

THE BOOK OF JUDE

by

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THE LETTER OF JUDE

Often neglected, the little letter of Jude (originally with just enough content to fill a couple sheets of papyrus) is an exhortation for insiders. Though its tone is polemical, its audience is not an external group. Instead, it is a warning to those “called” and “beloved” (1, 3, 17, and 20).¹ Clearly, there is a threat, but it comes from folk who are attached to the Christian community, since the author speaks of them as having “slipped in” (4) so that they participate in the Christian love-feasts (12a) while following leaders who are false shepherds (12b). Inside the community, their fault-finding and arrogance (16) threatens to divide Christians from each other (19). Deep ideological differences about orthodox faith (3), sexual mores (4, 6-8a) and spiritual authority (8b) become weapons of intimidation (10). Hence, though the Letter of Jude is ancient, it is surprisingly relevant for modern Christians, who live in a world where fundamental realignments threaten to alter “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (3).

Introductory Issues

The Letter of Jude, despite its brevity, raises more than its fair share of introductory questions.

Author and Date

The author identifies himself as Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (1a). The form “Jude” often is adopted in English Bible translations as a distinction between others with the name Judas. Though, no doubt, the description “Judas the brother of James” was clear enough to the first readers, the identification is not as helpful as one might wish for modern readers. In the first place, both names are common enough.² Jesus had a half-brother named Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3), but he also chose an apostle named Judas (Lk. 6:16; Ac. 1:13) who was different than Judas Iscariot (Jn. 14:22). In addition, there was an early Christian leader named Judas Barsabbas (Ac. 15:22, 27, 32). Furthermore, there were several early Christians named James, including another half-brother of Jesus (Ga. 1:19; 2:9) and two apostles, one the son of Alphaeus (Mt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18) and the other the son of Zebedee (Mt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19).

Since the author of the letter seems to distinguish himself from “the apostles of our Lord” (17), and also, since he seems to prefer the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (rather than the Septuagint),³ and yet further, since Jesus’ had two half-

¹ The NIV renders the term ἀγαπητοί (= beloved) as “dear friends”.

² The name Judas derives from the tribal name of Judah, while the name James derives from Jacob. Both were extremely popular as ancestral patronymics.

³ R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp. 136-137.

brothers named James and Judas, most interpreters believe the reference to “Jude” and “James” places Jude in the family of Jesus.⁴ Typically, one identifies oneself by reference to one’s father, not one’s brother, so in cases where a brother is mentioned, one should assume that the brother was particularly well-known. James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, fits this criterion. Should one ask why a half-brother of Jesus might not point out his relationship with Christ, it can only be suggested that modesty may be the determinative factor. If the Letter of James also was written by a half-brother of Christ (which is likely), then both half-brothers describe themselves as “slaves” of Jesus (Ja. 1:1; Jude 1:1), brothers who at one time doubted Jesus’ heavenly claims (Jn. 7:2-5) but who later became his devoted followers. Certainly Jesus’ half-brothers and their families were given considerable respect in the early church, even though they were not apostles (cf. Ac. 12:17; 15:13ff; 21:18; 1 Co. 9:5; Ga. 1:19; 2:9, 12). Eusebius (AD 260?—340?) records the ancient tradition of Hegesippus that Jude’s grandchildren were examined by the Emperor Domitian (late 90s AD) and that they were leaders in the churches on into the time of Emperor Trajan.⁵ Presumably, this refers to the churches in Palestine, though churches among the diaspora cannot be ruled out.⁶

If one accepts the conclusion that the author is Jude, Jesus’ half-brother, then the date of the letter could be as early as the mid-1st century, making it one of the earliest documents in the New Testament.⁷ If the half-brothers of Jesus were older than him,⁸ one would hesitate to put the correspondence much later than about 80 AD. If they were younger, a period late in the 1st century is still plausible.

Readers

The first readers of the letter are unknown. No internal indications specify a destination, and while the letter appeals to apocalyptic literature that would have been familiar to Jewish Christian readers (e.g., *Assumption of Moses*, *1 Enoch*); the type of heresy opposed seems easily compatible with a Gentile culture. Bauckham’s conclusion is probably best: “perhaps we should think of a

⁴R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 749. Of course, a number of historical-critical scholars, while conceding that Jude the half-brother of Jesus is intended in the salutation, also argue that the letter is pseudonymous, since the reference to the “words formerly spoken by the apostles” (17) could be construed to suggest a time later than the apostolic period, cf. R. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1971), p. 161; W. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), pp. 427-429. However, this reference may mean no more than that the author’s audience were the apostles’ converts, not some later generation of believers, cf. D. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), p. 867.

⁵*Ecclesiastical History* III.xix-xx.

⁶Early church tradition indicates that Jesus’ family preached the gospel in Galilee and Judea as well as in other parts of the world, cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* I.vii.14

⁷R. Bauckham, *ABD* (1992) 3.1101.

⁸Of course, the debated question about Jesus’ “brothers” (whether later children of Joseph and Mary, former children of Joseph only, or cousins) still is unresolved, cf. H. Jacobs, *ISBE* (1979) I.551-552.

predominantly, but not exclusively, Jewish-Christian community in a gentile environment”.⁹

Infiltrators

While many commentators have attempted to connect Jude’s opponents with some type of gnosticism,¹⁰ Brown is probably correct in saying that such conclusions arise from doubtful assumptions about how wide-spread gnosticism was in the 1st century.¹¹ What clearly is in view is a type of antinomianism and libertinism, though certainly such thought may have contributed to the development of gnosticism.

The objects of Jude’s diatribe, possibly itinerant preachers, rejected the sovereign lordship of Christ (4, 8). In its place, they claimed an authority by dreams (8) and natural instinct (19). That such traveling charismatics became a challenge to the early churches is clear enough from the letters of John (1 Jn. 4:1-3) as well as from early Christian literature.¹² In the end, they turned grace into a license (4) for sexual deviation (6-8), flouting church authority (8, 10) and bragging about their own superiority (16).

Relationship with 2 Peter

It has long been recognized that there are striking similarities between sections of 2 Peter and Jude, so much so, that it is common for commentaries to treat them both in a single volume. Both the content and order of the subjects addressed in the two letters are so similar, many scholars are convinced there is a literary relationship between the two.

2 Peter	Jude	Subjects
2:1-3	4	<i>False teachers whose condemnation was predicted</i>
2:5	5	<i>God’s ancient judgments on ungodly people</i>
2:4, 6	6-7	<i>Judgments of rebel angels and Sodom & Gomorrah</i>
2:10-11	8-9	<i>Flouting authority and slandering celestial beings</i>
2:12	10	<i>Living by instinct like brute beasts</i>
2:15, 13	11-12a	<i>Joining in Christian meals while following Balaam</i>

⁹ Bauckham, *ABD* (1992) 3.1102.

¹⁰ See, for instance, G. Krodel, “Jude,” *Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation [PC]*, ed. G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 93.

¹¹ Brown, pp. 758-759. Further, the appeal to gnosticism may well reflect a tendency to support an early 2nd century date and pseudonymous authorship, both of which are unnecessary.

¹² The *Didache* has been variously dated by scholars, ranging from the last quarter of the 1st century to the 1st quarter of the second. In it is a straightforward warning about itinerant preachers claiming to have a charismatic word from the Lord, and the instruction limits their visits to no more than a couple days and warns that if they ask for money they are to be discounted. The advice is, “Yet not every one that speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord. From his ways, therefore, the false prophet and the prophet shall be recognized”, cf. *Didache* 11.

2:17	12b-13	<i>Empty sources whose destiny is blackest darkness</i>
2:18	16	<i>Braggarts following their own lustful desires</i>
3:2	17	<i>Recalling the words of the apostles and prophets</i>
3:3	18	<i>Scoffers in the last days</i>

This many parallelisms in very much the same order can hardly be coincidental. To be sure, each letter offers its own voice, but nonetheless, it is hard to doubt that there is some type of relationship between them, especially with the very close verbal agreements. If there is a literary dependency, then there are three options: first, 2 Peter could be earlier and Jude drew from it; second, Jude could be earlier and 2 Peter drew from it; third, both letters could have drawn from the same independent source. The first of these options, though once popular, has now been discounted by almost all scholars. The third option of an independent common source to both has some support, but in the absence of any such extant document, the theory can only be regarded as speculative. By far most scholars are of the opinion that Jude is the earlier of the two letters and that 2 Peter draws from Jude. This conclusion is largely based on literary style, in which Jude's complex midrash¹³ seems more likely to be original.¹⁴

Canon

Canonization is the process by which Christians in the early centuries collected and recognized those documents that carry final authority for the life of the church. This process consisted of several stages. First, Christian writings were not composed for private devotion but for public reading, and increasingly, they were read alongside the accepted documents of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Some of the letters, for instance, from the beginning were intended for sharing (Ga. 1:2; Col. 4:16; Ep. 1:1; Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1; Rev. 1:11). With such use and exchange, it was inevitable that collections would be made by local congregations. Collection and exchange meant copying texts originally composed for others. By the mid-2nd century, Justin Martyr could describe the Christian worship service in such general terms as including reading and preaching from the apostles and prophets, and the assumption is that this was typical throughout the empire.¹⁵ Such Christian writings were already being called "Scripture" (cf. 2 Pe. 3:15-16).¹⁶ While at this early period a "New Testament", as

¹³ Midrash is a Jewish style of interpreting biblical passages with the goal of instruction and edification. Though the word itself appears twice in the Old Testament (2 Chr. 13:22; 24:27), it came into its own as a distinctive style of interpretation among the Jewish rabbis of the 2nd temple period in which canonical texts were commented on to make them relevant to a contemporary audience.

¹⁴ Bauckham, *ABD* (1992) 3.1100.

¹⁵ *First Apology*, 66-67.

¹⁶ 2 *Clement* specifically quotes Mark 2:17 as "scripture" (2:4), and he quotes other New Testament documents in a similar fashion (3:2; 6:1-2; 11:5-7).

such, did not yet exist, such citations at the same time imply a reverence for the Christian writings as carrying authority, since they are cited in the same way as passages from the Torah and Prophets.

Of course, there were many Christian writings—far more than the twenty-seven books that comprise our New Testament. Hence, canonization also included the process of recognition and selection. Some texts, like the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, were accepted in some churches (primarily in the west) but not in others,¹⁷ and in the end did not receive the full recognition of all the churches. Therefore, they were not canonized. Some of the earliest lists of New Testament documents, like the Muratorian Fragment, list most of our New Testament but not everything.¹⁸ To say that the missing books were not listed is not quite the same as saying they were rejected. It is unclear how widely spread all the documents were at this early period.¹⁹

This process of recognition and selection has a direct bearing upon the Letter of Jude, since Jude was listed by Eusebius (early 4th century) among those documents that were “spoken against” by some churches.²⁰ Of course, if Jude was a source for 2 Peter, it surely had considerable status rather early in at least some quarters. By the late 4th century, Jude appears alongside all the others in the full list of the 27 books of the New Testament compiled by Athanasius in his 39th Easter letter.²¹ Though Martin Luther had some reservations (he listed Jude along with James, Hebrews and Revelation at the end of his German Bible as having somewhat lesser quality), the church as a whole in all its branches has continued to recognize the canonicity of Jude.

¹⁷ Both appear, for instance, in Codex Sinaiticus, which also includes the Septuagint and all the other books of the New Testament.

¹⁸ The Muratorian Fragment includes some 22 of the 27 documents of the New Testament, but it does not have 1 and 2 Peter, 3 John, Hebrews or James.

¹⁹ The Muratorian Fragment is traditionally dated at the end of the 2nd century, and it is believed by many to be the earliest existing list of Christian scriptures. However, debates about the date of the Muratorian Fragment continue, and the issue is far from resolved, cf. G. Hahneman, “The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon,” *The Canon Debate*, ed. L. MacDonald and J. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2002), pp. 405-415.

²⁰ Eusebius distinguished between three categories of books: 1) those universally acknowledged, 2) those disputed, and 3) those spurious. Jude, along with James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Hebrews and Revelation were included in the second category with explanation that they were recognized by the majority of churches, but not all, cf. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), pp. 198-199. The primary objection against Jude seems to have been his citation of the pseudepigraphical literature, cf. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew 17:30* and Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 4.

²¹ Athanasius letter is generally acknowledged as containing the earliest full list of the 27 books of the New Testament identical to what has come down to us through the ages. The Festal Letters were composed after the Council of Nicea (AD 325) decided, in view of the controversy over the date of Easter, that the bishop of Alexandria would announce to his fellow bishops each year the date for the following Easter (which Athanasius did from AD 329-373). In his 39th letter, Athanasius set forth the recognized listing of Old and New Testament books, cf. L. MacDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1995), pp. 220-222.

Commentary

In a letter as short as Jude, structure plays less of a role than in a longer treatise. Nonetheless, Jude can be divided into five major sections, the middle being the longest:

- Address and Greeting (1-2)
- Occasion (3-4)
- Warnings and Analogues of Divine Judgment (5-19)
 - The Exodus (5)
 - Deviant Angels (6)
 - Sodom and Gomorrah (7)
 - Michael and Satan (8-10)
 - Cain (11a)
 - Balaam (11b)
 - Korah (11c)
 - First Diatribe against Heretics (12-13)
 - Enoch's Prophecy (14-15)
 - Second Diatribe (16)
 - The Apostles' Prediction (17-18)
 - Third Diatribe (19)
- Appeal (20-23)
- Doxology (24-25)

The vigor of Jude's letter derives not only from his punctuated style, but also from his unique vocabulary²² as well as his use of external sources that seem to have been chosen for their powers of association.

Address (1-2)

Jude's address is simple and straightforward. It follows the general stereotype of 1st century letters, naming the sender and the recipient and offering a blessing. While Jude does not specify a particular church, the nature of the letter suggests he has a particular situation in mind. It has been traditional to take this absence of naming a particular church in a known city as indicative that Jude was writing generally to all Christians everywhere, and hence, that this is a "catholic" epistle (addressed to all).²³ Bauckham and others have argued persuasively against

²² Jude contains no less than 14 *hapax legomena* (words found only once in the New Testament), remarkable in such a short letter, and three more words that are found elsewhere only in 2 Peter in sections that parallel Jude and presumably were drawn from Jude, cf. R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), p. 6.

²³ Bo Reicke may be taken as representative, cf. B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 191, 194.

this conclusion, however, and the specificity of the comments in the letter seems more applicable to a particular situation.²⁴

Jude identifies himself as a *δοῦλος* (= slave) of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. While this puts him in the family of Jesus, it does not presume upon his familial relationship for added authority. Others might call him a “brother of the Lord” (cf. 1 Co. 9:5), but Jude refrains.

He addresses his readers as “called”, “loved in God the Father”, and “kept of Jesus Christ”.²⁵ This triadic description may well derive from the Servant Songs in Isaiah, where Israel is described in just this way (*called*, Is. 41:9; 42:6; 48:12, 15; 49:1; *loved*, 42:1; 43:4; *kept*, 42:6; 49:8).²⁶ Christians long have interpreted Isaiah’s figure of the Servant of Yahweh as an extended double entendre, referring both to the exiled nation of Israel and also to the messianic representative who embodies the true ideal of Israel. If so, then this in turn may reflect upon Jude’s language that Christians are loved “in” God and kept “of” Jesus Christ. They are the remnant to whom the promises are fulfilled, loved just as Christ himself is loved by the Father, and guarded until that day when Christ shall complete his eschatological purpose in their salvation. This language is very similar to the description in John’s Apocalypse of those who are “called, chosen and faithful” (Rev. 17:14).

To this remnant—Christians who have put their faith in Jesus the Messiah—Jude offers a triadic blessing of abundant mercy, peace and love. Because of God’s mercy, Christians have peace within and are eager to show love toward everyone. Such a blessing is typically Jewish (cf. 2 Baruch, 78:3), but doubtless it was read by the first readers in a Christian context.

Occasion (3-4)

Oddly enough, Jude never intended to write this letter. He wanted to write an altogether different letter focusing on the blessings of salvation that believers have in common. However, a virulent strain of false teaching drove him to suspend this more irenic letter and substitute instead a communication of stern warning and urgent appeal. Once again, such a change implies that Jude was writing out of a specific circumstance rather than generally. Hence, the present letter, while bearing

²⁴ Bauckham, *Jude*, pp. 8-11.

²⁵ Jude’s use of the dative “loved in God the Father” and the genitive “kept of Jesus Christ” are unusual. Some translations take the dative in an instrumental sense (“loved *by* God, cf. NIV), but most simply leave it alone (so RSV, NASB, ESV) or else expand the translation (“who live in the love of God”, cf. NEB or “who have found love in God”, cf. NAB). The genitive expression has also been taken by some translators as instrumental (“kept *by* Jesus Christ”, cf. NIV), but others follow the eschatological sense of being kept *for* Jesus Christ (so RSV, ESV, NASB).

²⁶ Bauckham, *Jude*, p. 25.

the marks of unpleasantness, was a critical expedient. He “had to write [out of] necessity”.²⁷

This necessity was that his readers would fight²⁸ for the faith once-for-all given to God’s holy people (cf. 2 Ti. 4:7). By “the faith” Jude refers to the Christian apostolic tradition, the body of belief that Christians everywhere embrace.²⁹ This is similar to the language of Paul, who speaks of “the faith” in just this way (Ga. 1:23; Phil. 1:27). That the “gospel” and the “form of Christian teaching” and the apostolic “tradition” was established early seems clear enough from Paul’s letters (Ro. 6:17; 1 Co. 15:1-4; Ga. 1:8-9; 1 Th. 2:13; 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6, 14; 1 Ti. 3:9; 4:1, 6; 6:20-21; 2 Ti. 1:13-14; 4:7). While at this early period there was nothing comparable to the Apostles’ Creed or the other creedal statements that would come later, there certainly was a fixed body of teaching that all Christians everywhere were supposed to embrace and accept as normative. Maintaining the pure gospel was therefore an ongoing struggle, since forces of disruption and distortion continually threatened. Jude, no doubt, would have agreed with John that anyone who “runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God” (2 Jn. 9). At the same time, it is equally clear that Jude is concerned with more than just doctrinal precision. His letter focuses on the moral character of his opponents, suggesting that the Christian “tradition” consists of both right teaching and right behavior. The one without the other is inadequate.

Hence, Jude uses the language of the passing on of established tradition. The verb *παραδιδωμι* (= to hand down, entrust) is especially used of passing on something to succeeding generations.³⁰ Jude’s use of the term *ἄπαξ* (= once-for-all, pertinent to a single occurrence, decisively unique) is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe the singularity of the sacrifice of Christ (He. 9:26, 28; 1 Pe. 3:18). The establishment of fixed Christian teaching was comparable to the death of Christ. It was “once delivered” (KJV) to the saints. This teaching must not be changed. The “saints” (= holy ones) who receive it are not super-Christians—as though it were reserved for apostles and martyrs—but all Christians everywhere. This is the standard by which authentic Christianity must be judged. Anything less is unacceptable.

²⁷ M. Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 158. Some commentators have suggested that Jude only intended to write a single letter, but this explanation seems forced and does not suit the language as well, cf. Bauckham, *Jude*, pp. 29-30.

²⁸ *ἐπαγωνίζομαι*, used only here in the New Testament, is often an athletic term referring to contending with an opponent, cf. *BDAG* (2000) p. 356.

²⁹ The word *πίστις* without the definite article generally refers to trust or belief. When used with the definite article, as here, it refers to the body of Christian teaching.

³⁰ *BDAG* (2000) p. 763.

Infiltrators of low morality³¹ had sneaked into the Christian community.³² In ancient times,³³ such deceivers were already anticipated and their doom marked out. Their insidious teaching perverted God's grace into moral permissiveness. Properly speaking, divine grace embodied in the Christian message is God's compassionate gift of forgiveness to the sinner, but these imposters had turned God's grace into a justification for immorality, especially sexual immorality,³⁴ a behavior Jude will take up in more detail later. In so doing, they had denied Christ Jesus, forsaking his sovereign lordship³⁵ for other loyalties. Their denial of Christ's ethical teachings about sexual purity was, in fact, a denial of Christ himself! One cannot defy the teachings of Jesus about morality and still claim to be his follower (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; Lk. 6:43-46; Tit. 1:16).

Warnings and Analogues of Divine Judgment (5-19)

The body of Jude's letter consists of a midrash on the theme of divine judgment. Midrash was a Jewish method of interpreting sacred texts in order to make them contemporary and relevant.³⁶ Here, Jude weaves together the words of older texts into his own newer text, a process sometimes called "intertexture".³⁷ Such intertexture evokes emotive associations as well as intellectual content. Jude's texts include not only passages from the Torah and the Prophets, but also from 1 Enoch and the Assumption of Moses.³⁸ He also includes a citation that may

³¹ ἀσεβής = irreverent, impious, ungodly; this is a favorite word for Jude in describing his opponents, and forms of it appear no less than six times in this short letter (cf. 14-15, 18).

³² Once again, this verb is found only here in the New Testament. In other Greek literature, it carries the idea of creeping error or finding a loophole, cf. *BDAG* (2000) p. 774.

³³ The expression οἱ πάλαι προγεγραμμένοι (= the ones of old previously written about) has been interpreted to refer to 1) a heavenly record, such as, the "books" described in Jewish apocalyptic in which the destiny of individuals were recorded in advance, cf. J. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), pp. 250-251, or 2) the prediction of other Christians about the coming of false teachers (cf. Ac. 20:29-30; 1 Ti. 4:1-3; 2 Ti. 3:13; 2 Pe. 2:1—3:4), or 3) the predictions in pre-Christian writings, whether the Old Testament or other Jewish literature, cf. Bauckham, *Jude*, p. 36. Such anticipations are to be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for instance, cf. 1QS 4.9-14 (for an English translation, see M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr. & E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 130-131. The NEB offers a dynamic equivalency based upon the last option ("the very men whom Scripture long ago marked down"), though Jude may also have in mind writings other than the canonical Scriptures to judge by his later use of 1 Enoch.

³⁴ The term ἀσέλγεια (= lack of self restraint) in other Greek literature regularly carries the connotation of sexual excesses and indecent conduct, cf. *BDAG* (2000) p. 141.

³⁵ The NIV uses the expression "sovereign and Lord" to translate the titles δεσπότης (= master of slaves) and κύριος (= lord). By emphasizing that Christ Jesus is the *only* Master and Lord, Jude implies that these heretics had substituted another in his place. Because elsewhere the term δεσπότης is used only of God the Father, some translations, following a later Greek textual tradition, have inserted the word "God" into the text (so KJV, NKJV), but most English versions follow the earliest textual tradition that does not have the word God.

³⁶ Various early midrashes existed, both within the Hebrew Bible, in intertestamental Jewish literature, among the rabbis and at Qumran, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.818-821.

³⁷ DeSilva, pp. 800-806, 871-873.

³⁸ Some scholars also see connections with the pseudepigraphical Testament of Naphtali and Testament of Asher as well as the Genesis Apocryphon in the Dead Seas Scrolls (1QapGen), but these references are obscure enough to be debatable.

be from St. Paul. Jude introduces this employment of ancient texts by standard formulae, such as, δέ (= “but”, 9), ὅτι (= “that” or “because”, 5, 11) and λέγειν (= “saying”, 14, 18). He also shifts the tense back and forth from past (5-7a) to present (8) to past (9) to present (10) to past (11) to present (12) to past (15) to present (16) to future (18) to present (19).³⁹ Jude assumes that his readers will be well-enough acquainted with such texts to appreciate their rhetorical value as he brings them to bear upon the current debacle he opposes.

While Jude’s use of canonical scripture has long been appreciated, his use of non-canonical texts has been a source of discomfort. Discounting Tertullian’s (early 3rd century) advocacy that 1 Enoch should be canonized simply because Jude quoted it,⁴⁰ Christians still have struggled to know why Jude used such non-canonical material. Granted, the canon of the New Testament certainly was not fixed by his time, but the early Christians seem to have displayed no significant tension with the general Jewish conclusions about which Hebrew writings carried canonical authority.⁴¹ Of course, it must be pointed out that Jude does not stand alone in making use of non-canonical Jewish sources.⁴² Paul even quotes Greek literature on rare occasions.⁴³ Nonetheless, such usage, at the very least, calls for some attention.

Did Jude consider these works to be revelations from God, or did he only appeal to them as sources for illustrative material? Very conservative commentators are content to observe that Jude does not label them “scripture”,⁴⁴ but to be fair, Jude does not use such terms for his allusions to the Torah or Prophets, either, so such an observation has limited value. 1 Enoch, at least, was highly valued by various early Christians.⁴⁵ At the minimum, we must concede that the early Christians were open to a wider use of traditional texts than we might assume today. Later, when such materials became fodder for unrestrained teachings, Christian leaders like Augustine discounted them as “fables” containing “many false statements”, though he conceded that they might also contain “some

³⁹ Other hallmarks of midrash can be enumerated as well, cf. E. Ellis, “Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Jude,” *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 221-226.

⁴⁰ Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, I.iii.

⁴¹ E. Ellis, “The Old Testament Canon in the Early Church” *Mikra*, ed. M. Mulder and H. Sysling (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 2004), pp. 655ff.

⁴² For other references in the New Testament to such works as the Ascension of Isaiah, Baruch, 1 Enoch, 1 Esdras, Judith, 1, 2, 3 & 4 Maccabees, Psalms of Solomon, Sirach, Susanna, Tobit, and the Wisdom of Solomon, see the “Index of Allusions and Verbal Parallels” in *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed., ed. B & K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. Martini and B. Metzger (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2001), pp. 900-901.

⁴³ Aratus, *Phaenomena* 5 (Ac. 17:28); Epimenides, *de Oraculis* (Tit. 1:12); Menander, *Thais*, 218 (1 Co. 15:33).

⁴⁴ E. Blum, “Jude,” *EBC* (1981) 12.393.

⁴⁵ The *Epistle of Barnabas* iv (early 2nd century) appeals to 1 Enoch alongside Daniel, while Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century), *Fragments from Cassiodorus* ii.21, states that by quoting it Jude validates the prophecy in 1 Enoch.

truth”, and uses Jude’s quotation of 1 Enoch as an example.⁴⁶ In the end, the modern Christian must be content to accept that Jude, not to mention various other New Testament writers, employed textual material they considered to be valid, whether canonical or not. One might speculate about whether inspiration should be extended to the whole or even any part of such works, but at least there seems to be no cogent reason for denying that early Christians were comfortable citing them.

The Exodus (5)

Jude’s first example of divine judgment, something especially compelling if his first readers were Jewish Christians, comes from the exodus. Salvation out of Egypt held no unconditional guarantee for the future. In instance after instance, rebel groups from within the rescued community were judged and destroyed, some by execution (Ex. 32:27-28; Nu. 25:4-9), some by fire (Lv. 10:1-2; Nu. 11:1-3), some by stoning (Lv. 24:23; Nu. 15:36), some by plague (Ex. 14:37; Nu. 16:49), some by being swallowed up alive (Nu. 16:31-33), some by snakes (Nu. 21:6), and in the end, the entire original community aged 20 and older barring Joshua and Caleb (Nu. 14:29-35). It is this latter incident at Kadesh-Barnea, especially, that probably stood out in Jude’s mind, since it was regularly held up as the occasion of unbelief par excellence (cf. Dt. 1:32; 9:23; Ps. 106:24; He. 3:19; 4:2). All these occasions were prefaced by the ominous words of Yahweh:

Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ...when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. Exodus 32:33-34

Deviant Angels (6)

Jude’s second example of judgment concerns fallen angels, and he relies on the pseudepigraphical work of 1 Enoch, a book that dates to the general period of the Maccabean revolt (160s BC). 1 Enoch, in turn based upon Genesis 6, describes a couple hundred angels that abandoned their natural state in order to indulge in sexual intercourse with human women (1 Enoch 6-11). The angelic “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2, led by their chief, Semyaz (also called Azaz’el), produced through this union a race of evil giants. This interpretation of the Genesis story accounts for the violence and evil that engulfed the world prior to Noah’s flood.⁴⁷ Several stock phrases/ideas from 1 Enoch are used by Jude:

[those] who have abandoned the high heaven, the holy eternal place, and have defiled themselves with women (1 Enoch 12:4)
angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned

⁴⁶ *The City of God*, xv.23.

⁴⁷ For an English translation of the text of 1 Enoch, see J. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) I.13ff.

their own home (Jude 6)

‘Throw him into the darkness!’ And he [Michael] made a hole in the desert and cast him [Azaz’el] there... And he covered his face in order that he may not see light, and in order that he may be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment (1 Enoch 10:4-6)

these he has kept in darkness (Jude 6)

Bind them for seventy generations underneath the rocks of the ground until the day of their judgment... In prison they will be locked up forever. They...will be bound together...unto the end of generations (1 Enoch 10:12-14)

bound with everlasting chains (Jude 6)

the great day of judgment (1 Enoch 10:6, 16:1; 22:4, 11)

the judgement of the great day (Jude 6)

Jude’s point, of course, is clear enough. If even angels are subject to judgment for their defiance of divine authority and sexual perversion, the same certainly would be true for those who defied Christ’s authority and used grace as a license for sexual indulgence. However one answers the question about the use of texts like 1 Enoch, Jude considered their moral lessons to be valuable.

Incidentally, Jude here plays upon the verb *τηρέω* (= to keep). Believers are “kept” by Jesus Christ (1b), whereas the fallen angels, by contrast, did not “keep” their positions (6a), and as a judgment, they are now “kept” in darkness to await final judgment (6b).

Sodom and Gomorrah (7)

Jude’s third example, also from Genesis, recalls God’s judgment on Sodom, Gomorrah and the cities of the plain (Ge. 19). The sexual perversion of the deviant angels in Genesis 6 was comparable to (*ὡς* = as, like, similar to) the sexual perversion of the Sodomites in Genesis 19. Jude describes this perversion as “indulging in illicit sexual relations” (*εκπορνεύω*) and “going after different flesh” (*σαρκὸς ἑτέρας*). While the reference to sexual immorality is general, given the reference to Genesis 19 it almost certainly would include homosexual acts. The attempt of the Sodomites to copulate with the two angels visiting Lot certainly was homosexual in orientation, since the citizens of Sodom did not perceive the visitors to be angels but only outsiders to the city (cf. Ge. 19:5).⁴⁸ Revisionist attempts by pro-gay interpreters to extract homosexual behavior out of Genesis 19, and subsequently out of Jude 7, are tendentious and require special pleading.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ R. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 87-88.

⁴⁹ Classical pro-gay works, like John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), pp. 97-98, relegate the story in Genesis 19 to only a lapse in ancient Near Eastern hospitality, but this interpretation simply cannot be upheld, cf. Gagnon, pp. 71-91.

The Sodomites, also, serve as examples of those reserved for eternal judgment. Just as Sodom paid the penalty in the explosion of fire and brimstone, so modern deviants will pay the penalty in the eternal fire that awaits those who reject God. The imagery of fire is a frequent feature in apocalyptic descriptions of the eternal state of the damned.⁵⁰

Michael and Satan (8-10)

Jude frames his discussion of Michael and Satan by direct references to the modern heretics. Like the unbelievers in the exodus and the rebel angels and the perverts of Sodom, the modern infiltrators depend upon false dreams (cf. Dt. 13:1-3; Je. 23:25-29, 32; Zec. 10:2) by which they justify their defilement through sexual immorality. It seems clear enough that by “defilement” Jude has in mind sexual deviation, since this is the standard meaning of the term in parallel Jewish tradition.⁵¹ Not only do they defile themselves sexually, they reject the authority of Christ as Lord over the church,⁵² while casting aspersions toward God’s angels,⁵³ who mediated the Torah that condemns such deviations (Ac. 7:38, 53; He. 2:2, cf. Jubilees 1:29; Josephus, *Antiquities* 15:5.3.136).

The contention between Michael, the archangel, and the spiritual forces of evil begins in the Old Testament (Da. 10:13, 21; 12:1). However, it is in the intertestamental literature that this conflict takes on grand proportions and extends into the New Testament (cf. Rev. 12:7).⁵⁴ Michael is one of the four (or sometimes seven) archangels to whom was conveyed the judgment of the fallen angels, and he was appointed to carry the souls of the ancients to heaven.⁵⁵ It is in this context that Jude recalls the contention between Michael and Satan over the deceased Moses, an expansion of the story recounted in Deuteronomy 34:1-6. Here, Jude draws from an ancient work no longer available to us except in a late, fragmented form traditionally titled the *Assumption of Moses*.⁵⁶ Further, we do not have the original

⁵⁰ This language, absent in the Old Testament, describes a place of “burning flame” and “raging, undying fire” (1 Enoch 90:26-27; 103:7; 108:3; 2 Baruch 85:13; Apocalypse of Abraham 14:5; Sibylline Oracles 1:100-103; Apocalypse of Peter 1-6; Apocalypse of Paul 31-42).

⁵¹ For instance, 1 Enoch uses the term “defilement” to refer to what the fallen angels did by having intercourse with human women (1 Enoch 9:8; 10:11; 12:4; 15:3-4).

⁵² The expression *κυριότητα ἀθετοῦσιν* (= despise lordship) probably is to be connected ideologically to Jude’s earlier statement that the false teachers “deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (4b).

⁵³ The term *δόξας* (= glorious ones) is a Jewish way of talking about angels, attested in various Jewish literature (cf. 2 Enoch 22:7, 10; Ascension of Isaiah 9:32).

⁵⁴ For a general discussion of the growth of angelology in the intertestamental period, see D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pp. 240-254.

⁵⁵ M. Mach, *DDD* (1999) pp. 570-571.

⁵⁶ While we have an extant work called the *Testament of Moses* in the Pseudepigrapha, it has a mutilated ending and does not contain any passage describing what Jude describes. Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the so-called *Assumption of Moses* originally was part of this mutilated ending following 12:13 or another text altogether, cf. J. Priest, *ABD* (1992) 4.920. In any case, we do not currently possess an ancient copy. What we do possess is a

story to which Jude referred, though we know he drew from this work due to the testimony of several early church fathers.⁵⁷ He cites from this work that when Michael was sent by God to bury Moses, the archangel was opposed by Satan, who claimed that Moses' dead body, being matter, properly belonged to him, and further, that since Moses was a murderer (cf. Ex. 2:11-12), he had no right to heaven. Nonetheless, when Michael was confronted with such condemnations of Moses, he did not retaliate in his own authority. Rather, just as had been done in the vision of Zechariah, he deferred all rebuke to God himself (cf. Zec. 3:1-2). The point, of course, is that if even so great a figure as Michael, the archangel, did not flout the power of Satan, who is a force of evil, how much less should these false teachers flout the authority of God's angels, who mediated the Torah with its dire warnings against sexual perversion (cf. Lv. 18).

Still, the infiltrators blundered straight ahead, pouring out abuse on things they knew nothing about. They certainly ignored the angelic guardianship of the Torah. Their perception about heavenly things was so stunted (and later, Jude will say that they simply did not possess the Holy Spirit, cf. 19b), that they hardly knew anything at all about the true role of angels, despite arrogant claims to special knowledge. By contrast, the things they did know—which was brute sexual appetites comparable to that of animals—they championed to their own punishment!

Cain (11a)

The introductory “woe” is familiar from the Old Testament prophets as an invocation for divine judgment.⁵⁸ The same usage appears just as frequently in apocalyptic literature and the teachings of Jesus. The “way of Cain” derives from the biblical story of Cain's antagonism toward God (cf. Ge. 4:3-12). This story was magnified in later Jewish literature, which depicted Cain as the archetypal sinner, the teacher of sin to others, and the first heretic.⁵⁹ The false teachers were following Cain's footsteps, defying God and leading others astray.

6th century Latin text (discovered in 1861) that was obviously translated from Greek, and beyond that, perhaps from Hebrew or Aramaic., cf. G. Ladd, *ISBE* (1979) I.158.

⁵⁷ Origen, *De Principiis*, iii.2.1 in addition to references in Clement of Alexandria, Didymas, Gelasius, cf. J. Kelly, p. 265; Bauckham, *Jude*, pp. 67-74.

⁵⁸ A quick glance at the word “woe” in any standard Bible concordance will yield dozens of examples.

⁵⁹ Bauckham, pp. 79-80. In fact, in the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan, Cain is depicted as denying that there is any future judgment at all: “There is neither judgment nor judge; there is no other world; no good reward will be given to the good and no vengeance taken on the wicked,” cf. W. Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude [DBS]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 190.

Balaam (11b)

Balaam, the Mesopotamian prophet who attempted to curse Israel during their desert sojourn (Nu. 22-24),⁶⁰ was a typical ancient Near Eastern prophet for hire (Nu. 22:15-17; Dt. 23:4; Ne. 13:2). Though he failed in his attempt to curse Israel, Jewish tradition says he succeeded in showing the Moabites and Midianites how to seduce Israel into the Canaanite fertility cult, and hence, his influence lies behind the apostasy at Ba'al Peor (Nu. 25).⁶¹ Hence, Balaam is a particularly apt negative example of bad influence. The fact that Jude later says the false teachers work “for their own advantage” (16b), when read in light of the phrase “rushing for profit” (11b), reminds one of the warnings in the Didache (early 2nd century) about itinerant preachers who work the congregations for money.⁶²

Korah (11c)

Korah and his company (Nu. 16) rebelled against Moses' leadership, claiming they had as much right as he did to speak for God. Such rebellion, naturally, was schismatic, and it defied God's choice for leadership, just as the false teachers of Jude's day denied the sovereign lordship of Christ (4b) and divided the Christian community (19). That Jude says these infiltrators have “been destroyed” (2nd aorist form of ἀπόλυμι = to destroy) is probably an example of what has been called the “prophetic perfect”,⁶³ that is, putting a prediction about the future in the past tense to emphasize its absolute certainty.

First Diatribe against Heretics (12-13)

So far, Jude has addressed the infiltrators largely by analogues. Now, he launches into a direct, full-blown denunciation, blasting them with stinging condemnations.

In the first place, they were like hidden reefs just under the surface, but dangerous and deadly.⁶⁴ Their menace was all the more threatening, because they boldly associated with the Christians in their fellowship meals. The Christian “love

⁶⁰ Independent verification of Balaam's influence turned up when a plaster inscription discovered in 1967 at Deir 'Alla in the transjordan dating to about the 8th century BC names [Ba]laam [son of Be]or, seer of the gods”, cf. A. Lemaire, “Deir 'Alla Inscriptions,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 2.139.

⁶¹ Bauckham, p. 81.

⁶² *Didache* 11.

⁶³ See the discussion of culminative aorists verbs and gnomic aorist verbs in H. Dana and J. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 196-198.

⁶⁴ Here, we have followed the interpretation of σπιλάς (= rock) as referring to a rocky hazard hidden by waves (so NASB, ASV, JB, Weymouth, Phillips). This seems to be the most natural meaning of the word, and it fits well in the context, cf. Bauckham, p. 85. Σπιλάς is another of Jude's *hapax legomena*, and the other possibility, based on the traditional rendering in the Vulgate, is that it might refer to that which soils or stains, hence, blemished (so NIV, KJV, RSV, NEB, TEV, ESV, NAB), cf. *BDAG* (2000), p. 938.

feast” (ἀγάπη) was a common meal eaten by early Christians in connection with their worship, and because such a fellowship event fostered mutual affection and concern, it was called a love-feast.⁶⁵ These events the false teachers brazenly attended! Nevertheless, though they acted like pastors (and no doubt wanted to be recognized as pastors), they were like the ancient shepherds denounced by Ezekiel, who preyed on the flock and fed only themselves (cf. Eze. 34).

Jude fires four blistering metaphors at these imposters. They were like rainless clouds blowing across the horizon, full of empty promises (cf. Pro. 25:14). They were like fruit trees in the season of picking that bore no fruit—and worse, they were altogether dead! The language “twice dying, having been uprooted” drives home their uselessness. Not only are they fruitless, they are sapless, dead from the root upward. They were like a fierce tide continually producing dirty foam, leaving the residue of their scum on the beach when the tide recedes (cf. Is. 57:20). They were like shooting stars that burn out and are lost forever in the inky blackness of the night sky. The imagery of stars, which Jude calls “wandering” (again suggesting itinerant preachers), once more probably depends upon 1 Enoch, where the “stars”, representing fallen angels, are bound in a prison house (1 Enoch 18:14; 21:2, 6, 10). In the end, they would be consigned to blackest darkness. Of course, the imagery of fire alluded to previously (7b) and the imagery of blackness are not strictly compatible. Nonetheless, both images are combined in Jewish apocalyptic to describe God’s final judgment (e.g., 1 Enoch 103:7-8). In one passage, the description is of “black fire [that] blazes up perpetually” (2 Enoch 10:2), while in another, it is described as the “gloom of fire” (Sibylline Oracles 4.43).

Enoch’s Prophecy (14-15)

If Jude’s reference to wandering stars most likely derives from 1 Enoch, his reference to Enoch’s prophecy of the coming of the Lord certainly does, for he quotes from it directly.⁶⁶

Behold, he [God] will arrive with ten million [lit., ten thousand times a thousand]⁶⁷ of the holy ones in order to execute judgment upon all. He will destroy the wicked ones and censure all flesh on account of everything that they have done, that which the sinners and the wicked ones committed against him.

1 Enoch 1:9

⁶⁵ *BDAG* (2000) p. 7.

⁶⁶ The passage in 1 Enoch survives in Aramaic (4QEn^c 1:1:15-17), Ethiopic, Greek and Latin. The version quoted above comes from E. Isaac’s translation from Ethiopic, cf. Charlesworth, 1.13-14, though there is scholarly discussion about which version Jude actually quotes. For a discussion of these possibilities, see Bauckham, pp. 94-96. The NIV puts the passage in quotation marks to denote that Jude is quoting his source.

⁶⁷ The number here is a translation issue in which the more traditional understanding of the text is “ten thousand”.

Jude's designation of Enoch as "the seventh from Adam", while it may be derived from Genesis 5:1-18, is a phrase that clearly appears in 1 Enoch (60:8; 93:3). Equally clearly, Jude views this prophecy as legitimate, though it does not necessarily follow that he would have regarded the entire book as inspired. Nonetheless, judgment was coming! The repeating play upon the word ἄσεβεις (= impious, godless) is Jewish idiom; evil deeds are "godlessnesses", while those who commit them are "godless".⁶⁸ Hence, God would rebuke the godless sinners who commit godless works in a godless way while leveling slanders against Christ.

Second Diatribe (16)

Once more using language that evoked memories of the exodus narratives, Jude identifies the infiltrators as "discontented murmurers", recalling the children of Israel in the desert who murmured against Moses (cf. Ex. 15:24; 16:2; Nu. 14:2; 16:41). They follow their own wills rather than God's will, and they exalt themselves, paying compliments⁶⁹ in order to gain personal advantage.

The Apostles' Prediction (17-18)

While Jude was not included among the twelve apostles, nor so far as we can determine, among those outside the original twelve who also carried the title apostle, as a Christian leader he demonstrates deep respect for the apostolic tradition. He recalls that the apostles themselves had warned of end-time mockers, self-willed and godless deceivers. While we do not know whether Jude is appealing to oral or written tradition in this citation, nor does he name any particular apostle, his citation is very close to a passage from St. Paul: *The Spirit clearly says that in the latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come from hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron* (1 Ti. 4:1-2; cf. 2 Ti. 3:1-9, 13). Of course, Jude's letter may antedate the pastorals, but the idea of an eschatological apostasy was probably widely held, since it was a feature of Jewish apocalyptic, not to mention the teachings of Jesus (Mt. 24:10-12).

Third Diatribe (19)

Each of the diatribes begin with singling out the heretics as οὗτοι (= "these fellows", cf. 12, 16, 19). Here, Jude levels three accusations against them. First, they cause factions among Christians, probably by implicitly distinguishing between the "haves" from the "have nots". Second, they are dominated by the

⁶⁸ Bauckham, pp. 37-38.

⁶⁹ Lit., "admiring faces" (θαυμάζοντες πρόσωπα)

sensual life, not the spiritual life, whatever their claims. They are ψυχικοί (= soulish, natural, worldly), which by definition is the antithesis of being spiritual. Finally, they “do not have the Spirit”, even though in all likelihood they claimed to be “super-spiritual”.

Appeal (20-23)

Jude’s analogues of divine judgment lead directly to his final appeal, where he urges his readers to fight for their faith, which is being undermined. His fourfold directive is to the community; hence, he addresses them in the plural: *you* (plural), *beloved* (plural), *build up yourselves in your most holy faith* (20a). If the heretics are intent upon tearing the church apart, Christians of true faith must build it back together. Jude’s metaphorical description of “building” the church is similar to St. Paul’s (cf. 2:21-22), and it is clear that for Jude the foundation of the building is the gospel itself. Again, as in verse 3, the “most holy faith” is the core of Christian tradition handed down unchanged from the apostles and Christ himself.

The second directive sharply contrasts with the spiritual claims of the infiltrators, who “do not have the Spirit” (cf. 19b). Christians are to “pray in the Holy Spirit” (20b). The reference to praying ἐν πνεύματι (= in [the] Spirit), like Paul’s identical phraseology (Ro. 8:9; 9:1; 14:17; Ep. 5:18; Col. 1:8; 1 Th. 1:5; 1 Ti. 3:16), means praying so that the will of God, not human desire, drives the intercession (cf. Ro. 8:26-27; Ep. 6:18; Ga. 4:6). It is the Holy Spirit who perfectly understands the divine will. It is prayer under the influence of the Holy Spirit that desires what the Spirit desires and allows the Spirit to conform one’s human inclinations toward God’s purposes.⁷⁰

The third directive is that believers “keep” themselves in God’s love (21a). Already, they have been assured that they are “kept” by Jesus Christ (1), but Christ’s love for them calls for a response as well, and they must remain in the sphere of God’s love, just as Jesus taught (Jn. 15:9-10). Rebellion against God’s commands and remaining in the reciprocity of God’s love are mutually exclusive.

The fourth directive is eschatological, where “the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” refers to the *parousia* (21b). Since Christians already have been acquitted through the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus, they will be vindicated by his mercy in the great judgment at the end. “Waiting” for this vindication is the present lot of God’s people, who anticipate the coming of the Lord but do not know when it will happen.

⁷⁰ Pentecostal theologians sometimes have taken the phrases here and elsewhere about praying “in [the] Spirit” to mean praying in other tongues. This exegesis is doubtful, both for linguistic reasons (when referring to tongues, Paul speaks of praying τῷ πνεύματι = with the Spirit, not ἐν πνεύματι = in the Spirit, cf. 1 Co. 14:15) and for contextual reasons (there is nothing in the context to suggest that Jude intends other tongues).

The translation of 22-23a is very problematic, since significant textual variants exist from ancient times. Here are the primary textual witnesses:⁷¹

And have mercy [on] some, the waverers, and save some, snatching them from the fire; and [on] some have mercy with fear

(Codex Sinaiticus, 4th century, so RV, TEV, NIV, NASB, ASV, ESV, NRSV)

And have mercy [on] some, the waverers; save [them], snatching [them] from the fire; and [on] some have mercy with fear

(Codex Vaticanus, 4th century, so NEB)

And convince some, the waverers; save some by snatching them from the fire; and [on] some have mercy with fear

(Codex Alexandrinus, 5th century, so RSV, JB, NAB)

And have mercy [on] some, making a distinction; and others save with fear, snatching them from the fire

(Codex K, Codex L, Codex P, all 9th century, so KJV, Phillips)

And some snatch from the fire, and have mercy on the waverers with fear

(p72, 3rd or 4th century, so Moffat, Clement of Alexandria)

While the United Bible Society scholars have opted to follow the reading in Codex Sinaiticus, they only evaluate their conclusion as [C].⁷² Primarily at issue is whether the **διακρινόμενους** refer to either *those who waver*, *those who dispute*, or *those who are under judgment*, and further, whether Jude's readers are supposed to refute those in question or to have mercy on them. In other words, is Jude addressing the infiltrators themselves (in which case, his readers should refute the skeptical doubters, since they already are under judgment), or does he refer to those weaker church members who are being influenced by the infiltrators (where those who are confused should be treated with mercy and instruction). Most ancient texts, and hence most translators, follow this latter sense. It is reasonably clear, in either case, that Jude is concerned that whatever efforts are made, his readers must act with caution, since they are working to "snatch [them] from the fire". They must do so with godly fear for their own spiritual safety. The phrase "snatch from the fire" reflects upon Joshua, the high priest, who was described as "a burning stick snatched from the fire" in the face of Satan's accusation (cf. Zec. 3:2). Those saved from the fire would be rescued, as it were, at the last extremity.

⁷¹ Some of these variants concern spelling (either **ἐλεᾶτε** or **ἐλεεῖτε**, both of which = "to have mercy on"), and others are between the two foregoing verbs and **ἐλεγχετε** (= to convince, to refute). Finally, there is a variation between **διακρινόμενους** (= the ones wavering) and **διακρινόμενοι** (= to make a distinction). The translations vary widely.

⁷² The rating scale is as follow: [A] = virtual certainty; [B] = some degree of doubt; [C] = considerable degree of doubt; [D] very high degree of doubt, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. xxviii.

Their rescuers must be careful to maintain their own holiness and avoid contamination (23b).

The expression “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” would make perfect sense to a Jewish person, since it draws from the Torah’s impurity system (Lv. 12-15; Nu. 19). Israel’s impurity system stipulated that one could contract impurity by secondhand contamination, that is, by touching that which was impure. For Israel, this included such things as contact with the scale diseased person (Lv. 13-14), a woman in the birthing process (Lv. 12), the person with chronic genital flow (Lv. 15), and a corpse (Nu. 19). While Jude’s reference to a tunic soiled from the flesh here must bear a symbolic meaning, it is clear enough that his frame of reference is Israel’s impurity system, though by analogy he intends spiritual contamination from the heretics.⁷³

Doxology (24-25)

Jude concludes his letter by reaffirming what he said at the beginning—that in spite of the dangers at hand, God is able to keep his people from falling (24, cf. 1). Earlier, Jude urged his readers to keep themselves in God’s love (21), where the word for “keep” (τηρέω) carries the nuance of “keeping watch over”. Here, however, he uses the word φυλασσω (= to guard, defend). Michael Green offers the perceptive comment that there is a difference between the two. As Christians, “we must watch that we stay close to the Lord, but only He can guard us so that we do not stumble.”⁷⁴ Not only can God keep us from stumbling, he is able to present us before his glorious presence at the end (cf. Col. 1:22)—and in jubilation! That we will be presented unblemished is the language of sacrifice, that is, that since God requires unblemished offerings, Christians will be accepted by God as well.

To God our wise Savior, who alone is truly God, glory is to be given through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷⁵ The fourfold glorification—glory, greatness (or majesty), might (or power) and authority—is rightfully due him, both in the eternal past (lit., “before all the age”) and in the eternal future (lit., “now and unto all the ages”). A final “amen” sets the seal upon this confident affirmation.

⁷³ For more on Israel’s purity system, see the extensive treatment in J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-15 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 742-1009.

⁷⁴ Green, p. 190.

⁷⁵ The KJV following the Byzantine text (9th century and later) does not include the phrase “through Jesus Christ our Lord”. However, the phrase appears in all the earliest manuscripts, and the NKJV has offered an annotation to the effect that the phrase appears in the current critical editions of the Greek text.