

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the Epistle of Jude**

Extracted from “Stempublishing”

Reformatted by www.bible.beauport.eu

bible@beauport.eu

Rue du Château d’Or n°16/6

1180 Uccle (Brussels)

Belgium

Comments on the Epistle of Jude

By F.B. Hole

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE bears a very strong resemblance to 2 Peter 2:1 - 3:14, which lies upon the surface and must be apparent to every reader. Both refer to very evil men, who come in amongst the saints, and both unmask their true character. Both quote Old Testament examples by way of illustration and warning; and amongst the examples both mention the angels that sinned, and Sodom and Gomorrah. Both remind us that even holy angels would not assume authority as these men do. Both quote the case of Balaam. Both use a succession of very vigorous and graphic similes to impress us with their terrible evil and sin. And both turn to account what they have to say about the evil, by using it to urge the saints on to that which is good.

Yet with all these resemblances there is an underlying difference which we must endeavour to seize. In Peter the men in

question are distinctly false teachers, who themselves are going to destruction, and who influence for evil and drag with them to destruction unstable souls who, by making a profession of Christianity, have left behind them in an outward way the corruptions of the heathen world. In Jude the evil men are not spoken of as teachers in the same definite way, but the position of antagonism they take is even more pronounced. They are marked by regular apostasy, and in keeping with this the angels who await judgment are spoken of not merely as sinning, but as not keeping their first estate; that is, in other words, apostatizing. Jude therefore seems to contemplate a state of things just a degree worse than that which Peter contemplates.

The Apostle Paul also warns us as to the character of the last days in 2 Timothy 3:1 - 4:5; giving instructions to the servant of God in view of that which he predicts. The words used differ very slightly. Paul, and Peter also, speak of "the last days." Jude speaks of "the last time." John also in his first Epistle speaks of "the last time;" only there it is more accurately, "the last hour," and a somewhat different sense is attached to the word, for they were in the last hour when he wrote. No fresh "hour" was going to intervene between the time of his writing

and the coming of the Lord, which will take place when the Antichrist has appeared. Already many lesser antichrists had appeared as forerunners of the great one to come. Each of the other inspired writers, Paul, Peter and Jude, looks on to the coming of the Lord as the final sweeping away of the evil.

Jude addresses himself to the "called" ones; that is, to those who are genuinely the called people of God, and that without distinction. He does not write to the saints composing any particular assembly nor to Jewish believers as distinct from Gentile ones: all saints are before him. He views them in a twofold way: first in relation to God the Father, and then in relation to Jesus Christ. The word "beloved" seems to be better attested than "sanctified." They, and we, are "beloved in God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ."

How very beautiful is this note! — the first that is struck in this Epistle. The saints universally are addressed, as called out from the world. All are beloved in God the Father, as begotten of Him; and as under the mighty hand of Jesus Christ all are preserved. The true saints of God are the objects of Divine love, and in spite of all the evil which may invade the Christian circle they will be preserved to the end. Moreover, mercy and

peace and love are to be multiplied to such, though evils multiply around them. What encouragement there is in all this! How assuring and how fortifying! In the strength of it we can proceed to consider the evils that are exposed and predicted.

Jude had purposed to write a treatise concerning "the common salvation," but found himself turned aside from that design to write this short Epistle exhorting rather to the defence of the faith. This is a remarkable confession and quite unique. The "common salvation," that is, the salvation in which we all participate, is indeed an inexhaustible theme, and it may well be that on another occasion Jude fulfilled his original purpose, though not in an inspired way. As a matter of fact an inspired exposition of that salvation was already available in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and in the inspired Word God does not repeat Himself. There was, however, still a niche in Scripture which required to be filled, so Jude's original thought was set aside and he was honoured of God in being pressed into the service of filling it.

It was now needful that those called of God should be exhorted to contend for the faith. It was given only to the Apostles to authoritatively expound the faith, and commit it to the inspired

Writings. It was given to few, comparatively speaking, to be pastors and teachers and give instruction in the faith. How likely then that the mass of believers should jump to the conclusion that the defence of the faith and contention for it was also the business of but a few. Hence the need for this word of exhortation. Is it not extraordinary and reprehensible that with this exhortation before us there should today be so many who consider that contending for the faith is no concern of theirs, and would like to relegate it to a few who have high scholastic qualifications or some kind of official status?

The faith is unspeakably precious. It embodies all we know of God in Christ. If it goes, everything goes, as far as we are concerned. Hence it must be held in its integrity at all costs, and not only held passively but contended for actively. The faith has been "once delivered to the saints." There are three things in that statement which need to be carefully noted.

First, the faith has been delivered, not discovered. It is not something which has been worked out by men and added to bit by bit, as the "sciences" have been, but something handed over by God through His Holy Spirit. The sciences have been built

up by observation and experiment and reasoning. The faith has been revealed of God that our faith may receive it.

Second, the faith has been once delivered; that is, once for all. The delivery of it took some little time. It "began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard Him." However, by the time that Jude wrote, the delivery of it was finished: the circle of revealed truth had been completed in the Apostolic writings. The men of science are always awaiting fresh discoveries: they have very little that is certain, and settled beyond all question. We have a faith delivered once for all. God has spoken. His Word has been committed to writing, and we await no further revelation. It cannot be amended, though it may be rejected. We receive it, desiring help of God that we may increasingly understand it.

Third, it has been delivered to the saints. It was not delivered to the Apostles and prophets, but delivered through them to the saints. The saints consequently are its custodians, and not merely prominent or gifted men amongst the saints. This is a fact of deep importance. The faith addresses itself to the faith of every one of us. Each of us is to receive it and understand it, and each of us is to be set for its maintenance and to contend

for it as may be necessary. In the light of this one can see how disastrous has been the idea that it was right to have in the church a special class of men officially appointed, whether as priests or ministers, to whom all such things belong. It has been a master-stroke of the adversary, for where that idea has prevailed the great mass of saints have been put out of action in the conflict of faith, and kept in a state of spiritual infancy.

Every true believer then should contend for the faith, and contend earnestly as having a vital interest in it. Details of how we should contend are not stated by Jude in this short Epistle. Elsewhere we find that we must avoid all carnal weapons, and that our spirit should be that of the meek and lowly Jesus whom we serve (see 2 Cor. 10:4; 2 Tim. 2:24-25). Jude does give us instruction as to how we should fortify ourselves in the faith which must be preliminary to contending for it. But that comes toward the end of the Epistle.

With verse 4 there begins his exposure of the state of things that was developing, which made his message so urgent. Men of a very depraved type had crept in unawares — ungodly, turning the grace of God into utter license, and denying the great Master whom they professed to serve. In reading John's

first Epistle we saw how there were antichrists who "went out," whilst the men of whom Jude speaks "crept in." The former were apparently men of a high class type, intelligent and philosophic, who took their departure when their notions were refused. The latter were anything but high class, men of a dissolute type, who used the grace of God as a cloke to cover up their sin.

We sometimes hear people today objecting to the doctrines of grace on the ground that they may be abused. The answer to that is that they have been abused, and the abuse was in full swing before the first century had reached its end; and that the Scriptures tell us of the way they were abused, but that, instead of recommending us to drop the doctrines of grace, they urge us to contend for them!

In verses 5-7, we have three cases cited, which show how the irrevocable judgment of God lies upon the kind of evil that these ungodly men were committing. In the case of Israel it was plain and thorough unbelief, and the unbelievers were destroyed in spite of the fact that at the outset they participated in many privileges. In the case of the angels, their sin was in one word, apostasy. They totally abandoned their original place and

state. That is apostasy: and for any creature to do that, whether angel or man, is to be hopelessly doomed. Sodom and her sister cities gave themselves up to utter license, breaking through boundaries that God had set, and their judgment is eternal. Three awful warnings!

Now the men that Jude was denouncing were marked by similar things. They defiled themselves by fleshly sins, and at the same time were characterized by an arrogant refusal of authority. This leads up to the remarkable verse about the contention between Michael the archangel and the devil. What Jude cites is quite unrecorded in the Old Testament. The devil, though now fallen, was once a high dignity in the angelic realm, and until he is finally dispossessed by God his dignity is to be respected. Even so high an angelic dignity as Michael respected it. He did not take it upon himself to rebuke him, but left the Lord to do it.

In passing let us learn from this not to do ourselves what even Michael shrank from doing. How often we may hear people speak of Satan in a very light and mocking way, and we may have done it ourselves. Let us not do it again. Satan is a spirit being, who once held a leading place, if not the leading place,

in the angelic hierarchy. Though fallen, he still wields immense power, which we cannot afford to despise. Yet, under the sheltering power of our Lord we need not fear him.

Verse 10 contains a very trenchant indictment. Men who are ignorant as well as arrogant usually fall to abusing what they do not understand. These men not only did this but they also corrupted themselves in things of nature which they did understand. The New Translation is rather striking here, "But what even, as the irrational animals, they understand by mere nature, in these things they corrupt themselves." Things spiritual they rail at: in things natural they corrupt themselves. Truly a terrible indictment!

Now the course of these men, and more particularly perhaps of the evil that characterized them, and which would be perpetuated in their successors, is graphically sketched in verse 11. Again three cases are cited from the Old Testament, which exactly set the position before us. In this matter there is nothing new under the sun. Again and again evil takes the same forms, runs the same course, and comes to the same end. Jude does not mince his words. These men and their successors have nothing but woe before them.

The beginning of their course is a going in the way of Cain. This is a way of self-will in the things of God. Cain was the first to take that way, and his name is left upon it. He would approach God, and this in itself was good: but he would do it in his own way, and not in God's way. Now, by His action in clothing our first parents with coats of skins, God had indicated that death was His way, and Abel's faith had seized this. Cain had no faith, only his own thoughts. Why should not God be satisfied with the way that seemed right to Cain? He would take his own way in self-will.

These men trod the way of Cain, and it is still immensely popular. Multitudes there are who prefer their own thoughts to God's Word. Why should not God be pleased with their efforts and their approach? As long as they recognize Him, may they not draw near and worship Him as they please? At any rate that is what they intend to do. Alas, still they go in the way of Cain; and there is a woe at the end of it.

To "run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" is the next step. This is sheer self-seeking in the things of God. Religion of a sort is indulged in, and it becomes a profitable business. Balaam was a spiritist medium, who adopted so much as

was profitable to him of the true knowledge of God. That was the error that Balaam practised. The error that he taught, and by which he ensnared many of Israel and brought them under the judgment of God, was that of sinful alliance with the idolatrous world. And in all that he practised and taught the one thing before him was money-making — the love of reward.

Our Epistle speaks of "the way of Cain" and "the error of Balaam;" it is in 2 Peter that we read of "the way of Balaam." But in both Epistles the thought connected with him is the same, for in Peter we find him described as loving "the wages of unrighteousness." His course there is described as "madness." Alas! his madness has had many followers from the day in which Jude wrote to our own. The evil men that Jude was exposing "ran greedily" after his error, and we believe those two words are still applicable to very many. It is a striking fact that Balaam and his evil teaching appear in the Lord's address to the church at Pergamos (Revelation 2), inasmuch as that church sets forth prophetically the epoch when the church accepted the patronage of the world, and the corruptions of the Roman system began.

In that system we see religion as a money-making power carried to its highest pitch. Years ago in Spain we saw a paper in which it was pointed out that all the supposed benefits which Rome offered from birth to death cost money; that in fact there was nothing without it. Moreover after death it was still money, money, for there was purgatory to be shortened. The title of the paper, translated into English, was "The religion of money." The history of Rome through the ages furnishes us also with many and terrible examples of men who have turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, just as Jude says. Many other forms of error have a strong strain of money-making in them, though not perhaps to the same extent.

Finally there is the gainsaying of Korah, the details of which are given to us in Numbers 16. Korah's sin was self-assertion in the things of God, and it brought upon him swift destruction. Cain lived many a year after he took his self-willed way. Balaam lived for sufficient time to do much havoc in Israel by his error, and for a time at least his self-seeking seemed to be profitable. But the self-assertion of Korah was met by rapid and drastic judgment.

This is the third and final stage in the progress of the evil that fills Christendom today. We believe that we speak soberly when we say that terrible examples of it abound on every hand. Never were men more confident of themselves and of their powers in matters of religion. Korah asserted himself as against Moses and Aaron: today men who call themselves Christians are quite prepared to assert themselves against Christ. "Jesus Christ" say they, "thought this and said that. But we know better now as belonging to this enlightened age." A very sinister sign! Judgment cannot now be long delayed.

Let us, who love the Lord Jesus Christ, see to it that in everything we are subject to His will, that we seek His glory and not our own, and that instead of asserting ourselves we assert His rights. Thus we shall be pleasing to Him.

If verse 11 sketches for us the development and end of the evil leading to apostasy, we come back in verses 12 and 13 to the men who embodied the evil in Jude's day, and there is a further exposure of their character in a series of graphic figures, the meaning of which we must attempt to seize.

They were "spots" in the love-feasts of these early Christians. It appears that the word translated thus has the meaning of a jagged rock especially one with the sea washing over it. So these evil men who had crept in unawares, and who now were boldly taking their place in the social life of the believers, were a terrible menace, just as is the sunken rock which endangers the ships. To feed themselves was their passion, not to feed the flock. Jude warns us of their true nature so that we may avoid them.

Then, changing the figure, they are like clouds borne along on the winds, yet without water. In the land where Jude wrote the clouds were welcome as giving promise of rain. So these men had the appearance of bringing refreshment to God's weary heritage; but they had nothing to give, being themselves impelled by Satan's power, of which the wind is a figure.

Then again they are like trees "whose fruit withers," or, "autumnal trees." Now it is in the autumn that we expect to find fruit on the trees; but they are without fruit. These men are marked by promise without performance, for they are twice dead — first by nature and then as coming under the judgment

of God. In speaking of them as rooted up, Jude no doubt views them prophetically as having come under judgment.

They are also like waves of the sea raging and foaming, for they were uncontrolled save by the power of Satan; and it was their own shame that they displayed. The word, we are told is in the plural "shames"; and means the things which were a shame to them, and not that they felt any shame in them. Probably they did not, but gloried in them.

Fifthly, they were like wandering stars or meteors, in that their light was soon to be quenched in the blackness of darkness for ever. This again speaks of judgment, and brings us back to the point we reached at the end of verses 11 and 12. We all know the speed with which the meteor sweeps across the heavens and burns out into darkness. Thus it would be with them. They had no steady light to give.

We find then that the last words of each of the three verses (11, 12, 13) indicate judgment; and now in verses 14 and 15 Jude tells us plainly how the judgment will fall upon these apostates. It will be by direct intervention of the Lord, appearing in His glory, which had been predicted even from the days of Enoch.

All the information that Scripture affords as to this remarkable man is found in very few words, yet those words are full of significance. Genesis 5 tells us of the exalted character of his life, walking with God for no less than three hundred years. It tells us also of his glorious finish, translated into God's presence. Hebrews 11 tells us of his faith, the power of both his life and his translation. In Jude we discover that he was a prophet, and, as far as we know, the earliest of all the prophets.

The first prophet spoke of the closing scenes as regards man's day, when the Lord will come with myriads of His holy ones for the execution of judgment. His words make it very evident that when He does come man's iniquity will have reached its climax, and be so open and flagrant that judgment by conviction and execution is inevitable. The repetition of the word ungodly in verse 15 is very striking. It will be a case of ungodly men doing and saying the most ungodly things in very ungodly fashion. At His coming the Lord will convict them, bringing home their guilt to them so that they have to acknowledge it: then He will execute judgment upon them.

From the very earliest times then it has been a revealed truth that the Lord Himself will appear to deal with man's unblush-

ing evil; though not until New Testament times did it appear that the Lord Jesus is the Jehovah who is to come. He will not come because the Gospel has prepared the world to receive Him, as so many still think. He will come to cleanse the earth by judgment, attended by His saints. Other scriptures inform us who these saints are, and how they reach the heavens in order to come forth with Him. The Gospel will have accomplished its appointed work in gathering saints out of the world for heaven. Then judgment will take its course.

We have further description, and exposure of these men who crept in unawares, in verses 16 to 19. It is really very remarkable how the Spirit of God labours to make their character clear to us so that we may be able to identify them. They are said to be murmurers and complainers; that is, unsatisfied persons with grievances; the reason of it all lying not in those against whom they have the grievance, but in their own lusts. Their lusts so dominate them that nothing would satisfy them. They talk great things — about themselves no doubt — and they love grandiose language, while at the same time they fawn upon and flatter influential people in order to get something out

of them for their own benefit. What a contemptible picture all this presents to us!

Jude also bids us remember the things that had been said by the Apostles of the Lord before he wrote this Epistle. It is in 2 Peter 3:3 that we read about mockers coming in the last time walking after their own lusts, but evidently the other Apostles had testified to the same effect. The men that Jude had in view were of that stamp: they were sensual or natural men, not having the Spirit. To have the Spirit is the infallible mark of really belonging to Christ. Jude describes them also as "they who separate themselves." It is very much open to question whether the word "themselves" is really in the original, and the R.V. puts it simply "who make separations." The Holy Spirit is the power of unity. These men without the Spirit were the fomenters of disunity. With this word Jude's description of them comes to an end.

A darker picture of ungodliness it would be impossible to conceive. The description begins with the turning of the grace of God into lasciviousness, and the denying of the only Master and Lord. It ends with the making of divisions, as being utterly destitute of the Spirit of God. Yet they had crept in among the

saints unawares. Still God would find them out, and as apostates they will perish.

Now Jude does not only enlighten us as to the evil; he uses it as an incentive to the diligent pursuit of what is good, as far as we are concerned. In verse 20 he again appeals to the true saints of God, and he indicates what is to mark them in the presence of all these difficulties. His instructions fall naturally under four heads.

First, we are to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. Note the wording carefully. It does not say that we are to build up the faith. We have already seen in the Epistle that the faith is committed to us as a perfect and completed thing. It needs no building up: we can add nothing to it. It is we who need the building up. We may have received the faith, and taken our stand upon it in faith. That is the right and true beginning, but we must not stop at that point; we need to be built up on it so that it becomes our very life. We can never be too fully instructed in it or too solidly established on it. Jude speaks of it as "most holy." We have not got today a most holy place as Israel had of old: we have instead a most holy faith. It is not to be

trespassed upon or tampered with. None shall do so with impunity. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

Let us recall at this point that the main burden of the Epistle is that we should earnestly contend for the faith. Our being built up on it is undoubtedly a prerequisite for this. Some folk, who love a fight for its own sake, would rush into conflict on behalf of a cause which they understand but imperfectly, if at all. But this is not to be the way of the called ones who are beloved in God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ. The faith must be the basis on which we are built up before it becomes the banner for which we fight. And the more we are really built up on it, the more we shall be morally and spiritually equipped to enter into the conflict.

In the second place there must be this "praying in the Holy Ghost." Not, "to the Holy Ghost," as though we were to conceive of Him as an Object of faith, outside ourselves. It is "in" Him that we are to pray. Now prayer is the expression of dependence upon God, who is outside ourselves. We are very dependent, and we are to know it, and confess it practically in prayer. In this we shall be the very opposite of the ungodly men whom Jude has described to us. They feel themselves to be en-

tirely sufficient to themselves, and because of it they despise dominion and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

Our prayers however are to be in the Spirit; that is, we are to pray as those who are controlled by the indwelling Spirit, and who consequently ask for the things that are according to His mind. Prayer, which springs from the Holy Spirit acting in the hearts of the saints, is sure to be both fervent and effectual.

In the third place we are to keep ourselves in the love of God. In the consciousness and warmth and power of it we are to dwell. We are persuaded of course with Paul that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). His love has a firm hold on us, and He will never let us go. But we are also to have a firm hold upon it in the quiet recesses of our hearts. We are to be bathed in it, just like a bucket or other vessel which has been flung into the ocean. Then it is in the ocean, and the ocean is in it. So if we keep ourselves in the love of God, the love of God will be in us, imparting its beautiful character to our lives.

Again let us remind ourselves that this is said to saints who are exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith. In the warmth of

contention nothing is easier than to get irritated, and even to lose one's temper. If we keep ourselves in the love of God, our spirits are lifted above irritations that proceed from awkward or evil men and their reasonings. A believer may find himself entangled in controversy with men who are far more than a match for him on the intellectual plane, but if he is himself well built up on the faith, and if praying in the Spirit, he keeps himself in the love of God, he will not come off second best in the conflict. He may not convince his opponents, but any bystanders will be aware that they have witnessed something greater than mere intellectualism.

In the fourth place, we are to be looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. There is much that we have today, but there is more to follow. We are people with a prospect. The evil men may multiply around us and the full apostasy may approach, but we have a wonderful outlook and great expectations in the coming of the Lord. We look for His coming into the air, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, when He will receive His saints to Himself. This great action of His is described as mercy. We do not deserve it, any more than we deserved to be forgiven or redeemed. But we are going to

get it, simply on the ground of mercy. It will be an act of mercy, crowning all the other acts of mercy that have characterised His dealing with us. And it will land us to eternal life in its fullest sense. We shall then not only have the life, but also be in the scenes where that life has its home and expands to the fullest extent.

But the exhortation is that we keep actively looking for this wonderful consummation. We are not to set our expectations upon improvement either in world or church. We are not even looking for revivals — though God may in His mercy grant something of that sort, and if He does we shall rejoice and thank Him. No, we are looking for the coming of the Lord; and the more brightly that hope burns within our breasts the more shall we rightly sustain the conflict for the faith.

Judes' four exhortations, then, concern respectively, the faith, the Holy Spirit, the love of God, and the coming mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In regard to these we are to be building up, praying, keeping ourselves, and looking. These exhortations are very personal, appealing to each who loves the Lord.

In verses 22 and 23 we get further exhortations as to our attitude towards two different classes of people; designated as "some" and "others." These are neither the evil man denounced in the Epistle, nor the God-fearing saints to whom the Epistle is addressed.

The "some" of verse 22 appear to be people who have to some extent been affected or ensnared by the evil men. Such must be carefully distinguished and treated with compassion. The "others" contemplated in verse 23, have evidently become more deeply involved in the evil and contaminated by it. Even these however are to be saved if possible, though the one who would rescue them must set about it in a spirit far removed from self-confidence. He must fear the fire that threatens to devour them, and hate the flesh that has defiled them. Only if he goes about it in that spirit will he escape being burnt or defiled himself, and so be able to rescue them.

This is a very important word for us, for we are naturally very inclined to treat alike all who are in any way implicated in such ungodly things. We may discern the evil and feel most strongly against it and so be very ready to lump all together, the misled with the misleaders, leaving them in their defilement with noth-

ing before them but the fire. This must not be. We must remember the word, "making a difference."

When we come to verses 24 and 25, how delightful is the contrast with all that has preceded! We come out from the darkness of human wickedness and apostasy, and even from the contentions and efforts of true saints in the presence of the evil, into the clear light of the power and glory of God. Our eyes are lifted to "Him that is able to keep you from falling." Here, and here only, is real rest for the heart.

We are to contend for the faith, building up ourselves on it, and we are to labour to rescue others from defilement and doom, but we can find no repose in ourselves or our efforts. We may have grace to keep ourselves in the love of God, at least in some degree, yet we can only find rest in the fact that He is able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of His glory.

Since He is able, we have only ourselves to blame for any tumbles we get on the way. Yet though we may tumble we shall not ultimately fall. We shall be presented in the presence of His glory when forth it shines, and not even the light of that glory

shall discover a fault in us. How amazing! How excellent!
What a triumph for the grace and power of God!

Nothing remains but to bow in the presence of that Saviour-God, through the Lord Jesus, and ascribe to Him glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and to all ages. Amen.

