

Jude 1:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Analysis

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. Jude pronounces judgment—"Woe unto them!" (Greek *ouai autois, οὐαὶ αὐτοῖς*)—echoing prophetic denunciations (Isaiah 5:8-23, Matthew 23:13-29). He provides three more Old Testament examples characterizing the false teachers' errors. First, "the way of Cain" (Greek *tē hodō tou Kain, τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Κάιν*) refers to Genesis 4:3-8. Cain's sin wasn't merely murder but underlying rebellion: offering unacceptable worship, rejecting God's standards, resenting God's acceptance of Abel's faith-based offering (Hebrews 11:4).

Second, "the error of Balaam for reward" (Greek *tē planē tou Balaam misthou exechythēsan, τῇ πλάνῃ τοῦ Βαλαὰμ μισθοῦ ἐξεχύθησαν*) references Numbers 22-25, 31:16. Balaam, though initially refusing to curse Israel, eventually taught Balak how to corrupt Israel through sexual immorality and idolatry—for financial gain. "Ran greedily" (Greek *exechythēsan, ἐξεχύθησαν*) means poured out, rushed headlong—eager pursuit of profit through compromise. Balaam represents using spiritual position for personal gain, corrupting others for money.

Third, "the gainsaying of Core" (Greek *tē antilogia tou Kore, τῇ ἀντιλογίᾳ τοῦ Κόρε*) refers to Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16). "Gainsaying" means contradiction, rebellion, speaking against authority. Korah and fellow Levites challenged Moses' and Aaron's leadership, claiming all Israel was equally holy. God's judgment was

immediate and devastating—the earth swallowed the rebels. Korah represents prideful rejection of God-established authority.

Historical Context

These three figures were proverbial in Jewish tradition as examples of various sins: Cain (jealousy, false worship, murder), Balaam (greed, corruption, false teaching for profit), and Korah (rebellion against authority, presumption). Each faced divine judgment for their sins. Jewish rabbis used these as warning examples, and early Christians adopted this interpretive tradition.

The threefold categorization identifies distinct but related errors among false teachers:

1. Wrong worship and doctrine (Cain)—rejecting God's revealed way for human alternatives.
2. Mercenary motives (Balaam)—using ministry for financial gain, corrupting others for profit.
3. Rebellious rejection of legitimate authority (Korah)—refusing submission to God-ordained leaders and structures.

All three involve prideful autonomy: determining one's own worship, pursuing selfish gain, rejecting accountability.

First-century false teachers exhibited all three characteristics. Gnostic teachers created alternative worship systems mixing Christianity with philosophy and mysticism (Cain). Many charged fees for their teaching and promised material prosperity (Balaam). They rejected apostolic authority and church discipline, claiming direct access to divine knowledge (Korah). These same patterns recur throughout church history.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do contemporary forms of ministry exhibit the patterns of Cain, Balaam, and Korah?
2. What's the balance between testing teaching critically (Acts 17:11) and respecting legitimate spiritual authority?
3. When should churches exercise formal discipline against false teachers, and how should this be conducted?

Interlinear Text

οὐαὶ	αὐτοῖς	ὅτι	τῇ	ὁδῷ	τοῦ	Καῖν	ἐπορεύθησαν
Woe	unto them	! for	G3588	in the way	G3588	of Cain	they have gone
G3759	G846	G3754		G3598		G2535	G4198
καὶ	τῇ	πλάνῃ	τοῦ	Βαλαὰμ	μισθοῦ	ἐξεχύθησαν	καὶ
and	G3588	the error	G3588	of Balaam	for reward	ran greedily after	and
G2532		G4106		G903	G3408	G1632	G2532
τῇ	ἀντιλογίᾳ	τοῦ	Κορὲ	ἀπώλοντο			
G3588	in the gainsaying	G3588	of Core	perished			
	G485		G2879	G622			

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 2:15 (Parallel theme): Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

1 John 3:12 (Parallel theme): Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Revelation 2:14 (Parallel theme): But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Hebrews 11:4 (Parallel theme): By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Matthew 11:21 (Parallel theme): Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Isaiah 3:11 (Parallel theme): Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Isaiah 3:9 (Parallel theme): The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

Deuteronomy 23:4 (Parallel theme): Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

Micah 6:5 (Parallel theme): O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

Numbers 31:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.