

James, Peter, John, and Jude

Here we consider the works of four more men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit to put into writing the wisdom of God.

James

While there were many men named James in the first century, this is most likely the brother of Jesus who became a very strong leader in the early church (James the apostle was put to death about AD 44, Acts 12). We find James becoming prominent by Acts 15, and his influence in the early church is unquestioned. This work may have been penned as early as AD 50, yet could be as late as the early 60's. There is a strong Jewish element to the writing as James addresses "the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" (1:1) and even uses the word for "synagogue" to speak of their assemblies (ch. 2). This work, in fairly simple fashion, addresses the need for 1) real faith, 2) genuine works based on faith, and 3) godly wisdom. We read about such needs as having patience in trials, listening carefully to God's word, avoiding partiality, acting by faith, watching how we speak, understanding godly wisdom, avoiding worldliness, and being fervent in prayer. The lessons throughout are practical and always needed.



1-2 Peter

There are two epistles with Peter's name on them. Both epistles were likely written between AD 60-64, not long before Peter's death (which historical tradition places

around AD 66-68 under Nero). 1 Peter was addressed to saints scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey), calling them "aliens." This was a way of pointing out the fact that Christians are strangers in this world. Many Gentile Christians would have read this, understanding that they had now received mercy from God and needed to keep their behavior excellent (2:9-12). The overarching theme of 1 Peter concerns suffering for the cause of Christ. Because they were born again to a living hope, their new identity as Christians would also mean that many would oppose them. How should they handle the suffering that would come their way because they are Christians doing what is right? They needed to look to Christ's example, be committed to doing what is right no matter what may come, and seek after holiness. They were not to be afraid to suffer for Christ, but rather in His name glorify God through their sufferings.

2 Peter also speaks to the spiritual growth that the saints ought to be seeking, especially as they were facing false teachers who could lead them

astray. Among the many challenges Christians faced were those who were calling into question God's promises regarding the return of Christ. They needed to realize that the time factor was not a matter of God failing to keep His promises, but rather a manifestation of His longsuffering. Yet, judgment will come, and they needed to keep themselves alert and ready. So do we!

1, 2, and 3 John

Three epistles are attributed to John. Though John's name does not technically appear in the letters, the similarities to the Gospel of John and the early tradition of authorship attest to John's work. Likely, these letters were written near the end of the first century, possibly from Ephesus. John addresses some problems that appear to have been coming on the scene by the end of the first century (perhaps a proto-gnosticism, where the idea of the flesh is considered bad, and this led to the concept that Jesus, as God, was not truly incarnate). Consequently, John deals with the way some were viewing the problem of sin and their understanding of whether or not Jesus came in the flesh. Yet he also addresses the need for loving one another, which is key to all else he is dealing with. They needed to be reassured of the certainties they have if they will follow Jesus and not give up believing that He truly is the Son of God. Christians cannot afford to give up the truth of Jesus, nor can they afford to allow peddlers of error and men who love preeminence (like Diotrephes in 3 John) to take them away from Christ.

Jude

Jude refers to himself as a brother of James, which also meant that he was likely a brother of Jesus (see Mark 6:3 where both names are mentioned). This short epistle was likely written prior to AD 68 (note the similarity to 2 Peter). Jude's purpose is clearly stated. While he wanted to write about the common salvation shared by Christians, there was a more pressing need: "I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (vv. 3-4). These false teachers were threatening to overthrow the faith of Christians, so they are exhorted to "remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17). As always, there was the great concern that Christians remain true to Christ.

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