

THE AGES DIGITAL LIBRARY
COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

by John Nelson Darby

Books For The Ages
AGES Software • Albany, OR USA
Version 2.0 © 1996, 1997



John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

AGES Software is indebted to STEM Publishing, UK, for generously granting permission to reproduce their electronic text of Darby's *Synopsis of the Bible*. The Synopsis and the complete works of John Nelson Darby are available on a single CD-ROM, *The Darby Disk*. Contact L. J. L. Hodgett, STEM Publishing, 7 Primrose Way, Cliffs End, Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 5LF., U.K., Tel/Fax: 01843 584686, for information on acquiring this resource. Please contact STEM for publishing rights. The format which follows is copyright 1996 by AGES Software.

JUDE

The epistle of Jude develops the history of the apostasy of Christendom, from the earliest elements that crept into the assembly to corrupt it, down to its judgment at the appearing of our Lord, but as moral apostasy by turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. In John they are gone out; here they have crept in, corrupting. It is a very short epistle, and containing instruction presented with much brevity, and with the energetic rapidity of the prophetic style, but of immense weight and extensive bearing.

The evil which had stolen in among Christians would not cease until destroyed by judgment.

We have already noticed this difference between the epistle of Jude and the second of Peter, that Peter speaks of sin, Jude of apostasy, the departure of the assembly from its primitive state before God. Departure from the holiness of faith is the subject that Jude treats. He does not speak of outward separation. He views Christians as a number of persons professing a religion on the earth, and originally true to that which they professed. Certain persons had crept in among them unawares. They fed themselves without fear at the love-feasts of the Christians; and although the Lord would come attended by all His saints (so that the faithful will have been already caught up), yet in the judgment these persons are still accounted to be in the same class — "to convince," he says, "all that are ungodly among them." They may indeed be in open rebellion at the moment of judgment, but they were individuals who had once formed a part of the company of Christians; they were really apostates, enemies left behind.

When it is said, "These be they who separate themselves," it does not mean openly from the visible assembly, for he speaks of them as in the midst of it; but they set themselves apart, being in it, as more excellent than others, like the Pharisees among the Jews. Jude points them out as being in the midst of the Christians, and presenting themselves as such.

The judgment falls upon this class of persons; the taking up of the saints has left them behind for judgment.

Jude begins by declaring the faithfulness of God and the character of His care for the saints, which answers to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. They were called ones, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Happy testimony! which magnifies the grace of God. "Holy Father," our Lord said, "keep them": and these were sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. The apostle speaks with a view to the forsaking by many of the holy faith; he addresses those who were kept.

He had purposed writing to them of the salvation common to all Christians; but he found it needful to exhort them to stand fast, to contend for the faith once given to the saints. For already was that faith being corrupted by the denial of the rights of Christ to be Lord and Master; and thus also, by giving the reins to self-will, they abused grace, and turned it into a principle of dissoluteness. These are the two elements of the evil which the instruments of Satan introduced, the rejection of the authority of Christ (not His name): and the abuse of grace, in order to indulge their own lusts. In both cases it was the will of man, which they set free from everything that bridled it. The expression "Lord God" points out this character of God. "Lord" here is not the word generally used; it is despot; that is, "master."

Having pointed out the evil which had secretly crept in, the epistle goes on to show them that the judgment of God is executed upon those who do not walk according to the position in which God had originally placed them.

The evil was, not only that certain men had crept in among them — in itself an immense evil, because the action of the Holy Ghost is thereby hindered among Christians — but that, definitely, the entire testimony before God, the vessel which held this testimony, would become (as had been already the case with the Jews) corrupt to such a degree that it would bring down upon itself the judgment of God. And it has become thus corrupt.

This is the great principle of the downfall of the testimony, established by God in the world, by means of the corruption of the vessel which contains

it, and which bears its name. In pointing out moral corruption as characterising the state of professors, Jude cites, as examples of this downfall and of its judgment, the case of Israel, who fell in the wilderness (with the exception of two, Joshua and Caleb), and that of the angels who, not having kept their first estate, are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

This example suggests to him another case, that of Sodom and Gomorrha, which presents immorality and corruption as the cause of judgment. Their condition is a perpetual testimony here on earth to their judgment.

These ungodly men, with the name of Christians, are but dreamers; for the truth is not in them. The two principles which we have noticed are developed in them: filthiness of the flesh, and contempt for authority. The latter manifests itself in a second form, namely, the license of the tongue, the self-will that manifests itself by speaking evil of dignities. Whereas, the text says, the archangel Michael durst not rail even against the devil, but with the gravity of one who acts according to God, appealed to the judgment of God Himself.

Jude then sums up the three kinds or characters of the evil and of estrangement from God; first, that of nature, the opposition of the flesh to the testimony of God and His true people, the impetus which this enmity gives to the will of the flesh; in the second place, ecclesiastical evil, teaching error for reward, knowing all the while that it is contrary to the truth and against the people of God; third, open opposition, rebellion, against the authority of God in His true King and Priest.

At the time when Jude wrote his epistle, those persons whom Satan introduced into the church in order to stifle its spiritual life and to bring on the result which the Spirit views prophetically, were dwelling in the midst of the saints, took part in those pious feasts at which they gathered together in token of their brotherly love. They were “spots” in those “feasts of charity,” feeding without fear in the pastures of the faithful. The Holy Ghost denounces them energetically. They were doubly dead, by nature and by their apostasy; without fruit, bearing fruit that perished, as out of season; plucked up by the roots; foaming out everywhere their own shame; wandering stars, reserved for darkness. Of old the Spirit had announced by the mouth of Enoch the judgment that should be executed

upon them. This presents a very important aspect of the instruction here given; namely, that this evil which had crept in among the Christians would continue and still be found when the Lord should return for judgment. He would come with the myriads of His saints to execute judgment upon all the ungodly among them for their acts of iniquity and their ungodly words which they had spoken against Him. There would be a continuous system of evil from those in the apostles' time till the Lord came. This is a solemn witness to what would go on among Christians.

It is quite remarkable to see the inspired writer identifying the favorers of licentiousness with the rebels who will be the object of judgment in the last day. It is the same spirit, the same work of the enemy, although restrained for the moment, which will ripen for the judgment of God. Alas for the assembly! It is, however, but the universal progression of man. Only that, grace having fully revealed God and delivered from the law, there must now be either holiness of heart and soul, and the delights of obedience under the perfect law of liberty, or else licence and open rebellion. In this the proverb is true, that the corruption of that which is the most excellent is the worst of corruptions. We must add here, that the admiration of men, in order to gain advantage by them, is another characteristic feature of these apostates. It is not to God that they look.

Now the apostles had already warned the saints that these mockers would come, walking after their own lusts, exalting themselves, not having the Spirit, but being in the state of nature.

Practical exhortation follows for those who were preserved. According to the energy of spiritual life, and the power of the Spirit of God, they were by grace to build themselves up, and to keep themselves in the communion of God. The faith is, to the believer, a most holy faith; he loves it, because it is so; it puts him into relationship and communion with God Himself. That which he has to do in the painful circumstances of which the apostle speaks (whatever may be the measure of their development), is to build himself up in this most holy faith. He cultivates communion with God, and profits through grace by the revelations of His love. The Christian has his own proper sphere of thought, in which he hides himself from the evil that surrounds him, and grows in the knowledge of God from whom nothing can separate him. His own portion is always the more evident to

him, the more the evil increases. His communion with God is in the Holy Ghost, in whose power he prays, and who is the link between God and his soul; and his prayers are according to the intimacy of this relationship, and animated by the intelligence and energy of the Spirit of God.

Thus they kept themselves in the consciousness, the communion, and the enjoyment of the love of God. They abode in His love while sojourning here below, but, as their end, they were waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. In effect when one sees what are the fruits of the heart of man, one feels that it must be His mercy which presents us without spot before His face in that day for eternal life with a God of holiness. No doubt it is His unchangeable faithfulness, but, in the presence of so much evil, one thinks rather of the mercy. Compare, in the same circumstances, what Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:16. It is mercy which has made the difference between those that fall and those that stand (compare Exodus 33:19). We must also distinguish between those who are led away. There are some who are only drawn aside by others, others in whom the lusts of a corrupt heart are working; and where we see the latter we must manifest hatred to everything that testifies this corruption, as a thing that is unbearable.

The Spirit of God in this epistle does not bring forward the efficacy of this redemption. He is occupied with the crafty devices of the enemy, with his efforts to connect the actings of the human will with the profession of the grace of God, and thus to bring about the corruption of the assembly, and the downfall of Christians, by putting them on the road to apostasy and judgment. Confidence is in God; to Him the sacred writer addresses himself in closing his epistle, as he thinks of the faithful to whom he was writing. Unto Him, he says, who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us unspotted before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

It is important to observe the way in which the Spirit of God speaks in the epistles of a power that can keep us from every fall, and unblamable; so that a thought only of sin is never excusable. It is not that the flesh is not in us, but that, with the Holy Ghost acting in the new man, it is never necessary that the flesh should act or influence our life (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:22). We are united to Jesus: He represents us before God, He is our righteousness. But at the same time He who in His perfection is

our righteousness is also our life; so that the Spirit aims at the manifestation of this same perfection, practical perfection, in the daily life. He who says "I abide in Him," ought to walk as He walked. The Lord also says, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

There is progress in this. It is Christ risen who is the source of this life in us, which ascends again towards its source, and which views the risen and glorified Christ, to whom we shall be conformed in glory, as its end and aim (see Philippians 3). But the effect of this is, that we have no other aim: "this one thing I do." Thus, whatever may be the degree of realisation, the motive is always perfect. The flesh does not come in at all as a motive, and in this sense we are blameless.

The Spirit then — since Christ who is our righteousness is our life — links our life to the final result of an unblamable condition before God. The conscience knows by grace that absolute perfection is ours, because Christ is our righteousness; but the soul which rejoices in this before God is conscious of union with Him, and seeks the realisation of that perfection according to the power of the Spirit, by whom we are thus united to the Head.

To Him who can accomplish this, preserving us from every kind of fall, our epistle ascribes all glory and dominion throughout all ages.

That which is peculiarly striking in the epistle of Jude is that he pursues the corruption of the assembly from the creeping in of some unawares on to its final judgment, showing withal that it is not arrested but passes through its various phases to that day.