

# Beware Dangerous Reefs

Pastor Chris Baker // 02.10.19 // Centralia FBC

## Intro

In 1989 Joseph Hazelwood was in command of an impressive vessel. His ship, barely 3-years old and nearly 1,000 feet long, was capable of transporting its cargo at almost 20 miles per hour on the open sea. It was state-of-the-art in every way.

It wasn't just the ship that was impressive, though. Her captain had over 20 years experience. He twice received fleet safety awards. So on the night of March 24, 1989 it was shocking when his vessel became involved in one of the most famous maritime accidents in history.

On a clear night with calm seas, Hazelwood turned control of the ship over to an assistant and went to bed. At 12:04 in the morning, the captain was awakened with a jolt. The ship struck Bligh Reef, a submerged rock formation in Alaska's Prince William Sound. By the time the *Exxon Valdez's* captain returned to the bridge it was too late to prevent what was, at the time, the largest human-caused environmental disaster of all time.

Over the next several days almost 11 million gallons of crude oil leaked into the ocean. The spill cost billions of dollars and its environmental impact is still being studied today, but one of the most interesting angles of this event is that the ship struck a submerged reef that was documented on its charts on a night when the weather was clear and the seas were calm.

Everything was right with the world in one moment. And in the next moment, there was a catastrophic emergency. As we study Jude's letter today I think his warning in verse 12 should be striking to us;

***These people are dangerous reefs at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence.***

We're almost at the halfway point of the letter when this warning comes and he has already made his readers aware of some of the dangers posed by false teachers.

But this one especially caught me as I studied this week. Everything can seem fine on the surface. We can be plugging along nicely, on the right course, carrying out our mission, and something just below the surface can derail everything and cause major chaos.

Really, the local church is like a big ship in a number of ways. We're all on this boat together, we are (or we should be) headed to the same destination, when we get going we have a ton of momentum, we are steered by a small rudder so we generally don't change direction really fast, right? For better or for worse this metaphor works on a lot of levels.

And here's why I think this verse jumped off the page at me this week. First, it's a transition point in the letter where Jude moves from identifying false teachings to pointing out what is in store for the false teachers. We'll get to that part shortly. But second, I think we're in a spot here as a church family where the waters look pretty calm.

Numbers are not always an indicator of church health because what we're doing here is not about numbers, but they can tell us a small part of the story. And lately the numbers look pretty good.

Our Sunday morning attendance last year increased about 8% over 2017 to around 192 per week—and that's after the previous year had fallen off almost 15%. It probably doesn't look like it to you because we now have two services but for 2019

our attendance looks even better. Each of the past two weeks we've been over 200 people. We praise God for those things, but they're not the biggest reason I think we're in a good place right now.

I think we're in a good place right now because we are seeing people saved and we're seeing people growing. Every week people are telling me stories of what God is at work doing. People are seeing what God is at work doing here and wanting to jump in and join the church. A number of you are really fighting with sin issues in your own lives or fighting desperately to save your marriages or to overcome bondage to addiction. You're going the extra mile to love and serve one another and this community. That's more important than any number we can throw out. Lives are being changed by the gospel and that's what we're here for.

By the way, since we're talking about what's going on in the life of the church I want to update you really quickly on the status of our education building. Back in October we began a process of studying that part of our facility to see what really needs to be done. We evaluated a mold and air quality issue and found that, while we do have a mold problem, the indoor air quality isn't dangerous. The cause of the mold problem, however, is where the issue becomes much larger and will likely require a significant investment. We've also discovered a major plumbing issue in that building so you'll notice all the bathrooms and water fountains have been shut off over there. We'll have some tangible next steps to present to you at our next members meeting, which will be held March 17. We're making it work with the rest of the facility right now and we're extremely thankful for it.

All those things being said, this big ship we're in together seems to be sailing along fairly smoothly over reasonably calm waters. But if we fail to contend for the faith we run the risk, according to Jude, of seriously being damaged by the dangerous reefs that could be lurking just below the surface. They don't look dangerous, in fact we can't even see them. Jude says they're right there at your love feasts. The

dangerous reefs are right there at the church potluck. They brought the crock pot corn and you didn't even see them coming!

So what, exactly, is Jude warning us about? Let's read the first 16 verses of this letter together and we'll find out. We've read the first four verses already but I want us to take it all in again before we focus in on verses 5-16. This is the Word of the Lord:

**1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James:**

**To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.**

**2 May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.**

**3 Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. 4 For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.**

**5 Now I want to remind you, although you came to know all these things once and for all, that Jesus saved a people out of Egypt and later destroyed those who did not believe; 6 and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day. 7 Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns committed sexual immorality and perversions, and serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.**

**8 In the same way these people—relying on their dreams—defile their flesh, reject authority, and slander glorious ones. 9 Yet when Michael the archangel was disputing with the devil in an argument about Moses's body, he did not dare utter a slanderous condemnation against him but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these people blaspheme anything they do not understand. And what they do understand by instinct—like irrational animals—by these things they are destroyed. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, have plunged into Balaam's error for profit, and have perished in Korah's rebellion.**

**12 These people are dangerous reefs at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence. They are shepherds who only look after themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by winds; trees in late autumn—fruitless, twice dead and uprooted. 13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameful deeds; wandering stars for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever.**

**14 It was about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied: "Look! The Lord comes with tens of thousands of his holy ones 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all the ungodly acts that they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against him." 16 These people are discontented grumblers, living according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.**

Thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

It's those last 12 verses that will be our focus today. They're really and unfolding of what Jude says in verse 4. If you remember back to last week we said that verses 3-4 form the thesis of Jude's argument and vv. 5-16 build on verse 4 while verses 17-23 build on verse 3.

**Jude 3 – 'Contend for the Faith'**

**Jude 17-23 – 'How to Contend'**

**Jude 4 – 'Warning against ungodliness'**

**Jude 5-16 – 'Examples of ungodliness'**

Jude states the purpose of this section right there in verse 5. "Now I want to remind you." Jude isn't telling them anything new here. In fact, he never specifically tells us who these false teachers are or what their particular false teaching is. Instead, he points his readers back to examples from the history of God's people to show that

their false teachings are nothing new. They're the same old perversions of reality that Satan has been drawing people away with since the beginning of humanity. He gives six examples in the verses that follow and we're going to look at each of them.

But let me emphasize this is Jude's reminder. So much of preaching and so much of the study of Scripture is God reminding and reinforcing truths that we've already been taught. Do you know why? Because we forget. Sometimes we forget out of negligence, sometimes we forget because the circumstances of life drown out those truths so God constantly gives us memorial moments in life and specifically in His Word so that we'll remember what is true.

The second thing I want to point out is that all six of these examples grab just enough of God's truth to make it look right on the surface and then plunges that little shred of truth into utter darkness. That's what most false teaching is. If Joseph Smith rolled in here today and said, "Hey, I was hanging out in the woods and an angel directed me to a buried box and inside that buried box I found some gold plates with Egyptian writing on them and I translated them using a seer stone I kept in my hat and it turns out it was the real word of god even more sacred than the Bible and you should all do whatever I say now." You'd just smile and nod at him while someone in the back called 911 and had him taken to one of those really soft rooms for people who are going through a hard time. The Mormon church started in New York, ok? If Joseph Smith lived in Mid-Missouri that would have been a very short movement.

But most false teaching doesn't start that way. It looks good on the surface. One of the illustrations we used to use for sexual purity when I was teaching high schoolers was to bake cookies, but use salt instead of sugar. It looked right. Even the ingredients looked right. But there was something about it that was deeply wrong.

That's what the most dangerous false teaching is. Let's see Jude's six examples:

## Israel's Unbelief

The first picture from the past Jude calls up is of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness after escaping slavery in Egypt. He tells us *'Jesus saved a people out of Egypt and later destroyed those who did not believe.'* There's a theme that you're going to see here, by the way. All these false beliefs result in destruction. God deals with these false beliefs harshly because they are attempts at stealing His glory and usurping his position as King. So He punishes. It's important for us at this point to remember that this life we are living isn't about us at all. It's about Him. And in all six of these examples we see what He does with those who reject Him as King.

Israel's problem was their lack of belief that God was sufficient to save them. He had saved them from 400 years of slavery and was on the cusp of sending them into the land he promised to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 12. But the generation that saw God's miracles in Egypt never experienced his goodness in the promised land. Why? Well 2, they sent scouts into the land and they found out the men there were awfully big. So they said in Numbers 14:

***2 All the Israelites complained about Moses and Aaron, and the whole community told them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to die by the sword? Our wives and children will become plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let's appoint a leader and go back to Egypt."***

These people had seen God do the most incredible things recorded in Scripture. They had seen the Nile River turned to blood, a plague of locusts, frogs, and gnats, and they saw hail that killed people, livestock, and knocked down trees. You think we've seen some stuff with our weather? Our weather has more emotions than a middle school girl, but we've never seen hail big enough to kill a cow or down a tree. They also witnessed God take the life of the first born of every Egyptian

household, part the Red Sea, and rain down manna from heaven. Yet they thought conquering Canaan would be too hard for him? Listen to God's response:

Numbers 14:

***29 Your corpses will fall in this wilderness—all of you who were registered in the census, the entire number of you twenty years old or more—because you have complained about me. 30 I swear that none of you will enter the land I promised to settle you in, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.***

Unbelief doubts that God is God. The Israelites had clear direction from God—they had the truth. And yet they doubted—and their doubts were highly practical. That's where this false teaching becomes so dangerous. We're a pragmatic people. And the practical thing for Israel was to seek shelter in the one place that any of them had ever called home. There was familiarity and at least a chance for safety in Egypt. If they followed God into Canaan, some of them would absolutely die. But because they chose practicality over truth, because they lacked enough faith to follow God's direction, every one of them perished. Jude goes so far as to say God destroyed them. Following truth won't always be practical. In fact, it's becoming less practical all the time in our day and age. But we must believe God is God and that his truth is enough.

Jude shows us the reminder of unbelief and then he shows us the reminder of abused freedom. Look at verse 6

### **Angels' Abused Freedom**

6 and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day.

Most scholars agree Jude is grabbing another example from the Old Testament, one that his original audience would have known well.

Genesis 6

**6 When mankind began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of mankind were beautiful, and they took any they chose as wives for themselves. 3 And the Lord said, "My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, because they are corrupt. Their days will be 120 years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth both in those days and afterward, when the sons of God came to the daughters of mankind, who bore children to them. They were the powerful men of old, the famous men.**

The Jewish interpretation of Genesis 6 is that angels rebelled against God and tried to further corrupt humanity. We're not given full details of this rebellion but Scripture clearly views it negatively. In fact, its the descendants of the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4 the Israelites were afraid of over in Numbers 14.

Be it this or some other angelic rebellion Jude speaks of here, we see that some angels abandoned their dwelling in the presence of God's glory and abused the freedom they were granted as created beings to satisfy their own desires. This is the false teaching that God has given you the freedom to do whatever you feel is right, so go for it. Take advantage of the free will God has given you.

We believe that God is sovereign over everything, but the Bible makes it clear that man is fully responsible for his own actions and apparently that applies to angels, too. What's the penalty for abusing that freedom? Eternal chains in deep darkness. They went from freedom in the presence of eternal light to eternal chains in deep darkness. That's the difference in sound doctrine and false teaching.

But Jude isn't done there. Then he points his readers back to Sodom's immorality.

## **Sodom's Immorality**

We won't read this one in its entirety but you can find it in Genesis 18-19. God's view of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah is expressed later in Ezekiel 16

***49 Now this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, plenty of food, and comfortable security, but didn't support the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did detestable acts before me, so I removed them when I saw this.***

Sodom and Gomorrah represent immorality taken to its natural conclusion. They wanted to fulfill every desire of the flesh and would stop at nothing to succeed. Violence, homosexuality, sex trafficking, and all other manners of evil were present in these two cities. And they still wanted more.

We look at these heinous sins and can easily dismiss them, while at the same time pursuing fulfillment in our own sinful pleasure. Sure, ours are probably more respectable than Sodom's. But the penalty is the same. When pleasure is the goal, you're always going to be disappointed because the goalposts just keep moving. Especially when it comes to sexual sin. And the end result is, just like the example of Sodom and Gomorrah, the punishment of eternal fire.

The second set of three illustrations Jude calls up here are actually even more direct than the first three.

Verse 11 tells us those who aren't contending for the faith have gone the way of Cain—a reference I think to Cain's self-reliance.

## **Cain's Self-Reliance**

What's the way of Cain? Well, I think it's the way of thinking you can somehow save yourself.

Genesis 4 tells us Abel was a shepherd and Cain worked the ground. They both present an offering to God, but God rejected Cain's offering. The reasons aren't made clear but God does say to Cain in verse 7, ***If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.***

We know that Cain didn't believe God's teaching because he immediately murdered his brother. I believe Cain's thinking was that his offering of the fruits of his labor, his offering of the produce to God, should have been enough to earn God's favor. But the Bible makes clear that for sin to be atoned for something has to die. Right? The penalty for sin is death and the OT sacrificial system is built on substitutionary death.

Cain thought his work should be enough, but that can never be the case. The way of Cain is the way of self-reliance.

Jude continues by reminding his readers of Balaam's error.

### **Balaam's Self-Serving**

Balaam was a prophet, but he rejected God's guidance and turned himself into a prophet for hire of sorts. He came to his senses a time or two, even though God had to speak to him through his donkey in Numbers 22. But ultimately, Balaam used his relationship with God for his own personal gain—both financial and sensual. And we find him destroyed in Numbers 31 right alongside the enemies of God's people. Balaam was in it for what he could get out of God and out of God's people. Jude is saying these false teachers are the same way.

He has said they're self-reliant like Cain, self-serving like Balaam, and self-saving like Korah.

## **Korah's Self-Saving**

He says these false teachers have perished in Korah's rebellion. He's talking about Number 16, where we see that

***16 Now Korah son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took 2 two hundred and fifty prominent Israelite men who were leaders of the community and representatives in the assembly, and they rebelled against Moses. 3 They came together against Moses and Aaron and told them, "You have gone too far! Everyone in the entire community is holy, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"***

Korah led a rebellion against Moses' leadership, and therefore the very leadership of God. His error was that he thought he knew better how to save himself than Moses did. He said, look, all these people are fine. This entire community is fine, it's holy even. God is here, why do we need to keep listening to Moses?

Jude spends less time on these last three examples, so we won't spend as much time either, but it's clear that those who think they're self-reliant teach a self-serving version of the gospel and think they can save ultimately themselves then they've already sealed their own fate. Did you notice in verse 11 Jude said they'd already perished? That verse opens with the words 'Woe to them!' Jude doesn't take pleasure in writing these words. He's just pointing out the truth.

In fact, that's one of the ways you can tell false teaching from sound doctrine. There's an example he cites in verses 8-9 we haven't looked at yet:

**8 In the same way these people—relying on their dreams—defile their flesh, reject authority, and slander glorious ones. 9 Yet when Michael the archangel was disputing with the devil in an argument about Moses’s body, he did not dare utter a slanderous condemnation against him but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”**

If this scene between Michael and Satan doesn’t ring a bell to you it’s because you won’t see it anywhere else in Scripture. It comes from an apocryphal work titled *The Assumption of Moses*. Apocryphal just means that its a religious writing contemporary to the Bible that isn’t inspired. It’s not God’s word, but Jude cites it here because it was familiar to his audience and it makes the point he was seeking to make.

David Guzik commented: ***Today, our culture encourages us to reject authority and to recognize self as the only real authority in our lives. We can do this with the Bible, by choosing to only believe certain passages. We can do it with our beliefs, by choosing at the “salad bar” of religion. Or we can do it with our lifestyle, by making our own rules and not recognizing the proper authorities God has established.***<sup>1</sup>

False teachers rely on what comes from inside them—dreams. Those dreams lead them to defile their flesh, reject authority, and slander God. Yet sound doctrine comes gently and it comes from the Lord. False doctrine is produced by our hearts and it’s produced constantly. Sound doctrine comes from the Lord and His Holy Spirit convinces our hearts of its truth.

God is glorified in sound doctrine and this section closes with one final reminder: that God will judge false doctrine harshly. See verses 14-16:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/jude-1/>

**14 It was about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied: "Look! The Lord comes with tens of thousands of his holy ones 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all the ungodly acts that they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh things ungodly sinners have said against him." 16 These people are discontented grumblers, living according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.**

This is another example from a contemporary writing outside the Bible. Enoch is a Biblical character but this is taken from 1 Enoch and it reinforces the point that judgment comes to false teachers.

Judgment came to unbelieving Israel, to Sodom and Gomorrah, to the rebellious angels, to Cain, Balaam, and Korah. And this is perhaps the least popular truth of all Scripture today. Hell is very real. And because God will punish false doctrine, we must—as His people—devote ourselves to contending for sound doctrine in our lives and in our church. Jonathan Edwards memorably described hell this way:

**To help your conception of what hell is—imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven—or into the midst of a great furnace, where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire—as the heat is greater. Imagine also, that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full as a bright coal of fire, all the while full of quick sense. What horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! And how long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! If it were to be measured by the hour-glass, how long would the glass seem to be running . . . O then, how would your heart sink, if you thought, if you knew—that you must bear it forever and ever! That there would be no end—that after millions of millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end, than it ever was; and that you would never, never be delivered!**

***But your torment in Hell will be immeasurably greater than this illustration represents! How then will the heart of a poor creature sink under it! How utterly inexpressible and inconceivable, must the sinking of the soul be in such a case!<sup>2</sup>***

Folks, this is what is at stake with our doctrine. We have to be committed to it, because the greatest danger can lurk just below the surface of a calm sea. Let's pray.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gracegems.org/09/01/HELL.html>