

Notes on Jude

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Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Traditionally the writer of this epistle was Judas, the half-brother of Jesus Christ (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and the brother of James, the leader of the Jerusalem church (Jude 1; Acts 15:13). Some scholars have challenged this identification in recent years, but they have not proved it incorrect. As such, Jude (Gr. Judas, Heb. Judah, "praise") was a Jewish Christian. Like James he was a Hellenized Galilean Jew who wrote with a cultivated Greek style. As we might expect, Jude normally alluded to the Hebrew Scriptures rather than to the Septuagint, unlike many of the New Testament writers.

Jesus' physical brothers did not believe in Him while He was ministering (John 7:5). James became a believer after Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and we may assume that Jude did too. Jesus' brothers were part of the praying group that awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). They were well known in the early church (1 Cor. 9:5).

Jude's many allusions to the Old Testament suggest that his original readers were very familiar with it. While this could have been true of any Christians, it would have been particularly true of Jewish Christians. Consequently many commentators believe Jude addressed this epistle to Jewish Christians primarily.

". . . we should not see it as a 'catholic letter' addressed to all Christians, but as a work written with a specific, localized audience in mind."¹

"A predominantly, but not exclusively, Jewish Christian community in a Gentile society seems to account best for what little we can gather about the recipients of Jude's letter."²

The time of writing is very difficult to ascertain. Since Jude was a younger brother of Jesus, he may have lived into the second century. After the Jewish revolts against Rome in A.D. 66-70, Jude probably lived outside Jerusalem and perhaps outside Palestine, if he was still alive. References in the text to the false teachers and the apostles (vv. 3-5, 17) suggest a condition in the church some years after the day of Pentecost. Similarities with

¹Richard L. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 3.

²*Ibid.*, p. 16.

Peter's writings have led some to date Jude about the time Peter wrote.³ Obviously these are all very tentative guesses. Perhaps a date between A.D. 67 and 80 would be correct. At this time Jude may have been living somewhere outside Palestine.⁴

Fortunately the indefiniteness of the historical background of this epistle does not affect its message or value.

"The Epistle of Jude has stronger attestation than 2 Peter."⁵

GENRE

Many scholars regard this epistle as an "epistolary sermon."⁶ Jude could have delivered what he said in this epistle as a homily (sermon) if he had been in his readers' presence. Instead he cast it in the form of a letter since he could not address them directly. Other New Testament epistles that are really written homilies include James, Hebrews, and 1 John.

STRUCTURE

Several students of the book have noted the basically chiasmic structure of Jude, though they do not see the chiasms exactly the same.⁷

PURPOSE

"One thought characterizes this epistle: beware of the apostates."⁸

Incipient Gnosticism seems to be the heresy in view primarily.

"Here, in an undeveloped form, are all the main characteristics which went to make up later Gnosticism—emphasis on knowledge which was emancipated from the claims of morality; arrogance toward 'unenlightened' church leaders; interest in angelology; divisiveness; lasciviousness."⁹

³For discussion of the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude, see D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, pp. 196-200; and Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, pp. 216-24.

⁴See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3:229-33.

⁵Hiebert, p. 185. See pp. 185-92 for evidence of Jude's authenticity.

⁶E.g., Bauckham, p. 3. See Bigg, pp. 305-10, for references to Jude in the writings of the early church.

⁷See Jason Johnston, "The Multichiasmic Structure of Jude and Its Contribution to the Purpose of the Epistle" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008).

⁸Edward C. Pentecost, "Jude," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 918.

⁹Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, p. 39. Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:184.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction vv. 1-2
- II. The purpose of this epistle vv. 3-4
- III. Warnings against false teachers vv. 5-16
 - A. Previous failures vv. 5-7
 - 1. The example of certain Israelites v. 5
 - 2. The example of certain angels v. 6
 - 3. The example of certain pagans v. 7
 - B. Present failures vv. 8-16
 - 1. The nature of the error vv. 8-9
 - 2. The seriousness of the error vv. 10-13
 - 3. The consequences of the error vv. 14-16
- IV. Exhortation to the faithful vv. 17-23
 - A. The reminder to remember the apostles' warning vv. 17-19
 - B. The positive instruction of the readers vv. 20-23
- V. Conclusion vv. 24-25

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION VV. 1-2

Jude began his epistle by identifying himself and by wishing God's blessing on his readers to prepare them for what follows.

v. 1 "On the very threshold of a book written about apostasy appears a name which brings to mind a traitor who stands forever as the worst apostate the world has ever known."¹⁰

The writer identified himself in a humble way. He could have mentioned that he was the half-brother of Jesus Christ, but he preferred to describe his relationship with Jesus as spiritual rather than physical (cf. James 1:1). "Bond-servant" or "servant" (Gr. *doulos*) means "slave."

"The author's designation of himself as 'brother of James' is unique. No other New Testament writer introduces himself by identifying his family connections."¹¹

"It is probable that since Jude is not mentioned within the Acts of the Apostles nor in any of the other books of the New Testament, he was not a leader in the early church. Therefore, it was quite natural to identify himself with one who was a leader in the church—his brother James."¹²

Jude's threefold description of his readers is the first of many triads that distinguish the style of this letter. They present an impression of completeness and well-rounded thought. The Holy Spirit called Christians in the past (cf. v. 3), God the Father loves them in the present (cf. v. 21), and the Son will keep them secure for the future (cf. vv. 14, 21).

"The knowledge of God's calling, loving, and keeping brings believers assurance and peace during times of apostasy.

"Each of these points in Jude's address seem to be alluded to later in the epistle: the calling may be hinted at in the words 'the salvation we share' (v. 3), the love of God is mentioned in verse 21, and the keeping power of Jesus may be implied in the words, 'as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life' (v. 21; cf. v. 24)."¹³

¹⁰S. Maxwell Coder, *Jude: The Acts of the Apostates*, p. 7.

¹¹Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 192.

¹²Paul A. Cedar, *James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 244.

¹³Pentecost, p. 919.

"Kept" is a key word in this epistle occurring five times (vv. 1, 6 [twice], 13, 21).

"Spiritually we are simply that which we have received, and Jude does not lose sight of this for a moment, even when he is insisting upon the importance of the human co-operation by which the work of grace is made complete."¹⁴

- v. 2 We need God's mercy in view of our exceedingly sinful condition. We need His peace in view of the subtle and stimulating temptations that surround us on every hand. And we need His love to sustain and encourage us in our spiritual warfare. Jude's readers needed all this help in view of the false teachers' influence, which he proceeded to discuss.

"They are not self-acquired Christian virtues, but the gifts of God, which, the author prays, may be abundantly bestowed upon his readers. Nevertheless, by a divine alchemy, the gifts of God are transformed into human characteristics."¹⁵

II. THE PURPOSE OF THIS EPISTLE VV. 3-4

Jude explained his reason for writing this letter to introduce what follows and to impress the urgency of his subject on his readers.

- v. 3 Most Spirit-led preachers have felt exactly how Jude said he felt in this verse. It is enjoyable to talk about salvation and other positive subjects. Nevertheless occasionally a particular situation compels us to speak about a danger that God's people need to appreciate. The presentation of this subject must sometimes be quite negative. Delivering such a message is not as pleasant a task.

The faith delivered to the saints is the special revelation of God that Scripture contains and the apostles preached (cf. Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:1). Jude's readers needed to struggle to maintain this faith as a champion athlete labors to dominate and to subdue his or her challengers (cf. 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

"To 'contend earnestly for' (*epagonizesthai*) is an expressive compound infinitive which appears only here in the New Testament. The simple form of the verb (*agonizomai*), which appears as 'agonize' in its English form, was commonly used in connection with the Greek stadium to denote a strenuous struggle to overcome an

¹⁴R. Duane Thompson, "Jude," in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, 6:389.

¹⁵J. W. C. Wand, *The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 196.

opponent, as in a wrestling match. It was also used more generally of any conflict, contest, debate, or lawsuit. Involved is the thought of the expenditure of all one's energy in order to prevail."¹⁶

This unique compound verb pictures a person taking his or her stand on top of something an adversary desires to take away, and fighting to defend and retain it.¹⁷

"These efforts are, it is surely unnecessary to add, of a moral and persuasive nature only; all force of a physical nature being expressly forbidden the faithful. When Peter sought to defend the Lord with a sword he was rebuked for his pains; and in bidding him sheathe it, he forevermore made it clear that his followers are not to fight with carnal weapons in his behalf."¹⁸

"Jude has two major concerns—that they [his readers] will not be led astray by false teachers. He prays that they will instead take the initiative and contend for the faith."¹⁹

"The final argument for faith in the world is not the argument of words, but the argument of life."²⁰

"Indifference to error is a sign of false liberalism and humiliating weakness."²¹

The phrase "once for all delivered" stresses the unalterable and normative character of this faith.

v. 4 "Certain persons" stands in contrast to the "saints" (v. 3). These people had "wormed their way in" (NEB) to the churches (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1).

The verb "crept in" (Gr. *pareisedusan*), ". . . indicates a secret, stealthy, and subtle insinuation of something evil into a society or a situation."²²

¹⁶D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 3-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):144.

¹⁷G. F. C. Fronmüller, "The Epistle General of Jude," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12:5:13.

¹⁸Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, p. 385.

¹⁹Cedar, p. 250.

²⁰G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:203.

²¹Nathaniel M. Williams, "Commentary on the Epistle of Jude," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, 7:8.

²²William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 211.

". . . not only is the local community troubled by importations of an alien creed, but it seems that the heretics themselves have invaded the church, bringing their doctrines with them."²³

"They slipped in secretly (Jude 4; cf. Gal. 2:4) as itinerant preachers, a common part of first-century religious life (cf. Acts 13:15; 2 John 7-11; Didache 11.1-12; 13.1-7). Or they arose within the community itself and later quietly brought in heretical teachings from outside (2 Peter 2:1; cf. Acts 20:29-30; Rom. 16:17-18)."²⁴

These people were tares among the wheat (cf. Matt. 13:24-25, 38-39).

"Jude's opponents are a group of itinerant charismatics who have arrived in the church(es) to which he writes. Everything else Jude tells us about them is related to their antinomianism, which is the target of his attack. They reject all moral authority, whether that of the law of Moses (vv 8-10) or that of Christ himself (vv 4, 8), even though they claim to be followers of Christ. . . .

"In line with their rejection of moral authority, they indulge in immoral behavior, especially sexual misconduct (vv 6-8, 10); in this they may be deliberately flouting accepted standards of Jewish morality and conforming to the permissiveness of pagan society."²⁵

This writer meant that the false teachers were charismatics in the general sense of that word: they possessed great powers of charm or influence. He did not mean that they believed in the charismatic gifts of the Spirit necessarily.

Probably God had marked these opponents previously for condemnation in the sense that He knew their sin long ago and would punish them in the future for it. "This condemnation" refers to the sure punishment that lay ahead of them for their sin (cf. Matt. 7:15; Mark 13:22; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Pet. 2).

Jude's original readers could see the ungodly character of these people in two specific activities. They used the liberty from the Law of Moses that Christians enjoy as an opportunity for sensual indulgence and debauchery (i.e., antinomianism). Gnostics were guilty of this, and their influence

²³E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 83. Cf. Pentecost, p. 920.

²⁴Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 468.

²⁵Bauckham, p. 11.

seems to be in evidence here as well as elsewhere throughout this epistle.²⁶ However others have disputed this inference.²⁷ Second, they denied God and Jesus Christ, evidently by distorting the truth that Scripture reveals (cf. 1 John 2:22-23; Titus 1:16). In view of the Greek grammatical construction of this verse, "Master" seems to refer to God and "Lord" to Jesus Christ.²⁸ However, many scholars believe that Jude had Jesus Christ in view in both of these titles.²⁹

"Although they claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, Jude says that by rejecting his moral demands they are in fact disowning him as their Master and repudiating his authority as Lord."³⁰

Doctrinal deviation often accompanies and often justifies ethical and moral sin.

III. WARNINGS AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS VV. 5-16

"The brief epistle of Jude is without parallel in the New Testament for its vehement denunciation of libertines and apostates."³¹

A. PREVIOUS FAILURES VV. 5-7

Jude cited three examples of failure from the past to warn his readers of the danger involved in departing from God's truth. Divine judgment on flagrant evildoers is no novelty.

1. The example of certain Israelites v. 5

Jude's introductory words were polite (cf. 2 Peter 1:12) but also a reminder that what he now said was fact beyond dispute. His readers knew these things "once for all" because God had delivered them "once for all" in Scripture (v. 3; cf. 1 John 2:20-21).

After God redeemed Israel and liberated the nation from bondage in Egypt, the people failed to continue to believe God's promises and to trust in His power (cf. Num. 14:11; Deut. 1:32). God judged those who failed by destroying them in the wilderness. He let that generation die rather than bringing the unbelieving apostates into the Promised Land.

²⁶Green, p. 162.

²⁷E.g., Michael Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: Does It Tell Us More About the 'Godly' Than the 'Ungodly'?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (June 1987):93-95.

²⁸See J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 252; J. B. Mayor, "The General Epistle of Jude," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:257; and Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:531.

²⁹E.g., Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 226; George Lawrence Lawlor, *Translation and Exposition of the Epistle of Jude*, p. 60, footnote 57; and Bigg, p. 327.

³⁰Bauckham, p. 41.

³¹Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 185.

Some of the false teachers in Jude's day evidently were Christians. That is a reasonable conclusion since Jude compared them to the redeemed Israelites. They too were turning from continuing trust and obedience to God, and God would judge them as well.

"This allusion to Israel in the wilderness makes it very plain that Jude's opponents were once orthodox Christians who had gone wilfully [*sic*] astray into error."³²

Other interpreters believe Jude was referring to those Israelites who had never really believed in Yahweh in this verse.³³

Jude primarily wanted to point out the behavior of these false teachers, not to identify whether they were believers or unbelievers. Unbelief always results in some kind of destruction whether the unbeliever is lost or saved. God definitely destroyed these unbelievers physically. He also destroyed them eternally if they were unsaved.

"Jude insists that the Saviour can also be the Destroyer."³⁴

2. The example of certain angels v. 6

A group of angels also did not remain in their privileged position near God but left that sphere and so incurred God's wrath. Some interpreters believe Jude alluded here to Genesis 6:1-4 (but cf. Matt. 22:30).³⁵ Others believe he was referring to the rebellion of some angels that resulted in Satan's expulsion from heaven. The second explanation seems more probable to me.

The apocryphal Book of 1 Enoch described this rebellion. Some scholars believe Jude quoted from this book.³⁶ However, others say Jude was only confirming what it said.³⁷ In either case such a reference is not unusual in the New Testament (cf. Acts 17:28; et al.). Jude was not ascribing divine inspiration to 1 Enoch by quoting or referring to it.

The rebellious angels he referred to are now in bondage and await God's judgment (cf. 2 Peter 2:4). These appear to be different fallen angels from Satan's agents who are at work in the world today, namely, the demons who have considerable freedom.

Jude's point in this illustration was that the apostates in his day had also abandoned a position of great privilege and blessing, namely, the opportunity to serve and glorify God. God would also judge them severely because of their departure. The angels who fell were not elect. Perhaps the apostates in view here were unsaved, though God intended them, as well as the Israelites referred to previously, to be a group for His own possession.

³²Green, p. 164.

³³E.g., Edwin Blum, "Jude," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 389.

³⁴Sidebottom, p. 85.

³⁵See Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:551-52, for refutation of this view.

³⁶E.g., *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Jude, the Epistle of," by William G. Moorehead, 3:1771).

³⁷E.g., Lenski, pp. 610-12, 650-52.

"If the highest beings known in creation were subject to judgment, how much more sinful men!"³⁸

3. The example of certain pagans v. 7

This example shows God's judgment on those who practice immorality and sexual perversion, which the false teachers of Jude's day evidently felt liberated to practice. The fire that burned up the cities of the plain was the instrument of God's punishment. That punishment will eternally burn against those who similarly disregard God's will (Rev. 20:15). Here Jude seems to have had in view false teachers who were unsaved.

Each one of these illustrations highlights a particular aspect of the false teachers' error. It was a sin of rebellion by professing, and perhaps genuine, believers. It was a proud departure from a position of superior privilege. Moreover it involved immoral behavior, which the Gentile pagans practiced.

"No matter who may be the sinners, or what the circumstances of the sin, outrageous offences, such as impurity and rebellion, are certain of Divine chastisement."³⁹

"When we examine these examples of the past, we discover that they are not chronologically arranged. . . . Why this unchronological arrangement in this Epistle? . . . We believe the arrangement is made in the manner as it is to teach us the starting point and the goal of apostasy. It starts with unbelief. . . . Unbelief leads to rebellion against God. . . . The predicted lawlessness with which this age ends is the fruitage of infidelity. Such is the development of apostasy. Unbelief, rebellion against God and his revealed truth, immorality and anarchy. These steps may be traced in our own times."⁴⁰

They are also observable in the history of Israel in the Old Testament.

B. PRESENT FAILURES VV. 8-16

Jude next expounded the errors of the false teachers in his day to warn his readers even more strongly. A feature of Jude's style is that he referred to certain Old Testament types (vv. 5-7 and 11) or prophecies (vv. 14-15 and 17-18) and then proceeded to interpret them as fulfilled by the false teachers (vv. 8-10, 12-13, 16, and 19).

"Following his illustrations of the past fate of apostates (vv. 5-7), Jude turns to a direct attack upon the apostates who are invading the churches being addressed."⁴¹

³⁸Ronald A. Ward, *The Epistles of John and Jude: A Study Manual*, p. 81.

³⁹Alfred Plummer, "The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude," in *An Exposition of the Bible*, 6:655.

⁴⁰Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*, 4:179-80. See also Richard Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 616; Morgan, 2:2:198.

⁴¹Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 241.

1. The nature of the error vv. 8-9

- v. 8 Jude now pinpointed the three errors he had just illustrated and accused the false teachers of all three: lust (v. 7), rebellion (v. 5), and irreverence (v. 6). "By dreaming" probably refers to all three errors. Jude probably meant that the false teachers justified their actions by citing visions and dreams they claimed to have had (cf. Col. 2:18).

"Their perverted views and unrestrained conduct made them like dreamers living in the arbitrary fancies of their own imagination; they substituted the unreal world of their fancies for the real world of divine truth and righteousness."⁴²

- v. 9 The presumption of the false teachers stands out boldly in comparison with Michael's submission and reverence in dealing with another powerful angel, Satan.

"Michael seems to be the most powerful of the holy angels."⁴³

Michael would not treat the devil flippantly or reply to him rudely. How much more then should the false teachers submit to and respect God?

"They use language of good angels which Michael would not use of a bad one."⁴⁴

"The point of contrast between the false teachers and Michael is not that Michael treated the devil with respect, and the moral is not that we should be polite even to the devil. The point of contrast is that Michael could not reject the devil's accusation on his own authority. Even though the devil was motivated by malice and Michael recognized that his accusation was slanderous, he could not himself dismiss the devil's case, because he was not the judge. All he could do was ask the Lord, who alone is judge, to condemn Satan for his slander. The moral is therefore that no one is a law to himself, an autonomous moral authority."⁴⁵

It is also dangerous for us to confront Satan directly and to argue with him since he is much stronger than we are.

⁴²Ibid., p. 243.

⁴³John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 246.

⁴⁴Plummer, 6:656.

⁴⁵Bauckham, p. 61.

Jude cited this incident as historical. The book from which he evidently got it was an apocryphal one: The Assumption of Moses.

"No matter whence or how an inspired writer obtained his information, the Holy Spirit enabled him to sift out and adequately to present only what is genuine, true."⁴⁶

2. The seriousness of the error vv. 10-13

v. 10 The things the false teachers did not understand but reviled probably refer to aspects of God's revealed will that they chose to reject (cf. 1 Cor. 2:7-16).

"Jude, like his brother James, denounces the sins of the tongue frequently in this short letter."⁴⁷

What the false teachers did understand was the gratification of the flesh, and that would destroy them.

"Their way of life is to allow the instincts they share with the beasts to have their way; their values are fleshly values; their gospel is a gospel of the flesh. Jude describes men who have lost all sense of, and awareness of, spiritual things, and for whom the things demanded by the animal instincts of man are the only realities and the only standard."⁴⁸

"Jude is stating a profound truth in linking these two characteristics together. If a man is persistently blind to spiritual values, deaf to the call of God, and rates self-determination as the highest good, then a time will come when he cannot hear the call he has spurned, but is left to the mercy of the turbulent instincts to which he once turned in search of freedom."⁴⁹

"Slow suicide (not always slow) is the result of such beastliness."⁵⁰

v. 11 "Woe to them" is an imprecation of doom (cf. Isa. 5:8-23; Hab. 2:6-20; Matt. 23:13-29; 1 Cor. 9:16; et al.). It is the opposite of a blessing.

⁴⁶Lenski, p. 641. See Bauckham, pp. 65-76, for an extended excursus on the background and source of verse 9.

⁴⁷Richard Wolff, *A Commentary on the Epistle of Jude*, pp. 91-92. Cf. vv. 8, 10, 11, 15, 16.

⁴⁸Barclay, p. 222.

⁴⁹Green, p. 171.

⁵⁰Williams, 7:14.

"The doom of apostates is no less sure than the glorification of the saints."⁵¹

Cain's way was the way of godlessness and sensuality, violence and lust, greed and blasphemy, that led to divine judgment. It was the way of pride. Cain wanted to earn a relationship with God by his works, and he became a hateful murderer.

Balaam's error was compromise with God's enemies and teaching the Israelites that they could sin with impunity (Num. 31:16; cf. Rev. 2:14). He counseled the Midianites to seduce the Israelites to commit idolatry and fornication (Num. 31:16). His way was to use the spiritual to gain the material for himself. His error was thinking that he could get away with his sins. The false teachers also compromised God's truth in a way that involved idolatry and immorality. They would likewise perish under God's judgment, as Balaam did (Num. 31:8).

"Balaam stands for two things. (a) He stands for the covetous man, who was prepared to sin in order to gain reward. (b) He stands for the evil man, who was guilty of the greatest of all sins—the sin of teaching others to sin. So Jude is declaring of the wicked men of his own day that they are ready to leave the way of righteousness to make gain; and that they are teaching others to sin."⁵²

"Balaam was the prototype of all greedy religionists who lead God's people into false religion and immorality . . ."⁵³

Korah's rebellion was against God and His appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:1-35). The false teachers were rebelling against God and his leaders, the apostles. Korah also perished.

According to William Barclay there was a sect of Gnostics called Orphites that regarded Cain, Balaam, and Korah as great heroes of the Old Testament.⁵⁴ Barclay regarded much of what Jude wrote as polemic against Gnosticism.

Each of these three examples shows a different aspect of unbelief.

"Cain, to show the arrogance, malice, and false piety of apostates, the example of *religious* unbelief; Balaam, to show the avarice, subversiveness, and seductive character

⁵¹Coder, p. 72.

⁵²Barclay, p. 225.

⁵³Blum, p. 392. Cf. Charles H. Savelle, "Canonical and Extracanonical Portraits of Balaam," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):387-404.

⁵⁴Barclay, p. 192.

of apostates, the example of *covetous* unbelief; and Core [Korah], to show the factiousness and sedition toward rightful authority, the example of *rebellious* unbelief."⁵⁵

"Cain rebelled against God's authority in *salvation*, for he refused to bring a blood sacrifice as God had commanded. Balaam rebelled against God's authority in *separation*, for he prostituted his gifts for money and led Israel to mix with the other nations. Korah rebelled against God's authority in *service*, denying that Moses was God's appointed servant and attempting to usurp his authority."⁵⁶

- v. 12 Five more illustrations, this time from nature, emphasize the seriousness of the false teachers' error (vv. 12-13).

A coral reef that lies hidden under the surface of the water can tear the bottom off a ship if it unsuspectingly runs into it. Likewise the false teachers could ruin a local church. They threatened the moral shipwreck of others. That some of the false teachers were believers or at least professing believers seems certain since they were participating in the love-feast, the most intimate service of worship the early church practiced. The love-feast was a communal meal that included observance of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-22). "Caring for themselves" highlights the apostates' self-centeredness (cf. Ezek. 34:2, 8; Isa. 56:11; John 10:12-13).

"Jude seems . . . to mean that these men insisted on participating in these love-feasts, not to express mutual love and concern but to gratify their own appetites."⁵⁷

Like clouds the false teachers attracted attention to themselves and promised refreshment, but they proved to be all show and no substance (cf. Prov. 25:14). In Palestine summer clouds often add to the humidity and consequently make the intense heat even more unbearable.

"To follow such men would result in being led astray from the path of truth and purity."⁵⁸

Farmers often dig trees that bear no fruit out of the ground. The false teachers bore no spiritual fruit and were incapable of bearing spiritual fruit; they were twice dead (cf. Ps. 52:5; Prov. 2:22; Jer. 1:10; John 15:1-6). Another view is that twice dead means dead through and through.⁵⁹ A

⁵⁵Lawlor, p. 83. Italics added for clarification.

⁵⁶Wiersbe, 2:555. Italics his.

⁵⁷D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 12-16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July-September 1985):240-41.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 242.

⁵⁹*The Twentieth Century New Testament*.

third view is that it means dead in reality as well as in appearance.⁶⁰ A fourth view is that it means presently dead in sin and destined for eternal death.⁶¹ An uprooted tree is an Old Testament symbol of divine judgment (cf. Ps. 52:5; Prov. 2:22; Jer. 1:10). "Autumn" is literally late autumn in the Greek text, a detail that shows Jude believed he and his readers were living in the last days before the Lord's return. This viewpoint was common among the New Testament writers (cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:18). Late autumn was the time when trees would have had no leaves much less fruit on their branches.⁶²

"These men give no evidence of ever having been regenerated."⁶³

- v. 13 Waves cast up bits of filth and debris on the shore with their foam and flotsam (wreckage, refuse). Similarly the false teachers spread evidence of their uncontrolled immorality and impurity wherever they went (cf. Isa. 57:20). This comparison emphasizes "... the restless and unrestrained nature of these men."⁶⁴

Some "stars" move about in the sky differently from the other stars. We now recognize these as planets and distinguish them from stars. Similarly the false teachers behaved out of harmony with the other luminaries. The Greek word *planetes*, which transliterated means "planet," really means wanderer. Long ago stargazers observed that these wanderers across the sky were different from the fixed stars. Likewise the false teachers had gone off course and had led people astray.

Another possible though less likely interpretation is that the reference is to meteors or "shooting stars" that flash across the sky but quickly disappear in darkness.⁶⁵ The "black darkness," away from the Source of light, indicates the eternal punishment of those among them who were not Christians.

3. The consequences of the error vv. 14-16

- vv. 14-15 Jude quoted loosely from a prophecy that Enoch gave, which stands recorded in the apocryphal Book of 1 Enoch. This is the only place in Scripture where we read that Enoch was a prophet. He is the only individual who lived before the Flood that God identified as a prophet. Though God had not inspired that book, He led Jude to quote Enoch's

⁶⁰Alford, 4:537.

⁶¹Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 261.

⁶²Kelly, p. 272.

⁶³Williams, 7:16.

⁶⁴Hiebert, "An Exposition . . . 12-16," p. 243.

⁶⁵See Kelly, p. 274, for a refutation of this view.

prophecy.⁶⁶ The Holy Spirit sometimes led Paul to quote pagan philosophers (cf. Acts 17:28). This was a prophecy of God's judgment that will take place at the second coming of Christ (cf. Matt. 24:30; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). As such it is the earliest recorded prophecy of the second coming of Christ. The unbelievers among the false teachers would be the objects of God's judgment then if they were living then.

Jude's reference to Enoch as the seventh (generation) from Adam seems to support the idea that Genesis 5 records all the generations (i.e., it is a closed genealogy). However, critics of this view contend that Jude simply meant that Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam in the biblical genealogy. They assume there were additional intervening generations that Moses did not mention in Genesis. Nevertheless a careful reading of that genealogy shows that Moses left no room for omitted generations, though other biblical genealogies do contain gaps.

"Ungodly deeds may be performed by persons who have a form of godliness. Every action that proceeds from an unholy, unrepentant heart is an ungodly deed."⁶⁷

"Satan in Eden and Judas in Gethsemane clothed ungodly deeds in *soft* words."⁶⁸

v. 16 Enoch spoke of the words and the deeds of the ungodly in the quotation just cited. Jude commented further on the words and deeds of the contemporary false teachers in this verse. As the former grumblers, the false teachers in his day grumbled primarily against God.

"He who is out of touch with God is prone to grumble about anything."⁶⁹

They pursued their lusts for sensuality and gain (cf. vv. 4, 8, 10-11). Their arrogant words probably refer to what they claimed was true about God that contradicted apostolic revelation (cf. Dan. 11:36). Furthermore they flattered people to obtain personal advantage (cf. James 2:1-13).

"As the fear of God drives out the fear of man, so defiance of God tends to put man in His place, as the chief source of good or evil to his fellows."⁷⁰

⁶⁶Cf. Fanning, p. 465; Bauckham, p. 96.

⁶⁷Wolff, p. 113.

⁶⁸Williams, 7:18.

⁶⁹Hiebert, "An Exposition . . . 12-16," p. 247.

⁷⁰Mayor, 5:272.

IV. EXHORTATIONS TO THE FAITHFUL VV. 17-23

Having warned his readers about the failures of false teachers, Jude proceeded to exhort them positively to move them to persevere faithfully in spite of the danger that faced them.

"With these verses Jude turns from burning denunciation of the apostates to provide loving guidance and encouragement to the faithful amid apostasy."⁷¹

A. THE REMINDER TO REMEMBER THE APOSTLES' WARNING VV. 17-19

vv. 17-18 "Forgetfulness of the teaching and warnings of God in Scripture is a major cause of spiritual deterioration. . . .

"Remember! It is the first imperative that Jude has used, and it heads a whole cluster of them in this concluding section."⁷²

The term "apostles" here evidently refers to the Twelve plus Paul rather than to the larger group of Christian leaders whom Jesus sent out with the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20). The New Testament writers also called this larger group "apostles" (cf. Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The smaller group of apostles, however, were those who mainly established the church on the faith once for all delivered to the saints (v. 3). It is for that faith that Jude urged his readers to contend. The official apostles therefore seem to be in view here rather than all those who functioned as apostles (lit. sent ones).

Jude's quotation of the apostles' teaching (v. 18) seems to be a general summary rather than a specific reference. We find a similar statement in 2 Peter 3:3, and that too is probably a summary. Jude may not have been quoting 2 Peter 3:3 here. Many conservative scholars believe Peter wrote his second epistle after Jude.⁷³

The "last time" refers to the end of the historical period that encompasses the church age and the Tribulation. After this "last time" God will rule directly over humankind, first during the Millennium and then in the new heavens and new earth (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; et al.). It is the last time in relation to Jesus Christ's return to reign on earth.

The object of the "mockers" mocking seems to be the revealed will of God (cf. Ps. 35:16; Prov. 14:6; 19:25; et al.).

⁷¹Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 273.

⁷²Green, p. 180.

⁷³See my discussion of this subject in my notes on 2 Peter.

"These workers were . . . ever intent on experiencing the thrills of new forms of ungodliness."⁷⁴

- v. 19 The false teachers' teaching divided the believers into two basic groups: those who remained in the apostles' teaching and those who departed from it. While they may have claimed to be the truly spiritual group, the false teachers were really worldly-minded, sharing the viewpoint of unbelievers. In the case of the unbelievers, they were completely devoid of the Holy Spirit. In the case of the saved apostates, they were devoid of the effective influence of the Holy Spirit.

"In refusing the Divine Spirit they had sunk to the level of an animal life, immoral in itself, and productive of confusion to the Church."⁷⁵

B. THE POSITIVE INSTRUCTION OF THE READERS VV. 20-23

- v. 20 The contrast Jude introduced with "But" distinguishes Jude's readers from the false teachers. Since we are God's temples under attack by hostile enemy forces, we need to build ourselves up, to strengthen ourselves spiritually (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 2 Pet. 3:18).

"The best thing believers can do to withstand the malady is to develop their spiritual immunological resources."⁷⁶

This is the first of several commands, and it is a general order. What follows clarifies how to do this.

"'Building up' (*epoikodomountes*) depicts this growth under the familiar figure of the erection of a house or temple. The compound verb points to the superstructure being reared on an existing foundation. The present tense underlines the fact that the building of a strong and stable Christian character is an ongoing process."⁷⁷

". . . one can destroy in just a few hours that which has taken years to construct. However, to be a builder is much more fulfilling than being a destroyer!"⁷⁸

⁷⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 17-23," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):358.

⁷⁵S. D. F. Salmond, "Jude," in *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 14.

⁷⁶A. Duane Litfin, "A Biblical Strategy for Confronting the Cults," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):235. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:5-7.

⁷⁷Hiebert, "An Exposition . . . 17-23," p. 360. Cf. Phil. 2:12.

⁷⁸Cedar, p. 258.

"Your most holy faith" is the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). This is the foundation of our Christian life.

Second, true believers are not devoid of the Spirit (v. 19). We have Him and can pray in Him, namely, pray for God's help in harmony with the Spirit's desires (Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 4:6). Our greatest resource is God Himself. We secure His help through prayer.

"The development of spiritual maturity is vitally related to the practice of prayer at all times and in all places."⁷⁹

v. 21 Third, we should keep ourselves in the sphere of God's love (vv. 1, 6, 13; cf. John 15:9; Rom. 5:5; 8:39). When we depart from His Word and His will, we erect barriers between ourselves and God thus blocking the free flow of His love to us. We keep ourselves in His love by abiding in Him (John 15:9-10; 1 John 2:28).

"To be conscious of being beloved by God is one of the greatest protections that the believer can possess."⁸⁰

Fourth, we should keep in mind and consciously look forward to the complete realization of our eternal life (cf. 1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:29). This will be the greatest manifestation of Jesus Christ's mercy to us as believers.

". . . the Rapture will be the consummating evidence of His mercy."⁸¹

In other words, Jude exhorted his readers to keep their hope in view. We have only a short time to wait and to remain faithful.

"The Christian life is viewed as having an inward look relating to the development of character [v. 20], an upward look relating to communion with God [vv. 20-21], and a forward look being consummated in final glorification [v. 21]."⁸²

"The picture of the Christian life in terms of 'faith, hope, and love' (1 Cor. 13:13) is enriched by the addition of 'praying in the Holy Spirit.' There is also a carefully formulated reference to the Trinity: the Holy Spirit, the Father, and Jesus Christ."⁸³

⁷⁹Hiebert, "An Exposition . . . 17-23," p. 361.

⁸⁰Plummer, 6:662.

⁸¹Pentecost, p. 923.

⁸²Hiebert, "An Exposition . . . 17-23," p. 362.

⁸³Idem, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 286.

- v. 22 Fifth, Jude's readers should tenderly help those of their fellow believers who were struggling and perhaps stumbling under the influence of the false teachers. Those in view are earnest doubters who sincerely cannot decide between truth and error. They are wavering in their loyalty.⁸⁴ We should not abandon these brethren but compassionately seek to restore them.
- v. 23 Sixth, Jude gave instruction concerning those believers who have already fallen under God's discipline by capitulating to false teachers. We should attempt to extract them from their error before their consequent judgment falls (cf. Amos 4:11; Zech. 3:2). Fire is symbolic of God's judgment in Scripture. Here Jude saw God's judgment coming on believers for yielding to sin or false teaching.⁸⁵ And he also saw it coming on unbelievers.⁸⁶

In the case of those whom heresy has completely swept away, we should have pity on them rather than condemning them without compassion. Moreover we should regard them with fear, not fear of being infected by physical contact with them, but fear of falling under God's displeasure and discipline if we embrace their error. We should avoid any contact with these people because of the corrupting influence they can have on us through their words and actions (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). The "garment" stands for those things affected by contact with fleshly behavior such as personal habits and practices, speech, companions, and the like. Scripture often uses garments as a symbol of what other people see, namely, our conduct.

V. CONCLUSION VV. 24-25

Jude concluded his brief epistle with a formal doxology. It included a prayer for his readers. He wanted to assure them of God's ability to help them remain faithful in spite of the apostasy that threatened them.

"The concluding doxology (vv. 24-25) is universally recognized as one of the fullest and most beautiful in Scripture. Stressing the security of the believer in the midst of apostasy, it brings the epistle to a marvelous conclusion."⁸⁷

"It lifts the thoughts from earthly conflicts with which the author has been compelled to busy himself, up to the heavenly realms, where God is enthroned amidst eternal might and honor."⁸⁸

⁸⁴David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):742-43.

⁸⁵Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 290; Laylor, p. 127. Cf. John 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:15.

⁸⁶Coder, p. 116. Cf. Rev. 20:15.

⁸⁷Hiebert, *Second Peter* . . . , p. 204.

⁸⁸Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, p. 217.

v. 24 Our confidence rests in God's ability to keep us safe and faithful.

"He is able to save (Heb. 7:25), able to establish (Rom. 16:25), able to assist (Heb. 2:18), able to subdue (Phil. 3:21)—and here He is able to keep."⁸⁹

The Greek word translated "stumbling" implies the results of tripping as well as the fall itself. "Blameless" (Gr. *amomos*) does not mean without sin. It means having no justifiable ground of accusation (cf. Col. 1:22; 2 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 14:5). When the blameless person sins, he confesses and forsakes his sin. Standing before the judgment seat of Christ is in view in this verse.⁹⁰ This verse is not an unconditional promise that God will inevitably keep all believers from stumbling either doctrinally or morally (cf. v. 21).⁹¹

v. 25 Jude returned to his idea that the false teachers distorted the truth about God and Jesus Christ (v. 4). "Glory" is the effulgent radiance of God, "majesty" His transcendence, "dominion" His absolute power, and "authority" His freedom of action. These characteristics of God belong to Him eternally. In view of God's changeless character, we should remain faithful as well.

"Words could hardly express more clearly Jude's belief in the pre-existence and eternity of Christ."⁹²

"Jude . . . is a troubled pastor, anxious to shake the shoulders of his community to wake them up to the threats in their very midst. Some of Jude's scorching language can be tempered by realizing that in the ancient Mediterranean world such rhetoric in religious matters was common. But not all of Jude's passion can be explained away; for him, as for most of the early Church, faith in Jesus was a matter of life and death, and anyone or anything that threatened that life of faith was indeed a mortal enemy."⁹³

⁸⁹William MacDonald, *II Peter and Jude: The Christian and Apostasy*, p. 92.

⁹⁰Hiebert, *Second Peter . . .*, p. 295.

⁹¹See Robert N. Wilkin, "He Is Able to Keep You From Stumbling! *Jude 24*," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:1 (January-February 1994):2-3.

⁹²Bigg, p. 344.

⁹³Donald Senior, "The Letters of Jude and Second Peter," *The Bible Today* 25:4 (July 1987):211.

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