

MORE ANGELS

We will start to move now from “Who is Jude?” to “What does Jude have to tell us?” His message has several layers, and they are all intertwined in this short treatise. Naturally I need to say everything all at once. But I cannot talk fast enough to do that. I have to break it down into sections, artificial as that will sometimes seem. The problem is, we do not understand the situation Jude was facing unless we do a bit of digging. Even then, some of it will be by deduction and guesswork. We do that all the time, of course. What’s really going on with our children? What did my wife (husband) actually mean by that remark? Is this undercurrent I feel at the office just my imagination? It’s endless. And when the hints and clues are two thousand years old? Well, in some ways, that’s easier because it’s no longer changing minute by minute. On the other hand, if we are going to end up concluding that Jude is telling us things still relevant today, we better try our best to understand what was going on when he wrote to us.

Today I want to tell you a bit about Jude’s rather surprising perspective – an approach that very nearly got him kicked out of the New Testament. That is, it nearly prevented him from getting included in the first place, and afterward some of our most influential leaders thought it was a bad mistake to call the Book of Jude canon scripture.

Here is the core of it: Jude mentions well-known stories and traditions from the Old Testament – the Exodus from Egypt; the story of Balaam; Korah’s rebellion. But he does not quote or directly refer to any of the accepted biblical writings. Surprisingly, he does take material from First Enoch, as if it were genuine biblical prophecy – that is, as if First Enoch were as authoritative as a biblical writing. He also mentions a dispute between the Archangel Michael and the Devil over who gets possession of Moses’ body. This non-biblical story comes from a writing known as “The Assumption of Moses,” a writing that has been lost to us, though several times it was mentioned by ancient sources. We think it may have been part of The Testament of Moses, a book which tells of Moses’ last instructions to Joshua just before he died. Only, The Testament of Moses breaks off in mid-sentence, and the remainder, which may have contained The Assumption of Moses, has never been found.

Back to the point. Jude relies on First Enoch and on The Assumption of Moses. Think about it: If you accept Jude into the New Testament canon, and Jude, as canon scripture, uses non-canonical writings as authoritative, that sets precedent of enormous proportions. It means there are important writings outside the Bible! The borders suddenly got thin and cannot keep truth in – or out. We suddenly jump from an orthodox bastion of certainty ... to a far more human effort to search, to want to know, to try to understand what's going on. If Jude is canon scripture and Jude uses non-canonical sources as authoritative, then how do we know where all the legends and mythology end and the truth begins? Indeed, none of you would accept a good deal of the material in First Enoch as historical, factual, or accurate. Yet from the Bible *itself* we have precedent for not considering the Bible to be the only source of truth.

Now, you may have missed this little earthquake, but earlier Christians did not. Bede the Venerable (673-735 A.D.) was still trying to fathom it. Talking about the Book of Jude, he writes:

The Book of Enoch, from which this quotation is taken, belongs to the Apocrypha, not because the sayings of that prophet are of no value or because they are false but because the book which circulates under his name was not really written by him but was put out by someone else who used his name. For if it were genuine, it would not contain anything contrary to sound doctrine. But as a matter of fact it contains any number of incredible things about giants, who had angels instead of men as fathers, and which are clearly lies. Indeed, it was precisely because Jude quotes him that for a long time his letter was rejected by many as being uncanonical. Nevertheless it deserves to be included in the canon because of its author, its antiquity, and the way in which it has been used, and particularly because this passage which Jude takes from Enoch is not in itself apocryphal or dubious but is rather notable for the clarity with which it testifies to the true light.

If you had trouble with Bede's double talk: He claims that Enoch was a great prophet but that the book bearing his name was written by a scurrilous liar; however, Jude somehow managed to glean from this

wretched book a kernel containing the pure essence of truth and light. Therefore, all is well.

Possibly Bede thought he had cleared it all up. But the more I read what he said, the more I cannot tell whether he was pedaling forward or backward. In any case, it is no modern theory or realization that there are a lot of ancient manuscripts which were not written by the person the manuscript claims wrote them – and that some of these writings do not contain the unvarnished truth. Just to keep it more complicated, it is now clear that pseudonymous books – that is, a book written in honor of a famous person, or as if that famous person had written it – were not considered wrong or deceitful in ancient times. It may be that the designation was given in humility and with appreciation for the person named. In any case, between thirteen and fifteen of our twenty-seven New Testament books were not written by the person who seems to be the author. That does not imply that the people who wrote these books were silly or unfaithful or any the less worth reading. And all the other authors whose names we do know – are they perfect? Do they ever make mistakes? Do we really live in a world where some people do not make *any* mistakes?

We are, I hope, incredibly grateful for those who labored to bring us the Message. And especially for those who did it so well that the Christian community ended up approving of their writings so much that they were put in a collection of writings called canon scripture – the Bible. I keep on reading them, including Jude. But unlike some of my friends, I am not under obligation to believe everything they say. I *am* under obligation to listen to and obey whatever the Holy Spirit makes clear to me – including what reaches mind, heart, and soul when I am reading the Bible.

Augustine (354-430 A.D.), three hundred years before Bede, was also troubled by the Book of Jude, but I think he stays more honest: “Does not the canonical epistle of Jude the apostle openly declare that Enoch spoke as a prophet? It is true that his alleged writings have never been accepted as authoritative, either by Jews or Christians, but that is because their extreme antiquity makes us afraid of handing out as authentic works those which may be forgeries.” (*The City of God*, 18:38)

For Augustine, the man Enoch was of great antiquity, being in the seventh generation from Creation – son of Jared, and father of Methuselah. But Augustine does not trust the book which bears his name. Augustine

leaves it at that, and doesn't try to explain why the Book of Jude is in the Bible or why Jude quotes from First Enoch. What Augustine could not have known was that First Enoch was part of the growing apocalyptic movement between the testaments – written between 200 and 100 B.C., not between 6000 and 5000 B.C. Life had gone from bad to impossible, and First Enoch declares clearly, and generations before the birth of Jesus, that God will send a Messiah to save us. This Messiah has always existed, waiting for the proper time – glorious in power, and righteous beyond all the sin and evil of this world. It was a theme dear to the early Christians, and is still dear to every Christian who hates the suffering and evil in this world. But some of us have a slightly different expectation than what was pictured in apocalyptic scenes of 150 B.C. And we are still arguing about whether Jesus was “apocalyptic” and saw Himself as a Messiah like the one pictured in First Enoch. Nevertheless, Jude saw Him that way: the fulfillment of the Messianic expectation that was rampant in the first and second centuries *before* Jesus was born.

I, of course, would claim that Jude was wrong on this point. I am not a literalist, nor does inerrancy make any sense to me on any level. It is the make-believe of the frightened. Well, sometimes I am one of the frightened, but making up theories about how we cannot be wrong about anything does not comfort me. Jesus is the Messiah, and is far beyond anything imagined in First Enoch, but He really lived, and was not just imagined on paper. That is what comforts me!

So I do not imagine that Jude was right about everything, nor is that why I consider his writing so valuable. I like to know what he was thinking, and I realize that to some degree he reflects the perspective and beliefs of the early church. But where he gets valuable for me is when he tells us about the church, how it should live, and what he expects it to be like. We will get to that in the weeks ahead. But today we are mostly into the opinions and beliefs that Jude held, which I presume most of you do not share. Not only do I refrain from urging you to believe everything the way Jude believed it, I profoundly hope that you have very different understandings of what Creation is like and how things work here. We need to know where Jude was coming from, but that does not imply agreement. Had I lived when Jude lived, I would very likely have agreed with him on such matters. But that is no longer our world. Nor can *my* theology fit into the flat, two-dimensional constructs that Jude, through no fault of his own, held as a man in his own age.

From comments in Genesis 6:1-4, First Enoch develops a theology of fallen angels who consort with earth women (producing offspring who are giants) and who do much evil on earth. The evil is not just the lust; First Enoch seems even more concerned that the fallen angels are instructing humans in the ways of forbidden science: They are teaching them how to make swords and knives, and how to make cosmetics (eye shadow is particularly offensive). They are teaching them how to make jewelry, and how to process precious metals. They are showing them how to make writing materials, and how to use pen and ink. They are teaching them the art of magical medicine, and how to use plants and roots. They are teaching them the principles of alchemy, and how to understand the cycles of sun and moon and stars. It is all part of the evil which comes from eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This is all happening before the flood, you understand. Enoch is the grandfather of Noah. The flood, among other things, is what it takes to wipe out the race of giants that resulted from the angels mating with the daughters of men. The Book of Enoch says some of the giants were three hundred cubits in height. That is no dinky little Goliath. If a cubit is the length of a forearm, or about eighteen inches, then the giants were four hundred and fifty feet tall. And the stated problem is that it was impossible to keep them well fed, so they got hungry and turned mean. We love to tell scary stories, don't we? And that's okay – until people start confusing it with sound theology.

Now, if we were to take this as mythology and see the giants as symbolic of what happens when, in pride, we try to act like half-gods instead of like humans, then not being able to “feed” the giants of our lust for knowledge, wealth, and power might start to register again. Something about having a “tiger by the tail” – a variation on the story of the Tower of Babel. By the way, First Enoch seems particularly “modern” in its denunciation of sinners as economic exploiters, as political oppressors, as the *socially* unjust of the world.

Is Jude Jewish or Christian? Obviously he is a totally committed Christian, but what I mean is: Does he know and believe in Jesus as a very new and different sort of Messiah – the bringer of a very new and different truth to match the New WAY He invites us into? Because of Jesus, does Jude have a different expectation about God, about our Hope, about the nature and purpose of Heaven? Is Jesus truly the Savior, or does Jude think Jesus will save us by showing us yet again that Judaism was right all along: That we will be saved when we all

behave in righteousness, and according to God's laws. And that Jesus will come to right all the wrongs – kill off all the bad guys, and reward all the good guys – and we will have peace and joy at last because there will be no more evil. (Evil is only on the outside anyway, don't you know?) And that the Messiah is strong enough, and righteous enough, to finally get rid of all our enemies.

I was just wondering: Is Jude Jewish or Christian? Clearly he knows the stories of the Messiah that were told one hundred and fifty years before Jesus was born. They had it all figured out – what God was going to do and how God was going to do it – long before anybody had known Jesus, and long before anybody had experienced or known anything about the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, or Pentecost. In fact, most people are still reading and understanding the Book of Revelation as if it were just another First Enoch – second verse, same as the first. The coming of Jesus Christ – His life and death and resurrection – has not made one iota of difference in what we think the methods and motives of God are, or what we expect is going to happen? We had it all figured out before He came, and by God nobody is going to sell us any newfangled ideas about grace or transformation, or about gospel or love or new chances. Kill all the bastards, throw 'em in the Lake of Fire, and let's get on with the harps or whatever.

I should mention, I suppose, that in Jude's day, there was a growing movement within the church which believed that the church needed to separate itself altogether from Judaism. More of that next week, but some of Jude's approaches were his way of insisting that Christianity was thoroughly steeped in Jewish roots – in Jewish traditions and writings. That may have been why he went to First Enoch and The Assumption of Moses – to remind everybody about our Jewish connections. Doubtless it never crossed his mind that some who read his letter would no longer believe that science was evil, or that the angels were screwing our women, or that the Devil would try to claim Moses' body on the grounds that the physical was evil and only the spirit was worthy to go on. (Jude disagreed with this, of course, and, believing in the physical resurrection, he was reminding everybody that Michael was sent to rescue Moses' body from Satan and take it to Heaven.)

So anyway, Jude has all these opinions about fallen angels and about how evil is creeping back into the church. He assumes that all the true followers, if reminded, will see things in the same way he does.

Then they will band together and kick all the bad guys out of the church. Therefore much of his letter is describing what happened in the past when people were not faithful. He uses Jewish stories and history as an object lesson to threaten members of the current church with dire punishments if they do not stay faithful – meaning, right and righteous. And I suspect he means right and righteous *behavior*. When I talk about staying faithful, I mean TRUST: trusting God – trusting Jesus – for love, mercy, forgiveness, guidance ... and a future I cannot see. If you want to talk about the old variety of right and righteous, I'm out of here! I thank God every day that there is no justice, at least not by the old definitions. I wouldn't last ten seconds if we were going to go back to standards of perfection – standards of "justice" as that word is usually used and defined. If you want to talk about "the just shall live by faith" and by that you mean trusting in God's love for us, then that is a different matter. But that is the New Covenant, not like the Old Covenant.

We are talking about Jude, and I have a lot of appreciation for him, as you may yet discover in coming Sundays. But if Jude was the brother of Jesus, then I also need to say that one of us does not understand his brother. I don't think James understood his brother either. James and Jude may have ended up believing that Jesus was the Messiah, but they meant the old apocalyptic kind of Messiah. They never "got it." At least it doesn't sound like it from reading what they wrote. Jesus was too mind-bendingly new! Too far beyond all their traditions and expectations. At least that is my conclusion. They may have missed and loved their brother; they may have found a way back into the church He started; they may have tried to be as helpful and faithful as they knew how to be. But I think they never switched over to the Gospel. They were still "Law Men." And if that is true, then they were a greater threat to the Christian church they tried to serve than the very enemies they tried to warn the church against. For if you take the church away from the Gospel and back to the Law, that will destroy it more surely than all of us sinners with all of our flaws and errors and mistakes all put together. As long as grace flows, and as long as we trust Him and not ourselves, there is still hope for community, growth, repentance, forgiveness. We cannot make a mistake so big that Jesus cannot fix it. But if we go back to righteousness, and judgment, and who is deserving, and how much good do we have to do to earn our way into the Kingdom or into His love and approval, then all is lost – all love is pretense, and all hope is laced with fear and guilt too heavy to bear.

Look around you. Are you sitting in the midst of a perfect people? Will you be shocked and horrified – and will it dash your faith in Jesus and your expectations for the church – if somebody here makes a bad mistake? Or does something really selfish? Or does something that brings evil or destruction in its wake? I have reminded you, from time to time, that we are a fellowship of sinners. The well have no need of a physician, as Jesus said. And the righteous have no need of a Savior. But we are not just a fellowship of sinners. We are a fellowship of *forgiven* sinners. Even more to the point, we are a fellowship of *repentant* sinners.

Somewhere between the old righteousness and the new grace, there is the possibility for being accepted and repentant sinners – those who are far from perfect, yet who know themselves already loved and blessed and guided. It is a strange, in-between place that Jesus has created for us, a place nobody ever imagined or heard of until He came. To this day, most people bounce back and forth between the extremes: We cannot imagine a place where we pretend nothing, yet we are in no way content to stay the way we are. On our own power and authority, we cannot stay in this new place; it requires a Savior – a Savior willing to stay with us, both personally and continually. On the other hand, we do have such a Savior.

Whether Jude realized this new realm or not, he will try to help us with the repentance part. What has been happening to the church is not okay with him. I hope by the end of next Sunday, it will not be okay with you either. Being an unforgiven sinner – an unrepentant sinner – is the antithesis of the Christian Life. Yet it is being taught everywhere in our time, even by the church itself: unconditional love. If you think you are lost, that no ONE cares about you, that no ONE can love you ... then you do not yet know the Savior. But if you are a sinner who does not repent, and who is not repentant on a daily basis ... then you also do not yet know the Savior.