

98-01-05a

As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for a scripture reading to Jude, the book of Jude. I always get kind of a funny inflection in it because you want to say chapter and verse. There are no chapters and verses in Jude.

The book of Jude, right before Revelation. This is quite an interesting book. It's very short and in some ways very difficult.

There have been those who weren't even sure it was inspired. But we want to read this this morning. It ties in with our study in Genesis.

And where we left off last week in our look at Numbers chapter 22 and 23. Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called. Depending on your English translation, the next word is either sanctified or beloved.

By God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ. Mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

For certain men have crept in unnoticed who long ago were marked out for this condemnation. Ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe, those who were faithless.

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own abode, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority and speak evil of dignitaries.

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. But these speak evil of whatever they do not know and whatever they know naturally like brute beasts. In these things they corrupt themselves.

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. 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.

Raging waves of the sea foaming up their own shame, wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Now Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied about these men also, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts, and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain an advantage.

But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto or with a view toward eternal life.

And on some, having compassion, making a distinction. But others, save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen. This is one of those passages that is traditionally thought to be describing the contrast and the difference between believers and unbelievers in terms of eternal salvation. I would call your attention to a couple of things in the context that might lead us to a slightly different conclusion, in fact a very different conclusion.

First of all, this letter is addressed clearly to believers. In verse 1, it is to those who are called, those who are sanctified by God the Father or beloved, I'm not going to puzzle over the textual difference there, who are preserved in Jesus Christ. Mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.

He has been diligent in verse 3 to write concerning their common salvation or common deliverance, but this letter rises out of the necessity that Jude feels to write, exhorting believers to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Now this is the gospel, this is the believers gospel that we have studied in times past. This is Bible doctrine, if you will.

This is the living truth that is the power of God for deliverance. It is the power of God for deliverance out of this present evil age. It is the truth that is the object of our faith on a day-by-day basis.

This is the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. The gospel of salvation has been delivered to the world, hasn't it? The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin,

righteousness and judgment. God the Holy Spirit delivers the quote-unquote gospel of salvation.

The gospel that saves us from the lake of fire and enters us into union with Christ and relationship with God for all eternity. This is the gospel that was delivered to the saints. This is the gospel delivered to believers.

And the thrust of this short letter from Jude is to contend for that faith. This is why we stand up and speak when false doctrine is taught in churches, when erroneous views of the Christian life are put forward as being the means to spirituality, the means to pleasing God, the means to having a proper life as a believer. Personal fulfillment, the achievement of personal goals, the resolution of personal problems, great satisfaction and so forth is put forward as the goal of the Christian life and as the measure of the Christian life.

If you're happy, if you're fulfilled, if you're ministering, if you're having an impact, you're a successful believer. This is a false gospel. This is a false doctrine.

It will not stand up in the glaring light of God's judgment when our lives are evaluated. The fact that I personally had a great time in this life is not at the center of God's plan. It is a byproduct, but it's not the measure, and it's not the fulfillment of God's purpose.

God did not create the universe. He did not organize human history. He did not send His Son, Jesus Christ, to die just so I could be personally fulfilled and personally happy.

I have to say that carefully because my personal fulfillment and my personal happiness is something that flows out of God's plan. I have that as a byproduct and as a happy consequence of participation in God's plan, as we all do. But it's not the goal.

It's not the purpose. It's not at the center of God's plan. Jude says, listen, I've written to you in the past about salvation.

I'm writing you now because you need to contend earnestly. This is something important. He doesn't say if it happens to come up, if it seems like a good occasion.

He says you need to contend earnestly for the faith that has been delivered once and for all to the saints. It didn't have to be delivered over a great period of time. This was given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

It's been given through the apostles to the church. This is church age truth for church age believers to accomplish the church age calling for the people of God, the children of God, the sons of God. Why is it that it's necessary to earnestly contend for the faith? Because unnoticed, unidentified purveyors of a different truth have crept into the church.

They turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, do you think that somebody could come into the church and say, oh, by the way, Jesus is not the son of God, and God doesn't really exist, and God's not important, and you shouldn't worry about God, you shouldn't worry about Christ, and that they would creep unnoticed into a church? What sort of denial is this? What kind of false gospel is this that turns the grace of God into lewdness and denies God and denies the Lord Jesus Christ? This is not a denial of identity. This is a denial of truth.

This is a denial of purpose. This is denying God and denying the Lord Jesus Christ their rightful place, their rightful glory, their expression of truth. Jesus Christ is the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.

Jesus Christ is the full expression of God's grace, and He reflects the purpose of God's grace in our lives. To present a different gospel, to lead believers down a path that has a different goal and a different end is to deny God. It is the same thing that happened in Israel.

When they were disobedient as believers, the first commandment was immediately broken. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. To seek earthly treasures, to pursue worldly attainments, whether it is accomplishment or respect or the admiration of one's peers, whatever it might be, personal satisfaction, personal fulfillment in whatever area.

These can even be in legitimate areas. There is nothing wrong with marriage, but some people make a goal out of marriage and out of showing off some sort of a model marriage all the way around their circle of acquaintance and their family and so forth. To be able to get people to believe that your marriage is the best thing that ever happened, that is satisfaction.

That is the goal, to achieve financial success or employment success or social success. Some people, you sort of reflect your own personality when you are amazed by some things. It may not be amazing to other people, but we have people who pursue just physical beauty and who knock themselves out with hair appointments and cosmetics and clothes and their car and the appearance of their house and just the surface appearance of things.

If that comes off well, if they have a social, over the holidays if people come, there is nothing wrong with any of these things when they are in the right perspective. It is an admirable thing. You read Proverbs 31 about the woman who has everything in order, that is a wonderful thing.

But you can take any wonderful proper thing and put it at the center of the universe and now it is not a wonderful thing anymore. It has taken God's place and it denies the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place and it denies God the Father His rightful place. We think, well, we don't have this problem that Jude is writing about.

I haven't heard anybody lately come in and deny the Lord Jesus Christ or deny God the Father, so I don't really need to pay a whole lot of attention to the rest of this. This must be talking about unbelievers. They deny God, they deny Christ, they are not even saved.

Well, I know the difference between them. And then we sort of switch off and we don't pay a whole lot of attention to everything else that Jude says. We say, you know, I am in a comfortable circle of believers, I know where I stand.

Believers deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter knows about this and we are going to see Peter talk about it this morning. But you can turn the grace of God.

A non-believer can't take the grace of God and do anything to it because he doesn't possess it. He doesn't have any say over it. He doesn't have any comprehension of it.

It is believers who take the grace of God and pervert it. And this little book is talking about believers. And it's an unfortunate thing and I'll say more in a little bit about this problem that we have about taking sections of scripture that talk about believers who are missing their calling and saying, well, those are unbelievers.

Suffice it to say, unbelievers can't do anything to the grace of God. It is only believers who have received the grace of God, who have been given an understanding of the grace of God, who then turn around and pervert it and turn it into lewdness and deny in so doing the Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. So Jude says in verse 5, I want to remind you, though you once knew this, what's the implication? This is something they once knew, but it's slipped away.

It's gone away from their consciousness. They've stopped applying it. It has stopped having any practical value to them.

Though you once knew this, I'm going to remind you again. The Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. What's the message in that? What is the reminder there? I want to remind you, you knew this before, that God saved everybody out of Egypt and then destroyed a bunch of them for lack of faith.

What is that message? Those Israelites who came out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb represent believers. They are believers. And yet they drop in the wilderness over a period of 40 years.

Some of them are swallowed up in the earth, as we'll shortly see, before the 40 years even get well underway. Why? Not because they have repudiated the blood of the Passover lamb. Not because they no longer believe that there is a God or that there is a thing called redemption.

But because they are disobedient. Because they pursue their own desires, their own

goals, their own interests. They are concerned about their own relative level of comfort.

Oh, that we were back in Egypt with the leeks and garlicks. Oh, that even when we were slaves we had it better than we have it now out here in the wilderness. That becomes their focus.

They are disobedient. They are apathetic. They deny the Lord God the worship that He has due, the place in their lives that He has due.

And God destroys them. They die the sin unto death in the wilderness. So that's his first example.

He says, I'm going to remind you of a couple of things from the Scriptures. You knew this once, but it's starting to slip away under the influence of these people who are preaching this false gospel to believers. Verse 6, the angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own abode.

He has reserved an everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. You remember just a few weeks ago we talked about this everlasting, this idea of everlasting. In Greek it's unto the ages.

And everlasting doesn't mean into the indefinite eternal future, does it? These angels are in eternal chains, but that is until the judgment day. After the judgment day, those chains are not going to be there anymore. Everlasting or eternal, you have to understand it in context.

And I hope that my eternal salvation lasts longer than these eternal chains that are on the angels. Because those angels are going to be brought up and judged. And that issue that God has with them will ultimately be resolved.

But right now they are in the pit. Right now they are in darkness. And they are reserved unto the judgment of the great day.

Once the judgment of the great day takes place, they're not going to be in those chains. And yet those chains are called everlasting. Why is that important? Well, you need to always look at context.

We always have to look at context to know how long these things last. But who are these angels? Is this Satan and his demons? No, it's not. In the first example in verse 5, first of all you have the unbelievers who are left behind in Egypt.

You have Israel as the people of God, delivered out of bondage, delivered under the blood. And they are believers. And then, out of that group of believers, many of them are destroyed for unbelief.

For apisteia, lack of faith. Living faith. Obedience faith.

Fulfillment of calling faith. Here, you have these angels who did not keep their proper domain. These are not the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion.

These are the angels who were assigned to judge the earth in Genesis chapter 6. To which we will come in the not too distant future. Suffice it to say that God assigned angels a supervisory, overseeing responsibility on the early civilization of man outside the garden. And these angels violated their call.

They violated their office. They crossed a line that God had set between angels and man. These were, quote unquote, elect angels.

These were good angels. These were angels who were assigned by God to oversee the early infancy of human civilization. And we'll see this in detail in Genesis 6. But they're not the fallen angels that went with Satan.

This is a different category. These are angels who disobeyed. Who did not keep their office.

Who did not keep their first estate, it used to say in the old King James. That's why their current location is different. The demons and Satan roam the earth.

These angels do not. Satan and his angels are going to come under a certain judgment at the end of time. These angels have a different crime and a different punishment.

Verse 7, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in a similar manner to Sodom and Gomorrah, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. If you go back and study this in Genesis, what is the purpose of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Did you ever wonder about this? How many evil cities have there been? How many rotten civilizations? Well, they've existed in every generation of human history. Why is it that God picked out Sodom and Gomorrah and utterly destroyed them with fire and brimstone so that grass won't even grow there? Why did he pick out those particular cities, Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain, and utterly obliterate them? Why did God do that? Well, again, in our study of Genesis, when we come to that, we're going to see that these, it's exactly what Jude says here, God made an example out of those cities, specifically played against or in contrast to Lot.

Lot is a believer. Lot vexes his righteous soul, it says in Hebrews 11. Living there.

You can't have a righteous soul unless you're a believer. Lot's a believer. But Lot has bought into the economy in Sodom and that whole culture.

He's a judge there. He's the guy they come to, and he's trying to make a difference. He's trying to have an impact on his community in Sodom and in Gomorrah.

And if you read through that story, you'll see that the men, as they clamor outside to get the two messengers from God and have their way with them, that they say, you've set yourself as a judge among us, and now I think we're going to put our retribution on you instead of these two men. Lot was out there justifying his existence out in the world, saying, well, I'm out here and I can make a difference. And I'll display some righteousness here amongst these people.

And God says, Lot, you come out of there and I'll show you what I think of this people and what I think of their values and their culture and their self-serving, self-seeking, self-gratifying way of life. And God made an object lesson for Abraham and for Lot out of these people. God could not destroy Lot with fire and brimstone because Lot's a believer.

So God says, you come out of here and let me make an object lesson out of people I can destroy and that I can obliterate here to show you how hateful all of this is to me and how far away you ought to be from this. But this was a lesson for a believer and for all believers since. These three examples in verses 5, 6, and 7 are designed to wake up believers to the sanctified, separated way of life to which we are called.

It is not a self-seeking, self-gratifying, self-serving way of life. Why did these angels in verse 6 fall? They saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful and they married them. If this had been demons trying to corrupt the human race or something why would they have gone through a marriage ceremony? This was something that was justified in their minds.

They went through a marriage ceremony. They took wives, it says. This is not rape.

This is not attack. This is not forcible overthrow of these ladies. They compromised.

They married. They had families. They raised children.

They tried to justify this in their own minds and they disobeyed God in so doing. But they were carried away by their desire. The people who left the land of Egypt were carried away by their own desires, by their own sense of the need for fulfillment and the need for something they felt they didn't have.

Same thing in verse 6. Same thing in verse 7. It's an extreme there when you see these people in Sodom and Gomorrah who are so controlled by their lusts that they're willing to attack just about anything or anybody to fulfill themselves. And this is set forth as an example. Suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Let me ask you something. Are Sodom and Gomorrah still burning? No, they're not. Why does it say eternal fire? What's our context? The context is the judgment of God and the justice and the judgment of God, that is eternal.

That's an eternal part of God. He does not change. He's always righteous.

He's always just. His judgment is always just. And this is a judgment that took place once and its results go on forever.

But the fire itself is not eternal, is it? You can't go over there and see a John F. Kennedy grave type of flame coming up at the edge of the Dead Sea there. Likewise also, and now he comes back to the application. These dreamers defile the flesh.

Now, all of this language means something. In the early days of the church, Jude, one of the half-brothers of the Lord, he's in the early days of the church. In the early days of the church, it is almost exclusively Jewish.

These people came up under the law. What does it mean to defile? It means that you were clean. You were qualified.

You were allowed entrance into the court for worship and so forth. You were allowed in the assembly in the Old Testament days. To be defiled is to lose that privilege and to be outside the camp.

It was a ritual defilement, and you had a ritual purification, and there were regulations for this. But you can't be defiled unless you started out not being defiled. If you're unclean, you don't defile something that's unclean.

You defile something that's clean, don't you? So if these dreamers defile the flesh, what does that mean? It means that there was a time when they were not defiled. It means that they are believers. To say that this is unbelievers is to say that an unbeliever who, as all of us were in unbelief, are already as unclean and defiled as you can get can somehow defile yourself.

These are believers. They defile the flesh. They reject authority, and they speak evil of dignitaries.

If this were talking about unbelievers, what is the issue for an unbeliever? It is rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. It is rejection of God and His plan. It is rejection of God and His existence.

God and His righteousness. It is a rejection of the whole concept of accountability to God. Believers who pursue a disobedient, apathetic lifestyle become very similar to unbelievers.

Hence the confusion we have in passages like this. But the clues are here and the purpose is here. Jude is writing to warn believers about what can happen if they're not careful, about where they can go.

You don't have to warn a believer about being an unbeliever, because once you're a believer, you can't be an unbeliever again. But you can warn a believer about living like

an unbeliever, losing inheritance, losing reward, lapsing into the vomit that characterizes the fallen world. These dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of authorities or dignitaries.

These are sins. These are things believers should know better than to do. If I was going to write a passage condemning unbelievers, I could think of a lot worse things than rejecting authority and speaking evil of authorities.

I could think of a whole lot worse things than that. But these are awful things, awful sins for believers. It goes on and gives the example of Michael.

You have the whole quotation from the apocryphal books, and there's an issue there in itself. But these speak evil of whatever they do not know, in verse 10. And we see this happening all around us today.

And there are born-again believers on TV and on the radio and in books and in big churches, mega stadiums filled with people who stand up and mouth off about Satan and mouth off about the demons. And they stand there in their ignorance, speaking about what they do not know, and think that they are binding the demons and that they are binding Satan and that they're preying him down and that they're somehow having some big influence in the unseen world of the angelic creation. And this passage talks about those people.

This has happened in every generation, and it has proliferated in this age of media. And to say that this is talking about unbelievers, now what are you going to say about these people who are... If this is unbelievers, then do you have a passage of Scripture to talk about believers who do these things? Well, this is talking about believers, and we have this happening every day. It is happening as we speak.

If I went over and turned on Christian TV, I could find somebody who is engaging in this particular sin. Now, that's not judging. That's discerning.

If I went out there and tried to punish them in some way, I'd be judging. But we are commanded to discern and to know the difference between truth and error. And that is error.

They speak evil of what they do not know and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts. In these things, they corrupt themselves. Why is it that they spend all the time spouting the prosperity gospel? Because that's their gospel.

That's what they're looking for. That's what they're reveling in is prosperity and enlarging the coffers and getting those gifts and aggrandizing themselves and gilding their TV sets and enhancing their homes and their lifestyles and so forth. And they figure that everybody thinks the way they do.

So they preach the prosperity gospel and they preach the emotional gospel and they ride these waves of emotion and they figure that's what everyone else wants to do. And in many cases, it's true. And they know these things naturally.

Any human being in the flesh can feel the pull of lust, of desire, of the felt need for fulfillment. And so they cater to that. They understand it very well because they are entrapped in it and entangled in it themselves.

Woe to them, Jude says. They have gone in the way of Cain. We're going to see in Genesis chapter 4 what the way of Cain is.

The reason we're spending a little time on this passage is this is our background. We're going to understand exactly what's going on in that relatively short episode in Genesis chapter 4 with the benefit of this hindsight. They have gone in the way of Cain.

They have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit. Balaam is a prophet of God. He's not an Israelite, but he is a Mesopotamian.

He is from the region from which Abraham came just a few hundred years earlier. And for whatever reason, he has come to the knowledge of God. He is a believer.

He has a relationship with God. He understands truth about God, which he is going to preach. God the Holy Spirit is going to enable and empower him, and he's going to exercise his gift as a prophet to bless Israel as we began to see last week.

He also merchandises his gift. He takes his salvation, he takes his standing as a prophet of God, and parlays it into influence and wealth and things that are self-seeking, self-serving, self-gratifying. That is the error of Balaam.

Why is it the angel has to stop him on the road? Because he can't get down the road fast enough to earn that fee for cursing Israel. He's already heard God say no, but he figures there's got to be a way. I've got to be a way I can have my cake and eat it too.

I can go on down here and go ahead and accept these riches. And we're going to see more about Balaam. But he's a believer.

He has a relationship with God. God doesn't give truth in the Holy Spirit and have face-to-face conversations with unbelievers. He does that with believers.

They have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and they have perished in the rebellion of Korah. If you remember that story, that is a desire for prestige. Are Moses and Aaron the only ones who can speak for God? Didn't God say we're a nation of priests? Why do they get all the glory? Why do they have all the authority? Why can't we have the same standing as Moses? Who elected them and put them in charge? They're just self-appointed leaders.

Why can't we have that same thing? I want, I need, I deserve. And these people perished because of their rejection of God's order and of God's authority. So these are all examples of believers who pursue their own desires.

These men, these dreamers, these wayward You might use the term, if you've heard it before, reversionistic believers. They have reverted back to the lifestyle and the way of thinking that characterizes unbelievers. They 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. Remember Ephesians chapter 4? People who are carried about by every wind of doctrine. These people are rudderless, anchorless.

They have cast off the benefit that God gives through His Spirit and through His Word. They are trees without fruit. And this is a common metaphor for the people of God who are charged with bearing fruit and who fail to do so.

Again, you can go to John. I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and bear fruit.

This is the will of my Father. If you are a branch and you don't bear fruit, you're a believer, but you're going to be snapped off and that branch is going to be burned. And there is a consequence for disobedience and faithlessness for believers.

And it's severe. But we just gloss over that. We flatten it.

We assign it to unbelievers and we go on unwarned, unheeding, and in many ways susceptible to these very same errors because we don't heed the warnings. We explain them away. These are believers who are late autumn trees without fruit.

Twice dead. Why are they twice dead? They were dead as unbelievers. They were given new life in Christ.

And now, as believers, they are dead branches. They are fruitless. They reflect no glory of God.

They deny the Lord that bought them. They are dead again. Twice dead.

What other explanation can there be? They are twice dead. They were dead, made alive, and now they've died again operationally. Died with regard to righteousness.

Died with regard to the plan of God or opportunity for reflecting the glory of God. Pulled up by the roots. Reminds you of the parable of the soils.

Raging waves of the sea. Remember back in Isaiah, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. These waters cast up mire and dirt.

There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked. And you look at the context, and once again, that is faithless, disobedient Israel. Raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame.

Wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. You hit another one of these forevers, and you say, well gosh, blackness of darkness forever, that's got to be, unbeliever, eternal punishment. And it's not.

First of all, how do you get blackness out of the lake of fire? Why is God not consistent in his picture of eternal punishment for unbelievers? Is it a lake of fire, or is it blackness of darkness? Well, you think about the earlier part of this chapter, there is a difference between Satan and his demons who will be cast into the lake of fire, which burns forever and ever, and these angels who are, what you might say, not fallen angels, in the sense of following Satan and his rebellion, they are disobedient angels. They are elect angels who did not follow instructions with regard to the oversight of the human race. They mingled when God told them not to mingle.

They married, justifying this in their own minds, and they should not have. Their punishment, their discipline, their judgment from God is pictured as darkness. What is darkness? Darkness is outside the light, away from the presence of God.

It's the same picture you have of believers that we've seen in the parables who are outside the feast, outside the light, cast the unprofitable servant into the darkness, which is outside. Darkness is distance from the light. It is away from the light.

It is outside the presence of God, and compared to the presence of God, it's black, it's dark. If you don't value the presence of God, why should God honor you with His presence? If you don't appreciate it, if you don't value it, if you don't care about it, God's not going to foist it on us. And this blackness of darkness is forever in the same sense that the chains on the angels are forever, in the same way that the eternal fire that burnt up Sodom and Gomorrah is forever.

This is an expression of the absolute, forever nature of the justice and the judgment of God. I am not prepared to say that this discipline is eternal in the sense that believers who fail in this life will never again enjoy the presence of God, that they'll be resurrected and saved, but they'll be at a distance. But this is forever in the sense of history.

This is forever in the sense of life. This is forever, possibly, in the sense of the millennial kingdom. But there is a difference between the blackness of darkness and the lake of fire, and there's no way around it.

It's either fire or it's darkness. They can't both be the same thing. And so this argues for it being something different.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men, saying, Behold, the Lord

comes with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have committed in an ungodly way. A judgment of deeds is not a salvation judgment. A judgment of deeds is a judgment of believers.

Unbelievers are not judged for their deeds. They are judged for their lack of faith in Christ, their lack of righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. And the only mention of deeds at the great white throne is to indicate the inadequacy of those works to measure up to the righteousness of God.

But to be convicted of ungodly deeds committed in an ungodly way, and of harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him, these are sinners in the ranks of believers. These are unforgiven sinners who have not confessed, who have not been cleansed, who have not been washed clean, who have not been purged with hyssop and made whiter than snow. And we just don't like to think about this.

We prefer to think that believers are all up in this lofty plain from which we cannot fall and that there are not any very severe consequences. God will frown, and that's about it. And we deny the many, many scriptures that talk about the range of possibilities for those of us who are saved and who are resurrected.

And Enoch, living in the Old Testament economy, when he talks about the day when the Lord comes back, what day is that? That's the second coming. And in that day, there's going to be a judgment. There's going to be a judgment seat of Christ, if you will, for Old Testament saints, just as there will be for Church-age believers.

Ours comes seven years sooner. But when Jesus Christ returns with His holy ones, with His saints, which is us, He is going to have a judgment seat for Old Testament saints. And there's going to be the same range of possibilities for them, if not greater, that there is for us.

And for those who, by faith and patience, have sought after righteousness, He will grant eternal life. And that's the eternal life package of reward. A life in the sense of quality.

For those who have been disobedient, apathetic, tribulation, wrath, anguish, there is going to be shame. There is going to be sorrow. There is going to be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth among believers, both in the Church age and in the Old Testament age, for when we see the glory of God and we see what the opportunities were and how badly we have missed it, we receive our just recompense of reward, it's going to be a bad time and there's just no way around it.

The wonderful thing is that we can be warned by these things and there's no reason for us to suffer that negative fate. There is a great, bright hope. There is wonderful provision from God for us.

The purpose of these warnings is not to depress us and we think, boy, wide is the way and broad is the gate and what are my chances? I'm probably going to be in this big, pathetic crowd out in the darkness. There is no reason for that. The whole reason God chides us and warns us and scourges us with these warnings is to remind us that there is no reason to be in this category.

We look at the Israelites that came out of Egypt and we say, how could they have been so blind? How could they have been so callous? They saw the pillar. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire are right there. They can look up and see them at the very point that they're grumbling and complaining and bad-mouthing Moses and rejecting the whole plan of God for them.

All they have to do is glance up and there's this huge, supernatural pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. There's manna raining down on their heads every day. How could they possibly have missed it? Well, we need to ask ourselves that question.

We have manna raining down on our heads. We have the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in the form of the Word of God and the Spirit of God that encourages us and leads us and guides us, empowers us, convicts us, cleanses us. We're washed clean by the Word of God.

We are sanctified through prayer, through the Spirit, through the Word. There's no reason in the world for us to miss the bright hope and the wonderful opportunity to reflect the glory of God. We just have to wake up to it and we have to start looking around and recognizing where the truth is, where the right is, and it needs to make a difference on a day-by-day basis.

We've got to say, I've heard all of this wonderful Bible teaching. Does it make any difference? Am I a different person? Do I think any differently now than I did two weeks ago, two months ago, two years ago? Am I looking? Am I unearthing the rocks in my soul that are preventing the seed of the Word of God from sinking deep roots into me and rising up and bearing fruit? Is my life characterized by love, by joy, by peace, by patience? How do I treat believers? How do I treat... Think of the believer that is closest in your periphery. If you're married, it's your spouse.

If you're not married, you have people close in your periphery, believers in your periphery. What is the nature of that relationship? How do we treat them minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day? What is the nature and the flavor and the atmosphere there? Is it characterized by patience, by love, by encouragement, by... Or is it characterized by criticism, by fault finding, by hardness, by grudge bearing, by all of the things that are not a part of the fruit of the Spirit? We need to ask ourselves that question. We need to look at these passages and not just say, oh boy.

And we also don't need to get caught up in the idea that, well, oh boy, we're seeing

something here that nobody else has ever seen. This is a different interpretation. Some people thrive on trying to find some sort of a breakthrough or trying to be different.

And that's not the point. None of these things make any difference unless it changes our life, unless it brings us forward in God's plan and will make a difference when we stand before God each day as we go to Him in prayer, when we ultimately stand before God at the judgment seat of Christ. These things better make a difference or we're wasting our time.

We're just going through platitudes. We're going through the motions. We're doing some kind of a surface thing of saying, well, I've punched that part of my ticket.

Now I can go on and live the rest of my life. Jude writes this little short book to wake people up. Jesus told the parables to wake people up.

We've got the record of the Old Testament to wake us up. We've got fire and brimstone raining down on Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot escaping by the skin of his teeth to wake us up. There is a range of possibilities for us that hinges entirely on what we do with the Word of God, on what we do with the Word of God.

The Spirit of God and the power of God that He has put within our reach, has put right inside us. It's got to make a difference. What more can God do? The only other thing He could do outside of these sharp warnings, these attention-getting warnings, would be to start striking the ground with lightning around us to wake us up.

We see in Scripture God even did that in Israel and it didn't wake them up. If the Word of God doesn't wake us up, nothing will. Well, this is our wake-up call.

We're going to see after the break when we return to the end of Genesis 3 and the beginning of 4 and the link that we saw last week to the time of Balaam and the oracles of Balaam that this is...