

## CLASS NOTES ON THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

### LESSON 13 — JUDE 9-25

VERSE 9: Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

Michael appears only here and in Revelation 12:7 in the New Testament. In Daniel 12:1, Michael is named as a guardian of Israel.

As we mentioned in our previous lesson, the events recounted in this verse are similar to events described in the Assumption of Moses, an apocryphal work. We can't determine that for ourselves because that book exists today only in fragments, but we are told that by early writers who presumably had a complete copy.

#### **Here we should remember two important points.**

First, Jude is talking about false teachers who were steeped in the apocryphal literature. So it makes sense that Jude uses that same literature against them to make his points.

Second, we should remember that most such literature was built upon a grain of truth, and although men cannot locate that grain, the Holy Spirit knows what is true and thus so did Jude, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Whatever we determine with regard to whether Jude did or did not refer to the Assumption of Moses, we must conclude, if we believe in inspiration, that the events in this verse are historical events.

#### **So our next question then is, why?**

Why were they fighting over the body of Moses? Jude does not tell us, but the apocryphal literature does. Now, of course, we cannot be certain that any such explanation from outside the Bible is true, but it is interesting and it is not inconsistent with anything that has been revealed to us.

Those sources tell us that when Moses died, Michael was sent by God to bury him. But Satan disputed his right to do so. Why? Because Moses was a murderer (Exodus 2:12), and therefore Satan said his body belonged to him. But even with such a provocation, Michael was not disrespectful to Satan. He did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said only "The Lord rebuke you."

And there is the point of the event: If an angel was so careful in what he said about another angel (even a fallen angel), how much more should men watch what they say about angels. And that is the usual explanation of this event, but it is not the only one.

**There is another possible explanation for this strange verse.**

There is an interesting parallel to verse 9 in Zechariah 3:1-2, where the prophet reports that an angel showed him Joshua the High Priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Angel of the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan."

This Joshua is not the successor to Moses but is the much later high priest who assisted Zerubbabel in the attempt to reform and rebuild the temple after the return from exile. The parallel is striking, because here again a man is being accused by Satan as unfit to perform God's work (symbolized by his wearing filthy clothes) and again a high ranking angel stands aside and allows God to decide who is fit to serve him. Only God had the authority to banish Satan's legally correct accusation.

**So which view is correct?**

The big question is against whom was Michael reluctant to bring a slanderous accusation? Satan or Moses? The Greek text is ambiguous on that point, and the more literal translations preserve that ambiguity (as they should).

The parallel in Zechariah suggests that Michael here in Jude may have refrained from accusing Moses of murder, if that was what Satan was accusing him of. In fact, the phrase "bring a slanderous accusation" has less to do with being rude than it does with passing judgment. It is more of a legal phrase.

With this interpretation, what Jude is saying is that his opponents have misunderstood the nature of salvation by not realizing

what an incredible act God performed when he banished the legal charges against us. Not even Michael can declare Moses innocent, and not even Michael (the guardian of the law) can remove the accusations of the law from Moses (the lawgiver). He simply did not dare. Only God can do that. But by trivializing what God had done, the false teachers had changed the grace of God into a license for immorality by setting aside their own sins along with the sins of their followers.

With this interpretation, these verses turn out to have little to do with being polite to the devil, but instead call us to have the utmost respect for God's law as shown in the attitude of its guardian, Michael. This view fits well with the context of antinomianism we see in Jude, but the other view perhaps fits better with the immediate context of verse 8.

One final question is how to explain the similarity between the event from Zechariah and the event from Jude 9. The event involving the body of Moses occurred long before the vision in Zechariah. Thus, the vision given to Zechariah was modeled on that earlier event. Why? We don't know, but we should recall our discussion in the introductory lesson as to how Enoch's prophecy may have made its way into the apocryphal Book of Enoch. This allusion in Zechariah to the event regarding the body of Moses suggests that Zechariah may have also spoken of that event, which could tell us how it may have made its way into the apocryphal Assumption of Moses.

VERSE 10: But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

These dreamers no doubt claimed visionary insight into the world of angels, and yet their behavior was hardly angelic. They despised and rejected the very law that the angels revered and guarded. Instead, like the men of Sodom, they were filled with pride and lust.

Jude tells us that these false teachers were like unreasoning animals. They thought they understood everything, and yet all they understood were the physical appetites they share with the animals. And not just animals, but unreasoning animals. How ironic that though they claimed to be visionaries, they were actually ignorant.

When they thought themselves superior to the common man, they were actually on the same level as animals.

Jude is stating here a profound truth in linking these characteristics together. "If a man is persistently blind to spiritual values, deaf to the call of God, and rates self-determination as the highest good, then a time will come when he cannot hear the call he has spurned but is left to the mercy of the turbulent instincts to which he once turned for freedom. And those instincts given free reign are merciless. Lust, when indulged, becomes a killer." Recall Romans 1:27, "Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

With the three warnings in verses 5-7 before them, Jude's readers are urged to beware of the spiritual decadence of these false teachers. And this decadence pervaded their entire lives. Physically they became immoral, intellectually they became arrogant, and spiritually they denied the Lord.

But they were so progressive! Right, and progressive morality and progressive thinking often go hand in hand with progressive deafness to the voice of God.

VERSE 11: Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Verse 11 provides in many ways a repetition of the charges Jude has already laid out in his previous three examples, except now Jude concentrates on three individuals rather than on three groups. Jude adds Cain and Korah to Peter's example of Balaam. Jude prefaces this triad with the phrase "Woe to them!," which reminds us of Jesus in the gospels.

### **The Way of Cain**

First, they are compared with Cain, who was the first murderer. And perhaps Jude is referring to the murder of souls by the false

teachers. But Cain was also an unloving man who cared nothing for his brother. He disobeyed God with his bloodless sacrifice. When the writer of Hebrews talked about Abel, he mentioned his faith three times in stark contrast to his unbelieving brother. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Cain was the very opposite of the man of faith. He stands for the one who defies God and who is devoid of faith and love.

As Jude looks at the situation surrounding him, and of those who have taken the way of Cain, he is saying that they understood very clearly the standard that God expects, but they took it upon themselves to decide what they were going to accept or reject. Cain substituted his own human reason for the revelation of God. He disregarded God. That is the way of Cain, and that way is with us still.

### **The Way of Balaam**

Second, they are compared to Balaam, and once again there is an obvious point of similarity. Balaam was greedy. But, just as with Cain, more can be said. Balaam taught Israel to sin. It was Balaam who involved Israel with immorality and idolatry in Numbers 31:16. No doubt, he told the Israelites, who three times he had found himself unable to curse, that they were so firmly placed in God's favor that they could live as they pleased.

The way of Balaam takes the way of Cain one step further. He not only knowingly rebelled against God, he encouraged others to do so as well. Just like Cain, Balaam was faced with a clear statement from God, and he decided that God did not really mean it.

And note that Jude tells us they were greedy. We shouldn't skip over that word. Many, and perhaps most, of our troubles can be traced to that one motive, greed. False teachers lead people away because of greed, and leaders do nothing to avoid a drop in the weekly contribution. Christ thought Christians worthy of his own blood, but these intruders counted them as cheap merchandise to be used only to fulfill their own greed and lust. "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." (2 Peter 2:3)

### **The Way of Korah**

The way of Cain and the way of Balaam finally turn into full-scale revolt, which is the way of Korah. In Numbers 16, Korah and other Levitical priests rebelled against Moses. They accused Moses of

having gone too far, but Moses told them it was they who had gone too far, and to prove the point God destroyed them. In Korah we again find a man who decides that God must not have meant what he said, and so he tried to replace God's plan with his own plan.

Sound familiar? God's word is clear. Clarity is not the problem. The problem is that people don't think God means what he says.

The intruders, like Korah, had defied the leaders of the church, refusing to accept their authority and instead setting themselves up in opposition to that authority. Jude actually makes the false teachers participants in Korah's rebellion by using the aorist tense. They have already been destroyed in Korah's rebellion, Jude tells us.

So then in these three pictures from the Old Testament we see three main characteristics of these false teachers: like Cain they were loveless, like Balaam they were prepared in return for money to teach others that sin did not matter, and like Korah they were rebellious against God and the leaders God had appointed. And these were also major characteristics of Gnosticism. Claims to having special knowledge made men indifferent to the demands of holiness, made them indifferent to the needs of their brothers, and made them indifferent to the authorities. And these are characteristics of any who claim to have knowledge from God and about God apart from his revealed word.

And why did Jude mention Cain, Balaam, and Korah? We gave one possible reason in our introductory lesson. Some of the Gnostics had turned the Old Testament upside down, making villains of its heroes, and vice versa, because of their twisted view of God. They may have seen Cain, Balaam, and Korah as heroes of faith!

VERSES 12-13: These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

### **Spots or Rocks in Your Love Feasts**

The love feasts in verse 12 were most likely simply a shared meal or, as many commentators believe, it may have been something very closely associated with the Lord's Supper. In fact one commentator argues that the love feast and the Lord's Supper were two different names for the same occasion. I do not believe that was true, but I think it likely that the two were closely linked. These love feasts may well have provided the setting for the Lord's Supper in the early church, but very soon they appear to have led to abuse through greed, disorder, and immorality. (1 Corinthians 11:20ff)

In any event, the heretics in Jude were turning the love feasts into a time, not of love, but of division. Jude tells us they were blemishes or, as some translations read, reefs or rocks. The Greek word could have either meaning. The parallel of "spots" in 2nd Peter might favor the former, although some believe it was that parallel that later caused the Greek word for "reefs" to also have the meaning of "blemishes." Most commentators prefer "reefs" here in Jude. Jude would then be saying that the close proximity to such people is dangerous and should be avoided as a sailor keeps his ship clear of the reefs. He may also be telling them that, absent warning, they may not see the danger until it is too late.

Jude tells his readers that these men were eating with them without the slightest qualm. Again, showing their arrogance.

What were these heretics doing that was so bad? Why were they so dangerous?

**They fed only themselves.**

The ESV says they were “shepherds feedings themselves.” In short, they were greedy shepherds. From the earliest days, the church was warned against shepherds who wanted only to mistreat the sheep. (John 10:12-13, Acts 20:28-29) In fact, the passage that is likely behind Jude's language here is Ezekiel 34:2. (“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?”)

Does the term “shepherds” mean that these heretics had become elders? Perhaps, and in fact Paul had said in Acts 20 that such men would arise. But the term could also apply here to teachers who tried to lead others astray but who were not actual leaders in the congregation. Either is possible.

The point is that the people against whom Jude is writing were claiming to be teachers, and had convinced everyone that they were good shepherds, but in fact the sheep were starving. Their teaching served only to feed themselves.

Jude continues to pile on the invective, with four striking metaphors. They are clouds, trees, waves, and stars. Moffatt says “Sky, land, and sea are ransacked for illustrations of these men.”

**They were empty clouds.**

Jude says they are like empty clouds. In hot, dusty Palestine, a cloud was a signal of much wanted rain. But sometimes that cloud came and went with the wind, casting only its shadow on the dry ground, thus proving to be useless. Similarly, these shepherds promised a great deal, but it was insubstantial and unproductive. They claimed to be Bible teachers, and yet they did not teach the Bible. (Proverbs 25:14 — “Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give.”)

They promise rain, but they serve merely to hide the sun. Here is a graphic example of the uselessness of their teaching, which was supposedly advanced and enlightened, but had nothing to offer the ordinary Christian for nourishment of his spiritual life. In fact, any



teacher of God's word must constantly ask himself if what he is proclaiming is of benefit to anyone at all.

**They were barren trees.**

These heretics were barren trees. Both John the Baptist and Jesus had encountered and warned of the dangers of spiritual barrenness. (Matthew 3:10, 7:16-20, 15:13, 21:19, Luke 13:6-9) In fact, uprooting was a familiar Old Testament model for judgment. Here Jude says that the church has come up against empty, hollow teachers. Teachers who were barren trees, who had no value except perhaps as firewood. In fact, Jude refers to them as being twice dead, most likely a reference to the New Testament teaching that those condemned on judgment day are condemned to a second death, a final irrevocable separation from God. (Rev. 2:11) Their fate is so certain that Jude can refer to them even now as twice dead.

**They were stormy waves.**

They are stormy waves. To the desert tribes of Israel, the sea always represented a threat and was always seen as an image of chaos and danger. It was also often used to depict one who lacked self control. Jude is probably alluding here to Isaiah 57:20-21. ("But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.")

Unlike the barren trees, these storms are productive — but all they produce is a lot of noise and a lot of filthy scum left on the beach. In a similar way, these false teachers were foaming up their shame. They leave behind a polluted mess as the only byproduct of their self-willed ministry.

**They were wandering stars.**

These false teachers were wandering stars. Before the invention of the compass, the only sure guide for a traveller on a dark night were the fixed constellations in the sky. But the planets were not like the stars. Unlike the stars, the planets wandered about in the sky erratically and seemed to make no sense from the earth. In fact, the Greek word translated "wandering" is planetes, from which we get the word "planet." And so, a wandering star provides a good picture of a

deceptive leader who promises security and a safe road home, but actually delivers uncertainty and danger.

And, of course, the ultimate wandering star is the great deceiver himself, the fallen star, Satan.

Jude's warning has a power here that is hard to see in English. In verse 11, he warned of Balaam's error, and the Greek word translated "error" there is plane, and now he warns of the wandering that the error produces, using the same root word.

The wandering stars may also have referred to the shooting stars that fall from the sky. Also, in the Book of Enoch, the stars are linked with the angels and so Jude may again be thinking of the doom of those fallen angels when he writes of the doom reserved for the wandering stars.

The illusion to Enoch is particularly fitting, for whereas the fallen angels lost their heavenly home by disobeying God, Enoch gained Heaven by obeying God.

Jude has used illustrations from the four elements of the ancient world to describe these heretics: the air (the clouds), the earth (the trees), the water (the waves), and the sky (the stars).

All of these illustrations point toward one destiny for these heretics: blackest darkness if reserved for them.

VERSES 14-15: And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, 15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

### **The prophet Enoch spoke about them long ago.**

Jude confirms his analysis of these heretics with a prophesy of their inescapable judgment. (See our introductory lesson for an in depth look at this prophecy from Enoch.)

Enoch first appears in Genesis 5:21-24. In the genealogical list, he is the seventh from Adam, if we include Adam in the counting. Enoch next appears in the Bible as an ancestor of Jesus in Luke 3:37. And then in Hebrews 11:5, he appears as a model of faith. Finally, he appears here in Jude, where at last we hear him speak. And who does he talk about? Jesus.

The quotation from Enoch uses two key terms that are each used four times. The first is "all" and the second is "ungodly."

**God's judgment is universal.**

Enoch tells us that God's judgment is universal. Four times Enoch tells us that no one and nothing escapes God's scrutiny. He will judge everyone, and convict all the ungodly, of all the ungodly acts, and all the harsh words spoken against him. These false teachers may think they are very clever and that they have successfully fooled everyone. But they cannot fool God. They cannot hide from him.

**God's judgment is against the ungodly.**

Enoch tells us that the target of this judgment is the ungodly. Four times Enoch uses the word ungodly, and his four uses show how pervasive ungodliness can be. He uses it as an adjective to describe the ungodly ones; he uses it as a noun to depict the the works of ungodliness; and he uses it as a verb to show one acting in ungodly ways.

Jude first introduced the heretics by calling them godless men in verse 4. He closes his analysis of them by saying they follow their own ungodly desires in verse 18. Clearly, Jude is telling us that this one word sums them up with devastating accuracy. And it is just as clear that Jude was no fan of the euphemisms that we sometimes use today to describe such behavior.

**God's judgment is sure.**

Once people think they are free from God's scrutiny, they feel free to cut themselves off from his word and his commands. They begin to see God as a grumbling but ultimately soft-hearted parent who makes impressive threats but cannot bring himself to act upon them. Even today, many people (and even some in the church) do not believe that God will act as he has said he will act. They create a god in

their own image. They devise a god who changes his mind about the gospel, about the great commission, who changes his mind about baptism, and who changes his mind about the obligations of the Christian life.

VERSE 16: These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

Jude's character sketches of these people are becoming more and more specific. If this letter had 26 verses instead of just 25 I think we would have started to see some names.

### **Grumblers**

These men were grumblers. And what Jude has in mind here is once again a reference to Israel, who, as soon as they had been freed from Egyptian bondage, began to grumble and long to return to Egypt. These men in like manner grumble about their condition in the church. They, like Israel, grumbled against God and against the restrictions imposed by the law.

Perhaps they expected a magical transformation that would make them immune to sin and temptation, and when that did not occur, they began to grumble about the trials they faced and longed to return to their former carefree life before they had ever heard of Christ.

Whenever a man get out of touch with God, he is likely to begin complaining about something. Grumbling is one of the distinguishing marks of a man without God. (Phil. 2:14)

### **Complainers and Fault Finders**

These men were fault finders. The Greek word that Jude uses here is an interesting one — it seems to come from the name of a stock character who was used in the situation comedies of his day. It describes a complainer who was never satisfied with his lot.

One of those early Greek comic characters was described as follows: "You're satisfied by nothing that befalls you. You complain at

everything. You don't want what you have, you long for what you don't have. In winter you wish it were summer, and in summer that it were winter."

They are not happy with being Christians. They are forever gazing over the fence at what they see is the greener grass of those outside the demands of Christ. They envy sinners. (Proverbs 23:17 says "Do not let your heart envy sinners.") To them, the Christian life is not a life of joy but rather a daily grind, something to be endured.

### **Followers of Their Own Evil Desires**

These men follow their own evil desires. These men are going back on their initial commitment to Christ, if in fact they ever made such a commitment. They have found another master they prefer to follow — themselves.

Jude tells us that their behavior was not governed by God's will, but by their own evil desires. To them, self is all that matters, a philosophy of life that is also very common today.

They began as grumblers. That led naturally to fault finding. And that just as naturally led them to follow their own evil desires. When we are tempted to grumble, we should look down that road to see what is at the end. Jude tells us here.

### **Boastful**

These men boast about themselves. They think they have achieved a level of spiritual maturity that has not been achieved by lesser Christians, whom they see as narrow minded and unspiritual. False teachers very often spend more time telling you about themselves than about God. When they are finished speaking you feel qualified to write their biography, but you know nothing more about the Bible than when they first stood up. They take center stage, and they leave no room for God. Again, we see their pride and their arrogance.

### **Flatterers**

These men flatter others for their own advantage. When faced with a choice of obeying God or man, to them the choice is easy.

A flatterer can be very dangerous, because such a person slips in under our guard. Like Satan in the garden, a flatterer misleads in

the guise of telling of the truth. It is no wonder that the Bible warns us constantly against those who flatter. (Proverbs 18:5, James 2:1-9)

The most dangerous flatterer is the person who misleads about spiritual matters and who tells lies about God because he wants the hearer on his side. In Luke 6:26, Jesus said "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

In order to win followers and gain influence, these men have deliberately chosen to teach a false gospel that makes no demands on its hearers and promises what it can never deliver. Jude is a very modern letter!

Some TV preachers are so concerned about keeping the money rolling in that they never have a bad word to say to or about anyone for fear of causing offense. Is that how Christ taught? What about Paul, or Peter, or James, or Jude?

At the end of all the thunderbolts Jude has released, we find these boastful flatterers at the mercy of their own fears as to what other men will think of them. They are flatterers currying favor, and Jude has completely unveiled them in 25 short verses.

They had proclaimed a false message about the Lord, and Jude, the Lord's brother, has now proven them false.

VERSES 17-18: But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

There is a close parallel between verses 17-19 and verses 5-16. In each case, there is a call to remember. In each case, Jude begins by addressing himself to the faithful in warning and ends by addressing the heretics in condemnation. And again, Jude tells them to remember. There is nothing here that should not have been expected.

### **The church had been warned.**

We talked earlier about how strange it seems that Jude quotes Enoch, but in his day it might have seemed even stranger that he would quote the apostles. Some might have asked by what right did he quote with approval a group of his contemporaries along side such spiritual giants from the Old Testament. The answer of course is that the apostles stand in relation to the church just as the prophets stood in relation to Israel — both proclaiming God's authoritative word. In fact, the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20)

Jude's readers appear to have heard these warnings from the lips of the apostles themselves because Jude does not just call them to remember what the apostles said but he calls them to remember what the apostles said to you. In fact, Jude uses an imperfect tense, which means he is asking them to remember what the apostles were in the habit of saying to them. This verse tells us with certainty that we are dealing here with historical contemporaries of the apostles.

### **The Last Time**

We could spend much time considering the phrase “the last time” or “the last days” and how it is used in the Bible. Rather than dive into that issue here, please see my commentaries on Daniel and Revelation available on the website.

### **Mockers**

The apostles also said there would be scoffers. In fact, the Bible constantly warns us about the subtle undermining that a skeptical and scoffing person can create. (Psalm 1:1, etc.) We have all heard those teachers who appear on the surface to be faithful Bible teachers but who, just below the surface, can hardly contain or disguise their disdain for the Bible as the inspired word of God.

It seems clear from verse 18 that they laughed at those who refused to follow them in the paths of their own lusts. They laughed at those who still had scruples and who followed their old-fashioned standards, unlike the spiritual elite such as themselves. They laughed at those who fussed about sexual purity, and no doubt thought them astonishingly naïve. And yet God will have the last laugh. (Psalm 2:4)

VERSE 19: These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

Jude's final character sketch of the heretics is the shortest and sharpest. In three short pictures he makes clear once and for all the consequence of their error.

**They divide you.**

Jude tells his readers that his opponents are the men who divide you. They seem to have gone about creating cliques within the church. As Gnostics, they no doubt sought to create a division between what they saw as the spiritual elite and what they saw as ordinary Christians who had not achieved their own high level of knowledge. They were the spiritual aristocracy, and thus they couldn't associate with just anyone. In fact, the Greek word that Jude uses is a present participle indicating that these men were habitually divisive. Even today, when false teachers move against a congregation their game plan is to divide and conquer. For example, they may begin by promoting so-called house churches, where Sunday evening services are held in people's homes outside the watching eyes of the spiritually mature. And it is there that the false teachers begin their divisive work.

These Gnostics were Christian Pharisees even though they were at the opposite end of the spectrum when it came to law. But like the Pharisees, they had their own clique and they saw themselves as superior to the ordinary man. They were the elite. They were very much like the Pharisees, and Jude deals with them much as Jesus dealt with the Pharisees. In fact, the derivation of the name Pharisee probably means "separated" and denotes the exclusive group who divided themselves off. And Jesus told them they were indeed separated from the God they claimed to know. (Mark 3:23-26) And here Jude does the same thing. They claimed to be separated off. Well, Jude agrees. They are. They looked down on those they saw as ordinary Christians. They considered themselves the spiritual aristocracy immune to the laws of conduct that bound the ordinary man. Very well, Jude says, you ask for distinctions to be made. You shall have them. In fact, it is you who are governed by the lower natural instincts. It is you who are not part of the spiritual elite.



**They follow their natural instincts.**

Jude says that these are the men who follow their natural instincts. (To many in our own society, that charge would likely be seen as a compliment!) Far from being spiritual giants, they are being pulled down by the very things over which they claim to have victory. Sin is still firmly in control of their lives and their destiny.

**They do not have the Spirit.**

These men do not have the spirit. These false teachers claimed that it was the Holy Spirit who was guiding them into their lawless rebellion, and they argued that those Christians who were reluctant to follow them were not spiritual. But Jude says that it is these self-proclaimed spirit led people who do not have the Spirit. Those who spend the most time trumpeting their own spirituality often turn out to be the least spiritual. These men were not being led by the Spirit, but rather by their own desires and instincts, much like animals.

“When the Bible is declared outmoded, the resurrection denied, the saving death of Jesus watered down, or the Biblical guidelines on sex and marriage made amenable to people's greed, and all in the name of where the Spirit is leading us, we can be sure that the Spirit is not leading us there at all.”

**Were the intruders ever Christians?**

A widely debated question about Jude is whether the opponents were former Christians who had now fallen from grace or whether they had never been Christians at all. Of course, the Calvinists must argue for the latter situation, but those who reject the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved" understand that either situation could have been true.

In favor of these men once having been Christians, many point to the example of Israel that Jude leads off with because Israel fell from belief to apostasy, as did the angels in the second example. But we should remember that Jude also mentions Sodom and Gomorrah, and there is no indication that those people were ever believers.

In favor of these men never having been Christians we have Jude's description of them as intruders who wormed their way into the congregation.

In my view the most likely solution is that the group included some of each – some who had one believed but had now been seduced and had fallen away, and some who never believed but were just trying to fleece the flock from the very start.

In any event, one thing is clear: if a person does not have the Spirit, that person is not a Christian — and that was the state of these men as Jude wrote his letter.

VERSES 20-21: But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

So far, Jude has explained only why we should contend for the faith. In this final section of six verses, Jude tells us how to contend, setting out the three steps that are necessary if we are to do so.

First, in verses 20-21, Jude tells us we must take care of ourselves, ensuring we are correctly centered on God and on the gospel.

Second, in verses 22-23, Jude says that we have certain responsibilities to those who are falling victim to this false teaching (and those responsibilities are heightened if they fell victim because we did not rise up and timely contend for the faith!).

Third, in verses 24-25, Jude tells us that we must keep our own eyes firmly fixed on God's promises.

These final verses are not an appendix to the letter, as some argue, but rather are its climax.

The four injunctions in verses 20-21 are faith, hope, love, and prayer.

First, there is faith. The most holy faith is the faith from verse 3 for which we were commanded to contend. It is most holy because it is utterly different and set apart from the philosophies of this world.

Second, there is prayer. They must pray in the Holy Spirit, for that is how the battle will be won. Not by our own clever arguments, but by the power of God and the power of prayer. It is likely that these

false teachers had given up on prayer as many so-called advanced Christians have done so today by their own admission.

Third, there is love. They must remain within the sphere of God's love. And we know it is possible to turn one's back on the love of God. Jesus in John 15:9 said I have loved you, abide in my love. John 15:10 says "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."

Fourth, there is hope. They must keep alive the fire of Christian hope. If we focus exclusively on that hope, then we will become otherworldly and forget the work we must do in this world. But perhaps the greater danger is not to focus enough on that hope so that the future element of Christianity becomes soft-peddled and Christianity itself becomes merely a social services organization.

Christians are in the world but not of the world. We are world denying in the sense that unlike the vast herds we do not live as if this world were all that there is. We are pilgrims just passing through and our lives must show it.

VERSES 22-23: And of some have compassion, making a difference: 23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Jude tells his readers that they are to have pity on some, those for which they can make a difference. This group most likely includes those who had been led astray rather than those who had been doing the leading. But in any event they are to exercise great care while getting along side them lest they themselves become defiled. They are to retain their hatred of the sin even as they love the sinner.

What does Jude mean by the clothing stained by corrupted flesh? See Isaiah 64:6. ("But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.") Also, there is a continuing parallel here from Zechariah 3, where in verse 3 we are told that Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and in verse 4 the angel says "Take away the filthy garments from him." (See also Revelation 3:4, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.")

Jude here uses the word flesh in precisely the same way that Paul uses the word. It means the human nature made by God and made for God, but which has fallen out of harmony with God.

VERSES 24-25: Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,  
25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

These verses contain the closing doxology. Twice Paul was driven to his knees in praise in his letters as he considered the might of God. (Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:20) Here too Jude ends his letter with heartfelt adoration to the one who is able to keep you from falling.

True, he has told them that they must keep themselves in the love of God, but he uses a different word here. He uses a word that means to guard. We must watch that we stay close to the Lord, but only he can guard us so that we do not stumble.

In the midst of difficult company, turbulent thinking, and the questioning of moral standards, it is only the Lord who can preserve us and guard us.

But God can do even more than that. He will set us up or make us stand before his glorious presence in Heaven where will be found faultless or without blame. The word used there is a sacrificial word. Only the faultless sacrifice is fit for God. God has no charge to lay against those in Jesus Christ, the lamb without blemish or spot.

"This doxology is truly magnificent in its conception and its scope." It is truly cause for great and exceeding joy! And, as surprising as it might seem to some, that is how this letter about false teachers ends – with great joy. If God is for us, who can be against us?