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STRANGE AND TERRIBLE WORDS

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGE of the Church is described in the Acts of the Apostles. The end of the Church Age is set forth in the Epistle of Jude, which might well be called the Acts of the Apostates. The first book which can properly be said to contain Church history describes the deeds and teachings of men of God through whom Christ began to build His Church. The last epistle of the New Testament relates the deeds and teaching of evil men who will be living upon the earth as the history of the professing Church comes to an end.

Jude is the only book in all God's Word entirely devoted to the great apostasy which is to come upon Christendom before the Lord Jesus Christ returns. This brief message of twenty-five verses is the vestibule to the Revelation, introducing the Bible student to the apocalyptic judgments unfolded therein.

Without Jude, the prophetic picture which begins with the teachings of Christ in the Gospels and develops throughout the epistles would be incomplete. Our Lord raised the question: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Paul supplied us with the terminology commonly used by Bible students concerning a falling away from the faith of our fathers in the last days. He called it "the apostasy" (II Thess. 2:3, marg.). He described it as a departure from the faith (I Tim. 4:1), an unwillingness to endure sound doctrine (II Tim. 4:3). Through the apostle Peter, the Holy Spirit revealed that false teachers would some day appear and bring in "damnable

heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them" (II Peter 2:1; 3:3).

Jude brings the teaching of the entire Bible about apostasy to a tremendous climax. He takes us back to the very dawn of human history. We are reminded of apostasy at the gate of Eden and within God's ancient people Israel. Our thoughts are turned to princes and prophets, to saints and sinners, to eternal fire and everlasting darkness, to the sea and to the stars, to past judgments and future glory. We are taken into the unseen world for a strange and terrible story of the sin of fallen angels, and another story of a dispute between Michael the archangel and Satan, those antagonists who are set over against each other once more in mortal combat in Revelation 12.

It is a remarkable fact that the Epistle of Jude has suffered neglect by Bible students and preachers in spite of its wealth of revelation and the tremendous sweep of its subject matter. The great expositor Alexander Maclaren, whose works have been published in seventeen volumes, has given us only three sermons on it. The twenty-five volumes of Biblical studies by Joseph Parker, known as *The People's Bible*, contain but a single message on Jude. Only five pages in six thick books are devoted to this epistle in the beloved Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown *Critical and Experimental Commentary*. Of 844 pages in the great *Bible Commentary* dealing with Hebrews through Revelation a mere fourteen were set aside for this final epistle of the New Testament. There are twenty-three pages on Jude in the monumental *Lange's Commentary* of twenty-five large volumes.

Why should such a rich storehouse of Bible truth have been so seriously neglected? The answer may lie in the fact that Jude deals largely with conditions in the last days. The rising of the present high tide of apostasy within the professing Church has been necessary to call attention to the import of the epistle as a whole. Jude must no longer be con-

sidered a mysterious book, offering only two or three verses of value in the ministry of the Word of God.

The possibility that the denial of our holy faith, so widespread in our own generation, may be a prelude to the great apostasy referred to by our Lord (Luke 18:8) should quicken our interest in this final epistle during these momentous times. If the last page of history of the Church is about to be turned, we may expect the Holy Spirit to give us new light on the strange and terrible words and warnings of Jude. A fresh study may awaken us to a solemn realization that it is later than we think, so that we shall pray and work as never before, with the confident expectation of revival within the Body of Christ and an ingathering of many souls before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come.

Bible students have wrestled with the problem of outlining the Epistle of Jude or indicating its main divisions. Even though a completely satisfactory outline may be difficult to prepare (largely because of the richness of the contents), a careful study of the internal structure of the epistle reveals a mathematical progression of truth which clearly shows the hand of God in its design. No one would think that the one who wrote this short letter was following any particular pattern, and yet there is something in the way these great truths have been put together which reminds us of basic laws underlying the structure of the universe itself—the universe which came from the same creative hand that has given us the Bible.

Jude begins with a salutation containing a threefold blessing; it ends with a doxology containing a statement of the threefold heritage of the Lord's people. Salvation is mentioned in the third verse from the beginning and in the third verse from the end. We are exhorted to contend for the faith in verse 3, and to build ourselves up on our faith in verse 20. "Remember the Old Testament" is the theme of verse 5; "remember the New Testament" is the theme of verse 17. Such parallels of truth are easily discovered as we move to-

ward the heart of the epistle. Some of them may be seen in the accompanying structural outline.

A structural outline of Jude

Assurance for the Christian (vv. 1, 2)

The believer and the faith (v. 3)

Apostates described (v. 4)

Apostasy in Old Testament history (vv. 5-8)

Apostasy in the supernatural realm (vv. 9, 10)

An ancient trio of apostates (v. 11)

Apostasy in the natural realm (vv. 12, 13)

Apostasy in Old Testament prophecy (vv. 14-16)

Apostates described (vv. 17-19)

The believer and the faith (vv. 20-23)

Assurance for the Christian (vv. 24, 25)