

Contending for the Faith

A Commentary on the Letter of Jude

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Jude

Introduction to the Letter of Jude

There are many good commentaries available on Jude today, some more scholarly in their approach and some more pastoral. This commentary is primarily for the layperson, or Bible student, who is seeking to understand Jude in a greater way. Like my commentary on the letters of John, this commentary was actually originally written by hand many years ago when I first studied this letter in depth.

Because of the intended audience, I have opted to forgo the normal discussions typically found in most critical commentaries regarding various possible viewpoints and nuances of interpretations for each passage. The same principle is followed when discussing background and authorship. Rather than bog the reader down with arguments he is not likely to see as relevant, I have opted to assume a position on these things and argue that position from the internal evidence. This is not to say that this work is devoid altogether of that kind of discussion—indeed, I have provided extended discussion where I have deemed it necessary. Only that the approach of this commentary is to place concepts on a more popular level, so that they are both relevant and comprehensible.

Authorship

Jude (literally “Judas” in the Greek) seems to have been a quite common name in first-century Palestine. There are at least five separate men bearing this name in the New Testament alone: (1) Judas Iscariot (Matt 10:4; the one who betrayed Jesus); (2) Judas (a.k.a, Thaddaeus), son of James and one of the twelve (Luke 6:16, Matt 10:3, Mark 3:18 =

“Jude, not Iscariot” in John 14:22); (3) Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37); (4) Judas Barsabbas, who (with Silas) was considered a “leader among the brothers” (Acts 15:22, 32); and (5) Jude (lit., Judas) brother of James and half-brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55).

Fortunately, our task for determining which of the above is the author of this letter is greatly simplified. Of those mentioned, we may safely eliminate from further consideration options 1 and 3 (Judas Iscariot and Judas the Galilean) on the basis that we are specifically told both men died not only before the composition of this letter, but before the death of Jesus himself. We may also eliminate option 2 (Judas, one of the twelve) on two counts: Not only does the author fail to identify himself as an apostle (something that would immediately have established the authority needed to refute the heretical teachings that had infiltrated the church), but he in fact *distinguishes* himself from the apostles (v. 17). Option 4 falls short on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Nothing else is told us of Jude Barsabbas, and certainly there is no indication that he had a brother named James; and even if he did, what purpose would there be in identifying himself (in the letter) via his relationship to an otherwise unknown brother?

It is really only option 5 that makes good sense here. The author of the letter identifies himself as the “brother of James.” Such a designation indicates that this James would be well known among the churches. We know that James the half-brother of Jesus rises to prominence in the early church. He is one of the presiding members of the Jerusalem council, and is called a “pillar of the church” by no less a figure than Paul (Gal 2:9; cf. 1:19 and 2:12). It would therefore make sense for the lesser-known Jude to identify himself by his sibling relationship to James. That

would certainly go a long way toward establishing his own authority while distinguishing himself from any other Jude.

A Book of Triplets

Jude relies heavily on triplets to convey his points. In v. 1, his audience is *called, beloved* and *kept*. In v. 2, he wishes them *mercy, peace, and love*. In vv. 5-7, he provides the examples of *unbelievers, angels* and *Sodom/Gomorrah*. In v. 8, the heretics *defile, reject* and *revile*. In v. 11, parallel OT villains include *Cain, Balaam* and *Korah*. In v. 19 the heretics *cause divisions, are worldly minded* and are *void of the Spirit*. In vv. 20-21, the church is to *build, pray* and *keep*. And in v. 25, God has glory *before all time, now* and *forever*.

Purpose and Theme of the Letter

The original purpose of this letter changed just before it was written. Jude had intended to write a general letter regarding their “common salvation,” but ended up writing a letter to address heresies that had infiltrated the church. More will be said of the heretics below.

The overall theme of the letter is to teach the church how to contend for the faith, consisting primarily in identifying the characteristics and condemnation of heretics, followed by exhortations to Christians to obey the apostolic teaching that was delivered to them in order to avoid following in the heretics’ footsteps. There are several key and/or recurring words, phrases and concepts in this letter, including:

1. Comparing the heretics to animals (vv. 10-19)
2. Darkness (vv. 6, 13)

3. Eternal, everlasting (vv. 6, 7, 13, 21, 25)
4. To “keep” / be “kept” (vv. 1, 6, 13, 21, 24)
5. Judgment / condemnation (vv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14-15)

Occasion of the Letter

As we’ve already mentioned, Jude’s original intent for his letter changed just before composing it. Men whom Jude describes as godless, immoral, dreamers, arrogant, rebellious, complainers, blemishes, and the like had infiltrated the church “secretly,” were changing the grace of God into a license to sin, and were “denying” Jesus Christ. The urgency of the occasion prompted Jude to exhort the church to put up a strong defense of the original apostolic deposit.

Most likely Jude is referring to one of the many forms of incipient Gnosticism in the early church. Although diverse in their respective belief systems, incipient Gnostics of the first century held certain tenets in common. It will be helpful to look at these tenets, and then to examine the different (and often contradictory) applications made by the various Gnostic groups based on these tenets.

The word “gnostic” comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.” Gnosticism was based on two fundamental principles: (1) the impurity of the physical world (i.e., matter is inherently evil); and (2) the supremacy of illumination and knowledge. Gnostics believed in an ultimate God who remains “unknown” to people until each individual is illuminated with a special “knowledge” of him. From this god were generated “emanations” (or demiurges), smaller sparks of divinity

who in turn generated other emanations. Each generation of emanations became more corrupt than its parent generation. One of these corrupt emanations, the god of the Old Testament, created the known universe, the world, and Adam and Eve. Because that god was corrupt, everything he made was also corrupt. Hence, the world and everything in it was corrupt and evil from the very start, including the very matter by which all of mankind was made.

In the Gnostic belief, humanity and its flesh is inherently evil and in need of salvation. That salvation is attained through a special “knowledge” of God, known only to the illuminated initiates. In Gnostic theology, Christ was one of the more perfect emanations from God, though he himself was not God. His mission was to illuminate the initiates and give them a perfect knowledge of God. This knowledge provided “fullness” to the initiates, and made them “complete” and “perfect.” All others are destined to live animal existences on the earth.

This emphasis on the corruption of human flesh led to at least two contradictory Gnostic systems of belief: *ascetic* Gnosticism and *antinomian* Gnosticism. The first (ascetic Gnosticism) believed that because flesh was so evil, no Gnostic should indulge in anything but the most basic of physical activities, such as eating only what is absolutely necessary for existence—and certainly nothing that might be pleasing to the palate! These Gnostics also viewed any pleasurable activity (such as marital relations; 1 Tim 4:1-5) as something to be avoided altogether. Paul addresses this tenet of Gnosticism in his letter to the Colossians. In Col 2:20-23 we read:

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste!

Do not touch!?’ These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Paul is here referring to the ascetic Gnostics; that is, those who abstain from the physical world. He further describes this belief system as “hollow and deceptive philosophy” which has its basis in “human tradition” (2:8). The Gnostics engaged in “worship of angels” (2:18; likely a reference to the divine “emanations” from God that Gnostics worshiped). These Gnostics, according to Paul, go into detail about things they claimed to have “seen” (2:18). This may be a reference to their supposed “visions” of God.

The second form of Gnosticism (antinomian gnosticism) also believed that the physical world (included human flesh) was corrupted, but that nothing in the physical world could impact the spirit. Hence, regardless of one’s actions, there was no possibility of “sin” (1 John 1:8, 10). This belief led to a lawless and licentious conduct of life (Jude 4, 8, 18-19). Antinomian Gnostics felt free to indulge in any and every lust of the flesh since their spirits were completely unharmed by this activity. It is against this group that Jude writes his letter.

There is also evidence that some Gnostic groups, no doubt based on their belief that the Old Testament “god” who created the world was evil and therefore to be resisted, venerated Old Testament villains such as Cain, Balaam and Korah (see v. 11).

What we know for certain of the heretics Jude has in mind are that they erred on at least two fronts. They were

morally deficient (vv. 4, 8, 10, 13, 15-16, 18, 23), and they were doctrinally deficient (vv. 4, 8-10, 12, 19).

Jude's Use of the Old Testament and Pseudepigrapha

The use of both biblical non-biblical Jewish literature may suggest a Jewish audience, or may merely reflect the background of the author himself—or, indeed, both. The last option is to be preferred since Jude cites from both biblical and non-biblical Jewish sources in such a way that suggests his readers were steeped in the literature and would therefore be familiar with it. In particular, Jude makes use of the pseudepigraphical books of *1 Enoch* and the *Assumption of Moses*. In vv. 14-15, Jude directly cites a passage from *1 Enoch*; while in v. 6 he provides a loose paraphrase to a passage in that same book. In v. 9, he alludes to a passage from the *Assumption of Moses*. The question of just what authority Jude ascribes to these works will be taken up later in this commentary.

The Relationship Between Jude and 2 Peter 2

No one reading the second chapter of *2 Peter* alongside *Jude* can avoid noticing the uncanny similarities of the two letters. So great are the similarities, in fact, that there is no question that either (1) one borrowed from the other, or (2) both used the same source—a third, now lost source—when writing their respective letters. Below is a chart outlining their similarities:

Jude		2 Peter	
v. 4	Certain men has secretly slipped in among you.	2:1	False teachers will secretly introduce destructive heresies.
v. 4	(They) deny Jesus Christ, our only Sovereign and Lord.	2:1	Even denying the Sovereign Lord who bought them.
v. 6	The angels who did not keep their positions . . . but abandoned their own homes, have been kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment.	2:4	God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.
v. 7	Sodom and Gomorrah . . . serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.	2:6	Sodom and Gomorrah . . . are made an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.
vv. 8-10	These dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals-- these are the very things that destroy them.	2:10-12	(They) follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings. Yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.
v. 12	These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves;	2:13	They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stams and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you.
vv. 12-13	(They are) clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.	2:17	These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.
v. 16	These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage	2:18	For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error.
v. 11	Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.	2:15	forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,
v. 17	But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,	3:2	Remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.
v. 18	that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."	3:3	Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts.

Granted there is evidence of dependency between these two letters, the question remains, Just who is dependent upon whom? Unfortunately, there is just no easy answer to this question. Typically, when dealing with parallel passages such as this, the priority of the shorter one is assumed. Hence, since Jude's letter is much shorter than 2 Peter, this would normally suggest that Jude was written first and that 2 Peter is dependent upon Jude. If Jude was written first it would be easy to understand Peter's flow of thought and use of elaboration on germane points he finds in Jude. If, on the other hand, 2 Peter was written first, then we are left to explain why Jude would not have made more extensive use of 2 Peter—why focus only on the second chapter?

Yet, for all the similarities of thought between the two letters, there isn't all that much similarity in the exact *verbiage* that each writer uses. Each one looks like a loose paraphrase of the other¹—odd if one is using the other while writing his own letter. This observation, along with the fact that virtually all arguments advanced for the priority of one over the other can in fact be turned around to argue the opposite position, has forced many scholars to conclude that neither Jude nor Peter is relying on the other, but in fact both are relying on some sort of pre-written anti-heresy tract.

¹ Michael Green (*2 Peter and Jude* [TNTC, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 62) cites an analysis conducted by Donald Guthrie in which Guthrie compares all the parallel passages between Jude and 2 Peter and concludes that although in these parallel passages 2 Peter uses 297 words and Jude uses 256 words, they share in common only 78 words. What that boils down to is that if either writer is dependent upon the other, then he would have changed 70% of the text of the prior writer as he himself was writing.

Paragraph Divisions

The natural paragraph divisions in Jude, along with an abstract of each, are provided below:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1-2 | Greeting |
| 3-4 | Purpose of letter—earnestly contend for the faith;
Reason for contending—heretics have secretly slipped in the church. |
| 5-7 | The heretics condemnation is illustrated by three Old Testament examples: The Israelites in the desert, the angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. |
| 8-11 | The immoral and arrogant practices of the heretics, and how they are illustrated by villains of old and contradicted by heroes of old. |
| 12-13 | Further practices and characteristics of the heretics, and their final condemnation. |
| 14-16 | The heretics' error illustrated by 1 Enoch. |
| 17-19 | Exhortation to the church to obey the apostolic deposit, to remain in the true faith, and to shun the heretics. |
| 20-23 | Guidelines to the church in dealing with those who have been seduced by the error. |
| 24-25 | Doxology. |

Legend of Symbols Used

At the beginning of each paragraph addressed in this commentary is the NASB translation of that paragraph in its entirety, followed by the author's own literal translation from the Greek. In some instances, special characters are used in the literal translation to help clarify the meaning. Below are the characters used followed by their meaning:

/ —When there are ambiguous exegetical options for a word or phrase in the Greek, a forward slash (/) separates those options.

[] —When the literal translation does not make idiomatic sense in English, the idiomatic translation is used and the literal translation is offset in brackets.

{ } —When the literal translation does not clearly convey the most likely syntactical or grammatical relationships of the Greek words in the context of the sentence, verse, or passage, supplemental words are added and placed in braces to convey those relationships more clearly.

Jude 1-2

NASB: 1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: 2 May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

Lit. Jude, an of-Jesus-Christ slave, and brother of James, to the in-God-the-Father-beloved-and-by-Jesus-Christ-kept called ones. Mercy to you, and may peace and love be multiplied.

- v. 1 Jude does not refer to himself as the “brother” of Jesus Christ, but rather a “slave” (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ. Most commentators are agreed that he did so out of his recognition of the changed relationship between the two in accordance with the many statements made by Jesus to that effect (Matt. 12:46-49, John 19:25-27, etc.).² However, the force of Jude’s letter makes it imperative that he establish *some* type of authority, lest his words fall upon deaf ears. He accommodates this by adding “brother of James,” who (as the church well knew) was one of the heads (“pillars,” Gal. 2:9) of the Jerusalem church. Such a designation would effectively distinguish *this* Jude from all the other Judes (four in the NT alone), which was a common name.

² Nevertheless, Jude does not mean for anyone to take the title “slave of Jesus Christ” lightly. This is evident by two things: (1) Jude mentions his relationship to Christ *before* his relationship to his brother, and (2) whereas the title “brother of James” is in the normal word order in the Greek, the title “slave of Jesus Christ” is emphatic, placing the owner before the slave in an adjectival type of construction to show what *kind* of slave he is; namely, “an *of-Jesus-Christ* slave.” These two facts work together to show that Jude considered it more important and more authoritative to be a slave of Jesus Christ than to be a brother of James.

Jude does not address a specific church, although he does address a specific situation within a geographical area; namely, the infiltration of incipient Gnosticism into the community of believers. Other than that, this letter seems to be a *general* letter, being addressed to (and including all who are) the “beloved,” “kept,” and “called.” We are first and foremost (literally) “the *in-God-the-Father* beloved.” The perfect tense here denotes a permanent position. The adjectival usage shows what *kind* of beloved they were (“*in-God-the-Father*”).

These same two points may be said of the next statement as well; namely, in the phrase “the *by-Jesus-Christ* kept.”³ The idea of being “kept” by Jesus Christ is repeated at the close of the letter in the phrase “to Him who is able to keep you from falling” (vs. 24). Although two different Greek words are used (v. 1 has *tēreō*, whereas v. 24 has *phyllasso*), the idea in both instances is nevertheless one of “preservation.” Jude uses *tēreō* thrice more in this epistle: once in v. 6 in reference to the angels who are “kept” under judgment; once in v. 13 in reference to the eternal darkness that has been “reserved” for those who distort the gospel; and once in v. 21 as a command to keep ourselves in the love of God. In each case where this word is used in the passive sense in Jude’s epistle—regardless of whether the “keeping” is presented as a positive or a negative—there is no question but that the “keeping” is a certainty. Hence, when Jude calls those in

³ Although this phrase could be translated “*in-Jesus-Christ* kept,” borrowing the *en* from the phrase “in God the Father”—or (less likely) “*for-Jesus-Christ* kept”—following the strict usage of the dative case, it is probably best translated as a dative of *means*, hence “*by-Jesus-Christ* kept.” This rendering best agrees with v. 24, where the same idea is given—“to Him who is able to *keep* you from falling.”

the church “the kept by Jesus Christ,” there is no doubt that Jude intends for us to see absolute security for the day of redemption.

The last designation for believers in v. 1 is in the word “called” (*klētos*). This is placed at the very end of the verse and seems to tie everything in v. 1 together. It makes all the other clauses collectively adjectival in nature. Hence, if one were to ask the question, “What *kind* of “called” are they?”, the answer would be, “They are the *in-God-the-Father-beloved-and-by-Jesus-Christ-kept* called.” Jude uses “called” here not in the sense of a general invitation issued to all men, but rather to distinguish those who are called from the rest of men. It is used in the same sense of being drawn into salvation as is found in Rom 8:28-30 and John 6:44. Thus, the logical order of salvation in Jude is that we are “beloved” and so “called” and so “kept.”⁴

- v. 2 “*May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.*” Of the three qualities mentioned, only mercy and love are repeated later in the epistle; namely, in v. 21, where we are exhorted to keep ourselves in the *love* of God and wait anxiously for the *mercy* of Jesus Christ. Mercy is used twice again in vv. 22-23, where we are instructed to show mercy to others. In v. 2, however, these words are used as a greeting, and we should not press them into significance for the readers’ situation beyond that. Jude merely wishes them fullness of life in Christ.

⁴ Although, properly speaking, there is no *time* order *per se* (since in God’s eyes all of this was done simultaneously, Rom. 8:29-30), we can indeed speak of a *logical* order of events.

Jude 3-4

NASB: 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lit. Beloved, {while} every effort was being made to {continue to} write to you concerning our common salvation, I had [received] necessity/compulsion to write {at once} to you exhorting {you} to continue to struggle/contend in behalf of the once-for-all-time-delivered-to-the-saints faith. For certain men have secretly slipped in alongside of you, those of old prewritten into this judgment/decision; {they are} ungodly, changing the grace of our God into sensuality/loose living, and denying our only Sovereign and Lord, Jesus Christ.

- v. 3 This passage constitutes a sort of introduction to the rest of the letter Jude writes. His original goal was to “continue writing” (present tense) about their “common” salvation; not “common” in the sense of “inferior quality,” but in the sense of “belonging equally” to all “who are the called” (vs. 1). But Jude felt the need (“had necessity, compulsion, a sense of duty”) to interrupt his normal correspondence in order “to write” them this particular letter. The aorist tense of this last verb denotes an urgency—“to write at once”—and is here contrasted with the present tense in the former use of the same word—“continue writing.” Jude’s purpose for writing to his readers was to “exhort” them (*parakaleō*; “strongly encourage”) to “continue to struggle/contend” (*epagōnizamai*) in behalf of the faith. The present tense is an appeal to *keep on* struggling (don’t give up!). The word itself denotes an appeal to exercise great effort and exertion (“contend earnestly”) for something, in this case “the faith.”

Moreover, this *faith* for which our struggle ensues has been “once for all time delivered to the saints.” The “faith” here is not our trust in God but rather the body of beliefs to which Christians hold (1 Cor 16:13, Phlp 1:27, Eph 4:5). Jude is asserting that this “faith” is not going to change in any way. It was apparently being distorted and “changed” (vs. 4) by certain heretics spoken of in the rest of the letter. They were distorting the teaching about grace by saying it’s okay to do as one pleases since one is saved by grace and not by works (vs. 4).

Since there were other epistles written *after* Jude, the claim that this verse means there will be no more revelation after Jude cannot be sustained. What it does imply, however, is that the core doctrines of the faith had already been transmitted and were well known by this time. Hence, the message in any further revelation could only confirm what had come before, not contradict it. This would account for Jude’s usage of *hapax* (“once for all time”); the “once” not being a *point* of time, but a *period* of time (viz., the apostolic age). This also seems to agree with the writer of Hebrews when he writes “we must pay closer attention to what we have heard . . . [the message was] at first spoken through the Lord and confirmed to us by those who heard” (Hebrews 2:1-4; see also 2 Peter 1:19). In any case, we are not to look for new and novel revelation (quite the contrary, we are to *suspect* any such thing; 1 John 4:1), but rather fight for the deposit that has been entrusted to us and “contend” (struggle) to keep this deposit pure and uncontaminated from any distortion or misinterpretation.

- v. 4 Jude now gives the *reason* for this letter, “for certain persons have crept in unnoticed.” Jude must have just gotten word of this situation since his letter is so urgent. How he knew about these men in the first place is not told

us. Perhaps he received a letter from a church that was experiencing a similar problem—or, on the view that 2 Peter was written first, perhaps he is acting on the information found in the second chapter of that epistle, the essence of which he repeats here. Whatever the source of his information, Jude seems to be quite familiar with the practice and teachings of these particular heretics because of the many allusions to their teachings—and even more allusions to their practice—throughout this letter. These people had disguised themselves as Christians and had infiltrated the ranks of the church. The phrase “slipped in secretly” indicates that they came in and settled themselves in place *before* they began spreading their teachings and disclosing their practices. They were there before anyone in the church knew it. Only after they became a part of the Christian community were their true natures revealed; namely, that they were “ungodly,” and that their intent was to distort the meaning of Christian liberty by “changing the grace of our God into loose living.” They apparently believed that Paul’s teaching “where sin abounded grace abounded all the more” meant that the more one sins the more grace he receives, thus having a license to sin (Rom 5:20, 6:1, 3:8). There is nothing particularly unique to this teaching as it was a common tenet in the antinomian sect of incipient Gnosticism.

In addition, Jude tells us, they “deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ.” It is difficult to determine whether this phrase is to be taken as a *result* of their loose living (denying Him by their actions), or as a separate teaching in which they, in some way, denied Jesus as being master and Lord. In support of the first option is Titus 1:16, “they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him.” If this is the meaning of Jude 4 then the passage may

be paraphrased “who turn the grace of our God into loose living and, consequently, deny Jesus Christ as master and Lord.” But this interpretation does not adequately explain why Jude chose the words “only master and Lord.” The word “master” (*despotēs*) is five times used of God or Christ (rendered “sovereign”). If it can be rendered here as “sovereign,” then we have Jude refuting a doctrinal heresy as well as a moral heresy. The only other place in Scripture where “deny” is used in this same context is 2 Peter 2:1: “who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them,” a clear parallel to Jude 4. The subtle difference between the two is that whereas Peter emphasizes *doctrinal* heresies, Jude emphasizes *moral* heresies.

Still, inasmuch as the same words are used in both passages (*despotēs* for master and *arneomai* for deny), the concept of “denying” Jesus seems likewise to be the same in both. The definition of the word “deny” in these passages is probably best stated as “to negate what is asserted to be true” (see Matt 26:70; 1 John 2:22). More specifically, it is to oppose the basic tenants about something or someone, in this case Jesus Christ.⁵ Since both Jude and Peter use the word “sovereign” it makes sense to assume that these heretics were denying Jesus’ deity. This is further substantiated by Jude’s usage of the word “only,” as if to refute the claim that Jesus was not in a class by Himself. Since it is probable that these heretics represented an early form of Gnosticism, then the class they placed Jesus in was more likely that of a demiurge;

⁵ The word “deny” as meaning a denial of doctrine rather than a denial of moral living (as in Tit 1:16, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him) is further substantiated by the exhortation in v. 3 to “contend for the faith,” which refers to a body of beliefs, not practical Christianity *per se*.

emanations from God whom the Gnostics called angels. This also seems to be alluded to in verses 8-10 (for which see notes there).

The phrase “they were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation” seems at first glance to refer to the judgment of OT apostates in vv. 5-7, 11, 14-15. But if this is the case, it seems strange that Jude would say they were marked out for “*this* judgment” *before* he makes reference to the actual judgment. The antecedent (in this case, references to judgment) normally comes *before* the demonstrative pronoun (“this”). In other words, when the reader comes upon the words “they were marked out for *this* judgment” the natural tendency is to look *back*—or, at the very least, *immediately* ahead—to find what “this judgment” is. The fact is, there is no “judgment” to be found in either case.

An alternative (and, on reflection, more likely) interpretation focuses on a closer look at the word “judgment” (*krima*). While it is possible to render this word “condemnation,” it can also be rendered “decree” or “decision.” Moreover, the word translated “marked out beforehand” (*prographō*) is quite literally “pewritten”; and the word translated “for” (*eis*) in the NASB is normally translated “into.” If we take the passage in its literal sense, then we have, “they were long ago *pewritten* into this *decision*.” If this is the meaning, then the “decision” in view here is that these men would rise up, promote their heresies, and ultimately be destroyed, and this decision was God’s. He *decreed* the destiny of these heretics—they were “pewritten into this decision.” The reason for this decree is not stated, but we are told elsewhere that God decrees

everything for His own purpose (see Eph 1:9-11)⁶. Subsequent references to the judgment against OT apostates—such as God’s destruction of unbelievers in v. 5, of Sodom and Gomorrah in v. 7, and of Cain, Balaam and Korah in v. 11—may well serve to illustrate the fact that these heretics’ fates have been “prewritten” in a more literal way.

⁶ This does not make God the author of evil; it simply asserts that He is in complete and utter control of everything, without exception.

Jude 5-7

NASB: 5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Lit. Now I am determined to remind you, {though} you know all things [once for all time], that the Lord, having [once for all time] saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those not having believed. And the angels who did not keep their own beginning {state}, but left behind their own dwelling, He has kept in everlasting bonds/imprisonment under darkness into [until/for the purpose of] judgment of the Great Day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in similar manner to these {angels/heretics}, having indulged in excessive immorality and having gone after flesh of a different kind, are lying before {all to see} as an example/warning, undergoing punishment of eternal fire.

- v. 5 The pronouncement about the heretics entering the ranks of believers (vs. 4) must have been anything but good news to the recipients. These people were twisting and distorting the gospel and usurping Christ from His position as sovereign. In fact, the picture Jude draws in verse 4 resembles a disease which spreads throughout the body. But just in case some of the recipients take a fatalistic view of this situation—just in case some may become distressed by it to the extent that they forget the end of the story—Jude reminds them of the condemnation that ultimately awaits these heretics. In a seeming comparison of the way the heretics were destroying the gospel, Jude speaks of the final destruction of the heretics themselves: “Now I desire (lit., *am determined*) to remind you, though you know all

things once for all” (NASB; or, “though you already know all this,” NIV).⁷ The recipients were well aware of the references to the OT which Jude cites in the next three verses. His purpose is not to *inform* them, but to *remind* them of the heretics’ final judgment, lest they (the recipients) forget because of their temporal perspective on the situation. Jude is by no means downplaying the seriousness of the situation, since he himself exhorts them to fight for the faith (v. 3); but he does want them to avoid losing heart during the battle. He accomplishes this by citing three historical instances in which unbelievers engaged in similar activities as the heretics, and paid the consequences for it in the end.

The first of these is the case of the Israelites whom Moses led out of the land of Egypt. Accompanying those who truly believed were the “rabble,” who constantly complained about leaving Egypt. This illustrates what the heretics in Jude actually were; namely, unbelievers. In the OT narrative, these unbelievers were those who not only incited Israel to complain about not having quail (Num 11:4, 33-34), but were also no doubt involved in the making of the golden calf (Ex 32:1), and were subsequently destroyed for idolatry and immorality (Ex 32:35). The

⁷ Although the word *hapax* (“once for all time”) appears with the clause “having saved a people out of Egypt” in some manuscripts, the NASB has retained the correct location for it as part of the “know” clause: “though you know all things *once for all time*.” Jude’s intent is to call attention back to the *faith* which was “delivered” *hapax*” (v. 3). The readers familiarity with the OT allusions to which Jude will call attention in this paragraph could be characterized as “*knowing* once for all time” because that is what characterizes “the faith” itself! “You know this once for all time because the faith has been delivered to you once for all time.” The NIV has opted not to translate the word at all.

heretics in Jude likewise were “grumblers and complainers” (v. 16) and immoral people (vv. 4, 8); they too will be destroyed in a similar way that the Israelites were destroyed:

For who provoked Him when they had heard?
Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led
by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty
years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose
bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He
swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those
who were disobedient? So we see that they were not
able to enter because of unbelief (Heb 3:16-19).

The similarities between the heretics and the OT “rabble” are many:

1. they infiltrated the ranks of believers (vs. 4)
2. they spread their heretical beliefs and idolatry (vs. 4)
3. they were immoral (vs. 4)
4. they complained and grumbled (vs. 16)
5. they were/will be destroyed (vv. 5, 13)

- v. 6** The next illustration regarding the fate of the heretics is found in the example of the angels. Some have suggested that the angels referred to here are the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion. While these angels are no doubt *included* in Satan’s rebellion, they are distinguished from fallen angels as a whole by virtue of their fate. The text tells us of these angels that God “has kept them in eternal bonds under darkness.” The fact that fallen angels (demons) run loose in the world today indicates that there is a distinction to be made between fallen angels in general, and the angels in Jude 6. Some have countered that the “eternal bonds” here are metaphorical, and refer simply to the fact that these angels are “bound” to their sentence of divine condemnation. However, the parallel passage in 2

Pet 2:4 precludes that idea: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” Here we are told that these angels have been “cast into hell” (*tartaroō*), not simply tied to their fates. What is in mind here, then, is a special class of fallen angels. They partook of some sin other than just the general rebellion, and as a consequence (unlike the rest of Satan’s angels) have already been “imprisoned” in anticipation of the “Great Day.”

There are several considerations that lead us to believe these angels are none other than the “sons of God” referred to in Gen 6:1-4:

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

Some of the earliest Jewish interpretations of Genesis 6 identify the “sons of God” as angels (see esp. the pseudepigraphical book of 1 Enoch, particularly chapters 6 through 21). There are many good reasons for this. First, although some contemporary interpreters see the phrase “sons of God” as a reference to the “godly line of Seth (Gen 4:26), the fact remains that the only other instances of this phrase occur in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7, and all of these refer

to angels.⁸ Indeed, the very phrase “sons of *God*” seems to be set in contrast to the phrase “daughter of *men*.”

Second, the incident in which the sons of God took as wives “the daughters of men” (Gen 6:1) is presented as the sin that resulted in God’s decision to destroy the earth by means of the great flood (6:2, 5-7). This seems odd if the “sin” is merely that men married women. There is no sin in that; and there is certainly no mandate that would prohibit a man—not even one in the line of Seth—from choosing whomever he desired for his wife. Indeed, marriage between men and women was not only the original intent (Gen 2:24), but also God’s explicit command: “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). Certainly, such a “sin” (if unwritten) would not be as egregious as other sins that were being committed at that time (such as murder); and certainly such an activity cannot adequately explain God’s decision to wipe out mankind from the face of the earth.

Third, the *offspring* of this union between the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” are presented as unique. They are called “Nephilim” (lit., giants), and are said to be “the mighty men [or heroes] of old, men of renown.” But just why the normal union of a man and woman would result in abnormal (gigantic) offspring is not readily apparent if the “sons of God” refer to normal men. Moreover, the fact that these offspring are said to be “the mighty men of old, men of renown” leads us to believe that they served as a basis for later legendary figures, perhaps even gods. This may very well account for the legends of

⁸ The NASB follows the Hebrew text’s “sons of God” in all these passages, whereas the NIV follows the LXX text’s “angels.”

the “mighty” Greek gods, such as the Titans, Hercules, Atlas and others. In any case, the offspring produced by this union can be explained only on the view that these “sons of God” are something other than men.

That Jude is here referring to the Genesis 6 account seems clear on several accounts. First, this example of judgment is tied to two others which are clearly OT events (vv. 5, 7). When Jude mentions the Israelites in the wilderness his readers would naturally be “reminded” (vs. 5) of Exodus 32 and Numbers 11, among other passages. And when in v. 7 Jude refers to Sodom and Gomorrah his readers would naturally be “reminded” of Genesis 19. Hence, Jude’s “reminder” seems intended to take his readers specifically to some OT passage. If Jude 6 refers to Satan’s rebellion, to which OT passage would they be taken? Since nothing is said about that event in the OT, we are left with the awkward inclusion of a non-biblical event amid two biblical ones. In fact, the only conceivable passage that Jude’s readers could reasonably refer back to for this episode is Genesis 6.

Second, in verse 7 we are told that Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities “*in the same way as these*” indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh. The question here is, What is the antecedent of the masculine demonstrative pronoun “these”? It cannot be “Sodom” (a neuter noun), nor Gomorrah (a feminine noun), nor even “the surrounding cities” (also feminine). While it *could* refer to the heretics themselves, we would need to reach all the way back to v. 4 for that antecedent. The more natural (and closest) antecedent is “angels” in v. 6. And so, based on that grammatical relationship, we are told that Sodom and Gomorrah indulged in gross immorality and went after “strange flesh,” but that they did so “in the *same*

way as these [*angels*].” In other words, whomever these angels are, they too engaged in “gross immorality,” and they too “went after strange flesh.” The phrase translated “strange flesh” is literally in the Greek “flesh of a different kind” (*sarkos heteras*). The “flesh of a different kind” that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah pursued was the unnatural coupling of men, and the specific sin was homosexuality.⁹ The angels too went after “flesh of a different kind,” but in this case the “flesh of a different kind” was women, and the sin was the unnatural coupling of angels and humans.

Third, we are told that these angels “did not keep their own domain” and “abandoned their proper abode.” The question must be raised here, Just what is the “domain” and “proper abode” that these angels abandoned? The word translated “domain” in the NASB is *archē* in the Greek, and is properly translated “beginning.” Such a generalized word lends itself to a wide range of possibilities. Fortunately for us, Jude has provided us not only one statement of what the angels abandoned, but two. He states it first in the negative, “they did not keep their beginning”; and then in the positive, “they abandoned their proper abode.” The word translated “proper abode” in the NASB

⁹ As Michael Green (*2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Revised Ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 1987) notes, Jude may very well have in mind the episode in Genesis 19, in which the two angels who go to visit Lot in Sodom are accosted by the men of Sodom, who in turn demand that Lot turn these angels out (thinking they are men) so that they can have sexual relations with them (v. 5). If Jude is thinking of this episode then the episode of the “sons of God” who lusted after the “daughters of men” in Genesis 6 is directly reciprocated in the episode of the men of Sodom who (unwittingly) lusted after the “sons of God” in Genesis 19. As Green puts it, “*sarkos heteras* indeed!” (180).

is *oikētērion* in the Greek, a word used only one other time in the NT. Intriguingly, the other instance is found in 2 Corinthians 5, where it refers to the *spiritual clothing* we will receive after we die, very likely a reference to the temporary “clothing” of the intermediate state between death and resurrection:

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our *dwelling* [*oikētērion*] from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life (2 Cor 5:1-4).

If this meaning can set a precedent for its use in Jude 6 (since it is the same word and since the context accommodates it nicely), then what Jude is saying is that these angels did not keep (lit.) “their beginning [state of existence], but set aside/abandoned their heavenly clothing.”

Fourth, Jude’s words here seem to be a rather loose paraphrase of selected passages in 1 Enoch, which records the same episode of angels cohabiting with women. Kistemaker¹⁰ provides a helpful comparison:

¹⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 379.

1 Enoch

Jude

[The angels] have abandoned the high heaven, the holy eternal place. (12:4)	And the angels who did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their own home—(v. 6a)
Bind Azaz’el hand and foot (and) throw him into the darkness! (10:4)	these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains (v. 6b)
that he may be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment. (10:6)	for judgment on the great Day. (v. 6c)

The account of the angels found in 1 Enoch—which comprises at least sixteen of its chapters (6 through 21)—is one of the earliest interpretations of Genesis 6. First Enoch 6 reads in full:

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied, that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: “Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.” And Semjaza, who was their leader, said unto them: “I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.” And they all answered him and said: “Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.” Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And these are the names of their leaders: Samlazaz, their leader, Araklba, Rameel, Kokablel, Tamlal,

Ramllel, Danel, Ezeqeel, Baraqijal, Asael, Armaros, Batarel, Ananel, Zaqlel, Samsapeel, Satarel, Turel, Jomjael, Sariel. These are their chiefs of tens.

This is followed in chapter 7 by the account of the *offspring* of this union:

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.

Due to this activity, and the attendant increase of sin upon the earth, the archangels appealed to God to destroy the earth (recorded in chapter 9)”

And then Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel looked down from heaven and saw much blood being shed upon the earth, and all lawlessness being wrought upon the earth. And they said one to another: . . . “Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, which men were striving to learn: And Semjaza, to whom Thou hast given authority to bear rule over his associates. And they have gone to the daughters of men upon the earth, and have slept with the women, and have defiled themselves, and revealed to them all kinds of sins. And the women have borne giants, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness.”

God responds to this request in chapter 10 by sending one of his head angels to warn Noah of the coming flood:

Then said the Most High, the Holy and Great One spake, and sent Uriel to the son of Lamech, and said to him: "Go to Noah and tell him in my name 'Hide thyself!' and reveal to him the end that is approaching: that the whole earth will be destroyed, and a deluge is about to come upon the whole earth, and will destroy all that is on it. And now instruct him that he may escape and his seed may be preserved for all the generations of the world."

There can be little doubt (based not only on the similarity of events, but also on the very words used) that Jude is thinking of this episode when writing v. 6 of his letter. One of the reasons we know that Jude has this book in mind is because he quotes from it directly in vv. 14-15:

And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

This is a paraphrase from 1 Enoch 1:9, which reads:

And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment upon all, And to destroy all the ungodly: And to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

The preponderance of evidence must therefore be given to the view that Jude 6 is referring to the account of Genesis 6 as portrayed by 1 Enoch. These angels “did not keep their beginning [state] but abandoned their heavenly clothing” to corrupt themselves with human women. And because they did not “*keep*” their original state, God (in an ironic play on words) has therefore “*kept*” them in eternal bonds. Again, all of this is to illustrate the actions and fate of the heretics themselves. The heretics do not belong in the church; yet they, like the angels, “did not keep their beginning [place] but abandoned their own dwelling” (i.e., outside the church) where they belong, and came into the church where they do not belong (vs. 4). Jude’s point is that the act of the heretics infiltrating the church is just as *unnatural* as angels having sexual relations with women. Consequently, the fate of these angels is sealed forever; they are currently being “kept” under spiritual bonds until the day of judgment. Similarly, the heretics will, as a consequence to their actions, ultimately face the judgment of God.

Quite literally, the evil angels are said to be “kept under darkness” (*hypo zophon*) This idea is difficult to fathom since darkness is something intangible. But a look at the Greek reveals that this is not the normal word for darkness. The normal word for “darkness” in the New Testament is *skotia*, but here we have the word *zophon*. *Zophon* is used only four times in the New Testament; twice here in Jude (vv. 6, 13), and twice in 2 Peter (2:4, 17; parallel passages to Jude 6, 13). In fact, *zophon* is used with *skotia* in both 2 Peter 2:17 and in Jude 13, where the phrase is rendered “black darkness.” In both cases where they are used together, *zophon* is rendered “black” and *skotia* is rendered “darkness; hence, *zophon* almost certainly must be

rendered something other than “darkness” in Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4. Recognizing this, the RSV translates *zophon* in Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4 as “the nether gloom” (the NRSV has “deepest darkness”). Thayer says “densest darkness,” and BDAG cites examples of this word where, in some contexts, it is used of the “darkest nether regions” or “gloom of the underworld.”

If we take *zophon* to mean simply “gloom,” then we can make sense of all four of its uses: 2 Peter 2:4 “gloom of hell (or prison)”; 2 Peter 2:17 “gloom of darkness”; Jude 6 “under gloom” (with “under” acting as a preposition) or “the under-gloom (in which “under” is taken in compound with “gloom”; or “nether-gloom” [RSV], or “gloom of the underworld”); and finally, Jude 13 “gloom of darkness.” On this rendering, the evil angels are currently being kept in an “underworld” of sorts which is characterized by *gloom* or *gloominess*. The “eternal bonds” (*aidios*, instead of the more common *aiōnos*) are not literal, tangible bonds (such as handcuffs), but rather a restraint that keeps these spiritual beings in the “underworld” so that they never again “leave their proper abode.” They will be kept there “until” (literally “into”) the judgment of the “great day” (i.e., the Judgment Day). “The Great Day” refers not to a 24-hour period, but rather a fixed period of time—much as the “Day of the Lord” often refers to a long period of time, beginning with the time at which God begins to pour his wrath out upon the earth, and extending to the eternal state.

- v. 7 These angels, we are told, are being held down in bonds *just as* Sodom and Gomorrah (i.e., the bulk of the men that populated those cities and made them notorious) are also being held down and reserved for that day; that is (lit.), “they currently are lying before [all to see] as an example/warning, undergoing punishment of eternal fire.”

Contrary to the thinking of some, the physical destruction of these cities does not serve as an example of the annihilation of the souls of those who populated them. Most English translations do not fully bring out the Greek participle in this verse. The NIV has, “They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire,” and the NASB has, “[they] are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.” While the NASB has indicated a slight break in thought with the addition of the comma between the words “example” and “in,” it is not enough to show that there are two types of destruction operative in this verse, not just one (see the literal translation above). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah *the city* is one that serves as an ongoing example of God’s judgment against sin, since those cities still lie in ruin. Even though it happened long ago and the *act* of that destruction has ceased, we can still turn in the pages of Scripture to see that destruction happening all over again. Yet, the “destruction” doesn’t really end there; for those who populated that city are currently “undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.” The reason for this is that they too (like the angels) went after “strange flesh” (in this case homosexuality) and indulged in excessive immorality by it.

It is the physical destruction of the cities (as recorded in Genesis) that is modified by the phrase “as an example”—not the “punishment of eternal fire” itself, which is instead connected to the participle “undergoing” and forms a participle *of time*. In other words, the physical destruction of the cities is “laid out before all to see” *while* the population of these cities is “continually undergoing” (present tense) the “punishment of eternal fire.”

The parallel in 2 Peter confirms this rendering. After referring to Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter concludes that the Lord “knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to *keep the unrighteous under punishment* for the day of judgment” (2:9, NASB). The NIV brings this out even more clearly: “The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, *while continuing their punishment.*” What’s important to note here is that Peter writes this *after having made* the statement that God destroyed the cities themselves by “reducing them to ashes,” and that this destruction serves as “an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2:6).

In other words, the point annihilationists want to glean from Peter in v. 6 is clearly denied them in v. 9. Similarly, the point they want to glean from Jude 7 is denied them in that same verse. The “example” is not referring to *eternal punishment*, but rather to ultimate judgment. The wicked will not get away with their wickedness—they will eventually be brought into judgment. The sentence itself is carried out only after the judgment and it consists of the (continuous) “punishment of eternal fire” (2:9). Otherwise, the different *degrees* of punishment spoken of in 2 Pet 2:20-21 makes no sense at all. Why, and in what way, would it be “better for [the heretics] not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them,” *unless* the latter action (turning one’s back on the truth) contributes a *more severe* degree of punishment? Obviously, if the destruction of the all the wicked consists simply in their annihilation, then the wicked person who has never heard of the gospel is in no

“better” position than the one who has heard it and turned away from it.

The “example” of Sodom and Gomorrah is that God ultimately judges wickedness, and that wickedness does not pay dividends. That is the point Jude is making in all three OT examples he gives. In verse 5, the “rabble” received just recompense for their rebelliousness; in verse 6, the angels received just recompense for their rebelliousness, and in verse 7, Sodom and Gomorrah received it for theirs. The reason “they are laid out before all” is to cause us to ponder the outcome of evil paths. The person who contemplates following these examples is now fully warned to count the cost of his decision. If he chooses to take this same road he can expect to be judged for it. This warning is issued not only to the heretics themselves (there is no reason to believe that these heretics would not hear a public reading of Jude’s words since there were still in the church; v. 4), but to the believers as well, so that they would not envy the heretics’ so called “freedom” (v. 4).

Jude 8-11

NASB: 8 Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. 9 But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." 10 But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Lit. Notwithstanding {these judgments}, these dreaming ones/these by their dreams likewise, on the one hand, defile [the] flesh; and, on the other hand, reject lordship and slander glorious beings. But Michael the archangel/head-angel, when disputing with/against the devil (he was debating about the body of Moses), did not take it upon himself to pronounce a slanderous judgment against him, but said "May the Lord rebuke you." But these men, on the one hand, slander as many things as they do not know/understand; and, on the other hand, as many things as they, like unreasoning animals, understand by nature/instinct, in these things they are being corrupted/destroyed. Woe to them/how horrible it will be for them, because they went the way of Cain, and were poured out/swept away in the error/wandering of Balaam for gain/payment, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

- v. 1** The Greek text of v. 8 actually begins with a combination of three rather oddly strung-together words: "Likewise, nevertheless, also." "Likewise" is likely used to compare the heretics' immoral activity with that of the three examples mentioned previously in vv. 5-7. The last two of those examples (the angels, and the men of Sodom) involved sexual immorality (and a perverted kind at that). In the first example, however (that of the OT rabble), it is a bit more difficult to know with certainty whether it intends to point out sexual immorality ("the children rose up to play," which Paul connects with sexual immorality in 1 Cor 10:7-8, and which would correspond to the "loose living"

of the heretics here in v. 4), idolatry (the golden calf, which would correspond to their denial of Jesus as the “only sovereign and Lord” in v. 4), or merely unbelief (“those who did not believe” in v. 5). The last reference seems most likely, since Jude’s point is only to show the final destruction of unbelievers in the church. “Likewise,” then, *seems* to compare the three examples cited thus far with three corresponding activities of the heretics in v. 8: “defile flesh,” “reject authority,” and “revile angelic majesties.” The heretics engage in all three of these activities “nevertheless”; that is to say, *notwithstanding* the ultimate judgment of such people illustrated in the previous three examples. The word “also” here is probably redundant of “likewise,” and can on that basis be omitted in translation. The beginning of v. 8 then reads:

Likewise, these men are guilty of the same things as those in the examples, and they continue to engage in these activities even though the final end of such people is clearly exhibited on display for all to see (cp. v. 7).

It is difficult to determine whether to follow the NASB’s “these men by dreaming,” or the NIV’s “these dreamers.” The Greek has simply “these dreaming.” The decision must be made as to whether to connect the subject with the pronoun (“these *men*”) thereby making “dreaming” a participle of means (“these men *by* dreaming”); or to connect the subject with the participle (“dreaming ones”), thus translating the phrase “these dreamers.” If the former, then the options for what exactly is intended by the phrase “these men, by dreaming, defile the flesh” includes two: (1) these men were defiling themselves by merely *thinking* (“dreaming”) immoral thought (an unlikely option in light of the fact that Jude

makes an issue of their “loose living” in v. 4); (2) these men were experiencing visions, which in turn resulted in immoral behavior (in which case the participle would be one of *cause* rather than one of *means*—“these men, *because of* their dreams, defile the flesh”). If we accept the NIV’s “these dreamers,” the phrase is then only loosely connected to “defile the flesh,” and is only a name given to them sardonically by Jude in reference to their supposed “secret knowledge” they alone possessed as Gnostics. This rendering nicely complements Peter’s description of these same heretics in 2 Pet 2:3: “they will exploit you with stories *they have made up*” (NIV). This interpretation seems to make the most sense.

Earlier it was stated that the word “likewise” makes a comparison between the three OT examples (vv. 5-7) and the three practices of the heretics (v. 8). Technically, there are only two *practices* (sexual immorality and a denial of Jesus, v. 4), one of which (immorality) is reiterated twice in the examples (vv. 6-7; v. 5 is merely an example of unbelief, not a *practice* per se), and the other of which is reiterated once in v. 8: “reject authority” (corresponding to the denial of Jesus in v. 4). There is also a third practice introduced for the first time in v. 8: “revile angelic majesties.” Yet, the Greek of v. 8 is really broken down into two categories, not three—immorality and authority. The Greek literally says, “*On the one hand* they defile the flesh,” and *on the other hand* they reject authority and revile angelic beings.” The rejection of authority is possibly a reference to a denial of *Jesus’* lordship (the Greek is lit., “they deny lordship”), and may equally have reference to Jesus’ deity or to his right to rule over them. All other factors being equal, it is likely the former, since the latter could be said of *all* unbelievers and this seems to be a

problem that is unique to these particular heretics (hence, the reference is to “*these men*”). Peter calls this denial of Jesus a “destructive heresy” (2 Pet 2:1), indicating it goes far beyond rejecting Jesus’ right to rule. The word translated “authority” is elsewhere used (in the plural) of a specific class of angels (Eph 1:21; cf. 3:10, 6:12). But here it is in the singular, and that meaning hardly makes sense in this context, since it is unlikely that the heretics would single out *one* rank of angels whose authority they reject. The singular indicates that one person is in mind. Of course, the singular could also denote “lordship” or “authority” in general, such as the authority of a government. But the context mentions nothing of government, or any other type of authority per se. In what way then can it be said that these men reject authority?

The answer becomes clearer when we consider that one of the primary definitions of the word *kuriotēs* (“lordship”) is *the essential nature of the kurios* (“Lord”; see BDAG). When viewing v. 4 in light of this definition, it becomes clear just how these heretics “denied” Jesus as “sovereign and Lord.” The Gnostics equated Jesus (as they did the angels) as a mere emanation from God (albeit the least corrupt of them all). In other words, they believed that Jesus was something less than full deity; hence, they “rejected the essential nature of the *kurios*,” stated so clearly in passages such as Col 2:9, Heb 1:3, and John 1:1.

These heretics also “slandered” angels. It is difficult to know with certainty whether the Greek word *blasphēmeō* (lit., “blaspheme”) should here be rendered as “slander” or “revile.” If the former, it would imply that the heretics were in some way saying something untrue (and/or harsh) *about* the angels (lit., “glorious ones”), perhaps encapsulated in some false teaching about them. The Gnostic teaching that

angels were but corrupted emanations from God would certainly explain this blasphemy. If the latter is to be preferred instead, it would mean they were directly rebuking angels themselves. The problem of the exegete is further complicated by the ambiguous “glorious ones.” Does this refer to the elect angels, to fallen angels, or to both?

Both of these problems may be resolved by looking at the *example* of “blaspheming” provided by both Jude and Peter. The nature of their blasphemy in both cases seems to be a direct condemnation spoken against an angel. Jude uses the example of Michael’s dispute with Satan. Peter generalizes that same principle, and concludes that “angels [*angeloi*] who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against [*doxas*; “glories”] before the Lord” (2 Pet 2:10-11). Peter here seems to make a distinction between *angelos* (elect angels) and *doxas* (fallen angels). Jude seems to follow suit when he notes that the heretics slander *doxas*, whereas even Michael the archangel (or, “head of the *angeloi* [angels]”) does not dare rebuke Satan.

The “blasphemy” then is some kind of “reviling” rather than “slander.” The objects of that reviling are fallen angels. The Gnostics imitated much of the apostles’ teaching, but in a distorted way. The apostles are recorded as having cast out demons. However, when others attempted this it did not work (Acts 19:13-16). This is likely what the heretics in Jude and Peter were doing as well—which is not unlike the error of many today who attempt this same thing without success. The explanation held by some commentators that this “blasphemy” is actually “slander” is appealing, but does not do justice to the specific *examples* provided by both Jude and Peter.

v. 9 While these heretics revile and rebuke demons, “arrogantly and without fear” (2 Pet 2:10), even Michael the “chief of the angels” (*archangel*—the head of *all* angels, both elect and fallen) dies not dare to do such things—not because he hasn’t the *power* to do so (2 Pet 2:11 indicates he is greater in both might and power), but because it is not his *place* to do so—“May *the Lord* rebuke you.” It is unclear from the text just what it was that Michael and Satan were disputing in regard to the body of Moses. Fortunately, we are not left completely in the dark, since (as most commentators agree) Jude is here alluding to another the pseudepigraphical work, *The Assumption of Moses*. While the text of the AoM (also known as *The Testament of Moses*) that we have today does not include this section, we may piece together what that section was based on quotations from some early church writers (such as Clement, Origen and Didymus) who knew it. The section likely read this way:

Joshua accompanied Moses up Mount Nebo, where God showed Moses the land of promise. Moses then sent Joshua back to the people to inform them of Moses’ death, and Moses died. God sent the archangel Michael to remove the body of Moses to another place and bury it there; but Samma’el, the devil, opposed him, disputing Moses’ right to honorable burial. . . . The devil brought against Moses a charge of murder, because he smote the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. But this accusation was not better than slander against Moses and Michael, not tolerating the slander, said to the devil, “May the Lord rebuke you, devil!” At that the devil took flight, and Michael removed the body to the place commanded by God, where he buried it with his own hands. Thus no one saw the burial of Moses.¹¹

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 72-73, quoted in Kistemaker, 386.

The point Jude is making here is that even though the application of the devil's charge was unfounded, Michael did not presume pridefully and arrogantly to denounce and rebuke him, but left that for the Lord. His statement is in the optative mood in the Greek: "May the Lord rebuke you," and so is stated not as a command but as a wishful desire that justice would be done.¹²

- v. 10 The NASB has "these men revile the things which they do not *understand*; and the things which they *know* . . ." The word rendered "understand," however, is *oida*, whose basic meaning is "to know"; and the word rendered "know" in this verse is *epistemai*, whose basic meaning is "to understand"¹³ (although it is certainly not uncommon to translate it simply as "know"). The semantic range of both words allows interchangeability.

It is no great thing that the heretics revile demons, since (as we are here told) they revile (lit.) "as many things as they do not know," demons being just one of them. They are completely void of any knowledge of spiritual matters—else they would no doubt "tremble" at what they were practicing (2 Pet 2:10). Although it is true that Satan and his demons have no hold on a Christian (1 John 5:18-19), we must soberly realize that it is only by God's mercy that we are not "sifted like wheat" (Luke 22:31-32). We are certainly not to "play around" with the forces of darkness, nor take them lightly as these heretics were doing.

¹² For the whole question on whether Jude views pseudepigraphical works such as *The Assumption of Moses* and 1 Enoch as authoritative sources, see the discussion under vv. 14-16.

¹³ See Mark 14:68, where both words are used again: "I neither know (*oida*) nor understand (*epistemai*) what you are talking about." However, in Acts 19:15, the NASB has: "I recognize (*oida*) Jesus, and I know (*epistemai*) about Paul, but who are you?"

Sadly, the modern charismatic movement (with a few happy exceptions) displays a woeful lack of understanding of these things. When the itinerate Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:13-16 attempted to dabble in this arena, they thought they would be met with success if only they tacked on the phrase “in Jesus’ name” to their practice of casting out demons—as though it were some magical formula that anyone could use. As these men soon discovered, this authority was granted to a limited number of disciples, and was not theirs to “claim.” The modern charismatic movement would do well to realize this.

Although these men are void of any knowledge of *spiritual* things, they possess an over-abundance of knowledge in natural things; that is, “the things which they know by instinct/nature.” These “things” are hinted at throughout this letter; and while they certainly encompass all works of the flesh, what is in mind here is likely the “loose living” of v. 4 and the defiling of the flesh in v. 8. “Unreasoning animals” are *instinctually* interested only in self preservation and self gratification, whatever form that may take. In the case of the heretics, it takes the form of sexual immorality (v. 4, 8, 13, 23), self gain (v. 11), caring only for themselves (v. 12), along with arrogance and presumptuousness (v. 8-9). These men operate on base instincts and desires (“whatever they know *by nature*”). So corrupt are they that Peter views them as mere “beasts made to be caught and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12). It is in these very practices that Jude says they are “being *destroyed*.” The word for “destroyed” here (*phtheiro*) and can also mean “corrupted,” depending on the context. For instance, in 1 Cor 15:33 we read: “Bad company *corrupts* (*phtheiro*) good morals.” Here, too, the context seems to favor “corrupted” over “destroyed, since Jude is speaking in the

present tense about what impact these instinctual practices have on these men *now* (“in these things they *are being* corrupted”), rather than their future result (“in these things they *will be* destroyed”). So, these men lose all the way around. Not only do they fail to understand the spiritual things they *claim* to understand, but everything they actually *do* understand (and practice!) does nothing more than corrupt them even further.

- v. 11 As though suddenly realizing the magnitude of the heretics’ error (spurred on, no doubt, by his assessment in vv. 8-10 of their practices), Jude ends this section of his thought by comparing the heretics with three OT villains. The reference to these villains may have more significance than is apparent at first glance. Some sects of Gnosticism (viz., the Cainites) honored OT villains.¹⁴ Jude, then, may have this kind of sect in mind when making these comparisons. They truly had “gone the way of Cain,” and followed after the error of Balaam and rebellion of Korah. Since they held these villains in such high esteem they strove to style their lives after theirs. Because of this, Jude exclaims “Woe to them!”—a phrase that is roughly equivalent to “How horrible for them!”—for their decision to study and emulate the life of Cain and mold themselves after *his* image, rather than allowing themselves to be conformed to the image of *Christ*. Thus, they have chosen to “go the way of Cain”—a lifestyle filled with hatred, anger, murder, envy (Gen 4:5-8), and self preservation (Gen 4:13-14).

They had also “rushed headlong,” or (based on the passive tense) “been swept away” into the error of Balaam for pay. The word used here (*ekcheō*) means to “give

¹⁴ *Eerdman’s Handbook to the History of Christianity*; ed. Tim Dowley (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1977), 98.

oneself over completely to” or “abandon oneself to” something—the existential “blind leap” into the dark. Balaam’s error was that he was not content with *blessing* the Israelites and moving along the way (thus, keeping himself from sinning against God). Instead, he conspired with Balak to destroy God’s people, and counseled him to send foreign women to corrupt them with immorality and idolatry—and he gave this counsel in return for payment (Numbers 22). In a very similar way, these false teachers were attempting to convince God’s people that immorality was a viable way of life and that God was indifferent to it—hence, promoting both immorality and a false view of God, which is idolatry—and, as teachers, they were likely receiving payment for their teachings!

The final comparison here, “and [they] perished in the rebellion of Korah,” is difficult due to the aorist tense of the verb. When Korah and his cohorts rebelled against Moses (Numbers 16), they fell through the crevices in the earth and the earth closed in over them. In other words, they perished by means of *death*. However, Jude sees the final fate of these heretics as so certain that he can tell us “they perished” even though they are still alive! Since they have rejected the truth after having come to an understanding of it, Jude places them in the same category that Peter uses of these same men in 2 Pet 2:20-21:

For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them.

The aorist tense in Jude, therefore, is used in *anticipation* of their final destiny. Just as the elect of God are said to have already been glorified (Rom 8:30), so also these heretics are said to have already perished. The scope of Korah's rebellion is portrayed as so far reaching that it extends through time to sweep up and destroy these heretics.

There are at least two additional similarities between Korah and the heretics. First, Korah rebelled against the God-given authority of Moses; these heretics, too, were rebelling against the God-given authority of the apostles. Second, when Korah came to his demise he took many others with him. Similarly, these heretics were attempting to take converts with them (Jude indicates in vv. 20-21 that some had already fallen prey to the teaching of these men). The heretics, like Cain, were full of hatred toward those they were attempting to win. They, with Balaam, were attempting to lead these converts into sexual immorality. And through it all they were rebelling against the apostles as Korah rebelled against Moses.

Jude 12-13

NASB: 12 These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; 13 wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

Lit. These are the ones in your love feasts who are blemishes/hidden rocks, eating the feast with you fearlessly, shepherding/feeding/caring for themselves, waterless clouds being carried away by winds, fruitless late-autumn trees, having died twice and having been uprooted, wild waves of the sea foaming up their own shame, stars which are wanderers, for whom the gloom of darkness is kept forever.

v. 12 Jude now writes in such a way as to strike at a much more personal level to his readers than he has before with his general statements made thus far about the practices and condemnations of these heretics: “These men are blemishes at *your* love feasts” Now the earlier statement that they have “crept in among you” takes shape and hits much closer to home. These men were actually participating in the Christians’ “love feasts” (Gk. *agapē*)—another term for the Lord’s Supper. The word translated “hidden reefs” in the NASB is translated “blemishes” in the NIV. It is a difficult word because it can be translated equally as either, and the two meanings are so far removed from each other as not to be able to extrapolate a definition that reflects both meanings at once. If “blemishes” (NIV) is correct it would indicate that the presence of these men taints the otherwise pure celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This is the sense found in 2 Pet 2:13, although Peter uses a slightly different Greek word (*spilos* as opposed to Jude’s *spilas*).¹⁵

¹⁵ The root *spil-*, in its various forms, is used five times in the NT and is usually rendered “spot” or “stain” (Jas 3:6, Jude 23, Eph 5:27). The only other

They are “blemishes” in the sense that they are false Christians that taint the Lord’s Supper. If “hidden reefs” is to be preferred, then it refers to the submerged rock in a harbor, lying just below the surface, of which a ship must be constantly be on the lookout. Just as the “hidden reefs” destroy an unsuspecting ship, so also these men attempt to destroy the pure faith of unsuspecting Christians.

The latter rendering seems to be what is in view here since it flows more naturally with the rest of Jude’s imagery—waterless clouds, dead trees, wandering stars—all of which are undesirable objects of nature. These heretics have “slipped in secretly” and so are like “hidden reefs” which lie in wait to destroy the unsuspecting ship.¹⁶ They do not fear God—nor are they conscience-stricken in the least—when they join with Christians who are gathered together to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Moreover, they are completely unconcerned whether or not anyone else benefits from these gatherings (whether physically or spiritually), as they are interested in “shepherding/feeding” only themselves. The Greek word used here (*poimainō*) can mean “to shepherd,” “to care for,” or “to feed.” The NASB has chosen the second definition, whereas the NIV has chosen to combine the first and third in its “shepherds who feed only themselves.” Either meaning is essentially the same, but the NIV does a better job here in capturing the overall train of thought.

occurrences are those of 2 Pet 2:13 and Jude 12 which deal with the same subject matter. However, at least one difference exists between the two occurrences; whereas 2 Pet 2:13 has the second declension form, Jude has the third declension form, which is used in non-biblical literature for “hidden reefs.”

¹⁶ Compare this with Paul’s words to Timothy: “holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have *shipwrecked* their faith” (1 Tim 1:19).

These heretics were “feeding themselves” in the context of the *love feast* (Lord’s Supper). Once again, Jude points to the “instinct” of these men toward self preservation. They are oblivious to the community emphasis of the Lord’s Supper, and are there only for self-serving purposes.

This comes as no surprise to Jude, however, since if these men purport to be “shepherds/teachers,” then they have “cared [only] for themselves” in many contexts, whether in the Lord’s Supper, in their teachings, or in meeting the practical needs of the saints. In their teaching that are the very embodiment of Ezek 34:2: “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?” They are also neglectful in their obligation to aid in the physical needs of the flock (Acts 20:28-35). The apostle John speaks about the practice of such men (likely the same or similar sect of Gnosticism) when he writes: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Jude continues his thoughts about how these men “feed only themselves,” but next applies it specifically to the context of their teaching: They are “waterless clouds, carried along by winds.” Jude envisions thirsty crops that are withered by the lack of rain, but which receive a glimmer of hope at the sight of an approaching rain cloud. Once it arrives, however, the cloud is found to have no water and is blown passed by the “winds” (the plural is used to indicate the random and frequent change in direction), leaving the land parched. The idea here is that something was expected and failed to come about. In a very similar way these heretics appeared to be Christian teachers; however, upon closer examination are revealed to have nothing at all to offer the body of Christ by way of

“building up” (v. 20), although from a distance one might have expected *something* from them since they posed as Christians. They are the epitome of Prov 25:14: “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give” (NIV).

Third, these men are like “late-autumn tress” which are “fruitless,” hence, “having died twice.” They are “twice dead” in the sense that they are both dormant (“late-autumn”) *and* unproductive (“without fruit”). Like the “waterless clouds,” this analogy, too, expresses a hope unfulfilled. All trees become leafless and go into dormancy in autumn; that is expected. What is not expected is to wait out the normal growing season until the autumn harvest, only to find there is no fruit—it has been a dead tree all along. Likewise, these heretics have not produced any fruit in their lives or in their teaching, in spite of the fact they the readers have been expecting it, looking to them for spiritual sustenance. When a tree fails to produce the expected fruit at the expected time, it is assumed dead and is therefore “uprooted.” Because these heretics have produced no fruit, they too have been “uprooted.” In OT imagery, “uprooted” is an illustration of Divine judgment:

God will break you down forever; He will snatch you up, and tear you away from *your* tent, And uproot you from the land of the living. (Ps 52:5). . . . But the wicked will be cut off from the land, And the treacherous will be uprooted from it. (Prov 2:22)

It was a common practice in biblical times to uproot or cut down such trees and burn them (Matt 3:10). Since these heretics posed as “good trees”¹⁷ and yet failed to

¹⁷ “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Matt 7:18).

produce the fruit which would evidence life, they too have been pulled up from the ground so that they will never have another chance to grow. Jude's point is that these men have *already* been uprooted and are now merely awaiting their fiery fate at the judgment. They are in no better position than are the angels who are currently being "kept in bonds" (v. 6). In both cases, their fate is sealed.

- v. 13** These men are further described as "wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam" and "wandering stars for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever." The basic imagery here is that these men are reckless and directionless. As a "wild wave" tosses up foam, seaweed and debris to the shore, so these men recklessly make an open display of their own shameful and immoral activities. Jude may be drawing from Isa 57:20: "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud"—or perhaps from James 1:6, which describes the double-minded man as "the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." As a wandering star shoots through the universe in a random way, so also these men are completely directionless—they are men who cannot be relied upon to navigate the church in the right way. The "reserved" fate of both star and heretic is "black darkness forever." We have already examined the phrase "black darkness" in our discussion of v. 6, and there found it to be more accurately translated as "the gloom of darkness," or the "under-gloom/underworld." The parallel in 2 Pet2:17 uses the same words and Greek construction: *hozophos tou skotous* (lit., "gloom of darkness").

A potential conflict arise when one attempts to harmonize the various biblical metaphors that are used to describe the eternal state of the wicked. In some cases, it is

described in terms of a fire (Rev 19:20, 20:10, 14-15; cf. Mark 9:43-48), while in other cases (such as here and Matt 8:12), a place of darkness. Both are said to be everlasting, implying there will also be everlasting consciousness (else, what purpose would everlasting fire or darkness have?). The problem is, fire and darkness are mutually exclusive entities in a physical/temporal world. Possibly one or the other—or, indeed, both—is metaphorical. The Bible *must* describe eternal concepts using temporal illustrations and analogies if we are to understand them sufficiently. Hence, when the Bible speaks of the fires of hell it may be that the temporal element “fire” comes closest to describing the torment of eternal punishment. Similarly, when the Bible speaks of “outer darkness” it may be that “darkness” best describes the alienation from God that those who are so confined will experience for eternity. Hence, the point is the wicked will experience both *torment* and *separation* from God. There is, then, no real conflict between the two.

This “darkness,” we are told, is “kept/reserved forever.” The perfect tense of the verb indicates the permanency of this state, and is strengthened by the word “forever” (*eis aiōia*; lit., “into the age”). Just as a wandering star will never run out of universe no matter how far, how long, or in what direction it travels, so also these men will never run out of “gloom of darkness” since it, too, is forever.

Jude 14-16

NASB: 14 And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, 15 to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." 16 These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

Lit. Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied in reference to these, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads to make judgment against all and to convict every soul concerning all their godless works, which were godless, and concerning all the harsh things which godless sinners have spoken against him." These are grumblers, complaining about their lot in life, following after their desires; and their mouths speak over-weight words, marveling at faces for gain of grace.

v. 14 Jude constantly appeals to historical events and writings in this letter. Some of his sources are lost to us; but beginning in verse 14 he explicitly states that he is quoting from 1 Enoch 1:9 (a pseudepigraphical work he has already allude to in v. 6; for which see notes there). Enoch was included in the seventh generation of mankind (Gen 5:3-24). Jude is not saying that Enoch had these men specifically in mind when he says, "about *these* Enoch prophesied," but only that they are included with the rest of the ungodly whom the Lord will judge (v. 15). "Behold the Lord came" is clearly a reference to the second coming, which Enoch, in his prophecy, presents in hindsight. When he comes, He will not be alone but will bring with Him "his holy myriads." This refers to *all* the heavenly host.¹⁸

¹⁸ Although the text does not explicitly state who these "holy ones" are, there is sufficient evidence elsewhere to confirm that both saints and angels will be with Him (angels in Luke 9:26; and saints in 1 Thess 3:13).

v. 15 One reason for Christ’s return to the earth is to “execute judgment.” This judgment will include “all,” but will focus especially on “all the *ungodly*,” during which he will convict “every soul” of all their “godless works.” This “conviction” does not refer to causing a person to see his sinful condition (as the Holy Spirit does in the life a believer), but rather to a legal, courtroom conviction of a crime, regardless of whether the accused is willing to confess to it. The word “ungodly” (Gr. *asebēs*) is not limited to those who commit gross, blatant sins, but includes *all* who have rejected Christ in this life. In Jude’s eyes, whatever *anyone* does outside of Christ—even if it *appears* to be a good deed—is always done in an “ungodly way,” tainted as it is by sinful motives, attitudes and desires. Hence, they will be judged for three things: (1) their actions (“ungodly deeds”), (2) the manner in which they perform these actions (“ungodly way”), and (3) the things they have carelessly spoken about God (“all the harsh things which godless sinners spoke against him”). Jesus said that every careless word will be used as evidence against unbelievers (Matt 12:36-37).

Jude’s direct quotation of 1 Enoch—and his earlier allusion to *The Assumption of Moses*—leaves us to answer the question of what significance Jude attaches to these writings. Enoch “the seventh from Adam,” of course, did not write 1 Enoch (a.k.a. Ethiopic Enoch); it is a pseudepigraphical work, written by at least three writers over a long period of time during the first- and second-centuries B.C.—perhaps up to the mid first-century A.D. The question—Did Jude believe Enoch wrote 1 Enoch?—is not one of idle curiosity, for it has ramifications for the canonicity of Jude and the inspiration of Scripture. We will

do well to consider the options for this issue, and to separate true difficulties from imagined ones.

First, the imagined difficulties. The mere fact that Jude cites a non-canonical book to illustrate a point is not a cause for concern. Paul, on numerous occasions, quotes Greek poets and philosophers (Acts 17:28, 1 Cor 15:32-33, Tit 1:12); and while Paul assumes the truthfulness of the sayings quoted, he does not thereby ascribe inherent authority to them, much less inspiration. However, once the writer of Scripture records such sayings *and* affirms them to be true, they *become* part and parcel of inspired and authoritative Scripture. We can affirm at least this much regarding the quotation of Enoch by Jude. Jude quotes Enoch approvingly and assumes the quote to be true.

Second, it is also no cause for concern that Jude happens to use the word “prophesy” (*prophēteuo*) in relation to the quotation from Enoch. Paul uses the nominal (noun) form of this word when referring to a Greek poet: “Even one of their own prophets has said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’” (Tit 1:12). Yet there is no thought that Paul thinks a pagan Greek writer is somehow inspired by God. The words “prophet” and “prophesy” are to be taken in these two passages in their more general sense of “proclaimer/proclamation.” Hence, when Jude tells us that Enoch “prophesied,” we should not assume that Jude means this in the strict sense of “thus saith the Lord!”

The real difficulties come into play when we begin to examine just what Jude says and doesn’t say about Enoch. He doesn’t introduce the quote by affirming “the writing of Enoch prophesied.” Rather he affirms “Enoch,

the seventh from Adam, prophesied.” This at first appears to indicate that Jude believed Enoch actually wrote the work titled 1 Enoch. If so, then we have a problem—not that Jude may have wrongly ascribed authorship to this work (inspiration and infallibility extend only to what the authors wrote in Scripture; not to what they may have believed about all things in the context of their era), but that he *affirms* in Scripture that Enoch actually wrote the work. If that is the case, then we are left with only four options. They are:

(1) *Jude is right and Enoch really did write 1 Enoch.* This view would certainly preserve the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. But it fails on the level of textual criticism. We know 1 Enoch is an apocalyptic work that was written no earlier than the second-century BC.

(2) *Jude is wrong, but his letter is nevertheless to be considered inspired, canonical Scripture.* This view is internally inconsistent. To affirm at the same time that Jude is inspired *and* that he erred in his *affirmation* of the authorship of another writing places us in the precarious position of rendering the notion that Scripture is “God breathed” completely meaningless. What advantage does Scripture then have over other writings that, while true generally, err at times?

(3) *Jude is wrong, and his letter is not to be considered inspired or canonical.* This option would certainly solve the problem of Jude’s quote; but it would create more problems of canonicity than it solves for inspiration. No one wants to exclude Jude from the canon; and doing so would call into question God’s sovereign preservation of the canon throughout the age of the church. How could we then be certain that other books weren’t

mistakenly added along the way; or that some books that should have been added were missed?

(4) *Jude is right about the quoted saying, but 1 Enoch itself was not written by Enoch.* In other words, Jude accurately quotes a portion of 1 Enoch (or some other preserved tradition of Enoch) that turns out to be something Enoch actually said centuries earlier, and was subsequently recorded in 1 Enoch (which, of course, was authored by someone other than Enoch). On this view, a true saying of Enoch was accurately preserved for thousands of years and then included in 1 Enoch. This view has the advantage of preserving the integrity of Jude, inspiration, the canon *and* textual criticism. However, it is a large leap of faith to posit such a view, since there is no *positive* evidence to support it (it's really only a guess), and seems to be motivated solely by a desire to avoid the other three options above. As attractive as it is, the likelihood of its legitimacy is suspect.

Hence, if we assume that Jude believes Enoch is the source of the quotation he cites, we are then forced, in essence, to “pick our poison.” However, there is good reason to think that Jude knows he is citing a later work and doesn't actually believe that Enoch is the author. Although it a fact that Jude identifies the source of the quote as Enoch, we must ask the deeper question of whether he intends by this designation the *biblical* Enoch, or rather the *pseudepigraphical* one; that is, the Enoch of popular lore. Jude identifies this Enoch as “the seventh from Adam.” Even though one can count the generations from Adam in Genesis 5 to discover that Enoch is indeed the seventh from Adam, Enoch is never identified with this designation *per se* in Scripture. But he *is* identified this way in 1 Enoch 60:8. This leads us to believe that Jude is not here affirming that the *biblical* Enoch prophesied these words; rather that

the Enoch identified as the “seventh from Adam” in 1 Enoch prophesied these words, and they turned out to be true.

There are many well-known myths surrounding popular figures even today. The myth of Santa Claus was born from the acts of a generous man named Nicholas. The nativity scene that Christians display every Christmas season (complete with manger and three wise men) is something that is considered by some to be absolutely sacred, even though it is chock-full of embellishments and wrong information—Christ’s birth likely did not occur in winter, much less December; the birth likely took place in a cave, not a manger; the “wise men” (Magi) were not present at Christ’s birth “in the manger,” but arrived at his home some months or years later; and there is no evidence that there were only three of them (only that there were three kinds of gifts). If you are an American, you no doubt heard as a child several myths regarding George Washington—most notably that he chopped down his father’s cherry tree, and that he tossed a silver dollar across the Potomac River. Neither of these really happened. In fact, in the case of the latter myth silver dollars didn’t even exist in Washington’s day, and the Potomac is over a mile wide at Mount Vernon.

The point is, even today we speak of and present myths as actual events even though we know they are not. When we say things like, “George Washington extolled the virtues of honesty when he told his father, ‘I cannot lie; I chopped down the cherry tree with my hatchet,’” we *assume* everyone will recognize (1) that it is a myth, and (2) that the “truth” of the story is limited to its moral. The

same principle holds for the way Jude treats 1 Enoch and the Assumption of Moses.

- v. 16 The application of this passage from 1 Enoch to these heretics is fairly apparent—they were performing “ungodly deeds” in their “loose living” (v. 4); and, of course, they were doing all that in an “ungodly way.” But they were also guilty of speaking “harsh words” against God in their teaching that Jesus is not God (vv. 4, 8). That was not the extent of their “harsh words,” however, since, in addition to their false teaching, these heretics are also characterized by Jude as “grumblers” who “complain about their lot in life.” They are never satisfied with the things God, in his goodness, has given them. Instead, like the children of Israel they “grumble” and “find fault” with everything and every situation of life. The implication of this complaint is that God is at fault because he “owes” something to these people that they are not getting.

Just as the men in Enoch’s prophecy, these men “follow after the mandates of their own lusts” (“ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way”). Moreover, Jude informs us that these men “speak arrogantly”; but how so? The Greek word used here (*hyperoykos*) is derived from a combination of *hyper* (over) and *oykos* (weight). Literally, these men were speaking “overweight” words. We have already seen from v. 8 that these men revile angelic beings (one manifestation of arrogance, to be sure); but Jude has something different in mind here. In light of what comes next (“flattering people”) it seems unlikely that *hyperoykos* is to be translated “arrogant.” The participial form of *thaumazō* (lit. “marveling [at faces]”) indicates that it somehow modifies or explains the word *hyperoykos*. It is probably best to take it as a telic participle “they speak overweight words *in*

order to flatter people.” Translating *hyperoykos* as “arrogant” loses the train of thought here (“flattering” people); for who is flattered by arrogance? There is a difference between using “overweight words” to *impress* others, and to *flatter* them. “Arrogance” may produce the former effect on the weak-minded, but never the latter. These “overweight” words, then, are spoken by the heretics about the *hearers*, not about themselves. In other words, these heretics were not so much boasting about themselves as they were attempting to flatter individual members of the church.

But why would they do this? The last clause of v. 16—“flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage”—is literally “marveling at faces for gain of grace.” The heretics were flattering the members of the church in order to win approval so that they could gain some type of advantage. These heretics were able to get on the “good side” of people through flattery. Those who were most susceptible to their flattery became their prey. They used this opportunity to gain a foothold in order to spread their heresy in more subtle ways (v. 4, they came in “unnoticed”).

Jude 17-19

NASB: 17 But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, 18 that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." 19 These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.

Lit. But you, beloved, be in remembrance of the words spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they used to say to you, "At the [time of the] last time there will be mockers proceeding/living according to their own desires of godlessness." These are the ones who cause divisions/make distinctions, worldly minded, not having the Spirit.

Jude now transitions into the third and final section of his letter. The first section introduced the current situation and problem (vv. 1-4). The second section focused on the similarities between the current heretics and OT villains of the past, including their judgments (vv. 5-16). Now in his final section Jude exhorts the believers to continue in the faith. Although the distinction between these sections is clearly there, they are not without overlap. Jude does not cease to allude to the problem at hand after finishing section one (vv. 8, 10, 12). Nor does he cease to make comparisons of these men to others after finishing section two (vv. 19-20). However, whereas in section two the comparison consists of Jude's *likening* these heretics to others errorists, in section three his method is to *contrast* the heretics with the true believers. If these heretics were "making distinctions" (v. 19), Jude would make a few of his own.

- v. 17 "But you, beloved, ought to remember"—In sharp contrast to the practices of the heretics, Jude exhorts the believers to keep in their "remembrance" the warnings of the apostles

regarding men like these. The believers were constantly hearing the heretics' "overweight words" (v. 16), which appeared to flatter but which was actually nothing more than destructive and self-serving manipulation. Jude's contrast here seems to be focused on the difference between the dangerous "words" of the heretics and prophetic "words" of the apostles. Jude says in essence: "Don't dwell on what these heretics are saying—it will only poison your minds. Rather, dwell on what the apostles said about them beforehand—it will confirm that the heretics are in error."

The same phrase Jude attributes to the apostles, Peter attributes first to the prophets and second to the apostles (2 Pet 3:2). It is therefore likely that the apostles reiterated and confirmed this saying which originated from the mouth of "the holy prophets" of old (2 Pet 3:2). Just which prophets Peter has in mind is not readily apparent. In any case, Peter lays equal emphasis (and authority) on the prophets of the past and the apostles of the present. He is, in essence, equating the two, making "apostle" the first-century equivalent of the prophets of old. Jude, on the other hand, gives full authority to the office of "apostle," as though this saying originated with them—a strong statement of the first-century view of the apostles as the final authority for the church. It is also interesting to note that Jude does not see himself in the category of apostle, but rather speaks of them in the third person ("*they* were saying to you," v. 18), making it all the more likely that the author of this letter is the half-brother of the Jesus and not the *apostle* Jude ("Judas [son] of James," Luke 6:16), also called Thaddaeus (Matt 10:3).

- v. 18** The apostles had told the believers all about the heretics. The verb here is in the imperfect tense, reflected in the

NASB’s literal “they were saying to you,” which means: “they *used to* say to you” (i.e., as a *practice*), or “they kept on saying to you.” The apostles weren’t satisfied to communicate a teaching just once. It was their custom to mention it over and over again to instill it into their listeners (2 Pet 1:12-15; Phlp 3:1-2—Paul calls it “a safeguard for you”).

The specific content of this particular teaching was, “in the last times mockers will come.” The word “mockers” (Gk. *empaiktai*) is difficult here. It is used in its nominal (noun) form only here and in 2 Pet 3:3. In the fourteen instances in the NT where it is used as a verb all but one connote taunting ridicule (“where is the promise of his coming?”; 2 Pet 2:4). However, in Matt 2:16 it connotes deception instead—Herod was “deceived” (not ridiculed) by the Magi. Here also in Jude the idea seems to be deception, not ridicule. Jude’s emphasis is to expose false Christians who have “crept in unnoticed.” They were “mocking” in the sense that they were “mimicking” true Christians, so that they could blend in and take advantage of the church. Moreover, their use of “overweight words” to “flatter” the believers also contributed to their “deception”—they were only “pretending” to be impressed with those they flattered. The thing that gave them away, ironically enough, was not so much Jude’s pronouncement against them as it was their own lifestyles. They wanted to mimic Christians, but were more naturally inclined to “follow after their own ungodly lusts.” This was a dead giveaway for Jude. Only a false Christian would operate on the basis of fulfilling whatever their lusts dictated.

One of the most telling signs of a false Christian is his lack of concern for moral purity. Each day, thousands of professions of faith in Christ are made by those whose lives

will never evidence regeneration. Yet this is the one “fruit” we are told by the apostles—not to mention Jesus himself!—to look for in a profession of faith. If that profession of faith is not followed by an increasing sensitivity to moral purity—which in turn results in a way of living that is “pleasing to the Lord”—we are to reject that claim. The apostles never hesitated to label someone a “false apostle” or “false brother” if that person’s actions did not conform to his claim to know Christ (1 John 2:4).

- v. 19 Jude now applies the apostles’ prophetic words to the heretics themselves: “*These* are the ones.” Jude begins by pointing out that these heretics “cause divisions.” It is crucial to understand just what Jude means by this phrase, lest some are unfairly branded as heretics. Martin Luther surely “caused divisions” in the church of his day, and before him, Jon Hus and John Wycliffe. Still earlier, almost all the prophets caused division in God’s people, and Jesus himself said of his mission that he came to bring division and a sword, not peace. The point is, not *all* divisions are bad—indeed, some divisions are quite necessary. When the church has strayed from the word of God, and prophets or theologians consequently point out that error, it cannot be what Jude had in mind when he spoke of the fact that these heretics “cause divisions.”

The word “divisions” (Gk. *apodiopizō*) occurs only here in the New Testament, and means in essence “to make a boundary between oneself and someone else” (i.e., to make a distinction). The heretics were doing this in two ways. First, they were no doubt privately and individually taking people in the church aside and convincing them of their ways and their teachings. Second, by their ungodly living, they were persuading a portion of the church to do as they did. They are, according to Jude, “worldly minded”

(Gk. *psychikos*), the basic meaning of which is reflected in the NIV's "who follow mere natural instincts," a point Jude has already made about these men (v. 10). The sense is that these men seek to satisfy their natural cravings without restraint.

They are likewise "devoid of the Spirit"—literally, "not having the Spirit"; likely a *causal* participle, best translated as "*because* they do not have the Spirit. In other words, the reason these heretics follow after their own lusts is precisely because they do not have the Holy Spirit¹⁹ to restrain them. This, in fact, is the reason believers are able to refrain from following them in their immorality—because they *do* have the Holy Spirit to restrain them.

¹⁹ The NASB, NIV, RSV and NKJV all take *pneuma* as "Holy Spirit," whereas the NEB takes it to mean the human spirit, likely on the grounds that *pneuma* lacks the definite article here. However, the lack of the article cannot be pressed here, for in the very next verse (20) *pneuma* appears again without the article, but this time accompanied by the word *hagios* ("holy").

Jude 20-23

NASB: 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; 23 save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Lit. But you, beloved, {by} building yourselves up in your holiest/most holy faith, {by} praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God {while} eagerly awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that results in [into] eternal life. And, on the one hand, have mercy on some who are wavering/doubting/hesitating in their mind/at variance with themselves; save others by snatching [them] out of the fire; be merciful to others in fear, hating even the undergarment that is permanently stained from being in contact with the flesh.

- v. 20** The heretics were the cause of divisions within the church, and some in the church were being enticed to imitate their ungodliness. As a result, the unity of the church was in jeopardy. So, Jude once again adds the appropriate contrast between what the heretics were doing (namely, tearing down the church), and what he wants the believers to do: “But *you*, beloved, keep yourselves in the love of God by building yourselves up in your most holy faith.” Among the various subordinate participles in this verse, the main verb is an imperative: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” The two preceding participles (“building yourselves up” and “praying in the Holy Spirit”) should be taken as participles of *means*. Hence, the answer to the question, “How are believers to keep themselves in the love of God?” is, “By building themselves up in their most holy faith and by praying in the Holy Spirit.” And so if the heretics were enticing some to do as they did because of their love for lust (v. 18), the believers were to counter that by keeping themselves in the love of God. If the heretics were tearing

down the body of Christ by the divisions they caused (v. 19), the believers were to build themselves up in their most holy faith. If the heretics were “devoid of the Spirit” (v. 19), the believers were all the more to pray in the Holy Spirit.

Jude has come full circle here. In v. 3 he told his readers to “contend for faith [the body of apostolic teaching] that was once for all time delivered to the saints.” He now tells them, “build yourselves up” in this “most holy faith.” Again, this is in contrast to the practice of the heretics who were only tearing them down by distorting the faith, and by “changing the grace of our God into loose living” (v. 4). The believers were to build themselves up (plural) through *mutual* (not self) edification. This edification came from the true teaching about the Christian faith, in its absolute *purity* (“most holy faith”). The use of human wisdom and ecclesial tradition, as harmless as it may sometimes seem, can never achieve the result of building up the church in its purist faith. After all, it was on human wisdom and tradition that the heretics themselves were operating, and the outcome was disastrous. Jude maintains that it is the superlative “holiest faith” (or “most holy faith”)—that is, the faith in its purist form—that enables them to “keep” themselves in the love of God. This is the only sure safeguard against the distortions of the heretics.

Jude reasons that if believers are grounded in the truth, they will not be so easily swayed. This hold true even today. The teaching of the word of God in its purity is needed today more than ever, especially in light of the fact that there is an incredible amount of lethargy in regard to the teaching of Scripture among many so-called “pastors” who are more interested in “building up the church” by

telling stories, conducting skits, and creating “cultural relevance” among “seekers” than by teaching Scripture. As a result, the average Evangelical is ill prepared to answer the claims of modern heretics.

- v. 21** Verses 20-21 contain a subtle allusion to the Trinity. We are to keep ourselves in the “love of *God*” (the Father) by “praying in the *Holy Spirit*,” while we “anxiously await the mercy of our *Lord Jesus Christ*.” One question that arises at this point is, What exactly does the phrase “love of God” mean? Is it God’s love for us? Our love for God? Or something else? The phrase probably means the *sphere* or *realm* of God’s love. In other words, the believer is not to move outside of safe boundaries into areas that are decidedly *ungodly*, such as immorality and false teaching. But then another question arises: Why do we need to “keep ourselves” in the realm of God’s love since we were told earlier that we are being kept by Christ himself (v. 1)?

It is a common style of writing in the New Testament to state a *positional* truth and then to exhort believers to act in a way that is consistent with that position. For instance, in 1 John 2:14 we are told, “the word of God abides in you.” That’s our position. John points to this trait as one of the marks of a true Christian. But just five short verses later we are exhorted, “let that abide in you which you have heard from the beginning” (v. 19). Similarly, 1 John 3:14 tells us, “we know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.” Again, that’s our position. Loving the brethren is here presented as *proof* that one is a Christian, and it is assumed that all Christians already do this. Yet, in the very next chapter we are exhorted, “Beloved, let us love one another” (4:7). In 1 John 2:19 John informs us that a true Christian can never

leave the faith; and if someone does leave, he was never a Christian to begin with:

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

Yet, just nine verses later (2:28), John exhorts his readers, “and now, little children abide [remain] in him.” The purpose of such an exhortation, after having stated the corresponding positional truth, is to stir up the desire within the true child of God to conduct himself in a way that is consistent with what he really is.

God uses various *means* to accomplish his sovereign will. God has ensured, for instance, that all the elect will come to faith in Christ (John 6:37). But he uses the preaching of the gospel and the interaction of the lost with God’s people to accomplish that goal. In a very similar way, God has assured us that we are “kept by Jesus Christ” (v. 1); but he accomplishes this goal through the exhortation to “keep” *ourselves* in the realm of his love, through building ourselves up in the most holy faith, and through praying in the Holy Spirit.

The phrase “praying in the Holy Spirit” probably means praying in *conjunction* or *union* with the Holy Spirit. Or, the dative could be taken as agency—praying by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Whichever translation one adopts, the meaning is practically the same. Jude is not instructing his readers to pray in a special way, thus “*in* the Holy Spirit.” Rather, he is asserting that this is the sphere of prayer for *every* Christian. In other words, he is contrasting believers (who always pray in the Holy Spirit,

and are thus heard by God), with the heretics (who are “devoid of the Spirit,” v. 19).

While we “keep [ourselves] in the love of God” we are also to “wait anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.” The NASB phrase “to eternal life” is literally “*into [eis]* eternal life,” and either means “with a view to” or “resulting in” eternal life. When Christ comes, we will be shown mercy for all our shortcomings and sins, and this mercy is accompanied by eternal life. Without this mercy, we could do nothing but dread his coming. Because of it, we are able to “await him *anxiously*.”

- v. 22** Jude still has in mind the mercy that will be shown us at Christ’s coming, and exhorts us to allow that same kind of mercy to rule the day in our dealings with the failures and faults of each other: “and have mercy on some who are doubting.” The word “doubting” (*diakrinomai*) means literally “to be at variance with oneself about something.” Apparently, some of the believers who had come into contact with these heretics were shaken by their teachings. The heretics had put doubts in their minds about certain apostolic beliefs and practices (namely, Christ’s deity and holy living, v. 4). These believers may have been new converts, or just those who were not grounded well enough in their faith to guard against the distortions of the heretics, and who had been partially swayed by their teaching. It is toward these that Jude tells us to “show mercy.” They are literally battling in their minds to come to grips with the truth and to weed out falsehoods. They are at a very delicate stage; and the wrong attitude, action, or words said to them in exhortation might be devastating to their Christian growth. Jude would have us exercise patience with them. They are grappling with all that has occurred recently, and they need time for the Holy Spirit to settle

certain issues in their minds. And this he *will* do, but we are to be patient in the meantime.

So often when a new Christian begins to question some of the things he has been taught, he is not met with patience and mercy, but with rebuke. This does nothing but make him resentful and even more confused about the issue. We need to give room to the new convert to sort things out for themselves. The Holy Spirit has promised to keep him in the truth (1 John 2:20-24). So there is little danger that he will fall away. We should be there to guide him, but not to badger and pressure him.

- v. 23 With others, we need to be a bit more forceful: “Save others, snatching them out of the fire.” These are not new converts, but rather those who should know better. They may be taking the devil’s advocacy with the heretics’ arguments, even if they have not yet embraced them fully. Nevertheless, to *entertain* heretical beliefs is to play with fire. Hence, Jude wants us to throw aside the delicate caution he would extend to the first group and “snatch” these out of the fire. The word “snatch” (*harpazō*) usually denotes a “taking away by force” (Matt 11:12; John 6:15). When it is used in a positive sense, although the “snatching” is not necessarily against the person’s will (Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2 Cor 12:2; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 12:5), it is always initiated by someone else and is never contingent upon the cooperation or permission of the person who is being “snatched away.” Hence, the “snatching” is always “by force,” even if it sometimes results in the ultimate good of the one who is being snatched away.

That is the approach we are to take with those who have willfully entertained heretical teachings. We are to “snatch them out of the fire” in the same way that “forceful

men” were “taking the kingdom by force” (Matt 11:12); and in the same way that the Roman troops “snatched” Paul out of the hands of the Jews who wanted to kill him (Acts 23:10). This often entails “sharp rebuke” (Tit 1:13) in order to snap them back to reality. It is for their own good that we take them to task for entertaining such heretical notions, even though it may not seem pleasant to them or to us. Such rebuke “saves” them from the “fire.”

“Fire” in this case does not refer to the fires of eternal punishment, but rather to the danger of heresy. Jude’s analogy is one in which the unsuspecting person is attracted moth-like to the warmth and light of the fire. Consequently, this person has found that he has gotten too close and is beginning to burn. In a similar way, some of the believers had gotten too close to the heretics’ teaching and had been influenced by it. These are the ones we are to “save” by “snatching them out of the fire,” and the analogy of fire suggests that the situation is urgent. Time is of the essence in convincing them of their error; and unless we act quickly, those in this second group could very well find themselves embracing the heretics’ beliefs and practices.

But there is a third group to consider: “And on others have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.” Jude is much more cautious about this group. They had apparently gone too far. They were not merely *doubting*, as were those in the first group. They were not merely *entertaining* heretical notions, as were those in the second group. They had gone much farther than that, and had actually *indulged* in the heretics’ teachings and practices. At least for a time, they had embraced the heresy regarding the deity of Jesus (vv. 4, 8), the slander against celestial beings (v. 8), and the practice of an immoral lifestyle (vv. 4, 8, 18).

But they had now come back to the fellowship of the church. What is the appropriate response to such people? Jude exhorts us to show mercy even to them—but to do so with a great deal of caution (lit., “with fear”). We cannot yet tell whether their repentance is genuine; or whether this is just another ploy that allows them once again to “slip in secretly” (v. 4) in order to perpetuate the infiltration of heresy among the ranks of those who remain in the church. “Mercy,” in such a case, *is* to be extended, but only from a safe distance (“with fear”). Jude does not want to allow another opportunity for unsuspecting members of the church to be duped by those who may very well turn out to be nothing more than “mimickers” (v. 18). If they turn out to be disingenuous, there is a real danger that even more members of the church could begin to “doubt,” “entertain,” or “indulge.” So Jude issues a further caution that will help his readers to maintain a safe distance so as to guard against being negatively influenced by these people: “hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.” The word “garment” (*chitōn*) is literally “undergarment.” This was the garment or tunic worn next to the skin under the outer garment, the ancient equivalent to our modern underwear. This garment, by its constant contact with the body, naturally absorbed perspiration and other fluids secreted by the body. Hence, it quickly became “stained” (the word *spiloō*, rendered by the NASB as “polluted,” is rightly rendered as “stained” by the NIV). Jude still has in mind the immoral practices of the heretics, to which this third group succumbed. In a very real sense, their undergarments were likely “stained” as a result of the discharges associated with their sexual immorality. Jude no doubt wants his readers to see a literal application here, but extends to it a spiritual dimension as well. There may be

some residual immoral tendencies among this group due to their former practices (if indeed they *are* “former” practices), and Jude wants his readers to adopt the right way of looking at those practices. There is nothing glamorous or attractive about them. Indeed, they are to be “hated” and despised, and looked at in the same way that one would view someone else’s “stained underwear.” Viewing the former lifestyle of this group from *that* perspective (rather than from the heretics’ perspective of titillation) would be an added safeguard for his readers, who, as a result, would much less likely be enticed by it.

Jude 24-25

NASB: 24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Lit. Now, to the one who is able to guard all of you [and keep you] free from falling, and to cause you to stand in the presence of [before the face of] his glory, without blame and with extreme rejoicing; to the only God and our savior through Jesus Christ our Lord [be] glory, majesty/greatness, power/dominion/might, and authority, before any/every part of the age and now and forever [into the ages], amen [truly].

v. 24 Jude is now ready to close his letter with a standard Christian doxology, but is still acutely aware of the readers' situation. He has just told his readers of their responsibility to exercise mercy toward those who have been caught up (to varying degrees) in the heretics' error (vv. 22-23). But what if in the process of obeying that instruction one or more of the believers became influenced or persuaded by the rationale of the very people they were attempting to win back? While Jude does indeed want them to exercise caution in their dealings with these people ("show mercy with fear," v. 23), he also wants the true believers to know that they are absolutely secure in "him who is able to keep you from stumbling"—literally, "to guard/keep you free from stumbling/falling." The word is used only here in the entire New Testament. Even among the three groups Jude mentions in vv. 22-23 (the "doubters," the "entertainers," and the "indulgents"), those who are truly Christians will at last come to their senses and not fall completely. They too are being "guarded" because a true believer will never fall completely from the faith (1 John 2:19).

Not only will Christ guard us in the present circumstance, but he will continue to do so until we stand before him in his presence: “To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and *to make you stand in the presence of his glory.*” The purpose of this “guarding” is to present us to himself as “blameless.” He will complete the work he has begun in us, as Paul makes clear in his letter to the Philippians: “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). This blamelessness has only minimally to do with our conduct in this life. While it is true that he will preserve us from falling away from him (1 John 2:19) and being deceived by gross error (1 John 2:27), not one of us will stand before Christ and claim to have lived a blameless life. The “blamelessness” has instead to do with our right *standing* before God and just how God views us.

When we are justified by God, we are acquitted by him, even though there is nothing holy about us: “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who *justifies the ungodly*, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). That justification is pronounced *in anticipation* of the final judgment, when we stand before his throne. Hence, our *standing* before God, which he has graciously granted to us—his gracious declaration of our righteous position before him, according to which we have been fully reconciled to him—extends throughout our sin-riddled lives and provides us safe passage to the very end of our earthly journey when we finally reach our heavenly destination and stand before the throne of God; at which time he will present us “blameless” before him, in spite of all our failures.

This theme is not found in Jude alone, but permeates the thinking of the New Testament writers. It is

for this state that we have been chosen in the first place: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be *holy and blameless before Him*” (Eph 1:4). His goal for his church is “that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having *no spot or wrinkle* or any such thing; but that she should be *holy and blameless*” (Eph 5:27). Paul affirms in that we may “eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” precisely because it is he who will “confirm you to the end, *blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7-8). Indeed, the very reason we were justified by God and reconciled to him was “in order to present you before Him *holy and blameless* and beyond reproach” (Col 1:22). When we as God’s elect stand before him at the end of the age, it will be in a completely *holy* state, and we will be *blameless*. God will not “reckon our sin” against us (Rom 4:7-8), and no one else will be able to either (Rom 8:1, 33; “who will bring a charge against God’s elect?”). That is what it means to be presented “holy and blameless before Him”; no fear of condemnation from God, or from anyone else for that matter! “There is therefore now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

When we stand before him, there will be nothing left to judge since we have already gone through final judgment at our justification. All of our sin and its consequences have already been placed on Christ at the cross. Our sin was imputed to him (2 Cor 5:21) and he bore the penalty for it. If we were to be judged for any of our sins, then Christ’s death would have to be considered insufficient to satisfy the justice of God. As it stands, however, Christ’s death is more than sufficient for that task; and as a result, not only are we able to “stand” before

him at his throne, but we will do so “holy and blameless” before him!

He is also able to “cause us to stand in the presence of his glory” (lit., “before the face of his glory”). When Moses saw God’s glory pass by him, God had to shield him from his “face” so that he would not be consumed (Ex 33:18-23). When John saw the Son of God in the Revelation, he fell on his face as though dead (Rev 1:17). Many OT characters who saw God, including Isaiah and others, fell on their faces and immediately stated their unworthiness. But when we finally see Jesus, we won’t be on our faces. We will be able to gaze upon him in all his glory as we “stand” (not *fall*) in his presence. And because we will be “blameless” in his sight, it follows that we will have “great joy.” This rejoicing would not be possible if our sin were looming over us. It is possible only because of the “mercy” to be shown us at his coming (v. 21). This *mercy* will look past our sin and pronounce us “blameless” on that day. It is little wonder, then, that we will stand before him with great joy!

- v. 25** “To the *only* God”—Jude uses similar terminology in v. 4 with “our *only* master and Lord.” There is no succession of emanations from God as the heretics may have taught—each one more corrupted than his predecessor, but all in some sense ruling as “god” over the earth. Rather, there is only *one* God, and he is not the same one the heretics worshipped. This God is also “our Savior through Jesus Christ.”²⁰ He is our Savior in that he sent his Son to die for

²⁰ The NIV places the prepositional phrase “through Jesus Christ our Lord” as a modifier of “glory, majesty, power and authority” rather than “to the only God our Savior.” While it is grammatically possible to make this relationship, the rendering of the NASB (“to the only God our Savior, through

us. Hence, it is “through” the work of “Jesus Christ our Lord” that he is our Savior.

Jude here ascribes several attributes to God: “glory, majesty, dominion and authority” (NASB; the NIV has “power” for “dominion”). God’s “glory” (*doxa*) refers to his splendor and radiance. God, we are told by Paul, “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). We are informed by the writer of Hebrews that this “radiance” of God is none other than the Son of God himself: “He is the radiance [outshining] of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (1:3). God’s “majesty” (*megalōsyne*) refers to his greatness and awesomeness.²¹ His “power” (*kratos*, lit., “might/strength”) refers to the *intensity* of his power. His “authority” refers both to his jurisdiction and his right and freedom to act upon it. Of course, all creation is under the jurisdiction of God, and he is completely free to do as he pleases with it.

All of the qualities above are also possessed by man (or at least some men), even if in a limited sense. Jude’s point in ascribing these to God is to point out that all of these qualities have their ultimate source in God, and are infinite when found in him. The degree to which God possesses these qualities infinitely surpasses the degree to which they may reside in even the most exalted of men.

Not only does God possess these qualities to an infinite degree, but has done so “before all time” (lit., “before any and every part of the ages”); that is to say, from all eternity past. He also possesses them “now” and

Jesus Christ our Lord”) is to be preferred since it preserves the Greek placement of the phrase in relation to the other two phrases in this verse.

²¹ Modern colloquialism uses the word “awesome” in a trite, cavalier way. I am using it in its historical sense, as in “fear-inspiring.”

“forever” (lit., “into all the ages”); that is to say, all for eternity future. There was never a time, nor will there ever be a time, when God has lacked or will lack these qualities.

Jude ends his doxology with “Amen” (lit., “truly”). It is difficult to know with certainty why Jude ends his letter so abruptly at v. 23, followed by the doxology in vv. 24-25. Jude’s letter is among the shortest in the New Testament, along with 2 John, 3 John, and Philemon. The most likely reason has to do with the urgency with which he paused his usual correspondence to “write at once” about the danger of this particular heresy (see notes on v. 3). Whatever the case, what this letter lacks in length is more than compensated by its substance. Jude has provided us with perhaps the most theology-pregnant of all the “short” letters in the New Testament. The richness of its content rivals letters more than twice its length; and for that the community of believers owes Jude a debt of gratitude.

About the Author

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