



"When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity."

—Dale Carnegie

10-Aug-12

A Warning from Jude (Part One)

The [book of Jude](#) is one of the shortest in the Bible, containing just 19 sentences, and a little over 600 words. It is the length of an average blog post, yet this epistle is brimming with descriptive allusions and hard-hitting admonitions. The book's purpose appears in [Jude 3-4](#), where it states that Jude is writing to exhort his readers to fight for "the [faith](#) which was once for all delivered to the saints," because of "certain men," as the apostle calls them, who had slipped in among the brethren, and were using the grace of [God](#) as license for evil.

As short as this letter is, it contains so much that we will limit our focus to a single warning, found in [Jude 11](#): "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 refers to three well-known [Old Testament](#) characters, and these quick allusions add even more color to the overall tapestry that Jude is weaving. By examining the main themes in the stories of Cain, Balaam, and Korah, we can better understand Jude's warning to the church.

His first reference is to Cain: "they have gone in the way of Cain," or it could be translated as "they have traveled down Cain's path." Cain holds the distinction of being the world's first murderer, but his killing of his brother came quite a way down the path. In order to understand "the way of Cain," we have to go back to the head of the trail:

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. ([Genesis 4:3-8](#))

A couple of other scriptures touch on this incident. [Hebrews 11:4](#) teaches us, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous." In [I John 3:12](#), the aged apostle states that Cain murdered his brother "[b]ecause his works were evil and his brother's righteous." "Evil" may seem like a strong word to describe an offering made to God—his only recorded "work" prior to the murder—but that is how John classifies it!

Several Greek words can be translated as "evil," but the one John uses focuses on the *effect* or the *influence* of an act, more than the act itself. In other words, it was *good* that Cain brought an offering and that he made it "in the process of time," or "at the appointed [or designated] time." Even so, it was *evil in its effects* because of what was missing, as we will see.

The fact that Abel made an offering "by faith" means that God had already taught them about sacrifices, and Abel obeyed. As Paul writes in [Romans 10:17](#), "[F]aith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The sacrifices, then, were not something Cain and Abel dreamed up. They were being held to a definite standard, which is why God was pleased with one

and not the other. The brothers were not in doubt over what God required of them. On the contrary, one was faithful in his response, and the other believed he could [worship God](#) on his own terms.

To understand what happened, we have to refer to the instructions for the sacrifices found in Leviticus. In particular, a [grain offering](#) could not be offered without a whole burnt offering, and neither one of those could be offered until a [sin offering](#) had first been made. God is specific in His instructions because of what the various offerings represent. Notice, though, that Cain's offering was of "the fruit of the ground," which indicates a grain offering *without* the offerings which were supposed to precede it. Abel, on the other hand, brought an offering from the firstborn of his flock, a description that reveals that Abel's offering was either a whole burnt offering or a sin offering.

Whatever the case, Cain at the very least ignored God's instructions regarding an appropriate sacrifice, and thus his offering did not please God. But when we consider what the various offerings represent, his [carelessness](#) becomes quite grievous. In short, the sin offering represents the sinless life of the Savior, given to pay a life-debt so that man might continue living. The whole burnt offering represents a man's wholehearted devotion to God. The grain offering represents a man's devotion to his fellow man.

Putting this together, Cain's offering suggests that he was devoted to his fellow man, but his offering leaves out any thought of devotion to God, let alone atonement and reconciliation with Him. Cain, we might say, was the original humanist—he was focused on the human aspect over the divine, whereas the true path consists of [love](#) toward God *and* fellow man ([Matthew 22:37-40](#)). In a twist of terrible irony, when God rejected Cain's offering, he lashed out and killed the fellow man to which he had symbolically claimed devotion! On top of that, he was cursed with being a fugitive and a vagabond, always living *apart* from his fellow man ([Genesis 4:12](#)).

In summary, the "way of Cain" includes religion and worship on one's own terms, with more faith in one's own righteousness than in God's. It also contains a humanistic bent that believes that we can have good relationships with others even without first being reconciled with God and wholly devoted to Him. It can involve works that may appear good on the surface, but end up

being evil in their effect or influence. The way of Cain is about shortcuts for the sake of expediency, rather than submitting to the pattern that God has set forth.

Next time, we will consider the example of Balaam, the second character in Jude's warning.

- David C. Grabbe

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

God's sense of justice comes into question in the minds of men when they read of His judgments in the Bible and see His acts in history. His judgments seem unfair because man can never please God on his own since God's standards are higher than he can achieve. Yet He has made it clear that even the smallest infraction of His law merits the death penalty. Everyone is guilty! God, then, is absolutely justified in what He decides regarding the judgment and punishment of us all (conversely, He always rewards righteousness). Moreover, we do not know all the circumstances and reasons for His judgments, so our opinions of God's decisions are at best ill-informed. Of all judges, only God is absolutely fair and incorruptible. And when He shows mercy it manifests His lovingkindness and grace.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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