

“A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL”

“Identifying Spiritual Criminals”

Scripture Reading – II Peter, 2: 10b-21

Bold and arrogant, apostates are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey – a beast without speech – who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

‘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, 1:12-13, NIV

This series, ‘A HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL’, is based on THE LETTER OF JUDE.

To protect from harm, to guard from attack, to repulse enemies – for centuries rugged defenders have built walls, launched missiles, and waged wars, expending materiel and human resources in the battle to save nations and cities. With total commitment and courageous

abandon, individuals have fought for their families. It is a rule of life that we fight for survival, defending with all our strength what is most precious to us, from every real or imagined attack.

There are many people who live in opposition to God and his followers.

They twist God’s truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary, but God’s truth must go forth, carried and defended by those who have committed their lives to God’s Son. It is an important task, an awesome responsibility, and a profound privilege to have this commission.

This was Jude’s message to Christians everywhere.

Opposition would come and godless teachers would arise, but Christians should ‘**CONTEND FOR THE FAITH**’ by rejecting all falsehood and immorality, remembering God’s mighty acts of rescue and punishment, and the warnings of the apostles. His readers are encouraged to build up their own faith through prayer, keeping close to Christ, helping others, and hating sin. Finally, Jude concludes with a glorious benediction of praise to God.

There are many false teachers waiting to destroy your Christ-centred life, the credibility of God’s Word, and the unity of the Body of Christ. THE LETTER OF JUDE calls Christians to stand firm in their faith and defend God’s truth at all costs, because nothing else is more valuable...

“IDENTIFYING SPIRITUAL CRIMINALS”

Last time we noted that, in a sense, an apostate is a snake in the garden of God.

An apostate is one who has slithered in. The Bible says they ‘**HAVE SECRETLY SLIPPED IN AMONG YOU**’ – they have just slithered through the grass, but they are full of deadly venom. We have already noted that an apostate is like a crocodile who slides quietly and unnoticed into the water ready for the kill. Just as a ‘spiritual crocodile’ can be dangerous and deadly, a ‘spiritual snake’ can bite Christians and pollute their lives with deadly poisonous venom.

Today, I want to look at an apostate as a dangerous ‘spiritual criminal’.

I heard of a man who went into a bank in order to rob it. He took with him a note and shoved it through the small opening in the desk towards the teller. The note read: ‘THIS IS A HOLD UP. PUT ALL YOUR MONEY INTO THIS BAG AND SEND IT BACK, QUICKLY’. Taking a pencil, the bank worker wrote a note back to him, and sent it back. She had written: ‘STRAIGHTEN UP YOUR TIE, STUPID, WE HAVE CAMERAS TAKING YOUR PICTURE, AND THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY’.

Why do banks go to all the expense of having security cameras?

The answer is quite simple! They want to take pictures of anyone involved in a bank robbery, so that those pictures may be later displayed on television and in newspapers, in order that people will be warned about that criminal. Not only do the banks and police gain help in finding the criminal involved, but we discover who the criminals are within our own neighbourhood.

There are some ‘spiritual criminals’, who Jude would warn us against.

In his Letter, Jude focuses on the dangers of APOSTASY. Apostasy occurs when people turn away from God’s truth and embrace false teachings. It refers to those who once RECEIVED the truth, they knew the truth, but they eventually came to REJECT that truth. After a while their

rejection turns to RIDICULE; but they are not content to simply ridicule the truth, one day they plan to REPLACE the truth with Satan's deceitful lies and schemes.

'I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.'

Romans, 16:17, NIV

Jude gives us teaching as to who we should avoid and what they are like...

'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, 1:12-13, NIV

1. DANGEROUS LIKE HIDDEN ROCKS

'THESE MEN ARE BLEMISHES AT YOUR LOVE FEASTS'

The word incorrectly translated as 'BLEMISHES' is the Greek word 'SPILAS'.

This word is used only once in the entire New Testament, and it literally means 'HIDDEN ROCK'. However, in the parallel passage of **II Peter, 2:13**, Peter uses the word 'SPOLOS', which is frequently used elsewhere in Scripture, and literally does mean a 'BLEMISH' or 'SPOT'.

Chartered rocks are easy to see, but a sunken rock can cause immense damage.

Imagine that you are out on a boat on the water. The weather is beautiful and the seas are calm. Just as you rev up the engine to head towards the fishing ground, there is a great sense of excitement about the day ahead. Suddenly, however, the boat lunges, there is a terrible grinding sound, the boat lists to one side and everything comes to a stop. Now water starts to come in the gash in the bottom of the boat. You have ripped the belly of the boat on some sunken rock, and the water is around your feet. You are in danger because you are sinking.

In 1923, the US Navy lost seven ships on rocks off Honda Point, California.

This peacetime disaster had few equals at the time, and remains one of the worst disasters in the history of the US Navy. Disaster struck during the night of 8 September when the ships were on a run from San Francisco to San Diego. Instead of heading into the Santa Barbara Channel, the ships ran aground at a speed of 20 knots on the rocky shore due to navigational errors during thick fog and the unusual currents in the area caused by a recent earthquake in Tokyo. Twenty-three men were lost whilst the survivors waded ashore to safety through the deadly rocks. The ships were considered a total loss. Because of the dangerous waters, no salvage work was carried out and the ships still remain where they were wrecked.

Jude warns against those who are 'HIDDEN ROCKS AT YOUR LOVE FEASTS'.

The **'LOVE FEAST'** – THE AGAPE MEAL – was one of the earliest features of the fellowship of the Early Christian Church. It was a meal held every Sunday. To it, everyone brought what he could, and all shared alike. It was a lovely idea that the Christians in each little house church should sit down on the Lord's Day to eat in fellowship together. Undoubtedly, there were some who could bring much and others who could bring only little. For many of the slaves in the Church it was perhaps the only decent meal they ever ate.

The Agape Meal caused division in the Church at Corinth.

Some had too much whilst others starved. For some a meal of love and fellowship had become a drunken revelry. Because it was no longer a meal of true fellowship, the Love Feast was a travesty and had begun to belie its name.

'When you come together, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!'

I Corinthians, 11:20, 21-22, NIV

Jude's opponents were making a travesty of THE AGAPE MEAL.

In the Love Feast people were very close together in heart and there was the kiss of peace. These wicked men were using the Love Feast as a cloak under which to gratify their lusts. It is a dreadful thing, if men enter into the church and use the opportunities which its fellowship gives for their own perverted ends. These men were like sunken rocks upon which the fellowship of the Love Feasts was in danger of being wrecked.

As Christians, we must beware of those who would wreck our Christian fellowship.

2. DECEPTIVE LIKE WATER-LESS CLOUDS

'THEY ARE CLOUDS WITH OUT RAIN, BLOWN ALONG BY THE WIND'

The three years 1998 to 2000 witnessed a devastating drought in Texas.

Fifty-six consecutive rainless days were recorded during July to September 1998, whilst the following year saw the driest April to September period on record. In 2000, Texas suffered when there were fifty-nine consecutive days without rain. Residents of Dallas basked in temperatures over one hundred degrees for nearly six weeks. Texans who lived off the land were hardest hit, with agriculture losses estimated at nearly \$600 million.

Lack of rain sent water levels in Texas lakes plunging, threatening drinking supplies in scores of towns. Lake Lewisville, a major source of drinking water for Dallas, dried up, whilst water consumption was at a record high. The drought even damaged homes. Soil around houses compressed so much because of a lack of moisture that the foundations cracked and the walls separated from frames. There was so much damage birds could fly in and out of many homes. The situation was so bad that letters were received from Texas with stamps pinned to the envelopes in order to save licking them!

'I have witnessed a drought in Texas. The earth was iron. The heaven brass. Dust crowded the thoroughfares and choked the travellers. Water courses ran dry. Grass scorched and crackle. Leaves twisted and withered. Cattle died around the last water holes. The ground was cracked and there were fissures in the earth. The song of birds died out in their parched throats. Men despaired. The whole earth prayed: "Rain, rain, rain; heaven send rain".

'Suddenly a cloud rises above the horizon and floats into vision like an angel of hope. It spread a cool shade over the burning and glowing earth. Expectation brings life to desire. The lowing herd; look up. The shrivelled flowers open their tiny cups. The leaves untwist and rustle with gladness. And just when all trusting, suffering life opens her confiding heart to the promise of relief, the cloud, the cheating cloud, like a heartless flirt gathers her drapery about her and floats scornfully away. Leaving the angry sun free to dart his fires of death into the open heart of all suffering life.'

B H Carroll

There is a terrific story in The Old Testament that describes how the Lord proved that he alone is God by withholding rain until his prophet Elijah had forecast it. The land went through severe drought until God told Elijah that rain was coming...

'Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain". So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look towards the sea", he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there", he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back". The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea". So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you'". Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on.'

1 Kings, 18:41-45a, NIV

Jude compared 'spiritual criminals' to those who promise much but never deliver.

They are like clouds that promise rain, but fail to produce. They are a disappointment to the farmer whose crops desperately need their water. The apostates look like men who can give spiritual help, and they frequently boast of their abilities, but they are unable to produce. Like the clouds in the sky, the false teachers may be prominent and even attractive; but if they cannot bring rain, they are useless.

'Like clouds without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.'

Proverbs, 25:14, NIV

The Word of God is sometimes compared to the rain and the dew.

'Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.'

Deuteronomy, 32:2, NIV

As Christians, we must beware of those who display promise without performance
– those who have the trappings of Christian religion without a relationship with Christ.

3. DEAD LIKE A FRUITLESS TREES

'AUTUMN TREES, WITHOUT FRUIT AND UPROOTED – TWICE DEAD'

Jude pictures an orchard in autumn, when it is expected to be full of fruit.

Those who preach and teach the Word of God have the responsibility of feeding others; but false teachers, who have promise but not performance, have nothing to give. Not only are such people fruitless, but they are also rootless, hence Jude's claim that they are **'TWICE DEAD'**.

What a contrast they are to David's godly man.

'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.'

Psalms, 1:3, NIV

One of the evidences of true salvation is producing spiritual fruit.

In 'THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER', the seed that fell on the hard soil, the shallow soil, and the crowded soil did not produce fruit; but the seed that fell on good soil did produce fruit (see **Matthew, 13:1-9, 18-23**). No matter how much of the Bible false teachers may quote, the seed is not producing fruit in their own lives, or through their ministries. Why? Because they have no spiritual roots. They lack spiritual life. Fruit has in it the seed for more fruit. One of the evidences that a ministry is truly of God is that the fruit multiplies. Manufactured results are sterile and dead, but true fruit continues to grow and reproduce itself in the lives of others.

Jesus warned his disciples to guard against false teachers.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them."

Matthew, 7:15-20, NIV

Jesus taught us that we will bear fruit only in relationship with him.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

John, 15:1-5, NIV

As Christians, we must beware of those who do not produce spiritual fruit:
Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control.

4. DISTURBED LIKE WILD WAVES OF THE SEA

'THEY ARE WILD WAVES OF THE SEA, FOAMING UP THEIR SHAME'

I certainly would not want to be either in or on the ocean during a storm.

There is great power in those waves, as many a seafarer has discovered. But Jude compared the apostates to **'WILD WAVES OF THE SEA'** not because of their power, but because of their pride and arrogant speech: **'THEY BOAST ABOUT THEMSELVES AND FLATTER OTHERS'** (see **Jude, 1:16b**). Like the swelling of the sea, they make a lot of noise, but what do they actually produce? All that the apostates can produce is foam and flotsam. The true teachers of the Word bring up the treasures of the deep, but the false teachers produce only refuse.

Not so long ago we saw the devastation caused by a tsunami.

Clear blue seas were replaced by green coloured angry waves. After the wall of water had gone through once beautiful resorts, all that was left was devastation. Deposited for miles inland there was rubbish from the ocean floor. Sand, silt, stones and shells made the most beautiful of places uninhabitable within minutes.

'The waters of the Dead Sea can be whipped up into waves, and these waves, too, cast up driftwood on the shore; but in this instance there is a unique circumstance. The waters of the Dead Sea are so impregnated with salt that they strip the bark off any driftwood in them; and, when such wood is cast up on the shore, it gleams bleak and white, more like dried bones than wood. The deeds of the wicked men are like the useless and unsightly litter which the waves leave scattered on the beach after a storm and resemble the skeleton-like relics of Dead Sea storms. The picture vividly portrays the ugliness of the deeds of Jude's opponents.'

"THE DAILY STUDY BIBLE", William Barclay

'The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.'

Isaiah, 57:20, NIV

'Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.'

Ephesians, 4:14-15, NIV

'Christ is the truth, and the Holy Spirit, who guides the church, is the Spirit of truth. Satan, by contrast, is the father of lies. As followers of Christ, we must be committed to the truth. This means both that our words should be honest and that our actions should reflect Christ's integrity. Holding to the truth in love is not always easy, convenient, or pleasant, but it is necessary if the church is going to do Christ's work in the world.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

As Christians, we must beware of those who are tossed back and forth like the waves.

5. DOOMED LIKE WANDERING STARS

'WANDERING STARS, FOR WHOM BLACKEST DARKNESS HAS BEEN RESERVED FOR EVER'

Jude uses the picture of a meteor, or a falling star.

Jude was not referring to fixed stars, planets, or comets, because they have definite positions and orbits (see **Judges, 5:20**). Fixed stars can be depended upon to guide the traveller through the darkness – and have been used by sailors for navigation for millennia – but wandering stars can only lead sailors astray. Jude was referring to meteors, falling stars that suddenly appear and then vanish into the darkness, never to be seen again.

I think I have witnessed only two very memorable meteors crashing to earth.

Once, as I was waiting for a bus in Ipswich one dark afternoon, a beautiful streak of greenish coloured light swept across the twilight sky – it was a glorious sight.

One night when I was driving home to Eaton Bray, I saw a meteorite burning up in the night sky and falling to earth. It was quite large and eventually the rock that fell from the heavens was featured on the local television news.

Malachi, 4:2 identifies Jesus as 'THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS'.

Note that **'THE MESSENGER'** calls him the **'S-U-N'** not the **'S-Q-N'**. Once, people believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and according to **'STAR TREK'**, all directions are taken from our own sun. **'THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS'**, Jesus, is the One in whom we live and move and have our being. We are to gravitate around the Lord Jesus Christ. A spiritual criminal, an apostate, does not find his centre in Jesus Christ and is therefore like a wandering star.

Christians are called to so live that they 'SHINE LIKE STARS IN THE UNIVERSE'.

'Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.'

Philippians, 2:14-16a, NIV

Can you imagine what it would be like to be in a place of everlasting darkness?

In the place of everlasting darkness there will be no glitter of the stars. There will be no lustre of the moon. There will be no illumination and warmth of the sun. There will be no Shekinah Glory of the Lord. There will only be blackness and darkness for ever. It will truly be a place of doom and gloom. God has reserved **'EVERLASTING CHAINS [FOR] JUDGMENT'** for rebellious angels (see **Jude, 1:6**), and he has reserved **'THE BLACKEST DARKNESS...FOR EVER'** for apostate teachers. Beware of following 'wandering stars', because they will lead you into eternal blackness.

As Christians, we must beware of those who prefer to keep their sins in darkness – rather than bring them into the light.

**HOW DANGEROUS THESE PEOPLE ARE AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS
FOR THE CHURCH TO KEEP THEM OUT!**