

## Catholic Epistles

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## Overall

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- Letters written to Christians in general, i.e., "universal" or "catholic"
- not occasional as Paul's letters were
- James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude
- "Epistles" -- formal communications
- Catholic Epistles include sermons and other literature

## Historical Background on James

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- Author refers to himself as James
- Traditional view is that this James is the brother of the Lord (cf. Acts) who presided over the church in Jerusalem
- Recent scholars argue the author could not have been James for two reasons
  - The author does not draw upon Jesus' life or teaching
  - The Greek is fairly polished and reflects influence of the wisdom tradition popular in Greek-Jewish circles
- Luke Timothy Johnson has proposed this was indeed written by James based upon references to the letter at the beginning of the second century
- Almost all scholars agree the audience is Jewish-Christian

## Literary World of James

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- Trials and Temptations 1:2-27
- Trials strengthen character
- God does not tempt us to evil, evil comes from following temptation of our own desires
- Be doers, not just hearers, of the word
- "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

### Respect for the Poor (2:1-13)

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- Rich in congregation apparently are abusing the poor
- Faith given to the poor in this world
- Partiality is a sin against the Law (Torah)

### Faith and Good Works 2:14-26

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- vs. 14-16 -- faith requires action ("walk the talk")
- vs. 18 -- one can show s/he has faith through her/his works, but how does one show faith without works?
- vs. 19 -- belief alone is something even demons have
- vs. 23 -- attack on Pauline position?

### Controlling the Tongue 3:1-12

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- The enormous danger posed by small part of our body
- Self-control

### True Wisdom 3:13-18

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- Wisdom (like faith?) is manifest in how one lives, not what one says
- vs. 17 -- "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy."

### Warnings Against Ambition and Exploitation

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- James comes back to behavior of the rich
- 5:1-6
- 5:13-20 -- power of prayer

### Didache (Teaching) of the 12 Apostles

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- Rediscovered in 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Written around end of 1<sup>st</sup> century
  - Gives glimpse into life of early church
  - Earliest account of how baptism and eucharist were carried out
- Christian life was viewed as the Way of Life vs. Way of Death
- Lord's Prayer (see 458)

### Polycarp to Philippians

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- Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna in Turkey
- Known as early martyr (d. 155)
- Letter written as early as 110
  - Makes use of other Christian writings
  - Concern about a false teacher who is a docetist; called "antichrist."
  - Misconduct of the elder Valens and wife who took church funds
    - If they repent, take them back.

### 1 Clement (to Corinthians)

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- Clement, 3<sup>rd</sup> bishop of Rome, is not mentioned, just the church in Rome
- Written near end of 1<sup>st</sup> century
- Writing about a coup of the Corinthian elders
  - Concern with church governance
  - Apostolic succession
  - Resurrection and Phoenix! (463)

## Jude (Judas)

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- "Brother of James" – brother of Jesus?
  - Seems unlikely given good quality of Greek
- Problem of false teachers
  - Licentious behavior

## 2 Peter

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- Not Simon Peter (Cephas)
  - Sophisticated Greek
  - Uses chunks of Jude (so after end of 1<sup>st</sup> century)
  - Read over the letter – what is going on in this community?