

Jude

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The little, neglected book of Jude has special significance for us today.

Part 1

Jude is perhaps the most overlooked book in the New Testament. It is easy to overlook because it is so small. It's just one chapter long, and not a very long chapter at that. It isn't really a book—it's a letter; but a very important letter, especially for us today because it deals with a problem that still exists in some congregations today.

Since it is so short, Everett will read it straight through once so you can hear it as written without interruption to get the overall tone and context. Then, as he reads it through the second time I will insert some comments because the letter contains several Old Testament references that readers in Jude's day would have understood immediately, but might not be familiar to modern readers. So, I'll explain those references to you and tell you why they are still relevant today.

But first, let's just listen to the Book of Jude, uninterrupted.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And 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 on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even 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, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude's letter begins with a short, standard greeting of the day, praying that God will give them mercy, grace, and peace. Then he gets right down to business.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Jude really wanted to write an upbeat letter about salvation; but instead he felt it necessary to urge them to "contend for the faith" because their congregation had fallen into apostasy. Some false teachers had introduced new doctrines and had corrupted the church. Jude says,

They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

There are two closely related errors that these men are preaching. The first one is cheap grace. The second is lawlessness.

Cheap grace is a perversion of God's grace. God certainly is merciful, and does forgive sin when the sinner truly repents. We are saved through the grace of God, not our own merits. That's the true Gospel

message. But the doctrine of cheap grace says that God will forgive all our sins, whether we are sorry for them or not. Cheap grace is based on the false notion that God loves us so much He doesn't care if we obey Him or not—He will always love us and save us no matter what we do.

This leads to lawlessness. If God really doesn't care if they keep His law or not, they just keep it when it is convenient to do so, and ignore the law when it gets in their way. Doing this denies Jesus Christ as their only Sovereign and Lord because they are deciding for themselves which laws to keep, and which to ignore. They are saying, in effect, "my will be done," not, "thy will be done."

It is easy to see why cheap grace is so attractive. Many people would love to believe that God loves them so much that He doesn't care what they do, and will save them no matter how they live their lives. But the truth is that God loves them so much that HE DOES CARE what they do. He wants to save them from the consequences of disobedience.

Cheap grace abounds in some congregations today. Many sincere Christians have been taught that Jesus abolished the law and replaced it with grace. So, Jude's letter, written to a New Testament congregation that had fallen victim to cheap grace, is especially important to those modern congregations that have also fallen victim to this same doctrinal error. Here's how Jude refutes cheap grace:

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And 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 on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

God is a loving God. He delivered His people out of Egypt because He loved them, and felt they had been punished enough by the Egyptians. But then, when they were unfaithful, He destroyed many of them. Of course, you know what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, so we don't need to dwell on them. But you might not know about the angels bound with chains.

Remember, Jude said,

And 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 on the great Day.

This is a reference to the beginning of sin. Many people believe that sin began in the Garden of Eden, but sin began in Heaven before that. The angel Lucifer was the first sinner. He rebelled against God and became Satan. He brought sin to Earth when he tempted Eve in the form of a serpent.

Jude didn't need to explain this to his readers because they were so familiar with it. They well knew what it says in Isaiah 14:12 – 15.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12 – 15)

Because Lucifer tried to usurp God's rightful position, there was war in Heaven. Revelation 12:7-9 says,

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:7-9)

And Revelation 12:4 tells us that Satan, figuratively referred to as “the dragon,” led one third of the angels, figuratively referred to as “stars,” to fight against Jesus, figuratively called “Michael.” Since Jude refers to Michael later, we will wait until then to explain why John called Jesus, “Michael” in Revelation 12:7.

Jude says that these fallen angels are “bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.” This was well known in New Testament times. In fact, Peter says very much the same thing in the second chapter of his second letter.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while delaying their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:4-10)

Peter and Jude clearly state that even though God loves men and angels, disobedient angels are being held for punishment on Judgment Day, and they will eventually be destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah were. Men are no different from angels in this respect. Disobedient men will be consumed by fire at the final judgment as well.

As the familiar hymn says, the only way to be happy in Jesus is to trust and obey.

[music – Trust and Obey]

Part 2

Before the break, we were reading what Jude said about obedience. So, let's reread the second paragraph of Jude's letter to refresh our memories, and continue on to the third paragraph.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And 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 on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even 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, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion.

So these false teachers, who are preaching cheap grace, are polluting their own bodies and rejecting authority. They don’t understand that they are acting like unreasoning animals, doing things that will destroy them. Jude bolsters his argument by giving the examples of Michael, Cain, Balaam, and Korah. Most Christians today know that Cain killed Abel, but some will not understand the references to Michael, Balaam and Korah; so let’s talk about them

Let’s start with Michael. We first hear Jesus called Michael in the book of Daniel. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into the fiery furnace for failing to worship the king. Jesus joined them in that furnace. Here’s how Daniel describes what happened.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, O king.”

He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” (Daniel 3:24-25)

He didn’t say, “the fourth looks like Jesus of Nazareth” because this was hundreds of years before Jesus was born, so they would not know His name, or what He looked like. Later in the book of Daniel, this same divine being is called Michael.

The name Michael means, “one who is like God.” The book of Daniel uses this name to describe a celestial being who was co-equal with God. Today we understand Michael to be Jesus in his pre-incarnate form. Words really fail to adequately describe Him, so sometimes he is called the archangel Michael. Other times He is called the chief prince Michael.

Daniel was praying for the Jews to be set free from Babylon, so Gabriel came to Daniel to give him the answer. Here is what Gabriel said.

Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.” (Daniel 10:12-14)

We don’t know exactly why Gabriel was detained by the king of Persia for 21 days; but it probably has something to do with the earlier prophecy in the book of Daniel that said Persia would conquer Babylon. Perhaps the king of Persia was reluctant to attack the most powerful kingdom on Earth, and needed some

persuasion. Finally, Jesus Himself had to help Gabriel get the King of Persia to fall in line with God's plan.

Daniel had been told explicitly in two earlier visions that after Babylon fell to Persia, Persia would fall to Greece. So Daniel would have understood Gabriel when he said,

“Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.) (Daniel 10:20)

Finally, Gabriel completes the prophecy by telling Daniel what Jesus will do at His second coming. Of course, Gabriel calls him Michael because Michael would not be named Jesus until He was born hundreds of years later.

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1-2)

So, when Jude wrote about Michael, the Christians of his day would have understood that he was talking about the Messiah, who controlled the ascendancy of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and would come some time in the future to resurrect the dead; some of whom would be given eternal life, and some of whom would be finally destroyed.

We know Michael must be the Lord Jesus because Paul told the Thessalonians,

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

John says the same thing about the two resurrections in chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation.

They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) (Revelation 20:4-5)

Jude also reminded them about Balaam because Balaam was a false teacher who taught the Israelites to ignore God's law, just like the false teachers in Jude's day, and in our day. The full story of Balaam is told in Numbers 22:4-20. Jesus referred to Balaam's heresy in Jesus' letter to the church at Pergamum, recorded in Revelation 2:14.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught [King] Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. (Revelation 2:14)

Balaam taught the Israelites that, even though the seventh commandment prohibits adultery, God's law doesn't really matter. Sex outside of marriage is perfectly OK. Sadly, that is the prevailing secular view today. Educators say birth control should be given to teenagers because it is unreasonable to expect them to abstain from sex. Sadly, some churches consider themselves to be enlightened because they tolerate

homosexuality and illicit heterosexual sex. God punished the Jews who accepted Balaam's teachings. He will do the same to Christians who accept Balaam's sexual liberation theology today.

Furthermore, Balaam enticed Israelites to eat food sacrificed to idols. That sin certainly isn't as prevalent today as sexual sins are. Nobody sacrifices food to idols any more; but there is still an important lesson to be learned here.

In New Testament times, heathens sacrificed food to their pagan gods in a ritual service dedicating that food to the god. Then the food was sold to the general public. Some Christians bought and ate this food.

Communion is based upon the doctrine that the communion bread is Jesus' body. When we eat the bread, the bread becomes part of our body, and so we are thus joined to Christ. In the same way, eating food dedicated to a pagan god symbolically joins the diner with that heathen god. It was like taking communion with a heathen god.

In Acts 15:29 and 21:25, the church leaders wrote letters to Gentile converts telling them in no uncertain terms that they must not eat food sacrificed to idols. In chapter 8 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he rather diplomatically explains why they should not do it. Paul acknowledges the fact that, since an idol is nothing more than a piece of stone, offering a piece of meat to it does not logically change it in any way. So, logically, eating it does not change anyone who eats it. But after acknowledging the logic of their argument, Paul agreed with the Council of Jerusalem and said that one should not eat it anyway.

Notice that the Corinthians were using logic to rationalize their disobedience. The Corinthians didn't believe in the Greek gods, so eating food dedicated to them should not matter to God. The problem with that logic is that it does matter to God. That's why Jesus told John to write letters to the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira not to do it any more.

The key point is that these Christians thought they could rationalize their disobedience of a clear command of God using human logic that seemed reasonable. But, as logical as it was, it was still disobedience in God's eyes.

Many people today rationalize eating things God has forbidden. God forbids the eating of pork; but many Christians argue that, if they cook the pork well enough, it is OK—they won't get trichinosis. Likewise, there are cholesterol lowering drugs, so they can eat lobster tails in drawn butter without damaging their heart and arteries. Thinking they understand the health risks, and how to avoid them, they feel justified in polluting their bodies by eating food God expressly prohibited. But just as Jesus didn't accept the arguments for eating forbidden food in Jude's day, He won't accept similar arguments today.

The fact that society accepts sex outside marriage, and homosexual relationships, doesn't make those forbidden activities acceptable for Christians, either.

The point of Jude's reference to Balaam's teachings is that disobedience is still disobedience, no matter how man tries to justify it. You can't rationalize away sin. This leads straight to Korah's rebellion, which is probably why Jude mentioned it next..

Korah ... and ... Dathan and Abiram ... became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" (Numbers 16:1-3)

Moses and Aaron hadn't set themselves above the Lord's assembly—God had set them above the assembly. Korah's group ignored God's command that they obey Moses, and considered themselves to be equal to Moses, even going so far as to claim the whole assembly is holy. No doubt they quoted scriptures about how the Jews were God's chosen people, a royal priesthood. Their arrogance led them to believe that they didn't have to obey God's law any more. As a result, they, and all their followers, were dramatically destroyed by God.

It has taken me several pages to briefly explain all references Jude gave in just five sentences. But it all comes down to just two things—cheap grace and disrespect for God's law. Jude used these well-known examples to remind his readers not to listen to teachers who were telling them they could disobey God's law because they were covered by God's grace. That's why Jude said these false teachers were arrogant, not realizing their own ignorance. After giving these examples, Jude said this about the false teachers:

These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude used some colorful metaphors to describe these false teachers. They are selfish shepherds who feed themselves—but not the sheep. They are clouds that promise to bring rain to the crops, but just blow on by without doing any good. They are useless fruit trees that haven't born fruit in the past, and won't bear fruit in the future because they have been uprooted. They are wild waves causing shipwrecks. They are wandering stars that aren't useful for navigation because they don't stay put, and lead sailors astray. Then Jude drops all the metaphors and says plainly,

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

One of those apostles was Peter, who said,

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2 Peter 2:1)

At the beginning of his letter, Jude said he wanted to write an uplifting letter about salvation and God's love; but he could not do that because he had to warn the church about the dangers of cheap grace and disobedience. But Jude didn't end his letter on such a sad note. He ended it by reminding them that God can give them the strength to reject these false teachings. They can overcome the devil through faith and prayer. They must save themselves, and others, from these corrupt teachings. They can do it, through God's strength, and we can, too. Jude ended his letter with these words of encouragement.

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

With all this background, hopefully you can appreciate the warning that Jude was giving to the congregations of his day. The warning is still relevant to us today. There still are false teachers who change the grace of God into a license for immorality. With that in mind, let's read Jude's letter one last time, without interruption, knowing that it sadly bears wide application today.

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To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

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