
1:19-20	Be slow to anger; anger does not lead to righteousness	5:22
1:22	Be doers of the word, not just hearers	7:24
2:5	God has chosen the poor as heirs of the kingdom	5:3
2:10	Whoever fails to keep one law is guilty of it all	5:19
2:13	Judgment will be merciless for those who are not merciful	5:7
3:12	Can a fig tree bear olives, or a vine figs?	7:16
3:18	Righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace	5:9
4:4	Friendship with the world is enmity toward God	6:24
4:10	Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will lift you up	5:5
5:2-3	Your wealth has rotted... your gold and silver are rusted...	6:19-20
5:9	Do not complain against others, so you may not be judged	7:1
5:10	Take the patience of the prophets as an example of suffering	5:12
5:12	Do not swear by heaven or earth... let your 'yes' be 'yes', your 'no' be 'no'	5:34-37

C) Other Themes:

- **Dangers of the Tongue:** see James 1:19; 2:6-7, 12; 3:1-10, 14; 4:1-3, 11-16; 5:9a, 12
- **Dangers of Riches:** see James 1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6
- **Forgiveness of Sins and Anointing of the Sick:** see James 5:13-20

The First and Second Epistles of Peter

I) The Apostle Peter:

Peter in the New Testament:

- In the Synoptic Gospels, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, poor Galilean fishermen, are the first two disciples called by Jesus to follow him (Mark 1:16-17); Peter becomes one of Jesus' closest disciples.
- In John's Gospel, Jesus' first disciple is Andrew, who then brings his brother Simon to Jesus (John 1:35-42).
- When Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29), and Jesus in turn says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah... you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church... I will give you the *keys* of the kingdom of heaven..." (only in Matt 16:16-20).
- His original name is "Simon," while "Peter" is a Greek nickname meaning "Rocky"; Paul often calls him "Cephas," an Aramaic name that also means "Rocky" (1 Cor 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18—2:14).
- The NT does not mention the death of Peter, but later Christian tradition records that he preached in Rome and was martyred there under Emperor Nero in 64 or 65 AD.
- He later comes to be regarded as the first "bishop" of Rome, based partly on 1 Peter 5:1-2.

Associates of Peter:

- **Paul:** not one of the first twelve apostles, but met Peter several times during his life, in Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 15; Gal 1:18—2:14), possibly in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22), and later probably in Rome.
- **Silvanus:** called a "faithful brother"; the scribe or co-author of 1 Peter (5:12); a leader and "prophet" of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:22, 32); also a missionary associate of Paul (Acts 15:40—18:5).
- **Mark:** called "my son" in 1 Peter 5:13; from Jerusalem (Acts 12:12); also traveled with Paul (Acts 12:25).

II) Important Themes of 1 Peter:

Christianity does *not* Threaten the Social Order of the Roman Empire:

- Christianity was perceived by some Romans as a dangerous, subversive, anti-Roman religion:
 - as a "new" religion, it was suspect and/or despised by many
 - as monotheists, Christians refused to worship the emperor or other Greco-Roman gods
 - Christian preaching of "freedom" for everyone might be misinterpreted
- Christians are a "chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people" (**2:9-10**):
 - be God's obedient children (1:14)
 - live holy lives, just as God is holy (1:15; 4:1-6)
 - love one another (i.e., other Christian believers) genuinely (1:22; 3:8; 4:8-11)
 - accept the authority of the emperor, governors, every human institution; "honor" the emperor (2:13-17)
 - you are free, but do not misuse your freedom as a pretext for evil (2:16; cf. Gal 5:13)
- 1 Peter also contains a "Household Code" with instructions especially for *slaves and wives* (2:18—3:12); it seems to presuppose mixed Christian/non-Christian families, esp. with non-Christian masters/husbands.
- Gentiles who see the honorable lives of Christians might even become converts (2:12; 3:1, 15-16).

Accept Innocent Suffering as Christians:

- Rejoice, even if you have to endure trials and testing (1:6-7; 4:12-13)
- Follow the example of Christ in suffering unjustly (1:11; 2:21-25; 3:18; 4:1; 5:9)
- Don't do anything to deserve punishment (2:20; 3:16-17; 4:15)
- Don't repay evil with evil, but by blessing and doing good to those who persecute you (2:23; 3:9; 4:19)
- You are blessed if you are reviled or suffer "for the name of Christ" or "as a Christian" (4:14, 16)

Eschatology: Maintain Hope for your Future Reward:

- Jesus' resurrection gives hope for an imperishable inheritance (1:3-4, 11), the salvation of our souls (1:5, 9)
- Judgment day, the "end of all things" is near, so be prepared (2:12; 4:5-7; 5:8)
- Focus is on *Theo*-logy more than *Christo*-logy: Jesus is the model of obedient suffering, but God is the eschatological judge; the Christian community is the "Household of God," rather than the "Body of Christ"

Use of Christian Traditions:

- 1:20-21 sounds like it may be an early Christian “confession” (a brief profession of faith)
- 3:18-22 sounds like it may be a quotation of an early Christian hymn
- “Love one another” (1:22; 3:8; 4:8) is a major theme of the Johannine Jesus (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12-17; 1John 3:11-14; Rom 12:10; etc.)
- “You have been born anew of imperishable seed” (1:23) alludes to John 1:13
- “You are blessed if you are reviled for the name of Christ” (4:14) alludes to the beatitudes of Jesus (Matt 5:11; Luke 6:22)

III) Important Themes of 2 Peter:

Preserve and Pass On the Apostolic Teachings, and Avoid False Teachers:

- The letter is written in the form of a “Testament,” as the dying words of the apostle Peter (1:12-15; 3:1-2)
- Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus, not someone who made up or passed on myths (1:16-18)
- In contrast, false prophets and false teachers will try to deceive the believers (2:1-3, 10-22; 3:3-4, 16)

Ethics: Live a Virtuous and Godly Life; Avoid Evil and Immorality:

- Build up your lives, step by step:
 faith / goodness / knowledge / self-control / endurance / godliness / mutual affection / **love** (1:5-7)
- The Lord will punish the unrighteous, but rescue the righteous (2:4-10)
- Avoid sinners and any kind of sin: slander, revelry, adultery, greed, etc. (2:11-22)
- Live ethical holy lives as you wait for the coming of the “Day of the Lord” (1:3-4; 3:11-12)

Eschatology: Don’t Be Deceived or Discouraged about the Delay of the Parousia:

- Some people (“scoffers”) doubt that the Lord will come; they believe that the world simply goes on (3:3-4)
- Time is different for God: “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day” (3:8)
- God is not slow, but is patient, giving time for more people to repent (3:9)
- The “day of the Lord” will come suddenly, unexpectedly, “like a thief” (3:10a; cf. Matt 24:43-44; 1Thess 5:2)
- The final destruction/purification of everything will occur with “fire” (3:7, 10, 12)
- Finally, there will be “new heavens and a new earth” (3:13; cf. Rev 21:1)

Use of Scriptures (Hebrew and Christian):

- 2:22a quotes the Hebrew Bible (Prov 26:11), while 2:22b quotes a non-biblical proverb
- Several other passages (1:20-21; 2:4-10; 3:11-13; etc.) mention the “prophets” or allude to other OT texts
- 1:17-18 reflects Peter’s experience as an eyewitness to the *Transfiguration* of Jesus (cf. **Matt** 17:1-8)
- 3:1-2 presupposes knowledge of the **First Letter of Peter**
- 3:15-16 indicates that the **letters of Paul** were revered as “scripture” (since compared with the “other scriptures”); but they are also difficult to understand, and thus misinterpreted by some people
- Much of 2 Peter 2-3 is closely based on the **Letter of Jude**:

Jude	4	5a	6-7	8-9	11	12	16	17-18
2 Peter	2:1-2	1:12	2:4, 6	2:10-11	2:15-16	2:13, 17	2:18	3:2-3

IV) Questions for Review and Discussion:

- What does 1 Peter say about how and why Christians might suffer?
- What are some of the different connections between 1 Peter and the city of Rome?
- What does 1 Peter teach about how Christians should interact with civil/political structures and authorities?
- What does 2 Peter say about eschatology, about the coming of “the Day of the Lord”?
- What are some indications that 2 Peter was written very late (late first century / early second century)?
- How do 1 Peter and 2 Peter treat the Hebrew Scriptures? How do they treat other early Christian writings?

The First, Second, and Third Letters of John (1 John; 2 John; 3 John)

The Three Johannine Epistles/Letters, as a Group

- A) Author: Probably all three by the same author, but who?
 - 1) Self-identified as “the elder” in 2 John & 3 John; no author given in 1 John
 - 2) Traditionally identified as “John the apostle, son of Zebedee” – yes or no?
 - 3) Probably a leader of the “Johannine community” (in Ephesus?) – i.e. the community/-ies founded by the “beloved disciple” who value the GospJohn!
- B) Relationship of the Letters to the Gospel according to John?
 - 1) Many similarities in vocabulary & theology; but some slight differences.
 - 2) Same author of Gospels and Letters? If not, at least in same community!
 - 3) Scholars debate whether letters were written before, or probably after Gospel.
 - 4) Letters continue same teachings as GospJohn, but also correct misinterpretations
- C) Dates: Three letters written at about the same time; maybe a few months/years apart
 - 1) Late first century, to communities near the Johannine “mother church”
 - 2) Scholars disagree if 1 John written before, after, or at same time as 2 & 3 John
- D) Different genres, to distinct but related recipients, with slightly different purposes:
 - 1) 1 John is not a letter, but a theological treatise, for the whole community
 - 2) 2 John is an open letter of exhortation, to a particular church community.
 - 3) 3 John is a personal letter of commendation, to a named community leader.
 - 4) We’ll start with 2 & 3 John – shorter, easier to understand context & messages

2 JOHN & 3 JOHN: Historical Context and Literary Overview

- A) Attributed Author: “The Elder” – Apostle John? Beloved Disciple?
- B) Named Recipients:
 - 1) 2 John 1: “to the *elect lady* and *her children*, whom I *love* in the *truth*, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever”
 - (a) not to an individual woman, but to personified “church” (feminine), and the “children” (members/believers) of that community
 - (b) similar in conclusion: “The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.” – i.e. the believers in a “sister church” in a nearby city
 - 2) 3 John 1: “to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.”
 - (a) evidently a local church leader, friend of “the elder”
 - (b) 3 John also names an opponent (*Diotrephes*) & a friend (*Demetrius*)
- C) Similar Conclusions: Postscript & Greetings
 - 1) 2 John 12-13: “Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.”
 - 2) 3 John 13-15: “I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; / instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. / Peace to you. The friends (*philo*) send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.”

Outline and Contents of 2 John

- A) Letter Opening (1-4)
- B) Letter Body (5-11)
- C) Letter Conclusion (12-13)

Outline and Contents of 3 John

- A) Letter Opening (1-4)
- B) Letter Body (5-12)
- C) Letter Conclusion (13-15)

Conflict and Divisions within the Johannine Communities

- A) Community ideals:
 - 1) Walking in love, remaining/abiding in truth, loving one another, living in joy, showing hospitality to the “friends”; testifying to the truth
- B) Problems not with external “opponents,” but “schismatics” who left the community:
 - 1) 2 John 4: “I was overjoyed to find *some* of your children walking in the truth.”
 - 2) 2 John 7a: “Many deceivers have *gone out* into the world...”
- C) Divisions in 2 John caused by *doctrinal disagreements*:
 - 1) 2 John 7b: “those who do not confess *that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh*; any such person is the *deceiver* and the *antichrist!*”
 - 2) 3 John gives us NAME of a specific opponent: Diotrephes!
 - (a) Elder & Gaius & Demetrius on one side; Diotrephes on the other!
- D) In contrast, divisions in 3 John sound more like a *leadership struggle*:
 - 1) 3 John 9-10: “I have written something to the church; but *Diotrephes*, who likes to put himself first, *does not acknowledge our authority*. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in *spreading false charges against us*. And not content with those charges, *he refuses to welcome the friends*, and even *prevents those who want to do so* and *expels them from the church.*”
 - 2) Why are Diotrephes and the Elder opposed? No doctrinal differences mentioned, just inhospitality and excommunications (but maybe also due to doctrines)
- E) Recommendations for dealing with opponents:
 - 1) 2 John 10-11: “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.”
 - 2) **Irony**: Diotrephes (3 John 10) seems to be doing what the elder (in 2 John 10) had recommended: not receiving those who disagree with your teaching!

1 JOHN: Historical Context and Literary Overview

- A) Literary Genre: Not a letter, but a treatise or sermon (no letter opening or closing)
- B) Attributed Author: None! (later tradition attaches it to “John”)
- C) Named Recipients: None! But probably for the “Johannine communities” overall
- D) Date & Place: probably written in/near Ephesus, late first century (90’s? – prob. after the Gospel)

Outline and Contents of 1 John

- A) Overall Literary Structure:
 - 1) Prologue (1:1-4)
 - 2) Body (1:4—5:12)
 - 3) Epilogue (5:13-21)
- B) Body is hard to subdivide, since its theological instructions and practical admonitions are very mixed; scholars disagree whether the body has two or three main parts:
 - 1) Two-part division (R. Brown):
 - (a) Walk in the Light of God (1:5—3:10)
 - (b) Walk as Children of the God of Love (3:11—5:12)
 - 2) Two-part division (D.M. Smith):
 - (a) The true message of Jesus (1:5—3:24)
 - (b) Testing the claims of those who testify (4:1—5:12)
 - 3) Three-part divisions:
 - (a) What is Christianity? (1:5—2:28)
 - (b) Life in the Family of God (2:29—4:12)
 - (c) The Certainty of Faith (4:13—5:13)

Literary Features of 1 John

- A) No typical letter opening or closing (because it's not a "letter"!)
 - 1) Writer starts with "we" (1:1), but also says "I" (2:1)
 - 2) He's both a representative leader and an individual eyewitness
- B) Relationship to the Gospel according to John:
 - 1) Very similar opening (compare Prologues: John 1:1-18 and 1 John 1:1-4)
 - 2) Many obvious similarities, in vocabulary, concepts, and worldview
 - (a) Love, life, light, truth, the word, the world, joy, see, hear, believe, testify, remain, abide, born of God, Father & Son – make your own long list
 - (b) Main commandment: "love one another"
 - (c) Result of believing/abiding: eternal life & being children of God
 - 3) Some subtle differences in vocabulary and style
- C) Use in the Lectionary for Mass: Weekdays of the Christmas Season
 - 1) Beginning on Dec. 27, the Feast of St. John

Theological Issues in 1 John

- A) Teachings about Jesus
 - 1) Prologue 1:1-4 – Word of Life, Christ, Son, Paraclete
 - 2) Emphasis on Jesus' relationship with the Father, and with believers
- B) Teachings about God
 - 1) God is light (1 John 1:5)
 - 2) God is love (1 John 4:7-21)
- C) Opponents and Opposing Teachings
 - 1) Antichrist: indeed many antichrists have come (**1 John 2:18-22**)
 - 2) "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22)
 - 3) This is very different from the "Antichrist" of popular imagination!

Reflection Questions

- 1) Which verses or passages most surprised you, disturbed you, or inspired you as you read the First, Second and Third Epistles of John? Why?
- 2) Who were some of the early Christian leaders named John? What are some of the main arguments, both pro and con, as to who actually wrote these works?
- 3) What is the literary genre of 1 John? Why is it not really in the form of a "letter"?
- 4) What are some of the most striking and significant similarities between the First Epistle of John and the Gospel according to John.
- 5) What are the main problems (both theological and social) addressed in 2 John and 3 John? What are the relationships between the individuals named in these letters?
- 6) Why were there evidently such deep conflicts within the communities associated with John? What does that tell us about the early Christian churches?

Recommended Readings

- **Brown**, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, **1997**.
 - Ch. 12 (pp. 383-94); Ch. 13 (pp. 395-400); Ch. 14 (pp. 400-405)
- **Painter**, John. *1, 2, and 3 John*. Sacra Pagina, 18. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, **2002**.
- **Rensberger**, David. *1 John, 2 John, 3 John*. Nashville: Abingdon, **1997**.
- **Strecker**, Georg. *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*. Minneapolis: Fortress, **1996**.
- **Smith**, D. Moody. *First, Second, and Third John*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, **1991**.

Readings from the Johannine Epistles in the Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*

Readings from 1 John on Sundays and Major Feasts:

Of the 105 verses of 1 John, we read only 30 verses on the Sundays of Easter (Year B), and 4 more (with overlap) on other major feasts.

Sunday	Lect. #	Second Reading
3 rd Sunday of Easter – B	47	1 John 2:1-5a
4 th Sunday of Easter – B	50	1 John 3:1-2
<i>Nov. 1 – Solemnity: All Saints</i>	667	1 John 3:1-3
Holy Family – C (<i>option</i>)	17	1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 *
5 th Sunday of Easter – B	53	1 John 3:18-24
6 th Sunday of Easter – B	56	1 John 4:7-10
<i>Solemnity: Sacred Heart of Jesus – A</i>	170	1 John 4:7-16
7 th Sunday of Easter – B	60	1 John 4:11-16
2 nd Sunday of Easter – B	44	1 John 5:1-6
Baptism of the Lord – B (<i>option</i>)	21	1 John 5:1-9 *

* new options in the revised 1981/1998 Lectionary

Readings from 1 John on Weekdays:

1 John is the ONLY book in the entire Bible (OT & NT) that is scheduled in its entirety in the Lectionary! It is read every year on the weekdays of the Christmas Season. But, it is usually not finished, depending on which weekday Christmas is in a particular year.

Day	Lect. #	First Reading	10-11	11-12	leap	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16
<i>Weekday for Dec. 25, Jan. 1, & Jan. 8</i>			<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tues</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>Fri</i>
Dec. 27 – Feast of St. John, Apostle & Evangelist	697	1 John 1:1-4	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	[HF]
Dec. 28 – Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs	698	1 John 1:5—2:2	T	W	Th	F	Sat	[HF]	M
Dec. 29 – Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas (optional memorial: St. Thomas Becket)	202	1 John 2:3-11	W	Th	F	Sat	[HF]	M	T
Dec. 30 – Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas	203	1 John 2:12-17	Th	[HF]	Sat	[HF]	M	T	W
Dec. 31 – Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas (optional memorial: St. Sylvester)	204	1 John 2:18-21	F	Sat	[HF]	M	T	W	Th
Jan. 2 – Weekday in the Christmas Season (Mem.: Sts. Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen)	205	1 John 2:22-28	[EP]	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat
Jan. 3 – Weekday in the Christmas Season	206	1 John 2:29—3:6	.	T	W	Th	F	Sat	[EP]
Jan. 4 – Weekday in the Christmas Season (USA Mem.: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton)	207	1 John 3:7-10	.	W	Th	F	Sat	[EP]	.
Jan. 5 – Weekday in the Christmas Season (USA Mem.: St. John Neumann)	208	1 John 3:11-21	.	Th	F	Sat	[EP]	.	.
Monday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 7)	212	1 John 3:22—4:6	1/3	.	.	1/7	1/6	1/5	1/4
Tuesday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 8)	213	1 John 4:7-10	1/4	.	.	1/8	1/7	1/6	1/5
Wednesday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 9)	214	1 John 4:11-18	1/5	.	.	1/9	1/8	1/7	1/6
Thursday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 10)	215	1 John 4:19—5:4	1/6	.	.	1/10	1/9	1/8	1/7
Friday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 11) [or Jan. 6, if Epiphany is celebrated Jan. 7 or 8]	209/216	1 John 5:5-13	1/7	1/6	1/6	1/11	1/10	1/9	1/8
Saturday after Epiphany (trad. Jan. 12) [or Jan. 7, if Epiphany is celebrated Jan. 8]	210/217	1 John 5:14-21	1/8	1/7	.	1/12	1/11	1/10	1/9

Readings from 2 John and 3 John in the *Lectionary for Mass*:

Day	Lect. #	First Reading
32 nd Week of Ordinary Time: Friday (Year II)	495	2 John 4-9
32 nd Week of Ordinary Time: Saturday (Year II)	496	3 John 5-8