

Woe to them

14/6/20 dkm

Read: Genesis 4:1-15, Jude

Text: Jude v 11-16

Psalms: 84:1-9, 44:1-8, 14, 72old

Jude wanted to write to believers in the church about 'our common salvation', about the wonderful doctrines of grace found in the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord (v 3), but he ended up writing a very different letter. Why? Because he was concerned about ungodly men who had infiltrated the church. They were undermining the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, denying the sovereignty and lordship of Jesus and turning the grace of God into a licence to live by the lusts of the flesh. Like the apostles, he condemns these false teachers in the strongest of terms. There are false teachers in the church today, men and women who deny divine creation, who call the stories of the OT myths, who deny the virgin birth, and reject the resurrection of Jesus on the third day. There are also those who promote homosexuality, drink and drugs. How can such people be called Christians? They are, but not by us! We must hold fast to the gospel handed down to us in the pages of the Bible.

The term 'Woe' sounds ominous, and it is, at least in Scripture, where it is found over a hundred times. It is like pronouncing a curse on something or someone. The prophets had cause to use this term as they denounced ungodly people in Israel (Isa 5), and in Babylon (Hab 2). But it is Jesus who uses this word the most, pronouncing eight woes upon the Pharisees in one speech (Mat 23). Seven times he calls them hypocrites, and five time calls them blind or blind guides. He concluded this speech saying, 'Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell! (Mat 23:33). The apostles and Jude echo such words when they condemn false teachers found in the NT church. 'Woe to them!' writes Jude.

Jude has already reminded the church of three instances of divine judgment upon sin as recorded in the OT: angels who left their proper domain and await 'the judgment of the great day', the people

of Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed after giving themselves to sexual perversions including homosexuality, and the people of the exodus who rebelled against Moses and against God and perished in the desert. These people sinned against God, against his revelation in the creation or his spoken commands. The false teachers were similarly rejecting the authority of God, or his appointed representatives, and would face divine judgment.

Jude obviously knew the Scriptures, as in the OT, and so must we. He was a Jew, and so were many in the church, but the OT is not just for Jews, it is for all Christians, for all believers. I have recently reminded you of the stories recounted by Jude in case you had forgotten them, especially stories from the Book of Numbers. From three examples of God's judgment upon ancient peoples or angels, Jude turns to three examples of judgment upon individuals from ancient times, namely, Cain, Balaam and Korah. If we view verses 11-16 as a sermon, or the second part of a sermon begun in verse 5, we can identify an exposition of Scripture, an application, an illustration, and another application.

1. An exposition of Scripture

All sermons should, by definition, include an exposition of Scripture. Even inspired writers like Peter and Jude, and Jesus himself, teach from the Scriptures. Peter writes of prophecy as men, 'who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2Peter 1:21 NIV). If we deny the inspiration and authority of Scripture we are, of course, left with no foundation for a sermon. Jude believed the stories of Cain in Genesis 4, of Balaam in Numbers 22, and of Korah in Numbers 16, to be historical not myths. These were historical persons, men who sinned, who refused to repent, and who were judged by God.

Firstly, Cain. Cain was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, born after his parents sinned and were thrown out of the Garden of Eden. Cain the farmer brought an offering of fruit to the Lord but the Lord did

not respect Cain and his offering (Gen 4:5). An offering must come from a sincere, God-fearing heart. Cain got angry, and rather than 'doing well' as the Lord told him, he let anger rule in his heart. That anger was directed towards his brother Abel whom he murdered in cold blood. The way of Cain is the way of self-rule and jealousy, of rejecting divine advice and authority.

Secondly, Jude refers to Balaam, describing his error or sin as greed, as lusting after money. His greed led him to reject repeated warnings from the Lord not to curse the people of God; Balak was offering him lots of money to do so. Peter reminds us that on one occasion even his own donkey warned Balaam, but still the prophet's madness was not constrained (2Peter 2:15-16). In the end Balaam advised Balak to use Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel into sexual sin and idolatry (Num 25, 31:16). Remember what Jesus said when pronouncing 'woes' upon the Pharisees? Blind, blind guides! Cain was blinded by jealous anger, and Balaam by glittering gold. What was it that blinded Korah? Is there anything that is blinding you to the truth and authority of God's word?

The third person of Jude's 'woe' is Korah. Korah belonged to the congregation of God's people. He was a Levite, given the duty of carrying the Ark of the Covenant. But he was not satisfied with this duty. He lusted after power and authority; he wanted to be a priest like Moses and Aaron (Num 16:10). And so he gathered some two hundred and fifty men and rebelled against Moses, the Lord's anointed prophet, priest, and ruler. Jude reminds us of Korah's sudden end; he perished when a huge hole opened in the earth and devoured him. Korah was blinded by a lust for power and authority, a lust which meant rejecting the authority of God. Ironically, his blindness led him to a literal place of total darkness.

2. An application of Scripture

Jude reminded the church of these ungodly men of the past because men like them had crept into the church. 'They have gone the way of

Cain', been greedy for gain like Balaam, and rebelled against authority like Korah; most likely these false teachers rejected the leadership of the apostles and elders in the church. 'Judgment will fall on any pastor or teacher who loves freedom or money or sex or power more than fidelity to God's word'.

Jude describes these men as 'blemishes at your love feasts', feasting without any fear of God and concerned about no one but themselves (v 12, 2Peter 2:13). Love feasts were associated with the Lord's Supper in the early church. The apostle Paul had to condemn greediness and drunkenness at such feasts in the church at Corinth (1Cor 11:20-22). In a second metaphor or picture of faithlessness he describes them as feeding themselves rather than the sheep. Metaphors continue pouring from the mouth of Jude like words of a poet. We could contrast his poem of faithlessness with Habakkuk's poem of faithfulness (Hab 3:17-18). These ungodly men could only rejoice in things of the flesh, having denied the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a third metaphor Jude describes these men as clouds without water (v 12). Peter calls them 'wells without water', as well as clouds (2Peter 2:17). They promise life-giving water but never deliver because Jesus is the only life-giving water. Next, Jude calls them 'trees without fruit'. Towards the end of last summer my fig tree suddenly produced heaps of buds. I threw a net over the tree to protect the fruit that I expected but nothing came of the fruit. The tiny figs are drying and dropping. Jesus said that you will know men, and especially teachers, by their fruit (Mat 7:16). The men Jude condemns produced no fruit, being twice dead or completely dead, and pulled up by the roots (v 12). No hungry souls would be nourished by these men, who talk about God but in truth are godless.

In his fifth metaphor Jude likens them to waves of the sea, foaming up to their own shame (v 13). Waves make a lot of noise as they crash on the rocks but all that is left is a lot of foam that soon

disappears. These men boasted of liberty but were leading God's people back into bondage to sin (2Peter 2:19). His sixth and final metaphor describing false teachers is of wandering stars, stars that give no help to navigators, stars that shine for a moment and then disappear forever into black holes in the universe. A similar end is reserved for men and women who deny the truth and authority of the Bible, and fail to walk in obedience to the commands of Christ.

3. An illustration

Preachers use illustrations from various sources. My commentary on Jude quotes at length from a poem by T.S. Elliot. We may find magazine or newspaper articles that illustrate biblical teaching. The apostle Paul quotes from poets a couple of times (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12). Jude has already referred to a story about Moses from an apocryphal book (v 9). Now he refers to another apocryphal book that was popular among the Jews, the Book of Enoch (v 14). It was supposedly written by Enoch, the man who 'walked with God; and was not, for God took him' (Gen 5:24).

Jude does not see the Book of Enoch as the inspired word of God but the passage he refers to is consistent with the Bible. He refers to a prophecy about the Lord coming 'with ten thousand of his saints', or angels, 'to execute judgment on all' (v 14, 15), all the ungodly. The words 'all' and 'ungodly' dominate Enoch's description of God's judgment; all ungodly people, for all their ungodly deeds, deeds done in an ungodly way, and all harsh and ungodly words spoken against God (v 15). God sees and hears everything everyone does, including you and me, and he will judge all works and words that dishonour his glorious name.

Only a fool says there is no God (Ps 14:1), and only a fool dares to defy the power and authority of almighty God. False teachers in the church were denying the sovereignty and saving power of Christ. They were rejecting authority in the church, and the authority of God himself. They were probably saying that God loves everyone and will

not judge or condemn anyone to hell. On the basis of this popular Book of Enoch, and more so on the basis of the Bible itself, Jude assures his readers that no one, especially not ungodly sinners, will escape the judgment of God.

4. Another application

In the final verse of our passage, the final words of Jude's sermon, he once again attacks the creed and credibility of these libertine false teachers. They had crept into the church without any authority, and they recognised no authority in the church. They were ungodly men, marked out for condemnation, as he said back in verse 4. They are characterised as grumblers and complainers (v 16). They wanted to change everything in the church, both doctrine and practice. Like the complainers in the desert, they lusted after the leeks and garlic of Egypt. Their focus was on food and drink, on sensuality and sex, on money and prestige.

These men were great talkers, men who promised a lot but delivered little, nothing except misery and death. They flattered people in order to gain influence and power for themselves (v 16). False teachers quickly recognise the people who hold power and influence in the church and set out to influence them- they may not be the elected elders of the church. Jude's urgent message to the church is to examine, expose, and expel false teachers, and 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints'.