

# The General Epistles

Adapted from *Jeremy Chew, East Asia School of Theology, Singapore*

## I. The Time Period (Occasion)

- A. Named after Christians under stress as their general audience (hence the name)
- B. The 1<sup>st</sup> generation leadership was passing away
- C. Temple gone – change in the Jewish system
- D. Increasing antagonism between Jewish and Gentile believers (Jewish-Roman War AD 66-73)
- E. Gentile believers become targets for political blame (Jewish Christians suspected they had sided with their enemies)
- F. Great texts for preaching to encourage people

## II. A Time of Change

### A. Leadership changes

- 1. Original leaders were passing away.
- 2. James was beheaded, James (brother of Jesus), Peter & Paul were killed, and John was exiled

### B. Change from oral to written tradition

- 1. Teachings from Jesus & apostles were being published
- 2. Paul's letters were largely finished

### C. Expectation of Christ's return

- 1. Some expected Jesus to return at the time of Jerusalem's destruction, but nothing happened
- 2. People started to doubt & reinterpret their traditions

### D. Reorientation of the Jewish system

- 1. Temple gone, so Jews worshipped only in synagogues
- 2. Christians were eventually forced out of synagogues

### E. Impact of Changes

- 1. Churches became more Gentile in membership
  - a) The separation between Jews & Gentiles grew
  - b) Christians were no longer perceived as a sect of Judaism, which was protected, and hence became a political target of Rome

c) Hence, an increase in persecution

## 2. Churches became more Gentile in character

a) Hebrew thought was gradually replaced by Greek thought.

b) By the end of the first century, the minority Gentiles had become the vast majority.

## F. Faith—the issue of the day!

1. James: Faith that works
2. 1 Peter: Faith in suffering
3. 2 Peter: Knowing the faith
4. Hebrews: Faith that is superior
5. 1-3 John: Practicing the faith
6. Jude: Fighting for the faith
7. Revelation: Faith in God's sovereignty & rule

## NT Epistle Contrasts

Overview by Dr. Rick Griffith

|  | Pauline   | General   |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Books named after</i>                                       | Recipients  | Author (except Hebrews)   |
| <i>Authors</i>   | 1 (Paul)  | 5 (anonymous Hebrews, James, Peter, John, Jude)   |
| <i>Date</i>  | Earlier   | Later (except James)  |
| <i>Chronology</i>  | Missionary journeys & Acts (except Pastorals)                             | After missionary journeys & Acts (except James)   |
| <i>Number</i>  | 13  | 9   |
| <i>Number of Letters in Theological Categories (cf. p. 24)</i> | Soteriology (2)<br>Ecclesiology (5)<br>Eschatology (2)<br>Christology (4) | Soteriology (2)<br>Ecclesiology (0)<br>Eschatology (4)<br>Christology (1)<br>Missiology (2) |