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## NT 645 General Epistles

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**ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**Department of Inductive Biblical Studies**

NT(IBS)645  
Spring, 2004

**General Epistles**

**Bauer**

**I. General Description**

A study of 1 John, James, Jude and 1 and 2 Peter which builds on the methodology of the first inductive Bible study course by further use of what has been previously learned and by emphasizing the study of books as wholes. Accordingly, there is a special focus on the initial survey of books as wholes, the interpretation of parts of books in the context of the book as a whole, and the synthesis of books. In addition, attention is given to thinking, valuing and living biblically by learning how to apply Scripture to life and ministry. This course seeks intentionally to incorporate the grammatical analysis of the Greek language into the overall inductive process.

**II. Course Objectives**

- A. Methodology. The emphasis will be upon the observation and interpretation of books as wholes. By the end of the course, the student should be able to do the following:
1. Employ structural observations for the interpretation of individual passages within the book, as well as for the interpretation of the book as a whole.
  2. Raise various kinds of interpretive questions, and answer these questions, based on the use of exegetical determinants;
  3. Employ various kinds of relevant evidence, including that which involves exegetical use of the original languages, in a process of inferential reasoning for the interpretation of individual passages within the book, as well as for the book as a whole.
  4. Synthesize the interpretation of units of various lengths, such as the paragraph, the segment, the section (division), and the book as a whole;
  5. Use aspects of methodology that are especially relevant for epistolary material;
  6. Evaluate and apply truths that emerge from the interpretation of the material.
  7. Articulate the major issues involved in the movement from text to proclamation; move from the interpretation and application of the text towards its proclamation; and integrate the interpretation and application of a passage in the General Epistles with that of a correlative passage from the Old Testament so as to move toward a sermon (or teaching lesson) based on both an Old Testament and New Testament text.
- B. Content. The student should be able to do the following:
1. Think through the contents of each book of the General Epistles without recourse to the printed text;
  2. Identify significant passages in the General Epistles and interpret them contextually;
  3. Demonstrate the importance of a sound methodology for interpretation, including specific examples from the General Epistles;
  4. Describe thoroughly the meaning and development of major themes in the General Epistles, citing individual passages and other specific data to support conclusions;
  5. Discuss the historical and religious background of the General Epistles, demonstrating a general knowledge of critical problems regarding the General Epistles and an ability to use these data in the interpretation of the General Epistles.
- C. Attitude. The student should:
1. Appreciate the value of sound methodology for the interpretation of the biblical materials, resulting in a desire to apply the inductive method to other biblical books;
  2. Desire to make the General Epistles the object of intensive and creative study throughout life;
  3. Intend to employ seriously the General Epistle in preaching and teaching within the context of the church.

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### III. Course Texts:

#### A. Required Texts:

1. Revised Standard Version of the Bible, or New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
2. The Greek New Testament (or Interlinear Greek-English New Testament)
3. An Annotated Guide to Biblical Resources for Ministry, by David R. Bauer

#### B. Collateral Texts:

1. New Testament Introduction, by Donald Guthrie
2. The New Testament as Canon, by Brevard Childs
3. It's Still Greek to Me, by David A. Black

### IV. Course Requirements:

- A. The completion of the following lessons in writing, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. All lessons are to be handed in at the end of the class period on the day designated. No late papers will be accepted save in cases in which permission is granted by the instructor based on emergency.
- B. Punctual attendance at all class sessions. Because of the importance of class attendance, and because of government regulations regarding student loans, a record of attendance will be taken at each class session. Absence at more than three class sessions will result in grade penalty, and absence at more than four will result in loss of credit for the course. Exceptions may be granted based on emergency, in consultation with the instructor.
- C. A careful reading of the assigned portions of the required and collateral texts.
- D. Listening to the tape of an expository sermon on a passage from the General Epistles with a view toward using that sermon as a catalyst for class discussion on moving from text to proclamation.

### V. Course Evaluation:

Assignments will be 100% of the grade.

### VI. Course Assignments:

#### Lesson 1. Survey of the Book of James. (Survey of Book as a Whole)

1. Identify the general and specific materials of the book.
2. Locate the main divisions and sub-divisions of the book, and identify the major structural relationships operative in the book as a whole.
3. Ask a few interpretive questions of each major structural relationship observed.
4. Identify the key verses and strategic areas that provide insight into the book as a whole.
5. Locate data that bears on such higher critical issues as the writer, place and date of writing, etc.
6. Note other major impressions that relate to the book as a whole.

#### Lesson 2. Survey of James 1:2-27. (Survey of Segment as a Whole)

1. Identify the specific materials of the segment by giving a brief title to each paragraph.
2. Locate the main units and sub-units in the segment, and identify the major structural relationships operative in the segment as a whole.
3. Ask a few interpretive questions of each major structural relationship identified.
4. Identify the key verses and strategic areas that provide insight into the segment as a whole.

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5. Identify the literary form(s) employed in the segment.
6. Note other major impressions that relate to the segment as a whole.

#### Lesson 3. Detailed Observation of James 1:5-8.

Do a detailed observation of these verses, using the two-column format. In the process, identify two or three of the most promising questions.

#### Lesson 4. Interpretation of James 1:5.

Using the two-column format, interpret James 1:5 by answering the following questions: What is meant by "wisdom" in v. 5? Why is the prayer of faith without doubting indispensable for acquiring this wisdom?

#### Lesson 5. James 2:1-26.

1. Survey. Survey this segment, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. What problem lies behind 2:1-4 (be specific and analytical)? What reasons does the writer give in 2:2-13 to show no partiality? What is the precise meaning of each of these reasons, and how do these reasons substantiate the exhortation of 2:1?
  - b. State in your own words the main principle set forth in 2:14-26. Trace the lines of reasoning the writer employs to substantiate this main principle (note both explicit and implicit reasons/arguments): In what sense were Abraham and Rahab justified by their works? What is the full and precise relationship between faith and works?
3. Synthesis.
  - a. How is 2:14-26 related to 2:1-13? How do these two passages illumine one another?
  - b. How does this passage relate to Paul's understanding of justification by faith [alone] (see esp. Rom. 2:6-11; 3:27-28; and 4:1-5)?
4. Application and Proclamation.
  - a. On the basis of your interpretation under no.2 above, explore specific ways in which this chapter can be applied to yourself and/or other contemporary persons.
  - b. Develop a proclamation outline. A proclamation outline is not synonymous with a sermon outline (which assumes homiletical crafting), but is rather the statement of a specific proclamatory thesis, with three to five main points that develop that overall proclamatory thesis (and are clearly and explicitly related to each other). Each of these main points should themselves be developed in a brief but specific paragraph, which describes the (theological) teaching derived from the interpretation of the text, the contemporary appropriation derived from the application process, and the connection between the two.

#### Lesson 6. James 3:1-4:12.

1. Survey. Survey this segment, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. Using your survey as a general framework, trace the flow of thought in this segment. On the basis of your thought-flow and other relevant exegetical determinants (esp. the context of the book as a whole), answer the following questions:
  - b. What major characteristics of the tongue are set forth in 3:2-12? What is the meaning of the various images employed in these verses, and how do these images support the writer's arguments regarding the tongue? How does 3:2-12 substantiate 3:1, and how does this substantiation illumine the meaning of 3:1? Why this concern about the tongue?
  - c. What major principle is set forth in 3:13-18, and how do the contrasts in these verses support and illumine this principle? How is 3:13-18 related to 3:1-12?

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- d. What actions and attitudes characterize the readers according to 4:1-12? In your own words, describe how the exhortations of 4:7-10 flow from the statements of 4:1-6. Be specific and explicit. In light of 3:1-4:10; 1:19-21; and 2:8-13, what is the meaning of 4:11-12?
3. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 7. James 4:13-5:20.

1. Survey. Survey this segment, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. Using your survey as a general framework, trace the flow of thought in 4:13-5:11. What major exhortations are found in 4:13-5:11, and what is the meaning of each? How are these exhortations substantiated, and how do these substantiations illumine the full meaning of the exhortations (in the process, note the significance of 5:1-6 in relation to the surrounding exhortations)? How does 4:13-5:11 relate to the preceding context?
  - b. What is the meaning of 5:12? How does it relate to the surrounding context? Why does this kind of swearing lead to condemnation?
  - c. What major concerns are discussed in 5:13-20, and how does the writer deal with each of them? How are these major concerns related to each other, and illumined by each other? How does 5:13-20 relate to the preceding book context, esp. 4:13-5:12?
3. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 8. Synthesis of the Book of James.

Describe in a holistic, integrative, and comprehensive fashion the portrait of the Christian life as presented in this book, including such things as specific characteristics, problems, motivations, resources, and the theological foundation for proper Christian behavior and existence. Be careful to give evidence for all assertions (including verse references).

### Lesson 9. Survey of the Book of 1 Peter

Survey this book, following the suggestions under Lesson 1.

### Lesson 10. I Peter 1:3-2:10.

1. Survey. Survey 1:3-12 and 1:13-2:10, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. Trace the thought of 1:3-12. What is the precise meaning of each of the following concepts: born anew, faith, salvation and rejoice? How do these concepts relate to each other?
  - b. Trace the thought of 1:13-2:10. What is the meaning of holiness in 1:15? How does 1:16 substantiate 1:15, and what are the full implications of this substantiation? What other reasons are given for the exhortation to holiness in this context, and how do these reasons illumine the meaning of holiness here? How is this exhortation to holiness related to the other exhortations in 1:13-2:10?
  - c. What is the meaning of each of the exhortations in 1:22-2:10? How is each substantiated (note how the contrasts in this material illumine both the exhortations and the substantiations)? Make explicit what is implied in each of these substantiations. How, specifically, do these exhortations flow out of the theological affirmations of 1:3-12 (note the "therefore" in 1:13)?
3. Synthesis. On the basis of this study (and in your own words), how would you answer a layperson who asked you, "What does it mean to be holy?"
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 11. 1 Peter 2:11-3:7.

1. Survey. Survey this segment, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.

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2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. Interpret 2:11-12, with special reference to the following: What is the meaning of "aliens and exiles," and how does this status support the exhortation of 2:11? What is the meaning of the exhortation and purpose statement in 2:12? How does 2:12 illumine the remainder of the epistle, and how does the remainder of the epistle illumine 2:12? Why did the writer include this purpose statement? Implications?
  - b. Interpret 2:13-17 by answering the following questions: What is "every human institution?" How, specifically, is one to be "subject" to these institutions? What limits to this subjection are suggested by the context? What reasons does the writer give for this subjection, and what do these reasons imply?
  - c. What is the meaning of each exhortation to servants (2:18-25), wives (3:1-6), and husbands (3:7)? How is each exhortation substantiated, and what is the meaning and significance of each substantiation?
3. Synthesis. What principles lie behind the exhortations and substantiations in this segment?
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 12. 1 Peter 3:8-5:11.

1. Survey. Survey this section, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. What problems surrounding persecution and suffering are addressed (either directly or indirectly) in 3:8-5:11? Explore the meaning of the proper response to persecution and suffering and the reasons for this response, as set forth in this material. Note possible interpretations of 3:19-22 and 4:6, and the way in which these passages may function in 3:8-5:11.
  - b. What is the meaning of 4:7-11? Why is it placed here in the flow of 3:8-5:11?
  - c. What is the meaning of the contrasting exhortations to the elders in 5:1-3? What principle lies behind these exhortations? Implications? What is the meaning and significance of 5:6, and how might this verse illumine the meaning and unity of 5:1-11?

How is 5:1-11 related to 3:8-5:10?

3. Correlative Integration. Interpret Ps. 34, with a view towards (a) ascertaining the meaning of this passage in its original wording and contexts, and (b) ascertaining how the relationship between its original meaning and its use in this passage illumines the significance of both this passage and Ps. 34.
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 13. Synthesis of the Book of 1 Peter.

Describe in a holistic, integrative, and comprehensive fashion the portrait of the Christian life as presented in this book, including such things as specific characteristics, problems, motivations, resources, and the theological foundation for proper Christian behavior and existence. Be careful to give evidence for all assertions (including verse references).

### Lesson 14. Survey of the Book of 2 Peter.

Survey this book, following the suggestions under Lesson 1.

### Lesson 15. 2 Peter 1:3-2:22.

Using the skills in method you have developed, do an original study of this section. Indicate clearly the steps you followed, and the findings made in each step. Note especially (a) how the structure of this section can illumine the meaning of the section as a whole, as well as individual passages within the section, and (b) how a recognition of the function of a passage within the book as a whole can illumine the meaning of that passage.

### Lesson 16. 2 Peter 3:1-18.

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Using the skills in method you have developed, do an original study of this section. Indicate clearly the steps you followed, and the findings made in each step. Note especially (a) how the structure of this section can illumine the meaning of the section as a whole, as well as individual passages within the section, and (b) how a recognition of the function of a passage within the book as a whole can illumine the meaning of that passage.

### Lesson 17. Synthesis of the Book of 2 Peter.

Synthesize the Book of 2 Peter by answering these questions: What are the differences between the "holy prophets" (and those who follow them), and the "false prophets" (and those who follow them), and what is the full meaning of each of these differences? Why these differences? Why should the readers follow the way of the holy prophets vs. the way of the false prophets? What are the full implications? Compare and contrast the message and theology of this book with that of the Book of 1 Peter.

### Lesson 18. Survey of the Book of 1 John.

Survey this book, following the suggestions under Lesson 1.

### Lesson 19. 1 John 1:1-2:29.

1. Survey. Survey the segments 1:5-2:17 and 2:18-29, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret these segments (or portions of them) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your surveys. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. What is the meaning of 1:8, and how does it relate to 3:9?
  - b. What is the meaning of the affirmation "God is light" in 1:5? Note the contrasts in 1:6-2:6. What is the meaning of each of these contrasts? Why these differences? How do the contrasts of 1:6-2:6 relate to 1:5 and 1:1-4?
  - c. What is the full and precise meaning of "love" in this passage? How does this concept bind 2:7-17 together and illumine the major elements in this passage? What major groups are mentioned in 2:7-9, and what is the meaning and significance of each? How, specifically, is 2:7-9 related to 1:5-2:6?
3. Synthesis. Identify the main truths of 1:1-2:29. How are these main truths related to each other?
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 20. 1 John 3.

1. Survey. Survey this segment, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey.
3. Identify an OT passage (other than Gen. 4) that relates to a major issue of your interpretation of 1 John 3, and follow the suggestions under Lesson 12, part 3, for correlative interpretation. Be especially careful to relate the meaning of the OT passage to 1 John 3. This relationship should be reflected in your proclamation outline below (part 4 of this assignment).
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 21. 1 John 4:1-5:12.

1. Survey. Survey 4:1-6; 4:7-21; and 5:1-12, following the suggestions under Lesson 2.
2. Interpretation. Interpret these segments (or portions of them) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
  - a. What problems lie behind 4:1-6? What is involved in "testing the spirits?" Why is this testing appropriate and necessary? How is 4:1-6 related to the preceding material of the book, especially ch. 3?
  - b. Carefully trace the thought of 4:7-5:12. What is involved in loving one another, according to 4:7-12, and why should Christians follow these exhortations to love? What is the full meaning of the affirmation "God is love" (4:16)? Why did the writer make this affirmation here? Implications? What is the meaning of 5:6-8, and how does this passage function within this context?

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- c. What is the precise meaning of the purpose statement in 5:13? How is it illumined by the book as a whole, and how does the book as a whole illumine it?
3. Synthesis. On the basis of this study (and in your own words), how would you answer a person who asked you, "How can I know that I am a Christian?"
4. Application and Proclamation. Follow steps described in Lesson 5, part 4 above.

### Lesson 22. Synthesis of the Book of 1 John, and of the General Epistles.

Describe in a holistic, integrative, and comprehensive fashion the portrait of the Christian life as presented in this book, including such things as specific characteristics, problems, motivations, resources, and the theological foundation for proper Christian behavior and existence. Be careful to give evidence for all assertions (including verse references). Compare and contrast this portrait with those found in the other general epistles. What are the unique contributions of each of these books, and how do these unique contributions relate to, and reinforce, each other?

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