

“A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL”

“Learning From the Lessons of History”

Scripture Reading – II Peter, 1:19 – 2:10a

We have the word of the prophets made more certain, 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. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

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. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 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.

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; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men – for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.

If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

‘Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In 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.’

Jude, 1:5-7, NIV

This series, ‘A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL’, is based on THE LETTER OF JUDE.

To protect from harm, to guard from attack, to repulse enemies – for centuries rugged defenders have built walls, launched missiles, and waged wars, expending materiel and human resources in the battle to save cities and nations. With total commitment and courageous abandon, individuals have fought for their families. It is a rule of life that we fight for survival, defending with all our strength what is most precious to us, from every real or imagined attack.

There are many people who live in opposition to God and his followers.

They twist God's truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary, but God's truth must go forth, carried and defended by those who have committed their lives to God's Son. It is an important task, an awesome responsibility, and a profound privilege to have this commission.

This was Jude's message to Christians everywhere.

Opposition would come and godless teachers would arise, but Christians must ‘**CONTEND FOR THE FAITH**’ by rejecting all falsehood and immorality, remembering God's mighty acts of rescue and punishment, and the warnings of the apostles. His readers are encouraged to build up their own faith through prayer, keeping close to Christ, helping others, and hating sin. Finally, Jude concludes with a glorious benediction of praise to God.

There are many false teachers waiting to destroy your Christ-centred life, the credibility of God's Word, and the unity of the Body of Christ. THE LETTER OF JUDE calls Christians to stand firm in their faith and defend God's truth at all costs, because nothing else is more valuable...

“LEARNING FROM THE LESSONS OF HISTORY”

As you know, I prefer to lead worship and preach using a wireless microphone.

As I stand before you, I have a little microphone on my person that is linked to a transmitter, that sends a signal to a receiver, which is then amplified through the sound system, and so the voice that comes out of my mouth is heard through the speakers that surround you. I used a similar system at Uxbridge, and one Sunday evening, one of the soldiers sat listening to the meeting in her car. Clever stuff! But as you know, the system we have is not perfect, and some times we get strange noises and interference. At Hull Central, when we watched THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST, we heard a taxi driver's conversation with his booking office as he sat outside.

*The story goes that **Jack Taylor** was preaching using similar technology when another voice was suddenly heard that said, “HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP SAYING THAT?” and without breaking stride, he just said, “UNTIL THEY FINALLY GET IT!”.*

*There is another story that **John Wesley** preached the same sermon to his congregation from one Sunday morning to the next until someone finally asked him why. Wesley is reputed to have replied, “UNTIL YOU HEAR WHAT I AM SAYING, AND YOU CARRY IT OUT!”.*

That is the same way that Jude was.

Jude knew that his readers were already familiar with the important truths of Scripture, but he still wanted to remind them of some important events in history, thereby refreshing their memories about the important truths he felt he had to proclaim.

‘Though you already know all this, I want to remind you.’

Jude, 1:5a, NIV

Jude warned those who were perverting the creed and conduct of the church.

He told them that he was, in fact, doing nothing more than reminding them of things of which they were perfectly well aware. In a sense it is true to say that all preaching within the Christian Church is not so much bringing to men new truth as confronting them with truth they already know, but have forgotten, or are disregarding. In a very real sense, ‘IF IT IS NEW, IT IS NOT TRUE!’

There are certain truths of which we need to be reminded.

This is a good lesson for all of us, not just those of us who are preachers! You should never assume that because people once heard something they still know it, remember it, or act upon it. You may have to say something over and over and over again before it becomes effective.

It was Jude’s intention to help us learn from the true lessons of history.

To understand the first two examples which Jude cites from history we must understand one thing. The ‘CREEPERS, SNEAKERS, AND WORMERS’ who were corrupting the Church did not regard themselves as enemies of the Church or of Christianity; they regarded themselves as the advanced thinkers, a cut above the ordinary Christian, the spiritual elite, if you will. Jude chose his examples to make it clear that, even if a man has received the greatest privileges, he may still fall away into disaster; and even those who have received the greatest privileges from God cannot consider themselves safe, but must be on constant watch against the mistaken.

‘These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!’

1 Corinthians, 10:11-12, NIV

1. FALLING AWAY DESPITE PROFESSION

‘Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.’

Jude, 1:5, NIV

Jude’s first example was from the history of Israel (see Numbers, Ch’s 13 & 14).

The mighty hand of God had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt – What greater act of deliverance could there be than that? The guidance of God had brought the people safely across the desert to the borders of the Promised Land – What greater demonstration of his providence could there be than that? At the border of the Promised Land, at Kadesh Barnea, spies were sent out to scout out the land before the invasion took place.

With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, all the spies came back with the opinion that the dangers ahead were so terrible and the people so strong, that they could never win their way into the Promised Land. The people rejected the report of Caleb and Joshua, who alone were for going on, and accepted the report of those who insisted that the case was hopeless.

This was a clear act of disobedience to God, and a complete lack of faith in him.

The consequence was that God gave sentence that of these people, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, all those over twenty years of age would never enter the Promised Land but would wander in the wilderness until they were all dead.

The interesting thing is that all of the Israelites had a religious experience.

They all witnessed the shedding of the blood of the lambs. They all witnessed the Passover. They all witnessed the miracle of the Red Sea. They all saw the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. They were there when Moses came down the slopes of Mount Horeb clutching the Ten Commandments. They all ate their daily fill of manna and quail. They all wandered the desert for years without their clothes or shoes wearing out, and not once did their feet swell up. They all participated in all of that, yet some did not really have faith in God.

Some people, who are PROFESSING Christians, are not POSSESSING Christians.

They talk the talk but do they walk the walk? Even in the time of the Exodus, God’s people claimed to believe, but when the crunch came, their actions were remarkably different to their beliefs. They were with the people of God but they never really believed. They were guilty of the sin of apostasy, and God judged them accordingly.

Have you met people who say that they used to be Salvationists?

I am sure that you meet a few of them! They seem quite happy to tell you what they used to do in the Army, but now things are so much different. Instead of worshipping on Sundays, it is now a family day for them. They have no real interest in again joining in the worship and fellowship of the Corps. Get them talking about their hopes of spending eternity in Heaven and you may hear of their conversion experience. They will tell you that they are still certain because they knelt at the Mercy Seat when they were seven to ask Jesus to come into their heart.

The important question is not ‘WERE YOU SAVED’ but ‘ARE YOU SAVED’.

The Bible never tells us to look for the assurance of our salvation to an event that happened many years ago. The proof of your salvation should be sitting in your chair right now. Instead of looking back to a past profession of faith, we should be looking to a present possession of faith. In other words, is the person sitting in your chair right now believing in Jesus Christ, and him alone for salvation? Is Jesus Christ real to you today? Do you have a changed life? Does God’s Spirit witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?

Do not be like the Israelites who, despite having a religious experience, did not believe God.

2. FALLING AWAY DESPITE POSITION

‘And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.’

Jude, 1:6, NIV

The Jews believed in a fall of the angels, and there are two lines of tradition.

THE FIRST FALL WAS DUE TO PRIDE AND REBELLIOUSNESS

This tradition gathered especially around the name of Lucifer, the lightbringer, the son of the morning. As the Bible states: **‘HOW ART THOU FALLEN FROM HEAVEN, O LUCIFER, SON OF THE MORNING’** (see **Isaiah, 14:12, KJV**).

When the seventy disciples returned from their mission and told Jesus of their successes, he warned them against pride, saying: **“I SAW SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTNING FROM HEAVEN”** (see **Luke, 10:18**). The idea is that there was a civil war in heaven. The angels rose up against God and were cast out; and Lucifer was the leader of that rebellion.

THE SECOND FALL WAS DUE TO LUST AND IMMORALITY

This tradition finds its scriptural echo in **Genesis, 6:1-4**. In this line of thought, the angels, attracted by the beauty of mortal women, left heaven to seduce them and so sinned.

In effect Jude takes these two ideas and puts them together.

He wrote the angels left **‘THEIR POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY’** – they aimed at an office which was not for them. He also wrote that they **‘ABANDONED THEIR OWN HOME’** – they came to earth to live with the daughters of men. All this seems strange to us because it moves in a world of thought and traditions from which we have moved away. But Jude’s warning is clear. Two things brought ruin to the angels – they abandoned their position through pride and lust.

There is a lot that we do not understand about all this, but the point of the matter is that these angels, once bright, shining, holy creatures, serving and worshipping God in eternity were filled with pride and rebellion, lust and immorality, and are now bound in chains awaiting judgement.

God is warning us that we can be destroyed despite of our position.

You may be an Officer, or a Local Officer, or an Activity Leader, or a Sunday School teacher... but if the mighty angels can fall from their position of authority, do you not seriously think that the same can happen to you? **‘HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN’** warns **II Samuel, 1:15b, 27a**.

William Temple’s greatest fear was hearing Jesus say: “I NEVER KNEW YOU”.

‘Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”.’

Matthew, 7:21-23, NIV

Do not be like the angels who, despite having position in heaven, chose their pride and lust.

3. FALLING AWAY DESPITE PRIVILEGE

‘In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.’

Jude, 1:7a, NIV

The letters of II PETER and JUDE cite these cities as an example to warn the ungodly.

When you combine their descriptions, you discover that the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah (and the surrounding towns) were: ungodly, filthy, wicked, unlawful, unjust, and given over to fornication. They did not occasionally commit unnatural sexual sins; they indulged in them and gave themselves over to the pursuit of lust.

The Greek verb ‘EKPORNEUO’ means ‘TO INDULGE IN EXCESSIVE IMMORALITY’.

This was their way of life – and their way of death! The citizens were condemned for their **‘SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND PERVERSION’**. The bent of their life was constantly downward, indulging in unnatural acts.

‘God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another... Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.’

Romans, 1:24, 26-27, NIV

At one time, Sodom and Gomorrah were the most beautiful cities on earth.

When Abram and Lot separated, the old patriarch allowed his nephew to choose his own destination. Lot chose to pitch his tents near Sodom, not because of the city’s immorality, but because **‘THE PLAIN OF THE JORDAN WAS WELL WATERED, LIKE THE GARDEN OF THE LORD’**. In those days, this was the place to be – they were beautiful cities set in outstanding countryside.

However, the cities were also a hive for sexual immorality and perversion.

Lot soon discovered that Sodom was a quagmire of sin and degradation. It did not take him long to see that the citizens were wicked and greatly sinning against the Lord. Lot was not immune to the effects of their sinfulness. When two angels came to warn him of the imminent destruction of the city, Lot offered his two virgin daughters to the sex mad men, both young and old, who surrounded his home demanding sexual activity with the two visitors!

Notorious for their sins, these cities were obliterated by the fire of God.

George Adam Smith in **‘THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY LAND’** points out that no incident in history has ever made such an impression on the Jewish people, and that Sodom and Gomorrah are time and time again used in Scripture as the examples par excellence of the sin of man and the judgment of God – they are so used even by Jesus himself. Smith writes: **‘THE GLARE OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH IS FLUNG DOWN THE WHOLE LENGTH OF SCRIPTURE HISTORY’**.

This disaster was localised in the dreadful desert in the region of the Dead Sea, a region which Smith calls: **‘THIS AWFUL HOLLOW, THIS BIT OF THE INFERNAL REGIONS COME TO THE SURFACE, THIS HELL WITH THE SUN SHINING INTO IT’**. It was there that the cities were said to have been; and it was said that under that scorched and barren earth there still smouldered an eternal fire of destruction. It was with fire and brimstone that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

That awful desert scene was only one day's journey from Jerusalem and men never forgot this divine judgment of sin.

What happens when a nation turns from the truth to vile sin?

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, they were destroyed by fire and brimstone. But what about the United Kingdom? There was a time when people knew the truths of God, but now many actively turn his grace into a license for immorality. First there was apostasy in the church and in the pulpit, now there is vileness and wickedness and sodomy in the land.

Do not be like the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah who, despite having privilege, and living in an earthly paradise, chose to live lives of depraved sinfulness.

"THE EXAMPLE OF THE LESSONS OF HISTORY"

'They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.'
Jude, 1:7b, NIV

Up until the early 1800's the indigenous people of Hawaii, who claimed to be descended from the goddess Pele, performed human sacrifices to the goddess of the volcano. They would erect altars beside the lava streams that flowed from Mount Kilauea. They believed Pele was a sorceress that had to be continuously appeased by human sacrifices; otherwise she would make life on the islands miserable for them. They would take the warriors they had captured in battle up to the summit and engage in an elaborate ceremony with drums and dancing before throwing their hapless victims into the molten lava of the volcano.

Modern day scientists have calculated that it would take seven-tenths of a second to die...

DURING THE FIRST TENTH OF A SECOND

The clothing catches fire and the hair is seared from the body. The epidermis layer of skin is seared off immediately and the fluids – those miniscule amounts of liquid contained in your sweat glands, your hair follicles, and your fat cells, are vaporised. With two layers of skin gone, every sensory nerve cell in your body is exposed to the searing heat. You would feel an unrelenting agony as your body is engulfed in the molten lava.

DURING THE SECOND TENTH OF A SECOND

The surface liquid in the eyes and the wax in the ears boils and evaporates away. The eyeballs implode as the liquid inside them turns into a yellowish gas.

DURING THE THIRD TENTH OF A SECOND

The skeletal muscles constrict uncontrollably, and the body is contorted into a grotesque foetal position. You would feel the involuntary muscle spasm because of a mighty rush of adrenal fluid surging through your veins. The adrenal glands would be hopelessly trying to

reduce the constrictions of your intestinal muscles and your colon. This extra surge of adrenal fluid causes the blood to race through every vessel in the body.

DURING THE FOURTH TENTH OF A SECOND

The blood in the arteries, veins and capillaries boils as the body temperature instantly rises from 98.6 degrees to about 2,100 degrees.

DURING THE FIFTH TENTH OF A SECOND

As you attempt to scream in pain and terror, the super-heated air immediately sears your oesophagus and lungs. The lungs collapse, as the fibres inside them curl up like charred nylon, causing you to panic at the sensation of being suffocated. The last smell you would be aware of is the putrefying stench of your own burning flesh.

DURING THE SIXTH TENTH OF A SECOND

The tendons and ligaments begin to exert a force upon the large bones of your body – those found in your arms, legs, and neck. The force is so great that several of these bones snap like small twigs. The bone marrow – both the fatty yellow marrow and the red pasty marrow – are transformed into a noxious gas, and as this gas expands it causes every bone in your body to detonate.

DURING THE SEVENTH TENTH OF A SECOND

The large internal organs begin to convulse as the superheated air penetrates into your body cavity. You would feel your heart pounding as it tries desperately to pump blood through an arterial system that has been ruptured in a thousand places. The heart, liver, and kidneys all start to quake and shrivel up. Whilst this is happening, your brain is trying desperately to communicate with the rest of your body warning it to retreat from the all-consuming heat.

Then, as the skull explodes, the entire brain is exposed to the molten lava. First to go was the ability to see, then speech, then hearing, then smell. The last thing to go is the temporal lobe – the area of the brain that stores memory.

You would see visions of your mother and father, your spouse, your children – you will never be able to see them or laugh and play with them again. You will never be able to hold their hand, or kiss them, or feel their loving touch. If you wanted to weep, there would be no tear ducts from which your tears could flow.

ON THE EIGHTH TENTH OF A SECOND, you are launched into your eternal destination...

'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!'

1 Corinthians, 10:11-12, NIV