

The Book of Jude

Opening Hymn: #71—"Guide Me"

Some of the epistles in the New Testament are called "general" epistles because they are written to no specific individual or church. They went to the church in general. The general epistles are James, Peter, 1 John, and Jude. Today we will consider the last of these in our Bible, the epistle of Jude.

Who was Jude?

The name Jude is the Greek form for the Hebrew Judah. The Greek word appears 39 times and is translated Jude, Juda, Judah, and [75% of the time] as Judas.

Matt. 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.

It was a popular name among the Jews. Two of the 12 disciples of Jesus were named Judah/Judas. We know much about Judas Iscariot, and almost nothing about the other Judas. In fact we hear the other one speak only once:

John 14:22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

According to both Matthew [13:55] and Mark, Jesus had brothers and sisters:

Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?

So which Jude/Judas wrote this epistle: (1) the little-known apostle Judas or (2) the Lord's brother? Scholars do not agree, though many pick the Lord's brother. They cite as evidence Jude 17 and 18:

Jude 17,18 Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that **they** told you ...

Jude does not say "we" and thus include himself in this group. His only self-identification is in verse 1 where he says he is the brother of James. Those who believe that for scripture to be inspired it must come from the pen of an apostle, pick the apostle Judas. (Of course a large fraction of the New Testament came from the pen of non-apostles Luke and Mark.)

It is even possible **BOTH** choices are correct! McClintock and Strong says that the majority of the early church writers thought Alphaeus was Joseph's brother and that he died without issue. So Joseph following the direction of the law [Deut. 25:5] raised up issue with his brother's name: James, Jude, and others. Because James was the eldest, he was designated "son of Alphaeus" because he was the heir. When the mother died, Joseph married Mary.

So who was Jude? You decide: 1) The little-known apostle Judas; 2) A brother of Jesus because his father was Joseph; 3) Both of the above; 4) None of the above.

Content

This epistle covers the same subject matter as the second chapter of 2 Peter. Both contain a torrent of invective against false teachers who infiltrate the church and try to lead it astray. Images and examples tumble one after another. Jude [and Peter] feel strongly about this subject.

The denunciations are so passionate that we may be inclined to distance ourselves a bit from it. How could such things be? Actually it should have been no surprise. Jesus said this would happen:

Matt. 24:11,12 Many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Acts 20:29 For I [Paul] know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Jude 16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

One of the tests that come upon the Lord's people is to be confronted with obvious ungodliness that goes unpunished. We don't have the extreme examples cited by Jude in our fellowship, but we do see countless examples of unscrupulous false teachers who use the name of Christianity to lead others astray. Those with wonderful personalities find it easy to raise large sums of money to fund their own lavish life style. They preach a "feel good" gospel, a "blessings now" message. Centuries ago the Roman Church accepted the notion that the time for sacrifice was over and the time for reigning had arrived.

If you were Jude, how would make a convincing case that there would be a day of reckoning for such ungodliness? Jude cites historical precedent. He reaches back to the Old Testament and selects examples of the ungodly who eventually paid for their disobedience.

List #1: The Groups

Jude 5: Although the Lord saved many out of Egypt. he destroyed the unbelievers in the wilderness.

The people had an obviously God-selected leader in Moses. They had seen the sea part for them, their Egyptian enemies perish when the sea covered them, and there was manna six days a week. Yet they seemed all too willing to listen to other leaders who preached a different message. Note how quickly their behavior changed when they thought Moses would not come back down off Mt. Sinai. They forced Aaron to make a golden calf, made sacrifices to it, said it was the god that led them out of Egypt, and gave themselves over to singing and dancing in front of it. [See Exod. 32.]

Jude 6: Angels who left their heavenly home are now restrained for a future judgment day.

This is the next example of disobedient beings who were punished eventually. The Genesis account beginning in chapter 6 says that "sons of God" took wives of mankind. This wickedness went apparently unpunished until the flood swept all the disobedient away. Although we can not see the spirit plane with our natural eyes, we do see that since then these fallen angels can no longer materialize in human bodies. Their power is limited as Jesus showed on many occasions, and we

believe that there will be a final judgment upon them. “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” writes Paul in 1 Cor. 6:3.

Jude 7: Those in Sodom and Gomorrah are an example of punishment by eternal fire.

After their cover story on Evil, TIME magazine published a letter from a reader who said: “When the time comes that no one any longer believes in hell, what restraint will there be upon wickedness and evil?” This reader believes the “evil” committed by an all-powerful God in the everlasting torture of people will motivate us to not commit some evil of our own devising. Of course the “eternal fire” is not literal. The parallel chapter in 2 Peter says evil doers will be destroyed:

2 Pet. 2:6 [He turned] the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes . . . [vs. 12] But these shall utterly perish in their own corruption.

Fire did reduce the cities to ashes. The Greek word rendered “utterly perish” means destroy. It does not mean to live a life of agony in hell. We know that it does not even mean these people are everlastingly dead because Ezekiel prophesies about a future time when they will live again:

Ezek. 16:55 When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

Clearly the lesson Jude expects us to draw from his examples of faithless Israelites, fallen angels, and the wicked Sodomites, is this: God did not leave the disobedient unpunished in the past and he certainly will not leave them unpunished in the future.

List #2: The Individuals

In verse 11 Jude mentions three individuals as illustrative of the false teachers he has in mind: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. All three deliberately did **NOT** do what God instructed them to do.

Cain was told how to render an acceptable sacrifice. Instead jealousy drove him to murder his brother. When God punished him, he said: “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” (Gen. 4:13) God told Balaam he could not curse Israel. But Balaam was so eager to earn the biggest fee of his career, he conspired with the King of Moab to get the Israelites to bring God's curse on themselves by immoral conduct. That cost Balaam his life. (Num. 31:8) Korah's rebellion is recounted in Numbers 16. He was a Levite who organized 250 princes to challenge the leadership of Moses. Because it was really rebellion against God and not Moses, the earth opened and swallowed Korah and all his followers. It is almost unbelievable that the very next day many Israelites murmured against Moses claiming that HE had killed “the people of the Lord.” (Num. 16:41) God did not wait to deal with that mass rebellion. He immediately sent a plague and 14,700 people died. (vs. 49)

The lesson Jude draws is that false teachers among the flock will be similarly punished. Don't support them. Don't align yourselves with them. They and all their works will perish in God's due time.

The Body of Moses

Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

This is the only place in the Bible that describes a contention between the archangel and the devil about the “body of Moses.” When did it take place? Here are two suggestions:

#1--It occurred at the death of Moses.

In the *Question Book* (806:top) Bro. Russell answers this question with words from an eminent [unnamed] authority: “The Lord Himself buried Moses, hiding the place of the sepulchre. The primary reason for this probably was to hinder the Israelites from carrying his corpse as a mummy, which in after time might have become a temptation to idolatry. The passage in Jude 9 . . . is a hint along this line that Satan desired to have the corpse to use it for the further misleading of the people, but that the Lord through Michael the Archangel prevented this and kept the burial place a secret.”

#2--It is referring to an experience described in Zechariah.

Zech. 3:1-4 And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist [attack or accuse] him. And the [angel of the] Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan . . . Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments . . . Take away the filthy garments . . . I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

The words “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan” are the words used in Jude. Perhaps it is this experience that Jude had in mind. However, in Zechariah the contention between Satan and the angel of the Lord concerns Joshua the high priest, not the “body of Moses.”

Perhaps we should be reading “body of Moses” as a symbolic expression.

1 Cor. 12:27 Now ye are the **body of Christ**, and members in particular.

Of course we are not literally the body of Christ [*same Greek word as Jude 9*] but Christ is our head. We were baptized into Christ and became his body members. Likewise, the Israelites through a kind of baptism accepted Moses as their head:

1 Cor. 10:1,2 All our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

The Jude 9 reference may refer to the devil’s constant attack on Israel (pictured by Joshua) and their simultaneous protection by Michael, the archangel of the Lord. Likewise, the devil contends for you and I who are a part of the antitypical high priest. But our filthy garments are removed and we are given a change of raiment. The Lord protects “his body” using the archangel and his mighty power.

Enoch's Prophecy

We know very little about Enoch. Genesis 5 recounts the chronology from Adam to Noah. Enoch was born 622 years after the creation of Adam. He lived for 365 years and was the father of Methuselah, the one who lived longer than any other human being. We are told that Enoch “walked with God” and that “God took him.” (Gen. 5:24) But it was Jude who recorded a prophecy of Enoch:

Jude 14,15 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

We do not know how Jude knew about this prophecy. He uses it as another proof that God will execute judgment upon the disobedient. Although it has universal application, I believe it also says something about the wickedness already in the world at the time Enoch lived. No other person in the Gen. 5 chronology is said to have any special relationship to God. But Enoch “walked with God.” Enoch lived at about the half-way point between Eden and the flood. His prophecy about God's coming judgment upon the ungodly certainly had, as one application, a fulfillment when the flood ended the lives of all the disobedient.

The Conclusion of the Epistle

After the passionate language of condemnation, Jude tells us what we must do if we are not to perish with those who are bringing destruction upon their heads. He mentions several things:

#1—[vs. 20] Build yourselves up upon a strong foundation of faith.

Faith is important, but it is not enough. In 2 Peter, chapter 1, Peter makes a list of what kind of building we are to do. In verse 5 he says we are to add seven things to our faith: fortitude, knowledge, self-control, patience, piety, philadelphia love, and agape love. Then in vs. 10 Peter says, “If ye do these things ye shall never fall.” Peter doesn't say exactly how we make this adding occur, but Jude says we ought to **pray** in the holy spirit.

#2—[vs. 21] Keep yourselves in the love of God.

The false teachers do not love God. They love power, wealth, sensual pleasure—almost anything except God. But if we faithfully contend for the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” we will remain in that love.

#3—[vs. 22] “And of some have compassion. making a difference”

This seems obscure. There appears to be a difference of opinion about what the Greek text says. I prefer the reading of the Jerusalem Bible: “When there are some who have doubts, reassure them.”

Of course we want to build ourselves up. Of course we want to keep ourselves in the love of God. But we do have a responsibility for our brethren. If we see doubts or fears in the hearts of any, we should reassure them and build them up.

#4—[vs. 23] “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.”

This is more than giving reassurance. It means doing everything we can to save a fellow Christian who has fallen into the “fire.” In the context of this book, Jude is probably thinking about falling under the influence of false teachers. But he recognizes that there is also a danger that in trying to help, we might be contaminated. The Jerusalem Bible makes this distinction very clear and gives a different thought than the King James:

Jude 22,23 [Jerusalem] When there are some who have doubts, reassure them. When there are some to be saved from the fire, pull them out. But there are others to whom you must be kind with great caution, keeping your distance even from outside clothing which is contaminated by vice.

Peter said that if we “do these things (build up all the graces of the spirit upon a foundation of faith) ye shall never fall.” Jude says [vs. 24] that if we follow his advice, we will be presented “faultless” before God. Of course we can't be faultless in the sense of being actually perfect in this life. But the Greek word does NOT mean that. It is a technical word in classical Greek designating the absence of anything amiss in a sacrifice or anything that would render it unworthy to be offered. That must be our goal as we look to the Lord for strength and guidance along this narrow way.

Brethren, the devil would like to dispute about your body, your will, your commitment. He has many techniques. Jude emphasizes one: false teachers.

Let us reflect on the lessons in this book. Let us concentrate on building ourselves up upon a foundation of faith through prayer, keeping ourselves in God's love by doing what is pleasing to him, and helping our brethren remain faithful even until the end.

Closing Hymn: #20—“Awake, My Soul”

[First given in France in 1991]