

## “But You Must Remember”

*Jude 1-25; Zechariah 3:1-10*

### The Second in a Two-Part Series on Jude

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**H**ave you ever wondered what a sermon would be like in one of the churches founded during the time of the apostles? How did those in the apostolic circle preach? Since the New Testament was not yet completed, how did they utilize the Old Testament, so as to show forth Christ? Well, 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 epistle. Citing from both the Old Testament as well as apocryphal Jewish writings, Jude is able to remind his readers that God has a long history of dealing with false teachers and apostates, and those men who were currently troubling the churches to which Jude is writing face certain judgment. Even as Jude’s readers are to earnestly 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.

We wrap up our short series (two Sundays) on the Epistle of Jude. Last time, I dealt with introductory matters and the first four verses. Recall that this epistle was written by Jude—the brother of James and Jesus—as early as the mid-fifties of the first century. While Jude doesn’t give us any of the specifics about the churches to which he is writing, there is enough information here to gather that Jude is writing to a church (or churches) which was composed largely of Jewish converts to Christianity. The members of these church were steeped in Jewish mysticism and end-time speculation—we’ll see why that is important momentarily. Jude has learned that these unnamed churches were facing a very serious internal crisis, prompting Jude to write this epistle which is an urgent warning to his brethren.

Apparently, Jude was planning on a writing a letter to these churches about “our common salvation,” when word reached him that a group of traveling prophets and teachers had crept into these churches, introducing the dangerous heresy of antinomianism. Antinomianism is the notion that since we are saved by God’s grace and not by our works, Christians are not in any sense bound to keep the law. This particular group of false teachers had infiltrated their ranks, and were men who were using the grace of God as an excuse to engage in all kinds of sexual immorality. Furthermore, these men were claiming that God was revealing himself to them through dreams and visions, which, supposedly gave great credibility to their deceptive message. Upon learning that this was indeed going on, Jude sends this epistle to these churches exhorting them to deal with these men before they can do any more damage.

Although quite short, this epistle is packed with content. In the first four verses, Jude exhorts his readers/hearers to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In verses 5-16, Jude makes his case that the actions of these false teachers was foretold throughout the Old Testament. In these verses, we find a sermon of sorts, drawn from a number of Old Testament texts as well as the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*. Jude demonstrates that the history of redemption indicates that God’s judgment will certainly befall upon these men now plaguing the churches. And then, in verses 17-25, Jude concludes by reminding his beloved brethren that this was the very thing the apostles (who many in the congregation had heard preach with their own ears) warned them 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 for the coming of the Lord.

Since we have much to cover, we turn to the first part of our text, verses 5-16 of Jude, which is, in effect, Jude's sermon on the threat to the churches to which he is writing.

In verses 5-7 of Jude's sermon, Jude gives us three illustrations drawn from the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic sources regarding those who claimed to be servants of the Lord, but whose conduct proves them to be anything but. But before setting out his case, Jude issues an important reminder in the first clause of verse 5— "*Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it . . .*" a statement which I take to be a reference to the fact that Jude's readers already have been thoroughly instructed in "the faith" at the time they came to faith in Christ.

Since many of these people received their initial instruction in Christian doctrine (catechism) directly from the lips of apostles, Jude has no need to instruct his readers in that doctrine. Rather, he is writing to exhort them to put into practice what they have already learned.<sup>1</sup> This also implies that the apostles have already taught us everything we need to know about the gospel, and the person and work of Jesus. If that's the case, could anything possibly be missing from that doctrine taught them by the apostles, which God was supposedly revealing to these false teachers through their dreams and visions? Of course, not. As we saw last time, 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. It is utterly remarkable that Jude tells 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.*" Anyone who knows 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 Christ, Jude now looks back at the Old Testament through the lens of Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. No question then that the apostolic church believed that since Jesus was God in human flesh, Christians can speak of Jesus as YHWH, the one who rescued Israel from the clutches of the Pharaoh.

As we saw in our Old Testament lesson last time (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 seeing YHWH's awesome power first-hand, these Israelites still doubted whether YHWH was actually capable of defeating the Canaanites. They began to grumble against the Lord, and would come under God's covenant curse. They would be forced to wander for forty years in the wilderness of the Sinai until their entire generation died off. All of them, except the families of Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert.

Remarkably, 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—the very thing which our dispensational friends say should not be done. 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. And so 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 first 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

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<sup>1</sup> Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, 48-49.

fully understood Jude's application of this account from Israel's history directly to the disobedient and faithless individuals then creeping into the churches. As God had done with Israel, so now he does with his new covenant people, the New Israel. He dealt with apostates then. He'll deal with them now.

Jude's second illustration 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 the coming of Christ interpreted the account of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-4 precisely in this manner. 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 fully human thugs and warlords, not the product of 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.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the *Book of Enoch* is apocryphal, Jude utilizes Enoch's legend to make a point. In verse 6, Jude is clearly alluding to a passage in Enoch, "*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 erroneous nature of the 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 keep it"), have been "kept" in chains until 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, abandoned their place in heaven so as to engage in sexual relations with women, were immediately subject to God's judgment. Therefore, in his "sermon," Jude uses Enoch's legend to make the point that while the angels did not stay ("keep" their place), the Lord now "keeps" them in chains until the time of the end. Jude reinterprets Enoch's legend in light of the truth of the gospel.

In verse seven, Jude takes up the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities well-known to every reader of the Old Testament as places characterized by their open and rampant immorality—like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Bangkok and San Francisco are 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.*" No question, everyone in Jude's 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 will be punished eternally.

Jude utilizes both Old Testament history, as well as apocryphal legends (like that in the *Book of Enoch*), to make his point. But notice that Jude reinterprets these accounts in the light of Christ's person and work. In fact, in verse 8, Jude makes this point quite explicitly. "*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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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 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."*

At this point in his epistle, Jude gives 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. Given the fact that Jude has just mentioned Sodom and Gomorrah, most commentators see Jude's comments as a reference to homosexuality,<sup>3</sup> 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 took—was not only permissible for them, but for others as well. This is Paul's point 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."*

In claiming that their dreams were revelatory, giving 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 forbidden. Yet, these men were claiming that God revealed to them these things were permissible. Whenever God's word teaches one thing, while men like these were claiming that God revealed to them something else, we see the depths of human sinfulness. This is what Reformed theologians call "autonomy" (self-law). 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 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 what makes God's condemnation of these men a certainty.

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. *"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 then undue interest in angels is to be expected.

At this point Jude refers to another Jewish legend, which 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 clearly a reference to Zechariah 3 (our Old Testament lesson) which speaks of Satan accusing Israel's high priest Joshua of failing to fulfill

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 261.

his priestly duties, thereby bringing YHWH's purposes into question.<sup>4</sup> 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, Michael knew not to rebuke Satan, because the Lord himself had done this while prefiguring the gospel in the account of Zechariah. But 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. 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. They may act piously (probably 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, 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.<sup>5</sup> Jude also mentions Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16). Korah lead a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, but the ground then 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.*" Here 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. Jude points out the havoc these men wreck on the celebration of the Supper. These men cause spiritual shipwreck. They mock the things of God. They tend to their own needs, not the needs of others. They may appear pious and important, but in reality they are nothing. They are destined for judgment.

In verses 14-15, Jude takes up 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,

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly, [A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude](#), 264-265

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, [A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude](#), 268-269.

who will come to judge the ungodly with the hosts of heaven at the end of the age.<sup>6</sup> 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 himself. Jude’s point is these men are not teachers, but blasphemers, whose fate is certain. Even the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* condemns rank the antinomianism of men like this.

In verse 16, Jude goes on to describe 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. But while Jude sees the very presence of these men as utterly destructive to the church, he is hardly surprised by their presence. Since many in these churches likely became Christians through the preaching of the apostles, and those like Jude who formed the apostolic circle, all they need do is recall the warning the apostles had given them about this very thing. “*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.’*”

Not only does this comment imply that many in these congregations had personally heard apostolic preaching, there is clearly the sense that the entire period of redemptive history after Christ’s ascension can be characterized as the “last times.” In other words, that entire period of human history from Christ’s ascension until his second coming, is the final period of human history. The presence of these antinomians who follow their ungodly passions is the proof that Jude’s readers are living in that final age of redemptive history (as are we), only we are that much closer to the end.

In verse 19, Jude reminds his readers of the damage these men can do if left unopposed. “*It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*” Placing self-interest over the needs of the church, these men tear apart the body of Christ. They seek to draw followers unto themselves—away from Christ and those pastors and elders whom Christ has called to tend these flocks. The false teachers seek money and sensual pleasure, and they even dare use their claim to dreams and revelation as a basis for doing so. They speak of God’s grace as though it were nothing but an excuse for their sin. Such people are not sinners struggling with lusts of the flesh, but these are men who do not have the Spirit (although they claim to know the mind of God). They know nothing about the things of God, they only know the ways of this world. Their presence is, in part, proof that we are living in the last days.

Jude closes out his letter with an impassioned plea to the churches.

In verses 20-21, Jude contrasts the imminent judgment to come upon the false teachers, with the blessing that God has reserved for his own. “*But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*” As the false teachers tear down, believers are to build themselves up through the means of grace, and through prayer. As false teachers delight in their dreams and visions and use them as an excuse to gratify their every sinful craving, believers are to depend upon the “most holy faith,” which is surely a reference to the doctrine already taught them by the apostles. While the false teachers act piously, and proclaim outlandish things about divine mysteries and angelic beings—which they know nothing about—believers are to pray in the Holy Spirit (that is, in full accordance with the word already preached to them, and not in light of their own lusts). Instead of demanding that their sinful passions be immediately satisfied, believers will wait for the mercy of God—a reference to

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<sup>6</sup> See the helpful discussion in: Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 93-101.

Christ's return at the end of the age, when, at long last, Jude's beloved family in Christ will enter their eternal rest and receive all of God's gracious promises.

In light of the damage done by the false teachers, Jude exhorts the members of these churches to "*have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*" It was the sacred duty of the pastors, elders, and members of these churches to resist these false teachers, and at the same time to be compassionate towards all those whom the false teachers have duped. Since God's judgment upon these men was inevitable, Jude's plea is that Christians snatch the wandering sheep back from the edge before it was too late. Indeed, our common salvation teaches us that we are saved by God's grace—specifically Jesus' death for our sins and his righteousness being imputed to us through faith—nevertheless, Christians must be warned that if they trust in Christ, they cannot continue to seek to live so as to gratify the desires of the flesh. In fact, Christians must come to hate their sinful desires (flesh), because these sinful desires are what make the false teachers so attractive in the first place. The false teachers are the ones who tell us that these desires are not sinful, and since God is gracious, he wants us to satisfy them. Says Jude, rhetorically, hate the clothing that even touches sinful human flesh, which is Jude's way of reminding us that having trusted in Christ, we are buried with him and raised to newness of life. This is why we hate the sinful nature.

Beloved, false teachers will come. But you must remember what Jude and the other apostles have taught us. The last days will be perilous days. We will face all kinds of worldly people who will claim to tell us about the mysteries of God, but who are devoid of the Spirit. This is why we must cling to our common salvation as well as contend for that faith once for all delivered to saints.

I can think of no better way to end our short study of the Book of Jude than to leave with this benediction from Jude, brother of Jesus and James. "*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 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.*"