

Jude 1:9-13 - Agents Of Corruption

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I. Jude 1:8-13¹

A. **Jude 1:8-13** Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. 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. 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. These are spots in your love 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; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

B. Context

1. Desired to expound but found it necessary to warn.
2. Last session: Jude gives three examples of persons who left their proper place in God's plan and, as a result, God executed judgment upon them.
 - a) The Israelites who refused to enter the Promised Land.
 - b) The angels which left their proper domain.
 - c) The people of Sodom and Gomorrah who, like the angels before them, went after "strange flesh" -- that is -- flesh of a different kind, participating in unnatural acts which perverted God's created order.
3. Jude continues his description of these "agents of corruption" who profess to be Christians, but whose ultimate destiny is permanent separation from God (v. 13).

C. Related passage: 2 Peter 2.

1. Speaks of these same teachers who have secretly infiltrated "under the radar" and mentions very similar themes, even referring to the same angelic perversion as well as Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. **2 Peter 2:1-2** 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.

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D. Satan's two-fold strategy: 1) attack from without; 2) attack from within. (But the "within" only *appears* to be within—these agents of corruption are not true believers.)

II. Exegesis

A. Jude 1:8

1. "Likewise" – these are said to share characteristics with the examples which Jude gave earlier in the passage.
 - a) "defile the flesh" - "turn the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 1:4).
 - (1) They represent themselves as believers and followers of the Lord, but they deny Him in the way they live, often in relation to sexual immorality. Among there number in our day we would have to include numerous homosexuals and lesbians occupying leadership positions in various denominations which purport to be shepherds of God's flock.
2. "reject authority"
 - a) Peter says they "despise" (*katafronountas*) authority. The word is a compound meaning to "think down upon" or to hold in disdain (2Pe. 2:10). They believe they are "above" authority or that it only pertains to the weak or "little people."
 - b) The word for "authority" (*kuriotēta*) is a derivative of the word for "Lord" (*kurios*) applied to Jesus within the New Testament.
 - (1) They reject the Lordship of Christ Himself (as evidenced by their lewdness and refusal to bow to His commands).
 - (2) They reject the Lordship of the Bible: denying or obfuscating principles which the Church has unanimously accepted for centuries.
 - (3) They also reject authority in general—because they are predisposed toward lawlessness which incessantly works to throw off restraint.
 - c) Although their teaching, in its rejection of an objective authority, *appears* to the unwary as the path toward liberty, it is actually a path leading into bondage.
 - (1) **2 Peter 2:19–20** (NKJV) While they promise . . . liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. [They are overcome by licentiousness—their sin rules over them.] For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.
3. "speak evil of dignitaries"
 - a) The original language says they "blaspheme glorious ones" (*doxas*).
 - (1) "glorious ones" are those with an established reputation, often representing authority.
 - (2) Both Jude and Peter refer to angels in their examples.

(a) **2 Peter 2:10** . . . They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid (literally, “do not tremble”) to speak evil of dignitaries (*doxas*), whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

b) Jude’s point: they have no respect for established hierarchical authority structures or roles and assume they are in a position equal or above the authorities they criticize. They are full of pride and arrogance.

B. Jude 1:9

1. “Michael the archangel”

a) Jude contrasts these merely human blasphemers who speak evil of authorities with the much more powerful angels. Not just any angel, but an *archangel* – one of the most powerful of angels, Michael.

b) Of all God’s creatures who might have the right, power, and position to revile an opponent and strike out with accusing language, surely an archangel would! Yet Jude’s point is even this most powerful creature of God’s creation honors established authority structures and maintains respectful discourse – even when in strong disagreement with an adversary.

c) Here, Jude touches on an event associated with the death of Moses.

(1) Moses died on Mt. Nebo after having viewed, but been forbidden to enter the promised land because of his disobedience to God in the manner of bringing forth water from the rock in the wilderness at Kadesh (Num. 20:12; Deu. 1:37; 3:26).

(2) The passage in Deuteronomy indicates that God “buried him” (Deu. 34:5-6).

(3) It was God’s will that his grave site would remain unknown—probably because it would have become an idol and a source of stumbling for Israel.

(4) We learn from the New Testament that one of the ministries of the angels is to transport the faithful upon death.

(a) **Luke 16:22** So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

(b) Although this appears to be the transport of Lazarus’ soul and spirit rather than his body, it indicates that angels minister upon the death of believers.

(c) In the case where it is said that Moses was buried by God, it would seem that one of God’s ministering spirits, in this case Michael, was dispatched to bury Moses.

(5) Apparently the Devil, the “accuser of the brethren,” maintained that Moses was not worthy of burial by God, and perhaps even denied that his soul and spirit should be transported to Abraham’s bosom, or Paradise.

- (a) After all, the event of his death underscored his rebellion against God. The last recorded words of God to Moses on Mt. Nebo were these: "I have caused you to see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."
- (b) Also, Moses was guilty of murdering an Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-12).
- (c) Although the Devil was justified in his accusations, the redeeming work of Christ on behalf of the faithful rendered them null and void.
- d) Jude's point here is that even in this event involving two of the most powerful creatures ever created ("glorious ones"), respect for authority—God-given roles—held sway and Michael refused to slander the Devil. Yet the mere men Jude writes about have no such reservations.

2. The Assumption of Moses

- a) *The Assumption of Moses* (otherwise called the *Testament of Moses*) is a Jewish apocryphal pseudepigraphical work. It is known from a single sixth-century incomplete manuscript in Latin that was discovered in Milan, Italy in the mid-nineteenth century and published in 1861.
- b) This single extant copy does not contain any reference to this event—although the ending of the manuscript is incomplete and appears to be a translation of an earlier copy written in Greek (which itself may have been translated from Hebrew).
- c) Church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen apparently had access to an earlier, possibly more complete manuscript since they claimed that this event was mentioned therein.²
- d) Caution: do not assume that biblical authors are endorsing other writings which happen to record the same event.
- e) Other sources may recognize the same historical event, but it is the Bible alone which has God's stamp of inspiration—being certified by dozens of detailed prophecies.

C. Jude 1:10

1. A grammatical structure of contrast.

- a) On the one hand, they "speak evil of whatever they do not know."
- b) On the other hand (or at the same time) in "whatever they know naturally" they "corrupt themselves."
- c) That which they don't understand they reject and revile. That which they do know (experientially) corrupts them even further.
 - (1) What they "know naturally" is the word *phusikōs* from which we derive our word "physics."

² The correlation between Jude 9 and that document is confirmed by patristic sources (the earliest being Clement of Alexandria, Frag. in Ep. Jude).[Martin] Origen (De prin. iii.2.1) claimed that Jude's words reflect the pseudepigraphic Assumption of Moses, though nothing similar is found in the extant text.[Bromiley]

- (a) "According to the laws of nature."
 - (b) Here again we see the sensual orientation of these false teachers.
 - (c) They understand how to indulge their senses through unrestrained pleasure. But this indulgence brings further corruption and increasing bondage.
2. "like brute beasts" - as (mere) animals without reason.
- a) Jude compares them to animals which lack human reason. The Greek could read: "like the illogical animals" (*hōs ta aloga zōa*).
 - (1) They have no higher ideals to restrain their behavior.
 - (2) That which separates man from animals: the *imago Dei*—being made in God's image—is not properly functioning in the lives of these teachers. The result is predictable: their behavior is more akin to animals than humans.
 - (3) Deceivers are most often themselves deceived and so it is with these. While believing themselves to be progressive and advanced thinkers, God's assessment through Jude is that they are brutish beasts without reason.
- D. Jude 1:11 – Cain, Balaam, Korah (3 more examples)
1. "the way of Cain"
- a) They are traveling along path or track which follows that of Cain.
 - b) Cain disregarded God's instruction and offered an improper sacrifice. He rejected the guidelines which appear to have been established about what type of sacrifice was to be offered. He appears to have considered himself "above the rules."
 - c) Once confronted with his error, rather than correcting his behavior, he chose the path of rebellion.
 - d) Those walking in the "way of Cain" are not satisfied with promoting their own rebellion. They are compelled to persecute those who are righteous because the righteousness of others acts as a mirror continually reminding themselves of their unrighteous behavior. Thus it was with Cain. His argument was with God but his smoldering resentment resulted in the murder of his brother Abel.
 - e) In a similar way, these destructive teachers are opposed to the sound teaching of Scripture by others since it effectively judges their ministries.
2. "run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit"
- a) The original: "for wages, they have given themselves over to the error of Balaam"
 - b) They are devoted to Balaam's error, without restraint, motivated by financial gain.
 - c) Balaam
 - (1) A Midianite "prophet" who was hired to curse Israel, but through whom God spoke a blessing on Israel.

- (2) At first, he followed God's will in refusing to be hired to curse Israel (Num. 22:12-13). God told him Israel was blessed.
 - (3) But his desire for a diviner's wages overcame his restraint and so he tested God a second time (Num. 22:19-22). God gave him his desire, and allowed him to go, but ultimately opposed it.
 - (4) But God was angry with Balaam and the Angel of the Lord Who opposed him said that his ways were *perverse* or *morally reckless* (Num. 22:32). Although Balaam was gifted as a prophet, he traveled a morally dangerous path.
 - (5) "Balaam as a prophet offers the strange spectacle of a prophet-diviner—a mixture of paganistic ritual with a true, though blurred, knowledge of the true God."^[Unger]
- d) Like Balaam, these corrupting influences operating within the church at one time *knew* the rules of God, but their greed and sensuality cause them to push beyond the limits as they continue to travel down a morally dangerous path.
 - e) Jesus described the offenses of Balaam in the 3rd of the 7 letters to the churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelation.
 - (1) **Revelation 2:14–15** But I have a few things against you [that is, the angel of the Church of Pergamos], because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.
 - (2) Notice how Jesus holds the church responsible for failing to purge these corrupting teachers from her midst. It simply will not do to "look the other way" or tolerate the influences which Jude warns of in this passage.
3. "perished in the rebellion of Korah"
- a) Korah was a Levite who rose up to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron (Lev. 16:1-3).
 - b) God had established the leadership in the hands of Moses and the priesthood in the line of Aaron.
 - c) Korah rejected this authority structure, saying
 - (1) **Numbers 16:3** . . . "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"
 - d) Being a Levite, Korah already occupied a favored place of service regarding the tabernacle before God, but he was not content. He also wanted a place in the priesthood (Num. 16:8-10).
 - e) Korah, the leaders who rebelled with him, their families and 250 others who followed him all perished at the hand of God's judgment.

- f) Like Korah, the men Jude describes are presumptuous and self-seeking, having risen up against authority established by God, not being content to remain within divinely-established boundaries. Like Korah, they “left their proper domain” and have ventured beyond God’s design. Like Korah, they will ultimately perish by God’s judgment.

E. Jude 1:12

1. “spots in your love feasts”
 - a) “love feasts” (*tais agapais*) refers to fellowship meals among believers.
 - b) “spots” - the Greek word has two possible means, which different translations bring out:
 - (1) “spots” [NKJV] – “something which stains and causes disgrace to its surroundings” or
 - (2) “hidden reefs” [NASB] – a lurking danger to those who have no suspicion of its presence.
2. “clouds without water . . . late autumn trees without fruit”
 - a) They have an impressive appearance like clouds, but they don’t produce the expected precipitation which is so needed to water the parched land (of the Middle East).
 - b) It is late autumn, by now these trees should have born much fruit—but they remain barren.
3. “pulled up by the roots”
 - a) Here we find the reason for their fruitlessness: they are disconnected from the True Vine.
 - b) **John 15:5–6** “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.”

F. Jude 1:13

1. Severity of Jude's description – how politically incorrect this passage is in our day!
2. Jude refers to them as: “Dreamers . . . brute beasts . . . spots [or hidden reefs] . . . clouds without water . . . trees without fruit, twice dead . . . raging waves of the sea . . . wandering stars . . . ungodly men . . . ungodly sinners . . . grumblers . . . complainers . . . lustful.”
3. In case we might be wondering, Jude is telling us these are not good folks!
 - a) The severity of his condemnation is directly related to their position—appearing to be Christians *within the church*.

- G. It is critical that believers recognized we have a biblical mandate to expose false teachers and warn the flock.
1. These "crept in *unnoticed*" (v. 4) – most of the sheep are unaware of a problem.
 - a) Hence their response:
 - (1) "Why are you making such a big deal?"
 - (2) "So long as we all get along, why emphasize in-house errors concerning doctrine and practice?"
 - b) These are not "in-house." They only *appear* to be believers—Jude makes clear that their ultimate destiny is separation from God, "for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."
 - (1) This is a matter of identifying the tares which God's enemy has sown among the wheat (Mtt. 13:25).
 - (2) At the end of the age, the wheat will be gathered into the barn and the tares will be burned (Mtt. 13:30). But until that time, we must be watchful for the tares which the enemy seeded *among the wheat*.
- H. Paul did not hesitate to name names when necessary:
1. Warns Timothy of false teachers and adversaries such as Alexander, Philetus, and Hymenaeus by name (1Ti. 1:18-20; 2Ti. 2:16-17; 2Ti. 4:14).
- I. The need to identify in order to avoid their teaching and fellowship.
1. How are we to avoid the teaching and refuse the fellowship of those who we aren't willing to identify?
 - a) **Romans 16:17** Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.
 - b) **Ephesians 5:11** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.
 - c) **2 John 1:9-11** Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.
 - d) **1 Timothy 6:3-5** If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself.
 - e) Even so with believers, whether true and professed.

- (1) **1 Corinthians 5:9-11** I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person.
- (2) **2 Thessalonians 3:6** But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.
- (3) **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15** And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.
2. Identify, warn, avoid – but not debate.
- Tilting at windmills, Satan is happy to keep us distracted in fruitless endeavors.
 - Academic liberalism: asserts that we must engage with them for a hearing. This is often the “beginning of the end” for the unwary and less-experienced.
 - Pride: feeds our ego.
3. MacArthur summarizes:
- The right response of believers to false teachers, especially those who teach their heresy under the guise of Christianity, is not debate or dialogue. We are to turn away from them, to reject what they teach and to protect fellow believers, especially new converts and the immature, from being deceived, confused, and misled. Paul often argued and debated with unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile. While in Athens, he “was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the Godfearing Gentiles, and the market place every day with those who happened to be present,” including Greek philosophers (Acts 17:16–17; cf. 9:29; 17:2; 18:4; 19:8–9). He did not, however, provide a platform for those who professed Christ but taught a false and perverted gospel. Such people are not to be debated but denounced.

Although it is helpful for Christians, especially preachers and teachers, to have some knowledge of what liberal Christianity and so-called Christian cults teach, it is spiritually unwise and dangerous to be overly exposed to their falsehoods, whether through reading their literature or becoming involved in their churches, colleges, seminaries, or other institutions. By doing such things, many ill-prepared but self-confident believers have had their faith as well as their doctrine seriously subverted, as they are “carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by

craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14). Many seminarians, who typically are more familiar with Scripture than most other Christians of their age, have become so engulfed in dialogue with theological error that their effective ministry is all but forfeited. They do not, of course, lose their salvation, but they can easily have their usefulness to the Lord severely weakened and sometimes destroyed. ^[MacArthur, Rom. 16:17]

III. Pray

IV. Bibliography

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