JUDE: Recognizing The Danger Among Us

What is the biggest threat to the church today? Do the most serious dangers lurk in the culture, the government, or somewhere closer to home?

One of the shortest books of the Bible gives us an answer to those questions. Jude, the 26th book of the New Testament, sounds an alarm about false teachers that is repeated by Christ in His last words to the church (Rev. 2:1–3:22).

In the following pages, Bill Crowder, RBC director of church ministries, focuses on 25 often overlooked verses of the Bible that no member of the church can afford to ignore.

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TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

In the early days of television, game shows were in their prime. One of the most popular shows was called Truth Or Consequences. According to an online encyclopedia: The idea of the show was to mix the original quiz element of game shows with wacky stunts. On the show, people had to answer trivia questions correctly before “Beulah the Buzzer” was sounded. If the contestant could not complete the “Truth” portion, there would be “Consequences,” usually a zany and embarrassing stunt (www.answers.com/topic/truth-or-consequences). The idea of watching good-natured people face hilarious consequences made for a long-running series. From its first television airing in 1950 until its last program in 1974, Truth Or Consequences put a fun twist to a well-known principle of life.

In life, however, consequences for not knowing or acting on the truth can be more serious than fun.

VALUING TRUTH

The Bible was written in times of cultural and religious pluralism. The first-century Roman world was in many ways like our own. It was a day of numerous gods and competing religious groups.

In this setting, the first followers of Christ talked to one another about the consequences of not following the truth their Teacher entrusted to them.

One of the opposing philosophies they ran into...
was an early form of Gnosticism. The name comes from the Greek term *gnosis*, meaning knowledge, and represents a belief-system that promoted the idea of a secret knowledge reserved for insiders.

The characteristics of Gnosticism show why it was a problem for the early church.

1. Gnostics claimed a secret knowledge that undercut the good news that was publicly declared and openly debated.
2. Gnostics gave their members a license to sin by emphasizing a spirituality that diminished the importance of what was done with the body.
3. Gnostics viewed Christ as being more like an angel than a member of the Godhead.

Today, almost 2,000 years later, Gnostic ideas are once again resurfacing. The bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code* is one of several misleading books alleging that a group of Gnostic manuscripts found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, give us a more reliable account of the *real* Jesus than the Gospels of the New Testament.

On another front, highly educated members of “The Jesus Seminar” claim to have found the *real* Jesus. Spokespersons for this group talk about the need to edit and rewrite the Gospel records to remove unenlightened or unlikely (usually supernatural) elements.

Add to this the religious groups who emphasize merit more than grace, deny the deity of Christ, or downplay the dangers of false doctrine of any kind—and it's apparent that the battle for truth is as real today as in the first century.
LISTENING TO AN ORIGINAL

The problem is not new. Neither are wise attempts to confront it. Ever since the first century, one of the shortest books in the Bible has been sounding the alarm for the ever-present danger of false ideas about God and spirituality. Only 25 verses long, this letter is as timely today as when it was written. It is full of the love of God for people living in times of spiritual turbulence and change. It is the short letter penned by an original apostle named Jude.

A LETTER OF WISDOM (1:1-3)

What can we know about this small letter? It is helpful to begin by learning about the human author. His name is the first word we read in verse 1.

THE LETTER’S AUTHOR

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James (1:1a).

The writer identified himself as “Jude.” In the Greek, his name is actually “Judas,” but translators have used the name Jude to avoid association with Judas Iscariot. Bible teacher Matthew Coder wrote that people will name their sons Peter or Paul and their dogs Nero or Caesar—but no one would even name a dog Judas. It’s tragic that a name which means “praise” would
be lost to us because of one man’s treachery.

Who, then, was the Jude who wrote this particular book of the Bible? He referred to himself in verse 1 as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.” That might seem to narrow it down, but not necessarily. Judas was a very common name in ancient Israel, and at least five are listed in the Bible: Judas Iscariot (who betrayed Jesus); Judas of Damascus (Acts 9:11); Judas Barsabas (Acts 15:22); Judas (not Iscariot), one of the disciples (Jn. 14:22); and Judas, one of the Lord’s earthly brothers (Mt. 13:55-56).

That last passage, Matthew 13:55-56, is key, for I believe it shows us the identity of the writer. Judas is described as the brother of James and Jesus. This link makes Jude’s self-description as a servant of Jesus Christ a very telling thing. He could have been the ultimate “name dropper” by calling himself the “brother of Christ” or the “brother of the Son of God.” Instead, Jude declared himself a slave of Jesus. What humility—from unbelief (Jn. 7:5) to spiritual service!

**THE LETTER’S RECIPIENTS**

*To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ (1:1b).*

From his first words, the author made it clear that the warning he was about to write was not just for outsiders. It’s a letter to people Jude described as: “Called”—those who have responded to salvation’s call. The apostle Paul reflected on this term in 2 Timothy 1:8-9, where he wrote, “Share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us
and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

Jude further identified the recipients of his letter as:

“Sanctified”—This word comes from the Greek term for “holy” and describes people who are uniquely set apart for God’s own purposes. This is God’s own work to make each believer His very own precious possession.

Next, Jude described his readers as:

“Preserved”—secured by Jesus Christ Himself! The Greek word for “preserved” means “to stand guard over.” This word is seen in Jesus’ high-priestly prayer: “Holy Father, keep [preserve] through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (Jn. 17:11).

Jude wrote his letter of warning to the dearly loved family of God.

THE LETTER’S GREETING

Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you (1:2).

To set a heartfelt tone for his letter, Jude used three words as a greeting and a blessing. “Mercy and peace” was used as a common Jewish greeting. But the addition of “love” made it distinctively Christian. These terms are used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe God’s love and care for His children:

“Mercy.” “That He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom. 9:23).

“Peace.” “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be
troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Jn. 14:27).

“Love.” “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5).

It was only because Jude shared God’s love for his readers that he was intent on warning them of the present and future danger of false teachers.

THE LETTER’S PURPOSE

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (1:3).

Apparently Jude had intended to write about the joys and benefits of salvation. But as he began, he sensed the Holy Spirit steering him to write on the dangers of false teachers.

The dangers of wrong thinking and misbeliefs prompted Jude to write a different kind of letter than he intended. But these were not just problems of first-century Roman pluralism. Recent statistics show an alarming worldwide growth in high-profile religious cults. This multiplication signals a disturbing trend. False gospels are almost always marked by additions to the Bible, a low view of Christ, and a denial of the value of His sacrificial death for all who trust Him.

The phrase “common salvation” in verse 3 is not referring to salvation as if it were only a common thing. It’s describing salvation as something commonly received by all. There is no room for a caste system in the family of faith. What binds us together in the
body of Christ is that we are recipients of one salvation.

Jude had more on his mind, however. In fact, he felt compelled to call them to “contend earnestly for the faith.” This was to be their response to salvation. Why? Because it was “once for all delivered” to them. The word *delivered* carries the idea of something that is entrusted and to be treated as a stewardship.

How were they to “contend . . . for the faith”? “Earnestly.” The Greek word used here is an intense form of the word *agonize*. It means to be intensely involved in combat. In other words, we are to fight for the faith.

Jude agreed in principle with another apostle who wrote:

> The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier (2 Tim. 2:2-4).

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**We must contend for the faith without being contentious.**

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We need to keep in mind, however, what the rest of the New Testament emphasizes. We must contend for the faith without being contentious. Remember Paul’s warning to Timothy:

> A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition (2 Tim. 2:24-25).
Much damage has been done to the name of Christ by those who argue for His cause with a mean spirit. We don’t have permission to do that. We must always be careful to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

The world is full of false teachers who want to rewrite the message of Christ’s love. Let’s not help them by misrepresenting the spirit of the gospel.

A NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING (1:4-16)

Let’s take a look at these false teachers and the false, counterfeit messages Jude had in mind. This lengthiest section of his short letter gives us a variety of angles from which to view and understand seductive methods of dangerous religious leaders.

THE PROBLEM OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:4)

Certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men . . . (1:4a).

Who They Are

Jude identified the false teachers as “certain men [who] have crept in unnoticed.” In other words, they didn’t announce their presence. Instead, they entered with deception about their real mission and their actual message. The phrase “crept in unnoticed” is interesting. Vincent’s Word Studies indicates that it means “to come in through the side door.”

Jude also said that these false teachers “long ago were marked out for this condemnation.” It is worth noting that the Greek word for “marked out” means “written or prophesied.”
before.” This may actually be a reference to Paul’s warnings about apostasy in the last days (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

The “condemnation” Jude spoke of is a legal term that means “a pronounced verdict as a result of investigation.” Like King Belshazzar in Daniel 5, they have been weighed in the balances and found lacking.

In the end, Jude declared them to be “ungodly men.” They were men without reverence for God. They were not just religiously neutral; they were actually against God. Jesus described them as tares sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:36-43). They look and act like the real thing, but are not. They are spiritual counterfeits.

What They Do

... who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (1:4b).

These false teachers “turn the grace of our God into lewdness.” In other words, they take the liberty that is ours in Christ and turn it into a license to sin. While legalism is equally wrong, Jude reminds us that false teachers are often guilty of going in the opposite direction.

Paul wrote:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Rom. 6:1-2).

This lawlessness, rooted in rejection of biblical standards, is one of the characteristics of these “last days” false teachers. Note:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (2 Th. 2:3 NASB).
In this statement two concepts are linked together—apostasy and lawlessness. Clearly, the two feed each other. A lack of respect for biblical truth creates lawlessness, and lawlessness leads to falling away from the truth. It is a fearsome cycle of spiritual destruction that was of great concern both for the apostle Paul and for Jude.

They anticipated what happens when people turn away from the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” seeking instead words that allowed them to pursue their own passions and desires:

The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

This is the primary plan of attack that the false teachers of the last days will utilize—and one we see actively at work in our day. One Bible teacher described the strategy of the false teachers portrayed in Jude 1:4 this way:

• penetration of the church (“crept in unnoticed”)
• prostitution of grace (“turn[ed] the grace of our God into lewdness”)
• departure from truth (“[denied] the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ”).
This is rapidly becoming the portrait of religion in the modern world. As one man put it, “One of the troubles of the world is that people mistake sex for love, money for brains, and transistor radios for civilization.” We could add, “and religion for faith.” The facts of history have repeatedly proven, however, that civilization is incomplete apart from faith in Christ. In all of human history, He is the only proven way to make bad people good.

Tragically, these false teachers do more than bring harm to themselves. They damage the reputation of Christ and His church by working their way inside and among the people of God: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Ti. 1:16).

Because this is an “inside job,” Jude warned the people of Christ to be spiritually alert—watching and warning—and to grow in the truth of the Scriptures. This is our defense against the false teachers that Jude went on to describe for us.

THREE EXAMPLES OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:5-11)

Jude gave his readers examples of others who in the past had done much damage by abandoning the faith. He cited several stories his readers would have been familiar with.

The Unfaithful People Of Israel (1:5)

But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. The Lord had saved them out of Egypt—parting the
Red Sea, supplying manna, bringing water from the rock, and providing passage over the Jordan. But such miracles did not keep Israel true to their God.

Even pagan neighbors remembered what the God of Israel had done for His people in bringing them out of Egypt (Josh. 2:1-13). But God's chosen nation wandered in a wilderness for 40 years until a whole generation died without seeing the Promised Land. Their error? They failed to trust and remain true to the God who had done so much for them. They repeated the error of fallen angels.

Rebellious Angels (1:6)
The angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

There are several views of the meaning of this verse. But first we must understand that there are two classes of angels: faithful and fallen. And within the ranks of the fallen angels there are also two kinds: unchained (Mk. 1:23; Lk. 8:27; Eph. 6:12) and chained (Mk. 1:24; 2 Pet. 2:4).

So who are the chained angels? I believe the answer is found in the connection between Genesis 6:1-4 (where the "sons of God" cohabited with the "daughters of men"), 2 Peter 2:4 (which also refers to chained angels), and Jude 1:6. These passages taken together seem to indicate that fallen angels (demons) had sexual relations with women during the time of Noah and produced a race of creatures that God destroyed in the flood. Let's look at this more closely:

- Ancient Jewish historian Josephus, in Antiquities, wrote, "Many angels
accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust.” This was the common teaching of the day.

• The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) renders “sons of God” (Gen. 6:2) as “angels of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).

• The early church taught this as their view of the events of Genesis 6.

• Grammatically, the angels in Jude 1:6 are linked with the sin of sexual immorality in Jude 1:7.

• Although angels in heaven do not procreate (Mt. 22:30), it may be possible for a fallen angel on earth, perhaps through demonic possession, to impregnate a human being.

The point of Jude’s statement, however, is more important than the speculation. What he wanted his readers to remember is that even angels who had known the presence and service of God were not above rebelling against the Almighty. How much more urgent for us, fallen mortals, to be alert and on guard against the possibility of falling under the corrupting influence of false teaching.

Sodom And Gomorrah (1:7)

As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? A Jewish prophet gives us background to the words of Jude. Ezekiel said to the people of God, “Look, this was the iniquity of your
sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit” (Ezek. 16:49-50).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah followed a pattern that has often shown up among the people of God. The sexual perversion and violence of the notorious “twin cities” didn’t just happen. It was the result of self-centered patterns that violated the creative design of God.

In the sexual immorality that grew out of Sodom’s self-centeredness, they ended up going after “strange (heteros, ‘other’) flesh.” It was flesh “other” than that for which God had designed them. As a result, they suffered divine judgment and were used as an example here in Jude.

Notice that the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah isn’t just about a pagan people of the past. It is used by Jesus as a picture of the “last days” (Lk. 17:28-31). And at the heart of this story we also learn about Lot’s wife, who also is a part of this picture of apostasy (v.32). Why? Because, like her neighbors, she turned aside from God’s plan. She was like Paul’s associate Demas, who turned away because he loved the things of this world more than Christ (2 Tim. 4:10).

THE CONDUCT OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:8-9)

Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about
the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

Jude identified the false teachers as “dreamers” (Genesis 6:5 speaks of a corrupt, sensual imagination) and then described their conduct.

They “defile the flesh.” This phrase describes moral corruption among false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

They “reject authority.” It is not uncommon for people who wander from the faith to reject spiritual or governmental leadership. Those who reject the authority of the Bible often reject those who have been put in place by God to protect them.

They “speak evil of dignitaries.” Here, in verse 9, Jude gave a specific example of this kind of evil speaking by describing a fascinating event:

Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

There are several views of the meaning of verse 9. For example:

• It refers to Zechariah 3:1-3, and is probably Joshua, not Michael. The problem with this view is that it’s a different story with different characters and different events.

• It was a fable without any need for authenticity. The problem with this view: What else in the Bible can be disposed of as a fable?

• It quotes a factual part of an apocryphal book called “The Assumption Of Moses.”

This last view reflects what
“The Assumption Of Moses” says about the incident mentioned in Jude. According to this ancient Jewish writing, Michael was commissioned to bury Moses’ body. Satan opposed the burial with two arguments. First, he claimed, “As lord over matter, I own the body.” To this, Michael responded, “The Lord rebuke you!” Second, Satan pressed that “Moses was a murderer not deserving an honorable burial.”

Whenever the archangel Michael is mentioned in the Bible, it is always in times of spiritual conflict (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; Rev. 12:7-9). And that is also the case here. Still, why would Satan want the body, and how does that relate to evil speaking?

The best answer, I think, ties it directly to the issue of blasphemy. It is likely that Satan wanted the Israelites, who had honored Moses in life, to worship him in death. Remember, Satan’s main goal is not to get people to worship him, but to get people to worship anything or anyone but the true God.

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In fact, what Satan was unable to do with Moses’ body, he later did with the brass serpent (2 Ki. 18:4).

The point of Jude’s reference seems to be that people who wander from the truth often end up worshiping themselves. Putting themselves above all else, they foolishly disrespect not only the authority of God but even the power of an evil enemy.
THE JUDGMENT OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:10-11)

But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves (1:10).

Jude’s point is that “these” (referring to the “dreamers” of 1:8) do against God what Michael would not even do against Satan. Notice how Jude described these “dreamers”:

• They “speak evil of whatever they do not know” (to know through understanding).
• Whatever they know (instinctively) “they know naturally” (by sin nature).
• They are “like brute beasts” (beings without reason).
• “They corrupt themselves” (are spoiled and ruined).

Jude’s evaluation was to mourn:

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah (1:11).

The threefold error of apostasy in verse 11 is a powerful contrast to John 14:6, where Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Notice this contrast:

• Jesus is the way; false teachers follow “the way of Cain” (manmade religion, salvation by works).
• Jesus is the truth; false teachers “run greedily in the error of Balaam” (religion for profit, instead of truth).
• Jesus is the life; false teachers “perished in the rebellion of Korah,” rejecting God’s authority, and bringing death and destruction to themselves.

Amazingly, they do all this in the face of the One
who loves them and gave Himself for them—the One who is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

THE PORTRAITS OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:12-13)
The warnings of Jude about false teachers now get very specific. To accomplish this, he used everything at his disposal to unveil their real character and false agenda. These trademarks are key to understanding how to live wisely in an age of false teachers.

What are they like? How do they behave? Jude has already covered much of creation—angels, men, Gentiles, Jews. Now he turns his attention to nature with illustrations about earth, air, trees, seas, and the heavens. In verses 12-13, he used five word-pictures of false teachers.

These are warnings of the dangers believers will have to face and to deal with.

_These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever._

He began by calling them “spots in your love feasts.” Translators and commentators don’t agree on the use of the word spots. Some Bible versions use the phrase “hidden reefs.” The Greek word translated spots is very close to the word used in the parallel passage of 2 Peter 2:13. So it can be taken to refer to stains.
or filth in the church’s love feast. The Greek word used in this verse, however, is a word that refers to dangerous undersea reefs that could shipwreck a sailing vessel.

Either way, these false teachers were endangering the church with their selfishness (“serving only themselves”).

The early church met together regularly to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and share a common meal called the love feast. The more affluent members of the church would share their abundance of food with the less fortunate. But the false teachers spoken of in verse 12 cared only for themselves (see 1 Cor. 11:20-22).

Next, Jude called them “clouds without water.” They were like clouds that promised refreshing rain but delivered nothing. In other words, they pretended to have life-giving answers but instead provided no help at all. They were useless because they themselves didn’t have the water of life (Jn. 7:38-39).

The Greek word translated “without water” is also used in Matthew 12:43, where Jesus said, “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places.” This could hint of the demonic activity behind apostasy and false teaching. This would correspond with 1 Timothy 4:1, which states:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Jude then used the picture of “late autumn trees without fruit.” A fruit tree that promises a harvest but doesn’t deliver is useless to its owner and must be plucked up by the roots to make room for productive trees. False teachers produce
no good fruit, because they are spiritually dead. And they are described as “twice dead,” because someday they too will be “pulled up by the roots.” Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (Mt. 15:13).

Next, Jude described false teachers as “raging waves of the sea.” They promise powerful ministry but instead rant and rave without form or content, “foaming up their own shame.” This is not a cleansing foam but is the result of pollution. This parallels the warning of Isaiah 57:20, which says, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.”

Finally, Jude compared these false teachers to “wandering stars” or shooting stars. They are lawless and directionless. The result? They have a reserved judgment of eternal darkness waiting for them. This is one of the two main descriptions of eternal judgment (along with fire)—the result of their apostasy is that declared judgment.

How is the church to respond to these dangers? The apostle Paul responded with a broken heart and with the Word of God’s grace which both builds up and gives an eternal inheritance (Acts 20:31-32). Tragically, for those who reject God’s Word, only judgment remains.

THE DESTINY OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:14-15)

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly
among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Back in Genesis, Enoch prophesied judgment. Enoch (Gen. 5) seems to have become a believer at the birth of Methuselah. The name Methuselah has been translated “when he is dead, it shall be sent.” “It” apparently was the judgment of Noah’s flood. The recognition that God would deal with sin in judgment produced a life-transforming experience for Enoch.

Enoch’s prophecy also pointed ahead to another time of judgment—the last days. His prophecy dealt with the second coming of Christ, which he described with several key ideas.

When Christ returns, He will come with “ten thousands of His saints” (cp. Rev. 19:11-14) to establish His kingdom on the earth, a kingdom that He will rule for a period of 1,000 years (see Rev. 20:4-6). At the conclusion of the 1,000-year kingdom, Christ will “execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly.”

The key word in verse 15, used four times, is ungodly. It is the Greek word asebeia, which means “without any fear or reverence of God.” Enoch’s prophecy went on to describe a threefold judgment of those who are without a fear or reverence of God. Following 1,000 years of the perfect rule of Christ on the earth, all that is against God will be dealt with in final and ultimate judgment. This is the tragic fate of false teachers and their followers.

Notice that verses 14 and 15 go all the way from Genesis to Revelation.
Enoch (Gen. 5) described the return of Christ with His saints (Rev. 19). We now await the any-moment return of Christ for the church that precedes His physical return to earth by 7 years. The point is that as followers of Christ, we must always be prepared.

THE TACTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS (1:16)

*These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.*

If we are to be aware of and prepared for the presence and influence of those who would wreck the church with false teaching, how can we recognize them? What are their trademarks? Jude offers us yet another description of these dangerous spiritual leaders.

It is as if Jude wants to give us a completely diverse set of perspectives, viewing these false teachers from every possible angle so that we can’t possibly fail to recognize them when we see them.

First, they are “grumblers.” This is the point where church problems often start. The word *grumble* refers to a discontentment that produces rebellion. This action is seen in Israel’s grumbling against God (Num. 14:2; 1 Cor. 10:10), the crowd grumbling against Christ (Jn. 6:41,61), and the church grumbling against the apostles (Acts 6:1-2). It creates an environment of discord and dissension that makes the community of faith vulnerable to disruption.

Jude also described them as “complainers.” These are people who blame others—their boss, their...
spouse, their parents, their pastor—for their lot in life. In the Bible we see this blame-shifting from the very beginning, as Adam blamed Eve, who blamed the serpent for their sinful choices (Gen. 3). Human beings have been blame-shifting ever since.

Next, false teachers are seen as “walking according to their own lusts.” This speaks of people who are habitually driven by their own desires. It is a characteristic that is so self-destructive that it can only be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

Additionally, false teachers “mouth great swelling words.” They speak eloquent but seductive words—words that are, according to Shakespeare, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Once again, it parallels a passage in 2 Peter:

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error (2:18).

One element of this empty speech is seen in “flattering people to gain advantage.” It is the pattern of catering to their hearers rather than speaking the truth. They tell people what they want to hear instead of telling them what they need to hear. This is in contrast to true teachers of God’s Word who are devoted to speaking the truth in love rather than seeking the favor of public opinion. Paul warned against the flattering speech of false teachers when he wrote:

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Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Spiritual leaders who want to faithfully represent their Lord must constantly remind themselves that their commitment is to the Word of God, not to flowery speech or ear-tickling strategies.

Instead, with gratefulness for what God has done for us in Christ, we need to share the heart and mind of Jude—for the sake of God and others.

A STRATEGY FOR BELIEVERS (1:17-23)

Almost anything we purchase today carries with it two things: an owner’s manual and a warning label. They join together to tell us how to and, perhaps more important, how not to use that particular product.

Jude did something similar. He had warned his readers about the dangers of false teachers, apostasy, deception, falling away from the faith, rejecting the truth, and even God’s final judgment. But now at the close of his short letter he gets into the “how to’s.”

Our owner’s manual for living in the truth consists of seven simple instructions—and they form a practical strategy for living in the face of spiritual pressure and false teaching.
REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLES (1:17)

But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Remember." This is a command. Jude's readers were commanded to remember the apostles' words. The fact is that the apostles repeatedly predicted the apostasy of false teaching (Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:9, 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 2:18). These warnings have been left to believers of all time for our understanding and for our protection. And we place ourselves in jeopardy if we ignore these words.

RECOGNIZE THE FALSE TEACHERS (1:18-19)

How they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

Jude was painstaking in his concern that the church be able to recognize the false teachers and spiritual impostors the apostles had warned about. To get there, Jude synthesized the biblical information to give a final inspired portrait of false teachers.

These counterfeit messengers are first seen as "mockers," referring to those who use ridicule as a weapon. This term is also seen in 2 Peter 3:3 ("scoffers"), where the target of their mockery is the Bible's teaching about divine judgment and the second coming of Christ to the earth. In this way, "mockers" describes those who are not just unbiblical but decidedly antibiblical. This in itself provides convincing grounds
for steering clear of such thinking.

Second, they “walk according to their own ungodly lusts.” Jude has said this before, because it is so basic to the nature of these false teachers and their false teaching. Instead of being spiritually minded, they tend to be deceptive, self-centered, and manipulative. In other words, their priority is to satisfy themselves at all costs.

Additionally, they “cause divisions.” This is the essence of the problem with Diotrephes in 3 John 1:9-10, as well as other parts of the New Testament. For example:

- Romans 16:17 warns us to take note of divisive people in the church.
- First Corinthians 3:3-4 shows a church divided by “personality cults.”
- Philippians 4:2 addresses a division between individuals in a church.

This is why the Bible says we are to be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The result of that kind of unity is that the world sees Christ as the Son of God, the church as the beloved of God, and the gospel as the message of salvation. All of this, however, will be diminished when God’s people are wracked by division.

Continuing his description of false teachers, Jude again indicated that they are “sensual persons.” This describes people who are selfish and self-centered, to the point of being corrupted by wrong desires. This is a profound contrast to true believers, who are described in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you..."
completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” False teachers are wholly given over to self, but true believers are to be wholly given over to Christ.

False teachers are wholly given over to self, but true believers are to be wholly given over to Christ.

Jude’s last statement in verse 19 summarizes the false teachers by revealing them as “not having the Spirit.” In other words, they are spiritually lost. This is made clear in Romans 8:9, where Paul wrote:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (NIV).

Once again, the true character of these false teachers is exposed for all to see. Now we are challenged to respond.

BUILD YOURSELVES UP (1:20)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith . . .

First of all, Christians are challenged to be “building yourselves up on your most holy faith.” We must never stop growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We cannot slip into a mode of apathy or carelessness. Rather, we need to be committed to a continual growth in Christlikeness. Jude’s words mirror Paul’s challenge in Acts 20:32, “I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up.”
PRAY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (1:20)

... praying in the Holy Spirit ...

To keep growing, we must also be “praying in the Holy Spirit.” We pray this way because of the futility of trying to function in our own strength. This is especially true here, because prayer is the response of the heart that realizes it’s in need of God’s power.

Even our prayers to Him are dependent on Him. To that end, Paul wrote:

*The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God* (Rom. 8:26-27).

ABIDE IN THE LOVE OF GOD (1:21)

... keep yourselves in the love of God ...

We are also told: “keep yourselves in the love of God.” Through obedience, we stay in the place of blessing. In John 15:4, Jesus described Himself as the vine and believers as the branches connected to the vine. We are told to “abide” in His love.

We must be careful not to follow the example of the church at Ephesus who left their first love (Rev. 2:4). Christ’s love for us deserves a response that is abiding, faithful, and obedient.

LOOK FOR CHRIST’S RETURN (1:21)

... looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude reminded us that we should be “looking for the
mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” which seems to be a reference to the any-moment return of Christ for His church (cp. Ti. 2:13). This waiting profoundly impacts the way we live. When we live in anticipation of Christ’s return, we will recognize what it means to live expecting the sound of a trumpet. It will cause us to anticipate, long for, and live in the light of Christ’s promised return. As John wrote, “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3).

REACH OUT TO THOSE IN SPIRITUAL DANGER (1:22-23)

And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Our response is not purely personal, however. We are also called to reach out. This response is seen in Jude’s words in verses 22-23: “on some have compassion . . . ; but others save with fear.” In this challenge, we are reminded to balance compassion with the need for caution.

There is a difference of opinion among translators of verses 22-23. Because of some difficulties in the Greek text, some commentators see two groups of people in these verses while others see three. Either way, Jude challenges his readers to reach out to those who are being affected by false teaching and to respond with compassion, urgency, or fear.

Sincere Doubters. The phrase “making a distinction” in verse 22 is better translated “those who
doubt.” These people may be Christians who are weak in their faith and being swayed by false teaching. We are to have compassion on these doubters, gently and patiently reminding them of the truth.

Unbelievers In Danger. The people in this group are already committed to false teaching and in danger of becoming even more entrenched. Jude said that these people need to be treated with a sense of urgency, as if they were being pulled out of a fire.

Defiled And Persistent Sinners. This group of people to whom we are to reach out is the most dangerous. It includes those who are flagrant in their sinful lifestyle and those who themselves are false teachers. We are to approach them “with fear, . . . hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” We are to fear being contaminated by their twisted thinking and their corrupt lives. Those who reach out to people in this group should be spiritually mature and aware of the potential dangers.

A CALL TO WORSHIP (1:24-25)

Jude ended his letter the same way that he began it—by giving words of assurance to those who know the Savior.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. This great doxology shows that the people of God do not have to stand
firm in the truth and against error in their own strength. We rely on the living God.

Jude spoke of God, for He is able “to keep you from stumbling.” He has the power to protect us from ourselves, and to preserve our eternity. To do that, our God is determined “to present you faultless” (without blame). He will do this in His own glorious presence, and with great joy! This is the same joy that compelled Christ to go to the cross on our behalf (Heb. 12), and it is Christ's work on the cross that makes our forgiveness and transformation possible.

Our response is to worship our God. We acknowledge His “glory” (honor and esteem), “majesty” (praise for God’s matchless attributes), “dominion” (recognition of His right to rule), and “power” (God's omnipotence and lordship).

Notice, though, that we are not just to celebrate God’s greatness forever in the future, but also now, every day, in our lives. Let’s respond to His provision by glorifying Him each day by the way we live.

Centuries before Jude lived, Jeremiah quoted the Lord as saying, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me” (9:23-24).

In a day of false teachers, there is no substitute for embracing the God of all truth. If you do not have a relationship with God, you can know Him today. Place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior—the living Truth in a world dominated by error. Will you trust Him today?
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