

## **Book of Faith for December: Jude, 2 Thessalonians, Isaiah 1-12, Psalms**

*Jude is a very brief letter, only 25 vv. Jude was brother of James (the best known James in the first century was not the son of Zebedee and brother of John, who was the first apostle to die for the faith, but “James of Jerusalem” “brother [half-brother] of the Lord.” Jude, therefore, would also be among Mary and Joseph’s other children. Since this letter refers (v. 17) to “the apostles” as a group from the past, it was probably written late in the first century A.D., and so probably attributed to Jude as an honor, a common practice at the time, rather than actually written by him. As the letter expresses urgency about the approaching end of time, it is appropriate for Advent.*

*2 Thessalonians is also brief, three chapters. Also with its attention to the end of the world, is appropriate reading for the beginning of Advent.*

*Isaiah 1-12. Isaiah’s book is the longest of the prophets, 72 chapters. The first twelve chapters contain many lessons from the Advent and Christmas liturgies. They also set out Isaiah’s Law and Gospel preaching, including his vivid “Song of the Vineyard” and the prophets magnificent vision of the Lord in his temple, from which we get one of our liturgical songs.*

### **December 4 assignment. Read by (12/11) Jude, 2 Thessalonians, Isaiah 1-2**

Jude 3 salvation we share: a wonderful description of Christians: we are those who share the salvation. 3 to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints: “Faith” can mean either “trust” or it can mean “those things we believe;” here it is in the latter sense. Sometimes this is called “the deposit of faith”: those truths that Christ gave his Church. *Is “the faith” the same in all times and places, or does it change? How do you, as Jude writes, “contend” for this faith?* 4 intruders: *what makes them intruders, rather than simply church members with a different viewpoint?* 4 pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness: Paul, who preached grace so powerfully, was always questioned: “BUT, if God promises to forgive people for free, won’t people then sin without fear.” And in Jude we see that there are indeed people who do exactly that. (Paul’s answer is, that no one who genuinely has faith will want to sin; for the Spirit has given him a clean heart.) These people have horribly corrupted the Gospel. Some say that this describes some of our churches today. *Does your church teach the grace of God in a way that permits sin?* 5-8 These are three stories of judgment, leading off with people who had experienced God’s salvation (Exodus) and yet were later destroyed for their gross sins. (Paul makes the same point in 1 Cor. 10, warning that even reception of Baptism and Eucharist do not guarantee divine favor to those who turn away from God.) The other two judgments are on unnatural sex, angels with human women (Gen 6:1-4) and men with men. This is the “perverting grace into licentiousness.” *Do you see this happening today?* 8 defile the flesh, reject authority: the first must be referring to sexual relations between men; the second, because of the reference (v. 11) to Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16) could be lay people presuming upon the authority of church elders to govern the congregation. 12 these are blemishes on your love-feasts: the *agape* meal is, like in 1 Cor

11, a pot luck supper with Eucharist. The Lord's Supper among Jude's readers is blemished by these "intruders" who do not hold to "the faith once delivered to the saints" in the ways Jude has just described. They "do not fear" (which Paul commends to the congregation in Corinth 1 Cor 11:27-31), and stuff themselves rather than helping others. They are useless, described in several vivid metaphors. 14-16 Enoch there is a Jewish writing from about 250 BC called "1 Enoch" (attributed to this ancient worthy figure, though clearly not written by him—much like "Jude" itself!) which was not included when the OT canon was defined, but Jude regards it as a valuable writing. 19 worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, cause divisions: people who have the Holy Spirit will think and speak and act in one accord; divisions can only be between Christ's people and people who are not His. *Do you believe this? Why or why not?* 20-21 is how believers are to keep themselves safe; *do you do this?* 22-23 is what believers are to do for church members who are wavering or who have already perverted their faith: have mercy, with fear, hating: try to reach them; be fearful of being perverted yourself; do not forget that their actions are very evil.

2 Thessalonians 1 3-4 The church is commended for three things: increasing in faith and in mutual love and steadfastness during persecution. *How would you rate your church on those three scores: increasing of faith and of love, and steadfastness in persecution? How do you, or do you not, participate in or contribute to these?* 5-10 Paul asserts, perhaps because some people understandably questioned it, that God is righteous to permit their persecution! For it will make them worthy of the kingdom, and it shows Christ's enemies to be his enemies indeed. Thus at Christ's return the persecutors of His Church and those who refused his atoning sacrifice will feel his wrath, and His own will be rescued and glorified. 11-12 God has already called or summoned these believers to come into the Church; Paul prays that God will work in them to make them subsequently worthy of that gracious call, using divine power to assist them to carry out their good intentions.

2 Thessalonians 2 1-2 It seems that Paul heard that the congregation was rattled by a rumor that The Day of the Lord had already come. ("The Day of the Lord" is term as old as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet Amos; something like "Wait until your father comes home!") The Day was when the Lord would come and fix the rebellious world, executing His justice on the cruel and greedy, and rescuing the faithful and obedient. With the NT recognition that "Jesus is Lord" The Day become the Second Coming.) 3-9 is a reminder of what Paul had told them in person concerning "the lawless one" (for Jews, "lawless" is as bad as it gets). Who that is was clear to the Thessalonian church, but is not to us. One guess is the Roman empire or emperor, though that does not fit well. 10-12 *What do you think? Is The Truth here the truth that, in Romans 1:18ff, Paul says is obvious to all: that there is a Creator to whom all people owe honor and thanks? Or is it the specific truth of the Gospel?* 13-15 Paul gives thanks that God chose those in Thessalonika to be among the first believers. The sequence is evident: Paul told them the Message about Jesus Christ, through which the Spirit called them and they believe and the Spirit sanctified them (in Baptism) and the end is that, as they are not incorporated into Christ, they will obtain his glory! *What are you most looking forward to about your obtaining the glory of Christ?* "Tradition" is a word that sometimes refers to a treasure and sometimes to

foolishness. It means, “handed on.” Note that every single part of your faith is “tradition,” that is, it did not begin with you or your church but was handed on to us by those who were believers before us. *How far does that chain of tradition go back?*

2 Thessalonians 3 1-5 Paul asks their prayers for his mission. 6-13 Whether some church members were idle because they thought Jesus was coming back any day now, or because they were living off the charity of the church. *What was the tradition they had received? What is the right of an apostle or pastor?* Notice Paul can command Christians. 14-15 As in v. 6, Paul commands a sharp punishment for the lazy: to be shunned. *Is this malicious, or it is for good?* Notice the qualification in v. 15. V. 17 Apparently there was a concern with forgeries (see 2:2), one that was not present at the conclusion of 1 Thessalonians, the first letter of Paul’s that we have.

**Short Introduction to Isaiah.** *History: The book Isaiah is itself a bit like the NT or the Psalter: a range of writings from various times, all collected under a common theme. The first part of the book of Isaiah was the work of the prophet of that name, who lived and worked 742-687 BC in Jerusalem. This was a time of crisis; the northern kingdom, Israel or Ephraim was conquered and emptied by the invading Assyrian empire. Judah was not conquered, but under military threat had to be a loyal servant of Assyria, and was heavily taxed for the privilege. Isaiah may have been a priest. He was comfortable in the temple and had audiences with kings (chapter 7). Theology: Like his contemporaries, the prophets Amos and Micah in the north and Hosea in Judah (Isaiah seems to know their work), who were the first “writing prophets,” Isaiah’s two major criticisms of Judah and Jerusalem are, the turning from the LORD to other gods, and social injustice.*

Isaiah 1-2 *The book begins with a brilliant display of Law and Gospel in the opening chapters. Law and Gospel are the two main parts of God’s Word, not only in the NT but also in the Old. The Law tells what people must do and prophesies punishment and death because they do not do what is right. The Gospel is a promise of blessing based solely on God’s grace—in the NT that grace comes true in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.*

Isaiah 1 Note that Isaiah received messages from God during the reigns of four kings of Judah. 2-17 is the Lord’s complaint, like a lawsuit, against the people of Judah. 2-3 recalls the Lord’s providence to Judah, as the background for its ungrateful faithlessness (v. 4). *How can we apply this word today? Is it true of you, or of your church or of your churchbody or of your nation?* 5-6 The Lord has struck them in rebuke, but they continue to rebel as if they wish to be stricken again. 7-9 The medical picture is explained: the land has been devastated by conquering invaders, the Lord’s punishment for their unfaithfulness. Characteristically, the Lord limits his judgment and at least leaves a few survivors. 10-17 is shocking. First, the rulers of Judah are addressed as if they were the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities notoriously evil for same-sex rape. Mainly, the Lord is insulting their religion! Rather than pleasing the Lord, he hates their services: your liturgies are an obnoxious bore! In 15-17 the reason becomes clear: gross social injustice. *What are the main charges against the nation?* 18-20 is still a word of Law. It offers hope, but any hope is predicated on the repentance of Judah. 21-

23 *What are the charges here?* 24-26 sounds like a “surgical strike.” Wrath will not destroy generally, but will be to remove the social infections, so that with righteous judges and believing counselors, the city will be led back to goodness. 27-31 Oaks and gardens were places of pagan worship that some Jews used. With plays on words, Isaiah says those people will be like withered oaks and gardens, so that not even the strength of the strong will help them, but they will be burned with the Lord’s fire.

Isaiah 2 The abruptness of this promise of goodness is true to the biblical contrast of wrath and grace; chapter 1 had been little but accusation of Judah’s sins; but out of nowhere come promises of grace. This makes it ever clear that God’s salvation is not in response to human goodness; quite the contrary, despite human sin God will in sheer grace come with favor. *How in your life has God responded to your sin with his grace?* 2-4 Jerusalem is built on a mountain top, Mt. Zion, and the temple there was the Lord’s house. This is a promise that Jerusalem will be the focal point of the world. *Why will people from all nations come (v. 3)?* V. 4 The famous promise (perhaps borrowed from Micah, or vice versa) that the waste of war will be replaced by abundance. *What will be the cause of this wonder (v. 3)?* 6-22 was probably three stanzas (6-11, 12-17, 18-22), since vv. 11 and 17 end the same. 6-11 Judah’s prosperity (7) has led not to worship of the Lord but to idolatrous practices (6,8). “In that day” [of the Lord] the arrogant will be forcefully shown the truth and only the Lord will be exalted. *How are you careful that in your life only the Lord is exalted?* 12-17 *What is a good pride for humans? Clearly we must not be proud against the Lord; describe how a person or nation or church can be proud in a godly way.* 18-22 This terror before the Lord, people hiding in holes and caves (in limestone Judea with many caves, a typical wartime practice) is given prominence after the sixth seal in Revelation.

**December 11 assignment. Read by (12/18) Isaiah 3-7**

Isaiah 3 The clear that God’s salvation is not in

**December 18 assignment. Read by (12/25) Isaiah 8-12**

**December 25 assignment. Read by (1/1) Psalms**

<i>Dec 26:</i>	99	
<i>Dec 27:</i>	110	
<i>Dec 28:</i>	111	
<i>Dec 29:</i>	19	
<i>Dec 30:</i>	105	<i>A historical psalm, praise the Lord for his mighty acts</i>
<i>Dec 31:</i>	100	
<i>Jan 1:</i>	8	<i>Psalm for The Name of JESUS</i>

**January 1 assignment. Read by (1/8) Psalms**

<i>Jan 2</i>	104	<i>An environmental psalm; the life-giving wonders of creation</i>
<i>Jan 3</i>	106	<i>A historical psalm, confessing Israel's historical unfaithfulness</i>
<i>Jan 4</i>	107	<i>A historical psalm, the Lord's grace to His scattered people.</i>
<i>Jan 6</i>	72	<i>Epiphany Psalm for Jesus, born King of the Jews</i>