

SLOW FOOD: THINKING THROUGH 2 PETER AND JUDE

These two shorter New Testament letters contain a good deal of common material and appear to have been written at about the same time in the early to mid-sixties AD (CE). Despite considerable ancient and modern uncertainty about the authorship of 2 Peter as compared with 1 Peter, it has been assumed for the purpose of this exercise that the apostle himself is its source. Jude is supposed to be one of the brothers of the Lord (Mk 6:3), who did not believe in him during his lifetime (Jn 7:5) but who now gladly describes himself as 'a servant of Jesus Christ'. It is uncertain whether one draws from the other, or whether both freely adapt a third source not yet identified.

Both letters passionately attack false doctrine within the church emanating from leaders who advocate some kind of seductive 'freedom' and who exhibit immorality in their own lives. The context fits well with the unrestrained licence of the later years of the emperor Nero as described in the *Annals of Imperial Rome* by the historian Tacitus. We may find ourselves reflecting on similar features in our own age; but even more on our responsibility as Christian teachers and disciples for setting a sound example doctrinally and morally.

Standard commentaries include *2 Peter and Jude* by Michael Green (Tyndale 1968), William Barclay *The Letters of James and Peter* (St Andrew Press 2nd ed 1976), *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude* by Dick Lucas and Christopher Green (BST) and *Early Christian Letters: James, Peter, John and Judah* by Tom Wright (SPCK 2011).

1:1-2 *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

[1:1] It's Simon Peter writing again. I'll tell you why in a few moments. I'm using my ancestral birth-name Symeon which goes back to the second son of Jacob, the answer to his mother's prayers. Jesus is the answer to my prayers, the Lord of my life, God's long-awaited Messiah-King to whom every knee must bow. He called me to be one of his first ambassadors all those years ago, the ones he called 'apostles', and it's been my life job ever since.

This letter is for everyone who has come into the same incredible inheritance as we have. We haven't laid hands on it yet, which is why we call it our 'faith'; yet it's solidly ours, not because we've shown ourselves worthy of it, but simply and solely because God has come down to us in Jesus Christ, cleared our account and rescued us from the crazy mess we'd got ourselves into – and if there's any more rescuing to be done, he's the one to do it.

[1:2] So here's the same greeting I used in my first letter, the royal benediction: May you know more of his grace each day, the love that takes you as you are and endows you with all the gifts he has in store for you; and may you know his deep, deep peace, not the absence of trouble and pressure, but the settled assurance that nothing can come between you and his blessing, because the Prince of peace himself has begun his reign in your lives. And let me add this: in acknowledging Jesus as Lord of your lives, you've found the friendship of God. May this friendship grow ever deeper and more precious to you as you discover how amazing he is.

1:3-4 ³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

[1:3] Knowing the God of Jesus Christ. That's what it's all about. Is this knowledge something we are given and just accept, or is it something we must strive for with all our might? The answer has to be, both. We wouldn't have a chance of knowing him if he hadn't taken the initiative and spoken to us, called us into his friendship, summoned us by name. This wasn't because of any worth or virtue of our own – it was entirely because he's such a wonderful God and so full of goodness. Again, we wouldn't have a chance of qualifying for eternal life through our own holiness and blameless record. How could he lift a race of self-centred rebels like ourselves and make us fit for the worship of heaven? Well, he can, because not only is he God but he's the great Giver. So he's offered to us, entirely free of charge, everything we need to transform us into a holy people who belong to him heart and soul.

[1:4] So how do we actually obtain this transformation, this amazing metamorphosis from earthbound creatures into saints infused with the very nature of God himself? Is it through some new kind of physics? Or is it a conjuring trick? No, it's by faith. These gifts I'm talking about, that come to us entirely through God's love and goodness, are – wait for it – promises. Bonds signed with his own personal signature. They're worth more than gold or silver to the believer. They're so enormous that you can't possibly ignore them. They change you from the inside out; they grow the resurrection character of Jesus in your mortal frame. They're Spirit words setting you free. Here you are, imprisoned in the self-centred desires of a world that doesn't know God, on the way to total disintegration– and lo and behold a messenger arrives with a royal pardon and flings open all the iron-bound doors.

1:5-7 ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

[1:5] So my question is, are we using these promise-gifts that come straight from God? Or do we just take them for granted? I'll give you some examples of how you and I need to drop our casual and half-hearted attitude and really work at building Christlikeness into our character. For instance, I might have a genuine faith in Jesus as my Saviour and Lord, but still be leading a slovenly or even immoral daily life. So I find a promise like Isaiah's 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, instead of the brier, the myrtle' and I ask God to make this come true for me – and he does (because he's a professional at that kind of thing). Or at least he starts the regenerative process.

But supposing I'm fine on the moral front, never done a prodigal son-type escapade, yet I'm aware how little I know God and how the Bible is still a closed book to me. So I turn up the Book of Proverbs and I find it's star-studded with promises, this time with a condition attached, such as: 'If you seek understanding like hidden treasure, then you will find the knowledge of God'. This transforms the dry and often unrewarding study of scripture into a joyous adventure of discovering the God behind it all. And the self-satisfied goody-goody becomes the humble and passionate disciple.

[2:6] Meanwhile my friend who is deep in his commentaries and knows scripture like the back of his hand, and can tell you all the names of God and the Messianic prophecies, nevertheless has problems with his temper and is a little too fond of the bottle. I heard Paul preaching on this once: he was saying if you want other people to hear the gospel through you, you can't afford to let the personal discipline go. 'It's like the Olympic games,' he said. 'There's no athlete worth the name who doesn't exercise total self-control in every area of their lives.' More a wake-up call than a promise, really, but it hit me like a thunderbolt from heaven. I knew there were things I ought to give up, and I needed to reclaim from the colonising weeds.

But such self-control doesn't happen in an instant. Another friend of mine embarked on a regime that bordered on the ascetic, and after a few weeks he found it was all too much for him. He was good at the one-lap sprint, but not at the longer distance. In fact he began to think he was a total failure and nearly gave up the Christian race altogether. It was a saying from the Lord himself that kept him going: 'The one who endures to the end will find final salvation.' A bracing challenge and precious encouragement all in one.

Then what if you've settled down for the long haul, and you've begun to get used to the ups and downs of the life of discipleship, but you find you're secretly becoming fed up with all the familiar songs and prayers, and church is getting frankly boring. How can you revive that passion for worship you used to have? There's nowhere better than the Psalms for this kind of thing. David went through everything imaginable, but his soul hunger for God remained undiminished: 'My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God'. Those who travel through the clouded valley of bitterness find springs of water to refresh them. Again, not promises exactly, but secrets of the soul which enable you to keep on singing; maintaining the God-longing which Isaiah counts among 'the treasures of righteousness'.

[1:7] Yet it's all too easy to cultivate a private devotion and not notice the others around you. Are you becoming suspicious and almost hostile towards others' spirituality? They really matter, these brothers and sisters of yours. This kind of team spirit which appreciates even the slightest evidence of loyalty to Christ needs to be nurtured by the word of God, otherwise it will be a human construct with no staying-power. Here I would include the power of example. I'll never forget the wiggling I received from my dear brother Paul at Antioch for sitting at a different table from non-Jewish Christians. I'd allowed my scruples for the law to overcome the natural obligations of fellowship in Christ. Paul says it's got to be like the affection close members of a family feel (or should feel) towards one another. Our Lord is the supreme example of this, of course, in the way he welcomed complete no-hopers and sat down to lunch with them.

But good as it is, friendly feelings among Christians aren't the whole story, because sometimes you're going to be seriously let down by another brother or sister. That's why the Lord called it a 'new command, that we should love one another.' He himself showed the radical quality of this love by laying down his life, not only for his own followers, but for the world that had rejected him. It means being prepared to forgive enemies, especially when those enemies are fellow-Christians. It means setting aside one's own personal inclinations to the extent that your own comfort, your own advantage, your own rights even, mean nothing compared to the other's. You wouldn't even contemplate such sacrificial love if the Lord hadn't said things like, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' That's what I mean by 'using God's faith-gifts': you go on his word, and you find yourself becoming a new person as a result.

1:8-9 ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is short-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

[1:8] Now these examples aren't a kind of ladder of perfection, as if you only reach the ability to love by working through all the rest. These and other Christlike characteristics are all part of our basic new life equipment given us through the Holy Spirit; but the essential thing is that they need to be developed and matured by constant and deliberate attention. Yes, coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ sows the seed of eternal life in us – but just as the fruit farmer won't get his young saplings to grow into a strong and healthy orchard unless he rolls up his sleeves and puts in the full quota of daily work, so your lives won't bear fruit for Christ if you just sit around assuming godliness is going to grow all by itself. [1:9] Take the long-term view. What was the point of making a new start with Christ, getting baptised, washing off the filth of your old way of life, if the new person you became remains stunted and undeveloped? Do you want to be like a half-blind beggar tapping your way around the streets, having no idea which direction you came from or where you're supposed to be going?

1:10-11 ¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[1:10] You aren't there yet. Look, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ – what do you think our Lord meant when he said that many would receive invitations to his kingdom, but relatively few would end up on the roll of God's elect? He wasn't saying it was all predetermined so you can't affect the final outcome – in fact, he was saying the exact opposite. Have you heard my call? Do you want to be among my chosen? Then go for it! Don't give up halfway. Make absolutely sure you get there. All these qualities I've been talking about, they're not a package deal, you've got to tie them into your foundational faith, work at them till they become second nature. OK, you may stumble, as I know only too well, but with such a Lord to pick you up again you won't stay permanently flat on your face. [1:11] He told us the way into the kingdom would be hard; but that way is lined with cheering crowds of angels, there's massive help and encouragement every step of the long-distance race, and when you arrive you'll wonder why you ever uttered the words 'How long, Lord?' Because Jesus isn't just the exalted King of a far-off realm,

he's there by your side helping you to carry his cross, seeing you through. And he'll be there at the finishing-line with his 'Well run!'

1:12-15 ¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

[1:12] 'But, Peter, we know all this – why go on about it?' Yes, you know it because I (and others) have never stopped telling you, so why should I fall silent now? I don't mind how firmly rooted most of you are in New Covenant truth, there are always some who need reminders, or who can't quite get their heads around this amazing revelation. [1:13-14] In fact there's a perfectly good reason why I'm issuing these wake-up calls with every breath I draw, because I'm not going to be around for much longer. This mortal frame I've been issued with to carry me through however many years it is, isn't going to last for ever. In fact, bearing in mind what the Lord told me after that memorable breakfast on the beach, it's all going to happen quite suddenly (and not necessarily pleasantly either). [1:15] So I hope you can see why I consider it a matter of acute urgency, every time I give a talk or send another missive, to batter everyone's ears with these precious truths, which will carry on being true long after I've finally escaped the Egypt of this present existence. Truths which you in your turn are going to keep in people's memories, no matter what happens.

1:16-18 ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

[1:16] Of course, there are plenty of people who will claim that the Jesus story isn't true at all. They point to philosophers like Plato who spin elaborate myths which haven't a shred of historical reality but lay down a pathway for simple disciples to follow through the labyrinth of human speculation. It's exactly the same, they state confidently, when you talk about Jesus raising people from the dead, or predict his coming in glory: good stories, and that's as far as it goes. Convincing – but wrong. We were there. We weren't allowed to talk about it at the time, but once the resurrection had happened it could all come out. The transfiguration of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ lifted the veil for a brief moment and showed us how utterly great this Person really was and is – and, when he finally appears in his true wonder, will be for ever. I hope you will soon be able to read about it in the official accounts, but let me give you a foretaste from the point of view of someone who was actually there (and not the only one either). [1:17-18] Jesus, an ordinary man like you and me, was also the Son of God; this wasn't something he went about telling people, but there were moments (such as his baptism) when God the Father bore witness to his true honour and status by giving a testimony straight from heaven, in line with the prophetic word. When we went up on the slopes of that mountain (which has become even more awesome for us than Mt Sinai) we weren't dreaming – we really did hear the Lord Most High talking a language we could understand, and what he said was: 'This is my Son, my beloved and specially favoured only Son; I find total delight in him and always have done, because he and I think as One.' It's as vivid as if it happened yesterday.

1:19-21 ¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[1:19] 'So do we have to wait until we've heard God's voice actually talking to us?' No, because we've got God's word already, and it's all there in the prophetic writings, as I've been trying to tell you. It's been tested to destruction over centuries of human experience. Moments such as I've described only confirm its utter reliability; even if we hadn't heard it with our own ears, it would still be God's truth. Here we are in a world that's like a very dark cave, and the gloom is intensified by our own ignorance and wilful error, yet there's a Divine oil lamp burning in there which is just enough to give us light (I'm talking about the scriptures). It's all we have to go on for the time being. Soon, it's true, daylight is going to flood into that cave, and all our illusions will be stripped away, because Jesus the Light-Bringer will come to be where we are (though he's been in our hearts all the time) and the radiance of his star, so long anticipated, will flood the world with his glory.

[1:20] Just a word about prophecy. I want you to get hold of this absolutely vital principle: idiosyncratic as those mighty men of God may seem to have been, the words they passed on to us weren't forged out of their own subjective fantasies. [1:21] Time after time you get the prophetic author saying, 'The word of the Lord came to me and I felt compelled to give it to you' – it wasn't the product of their own powerful imaginations, it was the Holy Spirit carrying them along like a sailing boat before the wind, so that, in their very different and all too human ways, they found themselves speaking the very mind of God. And maybe, just maybe, some of these flimsy apostolic letters you keep getting will join them as he reveals more and more about who Christ is and what he means to us.

2:1-3 ¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

[2:1] But we've got to keep our wits about us. We can't just assume every prophetic word comes from God. All through scripture there are long and emphatic denunciations of self-professed 'prophets' who haven't been sent by God, and who simply deceive the people with visions and oracles that haven't come from heaven at all. Exactly the same thing is happening right now as we speak. These people don't preach obvious heresies – they're far too cunning for that – instead they plausibly dilute the truth with a different emphasis here and an alternative explanation there. Poison has the same effect whether it's presented in a jar labelled 'This will kill you' or infiltrated into your daily food in tiny amounts over a long period. The real test of these teachers is, of course, what they say about the cross of Christ: is the Jesus who gave himself up to death their Divine Lord and Master, paying for their freedom from slavery to sin by his own infinitely precious sacrifice, or isn't that really what was happening and we've got it wrong? If it's the latter, these people are heading for a spectacular crash which normally comes sooner rather than later. [2:2] The tragedy is all the sheep who are going to follow the false shepherds over the cliff-edge, very often attracted by the promiscuous lifestyle these people tend to adopt as a result of their loose teaching. Even worse, the knock-on effect is a distortion of the truth of the gospel in the popular imagination; if their God is like that, decent people conclude, then I'm not having anything to do with him. [2:3] Can I emphasise that these so-called 'spiritual leaders' aren't what they appear to be; their motivation is driven by their own ego-centred desire to attract as many disciples as possible, and they will assault you with an artfully brewed cocktail of metaphor, myth and magic. Well, they've got it coming to them, because even if it seems that God's sentence is slow in coming, it's been heading their way for a long time now. The Great Judge of all hasn't gone to sleep, and one day soon disaster is going to strike.

2:4-9 ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶ if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued

Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) –⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

[2:4] These aren't the ramblings of an embittered and frustrated old man, they're the remorseless logic of scripture. Follow me through some of those old stories in Genesis which show God judging the ungodly but saving the righteous. Firstly, it's no good blaming human sin on the fall of the rebel angels, or for that matter the deceiving words of the serpent to Eve; you only push the problem one further back, and you're still faced with the fact that God hasn't let those angels off, he has sent them down into the depths of what the Greeks call Tartarus or Hades, where they're shackled by chains in complete darkness, and he's left them there to await their certain judgment and condemnation at the end of time – well, isn't it logical that he's going to deal with human rebels in pretty much the same way? [2:5] But in case you argue that angels are a different category of being from us humans, look at the Flood. The wickedness of the world was so great that God decided to wipe it out altogether, though he made an exception of Noah and the seven members of his family, and brought him out safely because he had consistently told his contemporaries how God requires us to choose good rather than evil, and he'd followed that principle out in his own life. So what happened to all the disobedient people who couldn't care less what God wanted? They and the planet they'd polluted got comprehensively deluged in the father and mother of all rainstorms. Do you see the God we're up against? He's not going to stop till he's got sin and evil purged out of the universe; and if you persist in clinging to those things, you get purged too, angel, devil or humankind.

[2:6] Then there's the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Everyone knows how the Lord rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon those dreadful cities, which was no more than they deserved, and they got completely wiped out. So far from this being an isolated example of how spectacular wickedness was punished all those years ago, it's meant to be a template for how God is going to deal with all succeeding generations; our Lord made this clear when he said it would be worse at the judgment for people who reject his gospel messengers than for Sodom and Gomorrah. [2:7] But this story also underlines the other point I'm trying to make, because who was the exception to all this destruction? Yes, Lot, with or without his wife. God pulled him out even though it took two angels to do it, literally. Lot the selfish scumbag nephew of Abraham who chose the best land for himself without asking what his neighbours were going to be like. Even so, he had the Abraham character, the right relationship with God that meant living with those one-track-minded folk who would do anything to get their hands on a bit of flesh was a real pain to him. [2:8] Day after day Lot had to go to work in the morning and come back in the evening, take his children to school and so on, when he couldn't help seeing and hearing the sexual innuendo and the blasphemy and the wholesale moral blindness of that God-forsaking society; he'd been brought up with totally different standards and it was sheer torture to him, it was twisting his upright soul out of shape and would have succeeded in ruining him and his family had not his Saviour God acted so decisively. [2:9] Yes, this Lord of ours is a true professional when it comes to a crisis, when the enemy presses hard on us from all sides and we don't know how we can last a moment longer, but we squeak a desperate prayer and (I'm talking from personal experience) there's the hand of Jesus holding us steady and getting us through the time of trial. But what if they simply refuse to be rescued? What if nothing works to bring them to their senses, not even the chastening of temporal loss and adversity? All these God-rejectors have to look forward to is, not the oblivion of a final snuffing-out, but the terrifying actuality of seeing one's whole life played back in the full glare of the Day of Final Disclosure. When you did this, when you said that, did you really think you'd get away with it?

2:10-13a ¹⁰ *This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings;* ¹¹ *yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord.* ¹² *But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born*

only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. ^{13a} *They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.*

[2:10] So what about these self-proclaimed holy men in your midst? Let's follow them around for a day or two to find out what they're really like. Let's watch them before or after the church service to see who they spend most time talking to – those they find most attractive? Females – or males? Are there some they can't keep their filthy hands off? Let's listen to their conversation and observe their attitude to authority: do they think they're above the law and can do what they like without anyone raising a finger to stop them? What about the tone of their prayers and sermons: do they take liberties with the word of God, use daring turns of phrase, speak disrespectfully of people in positions of power, or even treat the name of God with contempt? [2:11] Let's tiptoe into the angelic council itself as the powers and rulers of the heavenly world debate what to do about these wannabe godlings down on earth – amid all the concern about them, you won't find disrespect or vindictive condemnation in the mouths of the really great ones. [2:12] What a contrast with these prattlers who utter confident statements about holy things, totally unaware of the folly and stupidity of their 'alternative theologies'. They rabbit on like brainless animals that sniff out their favourite food only to find they've put their heads inside a woodland snare and are destined to be served up on someone's table. That's the logic of the old saying that pride comes before a fall: people who assume they can get away with anything, and spread carnage all round them, tend to end up as dead meat themselves.

2:13b-16 ^{13b} *Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you.* ¹⁴ *With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood!* ¹⁵ *They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.* ¹⁶ *But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey – an animal without speech – who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.*

[2:13b] But meanwhile let's continue to shadow these model Christians as they turn up to the special celebration we hold in the Lord's name, when we gather at the table and eat together in love and fellowship. For them, eating means cheating. Their principle is to squeeze the maximum pleasure out of these occasions. It doesn't matter to them that they're operating in the full glare of a public event, nor that their behaviour is a foul blot on the purity of that sacred time – they're there for only one purpose, and that's to enjoy themselves. They stuff themselves with all the delicacies they can lay their hands on, sweetmeats, truffles, fine wines, the best cuts of meat. [2:14] But there's worse. Who are they cosyng up to? Who are they gazing at longingly? Is it that lovely young woman sitting apart from her husband they're homing in on? Oh, they've sometimes kind of wished they could stop doing this kind of thing, which in their better moments they know doesn't please the Lord, but they're driven relentlessly on. Like skilled fishermen baiting their hooks, they've become experts at saying just the right thing to land their prey, feeling out her spiritual weaknesses, getting their way with her body and soul. And they're supposed to be God's children! In reality they're under his sentence of condemnation. [2:15] These guys haven't consulted their moral compasses for a long time; they're way off track and heading for the cliff edge. They stand in a long line of false prophets going all the way back to the famous Balaam son of Beor, that deeply ambiguous oracle-monger who was ever so holy in everything he professed, yet who secretly coveted materialistic gain from his craft and ended up seducing the children of Israel into idolatry and immorality. [2:16] But he got what he so thoroughly deserved. Do you remember that ludicrous story about the talking donkey? Here is Balaam following his earthly paymasters, thinking he's doing the Lord's will all along, and the poor beast refuses to go any further because it can see what the prophet can't, which is a huge great angel with drawn sword blocking the way. After being beaten several times the animal asks in a perfectly normal human voice, 'Do I treat you like you're treating me?' Which brought the hell-bent prophet back to his senses, at least temporarily. If God has to use strange means to keep us on track, our case must be desperate indeed.

2:17-19 ¹⁷ *These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.* ¹⁸ *For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.* ¹⁹ *They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for ‘people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.’*

[2:17] These teachers are one big disappointment. They’re like well-heads in a desert land which the thirsty travellers see in the distance and run towards with hoarse cries of expectation, only to find that the water dried up years ago. Or they’re like those thick clouds a farmer may see on the horizon, bringing promise of rain after drought, and which turn out to be a sandstorm or a squall which flattens the few miserable crops he’s got left. They think they’re enlightened, but that’s all part of their self-inflicted blindness, and the Lord warned that being cast out into the final darkness was all they could look forward to. [2:18] Let’s sign on for one of their courses on ‘spiritual freedom’ and see what we get served up with. They talk – oh how they talk! – using solemn and high-sounding phraseology which actually doesn’t mean anything at all, and all the time they’re fishing with baited hook for a particular kind of victim, who has trusted Christ for salvation yet has never quite got himself (or herself) sorted as far as the pull of the world is concerned. What do I mean? There are plenty of non-Christian philosophies around, one of them being hedonistic Epicureanism, which blatantly advocates getting the maximum pleasure from life (‘the only life there is, so you might as well enjoy it’): well, most of the audience have seen that particular brand of atheism for what it is, but they’re still yearning for the fleshpots of Egypt, and these teachers feed that secret longing by proclaiming that since you are free from the law and under grace, you can do what you like with your body which after all is destined to perish; then in the next breath they’re saying that the act of sex can be some kind of communion with the divine. [2:19] That’s the kind of ‘freedom’ they’re really offering! In fact, it’s the only freedom they know themselves, because all the time they are on the devil’s lead, treading the rose-strewn path to destruction, but being cut some slack so they can herd others along with them. Make no mistake: yield to temptation, say yes to sin or self, and you surrender the freedom Christ has won for you. You can’t serve two masters, full stop.

2:20-22 ²⁰ *If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.* ²¹ *It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.* ²² *Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.’*

[2:20] Let me return to what I said at the outset: coming to know Jesus Christ, acknowledging him as your Lord and Saviour, wipes you totally clean from the moral taint and corruption of the world-city Babylon; but the choking weeds can all too stealthily grow round your soul again, and this time escape may not be so easy (if it ever was easy). This is what has happened to these professing Christians I’m talking about. Didn’t our Lord say the last state of that kind of person would be worse than the first?. [2:21] They’ve had their eyes opened to who Jesus is, the way the truth and the life, they’ve been washed and justified and received the Holy Spirit, they’ve set their feet on the highway of holiness – and now they’ve torn up all the apostolic instructions they’ve been given, thrown away the maps and gone off goodness knows where. If that’s the case, it was a big mistake to have started the journey in the first place. [2:22] In fact, one may doubt whether they really ever genuinely got converted. I’m tempted to quote a couple of proverbs here. In the first one there’s this dog who ate something disgusting and was violently sick; but rather than putting distance between himself and the mess, he came nosing back to his vomit and started licking then actually eating it. Sorry to be so graphic, but it’s there in Proverbs. The second one concerns this sow who decides she is too muddy and smelly, so she goes down to the stream and has a good bath; but it doesn’t feel natural, so back she goes to the pig-sty and has a lovely wallow in the steamiest manure she can find. Get my point? Repentance that is only skin-deep never truly transforms a person’s nature. Dog stays dog, and pig does what pig knows best.

3:1-2 ¹ *Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.* ² *I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.*

[3:1] Why another letter so soon after the first one I wrote to you folk over in Asia and the other provinces? Well, for one thing, as I said earlier, I'm that much more aware that I may not be around much longer. There are also topics I didn't cover in my first screed but which need urgently addressing. It's not that you've never heard them before, or that you've deliberately forgotten them – I give you full marks for diligence and commitment in your discipleship of Christ – [3:2] but it's all too easy for distortions to creep in under the influence of false teachers, and for genuine believers to forget not only the plain words spoken long ago by the inspired writers of holy Scripture, but even the instructions of our Master and Redeemer himself as passed on by those he trained to carry on his work. God doesn't contradict himself!

3:3-7 ³ *Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.* ⁴ *They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'* ⁵ *But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.* ⁶ *By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.* ⁷ *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

[3:3] At the head of the list is this topic of 'the last days'. You're well aware, of course, that the Lord Jesus told story after story of how he would come back to claim his kingdom, and how meanwhile, however long it took, we were to get on with the things he had given us to do. Surprise surprise, along come worldly-wise commentators and cynics (all with their own agendas, of course) who treat the whole thing as a joke. 'Hallo there, you Jesus-watchers, any sign of his coming back again? Didn't he swear black and blue that he'd be arriving in glory before most of you lot had gone? Yet here you are dying out like flies, and not a squeak of a trumpet-blast! The cycle of birth and death continues on its majestic way, as it has done ever since the dawn of time, and any idea of a new world just around the corner is a total myth.' [3:5-6] They choose to ignore the obvious absurdity of their worldview: material things aren't going to go on for ever, because they had to start at some point – Genesis pictures the celestial heavens and the dry land emerging as an ordered construction out of the waters of chaos, by the agency of natural processes such as water itself, but also by the supernatural agency of the Creator's spoken command. Then again by these two agencies – scientifically observable phenomena like rainclouds and river torrents, and the invisible operation of the express will of God – the world of rebel humanity (as it had then become) was completely swept away, and all life perished in the Flood. Can't these enlightened gurus see that a natural element like water can be both the origin of life and the cause of its destruction, all under the sovereign control of the Living God? [3:7] So might it not be entirely possible that another natural element – the energy contained in fire – could be the instrument of God's declared will, firstly in the loving and ordered creation of the stars and the nurturing of life on earth, but then also in the final denouement of God's great Day of Judgment when (as I'll explain in a moment) those human beings who refuse to bow the knee to their Creator are consumed, along with the world they thought so immutable, in the bonfire of the old creation?

3:8-9 ⁸ *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* ¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*

[3:8] Now I agree that the Lord's non-return up to this point in time is a serious problem – but only if you measure time in human terms. We have no idea how very, very much we are loved. From Love's perspective, all time is an eternal present. Recall how the Psalmist says 'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' and 'A thousand years from your point of view are like yesterday, like the couple of hours I spent awake last night.' Equally, one weekend might stretch to embrace the whole of human history.

[3:9] God sees things from a salvation perspective. If he says he's going to do something, then he'll do it no matter how long it takes. We chafe and fret at the seeming delay; but we have no idea of the massive patience of our compassionate God and Father-Saviour. It is entirely foreign to his will that a single soul should be lost eternally. Does this surprise you? His intention for every human being is that they, you, we should reach the point of saying, even if it's through clenched teeth, 'Yes, Lord, you were right and I was wrong.' If you object to this mercy-shaped thinking, just reflect that if Christ had come back all those years ago, you might not have been one of the redeemed. Why not allow God to be God, and to know exactly who he wants to belong to him? Why shouldn't he hold back the final denouement so that everyone who is going to call Jesus Lord can have the chance to do so – so that the full number of his people can be completed?

[3:10] Of course everyone wants to know exactly when that's going to take place. But the Lord memorably told us otherwise. 'If the householder had known the precise moment the burglar was going to slip silently into his house, he'd have been on the spot to deal with him.' We simply aren't allowed to know the timing of the Lord's return. Oh yes, there'll be plenty of noise when it does happen! The old order of created matter is going to vanish out of sight with a whistling sound like a missile from a siege-engine, or like the thunderous roar made by a volcanic explosion. There's going to be a tremendous release of heat as all the elements fly apart and their atoms part company with each other. It will be like a tornado blowing the roof off your house, so that what's going on in every room is instantly exposed. There will be nowhere to hide.

3:11-13 ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

[3:11] Given that this dismantling of the total physical universe is imminent, we who have set our hope in Jesus can't carry on as if nothing is going to happen. We've got to behave fundamentally like the new people we are, by God's grace. We've got to wipe the mud off our souls and live for Christ. Not a single aspect of our thinking can be earthbound; our whole character and personality should be directed heavenward. [3:12] The point is, we've got something we can look forward to with every fibre of our being; in fact, we're praying desperately that Jesus should come again, and if there's any way we can help to make that day come sooner, please Lord show us what to do. We've abandoned any faith in astrological signs – how could the planets hold the key to the future when they're just about to go up in smoke like a leaf on the bonfire? – nor do we place any reliance in the permanence of material things, now we know the old physics is due to dissolve like wax in a furnace. [3:13] The great thing is that something far better is going to replace the former order. Turn to those prophecies in Isaiah about how God is planning a Regeneration, an absolutely fresh re-creation of the universe from top to bottom, where there's no room for evil of any kind, only limitless perfection. We're not whistling in the wind about all this – we're betting on a certainty, because the Creator himself has signed the documents.

3:14-16 ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

[3:14] Because I feel God's own jealous love for you, my friends, I'm going to repeat what I said before only with even greater urgency. This isn't some weird kind of eschatological speculation we're indulging in, it's what tomorrow's world is going to look like, and it has very definite practical implications for the way you need to behave in this one. Don't let a single sin tarnish your character or grieve the Spirit, and if it does, get right again with him instantly. Live as if the Lord could walk through the door any second. [3:15-16] And if he doesn't come back today, why, you know that's because he's keeping the door of salvation open just a little longer, being the wonderfully generous God that he is. I'm not the only apostle who takes this line: my dear friend and colleague Paul has written letter after letter sharing his insight into the mystery of the gospel, an insight not gained by his intelligence or his years of study but given directly from God through the Spirit. He has consistently emphasised the compassion and mercy of God and has taught us to look forward to our final salvation at Christ's coming. The trouble is, to be frank, he doesn't always express himself as clearly as one might like (for that matter nor do I), and so you get folk who haven't got much spiritual perception and whose lives show minimal stability, wrenching Paul's wonderful revelations out of context and making them mean all kinds of things he never intended. They ransack the rest of Scripture (I say that deliberately, because Paul's letters and preaching are on the same level of inspiration as the law and the prophets) to support their heretical interpretations, but they're only going to end up under God's judgment and find their whole teaching ministry going up in smoke.

3:17-18 ¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen.

[3:17] I'm going to sign off now, but not before I've given you two pieces of counsel, one negative and one positive. They both flow from the heart of God because, as I've said so often, he loves you more than you ever conceived possible. Also, you've heard both of them before, so I'm just summarising the whole of this letter. One: keep your eyes open and your minds alert, because otherwise you're in grave danger of being swept along by the plausible half-truths of the permissive 'anything goes' charlatans, the effect of whose fair-sounding rhetoric is to ease you ever so gently off the highway of holiness and send you rolling down the embankment.

[3:18] Two: keep growing in Christ and into Christ. Your allegiance to Jesus as Lord, and your dependence on him as Saviour, must be primary and total. But don't stand still. There's always more of his grace to draw upon, meeting your every need whether for forgiveness after failure or adequacy for the situations he puts you in. And there's always more to discover about the faithfulness of his friendship and the riches of his precious word. Grow individually, grow collectively. Otherwise you'll go backwards.

Yes, he's wonderful! One day we're going to realise that fully and eternally; but right now too, in this perilous and fragile day-to-day existence, we can trust him to be our all in all. Thank you, Lord, thank you, thank you. Over and out – Simon Peter.

JUDE

1-2 ¹ Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: ² Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

[1] Hallo, everybody! This is a very brief letter from Judah, better known as Jude, the brother of Jacob (or James, whom you've all heard of). Like him, I am proud to confess Jesus the Messiah as my Master. Now I hope you realise that far from being victims of an impersonal and pitiless universe, you have God as your supremely loving Father, who gave you existence and sent his Son to die for you. It is Jesus the Shepherd-King who has kept you and watched over you as his very own. You haven't made some

terrible mistake in becoming Christians –you’ve heard his voice calling you by name. [2] So this is no conventional greeting: you really are forgiven even if you’ve comprehensively messed up; you really can enjoy the friendship of God and the knowledge that he is more than adequate for all your cares and anxieties; and you can know the depths of his love which pours out in an unceasing and plentiful stream. May this be true in the experience of all of those who read or hear this letter.

3-4³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. ⁴For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

[3] Now look, my dear friends in Christ: I got incredibly excited about the idea of writing to you all, highlighting the freedom charter we all share in the Lord, and reminding you of the royal privileges, responsibilities and prospects that belong to us because we belong to him. Our ‘declaration of independence’! So I summoned my trusty amanuensis and was preparing to dictate when I had an unmistakable sense of the Holy Spirit telling me to do something rather different. ‘My people are under attack,’ he was saying. ‘There’s a battle on and you must tell everyone they’ve got to redouble their efforts to fight off the enemy.’ Dramatic stuff! So I said, ‘Lord, where is the attack coming?’ And it was, ‘At the heartspring of the faith. What were you told that made all the difference? That changed your worldview once and for all, and set your feet on the path of life?’ So I thought, ‘Jesus died for me and rose again, that’s the big thing; and I’ve got to tell others about God’s incredible love.’

[4] Well, I started thinking about who this attack was coming from, and I realised it was from traitors within the sheepfold itself. How they got in I don’t know, but what I do know is that we were warned it would happen in the old scriptures, where it was clearly stated that these people were to be cut off from the people, it’s that serious. They never were true followers of Christ. They heard the message of God’s unconditional love and acceptance, but they have twisted it into meaning that once you’re a Christian you can do anything you like (or lust after). Oh yes, they profess allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, but they contradict it flatly by what they get up to. You can’t serve two masters, that’s what Jesus said – so there’s no way you can serve the flesh and the Spirit at one and the same time.

5-7⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

[5] This is nothing new I’m telling you – you must have heard it a hundred times if you’ve heard it once. But we all need reminding of the old truths. You cross the living God at your own peril. No matter that, for instance, you might have been physically a member of the great host that the Lord used Moses and Joshua to lead out of Pharaoh’s rule in Egypt and into the Promised Land: if you didn’t really trust and obey the God who had done all those miracles for you, your bleached bones were going to lie in the wilderness. [6] There are no exceptions to this rule, not even for angels: witness the persistent tradition that among the Shining Ones there were those who wilfully refused to carry out the special responsibilities they were given and instead left the courts of heaven to meddle with affairs on earth. And what’s happened to them? They’re down there in the permanent darkness of the Pit, bound hand and foot and waiting in utter terror for the great and dreadful Day of Judgment. Don’t mess with God. [7] Another example you know all too well (after all, you live in the modern Sodom and Gomorrah of the Roman Empire) is those cities that used to flourish all around the Dead Sea area; they were so obsessed with sexual practices of every kind that they even demanded to have their way with the angelic messengers who had come to rescue Lot. They provide a vivid analogy in the way they perished under a relentless hail of natural fire and brimstone – how much worse are the eternal penalties for disobedience going to be!

8-11 ⁸ *In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings.* ⁹ *But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'* ¹⁰ *Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct – as irrational animals do – will destroy them.* ¹¹ *Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.*

[8] But do these 'spiritual tutors' of yours care a bit about all that? They're oblivious to the realities of the heavenly world. Like the watchmen of old, they're fast asleep in their erotic dreams, physically polluting themselves while they ignore the Lord's insistent promptings to holiness, and airily dismissing the notion of good and bad angels as so much phooey. [9] If you don't mess with God, neither do you disrespect the powers of the spiritual world. Not even top angels make that mistake: you've probably heard the apocryphal story of how the devil said he had a right to the body of Moses (who was once a convicted murderer), and the archangel Michael, who could have thrown out this claim as outright blasphemy, merely remarked that it wasn't his job to bring charges against other heavenly dignitaries, because the Lord himself would do that when it suited him. [10] Contrast that kind of heavenly wisdom with the arrogant assertions of these 'professors of higher theology', who are blatantly teaching heresies without having the faintest idea what they're talking about. They have about as much idea about how the universe really works as earthworms have about logical philosophy; and it will be these unseen forces that will bring about their undoing, and indeed have already started to do so. [11] They don't even take any notice of the plain warnings of Scripture: like Cain they think they can tell God what sacrifices he ought to be pleased with, like Balaam they go headlong along the track that will bring in the fattest fees, and like the sons of Korah they set themselves up against the Lord's chosen leaders and are destined to meet the same fate as those braggarts did.

12-13 ¹² *These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead.* ¹³ *They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever.*

[12] The fact that these plague-spots turn up at your holy fellowship meals shouldn't fool you for one moment: there they are tucking in with the rest of you, but the reality is that they are shamelessly stuffing their own bellies, like those selfish shepherds who fed themselves without a thought for the needs of the flock. They should be spiritual reservoirs, but they're more like dust-clouds that whirl in from the desert, bringing no rain, only chaos in their wake. They should be orchards of life-giving fruit, but instead they're like those dead trees you see in the autumn, whose spring blossom promised a rich harvest but which now lie uprooted on the ground, dead twice over, useless to mankind or beast. [13] When you stand on the beach and watch the rollers coming in, you normally think 'What a glorious sight!', but there's nothing majestic about these preachers: they smash themselves on the sand in an orgy of wild words, and spew out all kinds of jetsam and filth. The prophet said that those who turn many to righteousness would shine like the stars for ever; how different from these space-wandering comets, who may blaze fiercely for a time but are destined to fly out into the distant darkness and travel ever farther from the sun which is the true source of light and life.

14-16 ¹⁴ *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones* ¹⁵ *to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'* ¹⁶ *These people are grumblers and fault-finders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.*

[14] I expect you've all been reading the book of Enoch which is going the rounds at the moment. Enoch was number seven in line from Adam, which makes him especially significant, and his walk with God contrasts with the vicious lives of everyone around him. Enoch makes this prophecy which directly refers to Christ's coming: 'Wake up, you dozy people! I have seen the Lord coming in glory, attended by

millions of his holy ones; [15] he's going to set up his judgment seat and establish courts where absolutely everyone is going to have their lives assessed.' This is really bad news for those who have messed with him. It doesn't matter whether they've been outright atheists or professing believers: what matters is their actual behaviour, what they thought they'd got away with, the words they've spoken, the way they've airily dismissed the Living God or distorted the message of his love. If the set of their lives has been anti-God and pro-self, they've not only made a serious mistake, they've classed themselves with the rebels and heretics who have no place at the Lord's side. [16] They don't have to be spectacular sinners – many of them will be your average long-faced person in the street for whom God is a dirty word because he's been unfair, he hasn't made life turn out well for them like he has for other people we could mention; others will be men and women who have organised their lives entirely around the next opportunity for their personal pleasure and satisfaction; still others will use their influence to speak or write unbelievably arrogant and blasphemous things about the King of kings; while others will fawn upon the rich and famous simply to get maximum advantage for themselves. They've left God out of the reckoning, and their lives will be rated accordingly.

17-19 ¹⁷ *But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.* ¹⁸ *They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.'* ¹⁹ *These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

[17] Dear friends, this shouldn't surprise you. It's what our Lord's apostolic messengers have been saying all these years. I'm not making it up: it's been passed on from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself. [18] They have faithfully and consistently warned us that in the times before the Lord's coming we are going to get a whole lot of loud-mouthed cynics saying whatever comes into their heads, in order to mock and discredit those who take God seriously. [19] I would include among these some professing Christians whose aim is to set up their own little cliques, who claim to possess the Holy Spirit but whose wisdom is entirely man-made and earthly.

20-21 ²⁰ *But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,* ²¹ *keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

[20] I feel I may have been a bit negative up to now, so I'll finish on a more positive note of encouragement. You, my fellow-Christians, are very precious to me, because we're all being built into a spiritual 'house' together, dedicated entirely to the God we believe in, and each of us has a part to play in that sacred building project. We're not left on our own, because the Holy Spirit is our friend and helper, and through him we can talk to God about absolutely anything. [21] We can't do anything to make God love us more than he already does, but we can be resolved once and for all to preserve our relationship with him unsullied. If we get it wrong (and no-one is immune to temptation), then let's remember that Jesus went to the cross to bring us the gift of undying life, and let's confidently cast ourselves on his promise of forgiveness as we tell him over and over again that we want him to be our Lord and King, no matter what.

22-23 ²² *Be merciful to those who doubt;* ²³ *save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

[22] God has always been on a rescue mission in his world, and he's carrying it on through us. Just as Jesus encouraged the man with the demonised child who found it so difficult to trust in a loving God, so we will need to deal gently and patiently with 'half believers' who may one day make it into the fullness of saving faith. [23] Or just as the Lord sent the two angels to Sodom to extract Lot, if necessary by force, from the fiery fate that was about to engulf him, so too we may be called to use decisive means (short of physical compulsion!) to alert spectacular sinners to the judgment hanging over their heads. Mind you, we must be very careful in coming alongside folk whose lifestyles are deeply impregnated with sin – just as the priests had to burn clothing contaminated by leprosy, so we should avoid like the plague any compromise with evil, while at the same time showing the Lord's own compassion to the returning prodigal.

24-25 ²⁴ *To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy –* ²⁵ *to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.*

[24] For this mission we need Divine power – left to ourselves, we fall flat on our faces in the road. Knowing our proneness to temptation, how could we possibly stand there when our wonderful King returns, look him full in the face and claim that our lives have been pure as the driven snow? Yet he can do it for us and in us, because the great Shepherd has committed himself to keeping his sheep safe for that day when we're going to know a joy and a delight that are literally out of this world.

[25] I want to end with a shout of praise to this God of ours. Not only is he the only God around, absolutely unrivalled and self-existent, but he minds about the state we've got ourselves into and he's done something about it. He has come himself in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and has died and risen again to set us free from sin. He was just an obscure Galilean carpenter – now he's receiving the reverence of the whole created order. He had no earthly status or impressive bearing – now he's the number one Person of all time and eternity. He once suffered in extreme weakness, unable to move a muscle to save himself – now he can literally make anything happen, including the emergence of a new creation entirely. Once his enemies resisted and opposed him – now he is acknowledged as the rightful Lord and Ruler in heaven and on earth. He was there before time began; while time continues he is present in every age of human history; and when all this is over he'll still be there in the endless, glorious future that we shall share with him. Let's worship him together, wherever we are, whoever we are. Why are we waiting? Let's go!

2 PETER AND JUDE CROSS-REFERENCES

For the complex relationship between 2 Peter and Jude, and the difficulty of establishing precise biblical or extra-testamental allusions, see any standard commentary. In the light of this uncertainty, the usual underlinings and asterisks have been dispensed with, and cross-references between the two letters have not been attempted.

2 PETER

1:1-2 *Symeon* Acts 15:14. *Mother's prayers* Gen 29:33. *Called apostles* Mk 3:14. *Royal benediction* 1 Pet 1:2.

1:3-4 *Gold or silver* Ps 12:6. *Spirit-words* 2 Cor 3:17-18. *Setting you free* Isa 61:1. *Total disintegration* Acts 2:40. *Iron-bound doors* Acts 12:7-11, *Pilgrim's Progress* Doubting Castle.

1:5-7 *The myrtle* Isa 55:13. *Knowledge of God* Prov 2:1-5. *Total self-control* 1 Cor 9:25. *Final salvation* Mt 24:13. *Living God* Ps 84:2. *Springs of water* Ps 84:6. *Treasures of righteousness* Isa 33:6. *Jewish Christians* Gal 2:11ff. *Towards one another* Rom 12:10. *Lunch with them* Lk 15:2. *New command* Jn 13:34a. *For the world* 1 Jn 2:2. *Forgive enemies* Mt 5:44. *I have loved you* Jn 13:34b.

1:8-9 *All by itself* 1 Tim 4:7b-8.

1:10-11 *God's elect* Mt 22:14. *My chosen* Lk 13:24, Heb 6:11. *Get there* Mt 7:14. *Foundational faith* Jude 20. *Flat on your face* Mic 7:8. *Would be hard* Acts 14:22.

1:12-15 *Breakfast on the beach* Jn 21:18-19.

1:16-18 *Plato* The Cave; The Myth of Er; Atlantis. *All come out* Mk 9:9-10. *Official accounts* Mt 17:1ff, Mk 9:2ff, Lk 9:28ff. *Prophetic word* Isa 42:1. *Think as One* Mt 3:17.

1:19-21 *Radiance of his star* Num 24:17. *With his glory* Rev 22:16. *The word of the Lord* Jer 20:9. *Apostolic letters* 2 Pet 3:16.

2:1-3 *Denunciations* Jer 23. *Precious sacrifice* Jude 4, the first of many consonances with Jude which it would be too onerous to list.

2:4-9 *Rebel angels* Gen 6:1-4. *Serpent to Eve* Gen 3:13. *The Flood* Gen 6:5ff. *Sodom and Gomorrah* Gen 19:24. *At the judgment* Mt 10:15. *Two angels* Gen 19:16. *Neighbours* Gen 13:10, 13. *Right relationship* Gen 15:6. *Him and his family* Gen 19:8. *Personal experience* Mt 14:31, Lk 22:32. *Get away with it* Eccl 12:14, Dan 12:2, Jn 5:29, 2 Cor 5:10.

2:10-13a *Great ones* Jude 8-9. *Alternative theologies* Job 42:8b, 1 Tim 1:6-7. *Dead meat themselves* Isa 66:24.

2:13b-16 *Stuff themselves* 1 Cor 11:21. *Balaam* Num 22-24. *Idolatry and immorality* Num 25:1ff, Rev 2:14. *Talking donkey* Num 22:22ff.

2:17-19 *Self-inflicted blindness* Jn 9:41. *Final darkness* Mt 8:12. *Baited hook* 2 Pet 2:14. *Enjoy it* 1 Cor 15:32. *Under grace* Rom 6:14. *Destined to perish* 1 Cor 6:12ff. *Has won for you* Jn 8:34, 36. *Two masters* Mt 6:24.

2:20-22 *At the outset* 2 Pet 1:4. *Babylon* 1 Pet 5:13, Rev 18:2ff. *Choking weeds* Lk 8:14. *Not be so easy* Heb 6:4-6. *Worse than the first* Mt 12:45. *And the life* Jn 14:6. *Holy Spirit* 1 Cor 6:11. *Highway of holiness* Isa 35:8. *In Proverbs* Prov 26:11. *Pig knows best* Jer 13:23, Mt 7:6.

3:1-2 *Other provinces* 1 Pet 1:1. *Said earlier* 2 Pet 1:13. *False teachers* 2 Pet 3:17. *Carry on his work* 1 Pet 1:10-12. *Contradict himself* 1 Cor 14:33.

3:3-7 *Claim his kingdom* Lk 19:11ff. *Given us to do* Mt 24:43ff. *You lot had gone* 1 Th 4:15. *New world* Mt 19:23. *Waters of chaos* Gen 1:1ff. *Spoken command* Ps 33:6. *River torrents* Gen 7:11. *Will of God* Gen 6:17. *In the Flood* Gen 7:21. *In a moment* 2 Pet 3:10. *Old creation* Isa 66:15-16, 24; Mt 13:42, 50 .

3:8-9 *You are God* Ps 90:2 . *Awake last night* Ps 90:4 . *Seeming delay* Hab 2:3. *Lost eternally* 1 Tim 2:4. *I was wrong* Rom 2:4. *Belong to him* 2 Tim 2:19. *Full number* Rom 11:25, Rev 7:9.

3:10 *Deal with him* Mt 24:43, 1 Th 5:2. *The timing* Mt 24:36. *Nowhere to hide* Rev 6:12-17.

3:11-13 *Directed heavenward* Col 3:1-4. *Come again* Rev 22:20. *Prophecies in Isaiah* Isa 65:17, 66:22. *Regeneration* Mt 19:28. *Limitless perfection* Isa 60:21.

3:14-16 *Door of salvation* 2 Cor 6:2. *Mystery of the gospel* Eph 3:3-6. *Through the Spirit* 1 Cor 2:7. *Mercy of God* Rom 9:15-18. *Christ's coming* 1 Th 5:23-24. *Nor do I* 1 Pet 4:6. *Never intended* Rom 6:1. *Up in smoke* Rom 3:8.

3:17-18 *Go backwards* 2 Pet 1:8.

JUDE

1-2 *Like him* Jas 1:1. *Watched over you* Jn 10:28, 17:12. *Calling you by name* Jn 10:27.

3-4 *Holy Spirit telling me* Acts 16:6. *The big thing* 1 Cor 15:3. *Got to tell others* 2 Tim 2:2. *In the old scriptures* Dt 18:20, Jer 23:14. *Profess allegiance* Tit 1:16. *Serve two masters* Mt 6:24. *At the same time* Gal 5:17.

5-7 *In the wilderness* Num 14:29. *Persistent tradition* Book of Enoch 12:4 etc. *Affairs on earth* Gen 6:4. *Bound hand and foot* 2 Pet 2:4, Rev 20:1ff. *Angelic messengers* Gen 19:5. *Penalties for disobedience* 2 Th 1:8-9. *Erotic dreams* Isa 56:10 LXX. *Apocryphal story* The Assumption of Moses. *The Lord himself* Zech 3:2. *Cain* Gen 4:3ff. *Balaam* Num 22ff. *The sons of Korah* Num 16:1ff.

8-11 *Selfish shepherds* Ezek 34:2. *The prophet said* Dan 12:3.

12-13 *Makes this prophecy* Enoch 1:9. *His holy ones* Dt 33:2.

14-16 *Blasphemous things* Dan 11:36.

17-19 *Saying all these years* 2 Pet 3:2-3. *Little cliques* 1 Jn 2:19. *Man-made and earthly* Jas 3:15.

20-21 *Spiritual house* Eph 2:22. *Left on our own* Jn 14:18. *Absolutely anything* Eph 6:18. *Undying life* Jn 3:16.

22-23 *Demonised child* Mk 9:24. *Two angels to Sodom* Gen 19:16. *Engulf him* Amos 4:11. *Contaminated by leprosy* Lev 13:52. *Decisive means* Lk 14:23. *Returning prodigal* Lk 15:20.

24-25 *Keeping his sheep safe* Jude 1. *Out of this world* 1 Pet 4:13. *Rightful Lord* Phil 2:10-11.

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