



Sunday School Lesson for November 30, 2003.
Released on November 28, 2003.

Study Jude 3, 4, 8-13, 16-23. Maintain Steadfast Faith
Questions and answers below.

TIME: about A.D. 70
PLACE: unknown

Jude 3,4,8-13,16-23

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

.....
8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

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

10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

.....
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.

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Lesson Background

Jude describes himself as "the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James" (Jude 1:1). This James wrote the book that bears his name, from which we took our lessons in September. Paul calls James "the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). So we see that both James and Jude were sons of Joseph and Mary, and half-brothers of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55, where "Jude" is spelled "Judas"). Neither James nor Jude was a disciple of Jesus before His resurrection (John 7:5).

Jude's letter is addressed faithful Christians (Jude 1:1). Jude warns his readers to watch out for evil men who sneak into Christian circles and begin to erode our fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Jude had wanted to write a letter about salvation, but the growing danger of these godless men demanded attention (Jude 1:3). Jude doesn't just warn us about these men; he gives us instructions for handling such threats. We are to "contend for the faith" and to build ourselves up in it. We are to "pray in the Holy Spirit" and remain in God's love. And we are to "be merciful" while trying to save others.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH (Jude 1:3,4)

1. What does it mean to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3)?

Though Jude would have preferred to have written about this "common (or shared) salvation," Jude felt it necessary to deal with a more pressing problem. It seems that false teachers were infiltrating the ranks of the faithful and were attempting to lead people astray.

The phrase "earnestly contend" in Jude 1:3 is one word in the original Greek and pictures combat or a contest. Those defending the true gospel are involved in spiritual warfare against the forces of the evil one (Eph. 6:10-17). Since Jude spoke of the faith, we can assume that he meant the body of Christian doctrine delivered by Christ to the apostles and now entrusted to the church of the living God.

The saints were not some special group of people held in esteem by others because of their spiritual achievements; the term refers to all of God's people and means "holy (or separated) ones." God's people have been separated from the world because they have come to Christ.

The word translated "saint" does not mean "perfect" or "sinless." This is seen in the fact that the Corinthian believers were likewise addressed as saints (I Cor. 1:2), and that church was filled with very imperfect people. Because of their status before the Lord, however, they could rightly be called saints.

2. What is implied by the fact that the Christian message has been delivered once for all time?

It is significant that the Christian message was entrusted to the followers of Christ once for all time (Jude 1:3). Throughout church history, and especially in more modern times, there have been many who have claimed new revelations from on high.

These supposed revelations frequently conflict with the teachings of Scripture. Even though some claim that God spoke to them or that an angel delivered additional scriptures to them, comparing their teachings with the revealed will of God in the Bible shows them to be erroneous. As Paul said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:8).

3. What were the "ungodly men" doing to the grace of God (v. 4)?

It is not the practice of ungodly men to announce their arrival. Instead, they secretly worm their way in among God's people, promoting their false doctrines and unholy lifestyles. The fact that these deceivers "were before of old ordained to this condemnation" does not mean that God planned for these "ungodly men" to infiltrate the church.

The statement is a reminder that God had previously declared that those who distort the truth of His Word will be judged accordingly. Deceivers cannot ply their trade without certain damnation (Rev. 22:18,19).

These men may fool themselves into thinking they're following Christ. But if their teaching doesn't match His then they have replaced Him with something false. That's idolatry!

4. How can Christians prepare themselves to recognize and refute false teaching?

One is able to recognize falsehood only after knowing what is true. Knowledge of spiritual truth comes through spending much time in God's Word-meditating, studying, listening, and discussing (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Jesus stressed the importance of truth in John 4:23, 24.

Watching what we "feed" our minds in other ways is also important; people have been known to believe lies after hearing those lies repeated often enough. Watching TV programs that depict ungodly morality can lead one to accept that morality after a while.

Prayer is crucial because that is the way we invite the Holy Spirit's help in our struggles. Worship reminds us continually of who the Author of all truth really is. These disciplines are difficult to maintain because of all the distractions and claims on our time. But failure in this area has eternal consequences!

5. What does "lasciviousness" mean?

One charge that Jude leveled against these heretics was that they were "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." The word translated "lasciviousness" designates someone who is indecent, self-indulgent, and without restraint. Paul identified lasciviousness as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19).

Apparently, these teachers were saying that God's grace permitted them to live whatever kinds of lives they chose, even very sinful ones. To say that it does not matter how we live after accepting Christ is disbelief. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1,2). God's grace does not lead us into sin but out of sin (Titus 2:11,12).

CORRUPT CHARACTER (Jude 1:8, 10, 12, 13, 16)

In verses 5 through 7, Jude cited three examples of God's judgment on sinners. These were the rebellious Israelites, fallen angels, and the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In each case, there came a day of reckoning for their disobedience.

With such examples on the record, everyone ought to know unbelief and disobedience will be punished. But these pretended Christians ignore the warning and continue in their wrong ways.

6. Why might these ungodly men have been called dreamers (v. 8)?

The dreamers Jude was describing here would likewise suffer the rod of God's judgment. Jude described these ungodly men as dreamers because they had been deluded by Satan (II Cor. 4:4; II Tim. 3:13).

Three charges are leveled against them in Jude 1:8. First, they "defile the flesh" by immoral living. Second, they "despise dominion," which could be rendered "reject authority." This they did by their unwillingness to follow Christ's teachings. Third, they "speak evil of dignities," which may refer to angels. They were rejecting all divine authority.

7. What kind of knowledge did the ungodly men have, and what did it lead to (v. 10)?

Concerning these wicked men, Jude said that they spoke evil of things about which they had no knowledge. "They are without spiritual sense, and so spiritual things are beyond them, and when these are brought to them they are treated with scoffing and mocking" (Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, Augsburg).

There were things that these evil men did know, but this knowledge was more like an unreasoning animal instinct and would end up destroying them. The picture painted by Jude is that of men who were consumed by animal appetites. They had no restraint whatsoever; they operated on instinct alone and were ruined by, or because of, the things they did. "Dependence upon knowledge gained only by the brute senses leads to sure destruction" (Pfeiffer and Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Moody).

8. What were the "feasts of charity" (vs. 12,13,16)?

Continuing his description of these apostates, Jude declared them to be "spots in your feasts of charity." This refers to the fellowship meal sometimes eaten in conjunction with the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:17-34). "These men had invaded the 'love feasts' in the local assemblies, but all they did was defile them. Instead of adding to the sanctity of the occasion, they detracted from it, like Judas at the last Passover that Jesus celebrated with His disciples" (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor).

Instead of feeding the flock as faithful pastors and teachers should (I Pet. 5:1-3), these false teachers were "feeding themselves without fear" (Jude 1:12). They were using God's people for their own advantage. While ministers of the gospel should be supported (I Cor. 9:14; I Tim. 5:17,18), they should be more concerned about

faithfully preaching the Word (II Tim. 4:2) than about amassing wealth or accumulating favors from others through flattery (Jude 1:16).

Jude used several vivid pictures to describe these false teachers. They were like clouds without rain, promising much but giving nothing. They were like dead trees, having no fruit to offer. Besides being fruitless, they were rootless, "twice dead, plucked up

by the roots" (v. 12). These teachers were like "raging waves" (v. 13) because "their mouth speaketh great swelling words" (v. 16).

They are described as "wandering stars" (v. 13), probably a reference to shooting stars (meteors), which appear ever so briefly never to be seen again.

These apostate teachers were "murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts" (v. 16). Their future was bleak because what awaited them was "the blackness of darkness for ever" (v. 13). Just as "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12) awaits the unbelieving, so it would be for these blind guides.

CONSECRATED LIVING (Jude 1:17-23)

9. True Christians can be recognized by their productive lives. What "fruit" can rightly be expected in the lives of genuine followers of Christ?

A good place to start is the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22, 23: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." There are other important tasks of the Christian life such as evangelism, prayer, hospitality, worship, stewardship, benevolence, and leadership. Able body Christians show fruit by earning their own livelihood to avoid being a burden to others (2 Thessalonians 3:6-14). Undoubtedly your class can think of others to add to this list.

10. How do we know that the false teachers did not have the Spirit of God (vs. 17-19)?

Jude called upon his readers to remember what the "apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" had previously said concerning false teachers. One of the reasons the apostates were mockers was that they wanted to "walk after their own ungodly lusts." Verse 18 is very similar to II Peter 3:3, where the mockers are described as scoffing at the promise of Christ's return. Here the mocking is more generalized, since the false teachers were mocking other truths of God's Word.

The word "separate" in verse 19 means "to cause division," which is certainly what these servants of Satan were doing. They were also "sensual," or worldly. Of course, the reason these men were this way was that they were devoid of the Spirit. Had they been filled with God's Spirit, they would have produced the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23), the very opposite of the actions of these heretics. Just because a person claims to have the Holy Spirit does not mean he does. Concerning false prophets Christ said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20).

11. What attitudes are we to have when attempting to rescue the perishing (vs. 20-23)?

Instead of being led astray by false teaching, Jude's readers were exhorted to grow in their faith. Faith was used earlier to refer to a body of doctrine (v. 3), but in verse 20 "faith" likely refers to personal faith development.

Likewise, Christians need to pray in the Holy Spirit. Since Jude did not explain what he meant by this exhortation, he could have meant being led by the Spirit or that the Spirit assists us in our prayers by interceding for us (Rom. 8:26,27). "By ourselves, we know not how to pray as we ought, but there dwells within One who makes intercession for us with unutterable groanings, intercession which is in accordance with the will of God" (Coder, Jude: The Acts of the Apostates, Moody).

The exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God does not mean we can be separated from His love, for nothing can do that (Rom. 8:35-39); rather, Jude was encouraging his readers to abide in God's love. As Christ said, "if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (John 15:10).

"Looking for the mercy of our Lord" (Jude 1:21) is a reference to the Second Coming. For believers, it will be a time of mercy; for unbelievers, it will be a time of judgment.

Since the Lord has shown us mercy, we should have compassion on those who are still unsaved (v. 22). Since non-Christians are headed for hell, to rescue them from that fate is like plucking them out of the fire. However, those who seek to rescue the perishing must do so with caution, lest they too be tempted (Gal. 6:1). Keeping oneself from moral defilement is probably the idea behind the last phrase in our lesson text: "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." We need to remember that Jude advises us first to strengthen ourselves and our own faith, then to help others do the same for themselves and their faith.

CONCLUSION

In our lesson this week we have seen the dangers of false teachers who creep into the church and cause destruction in the body of believers. We are called to be on guard and to maintain a steadfast faith.

If we set ourselves to find them and expose them, we must use discernment (v. 20). First let us not make false accusations, for fellow believers who need to strengthen their faith may be at heart as loyal as we are. Second, we may become as divisive as the enemies are (v. 19). Third, we may become too critical, too judgmental, too disagreeable in lacking discernment between issues of doctrine and opinion. For those who need help in strengthening themselves in our most holy faith, Jude advises us to be helpers, not detectives and prosecutors.

No matter how hard we try, no matter how gentle we are, there will be some who will not accept the truth. The leadership of the church will have to deal with them as appropriate, from not allowing them to teach to, in extreme cases, actually disfellowshipping them. (See, for example, 1Corinthians 5; Titus 1:10, 11; 3:10, 11).

PRAYER

How good it is to have a clear record of the truth taught by Jesus and His apostles! Thank You, Father, for the security we find in our faith based on that truth. Keep us from unseemly pride, and make us humble helpers of fellow Christians in need of help. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Maintain steadfast faith—your own and that of your Christian brothers and sisters.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Our next lesson is about one of the most famous children of the Bible. Samuel was a child dedicated to God. Study background Scriptures 1 Samuel 1:1-2:10; Luke 1:46-55.

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