

Jude 1:8-13

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Just as the examples of sin and faithlessness previously described, the men who are corrupting Jude's readers will be judged by God. The false teachers will be punished for their deceptions, and to follow them will only lead to loss of reward and fellowship with God.

To this point Jude has made clear that sin has consequences for believers, even though each person who has believed has been fully accepted into God's family by His grace. Jude is fighting the false teaching that because God has fully accepted each person who has believed by His grace (John 3:14-16) they therefore have a license to sin without consequence (Jude 1:4). Jude does not counter God's grace; it is true that God is faithful to those who are His, regardless of their behavior (2 Timothy 2:13).

But it is not true that sin has no effect; the wages (or consequences) of sin are death (Romans 6:23). Death is separation, and a believer walking in willful sin separates them from fellowship with God, themselves, and others. Instead of exhibiting fruits of the Spirit, we exhibit deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-24).

In the previous section Jude highlighted several biblical instances that illustrate that God's judgment applies to all sin, wherever it occurs. It applies to His people, Israel (Jude 1:5). It applies to angelic beings (Jude 1:6). And it applies to the ungodly (Jude 1:7). Now Jude equates the attitude and actions of the ungodly interlopers who have crept into the fellowship of believers with those of the biblical examples in the prior verses:

Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties (v 8).

The Greek word translated *dreaming* is in the middle voice, which indicates something acting upon itself. The idea seems to be that the ungodly interlopers are *dreaming* up their own stories rather than seeking and following the truth. In this manner they are behaving *in the same way* as the sinful people in the biblical examples of what-not-to-do, from verses 5-7. Those who follow paths of unrighteousness are those who follow false imaginations, rather than seeing and seeking what is true. Scripture indicates that truth is all around us, if we are willing to see, and those who refuse end up with darkened hearts (Romans 1:20-21).

Because these ungodly men follow these false speculations, they exhibit three negative behaviors:

- *defile the flesh*
- *reject authority*
- *revile angelic majesties*

In verses 9-13 it appears that Jude illustrates these three fleshly and ungodly characteristics in reverse order. First he addresses the arrogance of the ungodly interlopers in reviling *angelic majesties*, noting as follows:

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (v 9).

We can infer from this statement and the context of Jude countering people who advocated for licentiousness that these ungodly folks were sinning openly and asserting that Satan and his realm had no affect upon them. Jude counters, noting that even *Michael the archangel* did not rely upon his own strength when he *disputed with the devil* over the *body of Moses*.

The archangel *Michael* did not assert his own authority, but relied upon the strength and power of God, saying "*The Lord rebuke you.*" The reason Satan has no power over believers is because they are protected by God. The inference here is that if believers move out from under that protection and seek to stand on their own, then they are opening themselves to being attacked and harmed by the evil one. This idea is supported elsewhere in scripture, such as this passage from 1 Peter:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith."
(1 Peter 5:8-9a)

The inference of this verse from 1 Peter is that if believers walk in faith, when they resist Satan he will flee, but those who succumb can be devoured by him, meaning he can lead them into adverse and harmful consequences.

The "arch" in *archangel* derives from the Greek word "archo" which means to be chief or to reign. The angel Michael is noted in Daniel 10:13 as "one of the chief princes" which indicates that the angels are organized into a ruling hierarchy. In the story of Daniel 10, Michael is contending with a demonic ruler over Persia. The fact that holy angels contend with evil ones fits Jude's exhortation for his followers to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 1:3).

This episode of Michael disputing with Satan over the body of Moses is not from the biblical account, but likely comes from Jewish oral tradition. Some early Christian writers cite an extrabiblical writing called The Assumption of Moses as a source for the episode. Thus Jude appeals both to biblical as well as historical examples to make his point that to *revile angelic majesties* is foolish and ungodly.

Jude now appears to move to the middle point in the three allegations of ungodliness: these ungodly people who need to be resisted *reject authority*. Jude writes:

But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. (v 10).

The arrogance of *these men* who advocate that God's grace leads to licentiousness is leading them to destruction. Therefore they should be resisted, lest they lead others to follow. They have three attributes/consequences that seem to fall under the banner of resisting authority:

- they *revile the things which they do not understand*
- they ignore their conscience, resisting following *the things they know by instinct*, and
- they are *by these things* thusly *destroyed*

Rather than admit what they do and do not know, they *revile the things which they do not understand*. In context this would seem to apply to the spiritual realm. It would seem since they are practicing and advocating for licentiousness, these ungodly men are flaunting that Satan's realm of evil will have no effect upon them. In doing this they are placing themselves squarely into a place of being *destroyed*.

That they might be able to appeal to ignorance is swatted away; these are things that humans *know by instinct*. To know by instinct is to know *like unreasoning animals*. Any human senses that there are spiritual forces that are not to be trifled with. They know this even without knowledge, so they are without excuse. They are simply being arrogant and rejecting authority. Jude gives three examples of leaders who should have known better, but rejected spiritual authority: Cain, Balaam, and Korah:

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah (v 11).

Cain was the oldest son of Adam and Eve, and therefore ought to have been the heir to the family leadership. But he forsook his leadership when he succumbed to sin, falling into jealousy and murdering his brother rather than taking responsibility to bring a pleasing sacrifice to God on His terms (Genesis 4:5-12). God judged Cain for his disobedience and lack of leadership, causing him to wander in the land (Genesis 4:13-14).

Balaam was a prophet of God that desired to be in God's good graces by speaking only what was prophetically true, while also collecting payment from the king of Moab for bringing destruction on the people of Israel. Balaam gave advice to the king of Moab to tempt the men of Israel with Moabite women, knowing God would judge them for their sin (Revelation 2:14). Because of his duplicity and refusal to properly exercise his authority, God judged Balaam through Joshua (Joshua 13:22). No one can serve two masters; we serve either God or the things of the world (Matthew 6:24).

Korah was a leading Levite who led a rebellion against the authority of Moses. As a result of his rebellion, God caused the earth to open up and swallow he and his followers, along with their households (Numbers 16:27-32). God had designated Moses as Israel's leader, so when Korah defied Moses he was defying God. Clearly this was greatly displeasing to God.

These examples of abuse and reviling of authority make the point that disrespecting spiritual authority is a very bad idea, and something that ought to be resisted. Jude finishes by elaborating on the first in the list of immoral behavior, that they *defile the flesh*.

These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever (vv 12-13).

The phrase *love feasts* translates a single Greek word, “agapais.” It refers to a practice of early Christians gathering for a communal meal. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul refers to such a gathering, encouraging the believers in Corinth to conduct it in an orderly manner, and not allow factions to occur (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). The ungodly people Jude addresses who advocate licentiousness are like *hidden reefs* at these love feasts. A hidden reef is a danger to a ship. If the crew fails to see it, the ship can hit the reef and sink. In like manner, if these licentious interlopers are not identified and corrected, they can cause the entire group to fall into sin.

The particular behavior of the licentious participants is that they *feast without fear, caring for themselves*. The *fear* here would likely refer to fear of God, fear of the negative consequence of sin, leading to behavior that helps us avoid sin. The proper view of sin is shown in Exodus 20, when Israel was receiving the Ten Commandments. They asked Moses to please ask God to stop speaking to them, lest they die (Exodus 20:19). They were afraid to die, as is normal for humans. God was pleased with their request, but then told them they should not fear dying so much as they should fear falling into sin (Exodus 19:20).

The phrase *caring for themselves* indicates that the ungodly participants are pursuing their own pleasures, without regard to their adverse impact on others. Paul was adamant to say that all things were lawful for him, but not all things were profitable and not all things edified others (1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23). Paul further asserted that whatever liberty we have, it is important not to use that liberty in a manner that causes others to sin (1 Corinthians 8:9). Jude is displaying that these ungodly people whom his readers ought to resist do not care for others. Even if their behavior is not sin to them, they are not taking into account the potential adverse impact on others.

Jude now sets forth a list of examples that show that the ungodly *hidden reefs* that pose a threat to the believing community are of no positive use to them. They are like:

- *clouds without water, carried along by winds;*
- *autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;*
- *wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam;*
- *wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever*

The characteristic of *clouds without water, carried along by winds* is the first illustration of uselessness. In an agricultural society, a cloud without rain only serves to block the sunlight, which is of no use in producing fruit. Such a cloud has no self-determination, it simply blows wherever the wind takes it. In like manner, these ungodly people bring no usefulness to the group, and are simply driven along by their appetites.

The characteristic of *autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted* brings to mind a tree in harvest time that instead of bearing fruit is bare. Not only is it bare, without fruit, it is also *doubly dead*. The Greek word translated *doubly* is usually rendered “twice.” This would indicate that these ungodly people are likely those who have been given new life in Christ through His grace, and now are living as though they are dead in sin.

Paul warns of this throughout his writings, asking believers who have escaped the death and slavery of sin through God’s grace why we would want to go back into it (Romans 6:12-16). That these people are *uprooted* might indicate that they have been hardened past the point of repentance. Scripture warns that if we resist the Holy Spirit, our conscience can be seared (1 Timothy 4:2). A believer’s window of repentance can close (Hebrews 6:4-6).

The characteristic of *wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam* brings to mind an image of an undisciplined force that is of no use to anyone, but which might create chaos and wreak havoc. They are like the backsliding believers described by Paul:

“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*”
(Philippians 3:18-19)

The sinful, licentious behavior of the ungodly among those to whom Jude writes demonstrate their *shame* at living in sin. Their flaunting of God’s grace and indulging in sin will inevitably lead where sin always leads—to destruction. Their shame is as evident as the foam from the splash of the waves.

The last illustration is that the ungodly are like *wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever*. The Greek word translated as *black* appears as a description of the environment upon Mount Sinai, and is there rendered as “gloom” (Hebrews 12:18). The Greek word translated *wandering* is “planetes” from which we get the English word “planet.” The planets wander through the night sky, while the stars are predictable and dependable in their positioning.

This illustration of the ungodly among Jude’s recipients might refer to wandering planets that appear aimless and without order. Scripture also uses the term *star* to refer to angelic beings, as in Revelation 9:1, 12:14. Jesus refers to Himself as “the bright morning star.” So it is possible that this phrase *wandering stars* hearkens back to the illustration of verse 6, of angelic beings that did not keep their proper abode and therefore suffered judgement.

The phrase *black darkness has been reserved forever* applies to the *wandering stars*. Believers cannot be separated from God or from His love (Romans 8:16, 31-37). However, believers can experience “outer darkness” in the sense of losing honor, as in Jesus’s parable in Matthew 8, where the “sons of the kingdom” are in “outer darkness.” In that parable, Jesus contrasts “sons of the kingdom” (believing Jews, as explained in Matthew 13:38) who are in “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12) with Gentiles who are seated at the place of honor along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Jesus’s kingdom that is to come.

The picture is of an honor banquet, where the seat of honor is populated with Gentiles while the sons of the kingdom (faithful Jews) are in “outer darkness.” Jesus uses this hyperbolic description to illustrate that it will be those who exhibit faith who will be honored in the kingdom that is to come. The “outer darkness” in this parable refers to people not even invited to the banquet. The point Jesus is making is that the faith of the Roman centurion (Matthew 8:10) will bring greater honor in His kingdom than any amount of religious observance. The illustration could apply that those who sink into the ways of the world will only gain the rewards of the world, and will be excluded from the benefits and honors from faithful living.

Biblical Text

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