

Born to Win

The Epistle of Jude

by Ronald L. Dart

Here's a little background from the *Holman Bible Dictionary* on the Book of Jude. It's called a:

Letter of exhortation to those who are “called” (Jude 1:1) and “beloved” (Jude 1:3, 1:17, 1:20), to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Simultaneously, it is a direct attack against the opponents of the gospel.

It's hard to imagine, isn't it, that there were *opponents* of the Gospel.

Following his negative description of the opponents, Jude concluded the letter by urging his readers to have attitudes and life-styles different from the opponents. Then he committed them to the Lord's safekeeping in one of the most beautiful benedictions in Holy Scripture (Jude 1:24–25).

The authorship of this little letter has traditionally been ascribed to Jude, the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3). Although the letter says nothing directly about the date, origin, or destination of the letter, it is generally thought that the book was written later than A.D. 60 and earlier than A.D. 100.

I think it was written before AD 70 because there is no hint, in any New Testament book, that the Temple was no longer there. And that would be *far too big* a thing to be overlooked. But Holman goes on to say:

This is because the content of the faith is clearly fixed (Jude 1:3) and the congregation is comprised of second-generation Christians (Jude 1:17). The recipients were most likely Jewish-Christians in Syria, known to have been a likely place for the kind of heresy the letter addresses.

What's interesting on a sidelight on this is that some of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament are translations into the Syriac language. There was a very strong movement off into Syria in the early days of the church. Holman continues:

The hard-hitting attack denounces the demoralizing faction that has slipped into the congregation (Jude 1:4 ,1:12). They are arrogant in theology; they boast of visions and revile

angelic beings (Jude 1:8–10). They are self-centered (Jude 1:4, 1:8, 1:15); they create divisions (Jude 1:16–19) and leave disappointment behind (Jude 1:12).

Jude, by use of a creative interpretation of Old Testament examples (some found in noncanonical sources), responds with two sets of three exhortations. [...] Jude is a helpful book, for it reminds us that God alone can safely bring believers through the hazardous environment. While false teachers may reject Christ's authority, Jesus is our Savior and Lord now and forevermore.

Now, I thought it's interesting because this rejection of Christ's authority is both old and new. There are some hard-core self-described Hebrew Roots types who (and I'm talking about now—twentieth century) who are beginning to call the New Testament an *addendum* and who seriously challenge the divinity of Christ. Some have gone so far as to reject the authority of the New Testament altogether, not realizing that the same arguments will, if they follow him far enough, lead to a rejection of the Old Testament, as well. They haven't got there yet. Just wait.

So, turning now to the Book of Jude itself. Jude, chapter one...well, there's *only* one chapter.

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹ Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

² Mercy unto you, and peace and love, be multiplied.

Jude was one of a class of people called the *desposyni* (δεσποσύνη). This was an important element in the early church and was for many years to follow. It's a term that refers to the relatives of Jesus. There's a difference of opinion as to whether he *had* any blood relatives or not but most everybody concludes that Mary had additional children after Jesus. They're his brothers, half-brothers, and they were quite influential among the saints. You could kind of understand that. I mean, if there was someone around who had known Jesus ever since he was a tot—you know, grew up with him, had considered him an older brother; and they were maybe five, six years under him (no, it wouldn't have been even that much under him, probably)—those people would have been in demand. “What did he say? What did he do? How did he act?” I can think of a jillion questions I would ask Jude about Christ. Well, he goes on to say:

Jude 1

KJ2000

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

So the faith, by this time, is firmly established. “The common salvation” is an interesting expression. It calls to mind something that Peter said in one of his speeches recorded in Acts. Chapter four, verse eleven, he said:

Acts 4

KJV

¹¹ This [*Jesus*] is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

What was that name? In the Book of Acts, and in his gospel, Luke records it as *Iesous* (Ἰησοῦς). It's commonly transcribed from the Greek into English as "Jesus". Now, I've noticed some people beginning to close a prayer with words like "in the name of your son" in such a way that it appears to me that they're avoiding the name of Jesus. It's not, you know, all that common but I have encountered it here and there. Others insist on using the name of *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua* as though they are somehow better than the Greek *Iesous*. One would think that if that were the case you would see it in the Greek gospels and letters. You realize what I'm saying here? That if indeed it was important—if indeed *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua* or whatever it ought to be is better to use because it's Hebrew than the Greek word *Iesous*—you would find it shot all through the New Testament. Now, even in the New Testament when the reference is to Joshua the servant of Moses the name is rendered and the spelling is exactly the same as *Iesous*. Now, what has developed among some people is what I frankly think is borderline superstition about the Hebrew language. Hebrew is a *human* tongue; it is as corrupt as Greek and English. There's nothing sacred about it. Zephaniah, for example, in chapter three, verse nine says that in the future (way off in *our* future):

Zephaniah 3

KJV

⁹ For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

Why is that important? Well, it was written in Hebrew and it suggests that Hebrew is not a pure language. It is called (in Scripture, by the way) a Canaanite language. Isaiah 19, verse 18:

Isaiah 19

KJV

¹⁸ In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction.

...and so on. Now, contextually, the language of Canaan here is *Hebrew* and I think—historically, archaeologically, linguistically—that will prove to be true. You have the Semitic family of languages. One of those languages was Hebrew and it was essentially a Canaanite tongue.

Now, at one level the Hebrew Roots movement (and there's a difference—a distinction—between Hebrew Roots movements and Messianic synagogues and so forth) as I say, at one level the Hebrew Roots movement is a harmless fascination with things Jewish. At another level it threatens the foundations of the Christian faith and reproduces the heresy that provoked the Jerusalem Conference and destroyed the Galatian church, among others. And perhaps the most important thing to know about it is this: the roots of the church are not Hebrew. Nor are they dependent upon any language, any set of customs, nor any structure of law. I know that's a little spooky for some people, but stay with me, I'm talking about the roots. For the most part, the practitioners of Hebrew Roots are ignorant of the fundamental principles of linguistics (but that's another subject for another day). Where are the roots of the church? 1 Corinthians, chapter three, verse ten:

1 Corinthians 3

KJ2000

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon.

¹¹ For no other foundation can a man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It is not the language Jesus spoke that's the foundation. It's not Hebrew; it's not Greek; it's not any customs or any set of customs nor even *the Law*, for that matter, that forms the foundation. The foundation is none other than Jesus Christ, and Paul did not write here in 1 Corinthians (they were Greeks, by the way) he did not write in this context "*Yeshua Mashiach*". He wrote "*Iesous Christos*". And this is precisely the danger posed by the toxic branches of the Hebrew Roots. It starts down a road which, in effect, paganizes the name of the Savior in Greek. And because they assume that the New Testament was corrupted (generally they think it was corrupted by the Catholic Church—which is loaded with historic problems there if you take that route) because they do this they threaten the integrity of the faith. For (follow me carefully on this) if the New Testament could have been corrupted to the extent of *changing the names of Jesus* then there is no way to trust any part of it. So what really does lie at the root of all this? Well, let's go back to verse three of Jude:

Jude 1

KJ2000

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

There's a real irony in this verse, in that almost every new guru that comes down off the mountains cites this verse before he starts trashing the faith held by his audience. In other words, the idea is "I went up this mountain I got from the Lord the faith once delivered from the saints and what *you* have has been corrupted and become paganized down through all the generations. So I'm trying to restore the faith once delivered to the saints." Jude's readers, though, are exhorted to hang on to what they have—to earnestly contend for it. The Greek word for that is *epagónizomai* (ἐπαγωνίζομαι)—the word from which we get the word "agonize". He wants you to really seriously, earnestly agonize for the faith that was once delivered to the church.

Now, we aren't all that deep into church history and already challenges to the faith are cropping up like weeds in the garden. At least these people knew the Apostles, but that didn't keep some folks from challenging the Apostles. You know, for us, we'd almost be afraid to ask Peter a serious question for fear that we'd be in trouble. He's an apostle and he knows all this stuff; how can we question him? But we saw the believing Pharisees in Acts and Galatians do precisely that and that was a lot earlier than this letter. Coming back now to Jude, verse four. You've got to be careful to earnestly contend for the faith:

Jude 1

NIV

⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. [...]

Man, you talk about a loaded sentence! There is a lot in there. The fact that their condemnation was written about long ago goes must go clean back into the prophets. And the fact that they have *secretly* slipped in. They haven't honestly stood up. They have sort of sidled in amongst you Capel and they are:

Jude 1

NIV

⁴ [...] They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.

Do you realize how strong this is? “Godless men” “secretly slipped in” who “changed grace into a license for immorality.” I mean, that’s not an unfamiliar theme in today’s churches of people who trash the Law, dismiss the Law—they say the whole thing was done away at the cross, there is nothing left but grace. And, frankly, the result of it seems to be a license for immorality for some people. How on earth did they manage to combine *grace* with the *denial* of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Now consider this carefully: these men did not look like what they really were. They may not even have realized what they were doing. And did you catch that last sentence? What do we know about what happened to those people who did not believe. Well, the guys in their sermons in the New Testament—when they go back and recount the history of Israel—will tell us the story. And you can easily go back in the Book of Numbers, in particular, and read *exactly* what happened to the people who just wouldn’t believe. They got out of Egypt, they had all the miracles they walked dry-shod across the bottom of the Red Sea, and they ended up *dying in the wilderness* because they would not trust God to take them on into the land. It’s powerful stuff, to see that happening.

You know, it’s something which we’ve always had to remember—the Parable of the Tares [Matthew 13:24–30] comes to mind. Not everyone who comes among us is *one of us*. The Parable of the Tares—you know, the sower went out and sowed a good crop of wheat and what have you in his fields. And an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. And the tares grew up along with it and the servants came to the master and said, “Oh, some evil person has sold tares among your wheat. Shall we go up and gather them up?” (Now, this is really important.) The master said, “No. Let them both grow together until the harvest.” So it’s painful. But there is no suggestion of excommunication anywhere in all of this. You don’t go in there and try to root these people up. Who knows, you may be wrong. It may not be tares, it may be just some person is just off-base for the time being. The church cannot be protected by means of excommunication and shunning people. The church is protected by *teaching the faith*, teaching the truth, teaching the Bible. Now Jude goes on to give us yet another example.

Jude 1

KJ2000

⁶ And the angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

⁷ Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after unnatural lust, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Sexual immorality is not far from this sort of thing because the foundations of morality are destroyed. And this is a funny thing: of all the sins of the flesh that men might be tempted by—temptation to steal, the temptation to lie, the temptation for all these things—one of the things we can’t seem to get away from is our *sex drive*. And once the foundations of morality are taken away, it will not be far behind before things start happening that should not happen. So here are the examples laid out for us. And here, just as it was in the Parable of the Tares, the result is fire. They are destroyed.

Jude 1

KJ2000

⁸ Likewise also these *filthy* dreamers [...]

What an interesting expression that is.

Jude 1

KJV

⁸ [...] defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

I have a sad feeling when I read this because I've seen it happen again and again and again. That someone comes into a congregation, or someone who has been a congregation for some time, decides to begin to speak evil of leadership behind their back. You know, go to whoever it is they have a problem with and sit down and talk it over and say, "I have a problem with this." They will talk about them behind their back—undercut them. And you read between the lines in Paul's epistles and you can see it happen to him again and again and again. People came in and they *lied* about him. They attributed to him things that he had never said. They attributed to him things he had never done. When people go around talking about people behind their back—this is what he's talking about here. Behind-the-back sniping is endemic in this sort of thing.

Jude 1

KJ2000

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

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.

In other words, they do what the flesh says, "let's go do", and they will speak evil of things they don't even understand. Whereas Michael the Archangel, who is *fighting with the devil* wouldn't do that—which I think is fascinating.

Jude 1

KJV

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 Core.

Now, the "error of Balaam" is easy enough to pull out of the scriptures; it's very obvious what he was doing. He was actually so enamored with the money he had been offered that he was fudging on every corner to be able to go out there and curse Israel if he could (although he didn't do it—couldn't do it). The "gainsaying of Core [*Korah*]?" Well, that's well testified in a Book of Numbers—we don't need to worry too much about what was wrong there. But the "way of Cain" is not quite that easy. There are two errors of Cain that are evident when you read the account. One is that he didn't follow instructions, and the other is, when he's faced down with his sin, instead of accepting it and repenting he justifies himself. That's a *big* mistake. The story is told in Genesis, chapter four, and it might be worth taking a moment to just read back through the story of Cain to see if we can understand what Jude is driving at here. Genesis four, verse one:

Genesis 4

NIV

¹ Adam [lay with] his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."

² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,

⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Now, before I go on from this I want to see if I can clear up a misconception that keeps cropping up. There are those who believe that the reason for the problem with Cain's offering is he was not offering

according to law—that it was supposed to be a blood offering, supposed to be an animal, that he apparently should have gone and traded out for an animal and given that to God. But that’s not true. There were meal offerings, there were grain offerings. It was not wrong to offer from the crops of the field to God. Something else is not right here other than the fact. It was not a matter of law, no laws are spoken of, no laws are revealed. The two guys brought an offering of *what they had* to God. The problem was not the offering, the problem was *the man and his heart*. Be sure you have that straight. And you can see the result. Cain was angry and his face was downcast.

Genesis 4

NIV

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?”

⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must [master] it.”

Notice it’s not over. He’s made a mistake. He’s got a problem. He’s got to overcome it. And that’s what God expects of him.

Genesis 4

NIV

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Now, you can’t say on this that this was impulsive. You can’t say that, well, they were having an argument and he got carried away. No, no, he invited him out into the field. This was a pre-meditated murder.

Genesis 4

NIV

⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. [*He lied.*] “Am I my brother’s keeper?” [*Snotty.*]

¹⁰ The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.

¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

What a tragic story. The first man ever born of a woman murdered the second man born of a woman. We didn’t get off to a very good start as a species, did we? So, when you say they ran greedily after the “error of Balaam”, if they have gone in the “way of Cain” what are we talking about? Well, what I can see here is an attitude toward God—a resentful attitude toward God—that only found expression because he couldn’t kill God in killing his brother. But in fact he hated God. And it is mindful of what Jesus would say later:

John 15

KJ2000

²⁵ But this comes to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

And I just have to think that Cain was so certain of his own rightness that when God says, “No, no, no, you’re not right”, he *hated* God for it. Now, Jude will go on in verse 12 to say:

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹² [People like this] are spots in your love feasts, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: [...]

I think he has to be here talking about the people who come to the feast. They sit across the table from you they eat your food, though they are:

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹² [...] clouds they are without water, carried about by winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

¹³ Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; [...]

You know, it almost sounds like, at this point, he’s transitioning into...spirits. Because he calls them:

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹³ [...] wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

Jude doesn’t seem to tell us what to *do* about these people. There is no fellowship option, and there are people who come among us who are, in God’s eyes, spots. They’re not bearing any fruit. They are dried up or they’re like raging waves of the sea—they’re angry—they foam out their own anger and shame. And he says “I’m sorry, they’re wandering like wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” Eventually they’ll be dead...forever.

It seems to me that, even though there is no dis-fellowship option and we’re not told what to do about these people, it seems obvious that a good course of action is to *stay away from them*—give them wide berth. That’s even what Paul told the Corinthians to do about a man who was engaged in sin. He said just don’t have anything to do with him.

1 Corinthians 5

KJ2000

⁵ To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Don’t eat with him, don’t spent time with him, so he can become ashamed. And in that case it worked. He was ashamed and he turned around and came back. You don’t ever need to fear refusing to fellowship with people who are *in this spirit*. Cut them off—with love—but stay away from. Verse fourteen:

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹⁴ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints,

¹⁵ To execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly among them of all their

ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

Wow! This is really strong stuff.

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹⁶ These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling words, holding men in admiration for the sake of advantage.

I read that and I think, “Oh, politics is ever with us.” You know, looking around today and this particular—this is the silliest political season I have ever seen, it is the *weirdest* I have ever seen, and kind of, in some ways, the most frightening I’ve ever seen. It’s almost as though there’s a *spirit* in the world at large. And here we are in the church, the same sort of thing going on as people politick. Why. Well, Jude goes on to say:

Jude 1

KJ2000

¹⁷ But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by 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.

This verse 17 here is the reason Holman suggests that those who got his letter were second-generation Christians. They weren’t the ones who actually saw it themselves (they heard it from the Apostles, though). He said:

Jude 1

KJ2000

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

That’s really interesting because he says first of all they don’t have the Spirit of God—they are unconverted, even though they appear to be members of the church and with you and eating your festivals and all is kind of stuff. But there are people who are of a *separatist mentality*. They tend to separate themselves and oftentimes carve out other people to go with them. Separatist is the meaning of the word “Pharisee”. They are Pharisees of a sort—they aim to carve up a group of people for themselves. But Jude tells us what will be the end of it all. And that’s why Paul warns the folks to *stay away* from people like this whenever he says to them, “Look. Take note of those people who cause divisions among you and avoid them. Stay away from them.” [See Romans 16:17.] There’s a chance they might be ashamed and be drawn back from what they’re doing. Verse twenty:

Jude 1

KJ2000

²⁰ But you, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

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

I think this is kind of interesting, in a way. He says “Build up your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” You remember that statement that Paul made that we don’t really know how to pray like we should, but the *spirit itself* makes intercession for us with groanings beyond utterance [Romans 8:26].

That a lot of time we have to just be quiet and let the Holy Spirit speak for us, and keep ourselves in the love of God and look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and to eternal life.

Jude 1

KJ2000

²² And on 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.

Maybe, maybe there are some who have gone a little way down this road who can be brought back with love. The expression “pulling them out of the fire” is frightening—sobering to say the least. But I do know one thing: Love is stronger than death and love has a power to do things that argument simply cannot do. I once made the expression that some people, I think, don’t realize that you can actually *love* some people into the church. A very good friend of mine, his wife was not in the church for a year or so after he was. And someone asked her about that and she said, “You know, what happened to me is one day I woke up in the morning and I thought about it and I realized all my friends were in the church and I was not.” They all treated her with love. They all, you know, treated her like one of them and their love for her finally drew her into the faith...and she died in the faith. So I think we need to keep that in mind—that there are people we need to stay away from, but our attitudes should never ever be that of enemies. Love can pull us together.

Jude 1

KJ2000

²⁴ Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

²⁵ To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

So much for Brother Jude. You might want to spend a little time in prayer over this one. And we’ll see you again next week.

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