



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

"ALL CHRISTIANS TO ACTION STATIONS!!"

An outline study of Jude - an important little book for today.

By Rev Ivan Foster.

Part 5 : Five telling metaphors of the apostate

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever," Jude 1:12-13.

With what bold clarity and explicitness, Jude paints the picture of the apostates and their activities amongst the early church! These warnings are relevant still for these same creatures are at work today!

Of course, let it be noted, a warning is of little use when it is clouded by ambiguity and lacking in transparency. This is especially so when the matter about which the warning is made is of such a serious and solemn nature as the infiltration of the church by deceivers and agents of the devil.

Let preachers take note: Don't be as "dumb dogs", which "cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber," Isaiah 56:10. Be as Paul's trumpeter in 1 Corinthians 14:8, giving forth a clear, shrill sound that all will instantly recognise as an alarm "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

Oh how clear was the witness of the Free Presbyterian Church in former times under the energetic and Holy Ghost enabled early ministry of Ian Paisley and fellow ministers!

May it be generally so again.

The language Jude employs is, as ever, easy to understand. He employs five very graphic and telling illustrations of the evil character of the individuals he referred to at the first as "certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ," verse 4.

Please consider well these pictures painted of the apostate by the Holy Ghost.

I. SPOTS IN YOUR FEAST OF LOVE

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear," verse 12.

Let me point out something important about this word "spots".

Peter, whose writings are wonderfully paralleled by Jude in many ways, uses a similar phrase. "And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you," 2 Peter 2:13.

Interestingly, though Jude uses a Greek word very similar to that used by Peter, it has a very significantly different meaning. Jude uses the word "spilas" whereas Peter uses the word "spilos". The word employed by Peter means "a fault, moral blemish", whereas the word chosen by Jude carries the meaning "a rock in the



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

sea, ledge, reef.”

Noteworthy

To me this is very noteworthy. It highlights the terrible danger that evil deceivers pose for the people of God. They are not just as a stain on a garment but they are as a hidden rock which lies, as it were, waiting to wreck any ship that passes over it!

The impact of the influence of these “creepers” is the making shipwreck of the faith of those over whom they exercise an influence.

What a danger they are to the church of Christ! What a heavy responsibility lies upon ministers to watch for them, detect them and uncover them to the people of God!

Early love feasts

A word about these early church feasts of love or charity as it is translated in the Authorised Version. John Gill says of these events:

“These here seem to be the Agapae, or love feasts, of the primitive Christians; the design of which was to maintain and promote brotherly love, from whence they took their name; and to refresh the poor saints, that they might have a full and comfortable meal now and then: their manner of keeping them was this; they began and ended them with prayer and singing; and they observed them with great temperance and frugality; and they were attended with much joy and gladness, and simplicity of heart: but were quickly abused, by judaizing Christians, as observing them in imitation of the passover; and by intemperance in eating and drinking; and by excluding the poor, for whose benefit they were chiefly designed; and by setting up separate meetings for them, and by admitting unfit persons unto them; such as here are said to be spots in them, blemishes, which brought great reproach and scandal upon them, being persons of infamous characters and conversations.”

Matthew Poole has this brief comment which echoes John Gill’s view on these feasts.

“In your feasts of charity; feasts used among the primitive Christians, to show their unity among themselves, and promote and maintain mutual charity, and for relief of the poor among them.”

Over indulgence

Good indeed were it that we were in a spiritual frame to reinstitute such gatherings but sadly, today we are much more given to over indulgence and fleshly gatherings similar to that which John Gill says emerged from the early abuse of these sweet times of fellowship in those far off days of trouble and persecution.

It is hardly surprising that the early love feasts became corrupted by carnal appetites when it is remembered that these ‘corrupting creepers’ joined themselves to such happy and holy gatherings. “These are spots in your feasts of charity.”

The word ‘spots’, as already noted, refers to a hidden reef which endangers ships that strike it. Where better for the devil to hide that which will sink Christians than in a love feast!

II. CLOUDS WITHOUT WATER

“ . . . clouds they are without water, carried about of winds,” Jude 1:12.

Again, we have a vivid and impressive analogy used to inform us of the character of the apostate infiltrator that every generation of the Church of Christ faces.

How numerous are the clouds! It is extremely rare for our skies to be void of clouds. Likewise, these evil men who threaten the well-being of the people of God are numerous indeed. There are always some in the



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

In Revelation 9:1-11, we read of a Satanic attack permitted of God at the end of this age. The agents of Satan are likened unto a swarm of locusts. "And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power," Revelation 9:2-3.

Some swarms of locusts have as many as two hundred million per square mile! For the Lord to use such an analogy of the agents of the devil that threaten the Church is a sure indication of the abundance of the attackers Christians face.

The form these apostates take. We have little concept of how welcome the appearance of a cloud is for the people of middle east. In a land prone to drought and the resultant famine that would follow, clouds ensure food and comfort and are most welcome, heralding plenty.

The agents of the devil thus present themselves as emissaries of good. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works," 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. They promise that which a cloud would promise to the eastern dweller.

But it is an empty promise for they are "clouds . . . without water."

What a disappointment! What a raising and dashing of hopes, what misery and despondency are brought by such "clouds"!

What shadows they can cast. We here in Ulster know how clouds can cut out the sunshine and turn a bright day into a very dull day indeed. Apostasy casts a shadow over all who come under its influence. It cuts off God's truth from a people, a nation. The darkness which is so evident in the United Kingdom and in many other lands, where once the light of God's Truth shone brightly, is the direct result of the emergence of apostasy within the ranks of churches, the pulpits of which once sounded out God's message of saving mercy.

They are carried about of winds. Often, but not always, in the Bible, the 'wind' is used by the Lord to symbolise the work of the devil.

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock," Matthew 7:25. Here the 'winds' are part of the amalgam of enemies that buffet the Christian and test his standing in Christ.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree," Revelation 7:1.

Here are two instances in which 'winds' have an evil connotation.

These apostate intruders are 'carried about of winds' or moved and directed by wicked impulses and energy and thus cast abroad the dark shadows of the lies and deceit of "seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy," 1 Timothy 4:1-2.

III. TREES WITHOUT FRUIT

". . . trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots."

The phrase "trees whose fruit withereth" literally means "trees in autumn" or trees at a time when they are stripped of foliage and fruit. The season of fruitfulness and fulness of foliage is short for fruit trees. Very soon they are shorn of their covering and appear with nothing to garnish and beautify their bare branches.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

So it is with apostasy. Its appearance of beauty and beneficence is short-lived!

The beauty of Absalom was but skin-deep and, like snow off a ditch, soon melted!

"But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him, 2 Samuel 14:25. "And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel," 2 Samuel 15:6. The evil, licentious heart of Absalom was soon discovered. He has long been considered one of the most striking foreshadowings of the Antichrist of the end-times.

So it is with all who masquerade as messengers of God when they are, in truth, agents of the devil. They soon reveal themselves in their true colours just as did Judas Iscariot. They have no fruit with which to refresh and edify. They are "twice dead, plucked up by the roots." John Gill comments: they are "entirely, thoroughly, and really dead in trespasses and sins, notwithstanding their pretensions to religion and godliness; or the sense may be, that they were not only liable to a corporeal death, common to them with all mankind, but also to an eternal one, or to the death both of soul and body in hell."

It is against such that Jude warns the people of God in every age.

IV. RAGING WAVES OF THE SEA

"Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame," Jude 1:13.

What frenzied activity one can see on most days at the shore. The frenzy increases dramatically when the winds are blowing.

Here is a lesson for us all to learn.

The word 'raging' is linked to the 'wildness of savage animals.' It is reminiscent of the depiction of the latter-day apostasy given us by David in Psalm 2. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," verses 1-3. This tumult is so like the raging of the waves on the shore.

This storm of rebellion is alluded to in many places in Scripture. Here is one.

"Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever," Psalm 93:2-5.

It should be remembered that it was from the sea that the 'Beast' will arise. "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy," Revelation 13:1. This is of course the Mediterranean Sea that is depicted, but may we not also rightly conclude that out of the restless sea of man's wickedness shall arise the one who will prove to be wickedness incarnate.

It is in this rage that they 'cast up the foam of their own shame and dishonour.' For all their appearance of strength and might, the raging of the waves, even on the stormiest of days, peters out in a mere ripple of foam!

So it will be with the endeavours of the devil and his envoys. Christ and His Truth and His People will triumph in the end.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matthew 25:34.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever," Revelation 20:10.

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire," Revelation 20:15.

So will end the devil and man's rebellion against God

V. WANDERING STARS

" . . . wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever," Jude 1:13.

Here again is a telling illustration of the character and the wickedness of the apostate creepers whose activities threaten the Church.

How beneficial stars have proved to be to mankind! It was by them that travellers of old were guided. The sailor often still uses them to plot his course on the open seas where he is without a landmark to point the way. It was by a star that the wise men were led to Bethlehem where Christ was born.

Thus the stars picture for us the glorious revelation of God's truth set forth in the Holy Scriptures wherein is detailed for us the 'way of life', the 'way, the truth, and the life' that lead to heaven.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world," Psalm 19:1-4.

The stars bear universal and timeless witness to the existence of God.

Wandering stars are no safe guide. No sailor will find the harbour he seeks by following a 'wandering star'!

How like the apostate this is. The apostasy has been marked by the shifting, altering, unstable pronouncements of men who reject the Word of God. No safe eternal haven will ever be found following the guidance of the "certain men (who have) crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ," Jude 1:4. Instead, when "the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," Matthew 15:14.

Jude states clearly the destination of these 'wandering stars'. "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever," Jude 1:13.

Their damnation is 'reserved'. It is therefore most certain indeed. There can be no escape for those who openly reject the truth of God and follow their own perverted notions. The word reserved is used in reference to Peter's imprisonment in Acts 12:5. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." The word is translated here as 'kept'.

The end reserved for these apostates is most fearful. It is 'the blackness of darkness for ever.'

They will share the fate of the fallen angels in whose path of defiance and rebellion against God they have chosen to follow. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day," Jude 1:6. This is the 'blackness of darkness for ever' which is reserved for the apostate 'wandering star.'

It has to be said that this too is the place reserved for all who follow them. Of this dreadful fate Peter warned. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

truth shall be evil spoken of," 2 Peter 2:1, 2.

Many indeed have stepped on this path to perdition and multitudes today are being recruited on to this path to 'swift destruction'! It behoves God's servant to warn boldly of the creepers of whom Jude cried out some 2000 years ago.

I can still hear Dr Paisley preaching on 1 Timothy 4:6 just a month or so after I was converted and showing just what a 'good minister' was like. He was defending himself from one of the many attacks he came under for preaching out against the apostasy.

I have never forgotten that lesson.

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things (see verses 1-3), thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained," 1 Timothy 4:6.

I feel it is a lesson young ministers need to learn today!