

The New Testament, Book 26

Jude

Jude is a general epistle, addressed to the Church at large. It contains only one chapter of 25 verses; but those 25 verses are packed--one might say super-saturated--with meaning. Much of it reads like II Peter, speaking of both the cosmic past and the coming last days, and with warnings against heresies in the present. Jude vehemently denounces and threatens heretics, warning them that God's judgment will fall upon them even as it fell upon Cain, Korah and Balaam. His hallmark challenge is for the believers to reject false teachers and their heresies, and he urges them to "earnestly contend for the faith, which was once [and for all time] delivered unto the saints." The closing verses are encouraging, containing guidance for "building up yourselves in your most holy faith," and they close with a beautiful, often-quoted, benediction.

Jude uses amazingly powerful imagery (word pictures) to describe the heretics and their practices (e.g. "strange flesh," "filthy dreamers," "spots in your feasts of charity," "clouds...without water," "foaming out their own shame," and "garments spotted by the flesh¹." Here, again, is a similarity with II Peter, which uses such expressions as, "Having eyes full of adultery," "heart exercised with covetous practices," and "cursed children."

The content of Jude and its similarity to II Peter suggest that Jude was familiar with II Peter, and had the same things on his mind; in fact, in Jude's verses 17 and 18 he seems to be quoting from II Peter 3:2-3². In Jude there is also the sense of urgency so characteristic of II Peter.

It fascinates me that Jude, half-brother to Jesus, who contributed only 25 of the Bible's total of more than 31,000 verses, is the only writer in all of Scripture who tells us that Enoch (who, with Elijah, were the only two people in the Bible to be taken directly to Heaven without experiencing physical death) was a prophet--in fact a prophet of judgment; he gives us a fascinating glimpse into the burial of Moses that is found nowhere else in Scripture; and only he tells us that Michael is an archangel.

A. Author. The author of this brief-but-powerful epistle is Jude, brother of James, and half-brother of Jesus. Like his brother James, and like Peter in

¹ Jude's expression, "garments spotted by the flesh," is, I think, a classic example of the Bible's being earthy and realistic in its expression, but without being vulgar. By this word picture Jude is referring to the sensual, unchaste promiscuity characteristic of the false teachers.

² See in this regard the study guide to II Peter, **A. Author, Internal Evidence**, and footnote 5.

his second epistle, Jude identifies himself as the “servant” (in Greek, *doulos* – bondservant or slave) of Jesus. It appears that Jude and his brother James, because they did not recognize Jesus as Messiah until after the resurrection, declined to identify themselves with the more prestigious designation, “brother of Jesus.”

One of the interesting things about Jude is how little we actually know about him. He is identified by Matthew and Mark in their gospels as a half-brother of Jesus³. And, in Acts, Luke tells us in Acts that Jude was with his mother, Mary, in the upper room, after the Ascension of Jesus⁴. Beyond this, there seems to be nothing recorded about the life of Jude. Nothing is known of where he ministered or how, where, or when he died.

Jude’s Grandsons. There is, however, an interesting story about the grandsons of Jude, recorded by Eusebius, quoting an earlier source, Hegesippus the Chronicler, a Christian historian (ca 110-180 AD)⁵.

According to this account the Emperor Domitian, during his persecution of Christians, looked upon the tribe of David as if it were a human royal family. He determined to find all Christians of the line of David, and to eliminate what he interpreted as their threat to his throne, by having them all killed. He was determined to stamp out the living descendants (as he saw it) of Jesus, in the way that wicked Athaliah had her grandsons murdered, to enable her to seize the throne, about 900 years earlier⁶.

Arrested as descendants of the brother of Jesus, two of Jude’s grandsons were brought to trial before Domitian. He asked if they were of the family of King David and they said that they were. He asked them what possessions they had. They told the Emperor that the two of them together had a total of only 9,000 denarii, but not in silver; all of their wealth, they said, was in the form of the value of their 39 acres of farm land. From this small farm, they said, they paid their taxes and supported themselves by their own labor; as proof they showed Domitian their calloused hands. He then asked them about the Kingdom of Christ and when it would appear. They replied that the Kingdom of Christ is not an earthly kingdom; rather, they said, it is a spiritual kingdom, and that it would appear at the end of the

³ Matthew 13:55; Mk 6:3.

⁴ Acts 1:12-14. If his brother, James, was there at the time he is not mentioned; but we do know that he gathered there with the others, later (v 14).

⁵ Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Paragraph 20, pp 84-85.

⁶ II Kings 8:26; 11:1-3. This evil usurper was the only woman to rule over either the Kingdom of Israel or the Kingdom of Judah.

world when Christ would come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, judging each person according to his works.

Considering them to be simpletons, unworthy of his time, Domitian dismissed them, and decreed that the general persecution of David's descendants cease. Released, the two grandsons returned to leadership roles in the Church, "both as witnesses and relatives of the Lord." With their peace restored, they lived "even unto the times of Trajan⁷."

B. Place and Date. Jude was probably written from Jerusalem, where his brother, James, was presiding elder. The similarities to II Peter suggest that Jude was familiar with II Peter and that it was written at about the same time (i.e. ca 65 AD). Unger calls the date "undeterminable," but places it in the probable range of 66-80 AD. Theodor Zahn dates it at 75 AD⁸.

C. Occasion. Verse 3 suggests that his original intention was to write concerning the salvation of the believers ("the common salvation"), and God's plan for it; however, heresies springing up in the Church moved him to deal instead with them. He wrote to warn of the heresies which were spreading within the Church, and to encourage Christians to defend the faith in its original, uncontaminated form ("...once delivered to the saints."). Among other errors, there were apparently those in the Church who taught (and practiced) that, because of the grace of God, Christians could indulge themselves in sin and still be acceptable before God.

D. Theme. The theme of Jude is threefold: (1) heresy; (2) God's intolerance of it; and (3) our obligation to contend for the faith in its original, pure, simplicity.

E. Highlights. Highlights in Jude include the following:

1. A Change of Plan. (Verses 1-4)

After a brief pastoral salutation, Jude announces that he has changed his plan. He had intended to write, he says, "of the common salvation," that all Christians share (exactly what, within this broad topic, he intended to discuss, is not recorded). However, he says, the growing problem of heretical teachings within the Church has forced him to deal instead with this problem. False teachers, he says, have infiltrated the Church, teaching that believers can live lascivious, sinful lives, pursuing all sorts of sinful pleasures, because the grace of God will allow it. These men, he says, are denying the Lord God and the Lord Jesus, dismissing all that they have said and done.

⁷ Trajan was Roman Emperor from 98-117 AD.

⁸ Unger, Merrill F: "Unger's Bible Dictionary," "Jude, Epistle of," p 616.

2. Sin Has Consequences. (Verses 5-7)

Mincing no words, Jude strikes out against this heresy with examples of the dire consequences of defying God. He reminds the Church that God rescued the Israelites from slavery, bringing them out of Egypt; yet, he says, God destroyed the Israelites who rebelled against Him (in the Exodus). Citing pre-history, and also the recorded history of mankind, he reminds us that the angels who left their first estate, their blissful existence in Heaven, serving God, and rebelled with Satan, are in chains in darkness, awaiting final judgment, as are those who later impregnated women, producing giants⁹. The violent sexual perverts of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, were destroyed, suffering the punishment of “eternal fire¹⁰.”

NOTES:

a. Here, and in II Peter, are the only passages describing the rebellion of the fallen angels who turned against God; although both passages are brief, their meaning seems to be unmistakable. The mysterious passage in Gen. 6:1-6 refers to something the rebelling angels did long ago; and the passage in Rev. 12:7-12 seems to be describing a future event; but here, and in II Peter 2:4, are the only passages shedding light on the actual rebellion, as to how it took place.

b. Some commentators state that v 7 has no relationship with the rebellious angels of v 6; however, the matter revolves around the Greek grammar involved, and apparently will not be settled until the Lord returns to clarify such things. Therefore we shall take vv 6 and 7 to mean just what they say, and move on to the rest of the riches in Jude's epistle.

3. The Battle for the Body of Moses. (Verses 8-11)

Jude notes that those in the above verses, who are completely given over to sin, also completely reject authority, even speaking evil of heavenly majesties. Jude compares this with the behavior of the mighty archangel, Michael. He, when battling with Satan over the body of Moses, still did not bring railing accusations or abusive condemnation against Satan; he said only, “The Lord rebuke thee¹¹.” These utterly corrupt sinners speak evil of things about which they are ignorant. They know nothing except what is primal and natural, like brute beasts. They have terrible punishment awaiting them, like Cain who murdered his righteous brother, Balaam the

⁹ In this regard, see also Genesis 6:2-4; II Pet 2:4.

¹⁰ Note the word “eternal” in v 7. It appears that the sodomites and lesbians of Sodom and Gomorrah not only suffered death by fire, but will continue to suffer in flames for eternity. I can think of no other way to interpret these words.

¹¹ Zechariah 3:2.

corrupt prophet, and rebellious Korah ("Core"), whom the earth opened up and swallowed¹².

NOTES:

a. Only here in Scripture is found reference to the dispute between Satan and the archangel Michael over the body of Moses. God Himself buried Moses, but has never revealed the place. There are traditions to the effect that Satan wanted to make an idol of Moses' body to lead Jews into idolatry; but nothing is actually known beyond what Jude has written here.

Origen (ca 184-253 AD), who calls Jude "the apostle Jude," refers to an apocryphal work, "The Ascension of Moses," which describes the conflict between Satan and Michael over the body of Moses, and compares it with Verse 9 here.¹³

b. Only twice in my life do I believe that God has actually spoken to me in words, rather than by impressions or nudges by the Holy Spirit; and one had to do with Jude. My wife, Marty, and I were at a conference of the Presbyterian Charismatic Communion and, the night before, I had been asked to pray for a young boy who was apparently demonized. I had two other attendees to assist me, the session was difficult and lasted well into the night, but was successful. In the session the evil spirits spoke to us and, when it was finished and the boy was free, I unwisely closed the session with an insulting, rather triumphant statement to the ruling spirit. I went to bed, to be awakened early the next morning with a dream in which the Lord emphatically spoke only two words to me: "Read Jude!"

I was in a hurry to shower and dress for the day, so I asked Marty to read Jude to me while I shaved. When she got to v 9 where it reads "Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the Devil...durst not bring against him a railing accusation..." I was stopped in my mental and spiritual tracks! I immediately knew how wrong I had been; I had done, only a few hours before, what even Michael the Archangel dared not do! Then I learned that the boy's father, one of the attending pastors, and one who did not understand what had happened to his son, had lodged a complaint against me, and caused some embarrassment for the leaders, including Catherine Marshall, which, for personal reasons, I particularly regretted. I was thoroughly chastened, forgiven, and never repeated my mistake; but to this day I cannot read Jude without remembering it, and when I do I can still hear those thunderous words in the dream: "Read Jude!"

¹² Numbers 16.

¹³ ANF, Vol 4, Origen, "De Prindipiis, Book III, Chapt II, 1, p 328.

4. The Degradation and Falseness of the Heretics. (Verses 12-13)

In some of the most powerful imagery in all of Scripture, Jude describes the utter baseness, corruption, and degradation of these false teachers he is opposing. With his words striking like hammer blows, Jude describes the utter baseness and emptiness of the false teachers. He calls them “spots in your feasts of charity,” “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame,” “wandering stars, [doomed to] blackness of darkness forever,” and “clouds without rain, carried about [by the] winds¹⁴.” He seems unable to make his point powerfully enough to satisfy him.

NOTE: Included in this barrage of negative metaphor is the phrase “twice dead.” This one is a challenge to interpretation, and one with which commentators struggle. In Hebrew expression (and Jude was a Jew), repetition is used for emphasis; perhaps the meaning here is “utterly dead” spiritually, without hope of future spiritual life, or even a desire for it. With characteristic color and freshness, the great 17th Century commentator Matthew Henry expresses his thoughts on the matter: “Plucked up by the roots, as we commonly serve dead trees, from which we expect no more fruit. They are dead, dead, dead; why cumber they the ground¹⁵? Away with them to the fire.” Dr. Henry paints a picture for us that we can readily see and understand; perhaps it cannot be better explained.

5. A Unique Reference to Enoch. (Verses 14-16)

Jude makes an interesting, and unique, reference to a prophecy of Enoch, “the seventh [generation] from Adam,” and father of Methuselah. Quoting Enoch, Jude proclaims that the Lord will return, with multitudes of his saints, and execute inescapable judgment on the ungodly, their ungodly deeds, and their blasphemous statements about the Lord¹⁶. These sinners, he says, are murmurers (sowers of discord), speaking empty words, and flattering the powerful for selfish advantage.

NOTES:

a. Here is the only reference in the Bible to this end-times prophecy by Enoch. Jude is apparently quoting from an apocryphal book, “The Book of Enoch¹⁷.” This doesn’t by any means lend canonical authority to the Book of Enoch, nor does it undermine the validity of the prophecy; Jude’s quoting

¹⁴ Proverbs 25:14.

¹⁵ The descriptive phrase, “dead, dead, dead” has its origins in early British Common Law (and perhaps even earlier sources, such as here) in pronouncing the death penalty by a judge. It thence found its way into our legal system. A man sentenced to death by hanging was sentenced to “be hanged by the neck until dead, dead, dead.” The condemned man was to be dead, beyond any doubt.

¹⁶ See in this regard Rev 20:11-15.

¹⁷ For more on the Book of Enoch see “The Book of Enoch” in Part IV (Selected Topical summaries).

from it here, however, does give this prophecy itself inspired status. And, as we have already seen, Jude definitely had end-time judgment of heretics on his mind.

b. Here also is a classic example of Jude's style and his passion, hammering home the point he is making. The word "ungodly," describing those to be judged, is used four times in one verse (v 15), as both an adjective and an adverb! He wishes to leave no room for doubt!

c. Enoch was contemporary with Adam for the last 300 years of Adam's life. Here, in Enoch's prophecy, we can see that while Adam, the founder of the human race, was still alive, God had already announced the Second Coming of Jesus to judge wickedness, and banish evil, once and for all, culminating the End Times. We might summarize this by saying that, not long after the Beginning (with Adam), Enoch was prophesying of the Ending (with the returned Christ). This is only my speculation, but it is interesting speculation; and the thought is in perfect harmony with the credible theory that, with God, there is neither past nor future--only one enormous present.

6. Remember the Words of the Apostles. (Verses 17-19)

By implication, Jude tells us that we should not be surprised at his strong words about heretics and false teachers. After all, he reminds us, the apostles of the Lord Jesus told us that in the last time there would be mockers of truth, walking not after the faith, but after the satisfaction of their own ungodly, self-serving, lusts. These evildoers will create divisions and lofty positions for themselves, because they have not the life-imparting, life-changing Holy Spirit to motivate and guide them. They are, instead, guided by their own self-serving, ungodly, lusts.

NOTE: Verses 17 and 18 are almost verbatim quotation from II Pet 3:2-3, an indication that Jude was not only familiar with II Peter, but recognized it as valid. Note, also, that in quoting II Peter, the reference is to the words spoken before by "the apostles" (plural). This clearly suggests that what Peter wrote in II Pet 3:2-3 had also been spoken (and, perhaps, written in documents that have not survived) by others of the original apostles.

7. The Godly Alternative to the Heretics. (Verses 20-21)

In the closing verses Jude leaves us with a positive message: a godly alternative to the errors and sins of the heretics and false teachers. Emphasizing the transition with a comparative reference to the errors dealt with above, he begins with "**But ye, beloved...**" (emphasis mine). He tells us that, as believers, the situation is entirely different; we are to build up and strengthen ourselves in our most holy faith, "praying in the Holy Ghost." By praying in this way, completely inspired and led by the Holy Spirit, not

by our limited knowledge and imperfect understanding, we build ourselves up in progressive edification and grow stronger in faith¹⁸. In this way we can keep ourselves walking in the love of God, eagerly looking for the ultimate mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which brings us eternal life with Him.

***NOTE:** Edification is an interesting word, and a vital spiritual matter. The English word is derived from a Latin word, "aedificium," meaning a building. Thus, to edify means to construct or build, a progressive process of becoming stronger and more complete. This process of spiritual growth should go on as long as we live, walking and praying in the spirit, learning, following and serving the Lord. It seems that if we cease to grow we don't just stay at that level of completion; rather, we are likely to reverse the process, becoming weaker and less complete. This spiritual concept is comparable to physical exercise, or the lack thereof.*

8. Our Responsibility to Others. (Verses 22-23)

Finally, Jude reminds us that, as we walk in godly faithfulness, praying in the Holy Spirit and growing stronger and more mature daily, we have a responsibility to reach out to others who struggle with sin. We must look upon them with compassion, as Jesus always did, remembering their weakness (and our own), and their need. And some of them will need to be snatched from the fire with urgency, rescuing them on the very threshold of death and eternal damnation¹⁹. But, in dealing with those who are thus lost in sin, while loving them, we must despise the sin that entraps them, loathing the sensuality represented by their "garments spotted by the flesh."

***NOTE:** In v 22, the clause "making a difference" can leave us wondering what it means. In this case the underlying Greek does not help us, for it is one long Greek word meaning, literally, "making a difference." So, what do we make of it. The long Greek word is an expansion of the verb "diakrino," meaning "to make a distinction."*

Since the context of vv 22 and 23 seems to be guidance for helping others who are in error or sin, it seems to say that we must be careful to deal with different people in different ways. As the great 17th Century commentator Matthew Henry puts it, "We must distinguish between the weak and the willful." Some may require only a compassionate, gentle approach; while others, deeply involved in a besetting sin and hardened by it, may require a more urgent, no-nonsense approach. Concerning the latter, Matthew Henry

¹⁸ Romans 8:26; Eph 6:18; I Cor 14:13-17.

¹⁹ Zechariah 3:2.

suggests, "Endeavor to frighten them out of their sins; preach Hell and damnation to them." And then, as if in a temperate afterthought, he adds in parentheses, "I do but offer this for consideration." He goes on to warn us that this hard approach, if overdone, can have an adverse effect, causing the one whom we are warning to become even more rebellious and hardened in his sin.

9. A Beautiful and Comforting Benediction. (Verses 24-25)

Jude closes this urgent, power-packed call to battle against sin and error with a beautiful benediction. It is one that has been so loved by believers through the ages that it is often quoted, and has been established in liturgies throughout the Church.

In this benediction there is a comforting reassurance that what he has called us to do really is possible, for Christ Jesus is able to keep us from falling, and to present us, in the end, sinless before the Father's glory, with exceeding joy (both his joy and ours). And he ends with a reminder that our God, who is only and always wise, and is our Savior, is worthy of all glory, majesty, dominion and power, now and forevermore. And he closes, appropriately, with "Amen" (So be it).

A Closing, Personal Note

The following may seem unnecessary; in fact, it may **be** unnecessary. If it is, please indulge me (or don't read it).

By now you must have noticed that I love Matthew Henry's Commentaries. Yet I had a dear Christian friend, now in Heaven, who hated Matthew Henry's Commentaries. To him, they are much too expansive--exhaustively (and at times exhaustingly) thorough. He preferred a commentary that is brief and crisp, not requiring "wading through so many words to get to the point."

There is something to be said for my friend's position; but I love the old man and his work; I love the combination of his amazingly erudite and thorough scholarship, combined with his humble humanity and his heart. I have read so much in Matthew Henry that as I read I have come to know how his mind is working; and I love the way his mind works. You can see this in the way he has just been helpful to our understanding of verse 22. As I read him, sometimes, like today, I chuckle.

In some few ways I disagree with Matthew Henry; yet, strange though it may seem, I feel that Dr. Henry is a friend.