

The Ten Basic Steps: Step #10: Exploring the New Testament

Lesson 8-The General Epistles

Objective: To see the Gospel amplified and defined.

Read: James

Memorize: Hebrews 1:1-2

1. Hebrews
2. James
3. Peter
4. John
5. Jude
6. Life Application

The term "general" is at best an imperfect way to characterize the last eight epistles of the New Testament. It has been selected because, unlike the majority of Paul's epistles that are written to specific churches, most of the recipients of these eight epistles are either churches of some large area or are all Christians (the exceptions are Hebrews and 2 and 3 John).

Also, with the exception of Hebrews, these epistles are named for their authors.

Hebrews

The early church called this book "Hebrews" because it was originally addressed to Jewish Christians. In the early days following their conversion through the preaching of some of Jesus' original disciples (Hebrews 2:3), they had become exemplary Christians and had helped supply the needs of other Christians (Hebrews 6:10). They had taken cheerfully the loss of their own possessions as they were persecuted for Christ's name (10:32-34).

However, at the time this letter was written their original teachers and leaders had died (Hebrews 13:7). Now they were on the verge of slipping back from a confession of Christ into the Judaism out of which they had been converted (Hebrews 13:13-14). The writer of Hebrews exhorts the readers to remain true to Christ even at the price of having to shed their own blood (Hebrews 12:3-4).

That writer had to have been an outstanding leader in the early Christian church, but his identity is unknown. Many believe it was written by the apostle Paul, but this cannot be confirmed.

What four things must a Christian do, according to Hebrews 10:22-25?

Summarize in your own words the two lines of argument that the writer uses to support these commands.
Hebrews 10:26-34

What attitude did the original readers of this Epistle need to remain true to Christ in the midst of persecution (Hebrews 10:35-39)?

How did the Old Testament believers acquire this necessary quality (Hebrews 11:1-40)?

In view of the way these Old Testament believers lived, what should you do (Hebrews 12:1-3)?

James

The writer of this Epistle is thought to have been the half-brother of Jesus. Though not counted as one of the twelve apostles, James became a prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Because the name "James" was so common in those days, it is felt that only this James, who figured so prominently in the early church, would have announced himself to the readers of this Epistle without going into any detail as to who he was (James 1:1).

James wrote this Epistle to remind Christians about the qualities of heart and life that should characterize true Christian devotion in contrast to dead orthodoxy. In so doing, he made it clear how a Christian can find joy in Christ even when suffering for Him.

Why should the Christian consider adversity a reason for the greatest happiness (James 1:2-4, 12)?

In what way does the Christian receive the necessary resources to stand for Christ while suffering greatly (James 1:5-8)?

What two things should the Christian always remember when he feels tempted to do wrong? James 1:13-18

Instead of simply hearing what God has to say in His Word, what should the Christian do (James 1:21-25)?

What should we do instead of simply talk about being Christians (James 1:26-27)?

Read James 5. List several commands that you will apply this week.

Peter

1 Peter. Peter addresses the various churches scattered throughout Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). But like James, Peter's purpose in writing was to strengthen Christians so they could stand firm against the terrible persecutions by the Roman Empire. He begins by pointing out the wonders of the salvation that his readers possess (I Peter 1:3-12). Then he gives certain commands that when obeyed will help a person to realize the wonders of this salvation.

List the five commands Peter gives in I Peter 1:13-2:3.

When one fulfills these commands, how does his attitude toward Christ differ from that of those who do not believe and obey him (I Peter 2:4-10)?

How, in general, does the Christian witness to those around him by his life (I Peter 2:11-12)?

How, in relationship to the government, does the Christian demonstrate the praises of Christ (I Peter 2:13-17)?

How, in his relationship with an employer, can a Christian demonstrate the praises of Christ (I Peter 2:18-25)?

How can a Christian wife best testify of Christ to an unbelieving husband (I Peter 3:1-7)? How about a Christian husband?

2 Peter. As 2 Timothy records Paul's last words before martyrdom, so 2 Peter was Peter's last message before his martyrdom (II Peter 1:14; see also John 21:19). This Epistle is a continuation of the theme of 1 Peter. The sufferings that his readers had just begun to endure when that Epistle was written have continued unabated, and Peter's purpose in writing this second Epistle is to encourage his readers to endure steadfastly to the end.

From what two sources have the readers heard of God's grace? II Peter 1:12-21

However, there have always been those whose teaching would keep God's people from the truth. Name three ways to recognize those who are false prophets (II Peter 2:1-22).

What great event should determine the present conduct of Christians (II Peter 3:10-14)? How does Christ's return help you live daily?

John

I John. During his later years, the apostle John settled at Ephesus among Christians who had found Christ through Paul's ministry. While he was there, a certain false teaching became popular which declared that God did not become truly incarnate in Jesus Christ and that a life of actual holiness was not essential to the Christian life.

The first Epistle of John was written to counteract this heresy. However, it is more than a mere refutation; it is one of the most beautiful and inspiring documents of the New Testament.

The key verse is I John 5:13: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

See if you can find at least five tests of this assurance of eternal in the material leading up to 5:13. I John 1:7; 2:3, 15; 3:6; 4:7

II John. It is not clear whether the recipient of this brief Epistle is an individual, or whether the term "elect lady" figuratively denotes a church whose members are her "children" (verse 1).

Summarize in your own words the burden of the message John gives to this church. How can you better demonstrate love for those walking in truth?

III John. The principal characters of this Epistle are Gaius and Diotrephes. As church leaders went from town to town establishing new congregations, they depended on the hospitality of fellow believers. Gaius was one who welcomed them into his home. John wrote this Epistle to thank Gaius for his hospitality and faithfulness and to encourage him in the faith.

What example is Gaius to continue to follow in the future (verses 2-8)?

What is there about Diotrephes that Gaius is to avoid imitating (verses 9-11)? What do you think an attitude like Diotrephes' can do to church unity?

Jude

Many biblical scholars believe that Jude was another one of Jesus' brothers who was converted after His earthly ministry. He calls himself "the brother of James" (verse 1), and in verse 17 he indicates that he was not himself an official apostle.

What was Jude's reason for writing as he does in this Epistle (verses 3,4)?

What are two things that Jude wants his readers to remember?

Verses 5-16

Verses 17-19

What is the Christian's responsibility in view of the many false teachers that exist (verses 20-23)?

Praise God for His qualities found in verses 24 and 25.

Life Application

Determine one main truth from each book that is particularly helpful to you and list it here. James | I Peter | II Peter | I John | II John | III John | Jude

Describe how you will apply each to your life.

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