

2 Peter & Jude

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A Series

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To
Mariah, Jonah, Elijah & Jude
With thanks to God for your enduring faith

and

To
The Lord and Master who called us, keeps us,
and will present us in the presence of his glory with great joy

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession

Series Introduction

of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can

provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

It is always exciting to be let in on a secret. This commentary has the privilege of disclosing the secret regarding two of the most neglected books of the New Testament. Christians perusing their Bibles tend to navigate past 2 Peter and Jude to read other books that seem more beneficial. After all, there must be a reason why these short books are found at the end of the Bible. And was there not some controversy about their inclusion in the canon of Scripture? Thus, after the barest of glances, we flip our Bibles to a more well-worn path, such as Romans, Ephesians, or one of the four Gospels.

So here is the secret: 2 Peter and Jude are treasures filled with interest, instruction, and gospel edification. This is, of course, what we should expect, since their ultimate Author is the same Holy Spirit who inspired the rest of Scripture. As for 2 Peter, imagine possessing a letter from the great apostle, written to his beloved churches as a final testament on the brink of his expected death. We do have such a book—2 Peter! Opening his book with a brief sermon in chapter 1, Peter brings up the subject that is vital to every Christian: that we make use of God's grace to grow in godliness and assurance. Seldom does the New Testament provide the text of an apostolic sermon, but we have just such a treasure in the homily of Peter's opening chapter, filled as it is with both encouragement and exhortation. Likewise, how interesting is the short letter from Jesus' earthly brother Jude, one of the leaders of the early church in Jerusalem. His message of Christ's people as called, kept, and finally presented before God's glory with great joy brings immense blessing to readers, especially in our study of perhaps the greatest of all the doxologies in the New Testament.

But is it not true that a great deal of both 2 Peter and Jude consists of extremely severe denunciations of false teachers? This observation is true, and

Preface

here we receive vital instructions to which we should pay careful attention. The idea that church leaders today can disregard the threat of heresy is not only naive but also highly dangerous to our churches. Peter's readers were beset with denials of Christ's second coming, and so he not only critiques the false teachers but adds uniquely valuable material to our understanding of the end of our present age. Peter's opponents used their denial of future judgment to justify godless living, and this threat of antinomian doctrine and practice becomes the target of Jude's high-grade invective. Studying these books, we realize that the heated language employed by Peter and Jude is rooted in a tender love for God's people and a sober realization of danger from gross perversions of the gospel. Both writers highlight the value of a Christian's devotion to Holy Scripture, which Peter memorably calls "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). This commentary will not focus unduly on questions of purely academic interest, such as the priority of the shared material found in these two books, but it will pay close attention to the vivid and memorable language that both authors—Jude especially—employ.

Now that we have divulged the secret of the greatness of these two small but treasured books, the authors of this commentary commit our labors to God's blessing for those who read this volume. These chapters originated in sermons preached at Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina, where we have had the rich pleasure of laboring together in the gospel. To the dear and highly motivated sermon listeners of Second Church we extend our love and heartfelt appreciation. We further thank our wives and children for their steadfast support and colabor in the work of the gospel. We are especially grateful to Sharon Phillips and Linda Wilkey for their invaluable assistance in providing sermon transcripts. This volume is dedicated to Mariah Windt, together with her and Jeff's children—Jonah, Elijah, and Jude—with thanks to God for their steadfast love in the midst of a painful and lengthy trial that began when Jeff suffered a debilitating stroke in 2020. As we pray for God's miraculous hand of healing in his life, we also pray for God's supernatural blessing on our labors, which we humbly offer up to God through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Richard D. Phillips
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Greenville, South Carolina

2 *Peter*

HASTEN THE DAY

1

A FAITH LIKE OURS

2 *Peter* 1:1–2

*To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours
by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

(2 Peter 1:1)



Most people look back on receiving their life's calling with a sense of fondness. But for the apostle Peter, it was a bit complicated. During the Last Supper, Jesus commissioned Peter to a vital calling: "strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Here was a noble task of great significance. But Jesus first noted that Peter would deny him three times on that night of his arrest. Peter would boast, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (v. 33). But Jesus had forewarned him: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (vv. 31–32). Peter would be acted on by a power of evil too great for his resolve, but then delivered by the prayer of a Savior who was stronger still. It was in this context that Peter received his life's calling: "when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (v. 32).

Peter sent his second epistle in fulfillment of the charge given to him by Jesus. Second Peter is the apostle's final testament as he foretells his swiftly

approaching death (2 Peter 1:14). His aim is to strengthen the believers with confidence in their divine calling to salvation (vv. 3–15), in the truth of the gospel against false teaching (1:16–2:22), and in their hope of deliverance from the final judgment to come (3:1–13). Just as Jesus strengthened Peter to stand firm in his faith, the apostle now writes with the same purpose for us today. James Shaddix notes that “the one who fell, who—by the grace of Christ—was then strengthened to get back up, who was charged to then do the same for others, we now find obediently carrying out his assignment.”¹

SIMON PETER, SLAVE AND APOSTLE

The author of this letter identifies himself as Simon Peter, the strong-opinioned disciple of Jesus Christ. Yet even in the early church, many doubted this claim. One reason why 2 Peter was one of the last books widely accepted into the canon of Scripture is that it was suspected of having been written by someone only purporting to be the apostle. During the days of the early church, a number of books were written using an approach known as *pseudepigrapha*: honoring a hero of the faith by authoring a book in his name so as to popularize his alleged views. But 2 Peter contains so many personal claims by the author that such an approach would have involved extensive deceit. The fact that 2 Peter was accepted into the canon argues against this theory, since the early church was highly on the alert against pseudepigraphic materials. Probably the main reason why some doubted 2 Peter is that its style of Greek writing differs from that of the widely accepted 1 Peter. But 1 Peter 5:12 states that Peter used a scribe named Silvanus to pen that letter, information that more than accounts for stylistic differences in the second epistle. Ultimately, our acceptance of New Testament books relies on the witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God’s people, a standard by which 2 Peter is rightly accounted as apostolic and inspired.

One argument in favor of Peter as the author is the Hebraicized version of his name in 2 Peter 1:1: “Simeon Peter.” The more familiar “Simon Peter” is the Hellenized version of his name, and it is hard to explain why a forger would have thought to use this unfamiliar form. Simeon was the apostle’s birth name, while Peter was the name given to him by Jesus at the time of

1. James Shaddix, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Peter and Jude*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Holman Reference, 2018), 9.

his profession of faith (Matt. 16:16, 18). “Peter” means “rock,” referring to the bedrock of faith on which Peter was standing. Referring to that faith—not to Peter himself—Jesus declared that “on this rock I will build my church” (v. 18).² By using the names Simeon and Peter together, the apostle notes the two dynamics in every believer’s personal story: “what we were before Christ manifested Himself to us, and of what His grace has made us.”³ From the beginning, Peter presents himself as a man who was changed by Christ and whose life reflects both the flesh and the spirit.

Having shared his name, Peter calls himself “a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). The apostles held a unique office that pertained only to the founding era of the church, since it consisted of those who were eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). Not only did the apostles pass on Christ’s message, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (v. 8) they spoke and wrote authoritatively on Jesus’ behalf. Some scholars seek to drive a wedge between the apostles and Christ, saying that they heartily accept what Jesus said but hold doubts about the apostles (hence the popular “red-letter” versions of the New Testament, or those who describe themselves as “red-letter Christians”). But Jesus debunks such an approach, insisting that the teaching of the apostles has divine origin. Jesus said on the night of his arrest: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. . . . He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13–14). Peter will assert this approach in this letter, stating that the apostles “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Peter intended for us to receive his letter not merely by virtue of his experience as a disciple but because by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he was writing the Word of God.

Remarkably, he identified himself not only as an apostle but as “a servant . . . of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). The normal meaning of the word *doulos* is “slave,” the kind of servant who belongs to the one that he serves and is his rightful property. The word “servant” conveys the idea of Peter’s humility as he exercises his apostleship. But the word “slave” gives a different sense of obedience to his Master. The term “slave” is considered demeaning today, but Peter and the other apostles freely spoke of themselves as having been

2. Jesus used the Greek word *petra*, referring to the bedrock of faith, rather than *petros*, the name he gave to Peter.

3. Alexander Nisbet, *An Exposition of 1 & 2 Peter*, Geneva Commentaries (1658; repr., Banner of Truth, 1982), 222.

“bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20) and owing the entirety of their lives in service to Jesus. What William VanDoodewaard writes of the apostles is true of every Christian: “They were not independent, but belonged in the whole of their being to their master, living under his ownership and authority.”⁴ Simon Kistemaker thus describes Peter as “ready to accept, obey, and fulfill the orders of his Lord.”⁵ The same must be true of us.

It is from this approach of servant-apostleship that Peter wrote this letter that speaks to us today. He was an apostle, called to join in leading the church by means of God’s inspired Word. He was also a bondservant with a commission that he writes to discharge fully before he dies. As we approach his letter, we should appreciate the treasure that has been passed down to us as this apostle who was so close to Jesus in his earthly ministry now discharges his appointed calling. Jesus told him on the very night that Peter would betray him to “strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32). After his resurrection, Jesus confirmed Peter’s calling in case there were any doubts: “Tend my sheep” (John 21:16). Peter has little time remaining, so he writes this letter to strengthen and to tend. The result for its readers is that we are guarded and guided in God’s way. David Helm comments: “Second Peter is his road map to Heaven. It confirms that we can also possess a faith that will not fail.”⁶

TO THOSE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH FAITH

Second Peter also struggled to gain early acceptance because it lacks a local addressee. Instead of writing to a particular group of believers, Peter addresses himself before his death to the church at large: “To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). The exciting realization for us is that Peter seems to have included believers today among the “original” recipients to whom he was writing.

Writing to strengthen and confirm us in faith, Peter begins his letter by talking about its subject. First, the apostle addresses faith not as something we have achieved but rather as something we have received from God: “To those who have obtained a faith.” The “faith” is often referred to

4. William VanDoodewaard, *1 & 2 Peter: Feed My Sheep*, Welwyn Commentary (EP Books, 2017), 135.

5. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude* (Baker, 1987), 240.

6. David R. Helm, *1–2 Peter and Jude*, Preaching the Word (Crossway, 2015), 186–87.

in Scripture in terms of an objective body of doctrine. Here, however, Peter speaks subjectively of faith in terms of what we possess by trusting in Christ. Salvation is by faith in Jesus, so how does one get this faith? Peter writes that we “have obtained” it. The Greek verb *lanchanō* originally described something received by lot, something that came to us or was appointed for us. Matthew Harmon notes that here “the divine will stands behind what is received.”⁷ Therefore, Peter’s salutation in 2 Peter lines up with his greeting in 1 Peter 1:1, “To those who are elect.” Peter will turn to the themes of divine calling and election in the opening section of this letter (2 Peter 1:10), indicating that he means that our faith is obtained by God’s sovereign grace. Not surprisingly, his greeting in 2 Peter 1:1 agrees fully with Paul’s explanation in Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Not only should believers be strengthened in knowing that our faith is obtained from God himself, but Peter continues that it is “a faith of equal standing with ours” (2 Peter 1:1). He asserts that our faith, obtained from God, is of no less standing or worth than his own faith or that of the other apostles. Peter faced his challenges through faith, and we face our challenges with the same faith, which is as valid and effective as his. Peter’s faith joined him to Christ and his salvation, and our faith does the same, granting us the same assurance, strength from the Holy Spirit, and intercession from our exalted Lord in heaven. Alexander Nisbet writes, “Although some believers are more strong in believing, and so have more joy and peace than others, yet is the faith of them all of a like worth, in so far as it united them all to the same Saviour.”⁸ Our faith provides us with the same privilege of access to the Father in prayer that the apostles enjoyed. Our faith gains the same fatherly provision from heaven, and the same calling to serve and bear testimony with courage.

Peter continues his thought: “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Scholars debate the meaning of “the righteousness of our God.” Following the grammar, many argue that Peter grounds our faith on the faithfulness and equity of God in granting salvation. In this

7. Matthew S. Harmon, “2 Peter and Jude,” in *Hebrews-Revelation*, ESV Expository Commentary 12 (Crossway, 2018), 370.

8. Nisbet, *1 & 2 Peter*, 222.

case, the genitive “righteousness of . . . God” is *qualitative*, meaning that “God is righteous,” fulfilling all his promises, just as Christ fulfilled all the work that our salvation required. Nisbet summarizes Christ’s righteousness as “His doing and suffering to purchase [salvation], and other saving graces for us; and so, although we have it freely, yet Christ bought it dear, and God is righteous in giving what [He] Himself promised, and Christ paid for.”⁹

True though this definition is, Martyn Lloyd-Jones sees the “righteousness of . . . God” as a genitive of *source*, meaning the righteousness that is from God and that God provides for the justification of sinners who believe. Lloyd-Jones writes that this statement is “Peter’s way of putting in a phrase the great doctrine of justification by faith. . . . The message is, that there is only one way whereby man can be right, or righteous, in the sight of God; and that is by the righteousness that is given to us in Christ.”¹⁰ The name of this doctrine is the *imputation of Christ’s righteousness*, meaning that though we are sinners, Christ accounts his perfect and finished righteousness to us. There are two reasons why I believe that Peter is referring to this imputed righteousness through faith. First, the words “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” modify the idea of our obtaining faith in him. How is it that sinners received saving faith? The answer: by the saving work of Jesus Christ, providing his righteousness for us through faith. A second reason to take Peter this way is that the final section of this letter involves his concern that we take God’s final judgment seriously. Here at the beginning, therefore, he notes that our faith is just as effective as his own faith in obtaining eternal forgiveness of our sins through Christ’s blood and a righteousness from Christ by which we are justified before God through faith alone. When you fall into sin and are convicted of guilt before God, you may think, “If only I had a faith like Peter’s, so that I can be forgiven as he was.” He writes to say that you do. In Jesus Christ, you have “a faith of equal standing” with the apostles. Likewise, when you feel your weakness and worry about threats that may overcome you, Peter wants you to know that your faith is able to prevail in the same way that his faith prevailed: through the saving ministry and intercession of Jesus.

What matters most about our faith is not its own strength but its object. Peter therefore emphasizes the divine Being and power of the Savior in

9. Nisbet, *1 & 2 Peter*, 223.

10. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter* (Banner of Truth, 1983), 8.

whom we trust: “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Although some scholars seek to deny it, Peter is not speaking of two persons: the Father as God and Jesus as Savior. Rather, he uses the single definite article “the” for both “God and Savior,” then giving the name “Jesus Christ” to designate the second person of the Trinity.¹¹ Through faith, we possess a Savior who is no less than God himself. The atoning blood on which we rely for forgiveness was the blood of God the Son. The Deliverer who protects us from spiritual attacks is the One who created the heavens and earth by his mere word. The Roman emperor who would soon put Peter to death might style himself as “divine savior,” but Jesus would save Peter from that enemy and receive him into eternal life. Therefore, like doubting Thomas after Jesus displayed to him his resurrected body, we must embrace Jesus in faith with the words “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The Jesus of saving faith is not a cultural reformer or an ethical guru but God the Son, who came to save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

Earlier translations of the Bible rendered 2 Peter 1:1 to emphasize the preciousness of our faith. The King James Version reads that we have received a “like precious faith” with the apostles. The reason for this approach is that the Greek word *isotimos* can be taken as “of equal value.” Peter’s main point, however, is to emphasize the equal standing of our faith with the apostles. Richard Bauckham translates it as “to those who have received a faith which is of equal privilege with ours.”¹² Nonetheless, we must agree that the faith in Christ that we received from God is exceedingly precious to our hearts. Speaking of the righteousness that believers receive from Christ as a gift, R.C. Sproul writes, “There is no doctrine more precious than that of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the account of the believer, because the only righteousness by which we will ever be saved before God is the righteousness of Christ.”¹³

GRACE AND PEACE ABOUNDING

Peter’s opening words identify him as Christ’s slave and apostle, address us as those who have received an equally valid and valuable faith in Jesus

11. The definite article “the” is not seen in our English translations, being replaced by “our.” But in the Greek text, the article is present and factors into the proper translation.

12. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Word, 1983), 167.

13. R.C. Sproul, *1–2 Peter*, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Crossway, 2011), 206.

as God's Son and our Savior, and conclude with a word of blessing: "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2).

Grace is God's saving favor toward those who deserve condemnation but receive mercy instead in Jesus Christ. It is by grace that we are forgiven and in grace that we stand through faith. Peace is the result of grace, so Peter's word order is important. We will never have peace outside Christ, for the simple reason that we are alienated from God and guilty before him. The peace to which Peter refers is "the knowledge that we are fully reconciled to God through Christ, adopted as his children, tenderly cared for and protected in all things."¹⁴

Peter further prays for grace and peace to abound in our experience: "be multiplied to you" (2 Peter 1:2). We tend to measure our success in terms of money, position, or privileges, but Peter sees it in terms of growth in grace and peace. We will never grow in our justification, since we already stand in the perfect righteousness of Christ, imputed to us through faith. But we must grow in our sanctification, by God's grace embracing a more holy life and more godly character. Our faith will never have a better object, since we lay hold of "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 1). But our faith can grow and needs to be stronger, more clearly defined, and more actively expressed. In this way, we will experience more of the peace that we have with God in Jesus Christ.

Peter highlights that grace and peace are multiplied to us "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2). Here, he refers to both the Father and the Son. The key words are "in the knowledge." People today distinguish between head knowledge and heart knowledge, but the Scriptures know no such distinction. Peter refers to personal knowledge of the Father and Son through the study of God's Word in such a way that our hearts are transformed so that we act on what we have come to know.

The apostle highlights the knowledge of God through his Word in the opening and closing passages of this letter. Having begun by saying that grace and peace are multiplied to us in the knowledge of God, he concludes with the benediction: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). We see a similar emphasis in Paul's writing. This is the pivotal application of his letter to the Romans: "Do not be conformed

14. VanDoodewaard, *1 & 2 Peter*, 136.

to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Of course, both Peter and Paul got this emphasis on knowledge from Jesus himself. Our Lord spoke of the freedom that he came to grant, and declared that “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Martin Luther explained the transforming power of God’s Word by describing how an iron rod glows red when it is put into a fire. Just as the fire imparts its heat to the iron, “so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul.”¹⁵ This transformation results from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of Scripture and illuminates its reading and hearing today. Hugh Martin thus wrote, “Christ the Author, the Spirit the Agent, the truth the means, this is the scheme of spiritual liberty.”¹⁶ Spiritual growth comes by the knowledge of God through his Word—knowledge that shines a light in our minds and warms a fire in our hearts.

Peter wrote this letter so that we would be strengthened in grace and peace through the knowledge of God and his Son. Therefore, 2 Peter should be studied not as a theological treatise, but as a letter addressed to us personally on behalf of Christ. Sproul tells of a businessman who had his secretary type out the New Testament letters, chapter by chapter, sending one to him each day in the mail. Every day he received a letter from God and Jesus Christ, addressed to him personally. So it is that we approach 2 Peter today. Sproul writes:

If you got a letter written to you personally from God, you would read it repeatedly until you knew every word and every subtle nuance in the text, because you were being informed by a knowledge that comes from God Himself. I am firmly convinced that we have this very thing in sacred Scripture, which is why we never graduate from the school of Christ. We are to be always learning more deeply, more carefully, and hopefully more accurately the things that are contained in this Word.¹⁷

GROWING STRONG THROUGH GOD’S WORD

Two applications flow from these opening words of Simon Peter. The first concerns the message that we must deliver to the world. Especially in times

15. Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Fortress, 1989), 601.

16. Hugh Martin, *Christ for Us: Sermons of Hugh Martin* (Banner of Truth, 1998), 112.

17. Sproul, *1–2 Peter*, 211–12.

of chaos and confusion, there is a tendency for people to speak of the value of religion or morality. But notice that Peter does not take this approach. Instead, he directs us to the knowledge of God the Father and God the Son, from whom flow the only true grace and peace that this world will ever know. In the gospel, we offer not merely something useful for a season, but a message that is eternally precious. If someone were dying and we knew a doctor who had the cure, we would tell the sufferer with great urgency. Let us therefore not speak merely of political, moral, or religious solutions to the disease of sin that is destroying our generation and its people. Instead, let us preach and witness about a Savior who reigns as God, with grace to forgive and peace to bless. Let us give to our world the knowledge of God that has been committed to us by his Word.

Second, let us honor the apostle's dying wish by being strengthened in our own faith. True faith in Jesus never fails. But it can grow dim. It can suffer neglect. Faith can be put on a shelf where it wields little influence in our daily life and experience. Peter knew that his times needed Christians who were strengthened in faith by what Reformed Christians refer to as the *means of grace*: God's Word, prayer, and the worship of the church, including the sacraments. God has grace and peace to abound in your life, and they will never fail. Let us not fail to embrace them through a faith that has grown strong through the knowledge of God in his Word.

 *Jude*

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

20

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

Jude 1–2

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

(Jude 1–2)



he letter of Jude has been referred to as one of the most neglected books in the New Testament, if not the Bible. For many, Jude may simply be known as the obscure little book right before Revelation. Or perhaps Jude is the book with that wonderful doxology at its close and the familiar call to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The more we begin to unpack this book, however, we will see how helpful and relevant it is for Christians living in dangerous times.

Jude's relative obscurity can be attributed to its brevity, its mistakenly perceived negative tone, its polemical attacks, and its reference to obscure Jewish noncanonical literature. Jude also suffers for its unique relationship to 2 Peter. Fifteen of Jude's twenty-five verses bear a striking similarity to verses in the second chapter of 2 Peter. Scholars have long noted this similarity, offering three possible explanations. One argument is that Jude was using 2 Peter as he wrote his short letter. Another possibility is that Peter

employed the book of Jude as he wrote his final letter. Third, both Peter and Jude might have been relying on an already-existing third source that they adapted for their own purposes. Most scholars today agree that Jude was written first and that Peter adapted Jude's material for his own purposes in writing his second letter.

Despite this consensus, the situation calls for intellectual humility. E. I. Robson urges, "The very fact that arguments either way appear to their maintainers to be of equal cogency, seems to show that on traditional lines we shall never reach a conclusion."¹ The parallels between Jude and 2 Peter, while obvious and in places quite close, are almost never exact in their language. Therefore, it seems best to conclude that it is impossible to be sure who wrote first. Fortunately for Bible readers of 2 Peter and Jude, the question of priority does not affect the meaning or application of either book. Jude wrote for a purpose and in a context, and so did Peter—purposes and contexts that we can only infer from the biblical content.

A related question concerns when Jude was written. Under the theory that Jude was using 2 Peter, he could have written anytime between the mid-A.D. 60s and the 80s, since Peter wrote his second epistle shortly before his death around A.D. 64. But if Peter used Jude, then Jude must have been written before the mid-60s in order to have been read by the famous apostle. The testimony from the church fathers strongly indicates that Jude wrote before Peter's death. This early date contributed positively to Jude's inclusion in the canon (as the authorized collection of books in the Bible is called). For instance, the early-church scholar Origen (A.D. 185–253) referred to this book as "Holy Scripture" and commented that "Jude wrote a letter of few lines, it is true, but filled with the powerful words of heavenly grace."² Jude seems to have had a wide circulation quite early, and concerns about its canonicity arose only later over Jude's use of noncanonical sources.

The genre of Jude is best described as sermonic epistle (also known as a *hortatory letter*). Not only does Jude replicate early Jewish/Christian biblical exposition, but it also ends in a doxology. Moreover, Jude did not employ the customary ancient Greek greeting with its citation of sender and receiver. His

1. E. I. Robson, quoted in Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 18 (InterVarsity Press, 1987), 71.

2. Quoted in Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2008), 4. See pp. 1–9 for a thorough discussion of Jude's canonicity.

own conception seems to be that he was sending this letter as a form of the kind of sermon that he might otherwise deliver in person. As we consider Jude's introduction, we may glean his basic theological approach, transmitted to his early Christian readers by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

A HUMBLE SERVANT OF CHRIST

Who is Jude? He describes himself as the “brother of James” (Jude 1), assuming that his readers will recognize the one to whom he refers. Commentators conclude that Jude has in mind the author of the book of James and the influential leader of the early church in Jerusalem, the James who played such a prominent role in the first church council in Acts 15. Richard Bauckham observes: “Only one early Christian leader was commonly called simply ‘James,’ without the need for further identification . . . ; and only one pair of brothers called James and Judas are known from the New Testament. . . . Jude therefore uses this phrase to identify himself by reference to his more famous brother.”³

From the outset, we notice Jude's humility in his manner of presenting himself. This humility becomes even more apparent when we understand that James and Jude had another even more well-known brother: they were the earthly brothers of Jesus of Nazareth. *The brothers of the Lord* would become an important description in the early church. Bauckham writes, “Their blood relationship to Jesus put them in a special category, in the eyes of the first Christians, and they preferred a title for them which indicated this special category.”⁴ Yet notice that while Jude may lay claim to this “special” title, he does not claim it in writing this letter. In this way, Jude's opening lines tell us something about him as a man: not only does Jude display humility, but he also shows a primary concern for the well-being of the church rather than his own prestige.

The reason for Jude's humility lies in his self-conception as “a servant of Jesus Christ” (Jude 1). The Greek word *doulos*—which Jude uses for “servant”—is often taken to mean “bondservant” or even “slave.” So here is the blood brother of Jesus calling himself a slave of Christ! Before asserting his authority, Jude highlights the authority of Christ, in whose name

3. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Word, 1983), 24.

4. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 23–24.

he speaks. How remarkable these words are from a man who before the resurrection of Jesus did not even believe in the claims of his half-brother! The apostle Paul narrated the postresurrection appearances of Jesus, saying that “he appeared to James” (1 Cor. 15:7). Was Jude present as well when his brother witnessed Jesus’ resurrection? We would think that Jude at least would have learned about Jesus’ resurrection, and given his mother Mary’s involvement with the believing disciples, it seems likely that Jude would have seen Jesus alive after his crucifixion and death, persuading Jude that his half-brother, Jesus, was the promised Messiah and the Son of God. No wonder that, having come to saving faith, Jude regarded himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ,” and thus adopted a humble approach to his identity and ministry.

As Jude writes this sermonic epistle around thirty years after Jesus’ resurrection and his own conversion to faith, he displays a rhetorical brilliance and mastery of Greek vocabulary to go along with his theological depth and pastoral zeal. He now offers his inspired insight as one redeemed by the Lord for service to Jesus. Jude had once believed his brother to be deranged because of his messianic claims (Mark 3:21), but the resurrection of Jesus overwhelmed his skepticism and left him surrendered to the service of his earthly brother as his heavenly Lord.

Having first ascribed ultimate authority to Jesus, Jude in his description of himself as Christ’s servant evokes language that in the Old Testament was a key description of those called to lead God’s people. Among those spoken of as God’s servants were Moses, Joshua, and David. Biblical scholars use the term *Servant of the Lord* for Isaiah’s reference to Jesus, the anticipated Messiah, of whom God said, “Behold my servant” (Isa. 42:1). This title of “servant” was used by Paul and others as one of the humble and quiet ways that they designated their representative authority under the Lord Jesus. J. N. D. Kelly notes, “As a self-designation, however, the title has a special significance: it connotes one who is charged to labour in Christ’s service, i.e., His authorized minister and representative.”⁵ Presenting himself humbly—not making mention of his earthly relationship to Jesus—and describing himself as a servant, Jude writes with the authority of one who has been commissioned by the Lord to lead his people.

5. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (A&C Black, 1969), 242.

TO THE CALLED, BELOVED, AND KEPT

When we consider the audience to whom Jude is writing, we do not have sufficient information from external sources to determine their exact identity. Unlike Paul, who in most of his letters identifies his recipients, Jude does not explicitly address a specific church or churches. Nonetheless, the general descriptions that Jude provides in the second half of verse 1 provide a rich portrait of the believers.

The occasion for Jude's writing was the presence of false teachers and their promotion of immoral conduct. But before he gets to the "shock and awe" attack that will follow, Jude wants to establish his readers in understanding who they are. Throughout the letter, he draws a stark distinction between "you"—his readers—and "these people," referring to those who were troubling the church. His first description identifies his readers as "those who are called." The root of this phrase goes back into the Old Testament and would be a concept familiar to Jude's readers. The idea of *calling* emphasizes God as the initiator who summoned his people into being, going all the way back to the time of Abraham. God called a people to himself to be his people.

What does it mean that Jude's readers are those who have been called? Many Christians today associate Christ's calling merely with his invitation to believe in him. What is sometimes absent is the sovereign nature of God's call. Under this view, the Lord invites and coaxes but does not—will not—compel us to come. Yet this is not what Jude means in speaking of his readers as called ones. In Jude's mind, God's call is effectual.

According to the Bible, to be called by God is to have one's heart pierced and captured by the gospel in the same way that Hosea depicted God's call as the thundering of a lion to his cubs: "when he roars, his children shall come" (Hos. 11:10). Likewise, when Christ gathers his people, the gospel call is effectual. Whereas sin had rendered us helpless to respond to the gospel offer, God's gracious call draws us to himself (John 6:44). Jude's treatment of calling therefore centers not on the response of those who obey the call but on the sovereignty of God in summoning believers. Readers of Jude are never meant to think of themselves as having somehow contributed to their own salvation because of their response to the gospel. We are not the ones who chose God, but those who were chosen and called by God and thus could not help but respond to God's irresistible summons in the gospel. Jesus

The Epistle of Jude

made this link between election and calling explicit: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16).

Jude’s second descriptor for his audience is that they are “beloved in God the Father” (Jude 1). Here is the background of and bedrock underneath the calling. Why did God effectually call each and every believer? It was not because of any merit or worth on the part of those who are called, but rather that God loved his chosen people. As Paul explained, “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5).

Jude says that his readers are “beloved in God the Father”; this idea of being called by the great love of God inspired Isaac Watts to marvel:

Lord, why was I a guest?
Why was I made to hear your voice,
And enter while there’s room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?⁶

Watts answered his own question about the “why” of his own calling with the same affection expressed by Jude: “’Twas the same love that spread the feast / That sweetly drew us in.”⁷ This sovereign love of God stands behind the effectual calling of every believer in the Lord Jesus.

Interestingly, Jude’s readers are said to be beloved *in* God the Father, which is a unique way of stating this love. This expression means “that they are loved by God and that His love enfolds them. As a result of being called, they have fellowship with Him, and in that fellowship experience His love.”⁸ In other words, the love of God is something in which we abide: the Father’s love is not just something directed toward us, but rather something that enfolds us.

In dark and troubling times, when we are tempted to give in to the self-pitying suspicion that “nobody loves us,” Jude would have us remember that we are beloved in God the Father. Peter Davids comments, “Perhaps this could be depicted by a child picked up into a father’s arms and experiencing the father’s love while he or she remains there.”⁹ It is a love that had no beginning, and will continue evermore, never ending, always present. The

6. Isaac Watts, “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place” (1707).

7. Watts, “How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place.”

8. Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 243.

9. Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2006), 37.

Christian is enfolded in the love of God, swaddled like a baby in the love of God the Father.

Jude continues with a third reassuring idea for his readers to adopt: they are “kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude 1). We have been called. We have been and are being loved. But despite this gracious backdrop to our salvation, can we hope to make it to salvation in the end? Jude answers that God preserves and protects his called and beloved people. Christians face many trials and suffer from great weakness. But we trust a faithful and mighty God who keeps his people for salvation in the end.

The word “kept” implies an ongoing state, as a treasure is specially prized and is carefully preserved. Not only were Jude’s readers once objects of God’s love and preserving care, but they also continue to be the objects of his love and safekeeping. Moreover, we are being kept for Jesus Christ, referring to the return of our Lord in his second coming. Douglas Moo writes, “Being kept for Jesus Christ means that God throughout this life exercises his power on behalf of Christians to preserve them spiritually intact until the coming of Jesus Christ in glory.”¹⁰

Furthermore, “being kept” is written in the passive mood, implying that we are not the ones doing the keeping; we are kept. God himself is our Keeper. Jesus spoke of the Father’s keeping will in John 6:39: “this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” He added in John 10:27–29: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Similarly, in John 17:11, Jesus prayed, “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” We see, therefore, that the keeping of God’s people is the combined work of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. How well kept we all are in Christ!

It brings comfort to our concerns for assurance in salvation to examine each of Jude’s three descriptions—“called,” “beloved,” and “kept”—individually. But we may savor them best by considering the three together. Jude’s construction of the second half of verse 1 is a bit awkward when put in English, so we translate it as a series of three things. Yet in reality, Jude sandwiches all three elements into one rich, spiritually nourishing statement.

10. Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 1996), 223.

Taken literally, the second part of verse 1 sounds like this: “to those who are beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, called ones.” All three elements are packaged together to form our identity as believers in Christ.

Before long, Jude will exhort his readers to contend for the faith and will issue stern warnings concerning false teachers. But first he lays the foundation of a Christian’s identity, reaching back into eternity past and into the heart of the Father’s love. Jude also looks forward all the way to the eternal glory for which we are currently being preserved. Here is the foundation that lies beneath any call to Christian faithfulness and obedience: the faithfulness and love of God. Jude’s opening lines, together with the doxology at the end, form an *inclusio*—bookends—reminding the saints that God is able to preserve them. Their inheritance, though under assault by false teachers, is being kept safe and secure in the grace of God. This teaching gives us a timeline perspective on our brief life in this world. In the past we were loved and called, at present we are being loved, and we will be loved in the future. Whatever our future holds, believers are being kept for that day when Christ returns.

The language of Jude 1 also provides a historical connection with the ancient people of God. God called a people in the Old Testament, which uses the same three descriptions that Jude uses for Christian believers. All three of the categories in Jude 1 are cited in the Servant Songs of Isaiah—pointing forward to the coming Jesus and describing the final, eschatological people of God who are in Christ (Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). “Called,” “beloved,” and “kept” is language describing the people to whom the promises of God were given. The recipients of this letter—those who are called, beloved of God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ—receive the same eternal covenant love in Christ that had always been in the hearts of God’s true people. Therefore, before we don our battle gear in the war that Jude is going to wage against false teaching and lawlessness, we must not look to self and circumstances, but must constantly remember who we are in Christ, what God has done for us, and what he is doing now in and for us, what the Lord will continue to do for our salvation until the last day comes.

JUDE’S PRAYER WISH

The third part of Jude’s introduction—after presenting himself and describing his audience—issues an appeal on their behalf. Jude concludes

his salutation with a confident prayer: “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you” (Jude 2).

First, Jude pleads for the Lord to show mercy on his people. In the Old Testament, mercy was often presented in terms of steadfast love. In the New Testament, mercy is fleshed out as the saving mercy of God in Christ Jesus, culminating on the last day in the final judgment when believers in Jesus receive forgiveness and justification at his hand.

Next, the peace that Jude confidently asks for his people is reconciliation with God. Formerly, we were at war with God in our sin, but now in Christ we are at peace with God. Furthermore, Jude’s Jewish background understood peace in terms of the holistic wellness associated with the word *shalom*. Matthew Harmon explains, “In the Old Testament, peace communicated the state of wholeness and completeness that would result when God consummated his promises”¹¹ (Isa. 32:15–18; 48:18; 52:7; 53:5; 54:10).

Third, Jude prays for God’s love to be multiplied to his readers. Having received mercy and knowing peace, every believer is blessed to experience more and more a sense of the love of God. More than likely, since he has already talked about the love of God, Jude also has in focus a growing love toward others that is an overflow of our experience of God’s love in our hearts. Once again, it is all three blessings together that the reader is meant to take heart in. When we combine God’s mercy, peace, and love and see his grace multiplying, we can hardly imagine a more comprehensive pastoral greeting.

Jude says, “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.” Normally in an ancient greeting, these words would be listed without a verb, so Jude’s use of “be multiplied to you” intensifies his meaning. He intends this triple blessing to mature into an exponentially growing blessing. We will discover that Jude’s readers are in great need of these blessings in their state of spiritual danger from without and within. Again, the use of the passive mood indicates that it is God who will do the multiplying of these graces in their lives. It turns out that Jude prays for the things most relevant to our lives: to know the mercy of God in Christ, to know peace with God and the well-being and flourishing peace that comes with experiencing reconciliation with the Almighty, and to know the love of God so that we might love others all the

11. Matthew S. Harmon, “2 Peter and Jude,” in *Hebrews-Revelation*, ESV Expository Commentary 12 (Crossway, 2018), 507.

more. These are blessings that every human soul deeply longs for, and God will multiply them in the experience of his people.

One implication of Jude's prayer is that the believers already possess these blessings: you cannot multiply something that you do not already have. They have already experienced mercy, peace, and love. All Christians must remember that we have experienced the saving mercy of God! We have peace with him and know love from him, which we are empowered to show to others. The second implication of Jude's prayer is that Christians need more and more of these graces. We therefore should not be content to remain where we are in our Christian experience. Our experience as believers of knowing God's mercy and love, together with peace under his sovereign protective care, is not a check-off-the-box item in order to move on to other things. These blessings are the ocean in which we swim; they are the foundation on which our Christian lives are built.

FROM ONE WHO WAS CALLED

Although Jude opens his letter in a form that is fairly standard for letters of his day, he does so in a way that is so much more than standard. This humble, zealous, and eager servant of the Lord Jesus wants his readers to know where their hope is found so that they will live accordingly. How could a man such as Jude make such grand and majestic assumptions about his readers? How could he offer such a bold appeal with such great confidence? The answer is that he was a man who knew himself as one who had been called, was beloved, and was being kept.

We briefly noted Jude's former unbelief, stated in John 7:5: "not even his brothers believed in him." This rejection shows us the sobering truth that merely being in the presence of Jesus is not sufficient for salvation. Likewise, today, sitting in a Christian worship service does not make someone a Christian. J. C. Ryle writes about Jesus' earthly brothers: "seeing Christ's miracles, hearing Christ's teaching, living in Christ's own company, were not enough to make men believers. The mere possession of spiritual privileges never yet made any one a Christian."¹²

But Jude did know the Lord. Formerly, he had not believed, but now he had committed his life to Christ as a servant. In Acts 1:14, we find the broth-

12. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Baker, 1999), 2:2.

ers of Jesus gathered with the other believers in the upper room after the resurrection, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. Jude would go from an unbeliever and a scoffer to one who would play a vital role in the early church: one who would write a letter for our sake, for those who would read it two millennia later. Jude thus writes as one who has been called, knows himself beloved by God, and is being kept for salvation to the last. As a result, his short letter amounts to an invitation to any who have not yet come to know Jesus as Savior. Jude invites all to come and believe in the Redeemer who calls sinners out of darkness, who has loved his people from eternity past, and who will guard, preserve, and keep them for all eternity. Then, having come to know Jesus in saving faith—knowing that we love him because he first loved us—we must keep ourselves in faith with the confidence that he is keeping us until that great day when we will see him face to face. The good news is that Christ is still calling sinners to salvation, using us as those who have been called to convey his call to all the world, that he might bring a great host of grateful people into his glory forever.