

Jude 1 – Introduction

We are discovering the letter of Jude in the New Testament of the Bible. I am calling this series “The Acts of the Apostates.” The New Testament church began with the “Acts of the Apostles” and here, towards the end of the New Testament, we have “the apostates”. Apostasy has always plagued God’s church both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

An apostate is a person who professes to belong to God; who feels very safe and secure, but who departs from the truth and does not live by it. An apostate is also someone who puts his hand to the plough and turns back. Many profess to be Christians because they believe in a Christian creed, but without Christian conduct. It is Christian belief without Christian behaviour. They presume on the mercy of God.

This letter of Jude is unique and it is devoted to the subject of apostasy. It is very serious, very important and very practical. Jude is a somewhat neglected book. It begins with a salutation, a three-fold blessing. It ends with a great doxology, which is the three-fold heritage of God’s people. The theme of Jude is perhaps found in the word “remember”. In verse five, “Remember the Old Testament”; in verse seven “Remember the New Testament”.

So who is the author of this letter? He is clearly a Christian, and most commentators seem to be agreed that he was one of the half-brothers of the Lord Jesus and therefore a brother of James. The half-brothers and sisters of Jesus were all unbelievers during the ministry of the Lord. We read that in the Gospel of John chapter seven, verse five. James was actually the leader of the church in Jerusalem and he it is who wrote the letter that bears his name. Neither James nor Jude were apostles. In his letter, James sets out good works as the real evidence of saving faith. But Jude, in his letter, shows that evil works are the real evidence of apostasy.

To whom was this letter by Jude originally written? Well it may have been intended for the church at Antioch, but no one knows for certain. Certainly the people concerned were beloved, and they were called, sanctified and preserved, as we read in verses one and two. Indeed, we see in these verses that salvation is the work of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are effectually called by the Holy Spirit to faith in the Lord Jesus. God the Father is at work in our lives as believers, sanctifying us, that is separating us apart for Himself, and making us holy by the continued work of His Spirit. As Christians we are also preserved in Jesus Christ and kept in Him and through Him and for Him. What a comforting assurance to begin a solemn book of the Bible that deals with apostasy and the terrible judgement that awaits apostates and all the ungodly. This letter reminds us that they are all under the wrath of God.

So, Jude writes “To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ”. The call of God in our Lord Jesus Christ is clear; it is to “Come unto me.” Paul writes to the Romans, “Moreover whom God predestined, these He also called. Whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Believers are not only called, they are also preserved. The word used by Jude implies “watchful care” or “close attention”. It suggests present possession and it was used of Peter’s and Paul’s imprisonment in the book of Acts. It means “preserved”, “kept”, “watched over”. It is used in First Peter chapter one verse four concerning our inheritance as Christians, which is reserved or kept in heaven for us. This word is not used in the opening greetings of any other New Testament letter. It is a word that Christians need to be reminded of in an age of widespread apostasy, because we are always in danger. We fight the great fight of faith and we need to put on the “gospel armour” described for us in Ephesians chapter six. The Bible teaches the “perseverance”

or the "preservation" of God's beloved, chosen, called people. We are kept by Jesus Christ who can keep us from stumbling and He will guard us. Peter says, "you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." That's first Peter chapter one verse five. Our Lord Jesus accomplished redemption for all of his covenant people, not one of them shall be lost, none shall pluck them from his Father's hand.

In verse two Jude greets those to whom he writes. He says, "Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance." This salutation is much more than a mere courteous expression. This is in fact the only such statement in the entire Bible: "Mercy, peace and love." Remember that the context of this letter is apostasy in the last times. God's people need mercy in these days. There is divine help and pity in abundance for the needy and for the helpless. Then there is abundant peace also. While there is no peace for the wicked, the believer has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This peace comes from our reconciliation with God who made peace by Christ's death on the cross. This "upward" peace means "inward" peace. And then Jude says, "And love be yours in abundance." This is the love of God for his people. This is important because apostates have never really appreciated God's love; they are ignorant of God. If we are to be faithful to the Lord we shall need his mercy, peace and love multiplied to us day by day.

Now we come to verse three. Jude writes, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." Jude is very concerned to write to these beloved Christians. As one writer has put it, "A necessity compelled him." He was under pressure, as it were, from God Himself to write in the way he did. And he writes, "about the salvation we share." Christian listening to this broadcast, do you realise the greatness of the salvation which you share with all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ?

We have been redeemed; we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness; we have been released from the dominion and rule of sin and Satan; we are the purchased possession of God and of Christ, and we have been adopted into the family of God. The Christian is a new creation in Christ and there is no condemnation for sins for those who belong to Him. Christians are Christ's sheep, they know Him and they love Him and follow Him. Christian, be encouraged today by the greatness of your salvation. If you are not a Christian believer I urge you to seek the Lord Jesus with all of your heart and enter into the abundance of God's mercy, peace and love for you.

Jude 2 - "Contend Earnestly For The Faith"

We come to the second talk in this series on the New Testament letter of Jude. The theme is found in verse three of the letter and it is: "Contend earnestly for the faith." If we are to persevere in the faith we will be conscious of a continual warfare. To contend means to combat for, or strive for, to fight for. It is a word derived from the Olympic Games and it expresses a strenuous effort. It could be rendered "strenuously combat for the faith." True Christians care very deeply for the Christian faith. It is a precious faith and it is worth contending for. This is, of course, a command from our King, not an option or a possibility or a consideration. It is something that we must do. The faith is exceedingly important, and a very great deal depends on our contending for it. Jude says that we are to "contend earnestly for the faith." In verse twenty of his letter he will encourage us to build ourselves up on our "most holy faith."

As Christian believers we have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and we have this command to contend for the faith. So we must ask the question, "What is the faith?" Let me quote from a Christian writer who says: "The faith is that extensive body of Bible teaching which makes up the whole of the truth revealed by God concerning our common salvation." So it is very important that we understand what the faith is. Paul tells the Corinthian believers: "You must examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." We are to prove or test ourselves as Christians. The expression "the faith" occurs eighteen times in the New Testament. Paul writes to Timothy and he says, "Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience." A mystery in the New Testament sense is something that was not fully revealed in Old Testament times, but is now made known. Again, Paul writes to Timothy and says, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." In the book of Acts chapter sixteen verses four and five we read of Paul and Silas going through the cities and declaring to the Christians the decrees they were to keep which were determined by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." The apostle gave systematic, faithful teaching of revealed truth, which would establish local churches in the faith. This is what is needed in our churches today. The Bible is sufficient; it is the truth "once for all delivered to the saints." We must never add to it or take away from it.

So the question arises, "How do we contend for the faith?" Well, of course, the context of Jude's letter concerns false teaching and the serious issue of apostasy within the church. We must always remember that the Holy Scripture is our foundation, not tradition or the views of scholars or mystics. So, we earnestly contend for the faith in at least six ways:

First of all, BY KNOWING GOD'S WORD. If you possess a Bible, make sure that you read it regularly, daily, and systematically, that is in an organised way. Get to know the Scriptures, search them diligently so that you come to an understanding of what God's word teaches.

Secondly we contend for the faith BY TRUSTING GOD'S WORD. Our God cannot lie. We can trust completely all that He has said. This means that we will rest on his promises day by day in all the circumstances of our lives, whatever they may be. In this way others will see that our faith is real, and that the faith we confess is true.

Thirdly we contend for the faith BY OBEYING GOD'S WORD. A Christian preacher was once asked by a young person, "What is the greatest need of Christian young people today?" And the preacher answered, "To live biblically." That is to live in obedience to the Bible. Of course, that is the need of every Christian, young or older, to live according to Scripture. As we do this we will be witnesses to the power of the Gospel and of God's word to change lives. It will be a witness to the faith.

The fourth way in which we can contend for the faith is BY TEACHING AND PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD. We must make it known. There are still many places where the Word of God is not known. There are places where once the Bible was taught, but this is no longer the case. It is our Christian responsibility to declare God's Word, to teach it faithfully and accurately. We are to do this earnestly, for the faith we contend for is the only hope for a fallen world.

And fifthly, we contend for the faith BY PRACTISING BIBLICAL SEPARATION. As Christian people we have a Lord worth loving and a life worth living. We are to live wholly for our Lord and Saviour as "living sacrifices." We are called to live godly lives. This means that we are to keep ourselves separate from the sinful ways and attitudes of the world. We are to avoid all appearance of evil, as the Scripture says. We are to show by the way we live that we are God's children and that we are seeking to live to please him in all we do and say. If we do not do this, then we only weaken our defence of the faith.

Sixthly, we contend for the faith BY LOVING THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER. "By this", said the Lord Jesus, "shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." He also said that we would show our love for Him by obeying all that He has commanded in his Word. The love of believers for their Lord and Saviour, and their sincere love for one another is a powerful witness to the truth of the faith.

So, Christians, and true Christian churches, must have a distinctive testimony; be different from the world; have a very clear message that Christ is the only way of salvation; and have a godly witness and strong convictions both founded on the Bible.

According to verse four of Jude's letter there is every reason to "contend earnestly for the faith." He tells us that, "Certain men, whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

So, we see that not all who profess to be Christian are true Christians. In the church to whom Jude is writing, apostates had crept in amongst the true believers. Satan had sown his "tares" among the "wheat" of God's people in order to destroy them and to prevent their growth. He is the enemy of the godly and he is very active. He attacks and harasses Christians and Christian churches in particular ways. We must resist him and be on our guard against his cunning efforts to spoil and destroy. Faithful pastors often have to address particular snares and evils that may be threatening the church. It is their duty to feed, to warn and to protect the flock and make clear what the dangers are. Oh how serious false teaching is in God's sight! We must see it for what it really is and be on our guard at all times. Let us take note of the teaching and the warning that Jude gives us in these opening verses of his letter.

Jude 3 - "Privileged But Destroyed"

This time we are looking at Jude verses five to nine as we continue to discover the message of this letter found towards the end of the New Testament.

The theme of this talk is "Privileged but destroyed." We begin with verse five where Jude says: "Though you already know this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe." There is nothing new about departure from the truth of God. This is called apostasy and it is the danger that Jude is dealing with in this letter. According to verse eleven, Cain was an apostate. An apostate is a person who professes to belong to God; who feels very safe and secure, but who departs from the truth and does not live by it.

There are three different groups that Jude refers to as being "privileged but destroyed." First he points in verse five to Israel of long ago, after their exodus from Egypt. Then in verse six he refers to the angels who sinned, and in verse seven to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. All these three groups, Israel, the fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, were all privileged but they were all destroyed by God.

There are many lessons we can discover in the exodus of Israel and their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Large sections of the Old Testament are devoted to this event and to their subsequent wanderings in the wilderness.

It is a thrilling story of God's miraculous provision and of the giving of his law. It is the story of how God taught them about the necessity for sins to be atoned for by blood sacrifice, this foreshadowing the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, God's Pascal Lamb. But Jude focuses on just one aspect of all that happened. He focuses on the fact that because the people refused to believe God, they were destroyed. They were apostates by their words and actions.

Now as Christians, as God's children, we have assurances concerning our safe keeping. True believers will never perish; will never be plucked from God's hand. Romans reminds us that "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt and they had seen how God had demonstrated his love for them by that deliverance and by his provision for them. But after all this, as they neared the Land of Promise, and as the spies delivered their report about what they faced, we read in Numbers chapter fourteen verses one and two: "That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!" This cry of unbelief was heard by God and answered like a prayer. They had declared themselves to be apostates, no longer believing God's promises to them; no longer prepared to trust Him.

There were five ancient sins born of their unbelief. Their unbelief was demonstrated by their conduct. They lusted after evil things; they became idolaters; they committed sexual immorality; they tested the Lord; and they complained against their God appointed leaders. All these are marks of an apostate people. In first Corinthians chapter ten we are given the application and the warning of all of this. Take time to read those verses. Israel was a privileged people but because of their unbelief "they were killed by the destroying angel." Verses eleven and twelve of that chapter say this: "These things happened to them as examples, and were written down as warning for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" In Hebrews chapter three verse twelve we also have the warning: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." That is apostasy.

Now in verse six Jude goes on to talk about the angels who "did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home - these God has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day." Who could have had greater

privileges than the angels? Created perfect by a wise, loving God to do his bidding yet some of them fell from the greatest height to the lowest depths. They despised the goodness of God and they deserted their proper vocation and position. Their pride resulted in rebellion, which resulted in disobedience. They were privileged but they became presumptuous and so were imprisoned to await the great day of judgement. Pride and presumption and the usurping of power and position are the characteristics of the apostate mind.

Jude has one further illustration of apostasy. In verse seven he refers to the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It appears that the apostates, who had infiltrated the church to whom Jude was writing, were condoning immoral practices saying that the grace of God would not bring punishment on the perpetrators. In this verse Jude makes it quite plain that this is a lie. God will punish all the ungodly. Sodom and Gomorrah are a remarkable example of God's temporal judgement designed to instil the fear of God into people of all ages. This incident is referred to many times in the Bible. It is used to underline the reality of the judgement of God on sin and on impenitent sinners. A mark of apostasy is that it belittles sin and ignores the judgement of God upon it. The Lord Jesus said in reference to this "Remember Lot's wife." Lot's wife is an example of turning back and turning back is apostasy. We must never imagine that apostasy is a small, trivial thing its consequences are very dreadful, especially when it leads to the kinds of sin prevalent in Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities are set out as an example. Remember that only Lot and his two daughters escaped the judgement that God brought down upon them. Lot escaped because he believed God and obeyed his command to flee the evil place.

What we believe and how we live is very, very important. All three groups that Jude has referred to knew better. The Israelites had Moses; the angels had God Himself; the people of Sodom had Lot, so all were without excuse.

So, we have discovered in these verses the characteristics of those who are apostates, who have turned away from the truth and who deny the faith. They are these: an unbelieving heart; pride and presumption and the usurping of power and position; and finally, a shallow view of sin and of the judgement of God upon it. May we be on our guard against these things and may the Lord give us a heart to love Him. May we live lives that truly honour and obey Him.

Jude 4 - "Faith Under Attack"

We are looking again at the letter of Jude in the New Testament of the Bible. We are going to look at verses eight to eleven. I have called this talk "Faith under attack."

First of all I want to ask the question, "Does it matter what we believe?" Or, to put it another way, "Is it dangerous to deviate from the faith?" The Bible has been under attack for many years, perhaps never more so than in our day. We might also ask the question, "Who is it that is attacking the Word of God?" Sadly, very often it is religious people and even religious leaders who do this.

Why is it that they cast doubt on the truth or the accuracy of the Scriptures?

One reason is that, although they profess religion, they do not truly belong to God. You will remember that we have discovered that this small letter by Jude is dealing with the subject of apostasy, which is turning away from the truth and falling into the sin of unbelief.

So, in verse eight, Jude refers to false teachers. In the previous verses he has referred to the Children of Israel, the fallen angels and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of those who became apostate through their unbelief, their disobedience and their immorality. Now he says, concerning those who had secretly slipped into the churches with their false doctrines, "These dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings." These false teachers, he says, are very like the Israelites in the desert; they are very like the angels who rebelled; and they are very like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the Sodomites, they defile the body; this speaks of their behaviour. Like the fallen angels they reject authority; this speaks of their heart's attitude. And, like the Israelites in the wilderness, they speak evil of those to whom God has given spiritual authority; this speaks of their words. So the conduct, the heart and the words of the apostate are false.

Here are the results of apostasy - or going astray from the truth. First of all there is sexual immorality. How often in our time have we seen false teachers draw people after themselves with teaching that condones immoral practices? It is not a true church, but an apostate church, that allows such things. We have to say from the Scripture that all immorality brings shame and dishonour to the Lord Jesus and to his church. Whatever form it takes, whether it is homosexual practice, or fornication or adultery or pornography, it is sin in the eyes of a holy God. The only sexual relationship that is allowed by Scripture is the marriage relationship between one man and one woman.

And then the result of apostasy is the rejection of authority. The Bible is rejected as the sole authority for Christian faith and practice. It is replaced by, or added to, with traditions of men, or by so-called "special revelations." In apostate Christianity the divinity of the Lord Jesus is rejected, and the truth of salvation by God's grace alone through faith is rejected. Sin is no longer taught as rebellion against God, it becomes a mere human failing, a guilt feeling.

False teachers will deny the righteous wrath of God against sin. They will deny the judgement to come. They will deny the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for sinners and point to it only as the example of a great man. So, beware of any who add to or take away from the Scriptures, who deny Christ and the seriousness of sin, they are false teachers.

Thirdly, these evil men "speak evil of dignitaries" or they "slander celestial beings." In their arrogance they are careless in the way they talk about beings in heavenly places who are superior to humanity. Verse nine tells us that, "Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" He dared not go any further than that. How restrained and careful Michael was as he addressed even an

angel who was in rebellion against God, and condemned. Apostates are often marked out by the unrestrained language they use in their preaching and in their reference to the Lord and to spiritual things. Because words are very important and words are very powerful, great care is needed in the language we use, especially when we are speaking about the things of God.

He calls these men "dreamers". They are the false teachers that Peter refers to in his Second Letter chapter two verses one and two: "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute."

So, as we read through this letter of Jude we find that it is not written primarily about atheists, those who are in total spiritual darkness. It is certainly not written about true Christian believers. It is written to warn again those who profess to believe. "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good", as we read in Titus chapter one verse sixteen.

In verse ten we see that three things are true of them. This is what the verse says: "These men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals - these are the very things that destroy them."

The three characteristics of these false teachers are these: Number one, there is evil speaking. Secondly there is spiritual ignorance, and thirdly, says Jude, they corrupt themselves. First then, these apostate teachers speak evil against things that they do not understand. They denounce Christian teaching that does not accord with their own views. They say wicked things against churches that stand for the sound teaching of God's Word, and for reverent worship, and a biblical approach to the preaching of the Gospel. These men are blind leaders of the blind and often they come like wolves in sheep's clothing, appearing to be genuine but full of evil intent.

Secondly these apostates are guilty of spiritual ignorance, says Jude. They have only a superficial understanding of the Scriptures. This superficiality leads them into all kinds of error. Here is the natural man, not the spiritual man. He appears to have a form of godliness, he is certainly religious, but his sinful nature dominates him and he scorns those who hold to the faith, who are true believers.

Thirdly: It is these very things, evil speaking and lack of spiritual understanding that lead to their own destruction in the end, Jude tells us. They are spoiled or ruined by the sin that has stained them. In verse eight we are told that they are "polluted" or "stained" and the inevitable consequence is the corruption we find in verse ten.

Thank God, there is One, Jesus Christ the Son of God, who has taken all our sins upon himself on the cross of Calvary. It is only through His sacrifice that the pollution and stain of sin can be removed from our lives. He has born the judgement that was due to us and is the Saviour of all who will repent and believe. This is the true Gospel. Do you believe it?

Jude 5 - "People From The Past"

Once again we are looking at the letter of Jude towards the end of the New Testament of the Bible. This time we are looking at verse eleven and the title of this talk is "People from the past." If you have been able to listen to the previous talks in this series, you will remember that in his letter Jude is dealing with the dangers posed by false teachers. He is warning his readers against those who are apostates, that is those who have turned away from the true faith and are preaching another gospel. In verse eleven Jude refers to three men from the past, and he says that the false teachers who have infiltrated the church are like these men.

In this verse Jude denounces the false teachers in very strong words. He says: "Woe to them! They have gone in the way of Cain; have run greedily in the way of Balaam for profit, and have perished in the rebellion of Korah." Verse eleven is at the very heart of the structure of this letter. It actually stands midway between illustrations drawn from the supernatural realm, which we have in verse nine, and from the world of nature, which we have in verses twelve and thirteen. So it is preceded by apostasy in history, and it's followed by apostasy in prophecy.

So who are these three characters from the past? They are Cain, who was a farmer, a tiller of the soil; Balaam, who was a false prophet; and Korah, who was a prince in Israel. You see, apostasy affects all classes of people, not just leaders. It touches prophets, princes and ordinary people. The verse actually shows a pattern of apostate behaviour. They enter on a wrong path, they run down that path and eventually they perish at the end of that path. Jude teaches us that there is no hope for those who continue in their apostasy. He tells us that these people are not the true sheep of the Good Shepherd.

Notice now the three verbs that Jude uses in verse eleven. In the King James Version of the Bible they are "gone", "run" and "perish." These apostates have "gone in the way", "run in the error", and they have "perished in the rebellion." Remember that Jesus said concerning himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life." But these false teachers have gone away from his way, they have run in error, not in his truth, and they have perished in their rebellion, so they have turned away from life.

The first of these Old Testament characters is Cain. Jesus speaks of these false teachers taking "the way of Cain." We read in the book of Proverbs that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Psalm one speaks about the path of the "way of sinners." In Genesis chapter four we read that Cain brought to God a sacrifice from the fruit of ground. Earlier we are told that the ground had been cursed by God because of man's sin. The right way of approach to God was that taken by Cain's brother, Abel. He came bringing the sacrifice of a slain lamb in atonement for his sins.

At the very beginning of the Bible we are presented with the truth that "without the shedding of blood, there is no remission for sin." Here was a picture of the promised Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who would give his own life on the cross, as The Lamb of God, for the sins of the world. This is God's way of salvation, through the precious blood of Christ. All other ways are false ways. Jude says that these apostates have gone in the way of Cain, they have departed from the right way. The only way back to God. These false teachers are people who were once enlightened by the truth concerning Christ, but they have chosen to depart from it.

Next Jude refers to "the error of Balaam." "They have rushed" or "They have run greedily into the error of Balaam for profit." The phrase to "run greedily", used in the King James Version, in the original Greek means that they have "poured forth". They are like a reservoir bursting its banks and rushing onward. Balaam was a profit who was greedy for gold. He was hired by King Balak of Moab to curse God's people, the Israelites, because he was afraid of them. But God only allowed him to pronounce blessings on

Israel and not a curse. So Balaam actually forfeited his reward from Balak and he was very upset. He then conceived a plan so that he could still become rich. If he could persuade the women of Moab and Midian to entice the Israelite men to commit sexual sins and idolatry with them, then the judgement of God would come upon them and Balak's purpose would be served, and Balaam would become rich. The plan actually worked, he ensnared the Israelites and he received his money from the king. In the Book of The Revelation, speaking to the church at Pergamos, the Lord says, "You have among you those who hold the teaching of Balaam who caused Balak to put a stumbling block before the Children of Israel." This is the error of all apostates, they sacrifice eternal riches for temporal gain. They want the pleasures of sin for a season, and to gain some part of the world, even if that means the loss of their own soul.

And the third Old Testament character that Jude points to is Korah. He speaks of the rebellion of Korah. Cain ignored the word of God revealed to himself and Abel. Balaam subtly opposed the word of God. Korah appeared in open rebellion against the word of God. Who was Korah? He was a Levite and actually a cousin of Moses. Under his leadership and that of his associates Dathan and Abiram, a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron arose. It reached its crisis when God's judgement came upon them and upon their whole households. We read in Numbers chapter sixteen that "The ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community."

So what was the great sin of Korah that brought about this awful judgement? It was that he rejected God's appointed mediator, Aaron the priest, and he spoke evil of Moses, chosen by God to lead them. He presumed that he could approach a holy God directly himself, without the mediation of the High Priest. What, then, is this illustration telling us about the false teachers about whom Jude is writing? There are those today who claim to be Christians, but they actually deny the unique position of the Lord Jesus as the one mediator between God and man. They deny that his sacrifice on Calvary's cross for our sins is all sufficient for the salvation of those who repent and believe. Christ is our great mediator if we are true believers. He alone can plead for his people before the throne of God. Those who deny this are apostate, denying the truth, and we must be on our guard against them. They are guilty of the sin of Korah and face judgement as he and his followers did long ago.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except by me." Do you believe this?

Jude - 6 "Empty Promises"

You will remember that Jude is describing apostates, or false teachers, who have gone far away from the truth and who have secretly slipped into the church. Such people are still around today.

This time we are looking at verses twelve and thirteen which read like this:

"These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm - shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted - twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever." Jude is describing these false teachers in terms of empty promises. He describes them in general and then in particular. In general he tells us there are five characteristics of their apostasy. They are shepherds who feed only themselves. They are like waterless clouds with their false promises. They are like fruitless trees with their barren profession. They are like raging waves, full of wasted effort. They are like wandering stars in their aimless course. In these five statements he suggests the selfishness, the helplessness, the fruitlessness, the shameful and the hopelessness of these apostate, false teachers.

What a contrast they make with the True Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also described as "The rock of our salvation". These apostates are hidden rocks threatening shipwreck to the faithful. The Lord comes with clouds to refresh his people forever, but these are clouds that have no rain. The Lord Jesus Christ is a tree of life for believers, but these apostates are trees of spiritual death. Our Shepherd Lord leads us besides the still waters, but these false ones are themselves like the restless, troubled sea disturbing all around them. Our Lord Jesus is "The Bright and Morning Star" heralding the coming Day, but these people are wandering stars leading others to a night of eternal darkness.

At the beginning of verse twelve Jude describes these men who have crept into the fellowship as "Blemishes or spots at your love feasts". This phrase is more correctly translated as "hidden rocks at your love feasts". These are rocks on which unsuspecting ships are wrecked. "Hidden rocks" in the love feasts of believers! What can this mean? It means that these apostates were dangerous people bringing shipwreck to the love feasts of the early church. This love feast preceded the Lord's Supper in the early church. The wealthier believers often supplied the needs of the poorer Christians. Then some began to come who only thought about themselves, they ate greedily while others went hungry and they became drunk. The apostle Paul had to write to rebuke people like this He says in 1 Corinthians chapter six verse ten: "...nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." This behaviour was evidence that they were apostates, serving only themselves.

Jude also describes them as "clouds without rain". This is the opposite of what we read in Luke chapter twelve verse fifty-four where Jesus said, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "It's going to rain", and it does." These clouds, says James, only bring disappointment. Solomon wrote of them long ago in Proverbs chapter twenty-five verse fourteen, "Like clouds and winds without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give." The Christian profession of these false teachers is itself false. Clouds without rain deceive and discourage those who are thirsty, and they darken the skies and shut out the sun. So these men deceive those who are thirsting for the water of life, and they dim their vision of the Lord Jesus, the "Sun of righteousness." They are clouds carried about by the wind. Matthew Henry in his commentary says, "They are light and empty, easily driven about this way and that as the wind happens to blow." These teachers promise much, but because they are empty themselves, they have no spiritual life in them, all they say are empty words. So many of them talk confidently about things of which they know little or nothing. Their words

are false and they are deceiving. We must be on our guard against them, searching the Scriptures to see if what they are saying is in accordance with God's Word.

These apostates are like "trees without fruit." Like late Autumn trees they are fruitless and only fit to be pulled up. They are thus twice dead. What a contrast with the true believer described in Psalm one and verse three, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." These men are twice dead because they are both "fruitless" and "rootless." There is no fruit of the Spirit, no godliness, no Christ-likeness. Their uprooting will be the second death when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again in judgement against all the ungodly. Jesus said, in Matthew chapter fifteen verse thirteen, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots." Judgement awaits these false professors with their false teaching and their deceiving of God's people.

And finally these men are compared to the raging waves of the sea. The sea is used several times in the Bible to symbolise those who do not know God. Here is uncontrolled wickedness. False teachers are often those with strong personalities; they are noisy and full of excitable talk and pride. They have little biblical understanding or wisdom. Like the raging sea they often engulf their hearers with their rhetoric and fine sounding teaching, but in the end they leave them empty and disappointed, and often with a shattered faith. "They foam up their shame", says Jude. The Living Bible version puts it like this: "All they leave behind them is shame and disgrace like the dirty foam left along the beach by the wild waves." How often we have seen this in our own day as false teachers have come and gone leaving behind them misery and confusion and personal disgrace.

So Jude has graphically described these apostate teachers, who had infiltrated the church, as men promising much but delivering nothing of spiritual value. Men who had deserted the true faith for their own ends, whose actions and words betrayed their emptiness and their wickedness. How important it is then that we "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" and be sure that we ourselves are "in the faith."

As we draw this study to a close, I want to ask you to search your heart to be sure that you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ the only Saviour of sinners.

Jude 7 - "Prophecy Before The Flood"

We are turning once again to the small Letter of Jude in the New Testament. We have reached verse thirteen in which Jude describes false teachers as "wandering stars for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever."

Jesus said, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." The planets in our solar system move in orbits around the sun designed for them by the Creator, whereas wandering stars have no set course; their destiny is outer darkness. Darkness in the Scripture speaks of the eternal judgement of God on all who reject or neglect the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude says of these apostates, "for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever." In verse seven of this letter we read of "the punishment of eternal fire." What a fearful warning this is to all who turn from the truth to another gospel or to no gospel at all; their punishment is eternal.

Jude has already described these apostates as like dangerous rocks and waterless clouds and as dead trees giving no fruit; they are like raging waves and wandering stars, but the true Christian is not like this. Christians are living stones, not lifeless rocks; they are channels of living water, not empty clouds; they are not dead trees, but trees of righteousness, a planting of the Lord; they know peace like a river and calm in the storm. True Christians will never experience the blackness of darkness forever but will, as we read in Daniel chapter twelve verse three, "shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

Now we come to verses fourteen and fifteen of the Letter of Jude. I am calling these verses "Prophecy before the flood." These verses read like this: "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men, 'See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in their ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.'" This statement is not found in the Old Testament. Moses recorded the story of creation and edited the first five books of the Bible, and whilst Enoch is referred to in the Book of Genesis, this prophecy that he made is not actually recorded there.

So Jude is giving us some new information about this man who is described in Genesis chapter five verse thirty-four as one who "walked with God". To tell us that Enoch was the seventh from Adam emphasises the antiquity of this prophecy. When Enoch's son was born he was called Methuselah. His very name was a prophetic warning, for it means, "When he is dead it shall be sent." Enoch was given a revelation from the Lord that when this child died every living thing on earth would be destroyed by a universal flood. And that is what happened, the flood came when Methuselah died after a very long life.

People did not face God's judgement in total ignorance because they had Enoch the prophet, Noah the preacher, and Methuselah whose name was a prophesy.

There is, of course, a parallel with the days in which we are living. The world is under judgement from Almighty God for its sins. Methuselah lived for nine hundred and sixty-nine years, a long time even in an age of longevity. This reminds us of the long-suffering and patience of God. This present Day of God's Grace is a long one, for now as then, God is not willing that any should perish but that all sinners should come to repentance, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Enoch's prophesy from God concerning the flood was given in a single word - the name of his son, Methuselah. The prophesy that Jude records for us in these verses has yet to be

fulfilled and looks forward to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. There are four notable facts that are emphasised in Enoch's prophesy. They are these:

The certainty of Christ's coming,
The companions at his coming,
The purpose of his coming, and
The result of his coming.

Jesus' coming again is CERTAIN. "Behold the Lord comes." Enoch was given a vision of the future, the veil was taken away and he saw this great event so clearly that he could describe it as though it was already passed. The first coming of Jesus Christ was in grace, to bring salvation. His second coming will be in judgement to judge the impenitent and unbelieving. It will also be to gather home to Himself all his beloved people. The first coming of the Lord Jesus was prophesied, and He came. His second coming is prophesied, and He himself said He would return, and He will.

Secondly consider his COMPANIONS at his coming. Literally this verse says, "He came with his holy myriads." It is written in the past tense as though it had already happened. Such is the certainty of this event in the purposes of God. The second coming of Christ is mentioned in the Book of Zechariah chapter fourteen verse five: "Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him." Who are these holy ones, or saints, whom Enoch saw coming with the Lord? Moses described the great hosts that were with the Lord when the Law was given and all these holy angels will accompany Christ when He returns. But Christian believers are also to appear with Christ in glory when He returns with all his saints. So Enoch is referring to all the holy angels and to all the redeemed people of God.

What, then, is the PURPOSE of Christ's coming? It is essentially to execute judgement. Who will be judged? All people, whether living or dead will ultimately face the judgement of God. The Lord Jesus said, "The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgement to the Son." Only those who are in Christ will be safe from this judgement because their sins have been atoned for by Christ's death on the cross. Believers will be judged, not for their sins, but for what they have done for the Lord; for the way they have lived their lives since they came to Christ. Their salvation is secure in Christ, but there will be reward and there will be loss. This is the teaching of 1 Corinthians chapter three verses eleven to fifteen.

Finally what will be the RESULT of Christ's second coming? Jesus Himself describes this judgement for us in Matthew chapter twenty-five verses thirty-one to forty-six. It is a solemn warning: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with Him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'."

May we heed the warning of this prophecy of Enoch and may we all be found as true believers in Christ at his coming again.

Jude 8 - "How To Recognise An Apostate"

We are looking once again at the Letter of Jude in the New Testament of the Bible. This time we come to verse sixteen, which tells us how we can recognise false teachers - those who are apostates from the truth. Verse sixteen gives us this description of them: "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage."

There is really no excuse for churches that fail to recognise these people for what they are. Jude uses very plain language to describe them. Their outstanding characteristics are all here. False teachers have plagued the church from the earliest days. There are three terms used to describe these apostates. First of all they are "grumblers". Jude uses a word that is unique in the New Testament. It reminds us of the murmuring of the Children of Israel against Moses. The verb form of the word occurs in John chapter six verse forty-one, where we read: "The Jews then murmured, or grumbled, against Jesus, because He said 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.'" This murmuring and grumbling was a refusal to recognise or to accept the truth. When our Lord Jesus ended his teaching on the bread of life it is recorded: "Aware his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?' ... And from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him." That is a clear example of apostasy - turning back and no longer following Christ. This followed their murmuring against the Lord and his teaching. Such grumbling is not trivial, it is sinful. So beware of any who murmur against the teaching of the Lord Jesus and his word; of those who complain that it is too hard or demanding. Such an attitude leads to a turning back from following the Lord. It leads to apostasy. If we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ we should be a very grateful people, not a murmuring, doubting people.

Secondly, these men are complainers or faultfinders. Again, Jude uses a term that is unique in the New Testament. The verb form appears in Mark chapter seven, verse two where the Pharisees found fault with the disciples of the Lord. Their complaint was followed by one of the Lord's sternest rebukes. He said, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites." Their murmuring was really directed against the person of the Lord Jesus, even though it was spoken against his followers.

Weak Christians may be overtaken by this sin of faultfinding, and if so they need to repent of it, for it can do a great deal of damage. Others in a church who constantly find fault with others, or with the teaching, may actually be apostates, away from the Lord in heart and mind. Complainers are those who are dissatisfied with their lot, they are not contented people. True believers are able to live contented lives. Paul writes from prison to the Philippian Christians, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." He also says "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

And the third thing we discover about these false teachers and apostates is that "They follow their own evil desires." The same Greek word is used by Jesus in the parable of the sower where He speaks of the desire for other things choking the Word and making it unfruitful. An apostate is one who has heard the Word of God and received it, but who subsequently rejects it and turns from it. They would rather follow their own wicked ways and ideas than be subject to the truth.

In his Second Letter chapter three and verse three, Peter writes, "You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires." There has always been those who have mingled with the people of God for their own gain, or in order to plant their own ideas. There is nothing new about apostasy. We have murmurers, complainers and those who longed for the pleasures of Egypt all referred to in the Book of Numbers. These people were with the Children of Israel, but not of them. Their presence had a very negative effect on the nation. The motives of

apostates are evil and they seek only their own gain. We must be on our guard against them and watch out for these signs.

Next, Jude tells us that these men are never short of something to say. He says they "boast about themselves." Modern apostate leaders have plenty of opportunities to speak in the media. They have statements for every situation and every occasion, but what they say is not based on the Word of God or a true interpretation of it. Peter says of apostates that they have forsaken the right way and that their words are vain and empty. By their oratory they persuade people, but their words are without true spiritual power. Paul writes in 1 Timothy chapter four verse one: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." One characteristic of false teachers is their self-importance. They project themselves and their personalities rather than pointing people to the Lord Jesus Christ. True humility does not characterise them. How up to date the Scriptures are in their descriptions of these men!

Then Jude says that these men "flatter others for their own advantage." They flatter people to gain money, to get praise, and to gain position and authority in the church. Flattery is a sin, condemned in Scripture. In Psalm twelve, verses two and three we read: "Everyone lies to his neighbour; their flattering lips speak with deception. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue...." In Proverbs twenty-seven we read that "A flattering mouth works ruin." And in Proverbs twenty-nine, "A man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet."

So the application is very clear to us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ: We should not murmur or complain against the Lord and his dealings with us; we must not live for the sinful desires of our bodies and minds. And we must beware of those who do these things and of those who seek to gain personal advantage by flattering words.

How are we to do this? We are to follow the great example of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, who is himself the very truth that these apostates deny. Let me close this talk with the words of Peter in his First Letter chapter two verses twenty-one to twenty-three:

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps:

'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'

When they hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered He made no threats. Instead He entrusted himself to Him who judges justly."

Jude 9 - "Remember The Warning"

This time we are considering verses seventeen to twenty and I've called this talk "Remember the Warning." If you have a Bible you will find it helpful to have it open to Jude, but if not do not worry as I will read these verses now.

"But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourself up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit."

We have already discovered that Jude's purpose in writing this letter was to give a strong warning against the false teachers who had slipped into the church. These men were apostates; men who having known the truth had rejected it in order to follow their own wicked ways. In the earlier part of his letter Jude has referred to the Old Testament Scriptures to show that apostasy is not a new thing. Here, towards the end of his letter, he asks us to remember the words of the New Testament apostles concerning this danger.

After a lengthy description of these evil men, Jude now brings an admonition to God's beloved people. We have a great contrast in these verses. He begins with the words, "But you beloved" or "You, dear friends." Light is breaking out, no longer is he talking about those who are condemned by God and facing judgement. Here he addresses those whom he loves in Christ, those who are beloved of God. Unlike the apostates, they are to remember the teaching of the apostles and be warned by their words, and remain true to the faith. God's beloved people love God's word and obey it. David said, "I rejoiced in your word as one who finds great treasure." And again "His word is to be more desired than gold." In this evil age people have a choice, either to listen to the words of ungodly men, or to the words of godly men, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Just because someone is very learned, or has a very attractive personality, or is very persuasive, or holds an office in the church, or is a celebrated speaker, it does not necessarily mean that he is a faithful shepherd of God's flock. The apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ have laid this great foundation for our faith in the New Testament and they have given us clear these clear warnings concerning apostate teachers.

In verse eighteen Jude refers to "the last times." This is the Gospel age, the age of the Son of Man. This is the time in which we are living. In verses eighteen and nineteen there are five things of which we should be taking note as we are on our guard against false teachers. What are they?

First Jude tells us that these false teachers are mockers or scoffers. These people scorn the teaching of God's Word, especially, Peter tells us, the teaching concerning the second coming of Christ. "They will say, 'Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" But they deliberately forget how judgement fell on the ancient world and it will surely fall on this present world according to God's Word. The word of God is heard and understood but it is rejected and it is ridiculed. David says in Psalm one, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers."

How do these who reject God's Word live? Jude verse eighteen goes on to say: "Who will follow their own ungodly desires." In verse ten they are compared to "unreasoning animals". Jude is saying they are led about by their own wicked desires, just as an animal is led about by a ring in its nose. The animal has no choice. The apostate too has no choice because he is a slave. Peter again puts it like this, in Second Peter chapter two verse nineteen: "They promise freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity -

for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." So here is a warning that those who mock at the law of God, who despise the love of God and ridicule the word of God are in reality slaves to their own sinful desires.

The third thing we discover about these false teachers is that they are governed by their senses and the attitudes of the world around them. He says, "They follow mere natural instincts...". This is something different to the ungodly desires we have just been speaking about. It refers rather to the natural mind; the way of thinking and acting that is common in a world that does not know God. They have no real spiritual discernment and their teaching is based on their own ideas and not on the truth.

The reason this is so, says Jude, is that "they do not have the Spirit of God." They may have all the outward appearances of being believers, they may be engaged in Christian ministry, but it is a deception because they have never been born again by the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us "If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his." True believers are sealed with the Spirit of Promise, they are sons of God and they have been baptised by the Spirit into Christ's body, the church. The difference between true believers and these false teachers is that true Christian believers are indwelt by, and taught by, the Holy Spirit.

The fifth characteristic of these apostates is that they cause divisions. "These are the men who divide you", says Jude in verse nineteen. This is the work of Satan himself. It is his aim to break down the fellowship of God's people by introducing a party spirit or by using disagreements, often over trivial matters, to split the church. These false teachers often introduce practises and regulations into the church that are not found anywhere in the Scriptures and by doing this they cause division.

Paul gives an example of this in First Timothy chapter four verse three: They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth."

Jude's words recorded in verses seventeen to nineteen are surely among the most solemn in the entire Bible. They help us to clearly identify those who would come into the church as wolves in sheep's clothing to deceive, divide and destroy. Let us be on our guard and be ready to test all teaching by the Word of God, just as the believers in Berea did when even the apostle Paul came to them.

Jude 10 - "But you dear friends"

In our journey of discovery through the letter of Jude we have reached verses 20 and 21. In our study last time we considered those who are scoffers and ungodly and who do not have the Holy Spirit. Now in the following verses Jude addresses the true believers, those whom he describes as "dear friends." He tells them that they have a fourfold task to fulfil: It is "Building", "Praying", "Keeping" and "Looking". This time we will look at "Building" and "Praying."

He begins by saying: "Build yourselves up in your most holy faith." Now we can only be built-up in our faith by reading and studying and obeying the Word of God. Notice that he says, "build yourselves up." We will only grow in grace and progress as believers as we ourselves work at it. We are also responsible for the building-up of our fellow Christians by our encouragement and by care for them. It is by being with God's people for worship and service that we will be strengthened and go forward in our most holy faith.

In the Old Testament, Nehemiah used a sword to defend himself and a trowel with which to build. We know that our powerful sword is the Word of God. It is also our spiritual food and with it we build and strengthen the walls of our faith.

Every believer is part of a wonderful spiritual building. We read about many buildings in the Old Testament - the first city in Genesis chapter 4 - David's beautiful palace and Solomon's beautiful temple, but in the New Testament we find a different sort of building. Not a building of stone or bricks but a spiritual building. The Lord Jesus said, referring to this building, "I will build my church."

In Ephesians chapter 2 we read that believers are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone." Peter tells us in his first letter that believers are like living stones being built into a spiritual house.

In terms of our responsibility to be built-up, faith is foundational. Faith is God's gift to believers and the Lord Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith. We are responsible for building ourselves up in the faith. This is a life-long task. How do we do it? Paul said, "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up." We need to hear and to heed the Word of God regularly as it is taught and preached in a church that is faithful to that Word. Certainly, we should ourselves be reading the Scriptures daily and systematically. We should read them enquiringly and be willing to ask questions of more mature believers. We should read the Word lovingly because the Bible always points us to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus. The only way we can grow as Christian believers is through our careful study of the Bible and by our daily obedience to what it says to us.

Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundations on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

It is perfectly clear from this parable of the Lord Jesus that He is talking about his people building their lives on his words. Are you building yourself up on the sure foundation of God's Word? Any other foundation will fail you and you will not grow as a Christian.

Next he tells them to "pray in the Holy Spirit." Here is a great contrast between the godly and the ungodly - believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers are, we read in verse 16: "grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage." Believers are not to be like that.

They are to be content in whatever situation the Lord has put them. They are to treat their old sinful self as dead, and they are to live humbly before their God. In all things they are to make their requests known to their Lord and they are to do this by "praying in the Spirit."

There are different kinds of prayer, but all prayer should be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. If our prayers are not in the Spirit then they are merely prayers of the flesh. The desire to pray comes from the Lord Himself and our prayers should begin with Him. Jude says nothing about posture in prayer or when we should pray, he gives us this one exhortation that our prayers must be Spirit directed. All true prayer is in the Holy Spirit. In other words, God is in it. He is listening, He is observing. He understands our weaknesses as we approach Him. He knows our frame and remembers we are but dust. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their cry. By his Spirit the Lord teaches us how to pray. Paul reminds us in Romans 8 verse 26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know how or what we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Praying in the Holy Spirit cannot be without result..

Our Saviour's earthly life was one of constant communion with his Father. As children of our Heavenly Father we cannot afford to be half-hearted or lukewarm in our praying. We are in a great battle, but God has given us this mighty weapon of praying in the Spirit.

So Jude turns our thoughts from the destructiveness, and the ultimate destruction of those who scoff at the things of God, to things that build up, such as faith, and love and mercy. Now God dominates the scene as we read in verses 20 and 21: "Pray in the Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life."

To whom is Jude addressing the exhortations found in these verses? To every true believer in the Lord Jesus. Each one is loved of the Lord, and Jude declares his affection for these believers as he called them "dear" or "beloved friends", but how much more are we God's beloved people. If you are a Christian there is a building work for you to do in your own life. You have a great responsibility to ensure your own spiritual growth as we have seen in this study from Jude.

So as we build our lives on the Word of God and as our prayers are moved by the Holy Spirit, so we will be kept from the false teaching around us. We will truly grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 11 - "Keep Yourselves In The Love Of God"

Hello as once again we look at the New Testament letter of Jude which you will find towards the end of the Bible. This letter is as relevant today as it was in the first century when it was written. This time we are looking at verse 21 where Jude says to his readers, and to us today: "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life."

We have discovered in our previous studies that Jude is concerned that false teachers, or apostates from the truth, had infiltrated the local assemblies of God's people and were causing divisions and ensnaring the Christians with their falsehoods and errors. They are still doing this today and so this small letter is a warning to us to be on our guard and to be sure that we keep ourselves in the love of God.

So what does it mean that we should "keep ourselves in God's love"? And exactly how do we do this? Four things are required of us:

First there must be the strengthening of our faith. We have already seen in previous verses that we are to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. The word used in some versions of the Bible is "edification", and this simply means "building up." We can only do this as we know the truth. Our faith is to be built on the Word of God and on nothing else, for that Word is the truth. Any teaching that does not accord with God's Word is false teaching.

The second way of keeping ourselves in the love of God is through devotion. We have also discovered that we are to be a praying people, and that our prayers are to be Spirit led. As we learn to speak to God in prayer and to express our devotion to Him, so we will be more and more conscious of his love for us. We are to be faithful in our prayer-life. In his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 Paul says this:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Thirdly, we keep ourselves in the love of God through our love for our Lord Jesus Christ - our affection for Him. The more we appreciate and express our love for our Saviour, the more we shall realise the great love of God towards us in giving Him to die for our sins on the cross. We are to be ever grateful to Him for all that He has done for us. Peter puts it like this in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 8:

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

And the fourth way in which we can keep ourselves in the love of God is through "expectation." We read in verse 14 about waiting for "the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life". We are reminded that our Saviour is coming again and then our salvation will be complete. Are you looking for his appearing? As you wait, are you living for Him a life that is pleasing to God? Live each day in the expectation of Christ's return and you will keep yourself in the love of God.

Christ is coming in mercy towards those who love him, to bring us into the fullness of eternal life. But verse 15 of this letter also reminds us that He is coming in judgement on the ungodly: "To judge everyone and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done." Friend, are you ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Christian believer, are you concerned for the edification, the building-up, not only of your own faith, but also of the Lord's people where you are? If you are to keep yourself in the

place where God's love can bless you, then you must continue to grow; be truly devoted to the Lord; demonstrate your affection for the Saviour; and be expectantly waiting for his return.

This is what it means to keep ourselves in the love of God. We know that God loved us, even before we thought of loving Him. He has loved us from eternity, from before the creation, with an everlasting love. The living God surrounds us with his love having demonstrated it supremely at Calvary. If God is your Saviour and your trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ, then enjoy the fact that His love is a constant love, it is not here one day and gone the next. The love of God never changes towards his people. Do not lose the sense of God's love for you by careless or sinful living. We are to keep ourselves in God's love. This is something that calls for determination on our part. We are to seek always to live in God's favour and not to grieve Him. Do not cause the Lord to have to chasten or rebuke you, for those He loves He disciplines as a good father does his children.

We should meditate on the love of God for us. We should be always conscious of it and respond to it by the way we live our lives. The eternal God is our Father; this is a relationship that unbelievers do not have. The apostle John rejoiced in this when he wrote in 1 John 3 verse 1: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!"

So, what have we discovered concerning how we are to keep ourselves in the love of God? Firstly, Jude has reminded us that it is by knowing the truth as revealed in the Scriptures and by building ourselves up in the faith. Do not neglect going to hear the Word of God taught and proclaimed by faithful men of God. Do not neglect your own private reading. It is through the Word that you will be strengthened and armed to face the tests of faith that will surely come your way.

Secondly, as our prayers are directed by the Holy Spirit, so we be all the more conscious of God's love for us. Do not neglect your own personal prayer-life and be encouraged by joining with other believers for corporate prayer.

Thirdly, we must avoid anything that would diminish our love for the Lord Jesus, especially sinful and selfish things that would take his place in our affection. Keep short accounts with God. If you fall into sin confess it immediately and ask his forgiveness.

If it is at all possible for you, meet with other believers faithfully every Lord's Day. Keep his day holy and faithfully remember the Lord Jesus at his table as He has asked us to. All these God appointed ordinances are there to stir up your love, so do not feel that you can do without them. Keep yourself in the love of God by meditating on Him, the great Creator, his holiness and his love in redeeming you.

Keep busy for the your Lord. Are you using your gifts for Him? Is there no one to visit; no one to witness to; no one to encourage; no one to pray with? Those who keep themselves in God's love are also those who show that love to others.

Jude 12 - "Winning Souls"

This time we are going to consider verses 22 and 23. In these verses Jude is writing about the winning of souls.

Here is Jude's final message before his closing benediction. He tells us that this matter of winning men and women for Christ is the serious and sacred responsibility of all Christian believers. It is our duty towards those who are without Christ and without hope in the world. Our God, the only Living God, is full of compassion for those whom He has made who have rebelled against Him.

He is also a holy God whose righteous judgement against sin is very terrible.

But there are those who will be saved from that judgement, they are those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died, whose redemption He accomplished on Calvary's cross. They are those who respond to his call as He draws them to Himself. All must hear the Gospel of Christ if they are to be saved for without the Saviour all are lost. It is for us who belong to Christ to seek the lost and bring them the message so that God may, by his grace, save them.

Verse 22 flows right through to verse 23. This is what they say: "Be merciful to those who doubt, snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy mixed with fear - hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."

Jude's final words concerning soul winning are like the parting words of the Lord Jesus to his disciples recorded in Luke 24 verses 46 to 48:

"He told them, "this is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

In these verses Jude gives us three kinds of people to whom we must witness. There are those who need compassionate tenderness because they are plagued with uncertainties. He says, "Be merciful to those who doubt." Then there are those who require urgent boldness if they are to be snatched away from an eternity of fiery judgement. Thirdly there are those who must be helped with cautious wisdom lest the Christian becomes contaminated by their sins.

So, in verse 22, in our witness to those who are lost there is a need for compassionate tenderness. We are the recipients of God's great mercy towards us, so we too should show the same kind of mercy and compassion towards those who do not know our Saviour. We must be sensitive to the different situations that people are in. They may be hurting or confused; they may be seeking help; they may be struggling with fears and doubts. Our place as we witness to these is to be considerate, showing the patience and love of Christ. We are not to be proud, or harsh or judgmental, even to those who wilfully oppose us. Our God is forgiving and gracious, and we must be forgiving and gracious.

So we need patience and compassion as we try to help people full of doubts. They need to know that they must cry "Lord save me!" and trust entirely in Christ.

In verse 23 we are told that others are to be snatched from the fire and brought to safety. The expression suggests a rescue at the very last moment. In the Old Testament, Lot and his daughters were snatched as brands for the burning from the wicked city of Sodom. Amos declares the word of the Lord to Israel concerning his mercy when they deserved his judgement, "You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire." If the stick had not be snatched from the fire it would have been destroyed. How this emphasises the urgency of our task. The whole world is lost in the darkness of sin. Men and women and young people are going to a lost eternity. Many may have only one

opportunity to hear the good news that Christ has died for their sins to rescue them from eternal judgement. You may be the one to tell them. We are to be bold and positive and urgent in our witness. Evangelism is a serious and sensitive work. People have to be pulled from the fire. They are in a tragic and hopeless condition. They are heading for the fire of divine judgement.

Then in verse 23 Jude counsels us have wisdom in our approach to the third group of people. These are they whose life-style is corrupt and evil. Strong words are used here. Words such as "fear" and "hating." "Fear" is the word "phobos" in the original Greek. In English we have the word "phobia" which means the fear of something. "Phobos" means dread or terror or it can also mean reverential fear, the fear of displeasing God. In witnessing to those whose lives have been corrupted by all kinds of evil practices, we must never underestimate the power of Satan to ensnare us and bring us down, even by contact with the very ones we are trying to win. So we are to hate everything that is associated with their evil practices. The Good News Version of the Bible translates the last part of verse 23 like this: "Hate their very clothes, stained by their sinful lusts." Great care and great wisdom is needed by those who go among the most corrupt in order to win them for Christ. But here too there is to be mercy, no pride or condemnation of the individuals themselves, only an abhorrence of their sin. We always remember that the precious blood of the Lord Jesus cleanses from all sin. Faith in Him can truly make the vilest sinner clean.

The heart of God is towards the lost. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. He has given to his people the privilege and awesome responsibility of being Christ's ambassadors in this sinful world. He calls on us to go with the Gospel to our family, friends and neighbours with an urgency borne out of love for those who are lost. In the verses we have been discovering today, Jude has shown us how we should approach this task as we witness to different groups of people. The faithful soul-winner is sensitive towards those who doubt; urgent to save those who are dying, and wise in dealing with those whose lives are being destroyed by their sin.

Do you care about the lost? Do you have a soul-winners heart? May we all learn the lessons we have discovered.

Jude 13 - "NOW UNTO HIM"

This time we come to verses 24 and 25, which are a wonderful finale to the letter. We read: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen."

The letter of Jude is only short but we have found it to be full of wise counsel and teaching. It notes the failings, the faults and the falling of the apostate teachers that had crept into the church and warns against them. Jude has called on his readers to remember how the Children of Israel turned away from the Lord even after their miraculous deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh's pursuing army. They had sung "I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea." But in a few days they were clamouring to go back into Egypt. They had seen God's power at work and yet eventually they worshipped an idol - the golden calf. Jude has reminded us in verse 5 that the Lord "destroyed those who did not believe."

Then we were also reminded that even some of the holy angels sinned and fell and were driven out of God's presence. They are kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the Great Day that is to come. Jude points to Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 7 as an example of the judgement of God on those who defile themselves by sexual immorality and perversion. Those cities were destroyed in a moment. All these

examples, Jude has given, to show the seriousness of unbelief, of disobedience, of teaching error, of impure living, and causing people to stumble and fall.

Jude's letter is like a great danger sign, a warning sign. We see such signs at times, don't we? Signs such as, "Danger, falling rocks" or "Danger deep water". In Jude we see the danger of falling spiritually. But in this letter, which makes contrasts between the unbelieving apostates and the true believers, we have this wonderful final statement that Christians have a Saviour who is able to keep them from falling. Consider the dangers and pitfalls of the Christian life: the enticing world around us; the weakness of our own sinful natures; the craftiness of our enemy the devil. But consider also the fact that although once we were like sheep going astray now we have the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us and no one can take us from his hand. He accomplished redemption for us on the cross and drew us to Himself, and made us his own. God has made us alive together with Christ and He keeps us safe in Him. So, says Jude, "He is able to keep you from falling." This is a promise you can claim each day as you ask the Lord to keep you from those things that would stumble your walk with Him.

In this final doxology, then, we see three things that are ours as believers. We have just seen that our God able to preserve us, to keep us from falling into unbelief and sin. Now we see that we not only have PRESERVATION, but one day there will be PRESENTATION and GLORIFICATION.

One day we are going to be "presented before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." We know from Ephesians chapter 5 that the "Bride of Christ", that is his church made up of all true believers, will be presented to him faultless. Of course in ourselves we are not without fault, but we are not in ourselves, we are "in Christ." We have been justified freely by God's grace and the righteousness of the Christ is credited to us. We are clothed in his righteousness so that when God sees you and me, He sees only his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That presentation will be with great joy. Great joy for the Saviour for, as Hebrews reminds us, it was "for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." There will be great joy for every believer as we see the Saviour and our salvation is made complete. Some will come to that presentation through deep waters having fought great battles and been through great trials and temptations, but then their joy will be complete. The Lord Jesus Himself, in the words of Isaiah 53 verse 11, will "See the results of the suffering of his soul and be satisfied."

This doxology is addressed to "the only God our Saviour." Only God can save a lost sinner. Someone has said, "you can ruin yourself, but you cannot save yourself - only God can do that. Jude ascribes to this great Saviour God four characteristics: glory, majesty, power and authority. The glory of God is his manifest excellence, the radiance of his holy person. The majesty of God reminds us that He is the ruler of the universe. He is the sovereign Lord of all. He ascribes power to God, the one who upholds all things by the word of his power. He is the one whose mighty power is seen throughout all creation. He is the omnipotent Lord. And then Jude speaks of God's authority. Our Saviour God has all authority in heaven and on the earth. It is He who determines the outcome of history and it is He whose purposes will be fulfilled.

Notice that Jude brings his praise and worship of God "through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is only through the person of his own Son that we are able to approach this glorious, mighty God. It is only in the name of Christ, because of his death on the cross, that repentant, believing sinners can come into the presence of the one who is described as "The Holy One of Israel."

But there is one more thing that Jude tells us about our God and it is this: He is the eternal one whose glory, majesty, power and authority are from all ages past, and are now, and will be for ever and ever. The God who is our Saviour is the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the one who says of Himself, "I am the Lord, I change not." Christian believer, this mighty God is the one who is able to keep you from falling and who one day will present you faultless in his glorious presence.

So, with this outburst of praise and worship Jude concludes his short letter. A letter full of warnings, but full of spiritual advice for us today as we seek to live faithfully for Christ in an unbelieving world that chases after all kinds of ideas and philosophies that are not the truth.