

Reckless Dreamers

Jude 1:8-13

With Study Questions

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I. Dreamers

“Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries” (Jude 1:8).

Review

Earlier in his letter, Jude exhorts his readers to contend earnestly for the faith (verse 3) because of certain men who have crept into the church unnoticed, seeking to turn the grace of our God into lewdness thereby denying the Christian faith (verse 4).

In a loving warning, Jude reminds his readers of what they once knew. He reminds them of the Israelites who were saved out of Egypt but afterwards were destroyed because of unbelief (verse 5). He reminds them of angels who did not keep their proper domain and consequently are reserved in chains for judgment (verse 6). Both of these are examples of creatures who seemed to be, at least in some sense, in God’s favor. But in Jude’s third example we see that, apart from persevering in the faith, they are no different than Sodom and Gomorrah who suffered the vengeance of eternal fire (verse 7).

A Rotting Fish

It appears that the main point of Jude’s letter is to warn Christians against the influence of teachers who infiltrate the church and Christian thinking. It’s been said that the fish rots from the head down. This should be obvious to anyone who has lived long enough to see changing trends. In just one generation we have seen certain moral trends in our society, such as living together out of wedlock, abortion and homosexuality, move from unacceptable to acceptable. And these trends or attitudes are not restricted to those outside the church. These trends have changed within the church as well.

But it hasn’t been the salt of the earth, hard working, faithful church attending Christian that set these wheels of apostacy in motion. These battles are generally won or lost at the level of synods and general assemblies. It is at the seminaries and bastions of higher learning that the spiritual infection begins its journey. What I hear being taught in the seminary today will most assuredly be believed by the Christian in the pew twenty years from now.

Reckless Dreamers

It is these men who creep into the church that Jude refers to as dreamers who defile the flesh. This is very reminiscent of the words of Jeremiah.

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’²⁶ “How long will *this* be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart,²⁷ “who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.²⁸ “The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD.²⁹ “Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?³⁰ “Therefore behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor.³¹ “Behold, I *am* against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’³² “Behold, I *am* against those who prophesy false dreams,” says the LORD, “and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,” says the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:25-32).

Dreams, Hearts, He Says

How often today do Christians recklessly use the name of God! This is done by determining God’s will through dreams (verse 25), appealing to our own hearts (verse 26), saying “He says” (verse 31) which is very similar to saying “God told me” which is so common today. All of this is reckless Christianity, if it can be called Christianity at all. It is quite easy to live a life of immorality (which defiles the flesh) and reject authority, speaking evil of dignitaries (which may be an irreverent attitude toward angels) when you’re guided by your own dreams.

The Spirit Led Me

This type of thinking can very easily creep into orthodoxy. I know of a guest preacher who preached a sermon to a congregation that the entire elder board considered inaccurate, inappropriate and unbiblical. When confronted, his response was, “I just felt the Spirit led me to say what I said.” What can you say to that? To question him (even if it is the entire elder board—the biblically designed governing body of that church) is to question the Spirit of God

Himself! When a person functions that way, he places himself beyond any authority or accountability whatsoever.

Rejecting Authority

The nature of these dreamers is that they reject authority. And since there is no authority except from God (Romans 13:1), in rejecting authority they take rank against God Himself. This is the essence of the Fifth Commandment (honor your father and mother) where God establishes human authority. The Proverbs teach,

“The eye *that* mocks *his* father, And scorns obedience to *his* mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it” Proverbs 30:17).

Truth Will Prevail

All this can be discouraging and depressing to those who seek to hold to biblical Christianity, which is why the Lord says, **“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat” (verse 28)?** In other words, the wheat is food. And the wheat shouldn't allow the chaff to persuade it otherwise. The promise is that the true word of God is like a fire and a hammer—it breaks the rock in pieces.

Almost without fail, those who govern their lives (and often seek to govern the lives of others) by their dreams, hearts and personal visions reject the authority structure God has created for His church, namely a plurality of elders and the authority of church councils (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, Acts 15). They may appeal to the scriptures but ignore what the scriptures teach regarding the authorities in their lives. This includes husbands, parents, employers, elders, etc.

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people” (Exodus 22:28).

II. Michael's Example

Jude then gives the example of the archangel.

“Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”¹⁰ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and

whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 1:9,10).

Moses’ Body

We do not know where the body of Moses is buried (Deuteronomy 34:6). Perhaps God designed it this way to avoid the exhuming of his body for worship, mysticism or superstitious¹ reasons which would have been a great temptation to the Jews who were in the habit of worshipping items. Although there is also no record in the Scriptures of Jude’s account of this particular dispute (although it is apocryphal²), as we will see with Cain, the New Testament often augments the Old Testament.

The point of Jude here seems to be that if a good, unfallen archangel does not take it upon himself to autonomously revile someone as evil as Satan (He relies upon the authority and law of God), how much less should we, as fallen men, take authoritative matters into our own hands.

Speaking Evil in Ignorance

Jude indicates that they speak evil of whatever they do not know. It is not uncommon to hear a sound doctrine falsely represented by someone who doesn’t understand it. And this is often followed by a tearing down of the “straw-man” falsely built. I often see this with a false view of Calvinism, which suggests that there is no need for prayer or evangelism; a false view of obedience to the law, which suggests salvation by works; a false view of postmillennialism, which suggests that men create a utopian society by their own power and ingenuity, etc. People often speak evil of what they do not know.

In Common With Beasts

Jude goes on to explain that what they do know is that which is in common with the brute beasts. And it is in these things that they corrupt themselves. Michael Green poignantly reflects on this passage.

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries XXII* (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 439.

² The story goes something like this: “When Moses died, the archangel Michael was sent by God to bury him. But the devil disputed his right to do so, for Moses had been a murderer (Ex. 2:12), and therefore his body belonged, so to speak, to the devil. Furthermore, the devil claimed to have authority over all matter, and Moses’ body, of course, fell under this category. But even under such provocation, the story goes, Michael was not disrespectful to the devil.” Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Intervarsity Press, Reprinted 1998), pp. 183-4.

“How ironical that when men should claim to be visionary, they should actually be ignorant; when they think themselves superior to the common man they should actually be on the same level as animals, and be corrupted by the very practices in which they seek liberty and self-expression... If a man is persistently blind to spiritual values, deaf to the call of God, and rates self-determination as the highest good, then a time will come when he cannot hear the call he has spurned, but is left to the mercy of the turbulent instinct to which he once turned in search of freedom. And those instincts, given free reign, are merciless. Lust, when indulged, becomes a killer....Physically, they become immoral. Intellectually, they become arrogant. Spiritually, they denied the Lord...The judgment of God will catch up with them as surely as the slaughterhouse with the cattle. The whole thrust of Jude’s letter constitutes a stirring call to awake to moral integrity, intellectual humility and spiritual sensitivity.”³

The Tiger Gods

I saw a documentary on tigers and how they almost became extinct. Seeking to extol the beautiful animals, the narrator taught how the tigers were once considered gods. No wonder they almost became extinct. If your god is a beast designed to kill, then you will kill. It is only by serving a moral God, who calls His followers to the morality He has established, that the ecological system, we call earth (or any other system), has a chance to survive and thrive.

III. Cain, Balaam and Korah

“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah” (Jude 1:11).

Having given the example of three groups (the Israelites, Angels and Sodom) Jude now gives the example of three individuals.

Cain

He first mentions Cain. Here we see, arguably, the first church split. For Cain was not an outsider but was presenting an offering. We get a greater glimpse as to why Cain’s offering was rejected in 1 John.

³ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Intervarsity Press, Reprinted 1998), p. 185.

“...not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12).

These dreamers, like Cain, are spiritually (if not eventually physically) murderous to the brethren.

Balaam

Balak was a Moabite king who feared Israel because of what they did to the Amorites. He wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites and made a number of efforts to get Balaam to do his bidding. Balaam appeared to start strong.

“Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more” (Numbers 22:18).

With some exceptions, in Numbers 22-24, it seems as if Balaam fared well. He blessed instead of cursed God’s people. However in Numbers 25 we read, **“Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab” (Numbers 25:1).** This resulted in a great plague-judgment of Israel where twenty-four thousand died. But where did the Moabites get this idea and why did the nation of Israel fall prey to this immorality? We see the answer six chapters later.

“Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (Numbers 31:16).

Balaam’s greed proved fatal for many of God’s covenant people.

Korah

In Numbers 16 we read of Korah who lead a rebellion where two hundred and fifty leaders (renowned representatives of the congregation) thought Moses took “too much upon” himself, since the entire congregation was holy. They were leaders and they sought to use a spiritual argument to justify their rebellion. But they were taking rank against Moses, who was God’s prophet.

Again, this proved to be fatal for many of those who were among the people of God. There is one verse I thought to be of great interest in the account

of Korah's rebellion. They were referred to as **"...men who sinned against their own souls..." (Numbers 16:38).**

This would be like modern Christian leaders thinking they can sit in judgment of the word of God (similar to what we see in the Jesus Seminar).

Rebelling Against the Faith

The point of all these examples is to recognize that even among the people of God there are those who use their own dreams, imagination, standards, intuitions, etc. to either circumvent or altogether rebel against the genuine faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (verse 3).

A Poetic Castigation

Jude gives a poetically harsh description of these dreamers which I will not bother to exegete. I believe the words are self-explanatory so I will finish this section with the direct quotation.

"These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; ¹³ raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:12, 13).

Questions for Study

1. What seems to be the main point of Jude's letter?
2. How do ungodly influences infiltrate the church?
3. Discuss the prophets of Jeremiah 23:25-32.
4. How can appealing to dreams, our own hearts and direct "He says" forms of determining God's will be dangerous to the church?
5. When someone uses the popular "Spirit led me" method of determining God's will, what are they rejecting?
6. What does Jeremiah promise regarding the faithful speaking of God's word?
7. What kind of example did the archangel Michael provide?
8. Can you think of some examples of people speaking evil of what they do not know?
9. How are certain men like brute beasts?
10. Discuss the tiger gods.
11. Read and discuss the accounts of Cain, Balaam and Korah. How do we see this type of danger in the church today?
12. Review the poetic castigation of verses twelve and thirteen.