

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

by Mario Seiglie

NT-118 6-1-2024



EPISTLES OF JUDE – CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ONCE GIVEN

The first thing to notice about Jude's epistle is how *similar* it is to Peter's Second Epistle. It shows Jude and Peter were battling *the same problems* and this epistle was likely written around the same time as 2 Peter. As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "Most commentaries date the composition of the *Epistle of Jude* between A.D. 67 and 80. It is probable that the *Second Epistle of Peter*, which was written in A.D. 67-68, had a great influence on the one written by Jude."

So, by the end of the apostolic era, Satan had already sown his tares through false Christian systems to deceive a part of the Church and God's apostles were thus warning the brethren. Christ describes this struggle between the true and false followers during the first century in Rev. 2:2, 6, speaking of the apostolic age, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that *you cannot bear those who are evil*. And you have *tested* those who say *they are apostles and are not*, and have found them *liars*...But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the *Nicolaitans*, which I also hate."

It is significant the *only* mention of "apostles" in these letters to the seven churches in Relation 2-3 is found *here*. After this first apostolic age is over, in 2nd Century history, *no one* dares to claim to be an apostle, and their successors are instead called *bishops, pastors or elders*.

These "false apostles," in Paul's age, as he calls them in 2 Cor. 11:13, are most likely the followers of Simon Magus who is installed in Rome. Note that the most dangerous adversaries of Christianity would not to be the classic Gnostics, an outlandish group that would fade over time, but rather a class of leaders that would *infiltrate* in such a way that they would receive certain respect from some deceived brethren by being so similar to true Christianity. Paul calls this false system, "*the mystery of lawlessness*" (2 Thes. 2:8). Eventually, this religious system would be described in Rev. 17 as "a fallen woman" (a church) in the end times.

Consequently, Jude begins his epistle with a warning, "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and *brother of James*, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it *necessary* to write to you exhorting you to *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*. For *certain men have crept in unnoticed*, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, *who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ*.

In his second epistle, Peter uses almost the same words as Jude, saying, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be *false teachers* among you, who will *secretly* bring in *destructive heresies*, even *denying* the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And *many* will follow their destructive ways, because of whom *the way of truth will be blasphemed*. By covetousness they will exploit you with *deceptive* words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:1-2).

Jude initially wanted to write an epistle with edifying things regarding their "common salvation" but instead, aware of the danger, has to denounce, together with Peter and John, *a deadly infiltration* of false teachers in the Church. They were so astute and careful that it was mainly the Apostles who saw through their trickery. So, they had to stir up the brethren to combat this grave and subtle menace of *changing the original truths*.

By the way, in his opening words, Jude shows the same modesty as the other apostles but not using and impressive religious title. Jude was in fact, are younger half-brother of Jesus. In Mt. 13:55 it says, "Is not this the carpenter's son, and is not His mother's name Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and *Judas*?" Jude is a shortened form of "Judas," and is actually called "Judas" in Mark 6:3. As Acts 1:14 explains, when Jesus ascended to heaven, Mary and her sons were already members of the faith: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and *Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers*."

So we see that Jude is writing with pastoral authority to the brethren at the end of his life. He writes this epistle in polished Greek although it

naturally contains some Hebraisms, or phrases of Jewish origin. He also mentions at the beginning the same biblical truth about God's nature as Peter and John. He only mentions God the Father and Jesus Christ working together to strengthen the faith of the brethren and does not mention another "supposed divine person, the Holy Spirit," which would actually be an insult if this supposed person was part of the Godhead.

He exhorts the brethren "to contend earnestly," which in the Greek refers to the sport of wrestling practiced by athletes. This word, *epagonizesthai*, shows that the Christian faith is a constant spiritual battle. As Paul describes: "For we do not *wrestle* against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Jude urges the brethren to confront this infiltration, and vigorously resist it.

Here we see the *same two heresies* that Peter and John also denounced. The first error is about *the nature of God*, denying that there are two Divine Beings in that Godhead. The second has to do with abolishing God's law. So Jude explains that "grace" was not given by God so people could break His holy law with impunity, but rather to be able to *receive forgiveness* from breaking His law.

2 Pet. 2:21 described very well the results of such law-breaking by abusing God's grace: "For it would have been better for them to have had *no knowledge of the way of righteousness*, than to go back again *from the holy law* which was given to them, *after having the knowledge of it*." (BBE). Paul also says, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law [or under the condemnation of the law] but under grace? *Certainly not!*" (Rom. 6:15).

Those following Simon Magus and his "ministers" were precisely the group that taught of turning God's grace into licentiousness and setting aside God's holy law. In Rev. 17 we see that these false teachers would become a great church that would spiritually fornicate with the kings of the world. Even the Devil has deceived many scholars into thinking that the apostles had to contend primarily with the Gnostics. Is it the Gnostics who are described as the great church in Rev. 17? Of course not. Most of the Gnostics were a fringe

extremist group that had very little to do with the real contest between the Apostles and the false teachers. The real contest was primarily *doctrinal* and *governmental*, as Jude recounts. These followers of Simon Magus, the original heretic, were related to the Nicolaitans, (which could be a symbolic name or of a leader named Nicolas) and would gradually change the Sabbath to Sunday, baptize infants instead of adults, change God's Holy Feasts to pagan feasts, introduce false concepts such as the immortality of the soul, eternal judgment to go to heaven or hell, and establish a priesthood, instead of the ministry of Jesus Christ based on pastors and elders.

Augustine of Hippo in the 4th century said the heretical Nicolaitans existed at the same time as Simon Magus, the first heretic that would spawn other groups, saying, "But it will be urged that *the bad* outside [of the church] are worse than those within. It is indeed a weighty question, whether *Nicolaus*, being *already severed* from the Church, or *Simon* [Magus], *who was still within it*, was the worse – the one being a heretic, the other *a sorcerer*" (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, 4: 10:16). So while a Nicolas was kicked out of the Church, Simon Magus was *still operating within it*.

Jude warns the brethren that those *who follow* these false teachers will suffer the same terrible fate as other rebels against God. He says, "But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward *destroyed* those who did not believe" (vs. 5).

The first example he uses were those rebellious Israelites who during the 40 years murmured in the wilderness and did not follow Moses' instructions. They accused Moses of doing things on his own and he had to defend himself, saying, "By this you shall know that *the Lord has sent me* to do all these works, for *I have not done them of my own will*" (Num. 16:28).

The second example, used also in 2 Peter 2, deals with the angelic rebellion. Jude says: "And the *angels that kept not their own dignity*, but *left* their own habitation, He hath kept *in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*" (vs. 6). This incident of angelic revolt before the

creation of man is described in Is. 14:12-17 and Ez. 28:12-17.

The third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the people's immoral ways. Jude mentions, "As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to *sexual immorality* and *gone after strange flesh*, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (vs. 7). *Believer's Commentary* says, "The men of Sodom, Gomorrah...were greatly addicted to homosexuality. The sin is described here as having gone after strange flesh, meaning that it is completely contrary to the natural order which God has ordained. It is mere coincidence that many modern day apostates are in the vanguard of those who publicly defend homosexuality..."

Notice it says they suffered "the punishment of eternal fire." Here we have a good example of how this phrase does not mean that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah *are still burning*, but that they were totally burned up. The fire was "everlasting" in the sense that it did not go out until everything was incinerated. This is the same thing that will happen to the people who will be thrown into the lake of fire. They will burn "in the fire that is not quenched" in the sense that nothing will be left of them, as Mal. 4:3, "For they shall be *ashes* under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this."

These *false teachers* show the same rebellious spirit *as the fallen angels*--the same lack of respect for the Church leaders in charge, and the same disdain for God's law. Jude says, "Likewise also these *dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries*" (vs. 8). Jude calls them "dreamers" because it was common for them to claim to have dreams where are they received authority to change God's commandments (see Deut. 13:1-8). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* states, "'Dreaming' probably refers to the *dreams of false prophets, who produce falsehood while claiming to speak the truth* (see Jer. 23:25)."

This religious fraud of dreams happens all through history. For example, around A.D. 155, there is a letter from the Catholic bishop Pius in Rome who said that his brother had a dream where supposedly an angel had commanded him to *change the day of the Passover to a Sunday*, as

Catholics do today. After Polycarp had dissented from the Roman view of keeping the Passover on a Sunday around A.D. 150, what happened? Sir James Donaldson wrote, "One of the letters forged in the name of Pius, [bishop of Rome] where one Hermas [his brother] is mentioned as the author; and it is stated that in his book *a commandment was given through an angel to observe the Passover on a Sunday*" (*Apostolical Fathers*, 1874. p. 324).

Just as the rebels resisted the authority of Moses, so these false teachers resisted the authority of the apostles. Jude says: "Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves" (vss. 9-10). Moses' burial account is found in Deut. 34:5-6, "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day."

Here, Jude gives us a glimpse of the spiritual world, which God revealed. To prevent Moses from being venerated in his burial place, God Himself arranged for the burial. He sent the archangel Michael to bury him, but there, Satan contended with him about Moses' dead body to set up an idolatrous site, just as they did with the bronze serpent (2 K. 18:4). Michael did not allow him to do so, but instead of insulting him, for Satan has not yet been stripped of his authority, he only rebuked him in God's name.

By the way, this is a manner to deal with a problem involving evil spirits. If you ever feel the strange presence or see something weird, the best way to cast it out of your presence is to say, "May the Lord rebuke you." This is the biblical formula and I have seen how effective it has been.

Jude continues: "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (vs. 11). Here we see some of the doctrinal errors: just as Cain was envious of righteous Abel, they are envious of God's righteous leaders and resist them. They use Balaam's tactics

of having God's people break God's laws through "grace" and meanwhile, enriching themselves.

Then Jude adds: "These are spots in your love (Gk. *agape*) feasts, while *they feast with you* without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots" (vs. 12).

These *agape* feasts were fellowship meals held by the brethren, including at God's Feasts. We see their description in Acts 2:46, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." This has nothing to do with the invention of the Eucharist, which isn't biblical. Rather, it was an occasion to gather and "break bread" or eat together and enjoy fellowship. We do this all the time. These false brethren took advantage of these meals to pawn off their "pet theories" and speak against the ministry and the rest of the Church leaders.

Moreover, Jude compares them to rebellious angels. He calls them, "raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (vs. 13). These false brethren, if unrepentant, would be amassing a terrible judgment, which would lead them to "the second death," just as the rebellious angels are destined to be eternally in the blackness of darkness. Satan and his angels will be judged "in that great day" and after being thrown in the lake of fire (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). They will be restricted to utter darkness, probably beyond the confines of the universe, to contemplate all the damage they did--a kind of solitary confinement--just as they do here with the most rebellious prisoners.

Of that coming judgment, Jude says: "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him'" (vv. 14-15). *The Encyclopedia of Difficult Scriptures* notes, "Apparently there was a valid and accurate body of oral tradition available

to believers in the NT period; and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they were perfectly able to report such occurrences in connection with their teaching ministry...Here we have a remarkable example of a powerful prophetic utterance coming down to us from before the time of Noah. The mere fact that Genesis does not include this statement of Enoch furnishes no evidence against his having said it..." (p. 430).

Jude ends his denunciation of these false teachers by saying, "These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage" (vs. 16). That is, they resort to the old ways of secretly flattering, trying to impress others and murmuring against the authorities of the Church in order to form a group that they will later lead.

Jude warns them, "But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, *who cause divisions, not having the Spirit* [they are not converted]. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (vv. 17-23). We are to help those brethren who stumble or are deceived, but we should watch out for ourselves that we do not fall into the same trap.

Then, Jude ends his epistle on a positive note, reminding the brethren of a glorious future as they persevere to the end: "Now to Him [Christ] who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to *God our Savior*, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (vv. 24-25).

Notice again all the glory goes to God the Father and Jesus Christ - again, there is no third person mentioned here. Thus we conclude this wonderful and inspiring epistle of Jude!