

## Reading 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude

### Key Historical Background to 1 Peter

- The letter was written by the apostle Peter, who identifies himself in 1:1 and in 5:1 as an ‘eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ.’ He mentions in 5:12 that the letter was actually composed by “Silvanus” (called “Silas” elsewhere in the New Testament, Acts 15:22; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1), meaning that Silas is most likely responsible for the wording and structure of the letter, while the ideas and main points came from Peter.
- The main theme of the letter is maintaining faith during persecution, and his reference to “Babylon” in 5:13 is almost certainly a coded reference to Rome (see also Revelation 17-18). The letter was likely written during the first major persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Nero in the early 60s A.D.
- Peter knew that many Christians were being harmed, threatened and even killed throughout the Roman Empire for their allegiance to Jesus, and so he wrote the letter to encourage them to endure suffering and entrust their lives to God.

### **Key Themes in 1 Peter**

- Christians should expect suffering and hardship, and this can become one of the main ways God shapes our character and hope in Jesus: 1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:9, 13-17; 4:1-4, 12-19; 5:9.
    - Jesus’ suffering on our behalf provides us with an example: 1:17-21; 2:21-23
    - Our response to persecution should be love and blessing: 2:19-25; 3:8-17
  - Following Christ involves a total transformation of our hearts, minds and behavior (1:13-2:3), and so our lives should be morally distinct from the surrounding culture (4:1-11)
  - A community of Jesus should be a witness by reforming our relationships with one another (work, family, marriage) according to God’s grace: 2:11-3:7
- 

### Historical Background to 2 Peter

- The letter was written by Peter, most likely not too long before he was martyred sometime during A.D. 64-67 in Rome. He is aware that his death is imminent (1:12-15).
- He writes the letter as a final reminder to live in the hope of God’s promises that Jesus will return to set all things right. He also writes to warn of teachers who are propagating a distorted version of the Gospel that is leading some to moral compromise.

### **Themes in 2 Peter**

- God has graciously granted us the privilege to share in the divine nature through Christ: 1:2-4
  - This privilege should result in a life of holiness: 1:5-15
  - God’s promises in the Gospel are reliable (1:16-21), therefore people who distort the Gospel (2:1-10) and use their position of leadership for immoral gain (2:11-22) will have to face God’s justice.
  - Christians should endure opposition knowing that the present age is full of sin and tragedy (3:1-13) and that Jesus will return to set all things right (3:8-10).
-

### **Historical Background to 1-3 John**

- The author of the letters is anonymous, but it seems likely that it is same author as the Gospel of John, or someone closely connected to the Gospel of John.
- According to the earliest post-New Testament writings, John (named “the beloved the disciple” in John 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7) left Jerusalem along with most of the other Jewish Christians before it fell to Rome in A.D. 70. He relocated to Ephesus where he outlived all the other disciples, and so became a pastor to the leaders and churches in the surrounding region (likely, those mentioned in Revelation 2-3).
- 1 John lacks the form of a letter, and reads more like poetic-sermon that explores the core teachings of the Gospel and the kind of life that should result from believing in Jesus. The letter does not contain a linear development of thought, but explores a set of key themes over and over again from different angles.

### **Themes in 1 John**

- God is light (1:5; 2:8) and love (4:8, 16, 19): his love is demonstrated by sending Jesus to die for the sins of the world (3:16; 4:10, 14, 19; 5:11).
  - All humanity is in darkness (1:6; 2:8-11), but God have experienced a new birth (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18) and new life (3:14; 4:9; 5:11, 16).
  - God has given us the Spirit (2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13), and so he lives in us (2:14, 24, 27; 3:9, 24; 4:12): we can intimately know the Father (2:13; 5:20) and the Son (1:3; 2:3), through the Spirit (4:2, 6).
  - If one believes in Jesus and has experienced the new birth, a transformed life will be the natural result:
    - Doing what is right and true (1:6; 2:29; 3:7)
    - Walking in the light (1:7; 2:6)
    - Confessing sin and finding forgiveness (1:9; 2:12)
    - Obeying Jesus’ teachings (2:3, 5; 3:22; 5:2)
    - Loving our neighbor (2:10; 3:10-18; 4:7)
    - Growing in resistance to sin and temptation (2:17; 3:9, 22)
- 

### **Historical Background and Themes 2-3 John**

- The letters are written by “the elder”, and from the earliest known evidence were circulated along with 1 John. Given the similarity in content, language and style, it’s likely that these two personal letters were from John and addressed to two specific churches in the vicinity of Ephesus.
  - The “elect lady” of 2 John 1 is likely a church community and “Gaius” (3 John) was likely a particular leader in one of the churches John was connected to.
  - The letters mentions that some kind of division has taken place in the churches related to doctrine: some people were denying that Jesus was fully human (2 John 7). For John this struck at the core of the Gospel, and so he warns the church to reject these teachers and their lifestyle (2 John 8-11). 3 John mentions one of these troublemakers by name (Diotrephes, vv.9-10) and so he gives instruction on how to deal with him.
-

### Historical Background and Themes in Jude

- The letter was written by Jude, the brother of James and Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).
- The letter addresses a similar situation as 2 Peter, and it's likely that Jude either borrowed material from 2 Peter or vice-versa. They likely date to the same time period, mid-60s A.D.
- Jude warns against leaders who have gained a following in the church but who are promoting a distorted Gospel and living immoral lives; he declares that they will have to face God's justice for their selfish actions (vv. 3-16).
- He calls the church to defend the core truths of the Gospel against these teachers (vv. 17-23) and to live a life of holiness which is consistent with the true Gospel (vv. 24-25).

