

Expository — Jude.

The Epistle of Jude 1-7.

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Nothing certain is known of the writer of this epistle; beyond the description here given. He contents himself with two titles — "servant" (bondman) "*of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.*" If the James referred to be "the Lord's brother," of whom Paul speaks (Gal. 1: 19), rather than the apostle Judas, not Iscariot (John 14: 22), who seems to have been the brother of James, the son of Alphaeus (Luke 6: 16), then Jude also was, according to the flesh, a brother of the Lord. If so, what grace and humility are displayed in that he does not call attention to the fact. And what a lesson for all who take, or seek to take, a place amongst believers on the ground of human distinction or birth!

The similarity of this epistle to that of 2 Peter cannot fail to strike even the ordinary reader; but, in truth, there is a notable difference. "Peter speaks of *sin*, Jude of *apostasy*, the departure of the assembly from its primitive state before God. Departure from the holiness of faith is the subject that Jude treats. He does not speak of outward separation;" that is, of separation from the assembly, or from professing Christianity. Bearing this in mind, there are degrees of corruption to be traced through 2 Peter, Jude, and 1 John. In Peter, as pointed out, it is sin — sin working indeed in gross forms — in the bosom of the Church; in Jude it is moral apostasy, though those who are guilty of it still retain their place inside (v. 12); while in John the apostates have gone out. "They went out from us, but they were not of us," etc. (1 John 2: 19.)

Another point should be noticed as indicative of the character of this important epistle. While Jude deals with evils already existing in his own day, these evils are taken as shadowing forth the state of things that will be found at the close; and he thus speaks of the Lord coming "with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all," etc. The epistle therefore is prophetic, and as such has a special importance for those whose lot has fallen upon the last days, in which "perilous times" are to be expected.

The address of the epistle is as beautiful as it is peculiar to this writer: "*To them that are sanctified* by God the Father, and preserved in Christ Jesus.*" (v. 1.) Jude reminds those to whom he is writing that, if they were saints, they were so through grace, by a divine and sovereign call — a call which, addressed to them in the power of the Holy Ghost through the word of God, reached their hearts and consciences, and separated them from the world, to be God's people. We cannot too often recall the fact that it was God's call that made us saints, and that we are consequently not called to be saints, but saints by divine calling. Then we have a twofold description of the called. First, sanctified, or rather "beloved, in God the Father." Jude thus sets the saints in the immediate presence of God, teaches them that they are the objects of His heart, and would have them know that as such they have been brought into the enjoyment of an intimate relationship with Him; for He is their Father, as well as God.† Secondly, they are preserved in Christ Jesus. The ground, and possibly the means, of their security are thus stated; and it should never be forgotten that if we are kept, preserved in the midst of all the dangers which surround us, and of all the snares and temptations of the evil one, it is only in and through Jesus Christ. It is God's power that guards us, but the power is exercised, displayed on our behalf in and through Him who is now seated at God's right hand. What food for meditation then — yea, what ground for praise and adoration — lies in these two words, "Beloved in God the Father;" and, "Preserved in Jesus Christ!"

*The reading now generally accepted is, "Beloved in God the Father." (See Revised Version and the New Translation.)

†The address of the epistles to the Thessalonians may be compared: "To the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father," etc. But here it is perhaps that the spiritual life of the saints had been specially developed in the filial relationship.

The salutation differs both from those of Paul and of Peter; while it resembles those of Paul when writing to individuals in the introduction of "mercy," and those of Peter in the use of the word "peace." Jude says, "*Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied.*" (v. 2.) Such was his and God's desire, as expressed through him, for these beloved saints. Mercy is the first thing (see v. 21), for in view of the circumstances in which they were found this was their primary need, mercy for their weakness (compare Heb. 4: 16); the constant outflowing of the tender compassion of God to protect, sustain, and to guard them amid the perils of their path. Also peace, not peace with God, but peace, peace absolutely, which possesses the whole soul, and in the power of which we can walk with unruffled composure in the presence of the greatest dangers of the most malignant enemies. It is not said whether it is the peace of God (Phil. 4) or the peace which Christ gives, His own peace, to His people (John 14), because indeed it is a peace which, founded on the work of redemption, the soul enjoys in relationship with the Father and the Son. Love is added — the expression of the divine nature, that holy circle and atmosphere into which the redeemed are brought, and in which they live and move and have their being. (Compare 1 John 4: 16.) And all these (and the reader will observe the order — mercy, peace as the fruit of mercy, and then love as the sphere of the soul's life) Jude desires should be multiplied unto them. For even if these blessings are possessed, they are only possessed in measure, seeing that, like the source whence they flow, they are infinite in their character. The believer can therefore never say that he has attained, and his rest must thus be, as

has often been said, not in attainment, but in attaining; and he is drawn on to this by every new glimpse he gains of the boundless treasures, which are laid up for him in Christ.

The occasion of the epistle is now given. "*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 to the saints.*" (v. 3.) Jude, as he tells us, had been earnestly desirous to minister to the edification of the saints; but the state of things was such to render this impossible, and he had rather to stir them up to put on their armour, to gird on their weapons, and to prepare for conflict. This gives a principle of immense and abiding importance. When Satan, through his emissaries, has found a foothold within, and is engaged in corrupting and undermining the foundations of the truth, it is idle to talk of edification; for God, at such a moment, calls to conflict, and it is by conflict alone that His work can then be done. Timid souls are ever disturbed at the least sign of controversy; they plead for peace and charity, and urge the danger to souls from warfare. But when the truth of Christianity is at stake, is it genuine love to souls that abandons the field to the adversaries? When Goliath dared the armies of Israel it was David who wrought most for the welfare of the people of God. When Peter denied, at Antioch, the truth of grace by refusing to eat with Gentile believers, it was Paul who withstood him to the face, that laboured most effectually for the blessing of the saints. If God calls to conflict, it is nothing but supreme selfishness that turns aside from the battle under the plea of desiring to shield the saints. (Compare Judges 6: 16, 17, 23.) When Nehemiah, for example, was engaged in building the walls of Jerusalem, the enemy was so active, that every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded." Moreover, he adds, "he that sounded the trumpet was by me." And he commanded all classes of the people that in whatever place they should hear the sound of the trumpet they should resort thither. (Neh. 4: 17-20.) If the trumpet sounded forth its summons to conflict, the building of the wall was to be suspended, and all were to face the foe in dependence upon God. And this is the lesson enforced by Jude. Now, he says in other words, is the time for conflict. He puts God's trumpet to his lips, and summons them to the battle, to rouse them, that they might watch, stand fast in the faith, quit themselves like men, be strong, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. "The faith," it need scarcely be observed, is the thing believed, the truth, and the conflict was to be waged to maintain it as it had been delivered to the saints. Any modifications, any developments of it, any adaptation to modern thought and feeling — all of which are, in fact, corruptions of the truth — were and are to be resisted. Delivered to us through the apostles, we are to contend for it in the very form in which it has been received.

The next verse points out the source and cause of the danger: "*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 the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (v. 4.) We have, thus, the history and character of these corrupting apostates. First, they had crept into the assembly unawares, "unnoticed;" that is, their true character was not discerned when they were brought into the assembly. In a day of evil there can be no graver responsibility than that of the "porters" (see 2 Chronicles 23: 19); those who keep, so to speak, the gates, and whose duty it is to admit only such as have an undoubted title and qualification for the privilege of entrance. There was remissness in this day when these men were allowed to steal inside; and how often is there a lamentable lack of vigilance in the same way at the present moment. The

consequence, whether then or now, is confusion and corruption. While, however, the "porters" had failed, these men had been "marked out beforehand to this sentence;"† they had been foreseen by the omniscient eye of the Spirit of God, and the *ground* of their condemnation had been beforehand determined and proclaimed. In their essential character they were "ungodly" men — men who had not the fear of God before their eyes, and acted without reference to Him, shutting out God from their thoughts, acts, and ways. (Compare v. 15.)

*The word "God" should be omitted. Lord God are titles under which God was known to the Jews; God and Father those He has in grace assumed in relationship with Christians. In like manner the word "God" should be left out of 1 Peter 3: 15. In neither place has the word any sufficient authority.

†The word rendered condemnation is the same as in 1 Cor. 11: 29 and means "not the act of condemnation, but the subject-matter or charge on and for which they are condemned."

Then follow their special features: they turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denied the only *Master* (δεσπότην), and our Lord Jesus Christ. They seized upon grace as an excuse for sin; continued in sin that grace might abound (Romans 6: 1); and they rejected the authority of Christ, who was in fact their only Master. (Compare 2 Peter 2: 1.) They refused, in a word, the will of Christ, that they might be free to do their own will. It was thus the assertion of man in that sphere (the sphere of the assembly) where Christ and His authority are everything. This is the essence of all lawlessness, and was therefore true apostasy, though they yet occupied outwardly the ground of Christianity. The apostle Paul thus writes, "The mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work: only he who now letteth [will let], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked [lawless one] be revealed," etc. (2 Thess. 2: 7, 8.) These men who had stolen in among the saints unobserved were thus the precursors of the open apostasy and the "revelation" of the man of sin; for the same spirit governed them as will be exhibited in him in a more public way. These ungodly men existed in Jude's day; but let it not be forgotten that they have their representatives in every age of the church, and thus in our own time. We are therefore forewarned, and we need to be on our watch, jealous for the rights and honour of our Lord, against the slightest departure from His Word, or the smallest tendency to the abuse of grace. The seed-corn of apostasy may lie in what appears to be an insignificant act of the assertion of man's will in opposition to that of the only Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the next place Jude cites examples to show the certainty of judgment upon all that leave the place of subjection to the Lord, or fall into sin and corruption. *"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. 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. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them 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."* (vv. 5-7.)

*Many read, and with better authority, "Though ye once knew all things," a statement which contains a sad proof of the saints' waning state and knowledge.

There is, we cannot doubt, a twofold reason for the citation of these widely-differing examples of judgment. First, it is to show, from the case of Israel, that the judgment will proceed on the ground of their having occupied the place of the people of God. It would moreover seem — and this will be more clearly seen further on in the epistle — that the state of these men will be characteristic, towards the close, of public Christianity. Secondly, we have in these three examples the features — the forms of sin and iniquity — exhibited in these "dreamers" of whom Jude speaks. Thus those that were destroyed of the Israelites in the wilderness (and only *two* of those who came out of Egypt were spared — Caleb and Joshua) did not believe; they were children in whom was no faith. "And to whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief." (Hebrews 3: 18, 19.) The sin of the angels who kept not their first estate was rather that of disobedience; for one characteristic of those who have been preserved is that they "do His commandments." (Psalm 103: 20.) Lastly, in the case of Sodom and Gomorrha it was the will of the flesh, self-will in lust, "giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh." And let the moral order be noted: first unbelief, then disobedience, and finally the licence of the flesh — an order that is continually exemplified in the word of God.

Two other things may be indicated. The fallen angels, as we learn from this scripture, and from 2 Peter 2: 4, are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. They are, therefore, a class apart from the devil and the demons of the New Testament, who are so often found engaged in their evil work upon the earth. It is to these fallen angels that Paul may refer in 1 Cor. 6: 3. The destruction, moreover, of Sodom and Gomorrhah, and of the neighbouring cities, is set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Those cities lie still under the weight of their doom, swallowed up in the judgment by which they were overtaken; and the Spirit of God appeals to this both as a warning and an example, a warning of the certainty of coming judgment, and as an example of its eternal character. Let all such, therefore, as these corrupters of God's grace, and rebels against the authority of Christ, beware!

The Epistle of Jude 7-16.

The writer of this epistle had interrupted his description of the "certain men who had crept in unawares" among the saints, by the introduction of three examples of divine judgment upon sinners — sinners amongst His people in the wilderness, amongst angels, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha with the neighbouring cities. He now returns and points out that these men, notwithstanding these public and notorious examples of the certainty of God's judgment against evil, followed similar courses. He says, "*Likewise also*" (better, "Yet in like manner," or, "In like manner nevertheless") "*these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.*" (v. 8.)

Such were three of the characters of evil displayed in these false professors. But first they are designated as "dreamers," for they doubtless, deluded as they were by Satan, trusted in themselves that they were righteous, while they despised others. (See v. 19.) They were indeed dreamers, walking after the imaginations of their own hearts, and thereby lulled into a false security even while the storm of judgment was already gathering over their heads. Moreover,

they "defile the flesh" - a term expressive of moral and fleshly corruption. It is remarkable that everywhere in Scripture a lofty religious profession, which is without reality, is always associated with abominable sins. (See Matt. 23: 25-28; 2 Tim. 3: 1-5; Titus 1: 15, 16, etc.)

Next, they "despise dominion." This expresses the full development of self-will in man, asserting himself and his rights, and at the same time refusing to acknowledge any superior authority. The question is not raised as to what dominion or "lordship" is meant, as it is rather the spirit, the utterly insubject spirit, of these dreamers, that is stigmatized. It is the spirit of insubordination, the growing spirit of the world today: and, as has long ago been remarked, the evil current in the world at any period is that which most affects the Church at the time. The cultivation of independence, the rebellion of the mind of man against God's order, the casting off of all reverence for authority, whether in the Church or the world, are here exposed in all their naked deformity as a warning to the saints of God. The fruit, lastly, of despising dominion is seen in speaking evil of dignities — speaking "railingly" against dignities. It is the full licence of the tongue of those, who have no veneration for God or man, and who disown all allegiance — of those who say, in the words of the Psalmist, "With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is Lord over us?" (Ps. 12: 4.)

Having given the portraiture of these evil men, Jude presents a contrast in the conduct of Michael the archangel. *"Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."* (v. 9.) The sole object of the introduction of this controversy between the archangel and Satan is to show the true character of the conduct of those who speak evil of the dignities. These allow themselves to "speak railingly," whereas the archangel, even when dealing with Satan, the impersonation of all evil, and knowing his enmity against the people of God, did not permit himself to do so, "but with the gravity of one who acts according to God, appealed to the judgment of God Himself."* And in doing so he employs the same language — "the Lord rebuke thee" — as is used by the Lord Himself, when Satan was standing at His right hand to resist Jehovah's gracious interposition on behalf of Jerusalem, as represented by Joshua the high priest. (Zechariah 3: 1, 2.) Surely every child of God may find here guidance for his own conduct in his conflicts with evil, for who can appeal in vain to the Lord when His interests are at stake? How far more frequently would the efforts of the enemy be foiled if the people of God knew how to look to the Lord in this way to avenge His own cause!

*Michael is mentioned in the book of Daniel (Dan. 10: 13; Dan. 12: 1) as one who "standeth for the children of thy people;" and in Rev. 12 as fighting with his angels against the dragon and his angels. Of the nature of his reasoning with the devil about the body of Moses we have absolutely no knowledge. Speculations on the subject, and especially on the basis of the mysterious statement in Deut. 34: 6, have been endless, but it is one of God's secrets into which it is impossible for man to penetrate.

Jude pursues the contrast: *"But these speak evil of (or railingly against) those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves."* (v. 10.) The reader will notice the recurrence of the word railing, translated in vv. 8 and 10, to "speak evil." It will suffice to indicate its meaning if it is pointed out that the same word is used in the gospels in the phrase, "blaspheme against the Holy Ghost." (Mark 3: 29.) It is

a word indeed which betrays that the will and the corruption of the heart are in deadly activity. This is seen in a twofold way in the charge which Jude brings against these men. They blaspheme, speak railingly against, the things they know not, probably the spiritual things, or divine truths which were spoken of by the Christians amongst whom they moved, things which they could not comprehend, for "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." (1 Cor. 2: 14.) Then as to the things which "they understand by mere nature," in these they corrupt themselves, using them as they did only for the gratification of their own appetites and passions. Such were the men who sought to cloak themselves with a profession of Christianity.

Having thus exposed their true character, torn off their mask, so to speak, Jude heaps upon them the most solemn denunciations, adding, at the same time, further distinguishing features: "*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. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*" (vv. 11-13.) There is something very solemn in the pronouncement of this prophetic woe over these corrupters of the truth; a woe, which as it embodies the holy indignation of the Spirit of God, carries with it, where there is no repentance, the irrevocable sentence of judgment. "Dude then sums up three kinds or characters of the evil (as seen in these men), and of estrangement from God; first, that of nature, the opposition of the flesh to the testimony of God, and to His true people, the impetus which this enmity gives to the will of the flesh; in the second place, ecclesiastical evil, teaching error for reward, knowing all the while that it is contrary to the truth, and against the people of God; thirdly, open opposition, rebellion against the authority of God in His true King and Priest" These three forms of evil were displayed, as we are here reminded, in Cain, Balaam, and Korah; and now we learn that, through the energy of the enemy, they are reproduced in every age of the Church; that, in fact, they are typical expressions of the corrupt heart of man in opposition to the work of the Spirit of God. We are therefore put on our guard; and it is not too much to say that, thus instructed, it is not difficult to detect all these corruptions in the Church of God at the present moment.

**Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, vol. v. p. 552.*

The Spirit of God, using Jude as the vehicle of His thoughts, proceeds in the next place to use a variety of figures and illustrations to indicate the worthless and deceitful character of these wolves in sheep's clothing. They are, he says, "*spots in your feasts.*" It was the practice of the early saints, in the fervour of their first love, to gather together in happy fellowship at what was termed love-feasts; but just as at the feast, which the King made for the marriage of His Son, there was a man who had not on the wedding garment; so at these feasts, of which Jude speaks, these "dreamers" were found — having no title whatsoever to be present. They were therefore "spots," or, as some prefer to render, "sunken rocks," rocks which are peculiarly the danger of the unwary mariner. In like manner these constituted a hidden peril for the saints with whom they were assembled; and yet, being what they were, they feasted "*together with them without fear, pasturing themselves.*" What a proof of hard hearts and seared consciences! For being hypocrites they yet mingled with the saints of God, professing to enjoy what they enjoyed, and

were not afraid. Nay, as some of whom Paul writes, their God was their belly, for they "fed themselves," they gloried in their shame, and minded earthly things. (Phil. 3: 18, 19.)

They are described next as "*clouds without water*" clouds which as they rose upon the horizon promised fertilizing showers for the weary earth, but as they advanced were discovered to be "without water," and were swept "along" by the winds; then, changing the figure, they are "*autumnal trees without fruit.*" The season had come for fruits, but these trees, when discerned by the Spirit of God, were discovered to be fruitless; for, indeed, they were "*twice dead,*" dead, as another has said, by nature, and dead by their apostasy, and as such already "rooted up," or "*plucked up by the roots,*" done with for ever as far as this world was concerned. Two other illustrations are adduced: "*raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames,*" not simply shame, but shames, for nothing else can proceed from the heart of man under the power of evil (see Matt. 15: 19, 20); and they were also "*wandering stars,*" stars which had left their own orbit, and were now rushing, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, to their destruction, and hence Jude adds, "*To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*"

Let the reader pause and meditate upon this solemn picture; and let him remember as he meditates, that these men, whom the Holy Spirit thus describes, were not the open and avowed enemies of the truth of God, but professing Christians, inside and not outside, mingling freely with the saints, and taking part in their meetings. It is true that they were in heart hypocrites and apostates, but only those who were led of the Spirit, and could discern with His discernment, could have penetrated through the disguise worn. How closely we need to walk with God to be preserved in such an evil day? "The Lord knoweth them that are His;" and if we abide in the secret of His presence, we shall also know them, while we recollect the responsibility resting on every one who owns Christ as Lord, to depart from iniquity.

It is a great consolation to know that the Lord has ever foreseen the devices of the enemy, as well as provided the saints with their guard and defence. Enoch had thus foretold the appearance of these instruments of Satan: "*And 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 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.*" (vv. 14, 15.) Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and, as so rapt away from the earth before the judgment of the flood, he is a type of the church — of the saints who will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, before the manifestation of the man of sin and the occurrence of the great tribulation. And now we learn that he was a prophet, and that it was through him God announced the coming of the Lord in judgment with the "myriads" of His saints.

The significance of this striking prophecy is well shown in the following remarks: "Of old the Spirit had announced by the mouth of Enoch the judgment that should be executed. This presents a very important aspect of the instruction here given; namely, that this evil which had crept in among the Christians (in Jude's day) would continue and still be found when the Lord should return for judgment. . . There would be a continuous system of evil from the apostles' time till the Lord came. This is a solemn witness to what would go on amongst Christians."* The character of the evil to be judged should also be observed. The judgment is to be executed upon

all; and then those upon whom the stroke will specially fall are distinguished. They are the "ungodly," and they will be judged for all their "ungodly" deeds, which they have "ungodly" committed, and for all their hard speeches which "ungodly" sinners have spoken against the Lord. The repetition of the word "ungodly" cannot fail to arrest the attention; and it should also be noticed, that the Lord will "convince" them of their guilt; or rather "convict," demonstrate their sin so as to bring it home to them, so that they will be left without excuse. Moreover, as for example in Romans 1: 2, so here, the two grounds of judgment are works and the rejection of Christ, their own deeds, and their sin against grace in the person of Christ. Long ages have passed since Enoch prophesied, and the proclaimed judgment still lingers; but not the less surely will it come; "for when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (1 Thess. 5: 3.)

**Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, vol. v. p. 553.*

Several more features are now added: *"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."* (v.16.) Murmuring and complaining characterized Israel, and especially the mixed multitude in the wilderness (see Ex. 16, Ex. 17; Num. 11, Num. 14, Num. 16, Num. 17; 1 Cor. 10: 10), and on this account, as drawing our attention to the parallel, the words are doubtless here used. The next clause goes down to the roots of the evil — walking after their own lusts. They were in fact governed by their own inclinations and desires, and not by the will of God. (Compare Eph. 2: 3.) Lastly, they were loud and pompous talkers, using "swelling" words; and besides this, they were flatterers, paying court and homage to those out of whom they might be able to make some profit. God, as we are frequently told in the Scriptures, is no respecter of persons; but this is exactly what these "dreamers" were, with a view to their own advantage. How humbling it is to read these various traits of the corrupt heart of man! It is still more so as we remind ourselves that they are here delineated as found in actual expression among the saints of God. And above all is it humbling to remember, even while it leads us to extol the mighty grace of God which has wrought so effectually for us in Christ, that the capacity for all this evil is also found in the hearts of us all.

The Epistle of Jude 17-25.

Jude, in the next place, directs his attention to the saints themselves, to those who were walking apart from the evils he had indicated, and fortifies their souls with needed words of wisdom and guidance, while also pointing out the means by which they might be preserved from the wiles and seductions of the enemy. And with what relief must he have turned from his solemn denunciation of these apostates to the encouragement of the beloved saints! *"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. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit."* (vv. 17-19.)

The reader will recall that the correct reading of verse 1 is "beloved in" God the Father. It is doubtless on this account that Jude addresses the saints here, and in verse 20, as "beloved," not

only therefore as expressing his own love in the Spirit, but also as being in communion with the heart of God the Father concerning His people. And what would he have them do in respect of the evils by which they were surrounded? First and foremost, he would have them to recollect the warnings which had been given by the apostles. Not only had Enoch prophesied of these ungodly men, but the apostles of the Lord also had foretold their appearance. The Lord indeed never leaves His people unforeshadowed of the dangers and enemies they will have to encounter. (See Matt. 24; John 15: 16; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3; Rev. 2: 3; etc.) And if His warnings are treasured up in their minds, they are neither surprised nor disheartened when there are fears within as well as fightings without, but they are prepared for conflict with every form of Satan's enmity. The Lord thus said to His disciples, "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. *Behold, I have told you before.*" (Matt. 24: 24, 25.) How necessary then is it for the believer to be acquainted with these warnings of coming dangers!

To avoid all possibility of mistake in the identification of those of whom the apostles had prophesied, Jude gives more characteristic features. They would be "mockers" or "scoffers;" men utterly without reverence, and able to make sport of holy things, and led only by their own ungodly lusts. They will, notwithstanding, "separate themselves," not from evil, either moral or doctrinal, it need scarcely be said, but in a proud Pharisaical spirit, boasting of superior knowledge or intellectual progress, and affecting to despise the humble Christians who still implicitly believe and rest in the word of God; they will thus take a position apart, forming themselves, it may be, into a school of opinion. But not they who commend themselves are approved; and, in one sentence, Jude strips from these apostates their gay clothing, and exhibits them as they appear before the eye of God. They are, he tells us, nothing but "natural" men; for such is the force of the word rendered "sensual," natural men; those who have never been born again, or cleansed in the precious blood of Christ, and hence not having the Spirit of God. Is it possible, does any one enquire, that such men should be found among, and be reckoned as, Christians? Let such an one look around and behold what exists today. He will soon discover that there are those who hold high places among Christians; nay, that there are some who occupy prominent places in the pulpits of Christendom, who deride the simple faith of their forefathers, who preach a so-called morality instead of Christ, and who seek, in every possible way, to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the truths of Christianity. And what are these men? They indeed are mockers, walking after their own ungodly desires — desires which shut out God; and we may know, therefore, by the very fact of their existence, and their increasing number, that we are "in the last time."

We have now the second means of safety given: "*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*" (vv. 20, 21.) This, then, is the resource of the saints, as well as the means of preservation, in troublous times. The action of Nehemiah has already been cited; and few can read the two books (Nehemiah and Jude) without being struck with the parallel. Both alike had to urge to defence and warfare, and both also encouraged the saints to build. We learn, therefore, from both that, when we have to contend earnestly with the foe in defence of the truth, it is above all necessary to build ourselves up upon our most holy faith. Those who wield God's sword must be in a state to use it, if they would come victoriously out of the conflict.

Let us, however, examine these exhortations. The faith, "your most holy faith," as in verse 3, is the thing believed, in a word, the truth, and what Jude desired was that the saints should be well grounded in it, built up upon it, as on a sure foundation which cannot be shaken, and thus prepared for the attacks of the enemy; that they should be resting on the truth, the great truths of Christianity, as the source of strength for their own souls, being edified by it, filled with the thoughts of God, revealed by His Word, that Word by which we are sanctified, so that, reposing securely upon divine foundations, they might be strong for the conflict to which they were being called. This would involve diligence in the reading of the Scriptures; and accordingly we find that, when the Lord placed Joshua at the head of His host, and appointed him to lead Israel in their conflicts, He gave him the following charge: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." (Joshua 1: 8.)

The word of God and prayer are constantly combined in the Scriptures; and thus the next thing enjoined is "praying in the Holy Ghost." It might almost be said that these two things cannot well be disjoined, for whenever the word of God is received into the heart it must produce prayer. Jude speaks of "praying in the Holy Ghost," for in truth no other is real prayer. Petitions may be offered, prayers made, but the only prayer according to God is that which is the fruit of those desires begotten within us by His Spirit. Here, however, praying will rather mean the maintenance in the soul by the Holy Ghost of the constant sense of entire dependence upon God, for that is both the secret of safety and strength. (Compare Psalm 16: 1.)

In the next place it is, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." It is to be remarked that the word "keep," as is often the case in similar exhortations, is in a past tense (the aorist), the significance of which is that we are to seek "to be in that state," and perhaps reminding us of our own powerlessness, and of our need of constant grace in order to be so kept. The love referred to is God's love to us, which is unvarying and unchanging, only Jude would have us in the sense and enjoyment of it. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. This is common Christian knowledge; but it is quite another thing to be living with the consciousness of it in our souls. This is the secret of calm and blessed enjoyment in the presence of God; and it is the portion only of such who are walking in the power of an ungrieved Spirit, while it becomes in the heart of the believer the producing cause of holy affections, whether towards God or our fellow-saints. (Compare John 15: 9-12.)

In the sense, moreover, of the love of God, we are to be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." A reference to Heb. 4: 16 will explain the saint's need of mercy while passing through the wilderness. There it is mercy for our weakness, ministered to us at the throne of grace in response to the intercession of Christ as the High Priest. Here it is the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as knowing our constant need of it, because He Himself has trodden the wilderness. In the gospels we have an exquisite exemplification of the way in which He bestows it upon His own. In Gethsemane, when, during His agony in the prospect of the cross, He found His disciples, Peter, James, and John, sleeping, He said unto Peter, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26: 40, 41.) In the tenderness of His heart He felt for them in their weakness. He was touched with a feeling of their infirmities, and He ministered

to them the needed mercy. What heart like His heart? And the Spirit of God would have us count upon Him, upon His tender compassion, His mercy, all along our pathway unto eternal life. As has been written by another, "It is the mercy needed along all the path, mercy reaching to the end, and carrying us into eternal life."*

*Some confine the mercy to the eternal life at the end, regarding eternal life as the issue and full expression of the mercy of our Lord; but we prefer the interpretation as given above. Eternal life, as also in Paul's epistles, is looked upon as future, and it is therefore viewed in its results; viz., conformity to Christ in glory. In John's doctrine it is a present possession, expressed in and through the believer, whatever his growth or intelligence. All alike possess it, and may know that they have it (1 John 5: 13), though the manifestation of it may vary according as they are babes, young men, or fathers.

The following verses relate to the attitude and conduct of the saints towards those whom Jude has described: "*And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire: hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*"* (vv. 22, 23.)

*There is some confusion in the readings of these verses, and many emendations are offered. But as the sense, whichever may be adopted, is but little affected, we leave the text as it stands in the Authorized Translation.

The connection of these verses with the foregoing indicates a principle of much importance. Jude presses first upon the saints the acquisition of a right state of soul — urges edification, the realization of their dependence in the power of the Spirit, their need of the enjoyment of the love of God, and of counting upon the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ; and then he instructs them how to act in respect of those who, though inside, were really enemies of the truth. The lesson is, that unless we ourselves are walking before God in the power of the truths we profess to hold, we are not qualified to deal with those who have gone astray; and this lesson is one which we all need to remember at the present moment.

Another thing is to be remarked; that discernment is needed in dealing with such. "Of some," says Jude, "have compassion, making a difference." There may be leaders in the evil, corrupters of the truth, from whom we should stand entirely apart, those who are to be utterly rejected; others, those who are misled, simple souls who have been deluded by subtle speech, entangled by specious reasonings, are to be sought out and recovered. On these we are to have compassion — distinguishing their case from that of their deceivers. There are others again, occupying another position, who are to be saved with fear, "pulling them out of the fire." These have gone far in self-will and corruption, and thus it is only as in communion with God about them and their deeds that their case can be reached; for, while using all energy for their deliverance, even the garment spotted with the flesh must be hated. Both priestly separation, and priestly discernment, are necessary for such warfare with the power of the enemy.

Finally, Jude concludes with an ascription of praise, in which he also directs the saints to the only source of their preservation: "*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*"* (vv. 24,

25.) The saints are thus divinely cast upon God; and it must have been an immense comfort, amid the pressure of evil on every side, to be in this way reminded that God was able to keep them from falling, then and all the way through, until they were presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. And never was it more necessary than now to remember this truth. It may be, and is, an evil day, and the enemy is both subtle and active; but it is still true that God is able to keep us from falling, however hot the fiery trial, or fierce the temptation. There is no excuse, therefore, to be offered if we fall; the fault is wholly our own, and demands unsparing self-judgment. What a foundation then is laid for our faith in these few simple words — God is able to keep us from falling! And what a different record We should have had of our past lives if we had lived in the daily and hourly recollection of it! Then our eyes would have ever been up to Him, from whom alone our help comes, and who, when we are walking in dependence on Him, will never suffer our foot to be moved.

*Most editors agree in the omission of the word "wise" before "God," and in adding after "Saviour," "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Jude ministers, however, not only present consolation through the mighty succour of God, but also encouragement in the glorious prospect when, all the trials past, God Himself would present the saints faultless before His glory with exceeding joy. The word "faultless" is the same as is used of the Lord Himself when it says, He "offered Himself without spot to God." (Heb. 9: 14. See also Eph. 1: 4; 1 Peter 1: 19, etc.) Such will be the perfected condition of the saints; and of necessity so, as otherwise they could not stand before the presence of the glory of God. It is no wonder then that the words are added, "With exceeding joy;" for then they will perceive the full results of their "common salvation," and understand, as they had never understood before, that all the blessedness into which they have then been brought, full and entire conformity to Christ in glory, as well as their preservation from all the dangers attendant upon their wilderness journey, has flowed from the heart of Him before whom they now stand in eternal blessedness. And their joy will doubtless find expression in this ascription, provided for them when down here in the stress of the conflict, "To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen." (Revised Version.) The songs of heaven may therefore be learnt on earth; for God is above all time, unchanging, and His praise is therefore eternal. But it is grace, and grace alone, that can open our lips to sing His praise. E. D.