

THE URGENT MESSAGE OF JUDAH

The New Testament book of Jude written in the second half of the first century (probably somewhere between 65-80) and most likely written by Christ's brother, Judah, is a brief, but quite fascinating letter. There is a great urgency to it as Judah himself notes. It contains several references to extra-biblical writings. And it is all about a crisis affecting Judah's audience (specifically unknown to us, but very likely made up of mainly Jewish Christians). So there is the drop-everything quality about the letter to speak urgently and directly into that crisis and to warn these Christians of the depth of corruption presented them by a group of false teachers that had infiltrated their fellowship.

“Contend for the Faith”

This is the purpose of Judah's letter—to himself defend faith in Jesus against the backdrop of the corruptive nature of the false teacher and to urge his readers to stand against them as well. To accomplish this he has to expose these teachers and the depraved nature of their character. He does not address their theology as much as he does their immoral way of life.

At their core they had turned God's grace into a license to sin—corrupting the freedoms Christ offers as a means to do whatever they wanted, specifically a grab for money and sex. In so doing they had rejected the authority and lordship of Jesus. This was nothing new, however. They had been previously warned about such men. They were merely following a similar pattern of other corrupted people from previous generations. To make his point Judah recalls some of these stories—stories his readers were most familiar with—to historically demonstrate and expose how corrupt these current “godless men” were. They compared to:

- The rebellious Hebrews who turned on God in the wilderness during the Exodus and received God's punishment as a result (Numbers 14).
- The angels who abandoned God to have sex with women only to now be chained waiting for God's final judgment (see Genesis 6; this also is a reference to the apocryphal book, 1 Enoch, which adds more detail to the Genesis 6 reference).
- Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) in which men sought to have sex with angels. This sad episode, Judah says, continues to serve as an example of the consequences of such sin.

The false teachers polluting his audience operated and were “in the very same way” like these examples—rejecting God's authority, engaging in immoral activities, and slandering heaven itself. Referencing again a story from an extra-biblical source (The Testament of Moses) he reminds them that even the angel Michael in fighting for the body of Moses against the devil would not even slanderously accuse Satan—deferring to God to let him settle that matter. So what the false teachers were doing was incredible and blasphemous! They were acting like brute, ignorant beasts destroying themselves and everything around them.

So in using both biblical and extra-biblical stories well known to his readers Judah demonstrated how the behavior of these teachers had ancient roots and tendencies—rebellion against God; sexual immorality; and rejecting the authority and lordship of God.

“Woe to Them! “

Their corruptive influence was powerful—so Judah continues to sound the alarm and warn his readers of their danger. Again he uses a trio of stories to illustrate the vile character of these men and how they can be a corruptive influence upon others. They are like:

- Cain (Genesis 4) who murdered his brother
- Balaam (Numbers 22-25; 31:6) who led Israel to idolatry and sexual immorality
- Korah (Numbers 16) who led a rebellion against Moses in which thousands died

This is who these teachers really were—just like these ancient examples they will create problems, hurt others and cause chaos. Woe to them!

And be warned! He continues in painting the dreadful picture of these men by calling upon even more Old Testament images. These men are like:

- The selfish shepherds of Ezekiel 34 who only look out for themselves. “Blemishes at your love feasts” he calls them—eating without concern for others.
- The clouds with no rain of Proverbs 25:14. Blowing about with no good end; creating devastation and death in their path.
- The chaotic waves of Isaiah 57:20 restlessly crashing around wildly without anything to direct them.

And just to make sure they get the message of just how depraved, ungodly and dangerous these teachers were, Judah shares one more bit of information—again from the apocryphal book 1 Enoch and chapter one. Here Enoch speaks about the final days of God’s judgment (which interestingly has Enoch himself referencing several Old Testament texts) when God will bring about a conviction on all of the ungodly—like these grumbling, faultfinding, evil, boastful, conceited false teachers. Absolutely nothing good comes from them. They are exposed. They are like others before them who have been punished for their sins. This is nothing new—even the apostles forewarned about such men (2 Timothy 3:1-9). God will hold them accountable. God’s grace is not to be treated as a license to sin.

Be warned and stand up to them. Contend for the faith of Jesus Christ by building yourself up in this faith; by praying in the Spirit; by wrapping yourself up in God’s love; by showing mercy to others who may have fallen under the influence of these teachers; by helping them escape their destructive influence; and by avoiding at all costs the stain of corruption brought on by these evil men. God can enable this process—give him glory in Christ Jesus as you wait to be in his presence! This is how Judah concludes his brief but urgent message.

Contemporary Message

Obviously our takeaway is to be alert to any corruptive influence infiltrating us. Judah, however, emphasizes, the behavior of the false teachers over their theology—indicating how rebellion against God will express itself not just in what is taught, but in what is lived. Also it may seem strange to us that Judah uses several extra-biblical recourses, but these were well known and read in first century Jewish and Christian communities—some of which were once considered to be included in the biblical canon. So these books were just a part of their religious library and Judah used them effectively to make his urgent point in his fascinating letter.