

New Testament Survey #3

LESSON OVERVIEW

- In this lesson, we turn to Paul’s Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) along with Philemon, and the General (or Catholic) Epistles (Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude).
- The Pastoral Epistles give practical instruction for church leaders and congregations, emphasizing sound doctrine, godly character, and perseverance in ministry. Philemon, though brief, demonstrates how the gospel transforms personal relationships, urging forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ.
- The General Epistles, written by various leaders to a wide range of believers, focus on living out genuine faith in daily life, persevering under persecution, warning against false teachers, and holding firmly to Christ as the fulfillment of God’s promises.

I TIMOTHY – GODLY LEADERSHIP IN GOD’S HOUSEHOLD

OVERVIEW

- Timothy was Paul’s closest companion, joining him from his second missionary journey onward (Acts 16:1–3). Though faithful and gifted, Timothy was naturally meek and sometimes timid, so Paul reminded him that God gives a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:7–8; 2:1).
- Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to confront false teachers and to instruct the church on godly order in leadership, worship, and discipline (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:15).

THEMES

- Guard sound doctrine against false teachers – Timothy was tasked with silencing those spreading “strange doctrines” (1 Tim. 1:3–4). The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (3:15), so faithful teaching and godly living are essential.
- Establish godly order in the church – Paul outlines qualifications for overseers and deacons (1 Tim. 3), showing that leadership must be rooted in integrity and faith so the church can remain a

pillar of truth.

- Live as God's household – The church is God's family, called to reflect holiness in both leadership and daily living. Timothy himself is urged to set the example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

II TIMOTHY – GUARD THE GOSPEL & FINISH THE RACE

- Written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome (65–66 AD), this letter carries the weight of his final words before martyrdom. Paul was abandoned except for having Luke with him. He wrote with urgency and deep affection for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:6–11).
- Paul urges Timothy to visit quickly and writes to pass on his final charge for gospel faithfulness in the face of hardship and false teaching.

THEMES

- Hold fast and guard the truth – Paul exhorts Timothy to retain sound teaching and guard the gospel “treasure” through the Spirit (2 Tim. 1:13–14). This call to preserve apostolic teaching becomes Timothy's—and the church's—sacred trust.
- Pass the truth to others – Timothy must entrust the gospel to faithful people who can teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).
- Be ready to suffer for the gospel – Paul calls Timothy to endure hardship and preach the Word faithfully, even when unpopular (2 Tim. 2:3; 4:2).

TITUS – SOUND DOCTRINE & GOOD DEEDS

OVERVIEW

- Titus was a vital member of Paul's apostolic team who functioned in several different roles. (2Corinthians 8:23) Titus was a Greek believer and trusted coworker of Paul (Gal. 2:3; 2 Cor. 8:23). Paul left Titus in Crete to organize the church and appoint elders (Titus 1:5).

- The origin of the church in Crete is unknown, but it may have started when visiting Cretans were converted through the preaching of Peter at Pentecost. It is unknown when Paul became involved in the church at Crete. Written between 62–66 AD, after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment.
- False teachers, especially Judaizers, were spreading error (1:10–11). The great doctrinal theme in this letter is the relationship between grace and good works.

THEMES

- Grace and Good Works – Paul emphasizes that true grace is never passive—it produces transformed lives marked by obedience, purity, and self-control (2:11–14; 3:4–7). Good works flow from salvation, not as its cause, but as its evidence.
- Sound Doctrine – Leaders must guard the truth and silence false teaching.
- Order in the Church – God’s household must reflect His character through godly leadership and conduct.

PHILEMON – RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST

OVERVIEW

- Addressed to Philemon, a wealthy Christian and leader of a house church in Colossae (vv. 1–2).
- Written by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (around 60–62 AD). Sent along with Colossians, carried by Onesimus (a runaway slave) and Tychicus
- Onesimus, once “useless,” had become a Christian under Paul’s ministry and was now “useful” (v. 11). Paul sends him back, appealing for reconciliation.

THEMES

- Reconciliation in Christ – The heart of the letter is Paul’s appeal for Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother” (v. 16). This models the transforming power of the gospel to heal relationships, break down social barriers, and create a new family

- in Christ.
- The Use of Authority – Paul appeals in love rather than compulsion, showing how Christian leadership works through persuasion, humility, and trust (vv. 8–9, 14).
- Christian Fellowship – The letter highlights how faith impacts real-life relationships, making reconciliation part of the witness of the church.

HEBREWS – CHRIST THE BETTER WAY

OVERVIEW

- The authorship of Hebrews remains unknown. The writer was likely a Hellenistic Jew, highly trained in Scripture, and a second-generation Christian (2:3). Names such as Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, and Priscilla have been suggested.
- Written between A.D. 65–70, after Paul’s death but before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.
- Addressed to Jewish Christians tempted to abandon their faith under persecution and return to Judaism. (2:1; 3:12).
- Style: Hebrews reads more like a sermon of exhortation than a letter (13:22). Characterized by repeated “Let us...” appeals (e.g., 4:1, 14; 10:22).
 - Rich with Old Testament references: 29 direct quotations and over 50 allusions.

THEMES

- The Supremacy of Christ – Hebrews presents Jesus as greater than angels, greater than Moses, and greater than the high priests of the old covenant. He is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being (1:3). Unlike the priests who offered continual sacrifices, Christ offered Himself once for all, making complete purification for sins. Because of His unmatched greatness, believers are called to hold firmly to Him and not drift away.
- The Better Covenant – In Christ, we have a new and better covenant. He is superior to angels, Moses, the priesthood, and the prophets, serving as the ultimate mediator. He brings better

promises (eternal forgiveness and access to God), a better sacrifice (His once-for-all offering), and a better hope (anchored in His resurrection). The old covenant was temporary and incomplete, but the new covenant secures eternal redemption and transforms hearts by the Spirit.

- Perseverance in Faith – Hebrews exhorts believers to remain steadfast under trial. Through both encouragement and warning, the writer calls them to endure, looking to Jesus as the perfect High Priest and the guarantor of God’s promises.

JAMES – FAITH THAT WORKS

OVERVIEW

- Written by James, the half-brother of Jesus, who was not a believer during Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 7:5) but was converted by the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:7). The letter was likely written in the mid to late 40s, making it one of the earliest New Testament writings.
- James became a key leader in the Jerusalem church, presiding over the council in Acts 15 and earning the title “*James the Just*” for his strict piety.
- James was eventually martyred, stoned by the Sanhedrin (Josephus).
- Addressed to Jewish Christians scattered outside Palestine: “*To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*” (1:1). Likely written to those dispersed after Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 8:1).
- Practical in tone, it speaks to believers navigating persecution and daily struggles in the wider Roman world. Notably direct and practical: 54 commands in 108 verses, focusing on everyday conduct rather than abstract theology.
- Written in the style of wisdom literature, resembling Proverbs and echoing Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

THEMES

- Faith and Works – James insists that authentic faith produces action: “*Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (2:17).

He does not contradict Paul but complements him: Paul emphasizes the root of salvation (faith), while James emphasizes the fruit (good works). For James, works are the outward evidence of inward belief.

- Wisdom for Daily Life – James provides practical instruction for speech, wealth, relationships, and perseverance, reflecting biblical wisdom applied to ordinary life.
- Endurance in Trials – Trials refine faith, producing maturity and hope, enabling believers to remain steadfast until Christ’s return (1:2–4; 5:7–8).

Peter I & II

OVERVIEW

- Peter, one of the twelve apostles and “a witness of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 5:1), wrote these two letters to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor.
 - The first epistle was likely written from Rome (called “Babylon” in 1 Pet. 5:13) around 62–64 AD, with Silvanus (Silas) assisting in writing (1 Pet. 5:12).
 - The second letter followed a few years later, around 65–66 AD, as Peter approached martyrdom.
- The recipients mainly were Gentile Christians who faced two pressing challenges:
 - 1 Peter: increasing persecution and suffering for their faith.
 - 2 Peter: the rise of false teachers who distorted the truth and denied the return of Christ.
- Together, these letters strengthen the church to endure trials with hope and to guard the faith against error.

THEMES

- 1 Peter – Hope in Suffering: Peter encourages believers to stand firm in trials by lifting their eyes to their eternal inheritance in Christ (1:3–5). Suffering is not meaningless but a refining fire that proves the genuineness of faith (1:6–7; 4:12–13). He calls the church to holiness in the midst of hardship (1:15–16) and reminds them that God’s grace will restore and strengthen them (5:10).

God's grace is mentioned several times in the epistle.

- 2 Peter – Growth in Truth: Facing false teachers, Peter urges believers to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ (1:2; 3:18) as the safeguard against deception. He reminds them that the apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's glory and that Scripture is a reliable guide (1:16–21). While warning of destructive heresies (ch. 2), Peter anchors the church in the certainty of Christ's return, which should move them toward holiness and perseverance (3:10–14).

JUDE

OVERVIEW

- Jude was the half-brother of Jesus and the brother of James. He identifies himself as James's brother since James was a prominent leader in the church.
- Jude's decision not to highlight his family connection to Jesus, but instead call himself "*a servant of Jesus Christ*," shows his humility and devotion.
- Jude confronted false teachers whose errors were similar to those addressed in 2 Peter. Both letters deal with corrupt, antinomian teachers who abused God's grace as an excuse for immorality.
 - Like Peter, Jude warns of judgment by citing Old Testament examples.

THEMES

- Contending for the Faith – The heart of Jude's message is a call to stand firm against false teachers and defend the truth of the gospel. Believers are urged to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (1:3). This means holding fast to apostolic teaching, resisting distortions of grace, and actively protecting the integrity of the Christian witness.
- Remembering and Growing – Jude exhorts his readers to remember the words of the apostles (1:17) and to build themselves up in the faith through prayer, love, and reliance on the Spirit (1:20–21).

- Rescuing and Guarding – The church is to show mercy by reclaiming those led astray, while also guarding itself from corruption (1:22–23).
- Christ’s Keeping Power – Jude ends with a doxology reminding believers that Christ Himself can keep them from falling and bring them safely into His presence with joy (1:24–25).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. James teaches that true faith produces good works. How can we encourage obedience to Christ in our communities while keeping grace at the center of the gospel?
2. Hebrews exhorts believers to persevere in faith. What truths about Jesus in Hebrews give you strength to endure trials today?
3. Jude calls believers to “contend for the faith.” What practical steps can you take to guard against false teaching or spiritual compromise in your life?
4. In the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus), Paul emphasizes sound teaching and godly leadership. Why do you think both doctrine and character are essential for building up the church?

HOMEWORK – choose one of the assignments below.

1. Choose one of the warnings in Jude (vv. 4, 8, 12–13, 16) or Hebrews (2:1; 3:12–13; 10:23–25) and write a short reflection on how believers today can heed this warning and remain faithful.
2. Read 1 Timothy 3:1–13 or Titus 1:5–9. Make a list of the qualities required of church leaders. Which of these qualities apply to all believers, and how can you begin to cultivate one of them in your own life this week?