

MIGUEL NUNEZ 2 PETER & JUDE FOR YOU

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2 Peter and Jude For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *2 Peter and Jude For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary toward the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

Bible translations used:

NIV: New International Version (this is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated)

NLT: New Living Translation

ESV: English Standard Version

INTRODUCTION TO 2 PETER & JUDE

Over recent years we have witnessed the fall of a significant number of church leaders from many different backgrounds. The reasons have varied from one case to another, but often there have been issues of illicit sexuality, mishandling of finances, abuse of power and authority, and substance abuse, among a few others.

Every single case has been sad and painful. Yes, painful is the right word. These leaders have been looked up to by many as examples of godliness and gifting. When they fall away so catastrophically, we wonder what is going on. What happened to them? How did they start drifting? Didn't God warn them ahead of time? Of course, God did! I am sure he did—more than once and in more than one way. They just refused to pay attention to the warning signs. They refused to heed the apostle Paul's advice: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Many of these leaders were running the Christian race well at some point in their lives; but then they stumbled and fell. And this is something that could happen to any one of us—church leaders and church members alike—however well we are running today.

The reality is that these failures of faith and morality have been happening since the birth of the church and even before. Peter and Jude knew that first-hand. The brothers and sisters they were writing to were new believers, and they were experiencing persecution; in those circumstances, they had fallen under the influence of false teachers, who were sexually immoral, financially greedy and power-hungry. A terrible combination for a newborn church! The two letters that this book explores, 2 Peter and Jude, show a deep concern for the future of the faith of the believing communities they are addressing. Peter and Jude write with an intense sense of urgency about the danger of **apostasy*** under the pressure of wrong teaching and immoral leaders. They write to help their readers to stand firm.

* Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 147).

Introduction

The danger of stumbling is as real today as it has been throughout the course of human history. Our generation is especially vulnerable to moral temptations which come to us via television and social media—temptations which are accessible, anonymous and affordable. We are also constantly bombarded with ideas totally contrary to the word of God from every part of our culture. The internet offers all kinds of teachings, bad as well as good, 24 hours a day.

Lies even come from within the church itself. In the last two or three decades we have seen the spread around the globe of the prosperity gospel—whose preachers promise material blessing from God. We have seen the adoption of pragmatism into the heart of churches, tempting us to think that what makes an activity worthwhile or not is the impact it has rather than what Scripture says about it. We have seen the “name it and claim it” movement, in which people are taught that there is power in our words to convert our desires into reality. We have heard teachers of the word undermining the value of God’s law in favor of a super-grace that sounds more like license to sin. There are also issues surrounding social justice—an important topic, yet one which, if approached from the wrong angle, may threaten the centrality of the gospel.

As you can see, Satan never ceases to find a way to attack the church of Jesus Christ. He is doing what he has done since the very beginning—trying to divert our attention from the truth and lure us away from our God. When someone falls away—whether that shows itself in their false teachings or in their moral failings—they have believed Satan’s lies.

Truth and the Church

Pastor and theologian John Stott once wrote, “The church’s greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it, but those inside who try to change the gospel” (*The Message of Galatians*, p 23). If we lose the gospel, we lose the church, because the former leads to the latter. Truth is what anchors


the church. This is why the apostle Paul fought so hard to maintain the purity of the gospel message:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!” (Galatians 1:6-9)

Once truth has become negotiable, we can easily predict the consequences: division (which happened in the early church at Corinth); loss of the gospel (at Galatia); philosophical ideas becoming attractive (at Colossae); weakening of the first love (at Ephesus); a personal relationship with Christ becoming mere religiosity (at Sardis); the faith becoming lukewarm (at Laodicea); and in time, believers falling away altogether. What begins as a distortion of doctrine changes our thinking; and sooner or later, a changed mind gives birth to a sinful or an immoral lifestyle.

Both Peter and Jude know the weight of the issue: the gospel is at stake, and so the salvation of men and women is also at stake. As we study these two letters, we will see that they are about the preservation of the truth and, therefore,

the preservation of the church. In our day as in theirs, we need both men and women who are willing “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude v 3).



These letters are about the preservation of the truth – and the preservation of the church.

Outlines and Authorship

Before we study these letters, there are a few important facts to note. Apparently, Origen (AD 184 – 253) was the first **Church Father** to endorse 2 Peter as a canonical letter—part of **inspired** Scripture. This late acceptance may seem like a bad sign; but, in reality, it is good to know that the early church was careful and took its time in deciding the canonicity of each book of the Bible. It's clear that Peter is the author—he says so (1:1), and he also alludes to experiences we know Peter had (1:16-18). According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down by the Emperor Nero, who died in AD 68. Therefore, this letter must have been written before that time. Most believe that it was probably written around AD 67.

Here is a brief outline of 2 Peter:

1. Salutation (1:1-2)
2. Standing firm in what you know (1:3-21)
3. Standing firm against false teachers (2:1-22)
4. Standing firm until the Lord returns (3:1-18)

Regarding the **epistle** of Jude, we have some early evidence to believe that the author, who identifies himself as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” (1:1), was the half-brother of Jesus. Some discussions have occurred since the early-church era regarding the letter's canonicity, especially since Jude quotes some nonbiblical sources (Jude v 9, 14-15). However, it was accepted as canonical and ascribed to Jude as early as the 2nd century (see Elmer L. Towns and Ben Gutierrez, *The Essence of the New Testament*, p 319). It is judged to have been written between AD 60 and 70, on the basis that “scoffers are referred to as future in 2 Peter 3:3 and they are present in Jude 18” (Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament*, p 305).

Here is a brief outline of Jude:

1. Contending for the faith (v 1-7)

2. Condemnation for the false teachers (v 8-16)

3. Certainty of salvation until the end (v 17-25)

When it comes to our Christian walk, remaining on track is, on one level, the responsibility of each one of us. Peter says, “Make every effort to confirm your calling and **election**. For if you do [the things he has just listed], you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10). But at another level, finishing well is the work of God in us. Jude acknowledges that “kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude v 1): God is the one, in the end, who can keep us from stumbling (v 24). It is through pursuing him, and throwing ourselves on his mercy, that we will make it to the end of the race—to be presented before his glorious throne “without fault and with great joy” (v 24).

It is important, as you begin, to approach these letters as being fully inspired by God, which makes them inerrant and infallible; to pray for illumination of your understanding by the Spirit; to adopt a humble and teachable attitude; and to decide to obey their content. God will then bless the studying of his word.

1. HOW TO KEEP FROM STUMBLING

In the first chapter of his letter, Peter begins by helping us see how to run the race of the Christian life well. The final words of this first section read, “If you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter **1:10-11***). This is what Peter is leading up to throughout **1:1-11**.

Peter writes with a sense of urgency and intensity. It’s important to know why. What was happening was that false teachers were seeking to entice true disciples away from their Savior. Peter is desperate to ensure that the believers will not follow this dangerous path. He wants them to make it to the “rich welcome” that is waiting for them if they remain faithful to their Lord.

In 2:20-22, Peter will speak about how these false teachers had denied the holy commandment. Apparently, from what could be seen on the surface, these **apostates** had experienced salvation—or, at least, had been involved in some sort of encounter that led them to believe that they were in a state of salvation. In other words, they had seemed on the surface to accept Jesus as Lord. However, even after enjoying the Lord’s blessings, they had gone back to involving themselves in the corruption and pleasures of this world. Peter refers to these people as being blind: they had forgotten about the purification of their sins, which they had experienced the moment they believed (**1:9**).

* All 2 Peter and Jude verse references being looked at in each chapter part are in **bold**.

As we read further along in 2 Peter, we begin to realize that the group being discussed here had abandoned Christian morality. They had embraced sexual immorality, drunkenness, and gluttony (2:13). These men lived without law. They were rebelling against the Lord's commandments. In 2:19, Peter says they are nothing more than slaves of corruption—yet at the same time they are promising freedom to those who follow their teaching.

These pretenders inside the church did not take a passive stand; they actively tried to win over the disciples to their way of thinking and behaving. Their sinful practices were founded on untrue teachings about God, and they sought to persuade others to believe those teachings. They argued that the future judgment would never take place, and as a result they denied that the Lord would come in judgment (3:3-4). You can see why that would lead them to embrace immoral behavior; if there was to be no justice in the end, there was no obligation to act justly now.

This combination of **heretical** doctrine and sinful behavior was proving seductive, especially to those who were “unstable”—perhaps new believers or those who were especially tempted by particular sins such as sexual immorality. Peter was deeply concerned that those who were weak in the faith might be dragged away to follow the false teachers' lies. He knew that if these practices were allowed—and this is true of any church at any time—the end result would not only be the introduction of **heresy** but also the destruction of the overall stability of the congregation. This is why Peter is writing his letter.

Making Introductions

As soon as we begin to read, we notice that the author identifies himself by his first name, which was typical of 1st-century letters: “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Simon, which was his original name, comes from the Hebrew language; it was a very familiar and common name in 1st-century Israel. But

Christ himself renamed Simon with the Greek name Peter, which means “rock” (he is also called “Cephas,” which is the Aramaic word for the same thing). Here, both names are being used—“Simon Peter”—which was not unusual at that time.

Peter calls himself “a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” “Servant” is the translation of the Greek word *doulos*, which literally means “slave.” Peter is referring to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. But he is not trying to show humility, necessarily. Rather, the word “slave” conveys the idea of belonging to someone else—and in this case to our Lord Jesus Christ. In ancient Israel, the word was sometimes used of slaves who could have gone free during the Year of **Jubilee** (see Leviticus 25) but decided to stay with their owner out of love (Exodus 21:5-6). Perhaps this is the type of slavery Peter has in mind.

The word “apostle” denotes those chosen by Christ and charged with the responsibility of leading the early church. Peter is not trying to demonstrate superiority over anyone by using this word. Rather, he is emphasizing that he has the authority to write this letter.

Next, Peter identifies his audience: “Those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter **1:1**). Peter is aware that even though he is an apostle, the quality and caliber of his faith is no different from that of the rest of us—who have also believed as he did. Our faith is “as precious as” that of the apostles.

In passing, Peter explains how we received our faith: “by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” In other words, we have not received faith through our works or our own merits. Rather, we have received this faith as a gift of **grace** from Jesus Christ himself, who went to the cross and shed blood on our behalf. This sets us apart from any false teachers who say that salvation is obtained by some special knowledge that others do not have (as **Gnostics** believed in the 1st century) or through works of merit. As true disciples of Jesus Christ, we do work to be righteous; but we do it after being empowered by grace. It is through Jesus that we receive righteousness.

In **verse 2**, Peter greets the recipients of the letter by using the expression “grace and peace.” Peter helps us to see that grace and peace are received as the result of the redeeming work of Christ: “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Without this knowledge, there is no possible way to enjoy these blessings to which Peter is referring. With it, they are ours “in abundance.”

God's Promises for Our Walk

What follows is an extraordinary **revelation** from the writing of the apostle Peter. “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” (**v 3**). The day we are born again, we are blessed beyond measure in two different ways. We are not only saved from the **wrath** of God; we are also equipped by God to live the life we have just received. Since we do not possess in ourselves the power to grow in holiness, God sends his Spirit—the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9)—to dwell within us. We no longer simply have “God with us,” but, even better, God *within* us. This is the Spirit who empowers all of us as believers to live a life worthy of our calling—a life in which we turn away from sin and draw nearer to God. We were called from worldliness to godliness—that is, to a moral life that honors God.


The power to live in such a distinctive manner has been received “through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter **1:3**). The more we know God in Christ, the more we become like him. God has provided *everything* we need to live a victorious life to the very end as we follow the Spirit’s leading.

But if our growth in the knowledge of God stagnates, we return to the practices we had before we were redeemed. The Christian who does not live a life of moral excellence is resisting the power of the Spirit dwelling within them. This is the main cause of our failures.

God has given promises to those who believe in him, and these promises have the power to aid us in our walk with him. This truth

appears in the very next verse. Our God “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” (v 4). The New Living Translation (NLT) expresses it this way: “These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.” In other words, if we as Christians truly come to trust in the promises the Lord has given us, we will see that they are an enormous help as we face the difficulties and temptations of this world.

Hebrews 11 gives many examples of this. It refers to the joyful end of the Old Testament heroes, who trusted in the promises of God and as a result did not waver in their faith. They saw the things God had promised from afar and “welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13). When we trust God with all our heart and mind, his promises are an encouragement to us—serving, as it were, as a faith fertilizer or an empowering tool so that we may endure suffering as we carry out God’s purposes. **Abraham** is a particularly good example: “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered **Isaac** as a sacrifice. He who had *embraced the promises* was about to sacrifice his one and only son” (Hebrews 11:17, emphasis added). If Abraham was capable of being such a great witness while living under the **old covenant**, just by believing in God’s promises, how much more should we be able to live a life of faith now that we have received a wider revelation and “better promises” (Hebrews 8:6)? To put it bluntly, by comparison with **Job**, **Moses**, **Jeremiah**, and **Daniel**—just to mention a few—we are wimps.



God’s promises are a faith fertilizer, an empowering tool.

Given what we have learned in the initial four verses of this letter, we can see two reasons why believers compromise their Christian walk:

- They stop growing in the knowledge of God (2 Peter **1:3**).
- They forget the powerful promises Peter alludes to (**v 4**).

God knows very well the effect on us of the knowledge of himself and the understanding of his ways. To know God better is to grow in Christ-likeness.

So we must each ask ourselves: Am I growing? Or am I stagnating? How real are the promises of God to me?

Remember, through the power and the promises of God we have become partakers of God's divine nature and can escape "the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (**v 4**). That reality makes the entire difference.

Questions for reflection

1. God has given us everything we need for a godly life. So why do you think believers can have such a difficult time living a life of obedience?
2. According to what we studied at the beginning of this chapter, what is the difference between the teachers of the true gospel and the teachers of the false gospel?
3. Which promises of God do you find yourself doubting? Why? How could you take hold of those promises today?