

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT

## LESSON 15--REMAINING NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS: PART I

## THE PASTORAL EPISTLES (I-II TIMOTHY AND TITUS)

The prevailing view among modern historians is that these three letters, attributed to Paul, actually date from a later period. This view is well founded. I-II Timothy and Titus deal with church organization in a manner that reflects a later situation, specifying the qualifications of bishops, elders, and deacons. Their emphasis is also far more patriarchal than Paul's authentic letters, thus forming a caricature of Paul and his attitudes toward women. Also, their vocabulary is substantially different from that found in his genuine writings. In addition, their style and content does not fit into the continuity of Paul's spiritual development. If genuine, they would have to be dated after Colossians and Ephesians, and would represent a serious deterioration on his part.

Edgar J. Goodspeed makes a convincing case that the Pastoral Epistles can be dated about 150 A.D.<sup>1</sup> They are a refutation of the views of Marcion, who endorsed Paul's letters while nevertheless proposing that God is completely outside the created universe. Marcion held that the universe was created by a second, inferior God or Demiurge. This is refuted in I Timothy 1:17, which declares: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

In implicitly refuting contrary views, the Pastoral Epistles contain many statements that point to the active Presence of God within the individual and in creation. In this respect, they partially maintain Paul's approach to Christianity, which placed great emphasis on the indwelling God.

"They [the opposition] forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving." (I Timothy 14:3-4)

"In the presence of God, who gives life to all things." (I Timothy 6:13)

"God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (II Timothy 1:7)

"Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us." (II Timothy 1:14)

The opposition: "holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!" (II Timothy 3:5)

"To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. (Titus 1:15)

"He [God] saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5)

## THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Brevard Childs, commenting on Hebrews, states: "The early church's uncertainty over its authorship was revived in the Reformation and by the middle of the nineteenth century the denial of Paul's participation was virtually unanimous among critical scholars. There appeared to be a consensus that Hebrews differs from the Pauline style in structure, vocabulary, and theology. Moreover, it does not fit in with Paul's controversy with Judaism."<sup>2</sup> There is, however, an indirect connection with Paul. Hebrews 13:23 refers to "our brother Timothy," who was a close and valued associate of Paul. Therefore, it is likely that the unknown author was one of Timothy's co-workers.

The author probably addressed this document to a group of Christians of Essenian background in the city of Rome. The Essenes expected two messiahs, one a political messiah modeled after Moses, and the other a priestly messiah modeled after Aaron. A principal argument of Hebrews is that Jesus has fulfilled, and continues to fulfill and combine, both functions. He is called King, and also High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. The Dead Sea Scrolls also make important references to Melchizedek.

In its opening, Hebrews declares the Cosmic Christ, the Son "whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." (1:2-3)

An outstanding feature of the letter is Chapter 11, which extols faith and draws examples from Israelite history and legend. Hebrews 11:1 refers to faith as inner assurance and conviction. The New English Bible, in its translation, goes further, declaring: "And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see." Hebrews 11:3 affirms the Law of Expression: "By faith we perceive that the universe was fashioned by the word of God, so that the visible came forth from the invisible." (NEB)

This chapter on faith has much to offer, but it is hoped that Divine Science leaders will refrain from quoting Paul as the author of Hebrews or any of its verses.

## THE LETTER OF JAMES

Scholars differ on the question of authorship, though this writing has generally been attributed to James, the brother of Jesus who led the Christian group in Jerusalem. Those who accept James's authorship date the writing from about 140~60 A. D., while those who reject his authorship date it about 75-125 A.D. The likelihood is that James wrote most of it, with other statements added by a later editor.

A strong argument in favor of James's authorship is the resemblance of certain of its teachings (though not in exact words) to the collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5,6,7). Parallel sayings, to Matthew 5-7, in the Gospels of Luke and Thomas (non-canonical) tend to confirm the authenticity of these teachings of Jesus.

The original of James, however, may have been a sermon and may never actually have been mailed as a letter.

Theologians have long debated its meaning, especially as to the significance of the teaching that faith without works is dead. (2:14-26) The weakness of the theological approach is that faith has been defined as a fixed body of teaching, rather than as an inner dynamic and trust. If we drop these preoccupations, however, and look for statements that have a bearing on everyday thought and life, we find many valuable insights. For example:

- James 1:4 - Let patience do its perfect work. You will then be mature and complete, and lack nothing.
- James 1:5-8 - Claim wisdom from God, and do so single-mindedly (the single-eye attitude). Do not doubt, for the double minded are unstable and do not receive results.
- James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from God.
- James 1:22 - Be doers of the word, not hearers only.
- James 1:25 - Look to the perfect law of liberty, and you will be blessed in your doing.
- James 1:27 - "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 [worldly thoughts and motives]."
- James 2:8 - "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"--the royal law.
- James 2:26 - "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."
- James 3:17 - Positive traits of the wisdom that is from above.
- James 4:3 - Asking and receiving. Asking from wrong motives keeps one from receiving.
- James 4:8 - "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."
- James 4:11 - Judge not.
- James 5:14 - For healing prayer, call on the elders of the church.
- James 5:15 - The prayer of faith will heal the sick and dissolve sin.
- James 5:16 - "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

## I PETER

I Peter dates from a period of persecution, though the time of its composition is not conclusively known. Most modern scholars reject the view that Peter wrote it. While it could reflect persecution under the Emperor Nero (64 A.D.), it more likely refers to persecution under Domitian (95) or Trajan (110). In any case, it was intended to encourage the early Christians of Asia Minor, and to circulate among various Christian groups in that area.

I Peter's historical message is patience under persecution, as opposed to the use of external force. For example, 3:9 advises: "Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called--that you might inherit a blessing."

The letter affirms "the priesthood of all believers" in 2:5,9, thus affirming direct access to God. Specifically, 2:4-5 affirms: "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house [consciousness], to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

## II PETER

II Peter is generally dated late, between 125-150 A.D. The author has taken over the Epistle of Jude almost word for word, and virtually incorporated it into this longer document. Both writers condemn the immoral practices of certain Christians of their era.

II Peter also expresses a strong belief in the Second Coming. Its unknown author probably had read the Book of Revelation. II Peter 3:13 declares: "In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." (Compare Revelation 21:1)

## JUDE

This letter is a brief polemic against certain Christians, not specifically identified, who are described as intruders who "have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (v. 14)

The author is apparently familiar with, and strongly influenced by, Jewish apocalyptic writings. He quotes I Enoch (from the Pseudepigrapha) in verses 14-15.

## NOTES

1. Goodspeed, Edgar J. An Introduction to the New Testament; Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1937, pp. 327-344
2. The New Testament as Canon; op cit, p. 406

## REQUIRED BIBLE READINGS

Read I-II Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, I-II Peter, and Jude.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why do we date the Pastoral Epistles after Paul's lifetime?
2. What positive teachings do the Pastoral Epistles have for us today?
3. What teachings of the Pastoral Epistles do not apply in Divine Science?
4. How can the Letter of James benefit us today?