

# Notes on Jude

2023 Edition  
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## Introduction

### WRITER

According to tradition, the writer of this epistle was Jude, who was both the half-brother of Jesus Christ (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and a brother of James, the leader of the Jerusalem church (Jude 1; Acts 15:13). Some scholars have challenged this identification in recent years.<sup>1</sup> But they have not proved it incorrect.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus' physical brothers did not believe in Him while He was ministering on earth (John 7:5). James became a believer after Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), and we may assume that Jude did too.<sup>4</sup> 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).

"The Epistle of Jude has stronger attestation than 2 Peter."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>See Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 690-92.

<sup>3</sup>The Septuagint, often abbreviated LXX, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made in the third century B.C.

<sup>4</sup>See J. B. Mayor, "The General Epistle of Jude," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:226-29.

<sup>5</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude*, p. 185. See pp. 185-92 for evidence of Jude's authenticity.

## ORIGINAL RECIPIENTS

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 many Christians, it would have been particularly true of Jewish Christians. Consequently many commentators believe that Jude addressed this epistle primarily to Jewish Christians. Others believe that he wrote to a mainly Gentile congregation.<sup>1</sup>

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

## DATE

The time of writing is very difficult to pin down. 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 the land of Israel, 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 Peter's writings have led some to date Jude about the time that Peter wrote.<sup>4</sup> Richard Lenski argued that Jude wrote after Peter, because what Peter predicted about false teachers Jude described as having taken place.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps a date between A.D. 67 and 80 would be

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Kraftchick, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Richard L. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>For discussion of the relationship of 2 Peter and Jude, see Hiebert, pp. 196-200; and Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, pp. 216-24.

<sup>5</sup>Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, pp. 597-99.

correct. At that time Jude may have been living somewhere outside Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

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

## GENRE

Many scholars regard this epistle as an "epistolary sermon."<sup>2</sup> 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 because he could not speak to them directly. Other New Testament epistles that are actually written homilies include James, Hebrews, and 1 John.

Another indication of the sermonic style of this epistle is Jude's frequent use of triads: groups of three connected things.<sup>3</sup> One writer identified at least 20 sets of triads in this brief letter.<sup>4</sup>

## STRUCTURE

Several students of the book have noted the basically chiasmic structure of Jude, though they do not see the chiasms exactly the same.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3:229-33.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Bauckham, p. 3. See Bigg, pp. 305-10, for references to Jude in the writings of the early church.

<sup>3</sup>Brad Daskocil, "The Epistle of Jude," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 2:1239.

<sup>4</sup>J. Daryl Charles, "'Those' and 'These': The Use of the OT in the Epistle of Jude," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38:124, note 60.

<sup>5</sup>See Jason Johnston, "The Multichiasmic Structure of Jude and Its Contribution to the Purpose of the Epistle" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008). A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form.

## PURPOSE

"One thought characterizes this epistle: beware of the apostates."<sup>1</sup>

"Jude is not an epistle one reads for comfort or to ponder esoteric questions about theology; it is a letter of challenge. It is a letter of outrage, and we are unaccustomed to this much passion."<sup>2</sup>

"Few books in the New Testament have more to say to our generation than the Epistle of Jude."<sup>3</sup>

Incipient Gnosticism seems to be the primary heresy in view. Gnosticism was a prominent heretical movement of the second-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being: esoteric knowledge (Gr. *gnosis*) that enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

"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."<sup>4</sup>

## 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

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<sup>1</sup>Edward C. Pentecost, "Jude," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 918.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 2156.

<sup>4</sup>Michael 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.

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

### **MESSAGE**

The Book of Jude is in the Bible to teach us that we must be careful to remain faithful to the faith. That is a positive statement. Jude's emphasis, however, was mainly negative. He warned of the danger of departing from the faith once for all time delivered to the saints (v. 3). The subject of Jude, then, is the peril of apostasy: departure from the truth. Apostasy is a matter of obedience, not salvation. Christians can depart from the faith almost as easily as non-Christians. Many Christian teenagers abandon their faith in college and university, and many never return to it.

Apostasy, as the word is commonly used in Christian circles, involves a major departure from the faith, not a momentary lapse (e.g., Peter's denial of Christ during His trial). It involves rejecting a major doctrine of the faith. Backsliding usually refers to a regression in morals and/or spiritual enthusiasm. It may or may not involve a departure from the major doctrines of the Bible. Carnality refers to giving in to the flesh (one's sinful human nature) and indulging one's sensual appetites. This also may or may not involve a major departure from the faith.

Jude first defined the character of apostasy (v. 4). Some interpreters have believed that the progression in this verse is significant. It shows how apostasy develops. It moves from ungodliness, to licentiousness, and then to denial.

An ungodly person is one who has within himself refused to submit to God's authority over him. He may be a non-Christian or a Christian. He does not have the appropriate reverence for God. This involves a deliberate volitional choice. Morgan defined apostasy as "wilful [*sic*] return to ungodliness."<sup>1</sup>

Having made that choice, the apostate then proceeds to act on that basis. Departure from God's will begins to mark his behavior. He takes license. His conduct often becomes marked by unbridled lust, excess in the pursuit of fleshly satisfaction, and shamelessness. His apostasy moves from the volitional area into the moral area.

The next step is that he justifies his behavior with intellectual rationalization. He has to convince himself that what he is doing is right in order to silence his guilty conscience. Consequently he figures out a way to convince himself that wrong is right. In so doing, he must also convince himself that right is wrong. This leads to a denial of God's Word. What God has said is wrong, the apostate says is all right, and what God has said is right, he says is wrong. He has moved from volitional, to moral apostasy, and then to intellectual apostasy. All three aspects of apostatizing counter loving God with all one's heart, strength, and mind.

This means that heresy in the church often has its ultimate source in personal failure to submit to God in some area of individual life. This is the essential characteristic of apostasy. Many people have observed that moral failure frequently precedes doctrinal failure.

Next, Jude illustrated the nature and consequences of apostasy (vv. 5-11). He did this by citing three groups, followed by three individuals:

Group #1: The nature of apostasy in Israel at Kadesh Barnea was rebellion against God's revealed will for her—the volitional root problem (v. 5). This resulted in the premature death of the rebels. The apostate generation did not enter the land but wandered in the wilderness and eventually died there.

Group #2: The nature of the apostasy in heaven was some angels' abandonment of God's place for them—moral rebellion (v. 6). Their action in rebelling revealed the rebellion in their hearts. The consequence of this conduct was and is present bondage.

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 532.

Group #3: The nature of apostasy in Sodom and Gomorrah was repudiation of God's law over the residents (v. 7). By their actions these ungodly people were saying that their way of life was right and God's was wrong—the intellectual error. The result of this apostasy was, and is, ultimate judgment. The Sodomites were initially blinded and then killed.

Individual #1: Jude used Cain to illustrate apostasy because Cain did not submit to God's will for him volitionally (v. 11). He was a self-righteous person.

Individual #2: Jude used Balaam to illustrate apostasy because Balaam advocated to Balak that the Moabites seduce the Israelites to participate in their immoral feast (v. 11). He was a greedy person who lusted after money.

Individual #3: Jude used Korah to illustrate apostasy because Korah tried to make wrong right, and right wrong (v. 11). He was a presumptuous person.

In summary, self-righteousness, greed, and presumption identify apostasy in its various stages: volitional, moral, and intellectual. Jude also pointed out other characteristics of apostasy and apostates that follow in verses 12 and 13. He did not want us to fail to identify departure from the truth.

What did Jude urge his readers to do in view of the peril that apostasy poses? He gave a general command and then specific commandments.

Note first the general command (v. 3). We are to "contend earnestly for the faith."<sup>1</sup> This implies deliberate and determined effort. We learn how to do this in the specific commandments that follow.

Note these specific commandments in verses 20-23. Keeping these commandments involves three things: First, it involves "building yourselves up" (v. 20a). This comes through spiritual growth that takes place by consistently yielding to God. This counters the volitional aspect of apostasy. Second, it involves "praying in [with the help of] the Holy Spirit" (v. 20b). This means calling on God for help. This counters the moral aspect of apostasy. Third, it involves "looking forward" to the future (v. 21). This requires keeping ultimate realities clearly in focus. This counters the

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

intellectual aspect of apostasy. As we keep our hope in view we will make right choices, such as living for the future rather than for the present. By doing this we keep ourselves in the center of God's love.

We contend earnestly for the faith best by remaining faithful to it personally and by demonstrating an example of faithfulness to others. This is Jude's method. He did not have in mind apologetics and Christian evidences, though there is a place for those ministries.

By way of application let me raise and answer two questions:

First, what is the faith for which we are to contend? It is the faith once for all delivered to the saints, namely, God's special revelation contained in Scripture. That faith centers on the person of Jesus Christ. This is the mission of the church (Matt. 28:19-20).

Second, what is the contending that defends the faith? It is essentially volitional submission to God's authority. It is also behavior that is morally in harmony with His will. It is also conviction that is intellectually consistent with His revelation. This is the calling of each Christian.

Whereas there is much apostasy today, it is possible to remain faithful. Jude wrote in order to enable us to be faithful (v. 24). Since Jude wrote this warning epistle to Christians (v. 1), it must be possible for Christians to apostatize.<sup>1</sup> May our Lord be able to say to each of us one day: "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Matt. 25:21, 23; cf. Luke 19:17).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Rebellion and God's Judgment in the Book of Jude," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:680 (October-December 2013):453-77.

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:195-208.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION VV. 1-2

Jude began his epistle by identifying himself and by wishing God's blessing on his readers in order 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."<sup>1</sup>

The writer, Jude, identified himself in a humble way. He could have mentioned that he was a 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 (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."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

Jude's threefold description of his readers is the first of many triads that distinguish the style of this letter. These triads 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, 24).

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<sup>1</sup>S. Maxwell Coder, *Jude: The Acts of the Apostates*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup>Paul A. Cedar, *James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 244.

"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)."<sup>1</sup>

Kept is a key word in this epistle where it occurs 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."<sup>2</sup>

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 in order 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."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pentecost, p. 919. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>R. Duane Thompson, "Jude," in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, 6:389.

<sup>3</sup>J. W. C. Wand, *The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 196.

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

Jude explained his reason for writing this letter in order 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.

"As evil manners give rise to good laws, so dangerous errors often give just occasion to the proper defence [*sic*] of important truths."<sup>1</sup>

The faith handed down 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, like a champion athlete strives to dominate and to subdue his or her challengers (cf. 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 Pet. 1:5).

"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 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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1967.

<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 3-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):144.

This unique compound verb pictures a person taking his or her stand on top of something that an adversary desires to take away, and fighting to defend and retain it.<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"Yield in all things personal, but be firm where truth and holiness are concerned."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"The final argument for faith in the world is not the argument of words, but the argument of life."<sup>5</sup>

"Indifference to error is a sign of false liberalism and humiliating weakness."<sup>6</sup>

"Apostasy was just a little cloud the size of a man's hand in Jude's day, but now it is a storm of hurricane force that fills the land."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. F. C. Fronmüller, "The Epistle General of Jude," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 12:5:13.

<sup>2</sup>Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, p. 385.

<sup>3</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup>Cedar, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup>Morgan, *Living Messages ...*, 2:2:203.

<sup>6</sup>Nathaniel M. Williams, "Commentary on the Epistle of Jude," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, 7:8.

<sup>7</sup>J. Vernon McGee, "The General Epistle of Jude," in *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:851.

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

- v. 4 "Certain people" stands in contrast to the saints (v. 3). These people had crept in (NASB), or "wormed their way in" (NEB), to the churches (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1).<sup>1</sup> John wrote that many antichrists had gone out from the Christian community (1 John 2:18-19). Here Jude wrote that certain persons had crept in.

The verb crept in (Gr. *pareisedusan*) "... indicates a secret, stealthy, and subtle insinuation of something evil into a society or a situation."<sup>2</sup>

"... 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."<sup>3</sup>

"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)."<sup>4</sup>

"That which is peculiarly striking in the Epistle of Jude is that he pursues the corruption of the assembly from the creeping in of some unawares on to its final judgment, showing withal that it is not arrested but passes through its various phases to that day."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>NEB refers to *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup>E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 83. Cf. Pentecost, p. 920.

<sup>4</sup>Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Peter and Jude," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 468.

<sup>5</sup>J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:555.

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."<sup>1</sup>

This last quoted 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 necessarily mean that they believed in the charismatic gifts of the Spirit.

Probably God had marked out these opponents previously long beforehand for condemnation in the sense that He knew of their sin long ago and would someday punish them for it. Another view is that other writers had sounded the warning about apostates.<sup>2</sup> *Prographo* (to mark out for) means to write beforehand.

"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).

"This word ["ungodly," Gr. *asebeis*] may be almost said to give the keynote to the Epistle (cf. vv. 15, 18) as it does to the Book of Enoch."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bauckham, p. 11. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:852.

<sup>3</sup>Mayor, 5:256.

Jude's original readers could see the ungodly character of these people in two specific activities: First, they used the liberty from the Law of Moses ("the grace of our God") that Christians enjoy as an opportunity for sensual indulgence and debauchery ("indecent behavior," i.e., antinomianism, lawlessness). Gnostics were guilty of this, and their influence seems to be in evidence here and elsewhere throughout this epistle.<sup>1</sup> However others have disputed this inference.<sup>2</sup>

Second, these people denied their only Master and Lord, 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, some interpreters have concluded that "Master" refers to God and "Lord" to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> However many scholars believe that Jude had Jesus Christ in view in both of these titles.<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

"While Jude does not state it explicitly, it seems that he wants the congregation to expel the opposition."<sup>6</sup>

"There is a growing danger in this country [the United States of America] of the church actually espousing and condoning gross immorality."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>E.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.

<sup>3</sup>See J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 252; Mayor, 5:257; Kraftchick, p. 34; and Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:2:531.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 226; George Lawrence Lawlor, *Translation and Exposition of the Epistle of Jude*, p. 60, footnote 57; Lenski, p. 615; and Bigg, p. 327.

<sup>5</sup>Bauckham, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>Kraftchick, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup>McGee, 5:854.

Doctrinal deviation often accompanies and often justifies ethical and moral sin. For example, some Christian churches that have rejected the inspiration and authority of Scripture now defend and even promote homosexuality, which the Bible clearly condemns.

### 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."<sup>1</sup>

#### A. PREVIOUS FAILURES VV. 5-7

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

"Why this unchronological arrangement in This Epistle? There must be a purpose in it. We believe the arrangement is made in the manner as it is to teach us the starting point and the goal of apostasy."<sup>2</sup>

#### 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 factual and beyond dispute. His readers knew all these things once for all, because God had communicated them once for all in Scripture (v. 3; cf. 1 John 2:20-21).

"Preaching is not designed to teach us something new in every sermon; but *to put us in remembrance*, to call to mind things forgotten."<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 4:2:179.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 1968.

power (cf. Num. 14:11; Deut. 1:32). God judged those who did not believe by destroying them in the wilderness. He let that entire generation die rather than bringing the unbelieving apostates into the Promised Land. 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 continuous 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."<sup>1</sup>

Other interpreters believe that Jude, in this verse, was referring to those Israelites who had never really believed in Yahweh.<sup>2</sup> That seems to me to be an abnormal conclusion.

But Jude primarily wanted to point out the behavior of these false teachers, not to identify whether they were believers or unbelievers. He could easily have identified them as believers or unbelievers if he had wanted to distinguish one group from the other. 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."<sup>3</sup>

## 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 that Jude alluded here to Genesis 6:1-4<sup>4</sup> and possibly on the expansive interpretation of it in 1 Enoch (but cf. Matt. 22:30).<sup>5</sup> Others believe that he was referring to the rebellion of some angels that resulted in Satan's

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<sup>1</sup>Green, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Edwin Blum, "Jude," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 389.

<sup>3</sup>Sidebottom, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 296.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Alford, 4:2:532; Kraftchick, p. 38; Dskocil, 2:1241; et al. See Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:551-52, for refutation of this view.

expulsion from heaven. The second explanation seems more probable to me.

"Some persons grumble that Scripture does not in numerous passages set forth systematically and clearly that fall of the devils, its cause, manner, time, and character. But because this has nothing to do with us, it was better not to say anything, or at least to touch upon it lightly, because it did not befit the Holy Spirit to feed our curiosity with empty histories to no effect."<sup>1</sup>

The apocryphal Book of 1 Enoch described this angelic rebellion. Some scholars believe that Jude was quoting from this book.<sup>2</sup> However others say that Jude was only confirming what it said.<sup>3</sup> 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 that 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.

"The chains are called 'everlasting,' but they are only used for a temporary purpose, to keep them [these angels] for the final judgment."<sup>4</sup>

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.

"If the highest beings known in creation were subject to judgment, how much more sinful men!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:14:15.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Jude, The Epistle of," by William G. Moorehead, 3:1771).

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Lenski, pp. 611-12.

<sup>4</sup>Mayor, 5:260.

<sup>5</sup>Ronald A. Ward, *The Epistles of John and Jude: A Study Manual*, p. 81.

### 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 (Sodom and Gomorrah) was the instrument of God's punishment. That punishment will eternally burn against unsaved false teachers who similarly disregard God's will (Rev. 20:15).<sup>1</sup> Here Jude seems to have had in view false teachers who were unsaved.

The strange flesh that the men of Sodom sought to have sexual relations with could refer to the two angels that came to visit Lot (Gen. 19:1).<sup>2</sup> This was flesh of an entirely different sort than human flesh. Another possibility is that they sought to have sex with Lot, which to them was strange flesh in that homosexuality was prohibited.<sup>3</sup> I favor the latter view, because the men of Sodom probably did not know that Lot's visitors were angels and so would not be guilty of going after that strange flesh.

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. However, if some of the false teachers referred to are believers, then eternal fire must mean something other than hell for them, because no believer will go to hell. It was a proud departure from a position of superior privilege, and 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."<sup>4</sup>

"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.

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<sup>1</sup>See James E. Allman, "Suffering in the Non-Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, pp. 39-40.

<sup>3</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Plummer, "The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude," in *An Exposition of the Bible*, 6:655.

... 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."<sup>1</sup>

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

## **B. PRESENT FAILURES VV. 8-16**

Jude next expounded on the errors of the false teachers in his day in order 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).<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

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

v. 8 Jude now pinpointed the three errors that he had just illustrated, and accused the false teachers of all three: lust (v. 7), rebellion (v. 5), and irreverence (v. 6). Jude may have meant that the false teachers justified their actions by citing visions and dreams that they claimed to have had (cf. Col. 2:18). Or he may have meant that they presumptuously imagined (dreamed) themselves to be the ones in authority and had assumed a god-like authority over the real authorities.

"Their perverted views and unrestrained conduct made them like dreamers living in the arbitrary fancies of their own imagination; they substituted

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<sup>1</sup>Gaebelein, 4:2:179-80. See also Lenski, p. 616; Morgan, *Living Messages ...*, 2:2:198.

<sup>2</sup>A type is a divinely intended foreshadowing and illustration of a later reality, which is the antitype.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 241.

the unreal world of their fancies for the real world of divine truth and righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

"Today we are witnessing the destruction of the church from the inside—it's an inside job."<sup>2</sup>

v. 9        The presumption of the false teachers stands out boldly in comparison with Michael's submission and reverence when he dealt with another powerful angel: Satan.

"Michael seems to be the most powerful of the holy angels."<sup>3</sup>

Michael the archangel did not dare to treat the devil flippantly or condescendingly, or to reply to him disrespectfully or 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."<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:860.

<sup>3</sup>John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup>Plummer, 6:656.

<sup>5</sup>Bauckham, p. 61.

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

Jude cited this incident as historical. The book from which he evidently got it was an apocryphal one: The Assumption of Moses, or perhaps The Testament 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."<sup>1</sup>

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

v. 10 The things that 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."<sup>2</sup>

What the false teachers knew by instinct 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."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 630. See Bauckham, pp. 65-76, for an extended excursus on the background and source of verse 9. See *The Nelson ...*, p. 2158, for a short explanation of the use of apocryphal sources.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Wolff, *A Commentary on the Epistle of Jude*, pp. 91-92. Cf. vv. 8, 10, 11, 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, p. 222.

One writer argued that these false teachers were also magicians.<sup>1</sup> This may have been true, but Jude did not identify them as such.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"Slow suicide (not always slow) is the result of such beastliness."<sup>3</sup>

v. 11 "Woe to them" is an imprecation (curse) 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.

"The doom of apostates is no less sure than the glorification of the saints."<sup>4</sup>

Cain's way was the way of godlessness and sensuality, violence and lust, greed and blasphemy, which 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.

"... the point of comparison is that selfish regard and envy which was at the root of Cain's sin ..."<sup>5</sup>

Balaam's error was compromise with God's enemies, and teaching the Israelites that they could sin with immunity (Num. 31:16; cf. 2 Pet. 2:15-16; Rev. 2:14). He counseled the Midianites to seduce the Israelites to commit idolatry and

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<sup>1</sup>Rodolfo Gavan Estrada III, "Blaspheming Angels: The Presence of Magicians in Jude 8-10," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63:4 (December 2020):739-58.

<sup>2</sup>Green, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>Williams, 7:14.

<sup>4</sup>Coder, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup>Alford, 4:2:536.

sexual immorality (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."<sup>1</sup>

"Balaam was the prototype of all greedy religionists who lead God's people into false religion and immorality ..."<sup>2</sup>

"A man can seek for something other than money, however. He can seek for prominence, for popularity, for fame, for applause, or for position. There are many different things which would put a man in the way of Balaam."<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup>Blum, p. 392. Cf. Charles H. Savelle, "Canonical and Extracanonial Portraits of Balaam," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:664 (October-December 2009):387-404.

<sup>3</sup>McGee, 5:863.

heroes of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Barclay regarded much of what Jude wrote as polemic (criticism) 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 of apostates, the example of *covetous* unbelief; and Core [Korah], to show the factiousness and sedition toward rightful authority, the example of *rebellious* unbelief."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"Jude has a climax: *taking* a bad way—devoting oneself to error for pay—*contradicting* God's Word and order."<sup>4</sup>

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

The first illustration: Sunken rocks, or a coral reef that lies hidden under the surface of the water, can tear the bottom off a ship if the vessel 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,

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Lawlor, p. 83. Italics added for clarification.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, 2:555. Italics his.

<sup>4</sup>Lenski, p. 634.

since they were participating in the love-feast, which was the most intimate service of worship that 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 only 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."<sup>1</sup>

The second illustration: Like clouds without water the false teachers attracted attention to themselves and promised refreshment, but they proved to be all show and no substance (cf. Prov. 25:14; 1 Enoch 1:14-15). In Palestine summer clouds often add to the humidity and consequently make the intense heat even more unbearable.

"They [the apostates] have had courses in public speaking and homiletics, and they know how to spiritualize a text of Scripture and make it mean something entirely different from what God intended."<sup>2</sup>

"To follow such men would result in being led astray from the path of truth and purity."<sup>3</sup>

The third illustration: 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, thus they were doubly dead (cf. Ps. 52:5; Prov. 2:22; Jer. 1:10; John 15:1-6).<sup>4</sup> Another view is that doubly dead means dead through and through.<sup>5</sup> A third view is that it means dead in reality as well

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 12-16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July-September 1985):240-41.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:864.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 12-16," p. 242.

<sup>4</sup>Kraftchick, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>*The Twentieth Century New Testament*.

as in appearance.<sup>1</sup> A fourth view is that it means presently dead in sin plus destined for eternal death.<sup>2</sup>

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 that Jude believed that 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.<sup>3</sup>

"These men give no evidence of ever having been regenerated."<sup>4</sup>

False teachers are (1) like reefs in that they can be destructive. They are (2) like clouds in that they can be disappointing. And (3) like trees they can be unproductive.

v. 13 The fourth illustration: Waves cast up bits of filth and debris onto the shore with their waves and foam. 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."<sup>5</sup>

The fifth illustration: Some stars move about in the sky differently from the other stars. We now call these roving stars planets, and we 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

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<sup>1</sup>Alford, 4:2:537.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 261.

<sup>3</sup>Kelly, p. 272.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, 7:16.

<sup>5</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 12-16," p. 243.

stars (cf. 1 Enoch 80:6). 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 comets or meteors or shooting stars that flash across the sky but quickly disappear in darkness.<sup>1</sup> The black darkness, away from the Source of light, indicates the eternal punishment of those among them who were not Christians.

Like waves, false teachers can be defiling, and like wandering stars (or planets), they can be unreliable and misleading.

### **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 (1:9). Commentators debate whether Jude quoted from the book of 1 Enoch or from another source of Enoch's words, such as oral tradition.

"Jude quotes Enoch and not some book."<sup>2</sup>

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 the book of 1 Enoch, He evidently led Jude to quote Enoch's prophecy.<sup>3</sup> 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 who are living at that future time will be the objects of God's judgment then.

Possibly Jude mentioned Enoch as the seventh generation from Adam simply because seven was a perfect and climactic number to the Jews. As the seventh, Enoch's words would

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 1520. See Kelly, p. 274, for a refutation of this view.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 641.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Fanning, p. 465; Bauckham, p. 96.

have been especially worthy of the readers' attention and respect.<sup>1</sup>

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 that Moses included in the biblical genealogy. They assume there were additional intervening generations that Moses did not mention in Genesis. Some interpreters have argued that a careful reading of that genealogy shows that Moses left no room for omitted generations, though other biblical genealogies do contain gaps. A different explanation follows:

"However, a solution to the problem may rest in the fact that this alleged prophecy is a citation not from a single passage in Enoch, but from several, and it is probable that Jude also quoted the line 'the seventh generation from Adam' from Enoch 60:8. Thus Jude did not intend to refer to the Enoch of Gen 5, but referred entirely, even in the introductory line, to words found in the apocryphal Enoch. While the prophecy has no canonical status, its predictions are paralleled and supported by numerous Biblical passages, such as, Mt 25:31-46."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"Satan in Eden and Judas in Gethsemane clothed ungodly deeds in *soft* words."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kraftchick, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup>David H. Wallace, "Jude," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1489.

<sup>3</sup>Wolff, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, 7:18.

v. 16 Enoch spoke of the words and 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. Like 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."<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup>

#### **IV. EXHORTATIONS TO THE FAITHFUL VV. 17-23**

Having warned his readers about the failures of false teachers, Jude proceeded to exhort them, positively, in order 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."<sup>3</sup>

##### **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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 12-16," p. 247.

<sup>2</sup>Mayor, 5:272.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup>Green, p. 180.

"Remember! It is the first imperative that Jude has used, and it heads a whole cluster of them in this concluding section."<sup>1</sup>

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). However it was the smaller group of apostles, for the most part, that 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 or may not have been quoting 2 Peter 3:3 here. Many conservative scholars believe that Peter wrote his second epistle after Jude wrote this epistle.<sup>2</sup>

The "last time" refers to the end of the historical period that encompasses the Church Age and the Tribulation. After this "last time" Jesus Christ will rule directly over humankind from the earth first during the Millennium and then in the new heavens and new earth (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; et al.).

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.).

"These workers were ... ever intent on experiencing the thrills of new forms of ungodliness."<sup>3</sup>

v. 19      The false teachers' teaching divided the believers into two basic groups: those who remained in the apostles' teaching

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>See my discussion of this subject in my notes on 2 Peter.

<sup>3</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 17-23," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):358.

and those who departed from it. While they may have claimed to be the truly spiritual group, the false teachers were really worldly-minded—they shared 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."<sup>1</sup>

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

"In many ways, verses 20-23 form the core of Jude's letter—an appeal for the entire church to exercise communal aspects of a life of faith."<sup>2</sup>

v. 20        The contrast that Jude introduced with "But" distinguishes Jude's readers from the false teachers. As God's temples under attack by hostile enemy forces, we need to build ourselves up, to strengthen ourselves in our most holy faith 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."<sup>3</sup>

This is the first of several commands, and it is a general order. What follows in verses 20b-21 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

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<sup>1</sup>S. D. F. Salmond, "Jude," in *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Kraftchick, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>A. Duane Litfin, "A Biblical Strategy for Confronting the Cults," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):235. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:5-7.

that the building of a strong and stable Christian character is an ongoing process."<sup>1</sup>

"It is my conviction that since God gave us sixty-six books, He meant that we are to study all sixty-six of them—not just John 3 or John 14 and other favorite passages."<sup>2</sup>

"... 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!"<sup>3</sup>

"Your most holy faith" is the faith "that was once for all time handed down 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). Or, to put it another way, to pray "in the element of His influence."<sup>4</sup> Our greatest resource is God Himself, and 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."<sup>5</sup>

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 hindering 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 17-23," p. 360. Cf. Phil. 2:12.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 5:871.

<sup>3</sup>Cedar, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, p. 1521.

<sup>5</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 17-23," p. 361.

"To keep oneself in God's love is to stay where God can love us as his children and can shower upon us all the gifts of love that he has for those who are his children."<sup>1</sup>

"To be conscious of being beloved by God is one of the greatest protections that the believer can possess."<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

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

"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]."<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

v. 22 Fifth, Jude's readers were to tenderly help ("have mercy on") those of their fellow believers who were struggling, and perhaps stumbling, under the influence of the false teachers.

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<sup>1</sup>Lenski, p. 646.

<sup>2</sup>Plummer, 6:662.

<sup>3</sup>Pentecost, p. 923.

<sup>4</sup>Hiebert, "An Exposition ... 17-23," p. 362.

<sup>5</sup>Idem, *Second Peter ...*, p. 286.

Those in view who were doubting were evidently earnest doubters who sincerely could decide between truth and error. They were wavering in their loyalty.<sup>1</sup> We should not abandon these brethren, but compassionately seek to restore them.

v. 23 Sixth, Jude gave instruction concerning those believers who had already fallen under God's discipline by capitulating to false teachers. We should attempt to extract ("save") 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.<sup>2</sup> And he also saw it coming on unbelievers.<sup>3</sup>

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 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 in this verse stands for those things that were 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.

"It is notable that with all of the blunt descriptions of false teachers, Jude gives us neither a command to confront these troublemakers (only to avoid them) nor a plan of disciplinary action. He simply indicates they are under the condemnation of God."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):742-43.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 290; Lawlor, p. 127. Cf. John 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:15.

<sup>3</sup>Coder, p. 116. Cf. Rev. 20:15.

<sup>4</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 2156. See Herbert W. Bateman IV, "The Minority Report: a Different Assessment for Interpreting Jude, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:705 (January-March 2020):91-105, for the view that Jude did not write in response to false teachers. In Part

J. Sidlow Baxter and Charles Swindoll gave good counsel, however:

"We must love, even while we contend against the errors of apostatisers [*sic*]. We must love their *souls* even while we oppose their *words* and deplore their *ways*. Sometimes it is delicately difficult to keep these separate, but the love of Christ in our hearts will put wisdom in our lips."<sup>1</sup>

"It is biblical to hate the sin but love the sinner. You hate the stuff that has dragged them under, but you love the soul of the person who is being pulled into eternal destruction. As a result, you rescue whomever you can."<sup>2</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION VV. 24-25

Jude concluded his brief epistle with a formal doxology that included a prayer for his readers. The Apostle Jude 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."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

v. 24            Our confidence rests in God's ability ("who is able") to keep us safe and faithful.

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2 of this article, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177:706 (April-June 2020):195-206, this writer argued that Jude wrote in response to a Zealot uprising against Rome shortly after the death of James in A.D. 62.

<sup>1</sup>J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 6:316.

<sup>2</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 1637.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup>Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, p. 217.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

The Greek word translated stumbling implies the results of tripping, not only losing our balance, but also falling. Blameless (Gr. *amomos*) does not mean without sin. It means having no justifiable ground for 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.<sup>2</sup> This verse is not an unconditional promise that God will inevitably keep all believers from stumbling, either doctrinally or morally (cf. v. 21).<sup>3</sup>

v. 25 Jude returned to his idea that the false teachers distorted—and their successors would continue to distort—the truth about God and Jesus Christ (v. 4). Glory is the effulgent radiance of God, majesty is His transcendence, dominion is His absolute power, and authority is His freedom of action. These characteristics of God belong to Him eternally ("before all time and now and forever"). 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."<sup>4</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup>William MacDonald, *II Peter and Jude: The Christian and Apostasy*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, *Second Peter ...*, p. 295.

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

<sup>4</sup>Bigg, p. 344.

anything that threatened that life of faith was indeed a mortal enemy."<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible for a genuine Christian to deny that the Jesus whom he or she once professed to trust for eternal life is the Son of God? There seem to be many examples of such people in the church today, for example, Christians who convert to Islam or some other major world religion or a cult that denies the deity of Christ. Many Christian teenagers who go off to college become convinced, sometimes by a respected professor, that what they had formerly believed is not true.

Some would say that no genuine Christian would ever deny their faith in Jesus as the Son of God and that such a person must never have been a believer in the first place. It is probable that many such people were never genuine Christians, only professing Christians. But Scripture does not seem to rule out the possibility of a genuine Christian becoming deceived by false teaching and changing his or her mind about Jesus Christ.

A genuine Christian who denies the faith will not lose his or her salvation, because when a person trusts in Christ for salvation God declares that one righteous, seals him or her with His Spirit, and promises that nothing will ever separate him or her from His saving love (cf. John 10:28; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.). That one is "kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude v. 1) and is born again (John 3:1-21). He or she can never become unborn. As we are not saved by doing something good, neither can we be lost by doing something bad, though doing something bad is never God's will for His children.

Jude could have clarified that he was writing specifically about unsaved apostates, but he did not. He wrote to Christians, warning them of this possibility for anyone: Christians and non-Christians alike. That is why this epistle is so important.

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Senior, "The Letters of Jude and Second Peter," *The Bible Today* 25:4 (July 1987):211.

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