

ABIDE

CONTEXT

GUIDE



THE BRIDGE CHURCH

MATTHEW

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF MATTHEW?

While the book itself is anonymous, the earliest reliable Christian tradition links it to Matthew, a tax collector and disciple of Jesus.

WHO WAS MATTHEW WRITTEN FOR?

Matthew's gospel is clearly written for a Jewish Christian audience living within the immediate proximity of the homeland itself. Matthew's is the most Jewish of all the gospels. The community for which Matthew was written was a Jewish Christian community that was encountering some new tensions in the period of reconstruction after the first revolt. It would appear that they've been there for quite some time.

CONTEXT

The events described in Matthew take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman Empire during the early 1st century, between 10 B.C.E. and 40 C.E. The book was likely composed between 50 and 90 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Matthew is written in narrative, along with some discourse sections.

KEY THEMES

- God's blessing to Israel and the nations
- God closeness to his people
- Hope for and life within the messianic Kingdom of God

STRUCTURE

Matthew is divided into seven parts. Chapters 1-3 and 4-7 introduce Jesus as Messiah and God's Kingdom. Chapters 8-10, 11-13, and 14-20 invite people into the Kingdom's power. Chapters 21-25 and 26-28 conclude with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

MARK

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF MARK?

The earliest historical traditions available link this book to a Christian scribe named Mark, or John Mark.

WHO WAS MARK WRITTEN FOR?

Mark's gospel seems to have been originally intended for Gentile converts to Christianity, perhaps specifically in Rome. Mark gives a detailed explanation of Jewish customs and his linguistic preferences denote a non-jewish audience.

CONTEXT

The events described in Mark take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman Empire during the early 1st century, between 10-40 C.E. Mark was likely composed between 50 and 70 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Mark is written in narrative, along with some discourse sections.

KEY THEMES

- The good news of the Kingdom of God
- Jesus of Nazareth as the suffering servant
- The invitation to follow the Messiah

STRUCTURE

Mark is divided into four parts. Mark 1:1-8:26 shows the mixed reactions to Jesus' message. 8:27-10 present Jesus as the Messiah. 11-16 detail Jesus' persecution, crucifixion, and resurrection. And 16:9-20 is a longer ending found in later manuscripts.

LUKE

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF LUKE?

Christian tradition holds that Luke, a first-century C.E. historian, physician, and disciple of Jesus, is the author of this compilation of stories and eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus.

WHO WAS LUKE WRITTEN FOR?

Luke is addressed to a man named Theophilus, as is the book of acts which functions as a companion or sequel to Luke's gospel. In contrast to either Mark or Matthew, Luke's gospel is clearly written more for a wider gentile audience. Luke is traditionally thought of as one of Paul's traveling companions and it's certainly the case that the author of Luke was from those Greek cities in which Paul had worked.

CONTEXT

The events described in Luke take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman Empire during the early 1st century, between 10 B.C.E and 40 C.E. Luke was likely composed between 60 and 80 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Matthew is written in narrative, along with some discourse sections.

KEY THEMES

- The upside-down Kingdom of God
- Israel's freedom and new covenant
- God's faithfulness to his people seen in his human incarnation

STRUCTURE

Luke is divided into four parts. 1-2 introduce Jesus and John the Baptist. 3:1-9:50 detail the upside-down Kingdom of God. 9:51-19:27 focus on Jesus' inclusion of outsiders. And 19:28-24:53 conclude with Jesus' persecution, crucifixion, and resurrection.

JOHN

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF JOHN?

John's Gospel account claims to be his eyewitness testimony. There are continuing debates about whether this refers to John the son of Zebedee or a different John who lived in Jerusalem and was later known as John the Elder.

WHO WAS JOHN WRITTEN FOR?

Though less is known about the author of John, the intent of the book can be determined. John is written to second-generation believers as a way of strengthening their faith and affirming the deity of Christ. There are several key differences between John and the other three gospels that are well documented.

CONTEXT

The events described in John take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman empire during the early 1st century, between 30-40 C.E. John was likely composed between 70 and 130 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of John is written in narrative.

KEY THEMES

- Discerning light from darkness and life from death
- God's love for his people's unity throughout the world
- The true humanity and divinity of Jesus
- The choice to believe into God's power over death

STRUCTURE

John is divided into five parts. John 1 introduces Jesus. 2-12 detail seven miraculous signs. 13-17 focus on the night before Jesus' trial. 18-20 cover his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. And 21 concludes with the disciples' ongoing mission.

ACTS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF ACTS?

Christian tradition holds that this book, also called the Acts of the Apostles, was written by the physician and historian named Luke.

WHO WAS ACTS WRITTEN FOR?

Just like the gospel of Luke, Acts is addressed to Theophilus. The purpose of Luke-Acts may be ecclesiastical or apologetic. For ecclesiastical purposes, it may have been written in order to edify the church, serving as a history of both Jesus and his apostles. Or apologetically it may have been composed to make the case that Christianity was not a threat to the Roman Empire—more specifically, it seems that it could have been Paul's defense before Caesar.

CONTEXT

The events described in Acts take place in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman empire as well as Asia minor during the 1st century between 30–60 CE. Acts was likely composed between 60 and 90 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Acts is written in narrative.

KEY THEMES

- The power of the Holy Spirit given to human beings
- Jesus' ongoing mission to Israel and the nations after his departure
- The self-giving faithfulness of the early Church

STRUCTURE

Acts is divided into five parts. Acts 1 details Jesus' commission. 2-7 focus on the arrival of the Spirit and birth of the Church. 8-12 describe life within the Jesus movement. 13-20 recount the mission of the Church. And 21-28 ends with Paul's arrest.

ROMANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF ROMANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans.

WHO WAS ROMANS WRITTEN FOR?

The apostle identifies his recipients in 1:7 by saying: To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints. His intent was for the Christians in all of Rome to read the epistle. It also seems that there were multiple churches in the Empire's capital because there is mention of an additional church in the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:5).

CONTEXT

The events described in Romans take place primarily in the Greco-Roman empire. Romans was likely composed during Paul's third missionary journey between 50 and 60 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Romans is a letter written in prose discourse to approximately 6-10 house churches in Rome.

KEY THEMES

- God's gift of rescuing humanity through Jesus
- God maintaining his promises to Israel
- Love unifying the diversity of the Church

STRUCTURE

Romans has four main parts. Chapters 1-4 introduces the need for human rescue. 5-8 focus on how Jesus forms a new covenant family. 9-11 describes how God will not give up on his covenant people. And 12-16 discuss how love heals and unifies Jesus' family.

1 CORINTHIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians. This is the first of two known letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

WHO WAS 1 CORINTHIANS WRITTEN FOR?

The epistles to the Corinthians were written to the church that resided in Corinth of Achaia. The city resides on the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus to the rest of Greece.

CONTEXT

The events described in 1 Corinthians take place in the city of Corinth. 1 Corinthians was likely composed between 50 and 58 C.E., during Paul's three years in Ephesus.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 1 Corinthians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Corinth.

KEY THEMES

- The Gospel as a lens for life
- God's Spirit as the unifying force of the Church
- Jesus' victory over death

STRUCTURE

1 Corinthians has five parts. Chapters 1-4 introduce the divisions in the church. 5-7 focus on sexual ethics. 8-10 describe love as the ultimate ethic. 11-14 address unity in gatherings. And 15-16 define Jesus' resurrection hope for all.

2 CORINTHIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of 2 Corinthians. This is the second of two known letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

WHO WAS 2 CORINTHIANS WRITTEN FOR?

Like 1 Corinthians, the second epistle was written to the church that resided in Corinth of Achaia.

CONTEXT

The events described in 2 Corinthians take place in the city of Corinth. 2 Corinthians was likely composed between 53 and 58 C.E., about one year after Paul's first letter to Corinth. This second letter of Paul to the Corinthian church was occasioned by the report brought back by Titus, who informed Paul of their reception of the first letter, and how they received the rebuke that letter contained (2Cr 2:12-13; 7:5-9). Titus' report was encouraging, but evidently it also brought troubling news that some at Corinth were questioning Paul's authority as an apostle.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 2 Corinthians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Corinth.

KEY THEMES

- Reconciliation through Jesus
- God's generosity
- The upside-down way of the cross

STRUCTURE

2 Corinthians can be divided into three parts. Chapters 1-7 finalize his reconciliation with the Corinthian church. Chapters 8-9 address generosity in the community. And chapters 10-13 challenge those who reject Paul.

GALATIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF GALATIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians.

WHO WAS GALATIANS WRITTEN FOR?

Galatians is written to the churches that were established by Paul and Barnabas in the Roman province of Galatia (Ac 13:14-14:23).

CONTEXT

The events described in Galatians take place in the Roman province called Galatia. This letter was likely composed between 47 and 50 C.E. Shortly after the church began, some Jewish Christians came in and began teaching that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (similar to what happened at Antioch of Syria, cf. Ac 15:1). In an effort to persuade the Galatians, it appears the tactic was to discredit Paul as an apostle, challenge his concept of the gospel of Christ, and charge his doctrine with leading to loose living. This letter is written as a defense of Paul's apostleship and a rebuttal of the false Gospel that was being taught.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Galatians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Galatia.

KEY THEMES

- Unity of God's covenant people
- Jesus as fulfillment of the law
- New creation through the power of the Spirit

STRUCTURE

Galatians can be divided into three parts. Chapters 1-2 begin with God's family through Jesus. Chapters 3-4 address God's family as diverse and united in the Spirit. Chapters 5-6 are a reminder of the new creation and the power of the Spirit.

EPHESIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians.

WHO WAS EPHESIANS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter seems to be intended not just for the churches in Ephesus, but all the churches in the surrounding region. The letter lacks any specific exhortations or personal greetings. However, without question, it is intended for "the saints...and faithful in Christ Jesus." (Eph 1:1)

CONTEXT

The events described in Ephesians take place in the city of Ephesus. Ephesians was likely composed while Paul was in custody in Rome between 60 and 64 C.E. Unlike other epistles written to specific churches, this epistle does not deal with specific problems in a local congregation. Instead, Paul addressed great themes that pertain to the Christian's position in Christ, as a member of the body of Christ, the church.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Ephesians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Ephesus.

KEY THEMES

- The generous gift of God
- How to walk in a way worthy of God's gift
- Standing firm in the face of spiritual evil

STRUCTURE

Ephesians can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 introduce God's lavish grace and divine purpose for the new humanity. And chapters 4-6 exhort readers to live according to God's gift and offer a challenge for unity in the new humanity.

PHILIPPIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philippians.

WHO WAS PHILIPPIANS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to the church at Philippi, which Paul helped establish in Acts 16.

CONTEXT

The events described in Philippians take place in the city of Philippi. Philippians was likely composed while Paul was in custody in Rome between 60 and 64 C.E. The church at Philippi had sent a gift to Paul in Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus (Phl 4:10,18). Paul uses this occasion not only to thank them, but to comfort them concerning his situation as a prisoner for Jesus Christ (Phl 1:12-14). He also writes of his plans to send Timothy soon (Phl 2:19-24), and why he considered it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to them (Phl 2:25-30).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Philippians is a letter to the churches in Philippi.

KEY THEMES

- Imitation of Jesus through humble service
- The hope for the resurrection life
- God's gift of peace in difficulty

STRUCTURE

Philippians has five parts. Chapter 1:1-26 tells of Paul's gratefulness. 1:27-2:18 focuses on imitating Jesus. 2:19-30 explores imitating Jesus. 3:1-4:1 describes Paul's life as an imitation of Jesus'. And 4:2-23 reflects on Jesus' humility.

COLOSSIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Colossians.

WHO WAS COLOSSIANS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to the church in a Roman town called Colosse. It is unclear if the apostle Paul had ever been to this church at the time the letter was written.

CONTEXT

The events described in Colossians take place in the city of Colossae. Colossians was likely composed while Paul was in custody in Rome between 60 and 64 C.E. Paul had received a report of the situation at Colosse by way of Epaphras (Col 1:7-8). This report was for the most part favorable (Col 2:5). But the subject matter in the epistle strongly suggests that the church was facing the danger of sliding back into paganism or succumbing to heresy regarding Christ's divinity and the significance of circumcision.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Colossians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Colossae.

KEY THEMES

- Jesus as King over all creation
- Liberation through Jesus
- Freedom in the Messiah

STRUCTURE

Colossians can be divided into four parts. Chapters 1:1-23 begin with Jesus as head of the new humanity. 1:24-2:5 focuses on Paul's suffering. 2:6-23 addresses cultural pressures in Colossae. And chapters 3-4 describe examples of Jesus' self-giving love.

1 THESSALONIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians. This is the first of two letters Paul wrote to the Thessalonians.

WHO WAS 1 THESSALONIANS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to the church at Thessalonica, which Paul helped establish in Acts 17. 1 Thessalonians is considered one of Paul's earliest epistles, if not the first.

CONTEXT

The events described in 1 Thessalonians take place in the city of Thessaloniki (or Thessalonica). 1 Thessalonians was likely composed during Paul's second missionary journey between 48 and 52 C.E. The abrupt departure from Thessalonica so soon after the beginning of the church naturally left Paul anxious about the condition of the believers there. When Timothy joined Paul at Athens (cf. Ac 17:14-16), his concern prompted Paul to send Timothy at once back to Thessalonica to encourage and ground the new disciples in the faith, and to learn how they were enduring persecution (cf. 1Th 3:1-5). He returned with a good report of their faith so Paul writes to encourage and instruct them in Holy living.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 1 Thessalonians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Thessaloniki.

KEY THEMES

- Holiness in all of life
- Jesus as the true King of the world
- The hope of Jesus' return

STRUCTURE

1 Thessalonians can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 begin by celebrating the Thessalonians' faith and perseverance. Chapters 4-5 follow with instructions about good living and details about the return of Jesus.

2 THESSALONIANS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 2 THESSALONIANS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of 2 Thessalonians. This is the second of two letters that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian people.

WHO WAS 2 THESSALONIANS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to the church at Thessalonica, which Paul helped establish in Acts 17.

CONTEXT

The events described in 2 Thessalonians take place in the city of Thessaloniki (or Thessalonica). 2 Thessalonians was likely composed during Paul's second missionary journey between 48 and 52 C.E., about one year after he wrote 1 Thessalonians. From the second letter, it appears that they remained strong in the Lord despite persecution (cf. 2Th 1:3-4). But it is apparent from this letter that misunderstanding about the Lord's coming was present in the church. Some of the members were being troubled by false reports (cf. 2Th 2:1-2); others had stopped working, perhaps assuming that the Lord's imminent return meant one did not need to work anymore (cf. 2Th 3:11-12).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 2 Thessalonians is a letter to the churches in Thessaloniki.

KEY THEMES

- Patient endurance in suffering
- Hope for the Day of the Lord
- Imitation of Jesus' self-giving love

STRUCTURE

2 Thessalonians can be divided into three parts. Chapter 1 offers hope in the midst of continued persecution. Chapter 2 clarifies the coming Day of the Lord. And chapter 3 places a challenge before people who have been refusing to work.

1 TIMOTHY

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 1 TIMOTHY?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Timothy. This is the first of two letters Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy.

WHO WAS 1 TIMOTHY WRITTEN FOR?

This letter was written directly to Timothy, Paul's "true son in the faith." This young disciple traveled with Paul, is mentioned in multiple letters and stayed with multiple congregations to lead after Paul had planted them and moved on.

CONTEXT

The events described in 1 Timothy take place in the city of Ephesus. Paul likely composed 1 Timothy between 62 and 64 C.E. Paul had left Timothy behind at Ephesus with an awesome responsibility: to charge some not to teach anything contrary to the "sound doctrine" which was according to the "glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1Ti 1:3-11). Fulfilling this charge was made difficult by Timothy's youth and natural timidity (1Ti 4:11-12; cf. 2 Ti 1:7-8). While Paul hoped to come himself, he wrote Timothy to guide him in the meantime (1 Ti 3:14-15).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 1 Timothy is a letter written in prose discourse to a young pastor in Ephesus named Timothy.

KEY THEMES

- Love and genuine faith in the Church
- Equality and responsibility for the marginalized in the community
- Hope in Jesus as King of the world in spite of suffering

STRUCTURE

1 Timothy can be divided into four parts. Chapter 1 begins with the purpose of the Torah. Chapters 2-3 address problems caused by corrupt teachers. Chapters 4-6a continue addressing false teachings. And chapter 6b is a call to be rich in generosity.

2 TIMOTHY

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 2 TIMOTHY?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy. This is the second of two letters that Paul wrote to Timothy.

WHO WAS 2 TIMOTHY WRITTEN FOR?

This letter was written directly to Timothy, Paul's "true son in the faith." This young disciple traveled with Paul, is mentioned in multiple letters and stayed with multiple congregations to lead after Paul had planted them and moved on.

CONTEXT

The events described in 2 Timothy take place in the city of Ephesus. 2 Timothy was likely composed between 64 and 66 C.E., about one year after Paul wrote 1 Timothy. This epistle contains Paul's stirring words of encouragement and instructions to Timothy, his "beloved son." Longing to see him (2Ti 1:4), Paul writes this letter to have Timothy come quickly to Rome, and to bring along Mark, a cloak that was left at Troas, and some books and parchments (2Ti 4:9-13). He uses the occasion, however, to write concerning those things that are most heavy on his heart related to Timothy's work.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 2 Timothy is a letter written in prose discourse to a young pastor in Ephesus.

KEY THEMES

- Jesus' grace as a source of power
- Faithfulness to Jesus
- The comfort of Jesus amidst suffering

STRUCTURE

2 Timothy can be divided into three parts. Chapters 1-2a encourage Timothy to accept leadership. Chapters 2b-4a challenge Timothy to confront corrupt teachers. And chapter 4b is Paul's personal plea for Timothy to visit him in prison.

TITUS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF TITUS?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to Titus.

WHO WAS TITUS WRITTEN FOR?

This letter was written to a man named Titus who, like Timothy, was considered a son by Paul in the faith. There is no mention of Titus by name in the book of Acts, but we can glean much about him from the epistles of Paul. He was a Gentile by birth (Ga 2:3), and accompanied Paul to Jerusalem during the controversy over circumcision (Ac 15:1-2; Ga 2:1-5), before eventually becoming Paul's official emissary to the church in Corinth.

CONTEXT

The events described in Titus take place on the island of Crete. Titus was likely composed between 64 and 68 C.E. Like his first epistle to Timothy, this letter is written to a young preacher assigned a difficult task. Evidently the churches on the island of Crete were in need of maturation, and this letter is designed to assist Titus in that work.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Titus is a letter written in prose discourse to a pastor named Titus.

KEY THEMES

- Jesus as eternal hope
- The power of the Gospel in public life
- The upside-down value of generosity

STRUCTURE

Titus can be divided into three parts. Chapter 1 instructs Titus with his responsibilities in the church. Chapter 2 focuses on guidance in public life for followers of Jesus. Chapter 3 is a reminder that Jesus provided a way for new creation.

PHILEMON

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF PHILEMON?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philemon.

WHO WAS PHILEMON WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to Philemon, who was a member of the church at Colosse.

CONTEXT

The events described in Philemon take place in Asia-minor, close to Ephesus or Caesarea Philippi. Philemon was likely composed while Paul was in custody in Rome between 60 and 64 C.E. From the content of the epistle, it appears that Paul was writing primarily to secure forgiveness for Onesimus, but also to provide for himself a place of lodging after his release from imprisonment.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Philemon is a letter written in prose discourse from Paul to Philemon.

KEY THEMES

- Equality between followers of Jesus
- The gift of God's love and grace
- Slavery and Jesus' new humanity

STRUCTURE

Philemon can be divided into three parts. Verses 1-7 open with a prayer of thanks. Verses 8-20 are a request of forgiveness and restoration for Onesimus, an enslaved person. And verses 1:21-25 include encouragements and greetings.

HEBREWS

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF HEBREWS?

Although it is possible that Barnabas, Paul, or Apollos wrote the letter to the Hebrews, the author is not explicitly mentioned in the text.

WHO WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN FOR?

The general consensus is that this letter was written to Jewish Christians. There is uncertainty as to where they and the author were at the time of composition.

CONTEXT

The events described in Hebrews take place primarily in the occupied lands of the Greco-Roman empire. Hebrews was composed between 60 and 70 C.E., likely during Nero's persecution of the Church. The author wrote this epistle to prevent his readers from abandoning their faith in Christ (Heb 2:1-4). To encourage his Jewish brethren not to go back to the Old Law, he endeavored to show the superiority of Christ and His Covenant (Heb 8:1-2,6).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Hebrews is a letter written in prose discourse to a church community.

KEY THEMES

- Jesus' superiority over all creation
- God's gracious offer of forgiveness
- The comfort of Jesus in suffering

STRUCTURE

Hebrews has five parts. Jesus is compared to angels and the Torah in 1-2, to Moses and the promised land in 3-4, to the priests and Melchizedek in 5-7, and to sacrifices and the covenant in 8-10. 11-13 are a challenge to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

JAMES

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF JAMES?

Christian tradition holds that the book of James was written by Jesus' half-brother, James.

WHO WAS JAMES WRITTEN FOR?

The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (Jam 1:1). This naturally leads one to think of Jews (Ac 26:6-7) living outside the land of Palestine. Since the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, many Jews were scattered throughout different nations (Ac 2:5-11). While Jews, the epistle makes it clear that they were also brethren in the Lord, i.e., they were Jewish Christians.

CONTEXT

The events described in James take place in the city of Jerusalem. James was likely composed around 62 C.E. The epistle deals with a variety of themes, with an emphasis upon practical aspects of the Christian life. Some of the subjects include handling trials and temptations, practicing pure religion, understanding the relation between faith and works, the proper use of the tongue and display of true wisdom, being a friend of God rather than a friend of the world, and the value of humility, patience and prayer.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of James is a letter written in prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- The loving wisdom of Jesus
- Real faith is inseparable from actions
- Perseverance and patience in difficulty

STRUCTURE

James can be divided into two parts. Chapter 1 introduces Jesus and the wisdom he offers. And chapters 2-5 contain twelve teachings and an encouragement for perseverance in prayer.

1 PETER

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 1 PETER?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter. This is the first of two letters Peter wrote to multiple church communities in Asia-minor.

WHO WAS 1 PETER WRITTEN FOR?

Peter appears to be writing to both Jewish Christians and Gentiles who have come to faith.

CONTEXT

The events described in 1 Peter take place in the Roman province of Asia Minor. 1 Peter was likely composed between 61 and 64 C.E. It is apparent from the epistle that Christians in Asia Minor had experienced persecution (1Pe 1:6), and more suffering was on the way (1Pe 4:12-19). Throughout the epistle Peter encourages them to remain steadfast (1Pe 1:13; 4:16; 5:8,9). He reminds them of their blessings and duties that are incumbent upon them as God's "elect" (1Pe 1:2), "His own special people" (1Pe 2:9).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 1 Peter is a letter written in prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- The new identity of God's family
- Jesus as the new temple
- The hope of Jesus' future return

STRUCTURE

1 Peter has four parts. Chapter 1 begins with a greeting and a poem. Chapters 1b-2a focus on our new identity in Jesus. Chapters 2b-4a explore suffering as a way to bear witness to Jesus. And chapters 4b-5 describe the future hope for Jesus' return.

2 PETER

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF 2 PETER?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Peter wrote 2 Peter. This is the second of two letters Peter wrote to multiple church communities in Asia-minor.

WHO WAS 2 PETER WRITTEN FOR?

This letter is written to the same audience as 1 Peter - namely, Jewish Christians and gentiles who have converted.

CONTEXT

The events described in 2 Peter take place in the Roman province of Asia-minor. 2 Peter was likely composed between 64 and 67 C.E. Knowing his death is imminent (2Pe 1:13-14), Peter wanted to ensure that his readers remain established in the truth (2Pe 1:12), and be mindful of both the words spoken before by the prophets and the commandments given by the apostles, especially in regards to the promise of the Lord's return (2Pe 3:1-4).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of 2 Peter is a letter written in prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- Humans receiving faith as a gift and adding to it
- God's faithfulness to deliver his people
- Jesus as the exalted king of the universe

STRUCTURE

2 Peter can be divided into three parts. Chapter 1 begins by encouraging Jesus' followers to never stop maturing in their faith. Chapter 2 challenges the corrupt teachers' lifestyles. And chapter 3 is a reminder of God's justice and righteousness.

1-3 JOHN

WHO WROTE THE BOOKS OF 1-3 JOHN?

Christian tradition holds that an anonymous author wrote 1 John, but 2 and 3 John were written by someone called “the Elder.”

WHO WAS 1-3 JOHN WRITTEN FOR?

These letters appear to all be written to Christians throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

CONTEXT

The events described in 1-3 John take place in the city of Ephesus. 1-3 John were likely composed between 64 and 66 C.E. The author writes these letters as a way of instruction but also appears to speak directly to the rise in popularity of Gnosticism and to warn against its dangers.

LITERARY STYLES

The books of 1-3 John are letters written in prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- God’s light and love
- Righteousness by loving our neighbors
- Jesus as truth

STRUCTURE

1 John challenges followers of Jesus to stay true to what they already believe. 2 John is a warning to a specific house church. And 3 John is written to Gaius, one member of a house church.

JUDE

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF JUDE?

Christian tradition holds that Jude (Judah), one of the four brothers of Jesus, wrote the book of Jude.

WHO WAS JUDE WRITTEN FOR?

The letter is addressed "to those who are called" (Jde 1:1) without any specific designation as to who they were or where they lived. The references to Old Testament incidents and extra-biblical sources (cf. Jde 1:5-7,9,11,14) strongly suggests that the original readers were Jewish Christians, perhaps living in Palestine.

CONTEXT

The events described in Jude take place primarily in the occupied lands of the Greco-Roman empire, but a specific community or city is not mentioned. Jude was likely composed between 63 and 67 C.E. The author's original purpose in penning this epistle was to write of the common salvation he and his readers shared (Jde 1:3). But the presence of ungodly men and the danger of them leading Christians astray forced a change in purpose: To encourage his readers to contend earnestly for the faith that had been delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Jude is a letter written in prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- God's justice and judgment
- Jesus as the new temple
- Loving God through obedience

STRUCTURE

Jude can be divided into three parts. Verses 1-4 challenge the community to resist corrupt teachers. Verses 5-19 provide examples of resistance to God. And verses 20-25 are a reminder of God's call for obedience in love.

REVELATION

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Though most Christian traditions hold that Revelation (or The Revelation of Jesus to John) was written by the disciple John, his identity is not explicitly mentioned.

WHO WAS REVELATION WRITTEN FOR?

The book specifically mentions seven churches throughout Asia minor as its recipients.

CONTEXT

The events described in Revelation take place in Asia-minor to seven specific church communities. Revelation was likely composed between 94 and 96 C.E.

LITERARY STYLES

The book of Revelation is a compilation of apocalyptic literature and prose discourse.

KEY THEMES

- The hope of Jesus' final return
- Faithfulness to Jesus throughout one's life
- The comfort of Jesus in suffering and persecution

STRUCTURE

Revelation can be divided into seven parts. Chapters 1-3 introduces John's vision. Chapters 4-5, 6-8a, 8b-11, 12-16, and 17-20 focus on various visions of John. And chapters 21-22 are a concluding vision of the new heavens and new Earth.



THE BRIDGE CHURCH