

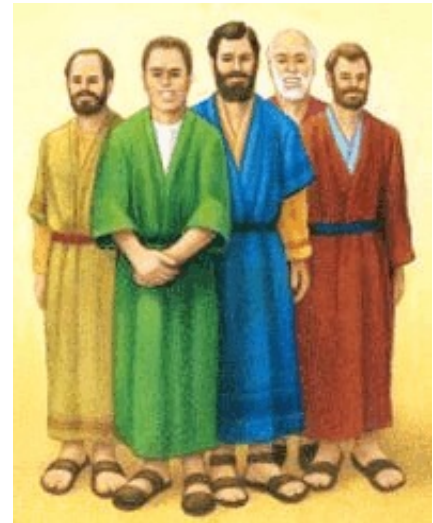
Church of God

Sunday School

THE BIBLE — THE GENERAL EPISTLES

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** James defines "pure religion" (James 1:22-27).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Peter encourages persecuted Christians (1 Peter 1:5-9).
- ❑ **Thursday:** John writes "that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:1-5).
- ❑ **Friday:** Jude writes a beautiful benediction (Jude 24-25).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Why were these things written (1 John 5:13-15)?



MEMORY VERSE: *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."* —1 John 5:13

What Is the Difference Between the Pauline Epistles and the General Epistles?

The 21 Epistles (formal letters) are divided into two categories: the Pauline Epistles (written by the Apostle Paul) and the non-Pauline Epistles (also called the "General Epistles"). While arranged as the Pauline Epistles (longest to shortest), the General Epistles are different in several ways.

The General Epistles have various authors, while the Pauline Epistles have the same author. Paul's Epistles are named according to whom the letters were addressed. The General Epistles (with the exception of Hebrews) were named according to their authors. The General Epistles have also been called the "Catholic Epistles" (*catholic* means "universal, widespread, non-localized"). These Epistles were intended for a larger, general audience than the Pauline Epistles with their specific audiences. It is thought that multiple copies of the General Epistles were made and distributed among the churches.

Another difference between the two sets of Epistles is that the General Epistles were intended mostly for a primarily Jewish audience, but Paul often wrote to the Gentile Christians. The majority (if not all) of the General Epistle authors were either leaders or elders of the church in Jerusalem. Paul was not. More than once Paul had to defend himself against accusations from some of the leaders of this church. Unlike Paul, the authors of the General Epistles were either one of Jesus' disciples (while He lived here on earth) or were related to Jesus in some way. The believed time of writing of these Epistles are an additional difference. The Epistles of Paul are believed to have been written before the intense persecutions began (under Emperor Nero), but the General Epistles are said to have been written later—during and after those great persecutions.

All of the General Epistles do not follow the formal letter style commonly found in Paul's letters. A variety of writing genres can be found in these eight Epistles. Hebrews is written as a sermon, but ends as a letter (13:19-25); James begins with a letter style but continues more like wisdom literature; 1 Peter is written as a pastoral letter to a large area of churches; 2 Peter is written as a goodbye letter; 1 John is also written as a sermon; 2 & 3 John and Jude are short letters.

Although different in style and intended audience, the General Epistles are very necessary. Combined with the Pauline Epistles, we have a more complete picture of how to live the Christian life. The different backgrounds, personalities, and life experiences of these authors bring differing viewpoints. Just as we

EPISTLES WRITTEN BY:

**Paul are called the "Pauline Epistles."
Peter are called the "Petrine Epistles."
John are called the "Johannine Epistles."**

have a better account of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection because we have four Gospel writers, our understanding of the New Testament Church doctrines is more complete with the variety of authors who wrote the General Epistles.

The Eight General Epistles

HEBREWS: there has been much disagreement concerning the author of this Epistle. Authorship has been attributed to Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and others. Generally, this author is stated to be unknown. This letter was written to the Hebrews (Christian Jews) to prevent ones from returning to Judaism. The key word in this Epistle is "better." The author wrote that our High Priest (Christ) is "better than the angels" (1:4), "of more glory than Moses" (3:3), and greater than Aaron (5:1-10). Because of what Jesus did on Calvary, we have a "better covenant" (8:6) and a "better country" (11:16). We also read of the "Heroes of the Faith" in Chapter 11 (called the "Hall of Faith").

JAMES: tradition tells us the author of this Epistle is Jesus' earthly brother (Galatians 1:19) who became a believer after the Resurrection (John 7:5; Acts 1:13-14). This is also supported by the similarity of the wording when compared with James' speech in Acts 15:13-21. This letter is sometimes called the "Proverbs of the New Testament" because of its writing style (wisdom literature). Historians call this author "James the Just" or "James the Righteous."

1 PETER: this Epistle was written to comfort and encourage the persecuted Christians. Rome (a city full of idolatry) is thought to be where this letter was written. The "church that is at Babylon" (5:13) very well might have been in Rome (Jewish writings often described Rome as "Babylon"), where Christianity would soon officially be declared a crime.

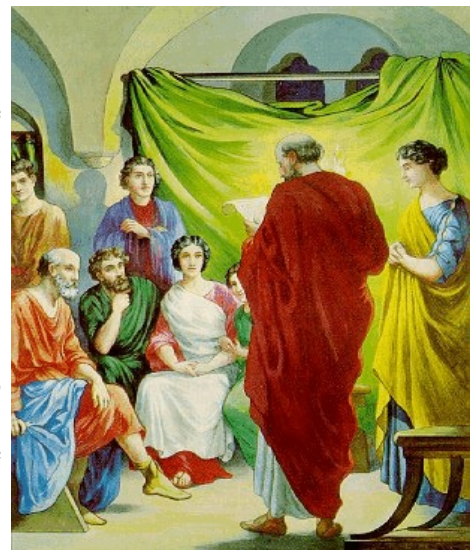
2 PETER: although both of Peter's letters were written to the same audience, the first letter deals with opposition or persecution from *outside* the church (Roman Empire) and the second Epistle warns of opposition or persecution from *within* the church ("false teachers"; 2:1). The styles of these two letters greatly vary, which could be due to the possibility that a scribe wrote the first letter (written in classical Greek) and that while in prison Peter physically wrote the second letter (written in the rough Galilean language). In this letter Peter also addressed building a Christian character and spoke of Christ's return. Tradition tells us that Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, died a martyr's death (crucified upside down).

1 JOHN: this letter was written after the Apostle John returned from exile (on the Isle of Patmos). Because it is written so similar to John's Gospel, some have described this Epistle as a "companion to John's Gospel." John wrote of three main thoughts: **(1)** God is light (1:5–2:11), and we must "walk in the light" (1:7); **(2)** God is love (3:1–4:21), and "We love him, because he first loved us" (4:19); and **(3)** God is life (5:11-13), and "He that hath the Son hath life" (5:12). This letter was written to encourage "little [dear] children" (term was used nine times in this Epistle).

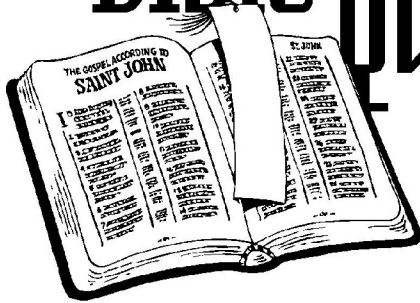
2 JOHN: because of its length, this has been called the second "postcard epistle." (The first "postcard epistle" was Paul's Epistle to Philemon.) Addressed to "the elect lady and her children" (verse 1), this letter is written as a personal letter. The "elect lady" has been said to be an actual woman and has also been said to represent the church and her converts. John warned against people who were "deceivers" (verse 7). He also rejoiced to hear that "thy children [are] walking in truth" (verse 4).

3 JOHN: this third "postcard epistle" is the last of the Apostle John's writings in the Bible. Believed to have been written at the same time as the other Johannine Epistles, John wrote of three men: **(1)** Gaius (*GAY-us*) who was walking in the truth (verses 1-8); **(2)** Diotrephes (*di-OT-ruh-fee-z*) who loved to be first, would not listen, and refused to receive "the brethren" (verses 9-11); and **(3)** Demetrius (*duh-MEE-tree-uhs*) who had a good report (verse 12).

JUDE: the author of this Epistle is said to be Jesus' brother Judas (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot). At first, Jude meant to write about "the common salvation" (verse 3), but God impressed him to write of the need to "earnestly contend for the faith" (verse 3). While Peter warned that false teachers *will* come (2 Peter 2:1), Jude wrote that false teachers *have* come (verse 4). This fourth (and last) "postcard epistle" ends with one of the most beautiful benedictions (divine blessing) in the New Testament (verses 24-25).



Bible Quiz



1. Why are the General Epistles sometimes called the "Catholic Epistles"? _____

2. Why are the General Epistles included in our Bible? Why weren't the Pauline Epistles enough? _____

3. What is the key word in Hebrews? _____

4. List at least nine of the Heroes of the Faith: _____

5. Two of Jesus' brothers are believed to have written Epistles. Who were they? _____

6. Why is James' Epistle referred to as the "Proverbs of the New Testament"? _____

7. Name at least one difference between the two Epistles written by Peter: _____

8. What are the three main thoughts in John's first Epistle?

God is _____ ; God is _____ ; God is _____

9. Name the four "postcard epistles." (Hint: the first one is one of Paul's Epistles.) _____

10. John wrote at least 10 times to "little children." Was John writing to small children? If not, what do you think he meant by "little children"? _____

11. What is the difference between what Peter and Jude wrote about false teachers? _____

The Pauline Epistles and The General Epistles

Describe the differences between
the two categories of Epistles
and their authors



Author

Pauline Epistles: _____

General Epistles: _____

Audience

Pauline Epistles: _____

General Epistles: _____

Persecution at Time of Writing

Pauline Epistles: _____

General Epistles: _____

Writing Style

Pauline Epistles: _____

General Epistles: _____

Experience With Jerusalem Church

Paul: _____

Authors of General Epistles: _____

Relationship to Jesus

Paul: _____

Authors of General Epistles: _____
