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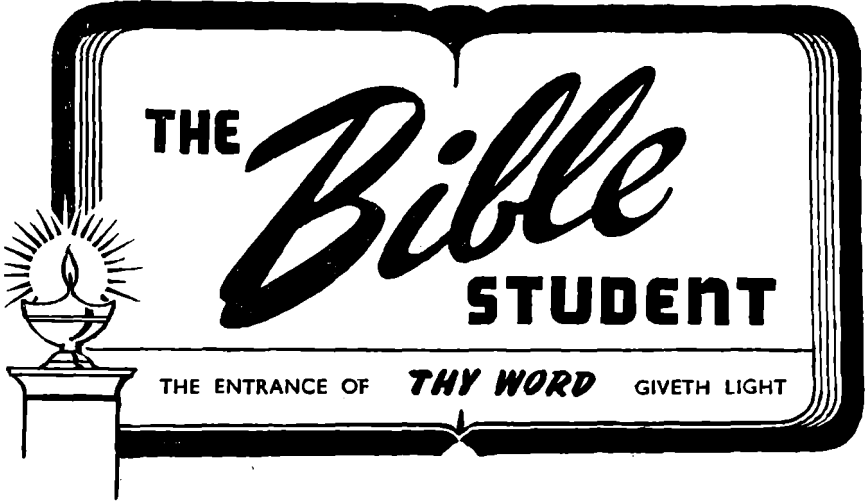
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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# The Bible Student

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NEW SERIES

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## THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

By THE EDITOR

Having studied the letter to Philemon, we take a look at the almost as short epistle of Jude. Both share the common feature of being seldom dealt with, as a whole, in public addresses. Yet both deserve the closest study for they provide good material for helpful expositions.

1. We begin with the author himself, Jude; the Judas mentioned in Matt. 13:55, and Jude in Mark 6:3—but *not* the Judas of Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 (where, by the way, 'brother of James' should more certainly be 'son of James', according to the best authorities). We may safely accept the conclusion of critical evidence that (1) he was *not* one of the apostles; (2) that he was one of the four 'brothers' of our Lord as given in Mark 6:3, children possibly of Joseph by a former levirate marriage (Moule, Ellicott, etc.). That being so, he must have been born some few years before 4 B.C., and therefore was nearly seventy years of age when he wrote this letter. Beyond this very little is known of him, but it is possible he was one of those referred to in John 7:5, and was finally converted to a full acceptance of Christ's claims after the Resurrection. It is not improbable this may have taken place when the Lord Himself appeared to James, referred to in 1 Cor. 15, v. 7—and, or, at His appearance mentioned in v. 8. The date of his writing was most likely before the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70.

2. The student will observe the similarity both in matter and in wording between this epistle and the second epistle of Peter. It leads to the almost inevitable conclusion that one writer must have known the work of the other, although that does not imply

necessarily that one borrowed from the other. There is an obvious independence of treatment of subjects common to both. Which was prior cannot be dogmatically determined, in spite of certain critical attempts to do so. Ellicott favours the conjecture that Peter's came first; Moule argues for the other view—and we can only leave it at that!

What is of interest to remark is that the view held in an earlier day, the 'old-fashioned view', as Ellicott terms it, was that the account of evil-doers in 2 Peter is more or less prophecy of what was speedily to come; whereas Jude speaks of them as already present. Jude's warning words, 'remember the words spoken before by the apostles . . .' (vv. 17, 18) are, therefore, a reference to Peter's in his second epistle (ch. 3:2, 3). On the other hand, the statement might as readily refer to such passages as Acts 20:29; 2 Tim. 3:1. What is beyond all doubt is that, even now we see in the present trend of events in the world-field an ever-expanding fulfilment of those things which are dealt with in both epistles. They both hold out a challenge and an appeal to every true Christian to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints'.

3. The *purpose* of the letter is clearly stated in v. 3. It seems clear that it was not his first intention to write as he did, but rather to give some instruction concerning the subject of *our common salvation*. But he is turned from that initial purpose as he contemplates the gathering forces of evil, bent on destroying that salvation and all it stands for. These forces were (and are) not content with merely trying to hinder those who would accept this salvation, but are attacking its most essential truths, and *denying* the very Christ of God who came to make it available by His death on the cross (see 2 Peter 2:1, where the same word *arneomai*, 'denying', is used). Hence this burning exhortation of his, to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints' (v. 3).

4. The *plan* of the epistle is interesting and laid with obvious care, though its sentences are like a burning fire, withering all opposition it meets. One special characteristic is the author's fondness for relating his subjects in groupings of *triplets*—as Ellicott says, 'wherever a group of threes is possible he makes one'.

Analysis	
(1) Introduction	vv. 1-4
(a) 3 fold address and 3 fold greetings	vv. 1-2
(b) Purpose	v. 3
(c) Occasion	v. 4
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(a) Three examples of God's vengeance	vv. 5-7
(b) Their application to the present conditions	vv. 8-11
(c) Warning descriptions of apostasy	vv. 12-16
(3) Exhortations	vv. 17-25
(a) To strengthen themselves by prayer, godliness, hope	vv. 17-21
(b) To discriminate in dealing with the 3 classes described	vv. 22, 23
(c) Concluding doxology	v. 24, 25

Our comments must be only brief, but the student will be abundantly repaid by careful study of the whole letter. It was once our privilege many years ago to hear the revered Dr A. T. Pierson give a most thrilling and arresting address on the whole epistle to a fashionable audience in Bristol, which stirred many a heart that evening. But it contains matter for more than one address if carefully studied.

#### Notes

I. The first two verses describe the writer, the readers he addresses, and his salutation, each part in triplet form. As to his readers, he says they are (a) *sanctified*, or better according to the R.V., *beloved* in God the Father, the Source and Sphere in which they are the objects of His love: (b) *kept*, or *preserved*, the tense implying the continuing experience of a completed act—we are *being kept* (cf. 1 Pet. 4; 2 Pet. 2:4, 9, 17; 3:7; and 4 times again in the epistle): (c) *called*, which comes first in R.V. It is scarcely a synonym of *chosen* or *elect*, but the outcome of a predetermining election in grace (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2).

Verses 3-4 describe the purpose and the occasion of the letter. Note the R.V. 'while I was giving all diligence to write. . . I was constrained to write': The first clause indicates his first intention,

the second his change of mind, because of the threatening dangers ahead. This is shown by the change of tense in the two verbs, the first is the present infinitive, implying a general intention to write, the second is *aorist* infinitive, indicating an immediate and present decision to do so, for the 'common salvation' was being attacked, not by open enemies, but by those within the Christian community, who had 'stolen their way in unawares'. The picture is certainly very much 'up-to-date' today! Note the three-fold description of these 'certain men' (cf. Gal. 2:4, 12; 2 Pet. 2:1); in *character*, ungodly; in *conduct*, licentious; in *doctrine*, denying the Lord.

II. The main body of the letter is introduced by three examples of God's judgments in the past (*vv.* 5-7). They reveal His divine sovereignty acting in accordance with His holiness and His justice, in every realm. *V.* 5 gives the first example from the *previous history* of God's people, for it was something the readers would know about, and should understand—'ye know all things once for all'. (Compare with 2 Pet. 2:5; 2 Cor. 10:1-10; Heb. 3:12-19). *V.* 6 gives an example from *the spirit world*—2 Pet. 2:4. The reality, and insidious, subtle, power of these evil forces are even more observable today, as Eph. 6:12 reminds us (but read also verses 11 and 13-18). *V.* 7 gives the third triplet of this group. It refers to the cities of the plain, which have been a byword of infamy down the ages. 'In like manner' implies a resemblance to the sin of the angels already named in v. 6 (cf. Gen. 6:4). The 'suffering vengeance of eternal fire' is surely more than the perpetual doom of the submerged cities of the Dead Sea region, but rather that of Matt. 25:41. The Gk. for 'undergoing' occurs only here in the N.T.

III. *Vv.* 8 to 11 contain the application of these illustrations to the false teachers. *V.* 8, should be noted in the R.V., as being far more accurate. The term 'dreamers', goes with all three clauses. These false teachers were visionaries, 'occultists', subtle and immoral. They are to be found today not only in certain eastern religions, but in the western as well, and in various occult ways pander to the lower nature as well as to the psychical and physical—it would be more accurate to say these realms cannot be considered 'watertight compartments', but react and interact together within the human personality. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:10).

The reference in *v.* 9 is admittedly obscure: There were certain Rabbinic stories (legends?) which were familiar to the Jews, but it is impossible to connect any one of them with this. Perhaps Jude had in mind the analogy of Zechariah 3:2, and we can but leave it at that.

*V.* 10 makes it clear that these false teachers were utterly in the dark about things of the spirit realm, whether of good or evil spirits (cf. Col. 2:18). But they did have all too 'terrible' a knowledge of the natural impulses of sensual desire, against which Jude inveighs with a 'burning vehemance of language'.

*V.* 11 contains three examples of counterfeit 'cults' or 'religions'—as we might term them today, illustrative of the kinds of evils which he was denouncing. The *way of Cain* is a 'natural' religion bereft of any divinely ordained sacrifice. *The Error of Balaam* represents a super-sensuous religion bereft of divine morality. *The gainsaying of Korah* may be viewed as an occult religion bereft of divine revelation. These have their replicas even today. With regard to Cain, it is apposite to recall that, with all his 'religion' he was a murderer. The apostle John reminds us that even to hate one's brother is murder (1 John 4:15). As to Balaam, we must connect this with the allusion in Rev. 2:14. In fact many commentators of note explain that the name Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6), is the Greek equivalent for Balaamite, of whom Peter reminds us that 'he loved the *wages* of unrighteousness' (2 Pet. 2:15; cf. Acts 1:18). Finally, note that the triplet in this *v.* 11, like that in *v.* 8, is parallel to the three examples of God's vengeance in *vv.* 5-7. Cain, like those in Sodom and Gomorrah, outraged the laws of nature. Balaam, like the impure angels, despised the sovereignty of God. Korah, like those who disbelieved the report of the spies, spoke evil of dignities.

IV. The next five verses seem to form a separate section, though it continues the general subject of the character of the false teachers. Some (e.g., Ellicott) would include also *vv.* 16 to 19 in this section, but in preference we adopt the above, although *v.* 16 might also be included (as R.V.). *Vv.* 12 and 13 contain six vivid word-pictures, descriptive of these false teachers. Let us take them individually first: (*a*) They were '*sunken rocks*' (cf. 2 Pet. 2:13) in those early Christian 'love-feasts', or *agapais* (from which we get the name *Agapae*). These were social gatherings.

of a religious nature, but had nothing to do with the Lord's Supper. Owing to their degeneration, which had already appeared in very early years (cf. 1 Cor. 11:21), they were finally discontinued in the 3rd century A.D. It is not unduly straining the imagination to see a reference to this state in Paul's reference in 1 Tim. 1:19, though we cannot be certain. (b) Next, they were 'shepherds', indulging themselves without fear in fleshly lusts (cf. Ezek. 34:1, 2, 8, 10). (c) 'Clouds without water', blown by the winds of their own desires, leaving the flock parched and scorched. (d) 'Autumn trees', which ought to have been full of fruitage, but were barren and already withering (cf. Matt. 3:10; 21:19). (e) 'Wild waves of the sea', which cannot rest but can drown many a soul in destruction. (f) 'Wandering stars' or, as we might say, 'shooting stars', short-lived and vanishing into darkness unknown. Could inspired description be more vivid and terrible? What must be the *reality* itself in the eyes of a holy God?

It will be seen that, in each of the six pictures, the false teachers hold positions of *power*, *prominence* and *promise*, arousing the expectations of their dupes to the highest degree for present enjoyments and eternal bliss to come. But in each instance the final outcome is disaster to soul and body in this life, and abysmal darkness and destruction eternally, for themselves and all who follow them. This is seen in vv. 14 and 15. They are almost a verbal quotation from the ancient tradition known as the Book of Enoch. How it comes to be quoted here we cannot say, but we take them just as they stand in their obvious meaning. V. 16 closes this section.

V. The final section (as given in the analysis) needs little comment, but two points deserve some mention: Vv. 17-21 contain (amongst other matters) the *means of the believer's safety* amidst the moral and spiritual currents of evil. Five words put it tersely—'Remember' (v. 17); '*building yourselves up . . .*'; '*praying in the Holy Spirit*'; '*keep yourselves . . .*'; '*looking for . . .*', with perpetual centrality of watchfulness. And yet mere selfishness and subjectivity is to be avoided; the soul must reach out to others struggling in the swift current and slimy morasses which are engulfing souls around us: each clause of vv. 22 and 23 is alive with appeal and spiritual concern. The letter closes with a doxology of radiant assurance. Make this inspired Text Book yours; pass it on to others; practise it yourself.