

Jude vs 24 declares that God's power to keep us from stumbling is one hundred percent iron-clad. At Christ's return, we will not only marvel at God's glory as a sure and eternal reality, we will also *agree with thankful hearts and voices* that we are only in heaven because of Christ's power to keep us, in the end, from stumbling.

Perhaps the biggest test to God's power to preserve His people, and to protect His elect remnant, was during the forty years of sinful wandering, the fall-out from the Hebrews' refusal to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:26-31). Would God really be able to bring His people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land, when all the Hebrew parents died in the desert because of their unbelief, leaving only their uncircumcised children to trudge towards Canaan?

All these serious questions lie behind Jude 5, which reads: "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe."

What a striking biblical statement, and what a test of the promise in Jude 1:24 that the Lord can "keep His people from stumbling" all the way to the Second Coming! Was God really in control of His people, when their unbelief so obstructed their participation in His blessings? Did God's purposes succeed *even though many of His people did not believe*? May the Lord give us bracing answers, full of hope, even while staring full in the face of the grim sin of the Hebrews.

Mon/Tues: Read Jude 1:5 & Exodus 15:25-16:30

Persevering Grace

To unlock the truth of the example of the unbelief of many of the Hebrews in the desert, we must appreciate *God's response* to this destructive sin. God is never knocked "on His back foot" by our sin. It does not surprise Him, nor confuse His response. And what *was* God's response?

The answer is found beginning in Exodus 15: 22-25: God tests Israel with thirst and with hunger, which was for their benefit in order to humble Israel into a more constant dependence on God. God divides His "hunger-test" of His people into two parts.

First in Exodus 16:4-21, God's test consists of telling Israel to gather only enough manna for their daily needs, trusting Him for the next day's supply, instead of sinfully hoarding the manna overnight. Sadly, some would not trust God's care and the manna which they hoarded rotted overnight, full of maggots.

The second part of the test in Exodus 16:22-30 consisted of resting on the Sabbath Day instead of gathering manna. God clearly tells Israel that if they do venture out on the day of rest to gather manna, they will find none. Yet some ventured out in a fruitless search for manna! Look at the Divine grief over such stubborn unbelief as God speaks, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out" (Exodus 16:28-29).

Meditate and Pray: Well now – that is a question worth pondering: “How long would Israel refuse to keep God’s commands” when it comes to these hunger and thirst tests in the desert?

Sadly, for the next forty years their complaints would be the same. No wonder God’s salvation is all about Divine Perseverance! In the Reformed lexicon, we talk about the perseverance of the saints, but perhaps we should more honestly call it the Perseverance of God. From beginning to end, it must be God’s persevering grace which carries us through the desert of this world. It is such monumental, long-term grace against which the false teachers in Jude were sinning.

Weds/Thurs: Read Jude v. 5, Exodus 16:27-28 and Mark 6:1-6.

Divine Amazement

Yesterday we saw God sovereignly in control of all the events surrounding His people’s wandering in the desert – even using difficult trials, such as thirst and hunger, to test their hearts.

But we must also appreciate God’s sympathy, compassion, and grief at His people’s unbelief. He cared greatly for His sinful people, though “all day long” He held out His arms of entreaty in response to their hard-heartedness (Romans 10:21). Truly, in order to properly assess the deep distortion of sin, we must see that it amazes even God! That is how high-handed, rebellious, and unnatural it is. There is no explaining the desperate wickedness of the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9).

Don’t be surprised that God expresses wonder at the sin of His own people: “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?” (Exodus 16:28). Such questions come from the deep well of Divine compassion. God is not rendered impotent or speechless at our propensity to sin. He is sovereign over all things – even our sin! But Divine amazement is the only way for our holy and compassionate God to lovingly reveal the scope and danger of sin’s wickedness and perversity -- so that we might run from it!

Meditate and Pray: Sin astounds God – and therefore must be a terror to us! Run from it! Don’t expose yourself to its bomb blasts! In New Testament terms, if the hard-hearted unbelief of Jesus’ own townsfolk could result in an amazed Jesus, able to do “only a few” miracles (Mark 6:4-6), then what foolishness for any of us to think that we can trifle with a sinful world or compromise with sin within! God’s advice is urgent: “Flee.... Flee away from all sin and into my arms!” Use *Trinity Hymnal* # 534 as your prayer for God’s constant help against sin:

*O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!*

*Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?*

*Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.*

*The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.*

Friday: Read Jude 5; Ex. 16:28; Nos. 14:29-35 and Nos. 20:1-11**A Gainsaying God**

We are struggling with questions about Israel's deeply-seated tendency to sin, so that even God asked, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands?" (Ex. 16:28).

The judgment against the parents was promised *at the beginning of forty years* (Numbers 14:29-35). After forty years of watching their parents die in the desert under God's curse, many wished that *they too had died along with their parents in the desert* - rather than submit to God's loving discipline! Their language is graphic: "Oh that we had died with our brothers *before the LORD!*" (Numbers 20:3). What despair, what rebelliousness! Yet we see even the godliest Elijah and Job at times of despair wish for the same thing – see 1 Kings 19:4 and Job 3:3. How terrible to see what sinful requests can come from our mouths; how gracious when God turns a deaf ear to them.

Meditate and Pray: Thank you, Father, for your grace in **not** granting Israel's request for death at your hands! Instead, you again provided water from the Rock. In the same way, thank you for the complaints and demands which you do not answer in our lives! Thank you that you know how to say "no" to us, in order to show us more grace! Thank you for holding out for our highest and best blessings. Help us to rest content under all the trials you send into our lives. Help us to learn that it is better to have a gainsaying God who graciously refuses our desires, than a God who grants us our sinful requests and then sends His judgment along with them (see Psalm 106:14-15)! We pray all these things in the Name of your Son, who "does all things well" – even when He refuses to give us what we impatiently demand! Amen.

Sat/Sun: Read Jude 5; Ex. 17:1-7 & 1 Cor. 10:1-4**The Rock, Struck**

As we see God patiently restrain His people and teach them in the desert what it means to rest by faith in His provision and guidance, we begin to understand the spiritual significance of Jude using these desert wanderings in Jude verse 5 as a metaphor for the spiritual dangers facing the church in his day.

But nothing could prepare us for God's solution to His people's unbelief in Exodus 17:1-7. In spite of their many deliverances in the past, Israel falls into the familiar complaints, questioning why the Lord brought them up out of Egypt at all. They say: "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us die of thirst in the desert?" As Jude names it, this accusing God of evil intent is indeed blasphemy.

Professor Ed Clowney describes this transaction between the Lord and His grumbling people in his book, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in The Old Testament*. Rather than the people suffering for their blatant obstinacy, the Gospel is revealed in great beauty. Once again, God responds in undeserved grace, instead of justly striking all Israel dead on the spot. Here are the relevant verses, related by Moses:

So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Exodus 17:4-6

In what Clowney calls one of the most amazing verses in the whole Old Testament, the Lord says, “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”

Clowney points out that, in matters of trial and judgment in the book of Deuteronomy, people stand before God for His judgment to be meted out. But here, the Lord says He will stand before the people, and (verse 5) before the elders in judicial assembly. Then God gives an even more astounding command: “*You* will strike the rock” (on which *I* am standing). In this way, the Rock took the penalty for His people’s rebellion in the desert. That Rock, in fact was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). We ought also to note that the rock on which the Lord stood was Mt. Horeb. That is one of the names for Mt. Sinai, on which the Lord gave Moses the Law and the Ten Commandments. Thus, the Lord is willing to bear the punishment of the Law on the Mountain of Judgment!

Meditate and Pray: Sing about Christ bearing the punishment due to us for sin in *Trinity Hymnal* # 248, one of the most profound expressions of Christ standing in our place in Reformed hymnody:

1 Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,
that man to judge thee hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected, O most afflicted.

2 Who was the guilty who brought this upon thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee.

3 Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered:
the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered:
for man's atonement, while he nothing heedeth, God intercedeth.

4 For me, kind Jesus, was thine incarnation,
thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation:
thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion, for my salvation.

5 Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving.**