



The History of the Bible
Session 09: Topic 2.1.4
The General Letters

Study by
Lorin L Cranford

Overview of Session

2.1.4 The General Letters

2.1.4.1 The Letter of James

- 2.1.4.1.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.1.2 Contents

2.1.4.2 The First and Second Letters of Peter

2.1.4.2.1 First Peter

- 2.1.4.2.1.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.2.1.2 Contents

2.1.4.2.2 Second Peter

- 2.1.4.2.2.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.2.2.2 Contents

2.1.4.3 The Letters of John

2.1.4.3.1 First John

- 2.1.4.3.1.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.3.1.2 Contents

2.1.4.3.2 Second John

- 2.1.4.3.2.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.3.2.2 Contents

2.1.4.3.3 Third John

- 2.1.4.3.3.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.3.3.2 Contents

2.1.4.4 The Letter of Jude

- 2.1.4.4.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.4.2 Contents

2.1.4.5 The Letter to the Hebrews

- 2.1.4.5.1 Compositional History
- 2.1.4.5.2 Contents

Detailed Study

2.1.4 The General Letters

Name. As described above, the documents in the “General Letters” or “Catholic Letters” include James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude. The name “general” or “catholic” is derived from the fact that these letters are not addressed to geographically identifiable congregations or specifically named individuals. Thus they are “general” as opposed to “specific” as in the Pauline letters that are sent to specifically named congregations and individuals. This is partially indicated in the traditional titles of these letters added to the documents in the second and third centuries, as is noted below. In the Pauline section, the title in the Greek is the letter of the Apostle Paul “*To the Romans*” (ΙΠΡΟΣ ΡΩΜΑΙΟΥΣ) etc. But in the general letter section, the title is simply “*From James*” (ΙΑΚΩΒΟΥ) etc.

Canonization. Although a bit latter we will look at the process of canonization in more detail, here we should note that the process of acceptance of these documents as authoritative scripture took time and went through stages. The symbolism of numbers played a role in this process from the second through the fourth centuries. At first the trinitarian related number three was significant and this meant three of these documents found widespread acceptance: James, 1 Peter, and 1 John. But with the passing of time, the symbolical significance of the number seven for completeness became more significant and to this previous list of three were added 2 Peter, 2-3 John and Jude. Thus this section of the New Testament contains seven documents. Here it has remained since the fourth century AD.

The sequential listing of these letters follows the same principle as do the letters of Paul. They are arranged in order of descending length. James is the longest, thus it is listed first. Jude is the shortest and thus at the end of the list. Second Peter and second / third John are listed behind the first of their respective letters, which determines their sequence in the listing.

Hebrews is the maverick that could not find a clear cut identity. And so it is listed immediately after the Pauline group of letters through a latter church father tradition associating it with Paul. But it is list before the

General Letters since it never was identified as a part of this group either.

Literary Patterns. The general letters represent a diverse mixture of literary forms. Although they are typically grouped under the literary genre of 'letter,' only a few of them actually follow an ancient letter pattern. Those that adhere basically to ancient letter forms include 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John and Jude. Third John represents about the closest adherence in form and length to the typical ancient letter that one will find in the New Testament. Two others, on the other hand, only contain one core element of ancient letters: James - the Praescriptio in 1:1 and Hebrews - the Conclusio in 13:18-25. The contents of these two documents favor the genre of 'ancient Jewish homily' (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως) as Heb. 13:22 identifies this document to be. First John contains a Prologue in 1:1-4 and no distinctly identifiable letter elements anywhere in the document. It somewhat resembles a short ancient philosophical tractate, but again lacks many of those characteristic patterns as well.

This diverse pattern of writing style helped play a role in the slow acceptance of some of the documents into the canon of the New Testament. It also helped produce doubts about and differing views of authorship among the church fathers. The influence of the apostle Paul on the pattern of letter writing can be seen in 1 Peter, but this is traceable to the fact that Silas (= Silvanus, the Latin spelling of his name) wrote the letter for Peter according to 1 Pet. 5:12. Not until the second century does the model of Paul's letters become the universal standard for Christian letter writing.

In surveying each of the letters below attention will be given to the history of the composition of each document. Then a quick synopsis of the contents of each document will be provided.

2.1.4.1 The Letter of James

This document stands at the head of the General Letter listing as the longest of these seven documents. In literary form, it only vaguely resembles a letter. The Praescriptio in 1:1, although very traditional in form, is the only letter element in the entire document. The paraenetical nature of the contents of the letter mostly following the ancient Jewish wisdom genre tip the literary identification scales toward ancient Jewish homily. Implications of this move primarily in the direction of the organization of the content of 1:2 - 5:20. Efforts to systematically outline the contents are doomed to failure and produce eisegesis¹ rather than exegesis,² thus distorting the meaning of the scripture text. That is, meaning is read into the text, rather than out of it. Ancient paraenesis (παραίνεσις), and especially Jewish wisdom paraenesis, did not move along systematic patterns of thought development. Instead, random ideas are set forth usually in a rather detached manner. This is certainly the case with the book of James.

2.1.4.1.1 Compositional History

The history of who wrote the book of James is quite fascinating. The *internal profile* of the writer is one who knew ancient Koine Greek quite well and was very skilled in using it to express his ideas. Influence from Septuagintal Greek is clearly present as well.³ Clearly the writer comes out of Jewish background, but also displays remarkable skill with the Greek language of his time.

The *external history* of the composition of the document is summarized well by Luke Timothy Johnson in his commentary on James in the New Interpreter's Bible (v. 12, iPreach):

Traditionally included as the first of the "general" or "catholic" epistles, the Letter of James is as clear and forceful in its moral exhortations as it is difficult to place within the development of earliest Christianity. Although its formal canonization was relatively late, there are signs that James was used by some writings (e.g., *1 Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*) before the middle of the second century CE. Largely through the enthusiastic endorsement of Origen, it became part of the church's collection, first in the East and, by the end of the fourth century, in the West. Martin Luther's distaste for James is well known, but was not widely shared by other reformers. Luther considered that Jas 2:24 ("You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" [NRSV]) contradicted Paul's teaching on righteousness in Gal 2:16 ("a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" [NRSV]). Luther's view dominated much of the scholarly approach to the letter until very recently. Most readers through the ages, however, reached a position like that of patristic interpreters, and

¹"the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas" [Merriam-Webster online dictionary]

²"from Greek exēgēsis, from exēgeisthai to explain, interpret, from ex- + hēgeisthai to lead" [Merriam-Webster online dictionary]

³"James is written in a clear and even somewhat elegant koine Greek that shows the influence of the Septuagint (LXX) not only in its explicit citations and allusions but also in its diction. The style does not lack adornment or rhetorical force. Its short sentences adhere to the ancient ideal of brevity, and although to some readers they appear disconnected, closer analysis reveals careful construction and vigorous argument." [Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Letter of James," in volume 12 of the *New Interpreter's Bible*, iPreach]

the opposite of Luther's: (1) James and Paul do not contradict each other, because they are not addressing the same point; (2) when read on its own terms, James is a powerful witness to both the diversity in early Christianity and the moral imperative of Christian identity in every age.

The traditional identification of this James in 1:1 is *James the Just*, the half-brother of Jesus. But numerous individuals by the name of James surface in the New Testament, as the Merriam-Webster online dictionary lists:

- 1 : an apostle, son of Zebedee, and brother of the apostle John according to the Gospel accounts
- 2 : an apostle and son of Alphaeus according to the Gospel accounts —called also James the Less
- 3 : a brother of Jesus traditionally held to be the author of the New Testament Epistle of James
- 4 : a moral lecture addressed to early Christians and included as a book in the New Testament

The picture of James the Just from the New Testament has been summarized helpfully by William Beardslee in "James," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (iPreach):

James apparently was not a disciple during the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 7:5). Yet he was a witness of the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and he appeared very early as an important leader in Jerusalem. Though he was not one of the Twelve, James was apparently regarded as an apostle. This is the most natural meaning of Gal. 1:19: "I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother." It has been suggested that James became an apostle as a replacement for James the son of Zebedee, since Acts first mentions him after the death of the latter. It is more probable, however, that in the early church there were more than twelve apostles from the beginning, since 1 Cor. 15:5-7 mentions the Twelve separately from "all the apostles." James, like the Eleven and Paul, became an apostle by the appearance of the risen Christ to him, commissioning him to be a specially authorized witness to the Resurrection. Though he apparently stayed in Jerusalem, in contrast to other apostles and other brothers of the Lord who traveled (1 Cor. 9:5), his vocation is apparent when Paul refers to the agreement that James, Peter, and John should go to the Jews, while Paul should go to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). Thus the beginning and basis of James's position in the church was not his human relationship to Jesus, but his special relationship by faith to the risen Christ. See APOSTLE.

From James's presence in Paul's list of those to whom the risen Christ had appeared, it is clear that James shared the eschatological faith of the first Christians, that God would establish a new age through Christ. James was at one with Paul in believing that the new faith in Christ was for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and they agreed as well that Gentiles did not have to follow the Jewish law (Gal. 2:6-10; cf. Acts 15:12-21). James's own special vocation, however, was to the Jews (Gal. 2:9). Perhaps James and many other Jewish Christians believed that the mission to the Jews would pave the way for the salvation of the Gentiles, as is suggested by Acts 15:16-18, quoting Amos 9:11-12 (LXX). Paul, on the other hand, believed that the salvation of the Gentiles would unexpectedly precede the conversion of the Jews (Rom. 10:1-11). It is difficult, however, to know James's thought in detail, especially since the speeches in Acts are not literal records of the words of the speakers.

Two church traditions provide differing accounts of his martyrdom in the mid 60s of the first Christian century (cf. Beardslee, *IDB*, iPreach):

Two separate traditions tell that James was put to death shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, writing ca. 94, James with "certain others" was stoned in 62 at the instigation of the Sadducee high priest Ananus, as one of his first acts as high priest. Ananus was able to carry out the execution because the newly appointed Roman procurator, Albinus, had not yet arrived in Palestine (*Jos. Antiq.* XX.ix. 197-203). It is possible that the others who were put to death were also Christians, but this is not stated. This passage has been suspected of being a Christian interpolation in the text of Josephus, but it shows no obvious Christian bias and fits Josephus' usual interpretation of the Sadducee party. Thus there is little doubt that James was put to death by the priestly authorities in the early sixties, perhaps as part of a wider move of opposition to Christianity.

Another account of the death of James comes from Hegesippus, in the passage cited above to describe his piety. According to Hegesippus, James met his death after being presented to the people at Passover to give his impartial judgment about Jesus. When he proclaimed Jesus as the Son of man, seated at God's right hand, he was cast down from the temple, stoned, and clubbed to death. Hegesippus agrees with Josephus that James was put to death by priestly authorities in the sixties, though he puts the episode shortly before the siege of 66. But the details of his story are legendary.

Assuming the accuracy of the early church tradition of James the Just, one needs to account for some of the tension between the internal profile and the external history, namely how a Palestinian Jew growing up as a peasant in the very small, somewhat isolated village of Nazareth in Galilee could have acquired the extraordinary writing skills with the Greek language present in this document. A very common explanation among scholars today is the understanding that this document, as a Jewish homily, is a summation of the preaching ministry of James to Jewish Christians in Palestine, and in Jerusalem in particular. Either shortly before his martyrdom or else sometime afterwards, the document was put together by disciples of James in order to preserve the wisdom of this leader of Christianity in the middle of the apostolic century. It was sent out to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. My personal view leans toward the editorial composition of James' preaching right around the time of his death in the early to mid 60s. Those who did the

writing of this material were unquestionably well versed in using Koine Greek. How well James himself could use Greek is unknown, since clearly he did his preaching of the gospel to his Jewish audiences in Aramaic, and not in Greek. Thus what we have in the book represents 'translation Greek' from the oral preaching of James through the 50s of the first Christian century. But more than translation, it represents interpretation of his message to an audience well acquainted with the more literary forms of Greek in that time.

2.1.4.1.2 Contents

The contents of the book revolve around two sets of material. The very traditional letter Praescriptio in 1:1 and then the paraenetical material in 1:2 through 5:20. In previous publications I have summarized this material as follows:

1.2-12 Trials	4.11-12 Criticism
1.13-18 Temptation	4.13-17 Leaving God out
1.19-27 Worship	5.1-6 Abusive wealth
2.1-13 Faith and worship	5.7-11 Patient suffering
2.14-26 Faith and service	5.12 Oaths
3.1-12 Tongues	5.13-18 Praying
3.13-18 Wisdom	5.19-20 Reclaiming the fallen
4.1-10 Worldliness	

For an in depth study of each of these pericopes, see my James Studies series at cranfordville.com. Some foundational themes reoccur in the document such as speech (cf. 1:19-27, 3:1-12, 4:11-12, 5:12). But for the most part, the paraenesis is self contained in individual units of text material, technically known as pericopes. Occasionally related topics will be grouped beside each other. e.g., 3:1-12 and 3:13-18; 2:1-13 and 2:14-26; 4:13-17 and 5:1-6, as well as 5:1-6 with 5:7-11.

2.1.4.2 First and Second Peter.

These two letters are identified with the apostle Peter both internally and externally. As such they make up the Petrine tradition in the New Testament. Occasionally, modern scholarship will include the Gospel of Mark in this on a secondary level, due to the Papias tradition (cf. *Euseb. Hist. II.39.15*) in the early second century that Mark wrote down Peter's recollection of the teaching and ministry of Jesus. The unity of the two letters - i.e., the lack of it -- has occasioned considerable doubt in modern scholarship about the Petrine origin of 2 Peter.⁴

Both documents exhibit traditional patterns of an ancient letter with Praescriptio, Proem (not 2 Peter), letter body, and Conclusio. Thus they reflect the literary genre of letter, but with features distinctive from the typical pattern found in the letters of Paul.

2.1.4.2.1 First Peter

First Peter represents the longest and most well established product from the ministry of the apostle Peter. Peter is known in the New Testament as Peter (Πέτρος), Simon Peter (Σίμων Πέτρος), Symeon (Σεμεών), and Cephas (Κηφάς).⁵ The ministry of the apostle Peter is as disciple of Jesus, then leader of the

⁴Three NT writings have been connected with Peter. The Gospel of Mark, according to a tradition which goes back to Papias (Euseb. Hist. II.39.15), was indebted to the preaching of Peter, but no one claims that Peter wrote this gospel. The opening verse of I Peter (see PETER, FIRST LETTER OF) ascribes the writing of this letter to Peter, and there is good ground for accepting this position if we may assume, as 5:12 indicates, that Silvanus phrased the writing as it now stands. It is generally agreed that Petrine authorship cannot be defended for II Peter (see PETER, SECOND LETTER OF); it is one of the latest writings of the NT.

"In addition to these writings, a number of apocryphal works are ascribed to Peter. These later works, all of which come from the second century or later, include the *Preaching of Peter*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and an *Epistle of Peter to James* connected with the Clementine Homilies. They cannot be trusted for information about the life and thought of Peter. Nor can the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, which make no claim to Petrine authorship, be used for writing the life of Peter. (For further information on these apocryphal works see the separate titles and APOCRYPHA, NT.) It is clear that the essential contribution of Peter did not lie in the realm of writing but in action." [Floyd V. Filson, Peter," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach]

⁵The NT uses four names to refer to Peter. Least used is the Hebrew name Symeon (שמעון; Σεμεων), which appears only in Acts 15:14 and in most Greek MSS of II Pet. 1:1. The Greek name Simon (Σιμων) occurs much more often: in Matthew, five times; in Mark, six; in Luke, eleven; in John, twenty-two; in Acts, four (all in the Cornelius story); and possibly in II Peter, one (1:1). Nearly twenty times, almost all of them in John, the name Simon is used in the double name Simon Peter. The other two names, Cephas and Peter, are identical in meaning. Both mean "rock." Cephas (κηφας)

apostles and of early Jewish Christianity. He suffered martyrdom in Rome at the hands of Emperor Nero in the mid-60s of the first Christian century, according to early church tradition. Nowhere in the pages of the New Testament can the claim by Roman Catholic tradition of him being the first pope be justified. The appeal to Matt. 16:13-20 and to him being given 'the keys to the kingdom' by Jesus is a bogus claim based on false understanding of this biblical text. But clearly he stood as the leader of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus, and at the Jerusalem Council meeting in the late 40s (cf. Acts 15) he represented the apostles in that meeting. As such he was the acknowledged leader of Christianity during its early Jewish Christian phase up to the middle of the first Christian century.

2.1.4.2.1.1 Compositional History

The *external history* and the *internal writer profile* comprise the compositional history of this document. The credibility of the external history stands in proportion to the compatibility of the two perspectives on authorship. The sources of the external history are the church fathers through the eight century AD. Especially important among these are the discussions of Origen at the end of the second century and of Eusebius in the fourth century, since they contain more detailed discussions and also report trends and diverse viewpoints about the compositional history of the documents of the New Testament.

Regarding the *external history* of First Peter, the almost universal consensus of the early church was to attribute the document to Peter. The article on First Peter in Wikipedia summarizes church tradition helpfully:

The author identifies himself in the opening verse as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus", and the view that the epistle was written by St. Peter is attested to by a number of Church Fathers: Irenaeus (140-203), Tertullian (150-222), Clement of Alexandria (155-215) and Origen of Alexandria (185-253). If Polycarp, who was martyred in 156, and Papias alluded to this letter, then it must have been written before the mid-2nd century. However, the Muratorian Canon of c. 170 did not contain this, and a number of other General epistles, suggesting they were not yet being read in the Western churches. Unlike *The Second Epistle of Peter*, the authorship of which was debated in antiquity, there was little debate about Peter's authorship until the advent of biblical criticism in the 18th century.

Regarding the *internal author profile*, the picture of the writer that emerges here is one who wrote very good Koine Greek, although not quite at the cultured level of James, Hebrews, and Luke-Acts. The thirty-five references to texts in the Old Testament come exclusively from the Septuagint, rather than a translated Hebrew text source. Very little personal information about the writer surfaces in the document. The theme and tone of the letter reflects echoes from the writings of the apostle Paul.

Thus because of a supposed tension between these two author profiles -- external and internal -- many modern scholars reflect doubt about the accuracy of the early church tradition, and prefer to designate the document as anonymous in its origin. But the fatal flaw of this viewpoint is the failure to give due consideration to the impact of the writing scribe of the letter, Silas (cf. 5:12). When appropriate consideration of the role of the amanuensis is given, one can plausibly account for most all the tensions between these two profiles. And thus the credibility of the early church tradition remains strong.

Very likely the document was put together by Peter with the help of Silas sometime in the late 50s to early 60s. If Peter was in Rome at the time -- as the reference to Babylon in 5:13 suggests -- then the dating would be after Paul's arrival there with Silas, Luke and the others who accompanied him to Rome from Caesarea Philippi. Thus the dating would be placed in the early 60s.

2.1.4.2.1.2 Contents

Because the form of an ancient letter is followed, the document can be clearly divided out into the traditional letter segments as the best way to gain an understanding of the material found in the document. The letter is longer and has formal elements and tone, rather than intimate personal tones. The contents of is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word *apk*, "rock." It occurs in John once, in I Corinthians four times, and in Galatians four times. The Greek word *πέτρος* has the same meaning (John 1:42). It occurs in Matthew twenty-three times, in Mark nineteen, in Luke seventeen, in John thirty-four, in Acts fifty-six, in Galatians twice, and in I Peter and II Peter once each. Because Greek MSS vary in the name given in some passages, these figures are only approximate, but they show clearly that the name Peter is dominant in NT usage, and that the name Simon, though used often, is much less frequent. The double name Simon Peter and the phrase "Simon called Peter" recall that Simon was the earlier name and the name Peter was given later. The frequency of the name Simon in the gospels and the rare use of Symeon in the NT indicate that the name Simon was not merely a later Greek substitute for Symeon, but that the name Simon was his alternate original name and was in common use during Jesus' ministry. If this is so, it hints at some Greek background for the pre-Christian life of Peter. He was not an Aramaic-speaking Jew who had no touch with the Hellenistic forces in Galilee, but a bilingual Jew who thereby had some providential preparation for later missionary preaching." [Floyd V. Filson, "Peter," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach]

the letter can be summarized as follows:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2

Superscriptio: 1:1a
 Adscriptio: 1:1b-2a
 Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem: 1:3-12

1:3a - core prayer
 1:3b-12 expansion

Body: 1:13-5:11

1:13-2:10 Holy living
 1:13-25 Ideals
 2:1-10 Privileges
2:11-3:12 Obligations

2:11-17 Civic
 2:18-3:7 Haustafeln
 3:8-12 Social

3:13-5:11 Persecution

3:13-4:11 Encouragement
 4:12-19 Explanation
 5:1-11 Proper conduct

Conclusio: 5:12-14

5:12 Sender Verification
 5:13-14a Greetings
 5:14b Benedictio

The letter is addressed to the “exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood” (cf. 1:1b-2). The geographical references depict the region of central and northern Turkey along the Black Sea coastal region. Although the Adscriptio seems to point toward Jewish Christians, the content and orientation of the body of the letter reflect universal concerns including both Jewish and non-Jewish believers. Evidently Peter was in Rome when this document was put together.



The body of the letter revolves around three central themes: holy living, obligations, and persecution. From these foundational emphases come much rich insight into living the Christian life in times of hardship and opposition. The Conclusio in 5:12-14 contains three identifiable elements often found in this part of ancient letters, and especially in the letters of Paul in the New Testament.

2.1.4.2.2 Second Peter

Second Peter represents a challenge in understanding its origin and thus its compositional setting. This, in turn, will play a significant role in the interpretation of the contents of the document. The document identifies itself in the Superscriptio (1:1a) as from “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” This differs somewhat from the Superscriptio in 1 Peter 1:1a, which reads more simply “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” But these are about the only aspects in common between the two letters.

Interestingly, however, is the similarity of material between 2 Peter and Jude:

2 Peter 1:5	Jude 3
2 Peter 1:12	Jude 5
2 Peter 3:2f.	Jude 17f
2 Peter 3:14	Jude 24
2 Peter 3:18	Jude 25

Tartarus in 2 P. 2:4 with Jude 6, but Jude 6 is coming from the Book of Enoch.

One of the resulting questions then is who was dependent on whom for this material, since written literary dependency is relatively clear. Differing answers to this question arise and emerge from conclusions about the compositional history of the document.

2.1.4.2.2.1 Compositional History

The *external history* and the *internal writer profile* comprise the compositional history of this document. Here the two pictures of the origin of the document sharply differ from one another and pose substantial barriers in finding ways to be reconciled with one another.

Regarding the *external history*, the early church had mixed views about the document and thus the writing was slow to gain acceptance into the canon of New Testament scriptures. The article on 2 Peter in

Wikipedia helpfully summarizes this history:

Acceptance of the letter into the canon did not occur without some difficulty; however, “nowhere did doubts about the letter’s authorship take the form of definitive rejection.”^[24] The earliest record of doubts concerning the authorship of the letter were recorded by Origen (c. 185 – 254), though Origen mentioned no explanation for the doubts, nor did he give any indication concerning the extent or location. As D. Guthrie put it, “It is fair to assume, therefore, that he saw no reason to treat these doubts as serious, and this would mean to imply that in his time the epistle was widely regarded as canonical.”^[25] Origen, in another passage, has been interpreted as considering the letter to be Petrine in authorship.^[26] Before Origen’s time, the evidence is inconclusive;^[27] there is a lack of definite early quotations from the letter in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, though possible use or influence has been located in the works of Clement (d. c. 211), Theophilus (d. c. 183), Aristides (d. c. 134), Polycarp (d. 155), and Justin (d. 165).^[28] Eusebius (c. 275 – 339) professed his own doubts, see also *Antilegomena*, and is the earliest direct testimony of such, though he stated that the majority supported the text, and by the time of Jerome (c. 346-420) it had been mostly accepted as canonical.^[29]

With this background of differing views about the origin of 2 Peter in the early church, one should proceed with caution in evaluating the credibility of the external history tradition.

Regarding the *internal author profile*, the challenges don’t become easier. Significant traits emerge from careful analysis of the contents of the letter. On the positive side is the material identifying Peter as being responsible. The Praescriptio presents the writing from “Simon Peter, servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Further, the author states in 1:14 that the Lord revealed to him the approach of his own death.⁶ He also was an eye-witness of the transfiguration of Jesus (1:16-18).⁷ He mentions having written an earlier letter in 3:1 to the same readership.⁸ In 3:15 he calls Paul “our beloved brother.”⁹ And yet these very deliberate efforts at author self-identification reflect traits commonly found in pseudepigraphical writings in the ancient world. No other NT writer goes to these lengths of self-identification.

Added to these internal traits are a) a drastically different style of Greek from 1 Peter; b) the probable use of Jude; c) possible allusions to second-century gnosticism; d) encouragement in the wake of a delayed parousia; e) implications in 3:4 that the apostolic generation has already passed away, and f) some distancing of himself from the apostles of the Lord and Savior in 3:2.

Thus, honest appraisal of the internal author profile produces a very different authorship picture than the external one from early church tradition. And this internal profile contributed to the differing church traditions. Whether the tension between the two pictures can be successfully resolved remains an open and often debated question in modern scholarship. Most biblical scholars conclude that it cannot. But a few do seek to affirm petrine authorship even while acknowledging significant difficulties with this view.¹⁰

⁶2 Pet. 1:14 (NRSV): “since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”

⁷2 Pet. 1:16-18 (NRSV): “16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.”

⁸2 Pet. 3:1 (NRSV): “This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you....”

⁹2 Pet. 3:15b-16 (NRSV): “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.”

¹⁰“A minority of scholars have disagreed with this position and forwarded reasons in support of genuine Petrine authorship. They argue that the letter did not fit a specific pattern of what they consider pseudepigraphy. The author did not use first person narrative, which Donald Guthrie argues was typical in pseudepigraphy.^[3] Certain details in the Transfiguration account differ from the synoptic gospels and that passage lacks embellishment which E. M. B. Green argues was common in apocryphal books.^[4] An uncommon title, “our beloved brother,” is given to Paul, where later literature used other titles.^[5] The author states that Paul’s letters are difficult to understand (2Peter 3:15-16) which Donald Guthrie argues runs counter to the tendency in pseudepigraphy to enhance the heroic alleged author.^[6]

Scholars who accept Petrine authorship have a number of explanations concerning the relation between 2 Peter and Jude. It could be that, conversely, Jude used 2 Peter.^[7] Other scholars argue that even if 2 Peter used Jude, that does not exclude Petrine authorship.^[8] On remaining points, Ben Witherington III argued that the text we have today is a composite, including points taken from the Epistle of Jude, but that it containing a genuine “Petrine fragment”, which he identified as 2 Peter 1:12-21.^[9] Finally, some scholars have advanced the hypothesis that differences in style could be explained by Peter having employed different amanuenses (secretaries) for each epistle, or if Peter wrote the second letter himself, while using Silvanus (Silas) as an amanuensis for the first.” [2nd Peter, Wikipedia online]

My personal view is toward the traditional understanding, with the assumption that Peter had to write this letter without the aid of an amanuensis and his skill in writing Greek was severely limited. But one cannot claim to be an honest scholar and be dogmatic on this view of authorship. The concrete evidence necessary to provide high certainty just doesn't exist.

Assuming Petrine authorship, then the time and place for the writing is shortly before Peter's execution by Nero in the mid 60s of the first century. This is Peter's 'farewell' address, or his 'last will and testament.'

2.1.4.2.2 Contents

The contents of 2 Peter can be summarized as follows:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2	2:1-3 Their coming
Superscriptio: 1:1a	2:4-10a Their future
Adscriptio: 1:1b	2:10b-22 Their immoral ways and teachings
Salutatio: 1:2	3:1-18a The Lord's return
Body: 1:3-3:13	3:1-2 A reminder
1:3-21 True knowledge	3:3-10 Certainty of his coming
1:3-11 Knowledge & obedience	3:11-18a Call to holiness
1:12-21 Trustworthiness of this knowledge	Conclusio 3:18b
2:1-22 False teachers	3:18b Doxology

The Praescriptio in 1:1-2 follows a reasonably common pattern: "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." The standard three elements are contained as outlined above. It is similar to and yet different from 1 Peter 1:1-2, "1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance." The letter recipients are indicated more generally in 2 Peter although 3:1 makes it clear that the same targeted audience is in mind: "the second letter I am writing to you..."

The writer skips over a Proem, somewhat strangely if he were trying to 'forge' an identification with 1 Peter, and moves directly to the body of the letter. Three themes serve as anchor points for his discussion: a) true knowledge; b) false teachers, and c) the Lord's return. Norman Ericson in the *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* effectively summarizes the central point of the letter:

Peter wrote this letter to announce the certainty of divine judgment on the false teachers (chap. 2) and to declare that God is able to preserve all who engage in the spiritual disciplines of grace and knowledge (3:18). Jesus Christ will certainly appear, and those who have fallen from the faith will be judged along with this evil world. Peter's second letter is presumably addressed, like 1 Peter, from Rome to the churches in northern Asia Minor about a.d. 65.

Eschatology is the dominant theological focus in 2 Peter, with an emphasis on the certainty of divine judgment on ungodliness and apostasy. This judgment has happened in the past, continues in the present, and will find ultimate expression on the day of the Lord (3:10). This is proven by the destruction of the ancient world in its ungodliness, the continuing detention of insubordinate angels, and the catastrophic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil and immorality (2:4-10).

2.1.4.3 The Letters of John.

The three letters of John comprise an important part of the Johannine literature of the New Testament that consists of these three letters, the fourth gospel, and the book of Revelation. In modern times with the Biblical Theology movement from the early 1900s has come the Johannine Theology perspective that seeks to summarize the core doctrinal teachings of these five documents as a collection of writings coming out of a late first century Johannine community. To be sure, differing reconstructions of both the theology and the community can be found among Johannine scholars in recent times. But the ideas of both a reasonably coherent theology and a community of believers with connections to the apostle John are widely assumed today.

The three 'letters' of John present something of a challenge in analyzing by literary form. First John hardly bears resemblance to an ancient letter, while Second and Third John come about as close as any NT document to following patterns of ancient letter writing both in form and length. The writing styles between the two sets also differ, even though many words and themes are shared by all three documents. These differ-

ences were noticed early on during the era of the church fathers and provoked considerable discussion even then.

2.1.4.3.1 First John

The first 'letter' of John is more of a philosophical tractate than a letter. Only a Conclusio in 5:13-21 possibly exists, and even this is not that clear. Many scholars will dispute this identification of literary genre here. The material certainly does not follow the usual Conclusio patterns in the other letters inside the New Testament.

2.1.4.3.1.1 Compositional History

The external history and the internal author profile must be compared in order to assess the reliability of early church tradition about the origin of this document.

Regarding the *external history* of First John, this document is typically linked closely to that of the fourth gospel and so early church tradition tended to discuss the two documents from a common authorship perspective.¹¹ Clearly the themes, terminology etc. do reflect a common viewpoint with the fourth gospel and point to a common author.

The dominant viewpoint in early Christianity is that the apostle John was responsible for the composition of First John. The document then would have most likely arisen in the last decades of the first Christian century somewhere around Ephesus where the apostle finished out his earthly life.

The contents have been summarized as follows:

The author wrote the Epistle so that the joy of his audience would "be full" (1.4) and that they would "sin not" (2.1) and that "you who believe in the name of the Son of God... may know that you have eternal life." (5.13) It appears as though the author was concerned about heretical teachers that had been influencing churches under his care. Such teachers were considered Antichrists (2.18-19) who had once been church leaders but whose teaching became heterodox. It appears that these teachers taught that Jesus Christ was a Spirit being without a body (4.2), that his death on the cross was not as an atonement for sins (1.7) and that they were no longer able to sin (1.8-10). It appears that John might have also been rebuking a proto-Gnostic named Cerinthus, who also denied the humanity of Christ.

The purpose of the author (1:1-4) is to declare the Word of Life to those to whom he writes, in order that they might be united in fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. He shows that the means of union with God are, (1) on the part of Christ, his atoning work (1:7; 2:2; 3:5; 4:10, 14; 5:11, 12) and his advocacy (2:1); and (2), on the part of man, holiness (1:6), obedience (2:3), purity (3:3), faith (3:23; 4:3; 5:5), and love (2:7, 8; 3:14; 4:7; 5:1). Thus both the external history and the internal author profile point to the same person as the one responsible for the fourth gospel. Early church tradition identifies this person as the apostle John.

2.1.4.3.1.2 Contents

The contents of the gospel can be organized around the follow points:

Prologue: 1:1-4

1:5-2:6 Godly living

2:7-17 Brotherly love

2:18-27 The Incarnate Christ

2:28-3:10 Righteousness

3:11-18 Brotherly love

3:19-24 Confidence before God

4:1-6 Testing the spirits

4:7-21 Brotherly love

5:1-12 Overcoming the world

Conclusio, 5:13-21

5:13-15 Confidence

5:16-17 Sinning

5:18-20 Reclaiming the fallen

The material with heavy paraenetical tones defies traditional outlining into thematic groups or progressive development of themes. For this reason, some term the document an ancient sermon, but it lacks a lot of the qualities found in this literary form. It seems better to apply the label tractate as an essay on a collection of themes in order to counter the growing influence of false teachers making inroads into the Christian communities around Ephesus in late first century.

¹¹"The book was not among those whose canonicity was in doubt, according to Eusebius; however, it is not included in an ancient Syrian canon. Theodore of Mopsuestia also presented a negative opinion toward its canonicity. Outside of the Syrian world, however, the book has many early witnesses, and appears to have been widely accepted." ["Authorship of the Johannine works," Wikipedia online]

2.1.4.3.2 Second John

Second John represents a fascinating letter to a 'lady' (ἡ κυρία) who was probably a congregation of believers, rather than an individual. The challenge is the lack of geographical or personal names in the letter. Thus we readers are left guessing who was addressed specifically by this letter. In the Greetings (v. 13), a sister 'congregation' sends greetings from where the 'elder' is at the time of writing. Where both these churches were is a matter of speculation.

2.1.4.3.2.1 Compositional History

The *external compositional history* for the letter ties in general this letter to the apostle John, although Eusebius contended that the "Elder" identified in the Superscriptio of 2 and 3 John was not the apostle John, but a John the Elder, a different person from the apostle. Certainly, the *internal author profile* supports a strong link of these two letters with one another. But sufficient similarities in vocabulary, themes etc. between these two letters and First John and the Gospel of John exist to create the plausibility of a common author of all four documents.

2.1.4.3.2.2 Contents

The clearly defined letter parts provide the best way to analyze the contents of this short document:

Praescriptio, vv. 1-3

Superscriptio, v. 1a

Adscriptio, v. 1b-2

Salutatio, v. 3

Proem, v. 4

Body, vv. 5-11

vv. 5-7 To the church

5 And now I beg you, lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love.

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

vv. 8-11 To the members

8 Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward.

9 Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.

10 If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; 11 for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

Conclusio, vv. 12-13

v. 12 Travel Plans

v. 13 Greetings

The twofold arrangement of the contents of the body of the letter make it clear that the writer is addressing a church first generally and then individually. Strong concerns with the influence of false teachers surfaces throughout this short letter.

2.1.4.3.3 Third John

The focal point of Third John is more specific and less vague than in Second John. But the absence of geographical references in the letter leave us in the dark as to exactly which congregation is being addressed by this letter.

2.1.4.3.3.1 Compositional History

2.1.4.3.3.2 Contents

The clearly defined letter parts provide the best way to analyze the contents of this short document:

Praescriptio, v. 1

Superscriptio, v. 1a

Adscriptio, v. 1b

Proem, vv. 2-4

Body, vv. 5-12

vv. 5-7 To Gaius

5 Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, 6 who have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey as befits God's service. 7 For they have set out for his sake and have accepted nothing from the heathen.

vv. 8-10 To the church

8 So we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth.

9 I have written something to the church; but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority.

10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church.

vv. 11-12 To Gaius

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God.

12 Demetrius has testimony from every one, and from the truth itself; I testify to him too, and you know my testimony is true.

Conclusio, vv. 13-15

vv. 13-14 Travel Plans

v. 15a Peace

v. 15b Greetings

The letter is addressed to Gaius, who is a leader in the church but has been pushed to the side by a domineering Diotrophes who has taken control of the church to the exclusion of the other leaders. Demetrius carried this letter to Gaius from the Elder and was a part of the authentic apostolic tradition of the gospel opposing what Diotrophes was doing.

The identity of these individuals poses something of a challenge as the following quote from the Wikipedia article on Third John suggests:

While the letter is addressed to Gaius (Caius), scholars are uncertain if this Caius is the Christian Caius in Macedonia (Acts 19:29), the Caius in Corinth (Romans 16:23) or the Caius in Derbe (Acts 20:4).^[1]

Indications within the letter suggest a genuine private letter, written to commend to Gaius a party of Christians led by Demetrius, who were strangers to the place where he lived, and who had gone on a mission to preach the gospel (verse 7). The purpose of the letter is to encourage and strengthen Caius, and to warn him against the party headed by Diotrophes, who refuses to cooperate with the presbyteros who is writing.

2.1.4.4 The Letter of Jude

Jude represents a unique letter in the New Testament. It identifies itself as having been written by the brother of James, which would make Jude a brother of Jesus as well. The letter makes use of non-canonical Jewish writings as well as of the Old Testament. It contains segments either copied from, or a basis for, parallel material in 2 Peter.

2.1.4.4.1 Compositional History

Interestingly, the *external history* of early church tradition is generally unified on Jude as the author and a part of the earthly family of Jesus. The uncertainty related to the lack of apostle status by Jude.

"More remarkable is the evidence that by the end of the second century Jude was widely accepted as canonical..." Clement, Tertullian and the Muratorian canon considered the letter canonical. The authorship was called into question when Origen of Alexandria first spoke of the doubts held by some — albeit not him. Eusebius classified it with the "disputed writings, the antilegomena." The letter was eventually accepted as part of the canon by the Church father Athanasius and the Synods of Laodicea (c. 363) and Carthage (397). Doubts regarding Jude's authenticity were revived at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

The internal author profile can be summarized as follows:

The Epistle of Jude is a brief book of only a single chapter with 25 verses. It was composed as an encyclical letter—that is, one not directed to the members of one church in particular, but intended rather to be circulated and read in all churches. The form, as opposed to the earlier letters of Paul, suggests that the author knew Paul's

Epistle to the Ephesians or even that the Pauline epistles had already been collected and were circulating when the text was written.

The wording and syntax of this epistle in its original Greek demonstrates that the author was capable and fluent. The epistle is addressed to Christians in general (1:1), and it warns them about the doctrine of certain errant teachers to which they were exposed. Examples of heterodox opinions that were circulating in the early 2nd century include Docetism, Marcionism, and Gnosticism.

The epistle's style is combative, impassioned, and rushed. Many examples of evildoers and warnings about their fates are given in rapid succession. The epithets contained in this writing are considered to be some of the strongest found in the New Testament.

The epistle concludes with a doxology, which is considered to be one of the highest in quality contained in the Bible.

Again, some tension between the internal and external author perspectives does exist, and should lead to caution about the accuracy of the early church tradition.

2.1.4.4.2 Contents

The letter structure provides the best way to get at the contents of this document:

Praescriptio, vv. 1-2

Superscriptio, v. 1a

Adscriptio, v. 1b

Salutatio, v. 2

Body, vv. 3-23

vv. 3-4 Writing the letter

3 Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

vv. 5-7 Divine judgment

5 Now I desire to remind you, though you were once for all fully informed, that he who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day; 7 just as Sodom and Gomor'rah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

vv. 8-9 False teachers' attitude

8 Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. 9 But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

vv. 10-11 False teachers' actions

10 But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. 11 Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion.

vv. 12-15 False teachers' character (1)

12 These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; 13 wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.

14 It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, 15 to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

vv. 16-18 False teachers' character (2)

16 These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage. 17 But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

vv. 19-23 Resisting false teachers

19 It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 And convince some, who doubt; 23 save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Conclusio, vv. 24-25

vv. 24-25 Doxology

As is clear from the above, concern with false teachers and their destructive impact is the central concern of

this short letter. Jude uses very blunt characterization to depict the individuals.

2.1.4.5 The Letter to the Hebrews

As is clear from the different orientation of the title given to this document focusing on the recipients rather than the author, this writing stands in a unique place in the canon of the New Testament.

2.1.4.5.1 Compositional History

The external compositional history is divided over the identity of the writer of this document:

The Epistle to the Hebrews was thought by some in antiquity such as Clement of Alexandria (Fragments from Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History Book VI*)^[1] to be by Paul, though it does not identify itself as such. However, Tertullian (*On Modesty* 20) indicates that Barnabas is the author of the epistle to the Hebrews - "For there is extant withal an Epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas – a man sufficiently accredited by God, as being one whom Paul has stationed next to himself...". Internal considerations suggest the author was male (Heb 11:32), he was an acquaintance of Timothy (Heb 13:23), and was located in Italy (Heb 13:24).

Tradition attributes the letter to Paul, but the style is notably different from the rest of Paul's epistles. Eusebius reports that the original letter had a Jewish audience and was written in Hebrew, and then later translated into Greek by Luke. In support of this, Luke's record of Paul's speech in Antioch (Acts 13:13-52) is sometimes claimed to have a similar style to Hebrews, notably different from Paul's letters to gentile audiences.

However, even in antiquity doubts were raised about Paul's alleged authorship. The reasons for this controversy are fairly plain. For example, his letters always contain an introduction stating authorship, yet Hebrews does not.^[2] Also, while much of its theology and teachings may be considered Pauline, it contains many other ideas which seem to have no such root or influence. Moreover, the writing style is substantially different from that of Paul's authentic epistles, a characteristic first noticed by Clement (c. 210). In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he forcefully defends his claim that he received his gospel directly from the resurrected Jesus himself.

Nevertheless, in the fourth century, the church largely agreed to include Hebrews as the fourteenth letter of Paul. Jerome and Augustine of Hippo were influential in affirming Paul's authorship,^[3] and the Church affirmed this authorship until the Reformation.

The internal author profile certainly argues strongly against Pauline authorship.

In general, the evidence against Pauline authorship is considered too solid for scholarly dispute. Donald Guthrie, in his *New Testament Introduction* (1976), commented that "most modern writers find more difficulty in imagining how this Epistle was ever attributed to Paul than in disposing of the theory."^[4] Harold Attridge tells us that "it is certainly not a work of the apostle";^[5] Daniel Wallace simply states, "the arguments against Pauline authorship, however, are conclusive."^[6] As a result, few supporters of Pauline authorship remain.

In response to the doubts raised about Paul's involvement, other possible authors were suggested as early as the third century CE. Origen of Alexandria (c. 240) suggested that either Luke the Evangelist or Clement of Rome might be the author.^[7] Tertullian proposed Paul's companion Barnabas. Barnabas, to whom other noncanonical works are attributed (such as Epistle of Barnabas), was close to Paul in his ministry, and exhibited skill with midrash of Hebrew Scripture; the other works attributed to him bolster the case for his authorship of Hebrews with similar style, voice, and skill.

Martin Luther proposed Apollos, described as an Alexandrian and "a learned man" (Acts 18:24), popular in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12), and adept at using the scriptures and arguing for Christianity while "refuting the Jews" (Acts 18:27–28).

In more recent times, some scholars have advanced a case for the authorship of Hebrews belonging to Priscilla. Perhaps the most thoroughly presented argument that Priscilla authored Hebrews came from Berlin Prof. Adolph Von Harnack in 1900^[8].

The reality is that we have no real idea who wrote Hebrews. The dating and place of writing are unclear, but seem to point to the mid first century. Timothy has been imprisoned for a time but is now free and able to travel (13:23). Greetings are sent from Italy (13:24) suggesting the place of writing as probably Rome. All that we can say with certainty about the recipients is that they were Jewish Christians struggling with how Jesus related to the Law of Moses and to their Jewish religious heritage. The superiority of Jesus was the answer provided by the writer of Hebrews.

2.1.4.5.2 Contents

The following provides a helpful overview of the contents:

Prologue, 1:1-4

1.4-4.13, Jesus the Son of God

1.4-2.18 Superior to angels

3.1-4.13 Superior to Moses

4.14-10.18, Jesus the great high priest

4.14-7.28 Superior to the priesthood of Aaron

8.1-10.18 Superior ministry through the new covenant

10.19-13.17 Call to obedience

10.19-39 Draw near to God

11.1-40 Walk in the way of faith

12.1-13 Persevere in the example of Jesus

12.14-29 Live righteously

13.1-17 Miscellaneous admonitions

Conclusio, 13:18-25

13.18-19 Prayer request

13.20-21 Doxology

13.22 Appeal to listen to words of letter

13.23 Confirmation of Timothy

13.24 Greetings

13.25 Benedictio

The Prologue defines clearly the agenda of the document, which identifies itself as a sermon in 13:22. The superiority of Jesus is the central focal point.

