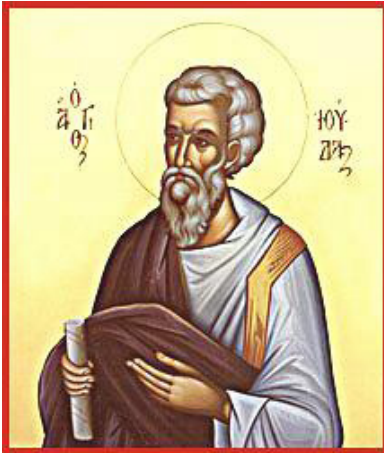


The Wisdom of Jude

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



The Bible readings for March 12 and 14 include the entire Letter of Jude, the second-last book of the New Testament.

Consisting of a single chapter with 24 verses, this letter has a powerful impact for so brief a document. It was inspired by a crisis, and is not the kind of letter the author had intended to write before the crisis arose. Jude states that he had planned to write about "our common salvation."

In other words, the letter was to be a general description of the beliefs that all Christians hold. He says that he was "very eager" to send such a letter. So it must have been quite a crisis that compelled him to write in an altogether different way, urging his fellow believers to "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

He then names the cause of the crisis: There are false teachers who have made their way, secretly, into the Church. These are not enemies from outside, putting forth theories about life and salvation that are different from those of the Church. These are people who are living, working and teaching among the believers and who "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Jude offers three examples of what happens to those who "pervert the grace of God" as these false teachers do. First he describes those who were saved out of the land of Egypt in Moses' time. That deliverance was no guarantee of eternal salvation for people if they did not continue in faithfulness; Jude writes that God "afterward destroyed those who did not believe."

Next he describes angels who rebelled against God. They fell from their lofty position and now await a fearful judgment in the "nether gloom."

The third example is Sodom and Gomorrah, where immorality and unnatural lust led people to actions worthy of "a punishment of eternal fire."

Jude sees the false teachers' arrogant behavior as being just as dangerous as the rebellion and immorality he has described. He writes that the Archangel Michael, when disputing with the devil, didn't presume to pronounce a "reviling judgment" on him, but left it to God. Unlike the archangel, these men "dare to revile whatever they do not understand." At the Eucharistic feast, they carouse and look after themselves rather than being peaceful and showing consideration for everyone.

This letter contains harsh condemnations. But Jude has seen the terrible effects of rebellion against God among his own people, in the churches established by the apostles. He calls on church members to be loving: to convince, save, or have mercy on anyone they encounter. But they must also take care for their own salvation through prayer, building on their foundation of faith, keeping themselves in God's love, and waiting patiently for Christ's mercy.

This path to salvation is open to anyone; those who rebel are freely choosing not to take it and they know the consequences. Jude uses strong language and powerful images to help his readers choose to stay on the path.