Jude - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Epistle of Jude, Jude 1:1-4: Introduction (1:1-4)

Jude's burden is to expose the apostasy in the Christian profession (vss. 4-13) and to pronounce its end under the judgment of God (vss. 14-16); and also, to encourage the saints to carry on in the path of faith with the resources which God has given for such times of departure (vss. 17-25). Thus, his purpose is twofold: first, to expose the character of men and the evil that they would bring into the Christian profession, and second, to provide direction and encouragement for the saints amidst the growing mass of apostates. Since God would not have us to be occupied with evil, it is a short and concise epistle.

There are many similarities between 2nd Peter and Jude, but they are not redundant. Both refer to the working of wicked men who have come in among Christians. Both describe the terrible conditions of Christendom in the last days, and both give guidance to the believer living in those difficult times. And, both quote from Old Testament examples of failure—of the angels that sinned, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Balaam, etc. J. N. Darby pointed out that the main difference is that 2nd Peter speaks of sin, whereas Jude speaks of apostasy. Also, that 2nd Peter has to do with the bringing in of erroneous doctrines, whereas Jude has to do with the giving up of sound doctrine (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, vol. 5, p. 547).

What is Apostasy?

There are two kinds of departure from God; both are bad, but one is infinitely worse. These are backsliding and apostasy.

A true believer may backslide (slip away from walking with the Lord) if he is not careful to maintain communion with Him. Peter is an example. He stumbled in the path of faith through sin and ended up denying the Lord, but he was restored later through the Lord's work as an Advocate.

Apostasy is different; it is a willful renouncing of the Christian faith that one once professed to believe. It is something that only a merely professing believer who has never been born again would do. A real believer may walk out of communion with God and at a distance from the Lord, but he will not abandon the faith. Apostasy is not a question of denying the Lord under the pressure of persecution; it is a decided giving up of the faith.

Apostasy is a very solemn thing, for once a person apostatizes, there is no hope of him turning around in repentance. Scripture says that it is "impossible" to "renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. 6:4-6). Thus, all such are damned, even though they are still alive in this world! Judas Iscariot is an example; he was a disciple of the Lord's, but he was never born of God (John 6:70). Peter returned to the Lord, but Judas never did. The following passages refer to apostates: Matthew 7:21-23; 12:43-45; 13:5-7, 20-22; Mark 3:28-30; John 15:2, 6; Acts 1:25; Romans 11:22; 1 Cor. 9:27; 10:12; Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-15; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:12-29; 2 Peter 2:1, 20-21; Jude 4-16; Revelation 8:8-12.

Many Christians don't know the difference between backsliding and apostasy, and by confusing these two things they've been led to wrong conclusions—one of which is that believers can lose the eternal salvation of their souls, which is not true. It is, therefore, important to understand the difference.

Jude shows that the seeds of apostasy were sown very early in Church history (vs. 4). It will culminate with the mass in the Christian profession giving up Christianity and following the man of sin in the worship of the image of the Beast (2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:11-18). There is no time in the history of the Christian testimony when the words of Jude have been more applicable than in this very day in which we live.

The Salutation

(Vss. 1-2)

Jude introduces himself as "Jude, the servant [bondman] of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." Neither he, nor his brother, were part of the apostolic band that followed the Lord in the days of His earthly ministry. They were half-brothers of the Lord (Matt. 13:55) but were unbelievers in those days (Mark 3:21; John 7:5). James was converted by the time the Lord rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:7) and Jude was probably converted around that time as well. By the time the Lord had ended His resurrection appearances, all of His brethren were believers and were among the saints in the upper room in Jerusalem waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

"James," whom Jude refers to here, is not James, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21); he was killed by Herod quite early in Church history (Acts 12:1-2). Nor was he the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), who is also called James the less (Mark 15:40). This James became a leader in the assembly in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19). "Jude" is not the Judas that supposedly was sent forth by the Lord with Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:16). Neither Jude, nor James were apostles. (See W. Kelly, Lectures on the Epistle of Jude, pp. 10-11.) We might wonder why Jude wouldn't have introduced himself as being the Lord's brother. He refrained from doing that because he was acting in accordance with the Christian principle: "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). Moreover, introducing himself as the Lord's brother might have appeared as being prideful and seeking honour for himself.

Those to whom Jude writes are "the called ones"—those who have been called by the gospel and saved. They are a remnant of true believers amidst the mass of merely professing persons. He views them in a double way: "beloved in God the Father" and "preserved in Jesus Christ."

(The word “sanctified,” in the KJV, should be “beloved.”) Knowing this is a comforting truth to rest on in times of departure. The true saints of God are the special objects of His love, and in spite of the movement of apostasy gaining momentum in Christendom, they will all be preserved to the end. We are eternally secure and thus preserved by the One who has called and saved us. Jude ends his epistle with this same happy thought in verse 24. This does not mean that true believers can’t be affected by apostasy. While a true believer will not apostatize from the faith, he can be influenced by the current of apostasy and begin to give up certain principles and practices that he once held. The only remedy for this is keeping close to the Lord (Deut. 33:12).

(Vs 2)

Jude adds, “Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.” This is God’s supply of grace to help us to go on in the Christian path. Hence, an abundant provision has been made for the saints in these last times.

The Need to Contend for the Faith

(Vs. 3)

It was on Jude’s heart to write on the subject of the salvation which is the common possession of all Christians, but the Holy Spirit constrained him to exhort the saints to contend for the truth that was being undermined by evil men. He says: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” “The faith” which Jude refers to here is the Christian revelation of truth. As a rule, when the word “faith” is used in Scripture without the definite article “the” preceding it, it is speaking of the soul’s inward energy of confidence in God (Eph. 2:8, etc.). But when “faith” is used with the article, as here in our text, it is referring to the precious deposit of truth that God has given to us—the body of Christian knowledge.

Jude’s simple but important exhortation is that we need to stand uncompromisingly for the truth. Like Shammah defending the field of lentils against the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:11-12), we are not to give up one iota of the truth to the enemy. We are not to relinquish it, nor to sell it (Prov. 23:23), but to keep it, as Paul exhorted Timothy: “That good thing [deposit] which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Tim. 1:14).

We are to “earnestly contend” for the faith by first knowing the truth, and then by walking in it. We cannot defend the truth if we haven’t taken the time to learn it. Some have great devotion of heart to Christ, and this is commendable, but sadly, they lack intelligence in the truth. Consequently, in desiring to be faithful, they will sometimes hold onto error ignorantly, and valiantly defend it, thinking that it is the truth. But this kind of misguided energy only adds to the confusion in the Christian testimony. (Compare John 16:2.) Let us, therefore, give due diligence to learning the truth (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:15) and to seek grace from God to walk in it (3 John 3).

Earnestly contending for the faith is not done by arguing for the truth. There is such a thing as doing a right thing in a wrong way. Being right on some point of truth doesn’t make fighting and arguing acceptable. Paul warned Timothy of this, stating that he was “not to have disputes of words, profitable for nothing” (2 Tim. 2:14). As alluded to already, we are to keep the good deposit of truth “by the Holy Spirit” (2 Tim. 1:14). That is, we are to act in the Spirit, not in the flesh, in holding the truth. It is one thing to contend and quite another to be contentious. “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men” (2 Tim. 2:24). Thus, it is not enough to uphold the truth; our behaviour must compliment the truth that we profess (Phil. 1:27).

Jude says that the faith was “once” delivered unto the saints. This means that the truth has been given once for all time; the delivery of it is complete. There is, therefore, no more truth to be revealed or added. False teachers love to say that there is more truth to be revealed, and that what they have is such—but that erroneous notion only opens the door to spurious doctrines. On the grounds of what Jude says here, if someone were to come to us with something new, we should know immediately that their new idea couldn’t be the truth, because all the truth has been given.

Note: the truth was “delivered,” not discovered by searching through the Old Testament Scriptures. This is because the Christian revelation of truth is not in the Old Testament. It was revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5) and communicated by them to the saints in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

Moreover, the body of Christian knowledge was delivered “to the saints.” It was not delivered to the apostles, but rather, through the apostles to the saints. Thus, the apostles were but the channels; the saints are the terminals of the truth. The term “saints,” refers to the whole Christian company; it includes both the brothers and the sisters. This shows that we are all the custodians of the truth. It is the responsibility of every saint to know the truth and to walk in it, and also to contend for it. Some have the idea that contending for the faith is a work that belongs to those who are teachers, but really it is a privilege and responsibility of all the saints. A sister might say, “I leave all that to my husband and the brothers in the meeting.” But that idea does not have the support of Scripture, for as Jude shows here in his use of the word “saints,” sisters are to be engaged in holding the truth too. What is so commendable about the Bereans is that there were among them many honourable women who searched the Scriptures; it was not something that just the men did (Acts 17:11-12). In fact, leaving the defense of the faith to a few “qualified” persons, or gifted teachers, has contributed to the loss of the truth as evidenced in Church history. Roman Catholicism has taken that idea to the extreme; it teaches that the Scriptures should be left in the hands of the clergy and stowed away in monasteries. Thus, in doing so, they have, in effect, taken the Scriptures (the truth) out of the hands of the saints!

A Twofold Evil

(Vs. 4)

Jude goes on to explain why contending for the faith is so important—many deceivers had crept into the Christian profession and were corrupting people with their evil doctrines and practices. He says, “For certain men have got in unnoticed [unawares], they who of old were marked out beforehand to this sentence [condemnation], ungodly persons, turning the grace of our God into dissoluteness, and denying our

only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.” These ungodly men had a mental acquaintance with the truth, but their ways were not in accordance with it. They had stolen in among the saints “unawares” by making an outward profession of faith, but they were charlatans. Simon the sorcerer was the first false professor to sneak in, but he was exposed by Peter and John and rejected (Acts 8). These whom Jude speaks of crept in undetected, and have remained among the saints, doing their evil work.

The KJV says that they were “ordained to this condemnation,” but the text should read, “marked out beforehand to this sentence.” God does not pre-ordain people for judgment; no one is predestined for Hell. What Jude is saying here is that God knew beforehand who these persons were and had the apostles and prophets forewarn the saints that they would arise, and to tell us that their end would be judgment. Therefore, being forewarned of their presence, we shouldn’t be surprised to see them at work in Christendom. Their seeds of ungodliness have a twofold character:

- The abuse of grace.
- The denial of the rights of Christ their Master.

“Turning the grace of God into lasciviousness [dissoluteness]” is to twist the truth of Christian liberty into license for the flesh (Gal. 5:13). These men pervert the truth of freedom from sin (Rom. 6:18) into freedom to sin! H. Smith said, “The great principle by which God is saving men from sin, and teaching them to live soberly is made the occasion by these ungodly men to gratify the flesh and indulge their lust, at the same time keeping up a fair profession and moving in the Christian circle” (The Epistle of Jude, p. 5).

“Denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ,” is not necessarily denying His name outwardly, but refusing to submit to His authority over them practically—while at the same time avowing that they do! He is their “Master” by virtue of His purchase on the cross (Matt. 13:44; Heb. 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1), but He is not their Lord and Saviour. They deny His right to rule over them, by lowering Him in their doctrine to the level of themselves. Thus, their doctrine strips the Lord of His deity, of His sinless humanity, and of His divine attributes, making Him as any other man (Psa. 50:21). The practical outcome of their erroneous notions is not to submit to His authority.

The Epistle of Jude, Jude 1:5-16: Six Old Testament Examples That Depict the Evil That Would Characterize the Apostasy in Christendom (1:5-16)

(Vss. 5-16)

These ungodly men who have crept into the Christian profession are identified in this next series of verses by various third person pronouns: “these,” “they,” “them,” “their,” “whose,” and “whom.” They stand in contrast to real believers whom Jude will address in verses 17-25. To designate these saints, he uses the first and second person pronouns: “ye,” “your,” and “our.” They constitute a remnant of true believers amidst the mass of ungodly, merely professing believers.

In this passage, Jude describes the fallen state of the Christian testimony by using six examples from the Old Testament. Hence, he begins with: “I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this” (vs. 5). This shows that he was assuming that they were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

1) The Children of Israel—Unbelief

(Vs. 5)

All apostasy starts with unbelief—not having personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For an example of this, Jude points to the unbelievers among the children of Israel. He says, “The Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.” (See Numbers 14:28-35; Deuteronomy 2:14; and 1 Corinthians 10:5-10.) The children of Israel had been physically “saved” by the Lord in an outward deliverance from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:30-31); but having that temporal salvation did not mean that they were born of God. Many were not, and they manifested their unbelief when tested in the wilderness, and consequently, were “destroyed” by God. These people had been baptized unto Moses in the sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2) and were in a covenant relationship with the Lord (Heb. 9:19-21), and thus, were in a favoured position of privilege. But these were outward things; they needed an inward work of faith in their souls to go with those outward tokens of favour—but this was the very thing that they lacked.

This is the foremost thing that characterizes Christendom. Being christened (or baptized), and/or having made some sort of profession of faith, the mass of professing Christians is in a position of outward nearness to God. However, they lack personal, soul-saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; 20:21; Eph. 2:8). Like the children of Israel who fell under God’s judgment in the wilderness, these will meet their end under the judgment of God.

2) The Fallen Angels—Rebellion

(Vs. 6)

Unbelief leads to rebellion; Jude touches on this next. To illustrate this, he points to the angels that sinned at the time of the flood. He says, “And angels who had not kept their own original state, but had abandoned their own dwelling, He keeps in eternal chains under gloomy darkness, to the judgment of the great day.” It is generally believed by Bible teachers that when Satan was expelled from heaven (Ezek. 28) that there were other angelic creatures that fell with him, because thereafter we read of “the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). This verse in Jude is not referring to that event, but to what happened at the time of the flood. Certain of those fallen angels manifested a discontent as to their state as angels and co-habited with the daughters of men in an attempt to create a sort of super race of men and angels (Gen. 6:1-4) The “original state” in which God created them was sexless; they did not procreate (Luke 20:35-36). But being rebellious and discontent with

their state as such, they “abandoned their own dwelling” in the heavens and came down among men to accomplish their evil plan. But in the flood, God wiped out those giants and mighty men who had come out of these unholy unions, and He took those wicked angels and put them in “eternal chains under gloomy darkness.” Peter calls this special place of confinement in the abyss “the deepest pit gloom” (2 Peter 2:4).

Some have wondered if verse 6 is speaking of a second fall of angels. J. N. Darby was asked about this as follows: “Were there two falls of angelic beings at two different times?” He replied: “Your question assumes two falls of angels of which Scripture does not speak, though it is very possible” (Letters of J. N. Darby, vol. 2, p. 447). Thus, being careful not to go beyond what is revealed in Scripture, it is generally taken that this passage refers to a rebellion among certain of the fallen angels. God took them away from the earth and confined them in the abyss because they were so diabolically corrupt. They will be cast into the lake of fire (Hell) at the great day of judgment (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). The rest of the fallen angels under Satan are still loose and practicing evil today. They will be taken and confined to the bottomless pit [the abyss] at the beginning of the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-3). After the Millennium, on the great day of judgment, the devil and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire.

Jude mentions this rebellion among the fallen angels to show us the spirit of the ungodly persons who will be found in the Christian testimony in its last days. They will be discontent with God’s natural order in creation and will rebel against it. This spirit manifests itself in a variety of ways today, ranging from: women teaching publicly in the house of God (1 Tim. 2:12), their abandoning of head coverings, which signify the proper roles of men and women (1 Cor. 11:2-16), the submission of wives to their husbands in the home (Eph. 5:22-23), etc. Such is the spirit that pervades Christendom today.

3) Sodom and Gomorrah—Immorality

(Vss. 7-10)

Discontent and rebellion against God’s natural order in creation will eventually end up in immorality. Sodom and Gomorrah are cited to illustrate this evil (Gen. 19). Jude says: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” Jude refers to their homosexuality as “going after strange flesh.” He calls it “strange” because that kind of unholy union is completely foreign to God’s moral order in creation. His point is that Christendom will be marked by having persons who will have given themselves over to this kind of sin, yet at the same time, they will profess to be Christians! How incredibly incongruous to associate such a sin with the holy name of Christ! This does not mean that every person will be engaged in immorality, but it will be so prevalent in the Christian ranks during the last days that people will condone it, and even defend it. Today, many Church ministers, though not personally engaged in immorality, will permit it in their churches, and even excuse those who are so engaged––even the sin of homosexuality!

(Vss. 8-10)

These “filthy dreamers defile the flesh” with their immoral practices. This sin is described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1. The difference between the two passages is that Paul is speaking of the heathen outside the Christian community, whereas Jude is speaking of those who profess to be Christian. These people say they are Christians!

They also “despise dominion [authority].” Being rebels against God, they naturally rebel against the governmental institutions which are set up of God (Rom. 13:1). They manifest this by “speaking evil of dignities [dignitaries].” Jude tells us that this is something that Michael the archangel would not dare to do—even if it was in regard to our enemy, the devil! This shows that the devil, though now fallen, was once of a high dignity among the angels, and until he is finally judged by God, his dignity is to be respected. Even so high of an angelic dignity as Michael the archangel respected it. Hence, he did not take it upon himself to rebuke the devil but left it for the Lord to do—saying, “The Lord rebuke thee” (vs. 9). Though fallen, Satan still has immense power. We are to respect his power, but we have no need to fear him. In fact, we are told: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). But at no time should we bring “a railing accusation” against him.

The “bone” of contention on that occasion was Moses’ burial site. Satan’s purpose was probably to set up a shrine there in memory of Moses, and thus, to ensnare the people of Israel in idolatry. (Compare 2 Kings 18:4). God, therefore, conducted a secret burial of his body in “the valley of Moab” (Deut. 34:5-6). (Note: “archangel” is in the singular; there is only one such creature. Similarly, “devil,” in Scripture, is always in the singular. The KJV, however, will occasionally say “devils,” but it should be translated “demons.” There is one devil, but many demons.)

Jude adds: “But what even, as the irrational animals, they understand by mere nature, in these things they corrupt themselves” (vs. 10). “Mere nature” refers to animal instincts. This shows that these morally corrupt people ought to have known better from observing the animal kingdom (Job 12:7), for the animals don’t debase themselves in such a manner. But they disregard the testimony of nature and corrupt themselves. In summary, their evil is twofold:

- In spiritual things they bring “railing accusation” against the truth (vs. 9).
- In natural things “they corrupt themselves” with immoral practices (vs. 10).

4) Cain—Bloodless Religion of Works

(vs. 11a)

Cain is then brought forward to indicate another characteristic of apostate Christendom—bloodless religion. Jude says: “Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain.” The way of Cain is to approach God on the ground of good works, rather than on the ground of a sacrifice (Gen. 4:3). He sought acceptance with God by what he had accomplished through the work of his hands, and on that ground, his offering was rejected. This depicts what much of Christendom has degenerated into, as far as the basic concept of how a person is reckoned righteous before God. Many Christian denominations question, and even reject, the vicarious atonement of Christ. His finished work on the cross as being the only way of salvation through faith (John 19:30) is replaced with the performance of good works for acceptance with God. Christ’s

death is reduced to being a model of humility, nothing more. As a result, people are enjoined to love their neighbour and to do good works for divine acceptance. Such is a bloodless gospel is really “another gospel” that is not of God (2 Cor. 11:4). It is the way of Cain.

5) Balaam—The Commercialization of Christianity

(Vs. 11b)

Jude says that these ungodly persons have “given themselves up to the error of Balaam,” which is seeking honour and glory in the sphere of divine things (Num. 22-24). The Apostle Peter speaks of “the way of Balaam,” which was Balaam’s love of “the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15). Thus, he was not only a self-seeking man, but also a covetous man who was willing to prostitute his prophetic gift to gain wealth, even though he made every attempt to have it appear otherwise (Num. 22:18). These men would also teach “the doctrine of Balaam,” which is to encourage worldliness among God’s people (Rev. 2:14).

Putting these three things together, we have a composite picture of the money-driven, glory-seeking side of Christendom. Greedy men have sought to turn Christianity into a profitable business, and they have succeeded in this in many ways. They see nothing wrong with serving in the pulpit for wages, taking money from the lost, etc. Many preachers have made themselves incredibly wealthy. The Apostle Paul decried this, stating: “We do not, as the many, make a trade [retail] of the Word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17). W. T. P. Wolston pointed out that if money and entertainment were taken out of the church systems in Christendom, many of them would collapse. He said that if entertainment were taken out, they would lose their large audiences, and if money were taken out, they would lose many of the men and women in the pulpit.

6) Core [Korah]—Ecclesiastical Error

(Vs. 11c)

Jude brings forward one more example from the Old Testament to illustrate another thing that marks Christendom—ecclesiastical error. This is error in things pertaining to Church doctrine and practice. Jude exposes this by mentioning “the gainsaying of Core.” Core (Korah) and his band of men (Num. 16) wanted a position above the people which belonged only to Moses and Aaron who are a double type of Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1). Not being content with the place that God had given them as Levites, they wanted an office of their own making, and their uprising against God’s order in that Mosaic economy was met with His displeasure and judgment.

Men in Christendom have risen up similarly and have introduced the office of a clergyman. This is a position in the Church that is purely a human invention, for God’s Word does not speak of it. It gives the holder of that office (be it a man or a woman) a distinguished place between God and His people. However, God never intended that there should be such a class of persons presiding over a congregation in Christianity. In fact, such a thing is decried in His Word (1 Peter 5:3). These men are presumptuous in this, often calling the flock of God their flock. Inflated with a sense of importance, they have overlooked God’s order for Christian worship and ministry in as taught in the epistles and have introduced their own man-made order. As a result, the clergy/laity system can be found in varying degrees in most, if not all, denominations in Christendom. One difference between Korah and his men and their counterparts in Christendom is that Korah’s men did not get as far as to take office, whereas clergymen in Christendom have been functioning in their man-made place for over a thousand years.

The Character of Ministry of Apostate Ministers

(Vss. 12-13)

We are not saying that every man or woman who is part of the clergy is apostate, for most are true believers. However, many are lifeless. Jude points to five similitudes in nature to describe the character of these false Ministers and their ministry:

FIRSTLY—Spots

Firstly, he says: “These are spots in your love-feasts, feasting together with you without fear, pasturing themselves.” A “spot,” or a shoal, is a sunken rock just below the surface of the water, which, if a sailing ship were to strike it, could cause shipwreck. Rocks that are charted are not difficult to steer clear of, but hidden shoals can be disastrous to sailors. This first metaphor shows that these false so-called Ministers—though ordained by some religious body and having a degree of divinity (DD)—have caused many to go into spiritual “shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:19-20). The fact that Jude says that “they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear,” shows that they have gained the confidence of the mass and are welcomed in many circles.

SECONDLY—Clouds

Secondly, they are as “clouds without water, carried along by the winds.” That is, they promise showers of blessing, but have nothing to refresh the soul. They are carried along by “the winds,” meaning that their ministry has been tainted by the false doctrines that are blowing around in Christendom (Eph. 4:14).

THIRDLY—Autumnal Trees

Thirdly, they are as “autumnal trees, without fruit, twice dead, rooted up.” Normally, autumn is the time when fruit is found on trees, but these have none. Jude explains why they don’t bear fruit; they are “twice dead.” This refers to being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5) and also being dead through apostasy (Rev. 8:9-11). All such trees will be “rooted up” and cast into the fire of God’s judgment (Matt. 15:13).

FOURTHLY—Raging Waves

Fourthly, they are “raging waves of the sea.” This speaks of their insubjection. Being in a lawless state of soul, they refuse to be controlled by the authority of God’s Word. Their teaching is really the “foaming out their own shames.” It is outright blasphemous, and involves the excusing of sin, rather than the teaching of righteousness. It is not that they feel their shame, but nonetheless, those things are a shame to

them (Phil. 3:19).

FIFTHLY—Wandering Stars

Fifthly, they are “wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” Stars have been looked to for navigation purposes by sailors for thousands of years. They speak of the leaders of God’s people who are responsible to provide spiritual light and direction for the saints (Rev. 1:20). Jude calls these false Ministers “wandering” stars because a star that leaves its place will only mislead those who look to it for direction. Such are false guides. Their false light will soon be quenched in “the blackness of darkness forever.”

The Epistle of Jude, Jude 1:14-23: Christendom's End (1:14-23)

Christendom’s End Under the Judgment of God

(Vss. 14-16)

Jude then brings in Enoch’s prophecy to show that the Lord will not allow this corruption associated with His name (testimonially) to go on indefinitely. Christ will intervene in judgment in the most decided way. Thus, the Christian testimony will not see restoration, but rather, its end will be judgment. He says: “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince [convict] all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.” Had we the Old Testament only, we would never have known of this earliest of all prophecies, for there is no mention of it there (Gen. 5:21-23). All we would have known of Enoch is that he was a man who walked with God and that this pleased God, and he was thereupon taken to heaven without seeing death (Heb. 11:5). But from this epistle, we learn that he was also a prophet. Jude identifies him as “the seventh (generation) from Adam” to distinguish him from the ungodly Enoch in Cain’s family (Gen. 4:17-18).

Enoch uttered this prophecy some 4500 years ago! The central point of it is the coming of the Lord—His Appearing. Many other prophets have spoken of this event as well (Isa. 30:27-28; Zech. 14:5; Matt. 16:27; 24:27-30; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14; 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2:8; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-21). What is so solemn in connection with Christ’s coming to judge the mass of apostates in Christendom is that since the Christian profession has been privileged by having the highest truth committed to it (the truth of the Mystery), those who will apostatize from it will have the greatest judgment! (Luke 12:46-48)

The Lord taught that those false professors who are alive on earth when He appears will be taken by the angels and cast alive into the lake of fire! (Matt. 13:37-42; 22:13; 24:37-41) They will not be killed, and therefore, will not come before the great white throne, which is a judgment of the wicked dead (Rev. 20:11-15). These will come face to face with the Judge Himself when He appears and will not need further examination or proof of their wickedness. His all-seeing eye has seen all their ungodly “deeds” and His ears have heard their evil “speeches.” Hence, not only will the true Church on earth be snatched away from the earth at the Rapture without seeing death, but the false Church (those alive at His Appearing) will also be taken away from the earth without seeing physical death. But how great will be the difference—that of Heaven and Hell!

Jude uses the word “convince [convict]” here in connection with the judgment of these ungodly people. J. N. Darby said that it is a difficult word (elenko) to translate (John 3:20 – footnote). It has the thought of reproof by showing or exposing a person’s fault. W. E. Vine suggests that it has to do with putting the convicted person to shame. Such will be the case in this judgment. These apostates (the religious leaders particularly) have spoken hard and injurious things about Christ as to His Person and work in their theological teachings, but in that day, they will be publicly shamed and judged in the most humiliating way—they will be taken by the angels as scoundrels and cast alive into Hell.

(Vs. 16)

These men (particularly the leaders) are exposed as being driven by fleshly motivations and self-seeking. They speak “great swelling words” of flattery to stroke the ego of persons of wealth and of high status in society with a view to gaining from them some personal “advantage” for themselves. Such is the way of the man of the world, but it will all come to a sudden halt when the Lord intervenes in judgment.

Christendom Judged in Three Stages

In fact, the judgment of Christendom will be executed in three stages:

Firstly, at the Rapture

Firstly, at the Rapture, the Lord will “spue” the merely professing mass of so-called Christians out of His mouth by leaving them behind on earth, and thus, He will formally disassociate Himself from them (Rev. 3:16).

Secondly, in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel

Secondly, in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel, which will be some 3½ years later, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Matt. 24:15-22), the Beast, the leader of the western confederation of nations will destroy the great Harlot (Christendom under the control of Catholicism), and thus, will bring its idolatrous practices to an end. This will be done to make way for the worship of the Beast and his image by all in the West (Rev. 17:16-17). The merely professing mass will abandon their empty Christian profession and will worship the Beast, which the man of sin (the Antichrist) will promote (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Thirdly, after the Great Tribulation

Thirdly, after the Great Tribulation, the Lord will appear out of heaven to judge the apostates who will have abandoned the profession of Christianity, by taking them and casting them into the lake of fire (Rev. 3:3). This last phase is what Enoch prophesied about.

Counsel for the Remnant of True Believers

(Vss. 17-25)

Being apprised of all this evil in the Christian testimony, we might wonder what we should do. Jude anticipates that this question would be on our minds, and thus in this last series of verses, he gives us his godly counsel. He shows that the answer is not to give up in despair, nor is it to go off into seclusion to try to protect ourselves from the evil influences of apostasy. Note also, Jude does not tell us that we should attempt to set disordered Christendom right. The Lord has not laid that "burden" upon His people (Matt. 13:27-30; Rev. 2:24). Rather, he shows that we are to go on in the grace that God supplies, with the resources that He has given, and to wait for the Lord to come and take us home to the Father's house above.

In this last section of the epistle, Jude addresses the true believers amidst the lifeless, professing mass, saying, "But beloved ... ." He identifies them with the first and second person pronouns: "ye," "your," and "our." His words of grace and comfort are a real encouragement to us. They are:

Remember the Words of the Apostles(Vss. 17-19)

Firstly, Jude would have us to remember what the apostles have said concerning the ruin of the Christian testimony. He says: "But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts." God has foreseen the ruin and has had the apostles forewarn the saints of its coming (Acts 20:29-31; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 1 John 2:18-19, etc.). It should, therefore, be no surprise to us. We have been apprised of it all beforehand, so that, while being grieved about it, we wouldn't be overcome with despair. The Lord knows that we wouldn't be able to carry out the following exhortations that Jude gives with any kind of conviction if we were in a distraught state of mind. The soul must first be at rest, and undisturbed—and this is what the Lord has done by telling us of it beforehand. There is something reassuring in knowing that He knows all about it.

Hence, he tells us that there will be "mockers" who will scoff at the truth, and thus we should ready ourselves (2 Peter 3:3-4). J. N. Darby remarked on this kind of bold opposition to the truth, stating: "Ignorance is generally confident because it is ignorant" (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, vol. 1, p. 11). Thus, we can expect opposition, but we're not to be dismayed by it. They can mock the truth, and attack it, and seek to undermine it, but it doesn't change the truth.

(Vs 19)

Jude says that these mockers are the perpetrators of many of the sects and divisions that have developed in Christendom. He says: "These are they that make separations, natural [soulish] men, not having the Spirit" (W. Kelly Trans.). W. Kelly remarked, "They break loose from fellowship and form some new thing which has not the sanction of the Word of God. That is what, in Scripture, is called a heresy" (Lectures on the Epistle of Jude, p. 142). Compare 2 Peter 2:1. "Not having the Spirit" makes it clear that they have never been saved (Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13).

Building up Ourselves on the Most Holy Faith(Vs. 20a)

Next, Jude speaks of the need of being built up on the solid foundation of the truth. He says, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith." The "most holy faith" is the Christian revelation of truth. It has been delivered to the saints by the apostles (vs. 3) and can be found in the 21 epistles of the New Testament. However, having the truth delivered into our hands is one thing and being built up on it is another. We might ask, "How exactly do we build ourselves up on the most holy faith?" The Apostle Paul answers this, stating: "The Word of His grace (the Scriptures), which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." Thus, it is through having a thorough acquaintance with the Word of God (particularly the epistles). Let us, therefore, give due diligence to this (1 Tim. 4:6, 16; 2 Tim. 2:15); it will keep us from being "carried about with every wind of doctrine" that comes along (Eph. 4:14). What a contrast this is to what we have seen in the earlier part of the epistle. While false teachers are seen tearing down the foundations of the faith in the hearts of those who listen to them, true believers are to be building themselves up in the most holy faith.

Note: Jude does not say, "Build up the faith." That would imply that the deposit of truth is not a completed thing, and thus, there are supplements to be added—but that is a false notion. The Apostle Paul said that with the giving of the revelation of the Mystery, the deposit of truth was "complete" (Col. 1:25-27). There were epistles written by others after Paul said that, but they do not add to the truth of the Mystery.

Praying in the Holy Spirit(Vs. 20b)

Coupled with the study of God's Word, there should be intelligent prayer. Hence, Jude adds, "Praying in the Holy Spirit." These two things go together "like a hand in a glove" (Luke 10:39–11:13, etc.). We need a balance of both. This is important because studying the Word of God without prayer can lead to legalism, and prayer without the study of the Word can lead to fanaticism. Praying "in" the Spirit is praying according to the mind of the Spirit. This comes from having a knowledge of the truth and having personal communion with the Lord.

Note: Jude says, praying in the Spirit, not praying for the Spirit to come. There will not be another Pentecost and another baptism of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we are not to look for a recovery of the public testimony of the Church. The Spirit of God has come, and since He is now resident in the Church on earth, we are to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18).

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God(Vs. 21a)

Jude passes on to another thing that we should be doing in view of the apostasy—we should be found living in the enjoyment of God's love. He doesn't say, "Keep on loving God." Nor does he say, "Keep God loving you." But rather, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." He is not speaking of our love for God, but of His love for us! It is like the sunshine shining in the street; one side of the road may be in the shade and the other side in the sunshine. On which side do we walk? God loves all of His children equally, but they don't all enjoy His love to the same degree. We keep ourselves in the enjoyment of the sunshine of His love by judging ourselves and maintaining our communion with Him.

Looking for the Mercy of Our Lord Jesus(Vs. 21b)

Next, Jude addresses our outlook, which should be upward to the Lord's coming (the Rapture). He says, "Looking for [awaiting] the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The tendency in these last days is to become occupied with the corruptions in Christendom and in the world, but that is not to be our focus. Let us remember that those who are occupied with failure become a failure! Noah's ark had a window "above," out of which he and his family could look. This speaks of having a heavenward outlook. The window was not in the side of the ark. Had it been there, they may have become occupied with the scene of death around them, and that would have been disheartening.

This is the only place in Scripture where the Lord's coming is spoken of as being a "mercy." Wanting to be taken out of this corrupt world is not the highest reason for wanting the Lord to come, but what a mercy it will be! "Eternal life" is viewed here as being at the end of our path when we are glorified and in our proper sphere where fellowship with the Father and the Son will be our undistracted delight.

Be Engaged in Service(Vss. 22-23)

Lastly, we are to be engaged in active service for the Lord, reaching out to those confused and entangled in the errors of Christendom. Jude says, "And some convict when contending. Others save, pulling them out of the fire. And others pity with fear, hating even the garment spotted with the flesh" (W. Kelly Trans.). Mr. Kelly remarked: "Our version—the Authorized [KJV] so-called—looks at two cases only. 'And of some have compassion, making a difference'—that is one class; 'and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted with the flesh'—this is the second class. Now I believe there are three classes, and not two only" (Lectures on the Epistle of Jude, p. 152).

Jude's words here show that reaching out to help people requires discernment, for not all cases are the same. In times of departure, we must distinguish between the leaders and the led. Some are willful and headstrong teachers; others are mere followers who have been stumbled by the erroneous teachers (Rom. 16:17-18). Note also, there is a moral order in this passage. It is only after Jude has spoken of being built up on the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, enjoying the love of God through communion, and having the imminence of the Lord's coming before our souls, that he encourages us to reach out to help others. Our effectiveness in serving the Lord will be greatly hindered if these other things are not in place in our lives.

Three Classes of Persons—Discernment RequiredThe First Class

The first class of people are the leaders entrenched in their evil doctrines. We are not to try to save these, for they are apostates who cannot be brought to repentance and recovered (Heb. 6:4-6). Rather, we are to "convict" them with the truth. (This is the same word used in verse 15, having to do with a convicted person being put to shame so that their guilt is evident to all.) Mr. Kelly pointed out that the phrase "making a difference" (KJV) in verse 22, should be translated, "when they dispute." It is clear that these men do not want the truth; they want to dispute it. The word used in verse 9, in connection with the devil disputing with Michael the archangel, is also the same word used here. Hence, these disputers of the truth are doing their master's work!

The Second Class

The second class of persons can be saved by "pulling them out of the fire." These are not deceivers, but those deceived by the deceivers. They have been ensnared unawares in the evil doctrines and need deliverance from those false notions. Being built up on the most holy faith and instructed in the truth, as Jude enjoins, we should be well able to guide these people out of those erroneous doctrines, if their wills are not at work. Note: it is "pulling," not "pushing" them out of the spiritual confusion and mess that they are in. Pushing implies getting into the ditch with them, but in doing that we could get entangled in the evil ourselves. No, we are to stay separate from the corruption, remaining on solid ground, and pull them out. The saving that Jude speaks of here is not the eternal salvation of the soul; that is something that only the Lord can do through faith in His work on the cross. This is a practical salvation from the doctrinal errors in Christendom (1 Tim. 4:16).

The Third Class

The third class are those of whom Jude says, "And others pity" (have "compassion"). These are people who have become so morally and spiritually corrupted, that, in reaching out to them, we have to be extra careful not to get defiled by the circumstances in which we find them. Hence, Jude adds, "Hating even the garment spotted with the flesh." A "garment" is something that surrounds a person when it is worn and is often used figuratively in Scripture to indicate the circumstances in which one lives (Lev. 13:47-59; Mark 10:50, etc.). We must hate their garment because their circumstances are defiling. Thus, we are to love the person, but hate his sins—and this hatred must be kept up at all times. Being conscious of the defiling situations these people are in, we are to labour with a "fear" of becoming defiled by such contact, and therefore, we should proceed with caution. It is not a question of being tolerant of the evil that they are in, but of being cognizant of it and remaining morally separate from it while we seek to deliver them.

The Epistle of Jude, Jude 1:24-25: A Doxology of Praise (1:24-25)

(Vss. 24-25)

In closing, Jude commends the saints to the Lord who is able to keep us from being tripped up in the pitfalls in the path, and he concludes with a short burst of praise. He says, “But to Him that is able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you with exultation blameless before His glory, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before the whole age, and now, and to all the ages. Amen.” Having “Him that is able” to keep us from “stumbling,” there is no reason why we can’t live our Christian lives without failing—even in these spiritually perilous times! (2 Tim. 3:1). Regardless of how dark and difficult the day is, the Lord’s grace is equal to it (James 4:6). If we apply to Him for help, He will, through His high priestly work, save us from every danger in the way (Heb. 7:25). Even though we live in days of general failure, He can present us “faultless [blameless] before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” This is an encouraging word indeed!

Since He is able to keep us, if we do stumble in the path and fail, we have only ourselves to blame. The KJV says, “Keep you from falling,” but it should be translated “stumbling.” “Falling away” is a term usually used to denote apostasy (Luke 8:13; 2 Thess. 2:3; Heb. 6:6; Rev. 8:10). A believer may stumble (Rom. 14:21; 2 Cor. 11:29; 2 Peter 1:10; 1 John 2:10) or fall from his steadfastness (2 Peter 3:17), but he doesn’t “fall away.”

What a contrast between the apostate corrupters and the true saints of God! The apostates will meet their end in judgment, whereas true believers will have their end in being presented before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy! It is no wonder that Jude ends with a doxology of praise to Him who is worthy.

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