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Session 32 - 2 Peter and Jude

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Tucked away near the very end of the New Testament are two of its shortest and honestly weirdest little letters, 2 Peter and Jude. They might seem a bit obscure, but they are absolutely locked in a fascinating literary puzzle, both written to take down one single really dangerous idea that was threatening the early church. And here's what's so interesting.

You have these two letters from two totally different authors tackling the exact same crisis. It was a crisis of ideas that threatened to completely unravel the moral fabric of the early Christian communities. And the way they overlap created this puzzle that scholars to this day still talk about.

So what was this big problem? Well, at the heart of both of these letters is a major conflict with a group of false teachers, and they were spreading this idea that was super seductive and also incredibly dangerous. I mean, just imagine for a second being told that your actions simply don't matter, that none of your moral choices have any ultimate consequence at all. That is the exact message these teachers were pushing.

Now there's a fancy-sounding word for this idea. It's called antinomianism. It actually comes from two Greek words, anti, which means against, and nomos, which means law.

So against the law. It's basically the belief that because you have faith, you're now above the law- any moral or ethical law- and you're totally free from responsibility. Their argument really boiled down to this.

They were claiming that the whole promise of Jesus returning for a final judgment was just a big lie. And think about it. If there's no final accountability, what's stopping you from doing whatever you want? Both letters make it super clear that this teaching was leading people directly into sexual immorality.

Okay, so first up to the plate to fight this is the apostle Peter. And he doesn't just dismiss the idea. No, he constructs this careful, logical, and really systematic takedown of their entire argument, piece by piece.

What's so cool here is the way the letter is written. To Peter is framed as a testament, which was a common way of writing back then. It's meant to be the last words of a dying hero.

So Peter knows he's about to die, and he's using this final message to give his warning some incredible weight and authority. So the false teachers start by attacking the source. They claim the apostles just made up a bunch of cleverly devised myths about Jesus' return.

And Peter's comeback is so powerful and personal. He's basically saying, myths? You think we just made this up? I was there. I saw it with my own eyes.

Me, James, and John, we saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain. We got a sneak preview, a glimpse of the glory he'll have when he comes back. Okay, next they go after the scriptures.

They argue, you know, all those Old Testament prophets who talked about a day of judgment, they were just wrong. But Peter fires right back, defending the divine inspiration of the scripture itself. He says the prophets weren't just giving their personal opinions.

They were conduits for God, moved by the Holy Spirit to deliver a message of both salvation and judgment. And this brings us to their biggest, most practical objection. Their trump card.

They're saying, look around. It's been a long time. If Jesus was going to come back, he would have done it by now.

The delay proves it's not happening. But Peter brilliantly flips this whole argument on its head. He explains that what looks like a delay to us is actually an act of God's patience.

God isn't being slow. He's being merciful, giving more and more people a chance to repent before the end. All right, so that's Peter's approach.

Now let's switch gears to our second letter from Jude. He's fighting the same exact problem, but he takes a completely different and much, much stranger approach. Jude, who right at the beginning says he's the brother of Jesus and James, doesn't bother with all the systematic arguments.

His letter is just this short, sharp, urgent burst of warning. And yeah, it gets pretty weird. He's essentially saying, you want to know what happens to people who defy God and live immoral lives? Fine, let me give you a list.

And whoa, what a list it is. He just rapid-fires these examples from history. He reminds them about the Israelites who were saved from Egypt, only to be destroyed in the desert because of their disbelief.

He brings up Sodom and Gomorrah, the classic story of judgment for sexual immorality. He even talks about a Jewish tradition about angels who rebelled and are now literally being held in chains waiting for judgment. And then he drops his strangest example of all.

OK, let's just pause here, because this is easily one of the most bizarre verses in the entire New Testament. Jude describes this cosmic battle between the archangel Michael and the devil over the dead body of Moses. Now if you're scratching your head trying to remember that story from the Old Testament, don't worry, it's not there.

Jude is actually quoting from another ancient Jewish book called the Testament of Moses. And he's using this wild story to make a point. Hey, even a super powerful archangel defers to God's authority, something these false teachers were refusing to do.

So we've got two letters, Peter's and Jude's, both fighting the same battle. But the connection between them goes way deeper than that. When you actually put the text of the two letters next to each other, you find something absolutely astonishing.

And I don't just mean they have similar ideas; I mean they share the exact same rare vocabulary, the same phrasing, the same unique examples. The similarities are so precise there is no way it's a coincidence. One of these authors was definitely reading the other one's work.

Take a look at this. This is just one example. You can see right here how both passages are describing the false teachers and their coming doom using strikingly similar language.

It's the ancient world's version of copy and paste. So the big question is, who copied whom? Well, the leading theory among most scholars is that Jude wrote his short, fiery letter first. Then, a bit later, the author of 2 Peter, facing the same problem, took the core of Jude's warning, wove it into his own letter, and then built his own detailed arguments right on top of it.

Now, this brings up a final, pretty obvious question, right? If 2 Peter contains most of Jude's letter anyway, why did the early church decide to keep both books in the New Testament? Why not just stick with the longer, more comprehensive one? Well, there are a few really good reasons. First off, Jude's credentials were rock solid. I mean, this is the brother of Jesus.

His perspective was considered incredibly important. Second, they really do complement each other. Jude provides the fiery, urgent alarm bell, while 2 Peter provides the detailed theological framework to defeat the teaching.

And finally, keeping both of them in sends this powerful, unified message. It shows just how seriously the early church took this threat, and it reinforces from two different authoritative sources that this kind of teaching has absolutely no place in the faith. So in the end, despite the different styles, the weird stories, and the literary borrowing, both Peter and Jude land in the exact same spot.

They are both arguing, passionately, that real, genuine faith is not just about a set of beliefs you hold in your head. It has to, and always will be, connected to how you actually live your life. And this leaves us with a question that is just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago.

This whole ancient debate forces us to ask ourselves: what's the real relationship between our beliefs and our behavior? For Peter and for Jude, the answer was crystal clear. You simply cannot separate the two.