

Jude

The heading of this epistle in my Bible is "The General Epistle of Jude". It is a general epistle in the sense that it has not been written to any one individual or to a particular church or locality. As verse 3 will suggest, it is written to all the saints. Scholars reckon it was probably written about AD 70 and if this is so, it is almost 40 years after the death of the Lord Jesus. How have things been progressing amongst the churches? No doubt numbers have been increasing as the gospel spread out to other lands. But problems seem to have been increasing also. The purity of the early church and its doctrine seem to have been compromised. It is lesson to us in what we assume to be the "last days" to look out for the dangers of profession.

Who wrote the epistle? There are two possible candidates. One possibility is that it was Judas, one of the 12 disciples. We read of "Judas, not Iscariot" in the gospels – he was the brother of James. However, in verse 17 of this epistle, Jude writes about "the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" as though he was not one of them. The other possibility is that he is one of the four brethren of the Lord Jesus spoken of in John chapter 7:

4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

They are named for us in Matthew 13:

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

It would appear therefore that the author of this epistle was a brother of the Lord Jesus, brought up with Him in Nazareth. If he was an unbeliever in John 7, how did he become the author of this epistle? It was an act of pure grace on the part of the Lord Jesus. In John 7, He said to the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, "Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me". This was the case after His resurrection. He could have appeared again to those who had condemned Him and thus have justified Himself, but He did not. There appears to have been only one exception to this rule. In I Corinthians chapter 15, Paul lists those who saw the Lord in resurrection, and amongst them was James – one of the Lord's brethren according to the flesh. That is why in Acts chapter 1, the disciples in the upper room are meeting with "His brethren". Yet is nice to see that Jude here describes himself simply as "the servant of Jesus Christ". He did not hold on to his links by nature – rather he is bondservant of Jesus Christ.

16 Wherefore 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.

In the book of Genesis, we read of the dreams of Joseph; the sun moon and stars, and the sheaves of wheat – all bowing down to him. This raised envy and malice in the hearts of his brethren, but one day the dreams were fulfilled as they cowered before Joseph in the palace of Egypt.

The subject of the epistle is apostasy, which means literally "a falling away". They were not backsliders but rather those who had once claimed to know the word of God and then had abandoned it. That is why in the epistle, Jude gives us examples of both men and angels who started off holding a certain knowledge of God or a certain place of privilege but then abandoned it.

Paul was accused of being an apostate because he was teaching men to abandon the religion of the Jews in order to embrace Christianity. Even in Acts 21, Paul is confronted by James in Jerusalem:

20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest,

brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

The word "to forsake" has the same root as apostasy. Thus Paul was regarded as an apostate Jew for he was forsaking the old ways.

Jude is writing to those who were "sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called". Mr Darby puts these things rather differently. He has it – "To the called ones, beloved in God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ". They were called of God in the past, beloved in God the Father as to the present, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Some commentators have it as "preserved for Jesus Christ". This is a lovely thought. Just as all the material world was made by Him and for Him, so His saints are preserved not only by Him but for Him. We are kept for His pleasure. The word for "preserved" in verse 1 is the same as the word "reserved" in verse 6. The angels are reserved in everlasting chains – there is no possibility of them escaping. So the saints are reserved or preserved – there is no possibility of them being lost.

The final words of introduction come in verse 2.

"Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied".

God has already shown us His mercy. In Ephesians chapter 2, we read, "But God, who is rich in mercy". God has given us peace. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". And God has shown us His love. Romans 5 says, "But God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". These things have been added – now, says Jude, let these things be multiplied. We are to show the same features towards one another as God has shown towards us..

In verse 3, Jude gives us the reason why he has written this epistle. He apparently had intended to write a letter about the "common salvation". Not that salvation is "common" in the sense of being inferior, but rather of the salvation that is common to all believers. But reports of other things had obviously come to his attention. And now he was giving all diligence to tell the saints to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints". There is a difference between contending for the faith and being contentious for the faith. In Ephesians, Paul tells the saints that they were to speak the truth in love. Love and truth were to go hand in hand together. But in no way are we seeking to water down the strength of the expression "earnestly contend". It means literally "to agonize". It is the same root as the word "agony" used of the Lord in Gethsemane. "And being in an Agony, he shed as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground".

The faith is not the faith we get in salvation but rather the body of truth which has been given to the saints. In Ephesians 4, Paul writes about the unity of the faith. Note that this body of truth has been "once for all" delivered. The canon of scripture closed after John wrote his epistles and the book of Revelation. It has not been added to since.

What aboys us? Does the faith really matter to us. Do we agonize over it? Paul contended for the faith in Galatians. By his actions, Peter had put at risk the unity of the church at Antioch. He had withdrawn from the Gentiles to sit with the Jews and Barnabus soon followed. Paul saw the danger and he withstood Peter to the face for he was to be blamed.

But why was Jude's ministry now so urgent that he had to write with diligence"? Verse 4 tells us why. Certain men had crept in unawares. Error seldom walks in the front door. It usually comes in by stealth. Paul warned Timothy about them in II Timothy 3:

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

The description of these men in verse 4 certainly suggests that they were not saved.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

They are ordained to condemnation, they are ungodly, they have turned the grace of God into licentiousness. Since salvation was not of works, they thought that they could live as they pleased. They felt that they had liberty to sin so that the grace of God might abound. But most telling of all, they denied the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 19 they are described as "having not the Spirit". Such wicked men were no longer outside of the company but very much now within. In verse 12, "These are spots in your feasts of love, feeding themselves without fear".

The first example of apostasy is given us in verse 5;

5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 10 that they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, but with many of them God was not well pleased. There was also a mixed multitude came up with them. Exodus 12 says:

38 And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.

They took their place alongside of Israel but they were idolators. Jude tells us of their fate- God "destroyed them that believed not". Hebrews 3:17 tells us that "their carcasses fell in the wilderness". They were dead even before they fell to the ground.

Jude's second example is taken from the realm of angels.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

They had a place given to them by God – their first estate or their beginning or origin. They left their habitation or dwelling place. In all of God's creation, no creatures are more highly privileged than angels. They have been in the very presence of God. They have tremendous power. Yet it seemed that some abandoned this place. They have been given a unique sentence. They are not like the demons we read of in the gospels, who were free to roam and to dwell in men. Their freedom will not be taken away till they are cast into the bottomless pit.

But these angels in Jude 6 seem to be a special case. They are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day". We believe the angels of Jude 6 are the same angels as those in II Peter 2:4:

4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

A unique word is used here for hell. It is not the usual word "Gehenna" but "Tartarus". So why is there a special place for them, why are they wrapped in chains? It is interesting that the next verse in II Peter 2 takes us to Noah :

5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

A similar thing is found in I Peter 3:19 and 20.

Verse 19 speaks of the spirits in prison. Verse 20 tells us when they were disobedient – it was "in the days of Noah".

Two suggestions have been made regarding the identity of these spirits. One idea is that they were the sons of Seth, described as "the sons of God" in Genesis 6, and that the Lord in spirit preached to those men in Noah's day. They are now in prison.

There are problems though with this idea. One is that although men have spirits, they are

never referred to as "spirits". When this word is used in Hebrews 1:14, angels are in view.

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Again, the "sons of God" is an expression found only 4 times in the Old Testament; once in Genesis chapter 6 and three times in Job – chapters 1,2, and 38. In chapters 1 and 2, the "Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them". In chapter 38, the sons of God are rejoicing together at the dawn of creation. It is evidently the case in Job that angels are in view. By the law of consistency, it is reasonable to assume that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 are also angelic beings.

If we do take it that angels are referred to in Genesis 6, I Peter 3:19, II Peter 2:4, and Jude 6, what does it tell us. That these angels left their place of origin, the place that God gave them, seeing that the daughters of men were fair, and took them wives of all they chose. As a result of this alliance, there were giants in the earth. I believe this defilement of the human race was an attempt by Satan to corrupt the seed of the woman. It was so heinous to God that it brought about the flood upon mankind. These spirits who were disobedient in the days of Noah were then cast into Tartarus and kept in everlasting chains. Noah and his family were spared because God said about Noah, that he was perfect in his generations.

But what about the Lord in spirit preaching to these spirits? The word for "preach" in I Peter 3:19 does not have the sense of preaching the gospel with a view to salvation. It is the Greek word *Kerusso* which means "to herald". After His death at Calvary, the Lord in spirit went to Tartarus and there He declared to these angels that He had won the victory on the Cross. Their attempt to thwart the purpose of God had been defeated and He was the victor.

I believe that this interpretation is the most consistent one covering all the scriptures mentioned above. And does not verse 7 of Jude substantiate this view. The example of Sodom and Gomorrah is hardly an example of apostasy. They never had a position before God that they should fall away from it. The men of Sodom were morally corrupt and brought upon themselves the judgment of God. What they are an example of though is the sin of the angels of verse 6. What marked the two cities was "giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh".

We are living with the sins of Sodom today. Fifty years ago, sodomy was illegal and could get you put in prison. Today, you might lose your job or face imprisonment for speaking out against these things. But the Bible is very clear that such things are an abomination to God. Paul spoke about "men with men working that which is unseemly". David in his day had no truck with such. He drove out the Sodomites from the land. King Josiah broke down the houses of the Sodomites in his day.

From verses 8 to 10, we come to another feature of these men. They not only defile the flesh, they despise dominion and speak evil of dignities. They despise those who are in authority. The word "dominion" is based upon the word for "Lord" and has the idea of lordship. They refuse to bow to those who hold positions of lordship. They also speak evil of dignities. "Dignities" is actually the word for "glory". It is not just the power they hold but also the honour that comes to men through holding that place. To put this into an assembly context, they would despise the authority of overseers and teachers, men whom God has raised up to lead and to teach the saints. Hebrews 13 tells us about the overseer:

17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Even in the secular world, we are to give place to the powers that be. Paul writes in Romans 13:

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Verse 9 takes us back again into the world of spirits. This time the veil of heaven is drawn back and we learn through Jude of a confrontation that once took place between Michael and the devil. The devil, or Lucifer as he began, was the highest of all God's creatures. God said to him, "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty". Even after Lucifer had fallen, the archangel Michael gave the devil his place in recognizing the place God had given him. Michael dare not bring against him a railing accusation but said, "the Lord rebuke thee".

Prior to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the devil had the power of death. But the Lord removed that power from him, according to Hebrews chapter 2:

14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

In Revelation chapter 1, he says about Himself:

18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Michael therefore had to contend with the devil yet give him his place at the same time. So what was this confrontation all about? The reason is given. Michael and the devil were contending for the body of Moses. Could it have been on Mount Horeb after the Lord had buried Moses, or had it something to do with the appearance of Moses with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. We cannot say for definite.

Strangely enough, Paul himself was unwittingly guilty of speaking evil of dignities in Acts. When a man before him orders him to be struck on the face, Paul cries out, "God shall smite thee, thou whited sepulchre". Paul is rebuked for it and has to apologise – he did not know that the man responsible was the high priest. He even quotes a verse, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people".

But the apostates of Jude's epistle had no such qualms. They speak evil of things which they know not. They were behaving just like brute beasts.

Verse 11 gives us three further examples from the old testament. They are not in chronological order. Cain comes first, but Korah comes before Balaam in the book of Numbers. Rather they are in a moral order. First we have an individual example of a man disobeying God. But in Balaam, we have the example of an individual whose doctrine brought many others into sin. Lastly, we have the example of Korah and the princes who brought destruction upon 250 of the Levites. Note the increase in intensity. They have gone, they ran, they perished.

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

In Hebrews 11, we read of the faith of Abel.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

This takes us back to Genesis chapter 4. The fact that Abel offered by faith tells me that God spoke to Abel and told him what to bring ie a sacrifice from the flock. God would surely say the same thing to Cain, but Cain came rather with the fruit of the ground. How often did the two brothers bring their offerings? Hebrews 11 speaks of Abel's gifts (plural). Abel came often with his sacrifice – Abel must have come often with his. That is why Jude speaks of the way of Cain. It was a determined pathway that he engaged in, in defiance of the declared will of God. That is apostasy.

Our verse in Jude also speaks of the "error of Balaam". What was this error? In the book of Numbers, we read that Balak, the king of Moab, offered much wealth to Balaam if he would come and curse the people of Israel. Balaam stands before Israel three times but

on each occasion, he blesses the people instead of cursing them. Balaam is mentioned three times in the New Testament. The first occurrence is in II Peter chapter 2:

15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

Peter speaks of the way of Balaam. He tells us the journey of Balaam to meet Balak. God had told Balaam not to go, then on the second occasion told him that he could go, but only to tell Balak what the Lord would reveal to him.

Revelation chapter 2 speaks of the doctrine of Balaam. We have some in Pergamos who hold the doctrine of Balaam ie causing saints to fall into sin.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

After Balaam had failed to curse the people, one might imagine that was the end of the matter. But he loved the wages of unrighteousness and quietly taught Balak that the way to ruin Israel was by introducing them to strange wives who would lead the men into idolatry and sin.

Balaam was undoubtedly a prophet for God spoke through him on those three occasions. It demonstrates that to have spiritual gift does not necessitate salvation. Take Judas Iscariot as an example. He must have been able to do what the other disciples could do, or he would have stood out amongst them. In a future day also, some will say to the Lord, "Have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wondrous works?" But the Lord replies, "I never knew you".

Finally in verse 11, we have the gainsaying of Korah. Another example of apostasy were the sons of Korah who challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16:

2 And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:

3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy,

They wanted to take the power of Moses and Aaron and share it amongst the people, and because of this they perished. Korah and those with him were Kohathites ie part of the tribe of Levi with responsibility for bearing the vessels of the tabernacle. They had a God-given role but they wanted more. Moses and Aaron were both divinely appointed for their role – Moses at the burning bush and Aaron by way of his rod that budded.

In verse 12, Jude makes an up to date application of his ministry. He refers now to those who were with the saints in their love feasts – the "Agape" referred to by Paul in I Corinthians chapter 11. But he calls them not "spots" as in the AV but "hidden reefs". They are hiding below the surface but just waiting to cause havoc and destruction. Another characteristic of them is that they feed themselves without fear. It was said of the church in its early days that "no man dare join himself to them". Unbelievers and professors stayed well clear of the company for it was evident that God was working in and through them. Perhaps the testimony of the saints in the days of Jude had diminished to such a low level that these apostates could feel comfortable amongst them.

There then follows four examples of useless things. They are clouds without water. They hold out promise of life giving and refreshing rain, but they produce nothing. Likewise they are trees without fruit. The fruit appeared for a little while and promised much but produced nothing. It withered away. Then they are like raging waves of the sea. They have much energy and seeming power, but it all recedes into nothing like the foam of dissipated waves. And finally, they are like wandering stars, shining brightly at first but then disappearing into the blackness of darkness, as will these apostates.

From men in the past who were marked by failure, we turn now to one of the earliest of the Old Testament saints, who prophesied of the ruin of the wicked. Enoch is described as

the seventh from Adam. If we count Adam as being the first generation, then Enoch was the seventh. Why should Jude tell us this detail? Seven is always the number of completeness and I believe he is here typical of the saints at the end of this present dispensation who will be caught up at the Rapture before the judgment of God falls. Noah on the other hand is described as the "eighth person", not just because there were eight people in the ark but surely that he is typical of those who will follow after those typified by Enoch and will go through the Tribulation before entering into a new world.

Enoch was a man to whom were given many divine revelations. The first was regarding the flood, hence he called his son Methuselah, "when he dies, it shall come". Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah – the revelation changed his whole life. The second revelation that we read of concerning this man is found in Hebrews 11. "By faith, Enoch was translated that he should not see death". God revealed to Enoch that he would not die but rather be taken up without dying into heaven. But the third revelation is here in Jude. We learn for the first time that Enoch was a prophet and spoke of the day of the Lord – a day which is still ahead of us. The prophecy is notable for the fourfold repetition of the word "ungodly". This is the special character of men in the last days. Who are these saints that will accompany the Lord in this day? I believe they are not saints of earth, but rather God's holy ones i.e. angels. Other scriptures such as Matthew 24 refer to the Lord coming with His angels in that day.

The men of Jude's day were like the men of Moses' day – they were murmurers. This was the great sin of Israel for forty years in the wilderness. Numbers 21 shows what God thought of murmurers :

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

In verses 17 and 20, he uses the word "beloved". In verse 17, he tells his beloved to remember the words spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the foundation of the early church – the apostle's doctrine. Verse 18 is a particular word of warning from the apostles – that "there should be mockers in the last time". Peter also spoke about scoffers saying "Where is the promise of His coming". Peter especially has in mind the scoffers in the Tribulation period, who will ridicule the idea of the Second Advent.

Verse 19 gives us three more features of the ungodly. Firstly, they cause divisions (rather than they who separate themselves). Then they are "sensual". It is the word "natural" used by Paul in I Corinthians chapter 2:

14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But most damning of all, Jude adds, "Having not the Spirit". Elsewhere we read that if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His". Yet another verse says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God".

In verses 20 and 21, we have some positive advice – "building up yourselves in your most holy faith". It is never an excuse to blame the conditions of the day or the lack of faithfulness on the part of others. Even if all else fails, we can build ourselves up. We can read the word of God for ourselves, relying upon the Spirit of truth to enlighten us. Notice that the faith is now called "your most holy faith". The truth of God never changes and is never corrupted. Men may change but the faith remains "most holy".

We can also engage in "praying in the Holy Ghost". These were the resources of the apostles themselves in Acts chapter 6. "We will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word".

The third positive element is in verse 21 – "Keep yourselves in the love of God". One might argue, "But surely we are always in the love of God". That is true, but God loves those

who keep His commandments. John 14 records:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Finally in this little section, we are to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. God has shown us His mercy in salvation (Eph 4), but we need mercy in our on-going Christian experience. The epistle began in verse 2 with "Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied". Here at the end it is "mercy unto eternal life". Every believer received eternal life when he was saved, but it is also looked at as a continual thing. Paul urges Timothy to "lay hold upon eternal life". That is, to make full use of it.

How have the saints to deal with those who have come amongst them? There were no doubt some who had to be removed from amongst them and Jude has identified sufficient features of the professors for them to be identified. But they have to temper judgment with mercy. There is always the danger that true saints can be led astray by unbelievers, so that they have to make a distinction with these men. Some then needed to be treated with compassion, making a distinction. Others were to be saved with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Paul gives this ministry of recovery in Galatians chapter 6. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness".

The closing benediction is in verses 24 and 25. Glory is ascribed to Him who is able to keep us from falling. In John 17, the Lord committed His own to the Father. "Holy Father, keep though thine own name those whom Thou gavest Me". God is also able to "present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" .

This is the great desire of the Lord Jesus according to Paul in Ephesians chapter 5.

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

We will be faultless and blameless in that day but God is able to keep us today.

(Note the preposition "before" is KATENOPION – in the immediate presence of". It is used only three times in the New Testament and always regarding the Church. In Ephesians chapter 1, God has chosen us that we should be holy and without blame BEFORE Him. In Colossians chapter 1, it is translated as "in His sight" :

22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

Truly the saints of this dispensation stand in a unique position before God)