

Jude: Contending for the Faith

The Epistle of Jude commences with a statement regarding the writer's original intention, which was overridden by the inspiring Spirit's purpose:

“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” (Jude 3).

Here we find that Jude's primary objective was to write of the Salvation common to all believers. However, it was rather necessary for him to write instead of the influence of false brethren, and how that the faithful must “earnestly contend for the faith” against the inroads of apostasy. Contending “for the faith” originally taught by the Apostles is necessary for all believers in all ages, for since Apostolic times, false doctrine continues to be taught by false brethren, “whose mouths must be stopped” (Tit. 1:11), according to the Apostle.

Sometimes it is claimed that ecclesial life in Christ is all about building up, and edifying brethren and sisters. But whilst it is true that such building is essential for the survival of believers who live in a day of evil, it is also true that there is a need for the pulling down of the edifice of apostasy:

“to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; *A time to break down, and a time to build up ...*” (Eccl. 3:2-3).

A similar sentiment is seen in the Proverbs:

“They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but *such as keep the law contend with them*” (Prov. 28:4).

Notice that here, part of keeping the law is the contending with the wicked: a command to all who desired to please their Maker. Significantly, Israel were rebuked for not doing this: “They bend their tongues like their bow for lies: But *they are not valiant for the truth* upon the earth” (Jer. 9:3). Here the Hebrew for the phrase “valiant for the truth” can also be rendered “contend for the faith” - Israel did not do this, and we must heed their example of unbelief.

CONTENDING, NOT RAILING

Interestingly, when describing how to deal with false brethren, Jude uses the example of an Angel from heaven: Michael the Archangel. Brother Robert Roberts describes the Angels as the “true gentlemen of the universe”, and in this example we can see how this is so. False brethren “defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities”. 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” (Jude 9).

The account in Zechariah chapter 3 is where Jude is alluding to. The body of Moses consists of those who were baptised into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2), even as believers today become part of the body of Christ by being baptised into Christ. Zechariah chapter 3 describes the three persons referred to by Jude: Satan the contender, the Angel of Yahweh, and Joshua the High Priest:

“he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And Yahweh said unto Satan, Yahweh rebuke thee, O Satan; even Yahweh that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee ...” (Zech. 3:2).

Here, we have what has been described as a courtroom scene: there is the Satan who is resisting Joshua, both appearing before the Angel for judgment. The verdict is given—no railing accusation, but a simple rebuke: “*Yahweh rebuke thee, O Satan, Even Yahweh that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee ...*”

According to Jude, this Angelic rebuke provides an example of how we must deal with false brethren: although we must “contend” against them, at the same time we are not to rail against them. Leaving all judgment to

Yahweh, we seek only the cause of the Truth in all our ways, and greatly desire the adversary to repent, and embrace the Truth in all its glory and purity.

In order to illustrate and categorise the things that motivate false brethren, Jude provides various examples: in our considerations today, we shall consider three of them: “the way of Cain”: the belief that we are at liberty to serve God in any way that we please, “the error of Balaam”: the selfish pursuit of present advantage to the detriment of others, and the rebellion of Korah, the desire for an elevated position in the sight of men. We shall consider these three examples in turn.

THE WAY OF CAIN

The Genesis account relates the events that took place regarding the worship of Cain:

“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Yahweh. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Yahweh had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (Gen. 4:4).

Sometimes it is thought that Cain’s sin was not that bad: he simply misunderstood what was required, and made an innocent mistake. However, the New Testament commentary ought to correct such a view:

“This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because *his own works were evil*, and his brother’s righteous.” (1 Jno. 3:12).

Here, we are specifically told that Cain’s works “were evil”. It was not a simple case of a simple misunderstanding: it was *evil* – it was intentional. And being unable to accept the correction of a rebuke, he slew his brother, being filled with a hatred that was implacable. Abel was a shepherd, and so Cain should have gone to his brother to obtain sheep to offer as an acceptable sacrifice, but instead he was envious of his brother, and hated him. We see this spirit in the churches around us, particularly the Catholic system. Eschewing the commandments of Christ, they worship in a way of their own, and not as prescribed by the Master. And like Cain, they have been the slayers of the righteous down through the ages. That system is, as was shown to John, “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6). The way of Cain therefore, is a way of hatred of the true saints and martyrs, and the belief that all men have a right to worship in the way of their choosing—the very basis of the ecumenical movement of our day.

The principles of the Way of Cain are epitomised in the Proverbs:

“the labour of the righteous tendeth to life: *the fruit* of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproach erreth. He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he the uttereth a slander, is a fool” (Prov. 10:16-18).

By contrast to the labours of Abel the righteous - who kept instruction, and was in the way of life - the fruit of Cain tended to sin. He refused reproof and hid his hatred for Abel: - little wonder why his works are described as being “evil”!

THE ERROR OF BALAAM

The error of Balaam was a primary concern for personal reward, even if it was to come by cursing the people of God. Judas Iscariot followed the way of Balaam, by betraying Messiah for money. Again it is a characteristic of false brethren, that they seek their own advantage, to the expense of the saints.

Numbers chapters 22—24 recounts how that Balaam, a renegade prophet, was hired by the king of Moab to issue a curse upon the people of God. It was a foolish mission to begin with: why would Yahweh listen to the words of mortal man, and curse his own people? But Balaam was so preoccupied with thoughts of wealth and prosperity, that he was prepared to do just about anything to gain this world’s goods. The record proceeds to inform us that each time Balaam sought to utter a curse upon, the spirit of Yahweh came upon him, compelling him to give a blessing instead. What was Balaam to do therefore, to obtain the promised wealth? Being as

insidious as a man can be, he found a way to induce Israel to bring a curse upon themselves. There were those in the ecclesia who followed his approach in John's day:

“I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication” (Rev. 2:14).

Balaam therefore taught Balak what he should do in order to cause Israel to stumble, and bring condemnation upon themselves. He sent in the Moabitish girls to tempt Israel to commit fornication with them:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifice of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel” (Num. 25:1-3).

The Apostle rhetorically asked the question:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-38).

The situation was the same in relation to Israel, the people of Yahweh. Nothing could separate them from the love of God—even the cursing of a corrupted prophet. But nothing that is, except themselves. Speaking of false brethren, Jude wrote: “These be they who **separate themselves**, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19). No one else can separate us from the love of God except ourselves.

In the cases of Cain and Balaam then, we see what motivates false brethren: the belief that we all have the right to serve God in the way that we please, and the ruthless pursuit of this world's goods. In the example of Korah, we see the spirit of self-elevation:

THE GAINSAYING OF KORAH

The spirit of Korah is a spirit of self-exaltation, to the detriment of others. The record in Numbers chapter 16 recounts for our learning the rebellion of Korah and his leading associates against Moses and Aaron, who Yahweh had set over the nation's affairs:

“Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Yahweh is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of Yahweh?” (Num. 16:1-3).

These men fall into the category of which Jude says that they “despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities” (Jude 8). Notice the hypocrisy here: they were accusing Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves over the congregation – yet that is exactly what the rebels were doing! But the truth of the matter was that Moses was appointed by Yahweh to lead the people, and Aaron had similarly been chosen to be the High Priest. (By the way, it is interesting to note that On is not mentioned again in the record: it would appear that he distanced himself from the rebellion, upon Moses's appeal to Yahweh.)

But notice the response of Moses to this challenge to his authority. In the Spirit of Michael the Archangel, he did not give a railing accusation against them. He did not attempt to justify himself, or exalt his position against the rebels. Rather, he prostrated himself before the Lord: “When Moses heard it, he fell upon his face ...” (Num. 16:4). His words were not to present an argument or line of reasoning to reassert his authority, rather it was an appeal for Yahweh to demonstrate who He had Chosen:

“he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow Yahweh will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him” (Num. 16:4-5).

Here then, we see the many in opposition to the few – democracy in action. But as is often the case, the majority were in the wrong. The chapter continues to describe the arrangement by which Yahweh would make his Chosen Ones known amongst the camp. Every man of Korah’s company were to put incense in their censers, and offer it up before Yahweh. The people were commanded to separate themselves from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, which had been erected in opposition to the Tabernacle of the Congregation established through Moses. And the judgements of Yahweh were manifest, in the destruction of these men:

“The ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation … and there came out a fire from Yahweh, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (Num. 16:31-35).

By this means, it was declared to all the congregation who Yahweh had chosen, as those who “despised” Moses’ “dominion” perished by a most remarkable death, being cast down into the pit, and being buried alive. To use the words of the prophet Isaiah, “hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it” (Isa. 5:14). If they had died the common death of all men, there would have been nothing to signify whom Yahweh had chosen. But in being rejected by Yahweh, it was evident that Aaron and Moses had been selected by the Father to come near to him, and serve in the manner appointed to them.

These events regarding the overthrow of apostasy in Israel are alluded to in Paul’s letter to Timothy:

“… the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, ***The Lord knoweth them that are his.*** And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ ***depart from iniquity***” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Compare the highlighted words with the record in Numbers:

“he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow Yahweh will show ***who are his***, and how is holy, and will cause him to come near unto him” (Num. 16:5).

“and Yahweh spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, ***Separate yourselves from among this congregation,*** that I may consume them in a moment” (Num. 16:12).

So then, just as Yahweh was to make known “who are his” to all Israel, the Apostle testifies that He Knows who are his, amongst the multitude of Gentiles who receive the calling of the Truth. And just as all Israel were to depart from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, even so we, as followers of Christ, must depart from iniquity, even if it occurs in the camp, the household of faith.

Each of these three examples which we have considered, all emphasise *self*. Cain thought he could worship as he saw fit. Balaam thought he could obtain personal wealth by teaching wrong things. And Korah – with his company – thought he could be elevated in status by bringing down Moses. But by contrast, we read of Messiah “even Christ pleased not himself” (Rom. 15:3). He did not elevate himself to become a mediator or priest – he was appointed by Yahweh: “no man taketh this honour unto himself [i.e. compare Korah], but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee” (Heb. 5:4-5). He was “meek and lowly in heart” (Mat. 11:29). This is the mind of Christ which we should seek to emulate: “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus …” (Phil. 2:4-5). This is the way of truth: humility is the path to future glory.