

“Jesus, Who Saved A People”

Jude 5-16; Genesis 4:3-8

The Second in a Three-Part Series on Jude

What was a typical sermon like in the apostolic age? How did those men identified with the apostolic circle preach? In verses 5-16 of the Epistle of Jude we find such a sermon (or at least a portion of such a sermon) which serves as the main body of Jude’s short epistle. Citing from the Old Testament as well as two apocryphal Jewish writings (the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch*), Jude reminds his readers that God has a long and consistent history of dealing with false teachers and apostates. The Old Testament incidents which Jude recounts, serve as graphic illustrations and a reminder of the certain fate of those who attempt to deceive the people of God. Even as Jude exhorts his readers to “*contend for that faith once for all delivered to the saints,*” they are to also build themselves up in the most Holy faith, and to pray in the Holy Spirit, knowing that unrepentant false teachers who have infiltrated the church and deceived God’s people will face God’s full fury and wrath on the last day.

We return to our brief series (three sermons) on the Epistle of Jude. Last time, we covered introductory matters and the first four verses of this short but packed epistle. This epistle was written by Jude—the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus—as early as the mid-fifties of the first century. While Jude doesn’t give us any of the specifics about the church to which he is writing, there is enough information in the epistle’s twenty-five verses to ascertain that Jude is writing to a congregation which was composed largely of Jewish converts to Christianity. The members of this church were steeped in Jewish mysticism and end-times speculation—we will see why that is important momentarily. Jude has learned that the churches were facing a very serious internal crisis, prompting Jude to write this epistle, which is essentially an urgent warning to the churches to deal with these false teachers before they do any more damage to the people of God.

We learn in verse 3, that Jude was planning to write a letter about “our common salvation,” when word reached him that a group of traveling prophets and teachers had crept into at least one of the churches, introducing a dangerous form of antinomianism. Antinomians teach that since Jesus fulfilled the law, and we are saved by God’s grace through faith and not by our works, Christians are not in any sense bound to obey the commandments of God. Such antinomians remain with us to this day. The particular group of false teachers of which Jude has become aware were claiming that God was revealing himself to them through dreams and visions, which gave great credibility to their deceptive message. Upon learning that this was going on, Jude ceases work on his other more comprehensive letter and sends this short epistle to the church exhorting them to deal with these men quickly before they can do any more damage.

In the first four verses (the opening section), Jude exhorts his readers/hearers to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In verses 5-16 (our text this time), Jude makes his case that the actions of these false teachers were foretold throughout the Old Testament. In these verses we find an apostolic sermon (or an excerpt from one) based upon a number of Old Testament texts, and which also include references to two apocryphal books: *The Book of Enoch* (alluded to in verse 6 and quoted by Jude in verses 14-15), and the *Assumption of Moses* (quoted in verses 9 and 16 of our text). Citing numerous Old Testament examples, Jude demonstrates that the history of redemption teaches us that God’s judgment will fall upon these men now plaguing the church.

Then, In verses 17-25 (which we will cover on Palm Sunday, the 29th), Jude concludes by reminding his

beloved brethren that the appearance of false teachers was the very thing the apostles (whom many in the congregation had heard preach with their own ears) warned would happen. Even as they are contending for the faith once for all delivered, these Christians are to use this time to build themselves up in the most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit, while they wait patiently for the coming of the Lord.

As we turn to our text (vv. 5-16), in verses 5-7 Jude gives us three illustrations drawn from the Old Testament regarding those who claimed to be faithful servants of the Lord, but whose conduct proves them to be otherwise. Before setting out his case, in the first clause of verse 5, Jude issues an important reminder—“*Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it . . .*” This is a “disclosure statement,” i.e., a reference to the fact that Jude’s readers already have been thoroughly instructed in “the faith” (i.e., the doctrines of the Christian faith) after they originally came to faith in Christ.¹

Many of these people, apparently, had received their initial instruction in Christian doctrine (catechism) directly from the lips of apostles. Therefore, Jude has no need to instruct his readers in those same doctrines in which his readers have already instructed. Rather, Jude is writing to exhort them to put into practice those things they have already learned.² This implies that the apostles have already taught us everything we need to know about the gospel, and the person and work of Jesus (i.e., “the faith once for all delivered”), the content of which is found in Holy Scripture, and summarized for us in the creeds and confessions of the Reformed churches. If this is the case, is there anything missing from that body of doctrine already taught them by the apostles, which God was supposedly revealing to these false teachers through their dreams and visions? Of course not. In verse 3, Jude speaks of a “*common salvation*,” and “*a faith, once for all delivered*.”

Jude’s first illustration is taken from one the most famous episodes in Israel’s history. Jude reinterprets the Exodus account so as to tell us that it was Jesus who called the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt; “*that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe*.” Although some manuscripts indicate that it was “the Lord” who saved a people,³ the majority favor the reading “that Jesus” saved a people (i.e., the Israelites). Anyone familiar with the Passover/Exodus story as found in the Book of Exodus knows that it was YHWH who killed the firstborn males of Egypt, and who delivered the people of Israel on the night of the Passover. It was YHWH who then lead the people through the Red Sea on dry ground. After Jesus died and then rose again from the dead, and after Jude came to faith in Jesus, Jude (as we see throughout apostolic preaching) now looks back at the Old Testament through the lens of Christ’s fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.⁴ No question then that the apostolic church believed that since Jesus was God in human flesh, Christians speak of Jesus as YHWH, the one who rescued Israel from the clutches of the Pharaoh. It was Jesus (the Pillar of Fire) who lead God’s people through the Red Sea. It is Jesus who will judge those who reject God’s covenant promises.

¹ Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Logos on Jude 5.

² Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, 48-49.

³ Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975, 723-24.

⁴ Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Logos on Jude 5; contra Davids, The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude, Logos, “Jude 5.”

As we saw in our Old Testament lesson last Sunday (Numbers 14:26-35), after the Israelites left Egypt, Moses warned them that the unbelievers and grumblers among them were rejecting God's covenant promise to grant them the land of promise. Even after witnessing YHWH's awesome power first-hand, many Israelites still doubted whether YHWH was actually capable of defeating the Canaanites. They began to grumble against the Lord because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, and would come under God's covenant curse. They would be forced to wander for forty years in the wilderness of the Sinai without ever entering the land of promise, until their entire generation died off. All of them, except the families of Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert.

Jude ties all of this directly to Jesus. The implication is that preachers in the apostolic circle, like Jude, were led by the Holy Spirit to read the Old Testament through the lens of the person and work of Christ. Jude also has no trouble in applying an Old Testament example of Israel's disobedience directly to the situation then facing the churches when Jude wrote his epistle. In his sermon, Jude argues that it was Jesus who rescued Israel from Egypt. And it was Jesus who allowed the faithless grumblers to wander in the desert for forty years until that entire generation of Israelites was wiped out. Jude's readers were, no doubt, very much aware of the story of Israel's disobedience and God's judgment. No doubt, they also understood Jude's application of this account from Israel's history directly to the disobedient and faithless individuals creeping into the churches. As God had done with Israel, so now he does with his new covenant people, the New Israel. YHWH dealt with apostates then. Jesus will deal with them now.

Jude's second illustration in verse 6 comes from a Jewish legend found in the *Book of Enoch* about angels leaving heaven and then inter-marrying with women so as to corrupt the human race. A number of Jewish writers living before Jesus' first advent interpreted the account of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-4 precisely in this manner. Many Christians still do. Although by the end of the first century, most Rabbis, as well as most subsequent Christians writers rejected this idea—instead seeing the "Nephilim" as human thugs and warlords, not the product of sexual relations between women and fallen angels—the notion of angels supposedly procreating with humans is quite prominent in the *Book of Enoch*, a Jewish apocryphal book then popular in both Jewish and Christian circles.⁵

Even though the *Book of Enoch* is apocryphal, Jude utilizes Enoch's legend to make a point—one which would not be lost on his readers, especially if they were familiar with the *Book of Enoch*. In verse 6, Jude is clearly alluding to a passage in *Enoch* (1 Enoch 6-19); "*and the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.*" Without comment upon the common interpretation held by those in his audience who were influenced by the *Book of Enoch*, Jude reminds his readers that those angels who followed Satan, and who fell from their place in heaven ("*did not stay within*"), have since been "*kept*" in chains awaiting the day of judgment.

Whatever we make of Jude's use of an apocryphal source like the *Book of Enoch*, Jude sees nothing wrong with alluding to it to make an important point—those angels, who, according to Enoch, had abandoned their place in heaven so as to engage in sexual relations with women, were immediately subject to God's judgment. Jude uses Enoch's legend to make the point that while the angels did not stay

⁵ Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, 50-51; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 256-257. On the history and text of the Books of Enoch, J. J. Collins, "Enoch, Books of" in Craig A. Evans, and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 313-318.

(“keep” their place), the Lord now “keeps” them in chains until the time of the end and the final judgment.⁶ Jude reinterprets Enoch’s legend in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and with eschatological categories given by Jesus, not grounded in Jewish legend. If God judges angels in such manner, then he will certainly do the same with the false teachers. God’s judgment upon them is certain.⁷

In verse 7, Jude mentions Sodom and Gomorrah (from Genesis 19:4-25), cities well-known to every reader of the Old Testament as places characterized by their open and rampant immorality—like Amsterdam, Bangkok, and Las Vegas are often viewed today. *“Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”* Jude’s Jewish audience knew this story and that these two cities were destroyed by direct intervention of God because Sodom and Gomorrah were centers of immorality and unnatural desires. These cities serve as vivid examples to us of what God will do to those who use the grace of God as an excuse for sexual license. Notice too, that Jude substitutes burning sulphur (Genesis 19:24)—a volcanic-like temporal judgment—for “a punishment of eternal fire.” Jude’s point is that false teachers who intentionally use the grace of God as justification for sexual immorality—and who fail to repent—will be punished eternally.

While Jude utilizes Old Testament redemptive history as well as apocryphal legends (like that in the *Book of Enoch*), to make his point about the inevitability of God’s judgment upon false teachers, in verse 8, Jude tells us of their specific sin. *“Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.”* Just as the Israelites doubted God’s promise, just as the angels left heaven, and just as Sodom and Gomorrah flaunted their licentiousness, so too, the false teachers who (“in like manner”) have crept into these churches and are using the grace of God in order to sin, have brought themselves under God’s condemnation. Jude is making a point similar to the one made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:4 when Paul speaks of God’s judgment upon the faithless Israelites in the wilderness as examples to us today. *“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”*

Jude quickly moves on to give us some insight into the deceptive mode of operations of the false teachers. These men were claiming that God was revealing himself to them through dreams, and that what God was supposedly revealing to them, was the justification for their sinful actions which defile the flesh (“God appeared to me in a dream and told me it was OK to sin”). Given the fact that Jude has just mentioned Sodom and Gomorrah, most commentators see Jude’s comments as a reference to homosexuality,⁸ although Jude’s primary concern here is the intentional misuse of God’s grace on the part of those making the claim of possessing direct revelation from God. In other words, the primary issue is not the exact nature of these men’s sexual sin, but that these men were contending that God had revealed to them that their sexual immorality—in whatever form that immorality took—was not only permissible for them, but for others as well. Likewise, Paul condemns this behavior and attitude in Romans 1:32. *“Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*

⁶ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Logos, “Jude 6.”

⁷ Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1072.

⁸ Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 261.

In claiming that their dreams were revelatory—attempting to give credence to their claim that their sin was permissible—Jude says they “reject authority.” Scripture is crystal clear that sexual relations are limited to marriage, and sex before marriage (fornication), sex outside of marriage (adultery), as well as homosexuality are sinful acts. Yet, these men were claiming that God revealed to them these things were permissible. Whenever God’s word teaches one thing, and sinful men and women were claiming that God revealed to them the exact opposite, we see the depths of human sinfulness. This is what Reformed theologians call “autonomy” (self-law). Because of sin, we become a law unto ourselves. We end-up doing what Israel did in the days of the Judges: “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” It is one thing to struggle with sin (even sexual sin), as we all do. It is another thing to falsely claim that God revealed to us in a dream that our sexual sins are not really sins—and that God blesses what we are doing. This specious and deceitful claim is the basis for their certain condemnation.

In line with their claim to receive revelations from God, Jude accuses these men of blaspheming the “glorious ones.” This is a reference to angels as becomes apparent in verses 9-10, as Jude cites not from the Old Testament, but the apocryphal *Assumption* (or *Testament*) of *Moses* in verse 9.⁹ Scholars believe *The Assumption of Moses* was written as early as the second century B.C, or even perhaps during the years after the death of Herod (7-30 A.D.). *The Assumption of Moses* insists that Jews remain loyal to the Torah, despite the encroaching influence of Gentiles. Jude cites it in reference to Moses’ central role in the *Assumption*.¹⁰ “*But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’ But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.*” Since those to whom Jude is writing were steeped in Jewish mysticism and apocalypticism, undue interest in angels was to be expected. The story of Michael wrestling with the devil over Moses’ body was no doubt intriguing to many Jewish Christians in the apostolic churches, as it is with Christians today.

So, in citing from the *Assumption of Moses*, Jude is referring to yet another Jewish legend. This one held that when Moses died, Michael—according to Revelation 12:7, Michael is an archangel (a chief angel)—was to bury Moses’ body, but then Satan opposed Michael claiming that Moses’ corpse was his. Michael made no personal judgment about Satan, but reminded Satan that the Lord had already rebuked him. This is a reference to Zechariah 3:1-10 which speaks of Satan accusing Israel’s high priest Joshua of failing to fulfill his priestly duties, thereby bringing YHWH’s purposes into question.¹¹ At that time the Lord rebuked Satan, stripped off Joshua’s filthy clothes, and then placed new, spotless, priestly garments on Joshua. Zechariah 3 is a picture then, (a type) of Christ’s death washing away our sin, even as Jesus’s righteousness provides us with a perfect righteousness, with which the devil can find no fault.

In the legend quoted by Jude, Michael knew better than to rebuke Satan, because the Lord himself had done this while prefiguring the gospel in the account of Zechariah. Unlike Michael, Jude points out that these false teachers don’t have enough sense to leave well enough alone. They claim to be speaking for God (based upon their dreams and visions), but in reality they understand nothing and utter blasphemies

⁹ Davids, The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude, Logos, “Jude 9.”

¹⁰ D. A. DeSilva, “The Testament of Moses,” in Craig A. Evans, and Stanley E. Porter, Dictionary of New Testament Background (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1192-1199.

¹¹ Kelly, A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude, 264-265

against angelic beings they know nothing about. These false teachers claim to be prophets and teachers who know the mind of the Spirit of God, but in actuality, these men are behaving like wild animals acting on instinct—similar to Peter’s rebuke of such men in 2 Peter 2:10. They may act piously (and pray in King James English), but don’t have a about clue spiritual things, nor the judgment which awaits them.

In fact, in verse 11 Jude pronounces a covenant curse upon these men, just as Michael reminded Satan of the Lord’s rebuke. “*Woe to them!*” says Jude, “*for they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error and perished in Korah’s rebellion.*” Again, Jude cites three more Old Testament accounts of those who rebelled against God and his gracious purposes. Jude mentions Cain, who according to Genesis 4:3-8 (our Old Testament letter), killed his brother Abel when God accepted Abel’s offering but not his. Jude mentions Balaam, the prophet who spoke only as the Lord commanded (but for monetary gain), and who later led the Israelites into idolatry (when the people worshiped Midianite gods). Balaam functions as a kind of biblical prototype of those subsequent prophets and teachers who would do just about anything for money.¹² Jude also mentions Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16:19-35). Korah lead a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, but the ground opened up and swallowed Korah and his household, along with all those who followed him. The fate of these men and the judgment which came upon them was well known to all those in Jude’s audience. Jude’s point—the bad guys are gonna get it.

Having given another list of examples, Jude reminds the congregation why these men must not be tolerated in the churches. We read in verses 12-13, “*These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.*” This is an important reminder of the centrality of the Lord’s Supper (“love feasts”) in early Christian worship. This is also why we “fence” the table today. Such men make a mockery of the celebration of the Supper. These men cause spiritual shipwreck. They mock the things of God. They bear no fruit. They seek the satisfaction of their own needs and urges, and they are not the least bit concerned with the needs or circumstances of others—unless they can use this as a means to exploit others. They may appear pious and important, but in reality they are nothing. They are destined for judgment.

In verses 14-15, Jude quotes another prophecy from the *Book of Enoch*. “*It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’*” Jude cites from 1 Enoch 1:9, and applies the prophecy directly to Jesus Christ, who will come to judge the ungodly with the hosts of heaven at the end of the age.¹³ With his words resounding with echoes from *Enoch*,¹⁴ Jude reminds the churches that these false teachers—despite using the authority of dreams and revelations to share their great insight into spiritual things—have actually spoken harsh things (blasphemies) against the Lord Jesus, even while claiming to speak in his name. Jude’s point is these men are not teachers, but blasphemers, whose fate is certain. Even the apocryphal

¹² Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 268-269.

¹³ See the helpful discussion in: Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 93-101.

¹⁴ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Logos on Jude 15.

Book of Enoch condemns the foolish audacity of men like this.

In verse 16, Jude describes these men as “*grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*” Not exactly kind words from Jude, and again he alludes to the account in Numbers 14 which he raised earlier (v. 5). These men complain and are never satisfied. They boast about themselves, and their spirituality, and their accomplishments. They will say and do anything to gain favor with weak people whom they can exploit, or with wealthy or influential people from whom they can gain influence. While Jude sees these men as utterly destructive to the church, he is hardly surprised by their presence. In fact, he tells us in verses 17-19 of the concluding section, “*but you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*”

What, then do we take with us from Jude’s mini-sermon in verses 5-16? First, it is clear that apostolic preachers reinterpreted the Old Testament in light of Jesus Christ’s person and work. Jude substitutes Jesus (or “the Lord”) for YHWH in a passage which everyone knew referred to YHWH (the Passover and Exodus). This is not an allegorical reading of Scripture, because the church correctly believed that Jesus was God in human flesh and one with YHWH. This was something the writers of the Old Testament could not have understood until Jesus stepped out of the types and shadows of the old covenant to take his place as the central figure in the Old Testament (cf. Gal. 4:4-6).

Second, Jude cites two apocryphal books—which offer legendary interpretations of various Old Testament events, and which were, apparently, widely known to those receiving this epistle—to make the point to his readers that Jesus Christ fulfills various aspects of Old Testament prophecy. Jude cites a legend dealing with Genesis 6:1-4 from the *Book of Enoch* to the effect that when angels sinned they were immediately bound, and await the judgment. Jude is making the point that if fallen and disobedient angels will face the final judgment, so too will false teachers plaguing the churches. Jude also cites from *Enoch* to make the point that the one returning in judgment with ten thousand of his holy ones is none other than Jesus.

Jude also refers the legend in *The Assumption of Moses* regarding Michael’s tug of war with Satan over Moses’ body, to make the point that if even Michael (who was more than a match for the devil) refused to rebuke the devil, how foolish it is for false teachers to blaspheme angelic beings they completely underestimate and cannot comprehend. Jude uses these legendary accounts—which were written to fill in gaps in the biblical narrative so as to satisfy people’s curiosity about what happened when the Bible doesn’t tell us—to show how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. Jude does so in such a way as to render these legends moot—now that Jesus has come and revealed the purposes of God, why be preoccupied with mere speculative legends?

Those influenced and intrigued by, and familiar with these two apocryphal books, must realize that Jesus is one with YHWH, and Jesus is the one in whom all biblical prophecy is fulfilled. Jude has proven this from the Old Testament in the case of the mighty redemptive acts of God (i.e., the Exodus and Passover), he has shown the Old Testament to foretell of the certain fate of false teachers, and he has shown that even Jewish legends make certain points which are best understood in the light of the coming of Jesus Christ, who saved a people. This same Jesus will not only save us from the wrath to come, he will protect us from those false teachers who seek to deceive and exploit us.