

# Chapter 3: The Struggle for a True Allegiance

By Pastor *Jake Wilkinson*

**Are you winning?** Someone's honest. See if we can get this to recognize me here. Are we winning in life? That is the question. I'm gonna say yes, because you're sitting in this room today. You could be anywhere else in the world, in our distracted culture, in the crazy place that we live—you could be doing anything, you could be anywhere else—and you're here. In my book, not just because I'm the pastor here, but you're winning in life. And we're about to see why.

When I first came back to church, I went to this place and the head elder of the church grabbed me. We went on a church campout and they blindfolded me. They set up this field full of all these items and I had to stay within the boundary line. There were all these people surrounding this field and they were all giving me directions. The whole point of the game—which I did not enjoy at the moment—is I'm blindfolded and I have to get to the other side to where "Jesus" is at. It was actually this tiny little man with a squeaky voice named Jeff. Sweet guy.

I remember I had to get from one side of this thing to the other side without stepping on any objects. I couldn't see anything, but I had to listen to the voices around me. And so what happened, they said, "Go." And all the voices were saying a different thing. I started walking across, blindfolded, and very quickly, I started stepping on things. And you know what happened when you stepped on things? You had to go back and start over. We were there for a little while. **(Laughter)** But what I noticed about this—this thing in particular stuck with me—because it was like the world that we live in. There are so many voices telling us what God's will is, what God's call is, and you have to pick the one voice out of there that's actually leading in that direction. I remember at the very beginning of this, there was somebody that came up and whispered in my ear, "I'm the voice of the Holy Spirit." And it's like, "What? This is so weird." And so I'm sitting there walking across this thing, and I started hearing that same voice, and it was calling out to do something different than all the other voices. In fact, all the other voices started saying the same thing, like, "Oh, turn left there," and they started trying to make me mess up. I realized I started picking out this one voice, and I started going—we're actually making some success in life.

What a simple illustration, because we live in a world where people claim to know God, they claim to know God's direction, and they may even claim it for your life. How do we know what it really is for our life? And I will say this, it's not easy. And some of it's trial and error, and there's grace for that. There are tons and tons of commands in the Bible. We do our best to maybe follow them, hopefully. Sometimes we succeed—don't laugh at that—sometimes we succeed, and other times we fail.

But for most of us, there's a few things that we can hang our hat on. Like, we don't murder, in general. We don't steal actively—and I'm not trying to call you out if you do those things. **(Laughter)** But I think most of us can hang our hat on at least a couple of those things. I don't do a lot of the terrible things that are actually there. But today, we're going to take a timeout and I don't think many of us have ever considered this: Have you ever abused the angels? Some of you were like, "Well..." What a crazy concept.

So we're in this book of Jude, and if this has been a struggle for you, well, join the crowd. We don't recommend doing this, actually—starting a series for the church on Jude. But mama didn't raise a quitter, and so we're here today, and we're gonna tackle this subject. Jude, again, he's stopping to write—this is the brother of Jesus—and he's stopping to write this letter to people. There's been other voices saying they understand God's will, they know God's will, and "this is the way," and Jude's like, "No, you guys need to understand that it

is in Jesus." I know he's my brother, but it's in Jesus and him alone, and understanding his way of life—that's actually what's gonna produce the best life in you.

This is the whole point of the story of Jude. We're gonna talk about those people for just a minute, whoever "those people" are. It calls them ungodly, or something missing God's character. They're looking at life and they're seeing something else to try to obtain wholeness and to try to obtain life, and they're recognizing that actually this is leading you down a path of destruction and hurt and death. That's actually where you're gonna end up. And he says several things about them, and one of these things is slandering angels.

I'm in verse 8. It's only one chapter and I don't have any slides today—David's sick, pray for him. He makes my slides for me. Is that weird? I've never had somebody do that, but they're way better than mine, and I'm embarrassed if I put mine up there. So we're in Jude in verse 8. It says: *"In the same way, these people who claim authority from their dreams, they live immoral lives, they defy authority and they scoff at supernatural beings."* Literally, it means to slander against the holy ones. Anybody else want to preach on this for a moment? Go ahead, thanks. Thanks, Greg.

The problem with this is none of us have ever thought—we tend to read past these things, and we read over them and we're just like, "Dude, what is this guy even talking about?" He reads these crazy stories from the Old Testament, and you're like, "I don't even know what those are talking about." And yet we're sitting here reading Jude going, "There's got to be something in here to take away."

What he means by slandering angels—I'm gonna summarize it for us in a short few sentences, I hope—is that in the first century, early Christians used to have a very high view of what angels were. They weren't the little babies with wings, the chubby babies with wings shooting arrows at people. Okay, it wasn't like this. Angels in the Old Testament in particular were God's mouthpiece. Whenever the angel of the Lord shows up in the Old Testament, or even in the New Testament, it's as if God was speaking directly to the people. And so what Jude is actually accusing them of is he's like, "It's not that you're speaking directly bad about the angels, it's that you're saying that what they said doesn't actually matter." It's as if you're saying what God is actually instructing us and telling us what to do with life doesn't matter in your life.

And he goes, "They are like a reef for your ship," that it's like a shipwreck waiting to happen. He goes on—hang on with me—he goes on towards the end of Jude in verse 18 and 19: *"These same people, they said to you in the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own desires. These are people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."* You ever watch TV or we see something and we're—or even talking to some people—and they're like, "I am sure that this is God's will," and you're like, "I'm not sure about that." What do we do with this, right? We have people in our lives and voices in the world that claim to know God's will and all of a sudden they're opposing each other and they're completely opposite, yet both claiming to know what God's will is. Right? This is the world we live in. And sometimes that world is actually inside of us and we're like, "Which voice do I listen to?" You struggle with that? Yes. **(Laughs)** I love it. Me too, sometimes. I'm a little—the more confident someone is that they're sure that "this is God's will," sometimes the more skeptical I am. **(Mm-hmm from audience)** God's never spoken directly to me. I've never actually heard His voice audibly. And yet there are things in my life where I look back—and I know, I hope in your life too, where you look back and you can clearly see that He moved in a way where you wouldn't be here today if it weren't for those moments, right? I look back on what we were talking about in our marriage class this morning and—there, my wife is a gift from God. And I remember I was engaged to another girl before and I was sure it was God's will that I was with her in my life. What a disaster! I was 18. 18-year-olds, listen up for a moment. I was sure. What a disaster that would have been. And I was so unsure with my wife, and now it's like I couldn't imagine another life without her.

There's these moments where we wrestle. The name "Israel" means to wrestle with God. It literally means to try to understand His will, to try to discern it from the rest of the world. It takes work, you guys, and we're already tired. Hang in there.

Something that's completely normal for them to do—I'm coming back to Jude for a moment—is they would explain life and how it looks and what's actually happening in the current context, and they would look at the Old Testament stories or look at stories that they assume that you all know and they say, "That exact thing is happening here." He gives several examples of it. We try not to be weirded out by some of these things and understand that he's coming with the assumption that you would understand, even though you don't. I don't even understand! Like, why is Jude saying there's a part in here where like Satan and Michael the Archangel are arguing over where to bury Moses' body? That's not even in the Bible! That's weird. There's—I don't have time to go into it, but there is a podcast that was super helpful by the Bible Project on this and understanding it. It actually comes from extra-biblical sources. Try not to get bogged down by the weird things in Jude.

And what I would say is, there's this one statement I think that he's trying to get to us through the whole book, and it's this assumption we make: It's because we are God's chosen people, we believe that—I hope so—because we are God's chosen people, then God must be on our side. And what he's saying is, be careful when you go down that road. We have a long history as a denomination—should I not go there, Greg? We love it here. **(Yeah! from audience)** Of course, we're like, "We're here because of that." Yeah.

We have a long history as a denomination of thinking that we're safe because we're Seventh-day Adventists or because we're Christians or because we're American or because we're whatever. And we label ourselves as "God's chosen people," and then we forget that we may not even hear His voice at some point. We got completely sidetracked as a denomination in the 1950s because of this. Because we thought that we were secure because we knew that we were God's chosen people. This is nothing new. In fact, the minor prophets in the Old Testament—the whole Old Testament is basically this story that Israel was sure they were God's chosen people and they get so comfortable and so confident in that that they miss Him completely.

This is how we got the Pharisees, by the way. The very people that killed Jesus—that killed God Himself—were God's chosen people, but because they just relied on that and forgot to continually give their heart to Him and check in with Him once in a while. They believe that having the right lineage, the right rituals, the right temple, the right theology, the right belief system—it meant that God would back whatever that they did. And Jude is actually pushing back against this right now. He's like, "Be careful, don't go there."

There's one story in the Old Testament that sticks out to me to help me understand maybe where Jude's coming from. Now, the most significant story in the Old Testament that's referred to more than anything else—does anybody know? It's not Abraham. Right after that. Well, the next book after that. Huh? The wilderness! Right before the wilderness, it is the Exodus experience, okay? This thing where the people are enslaved by the Egyptians and God sets them free. And that's the view that the New Testament writers—they're actually having when they write the New Testament—they're saying, actually, when Jesus returns and when Jesus wants to set you free, they're actually looking at that Exodus experience and using it as an example.

This is where we're going though, Katya—is right after that, there's this 40 years of wandering that they go in the wilderness after being freed from captivity, and the entire generation is marked by unbelief. They want captivity. Anybody else want captivity? We live—I will say this—I believe we live in a culture that desires captivity. We desire enslavement to our own desires. This is the very thing that the Israelites were actually struggling with and God had to wait for an entire generation to die off, 40 years.

And then there's this new generation finally comes around and they're making steps towards the land that God promised them. And God even showed up. He showed up to Joshua. They have this new leader, Moses who's gone, and He showed up to Joshua in the same way and they parted this little tiny river just like the Red Sea was parted for them. As if to show you—God was showing them—"I'm still with you." Now, if that was you and there was water parted right in front of you and you were walking through it on dry land, you're not gonna walk through like, "Oh my goodness, I hope we're okay." It's like, I'm walking with a little swag through that thing. Right? You gotta walk like—"There, God's with us no matter where we're going," right?

There is a confidence in your step when you're walking through that, that God's behind us. You ever see the picture of the little tiny lion and the mama lion behind it? It's like that's how you're walking through that. You might be some little lion, but God's walking with you through that. And then they get to the other side of the river. God's with them, right? The "God's chosen people," right? Hang on. They're on the edge of this promised land and they're on the edge of Jericho, which is the first major city. And there's this scene that I'm drawn back to over and over again. And Joshua comes across this thing, and he's standing there, and he sees another—a warrior person standing in front of him with a sword. And he goes, "Whose side are you on?" And the warrior stands there and goes, "**Neither**." And he says, "But as commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come." And then Joshua fell face down in reverence and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for His servant?"

God's very own people. He's with them. He's in them. He's moving. He's moving with them. You have that confidence. And yet you come upon the warrior of the Lord—and we think God's with us no matter what we do—and you say, "Whose side are you on?" And he goes, "Neither." It reminds me—if I have any Lord of the Rings fans here, I know they were in my class this morning—there's this scene... yeah, there's one, okay, good. There's a scene where Pippin and Merry are with Treebeard, the big tree, and he's walking with them and he goes, "Well, whose side are you on?" He goes, "Side? I'm not on anybody's side because nobody's on my side."

And here's what I want to say is that I think sometimes this is the conundrum that God finds himself in. Everybody's claiming His side, and maybe nobody's on His side. And the question isn't whether God is on your side or not, the question needs to be: **Are we on His side?** We can't assume that God fits into our categories and we must let God define Himself.

Jude's whole letter is built on this. He's confronting people who claim God's authority, use God's name, assume God's approval, and end up "abusing the angels." They presume God is on their side because they believe the right things. We start thinking... let me just say, I think we live in a world that's easy—it's almost natural to assume that God automatically blesses our preference, our politics, our personality, and our plans. We make that assumption in our culture. "God must agree with me. He must approve of what I want, and He must be on my side." Is God on your side? He's for your life. He's for your benefit. He wants that for you.

But let me just say, when we beg the Lord—and I think Joshua does it right, where he falls on his face and he asks for help in this moment—"What is it that You want from me?" When we ask for help from the Lord—"Help me to walk with You, help me to hear Your voice, shape my heart to look like Yours, lead me in Your way"—I will say that, in this world, that looks like insecurity. And it's not. That is not insecurity, that's humility, and it's what it means to actually follow Jesus. It's the posture in which we approach God with. Someone who trusts God that His ways are better than our own.

And I don't think the real danger is that God might not be on our side. That's a fear we have. The real danger is that I might accidentally assume that my side is His. But the Bible continually prompts this question on our own lives. And for those of you that said that you struggle with this, I'm gonna tell you something, and you're not gonna like it: Keep the struggle alive. Keep the battle alive. We're at war here and there are lies and there are

all sorts of stuff out there that tells us what His will is, and they confuse us. And I'm just telling you that it won't stop until the next life. Keep the struggle alive and keep holding on to Jesus. He is going to show you the way. I promise you this. He is for your life. He is for your benefit.

And I think there's many reasons we often go around—we want the best for ourselves. We want the best for our kids, the people around us, our church. We want to win at life, don't we? Jude ends his whole short chapter, and he ends with this. It says: *"Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away, and bring you with great joy into His glorious presence without a single fault."* Who's responsible for that? It says it's actually not even your victory here, it's His. **(Yeah! from audience)** He's actually the one that can help you and keep you from making faults. He says: *"All glory to Him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, all glory, majesty, power, authority before all time and in present and beyond all time."* He's claiming that there is one God over everything. There is one God who's gonna direct your life and save you from this life. Stick close to Him. The victory is not yours or mine, it's actually in Jesus. We just get to join Him in that.

Anybody here read my book? Don't laugh, Katya. I've written a book and it won't get published. They won't publish it for me. I don't think anybody's heard of it, I kind of keep it under wraps. I haven't quite memorized the whole name of the book, so I'm going to read it for us. Are you ready? It's: *The Eschatological Conclusions Considering the Missiology and Soteriology of all Human Races within the Mysterious Outworking of Divine Sovereignty, Cosmic Renewal, and the Teleological Consummation of Redemptive History of the Already and Not Yet Kingdom of God.* **(Yes! from audience)** Isn't that amazing? **(Yes! from audience)** It looks cool. **(Yes! from audience)** And they said, "We can't publish your book." And I said, "Why?" They said, "The title's too long, and it doesn't make any sense." I said, "It does make sense. Go look up those words!" **(Audience laughing)** And they said, "No, the title is way too long. It can't even fit on a page." And I said, "Fine, if I shorten it, will you publish it?" And they said, "No." And I said, "Why not?" They said, "Because your book is only one page long." **(Audience laughing)** And I said, "What's wrong with that?" They said, "It's not even that it's one page, it's that there's only two words in it. Your title's about 20 times longer than the whole book itself." And I said, "Just publish it, it's the best book ever."

And they said, "What two words are those?" And they said, "Well, let me read the title again." *The Eschatological Conclusions Considering the Missiology and Soteriology of the Human Races with the Mysterious Outworking of Divine Sovereignty, the Cosmic Renewal and the Teleological Consummation of Redemptive History of the Already and Not Yet Kingdom of God.* Amazing title. And I said, "What are those two words?" And they said, "It's only two words: **He won.**" **(Congregation cheering)** Sometimes I will say this—we get confused by the complexity and all these crazy words that the Bible puts through us. And we need to remember this fact: that when you stick with Jesus, you have won in life. **(Congregation cheering)** That we have victory because we have the Christ. We have the risen one, and He wants to live in your life. He wants to live through you and work through you in a culture that is incredibly broken. In other words, when you have Jesus and you stick to Him and you allow Him to show Himself to you for who He is, you cannot lose. Sounds pretty good to me.

Every loss—we'll say this—has an expiration date to it. Every wound has a future healing. Every injustice has a coming reversal. Every unanswered question has a promised resolution. And there's quite literally nothing that could happen to you in life that hasn't already been overturned in the next life. It means that the worst thing that could ever happen to you has already been defeated. It means the darkest valley you will walk through has a sunrise and it's scheduled. It means that every tear you shed is already accounted for in the future where God wipes away tears with His own hands. It means your story can bend, break, twist and ache, but it cannot reach defeat. You can't lose, and even death will not have the final say. You can't lose because we have Jesus.

This is the story that he's saying, and what you have to do is keep wrestling with God. There are voices in our lives. There are voices in the world that tell us who God is, and I want to tell you that you can ask Him yourself.

You can have the same humble spirit that Joshua had here, where we go, "Whose side are you on?" And He's like, "Neither." And yet, we come up—"I want to be on Your side, God. Create in me a clean heart, create in me a heart that understands You, that there's grace for my faults and mistakes, and yet You keep teaching me a better way of doing life."

I think that's worth the risk, you guys. I was saying that I could be wrong about some of my assumptions about God—actually getting a better life. That's my challenge for us this week is to allow God to challenge those very things that we believe about Him so that we can see Him better, we can live a better life, and we can have victory in Jesus. Let's have a word of prayer.

Jesus, thank You. Lord, I wanna thank You for the voices that teach us to not listen to them. I wanna thank You that there is a song that we will sing in the kingdom that is coming that even the angels can't sing. And that is because we learned to hear Your voice, we learned to hear the Spirit, and we did not turn away from Your voice. I pray that for our church. As we're coming into a changing of a season, Jesus, I pray that we continually not stand on the ground that we are Summit and that we are the best church in town—while I believe that, Lord, thank You for that—let us not rest in this assumption that You are simply with us because we are Summit. You are with us because we humbly put our hearts before You. We want to learn more about You and we want to be with You, whatever side You're on, Lord. Help us to see that, help us to understand that, and guide us in our steps. And Lord, when we have to hit the reset button, turn around and do it all over again, help us to hear Your voice more clearly, and understand what success and winning actually looks like as You understand it, Lord. We thank You and we love You. In Jesus' name, amen.