

Jude and the Ungodly Teachers

Early Christian Literature

BIB 114

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CL 51

August 2, 2003

One of the remarkable attributes of the Bible is the relevance of its message to the reader, despite the distance in time and culture from that of the writer. This includes the often-overlooked book of Jude and its message against ungodly teachers. Dennison (2003) notes, "In modern liberal circles, it has been easy to dismiss this epistle as a rabid diatribe by a dyspeptic Judaizer..." (p. 1). Many like to point to external influences as the threat to today's church. There can be no doubt that these influences are significant threats, but the ultimate threat comes from those inside the church, from ungodly people with their own ungodly agenda. This is not to say that every church body should contain only steadfast believers. One should expect that any church body would contain believers and those that are still in doubt about what to believe. The threat comes from those that refuse to believe or are downright disobedient, especially if they are teachers or are in some other position of leadership. Jude's epistle warns not only the churches of his time about this threat from ungodly teachers but it also serves as a warning to believers today. The purpose of this paper is to discuss who wrote the book of Jude and detail the descriptions and warnings it contains.

The entire Bible is considered inspired, but further credibility can be obtained by understanding more about the individual who penned the words. The book of Jude states plainly its author in the opening greeting in verse one by saying, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (Jude 1, NIV). It is obvious that Jude is a Christian and is related to someone named James, but is there any other information revealed about him in the Bible?

The name Jude is a form of the Hebrew name Judah or Greek name Judas meaning praise (Lockyer, 1986) and it was a common name among the first century Jews (NIV, 1995). There are three Judes mentioned in the New Testament, one being "Judas son of James, and [a second being] Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor [to Jesus Christ] (Luke 6:16, NIV).

Because the author of Jude is not identified as an apostle, scholars believe that the third

Judas wrote the book of Jude. He is mentioned in the New Testament book of Matthew as the Lord's brother (NIV, 1995). The passage reads, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas" (Matthew 13:55, NIV)? Not much is known of this Jude, except that he did not come to know Christ as Savior while he was alive for it is recorded, "For even his [Jesus] own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:2, NIV). Fortunately, after Jesus' death, Judas appears to have come to know the Lord as Luke recorded, "They [the apostles] all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14, NIV). The Bible does not provide any further information about Jude.

There is a purpose behind and an intended audience for the writing of every book in the Bible. The later part of verse one clearly states that the letter is being written to Christian believers about Jude's concerns. According to Halley (1965), Jude was planning on writing a more general epistle about the Gospel, when Jude apparently received news of a dangerous heresy appearing in the church, for which he felt compelled to write.

The body of the letter begins at verse three, with Jude indicating his eagerness to write to them regarding salvation, but he has decided to write instead on the need "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3b, NIV). The reason that faith must be contended or fought for is explained in verse four. In it, Jude claims that godless men have crept into the congregations who believe that grace allows them to sin without worry. The intent of the grace that believers share is not to allow unlimited sin but to deliver from sin (Henry, 1721). This certainly causes one to ponder the question, why are believers set apart in this way?

Believers are to be set apart or sanctified to God. They are called to be a part of higher and better things, separated from uncleanness and separated to holiness (Henry, 1721). To help clarify this point, Chafer (1974) presents an interesting study on the topic of sanctification.

He contends that the same root Greek word translated as "sanctify" in English is also presented as the English words "holy" and "saint" (p. 202). The meaning of these words must be understood in order to understand sanctification. With this in mind, to just be separated from unbelievers is not enough, one must also be separated or sanctified to God. In the context of "holy", one must not only be separated from the unholy but to the holy. "Saints" is a reference to those believers that are sanctified to God. Many interpret this word "saint" as indicating someone has achieved some higher state of being or perhaps a closer relationship with God because of some sense of achieving a higher morality. Does this word "saint" really mean a believer has reached a sinless perfection or some other level of spiritual plateau? The answer according to Chafer (1974) is no. As noted previously, a believer is a saint because of their relationship with God, but they are not to be considered to have reached perfection or some other plateau. They are to continue to strive toward higher levels of holiness. As Jude would say, they are "to contend for the faith" (Jude 3b, NIV).

In verse five, Jude focuses the attention of the reader on the ungodly teachers. He begins by noting examples of how the godless may enjoy a season of deception, but reminds the reader that God has, does and will bring about judgment on them. Jude starts first by using an example from Israel's past as he notes "that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 5b, NIV). He goes on to note that "the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment..." (Jude 6, NIV). These ungodly angelic beings are still waiting for their punishment. Jude concludes his historical examples by citing how "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion... [and] they serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7, NIV).

Referring to the quotes above, the Israelites witnessed miracles, but some still did not

believe. Some of the angels were overcome by pride while the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were overcome by lustful desires. Jude makes the point that no matter what outward privileges, no matter what profession someone may have, and no matter how spiritual someone may appear, none of this offers the unbeliever or disobedient believer escape from the hands of an angry God (Henry, 1721).

Certainly, the church and the believer needs to know how to identify these ungodly teachers in order to avoid falling into their trap, but how does one identify them? Jude provides some insights as he continues in verse eight by describing some characteristics of these false teachers. He refers to them as "dreamers [who] pollute [or misuse] their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings" (Jude 8, NIV). Henry (1721) describes these teachers as having a disturbed mind and rebellious spirit. In their rejection of authority they forget that the powers that be are ordained of God. The scriptures say, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1, NIV).

Believers have an entirely different perspective on authority, which Jude exemplified by providing an example of respect for authority, even evil authority. He begins citing how "...the archangel, Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him..." (Jude 9). Despite the fact that the devil wanted the body of Moses in order to snare the Israelites, Michael shows respect for him in his position as the seat of evil (Henry, 1721). On the other hand, Jude explains that false teachers "...speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand [is] by instinct..." (Jude 10). They are like animals that will be destroyed by their very nature, which Jude explains in verse eleven as the "way of Cain", "Balaam's error" and Korah's rebellion. That is to say their nature is that of selfishness, greed, and rebellion against God's leadership (NIV,

1995).

Jude continues in verses twelve and thirteen by providing further representations of ungodly teachers through the use of graphic metaphors. Jude says, they "are blemishes at your love feasts..." (Jude 12a, NIV), referring to their shameless behavior at religious feasts. They are "shepherds who feed only themselves" (Jude 12a, NIV), rather than caring for the sheep. "They are clouds without rain" (Jude 12b, NIV), promising soul stirring truth but delivering nothing. They are "autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted-twice dead" (Jude 12b, NIV). Twice dead means that a fruit bearing tree cut down because of no fruit dies to life and to the ability to bear fruit, so also will the ungodly die twice, physically and spiritually. "They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame..." (Jude 13a, NIV), as they move about continually stirring up moral filth. They are "wondering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever" (Jude 13b, NIV), as these ungodly teachers appear for awhile and then disappear into eternal darkness that has been reserved for them by God (NIV, 1995).

Should the believer be surprised by the appearance of these false teachers? Jude explains in verses fourteen through sixteen that this should not be a surprise and goes on to quote Enoch's prediction of them. Enoch's writing was respected at the time Jude was written but it is not considered inspired, thus not part of the Bible (NIV, 1995). After pronouncing judgment of the ungodly, Enoch describes them as "grumblers and faultfinders...follow[ing] their own evil desires...boast[ing] about themselves and flatter[ing] others for their own advantage" (Jude 16b, NIV).

At verse seventeen, Jude changes the focus from that of the ungodly teachers to that of the believer. He reminds the believer how they have been warned that this is how it would be in the last days. That there will be "...scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires" (Jude 18, NIV). It is these people who will cause division, from Christ for themselves and for His

church. They do this because they have chosen to follow the devil, the world and the flesh (Henry, 1721).

In verses twenty through twenty-three, Jude then gives instructions to the believer on what they must do. He instructs the believer to build up their faith, pray to the Holy Spirit, and keep in God's love throughout life. He goes on to provide instruction on how to deal with those being influenced by the ungodly, those not yet influenced, and the ungodly themselves. His advice is to show mercy to those who may be under the influence of ungodly teachers, lead those not influenced to salvation, and show mercy to the ungodly but fear their sin, even to the point of fearing their garments. Jude concludes his epistle by giving glory to God, who is able to keep those who trust in him from evil.

In one of the shortest books of the Bible, Jude has managed to say a great deal about ungodly teachers. Dennison (2003) sums it up well when he notes that the "contribution of Jude is to reduce all these errors [of the ungodly teachers] to one common denominator-the priority of pleasure" (p. 1). It is no wonder that for a society that has practically given itself over to pornography, abortion, homosexuality and other sinful pleasures, that a message like Jude's is overlooked today. For how can teachers under the influence of such vices teach against them? Instead, their churches are hardly different from that of other entertainment venues, with their priority being "to advance their own prestige, dominate the vulnerable and find fault with those who will not submit to their agenda" (p. 3). Dennison (2003) further observes that Jude was not writing his message to society outside the church, but rather to the believers inside the church. This is an important note to highlight because corruption in the church can be disastrous to believers, but eternally condemning for the unbeliever who falls under the influence of an ungodly teacher and never comes to truly know Christ.

This paper has discussed the book of Jude as well as its author, one of the Judas'

mentioned in the New Testament. Because the book of Jude does not mention authorship by an apostle, and Judas Iscariot did no writing for obvious reasons, the writer is believed to be the Judas, brother of Jesus. The fact that he is believed to have come to salvation after the death of Jesus was discussed, quoting from the book of Acts where he was with apostles praying. Like any book, there is a purpose behind its writing and an intended audience. Jude was written for a Christian audience to warn them of ungodly teachers that have crept into the church. While a believer's sins are covered by grace, this does not mean that a believer is free to commit unlimited sin. They are to be set apart or sanctified not only from that which is unholy but sanctified to that which is holy. After an introduction, Jude focuses his attention on the ungodly, providing examples of how they may be able to deceive for a season, but eventually God has a punishment reserved for them regardless of their appearance of spirituality or position. Jude then identifies them as dreamers who misuse their bodies and reject authority. Believers, on the other hand, have a respect for authority even if that authority is evil, like the devil. Jude then provides graphic metaphors for ungodly teachers stating they are like clouds without rain and wild waves of the sea. He does this to show how they are without substance in their teaching and they move about stirring up the worst in people. The believer should not be surprised by this, but should instead build up their faith and pray to keep in God's love. The book of Jude is a warning to believers, to be on guard for those unbelievers who come into the church to influence others with their selfish desires, causing believers to stumble and those not yet saved to perish.

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