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2 Peter and Jude
Session 4

The letter of Jude, full of obscure allusions, full of fiery polemic, addressing a murky situation, is perhaps appropriately nestled toward the back of the New Testament. There it tends to sit, revered but conveniently forgotten. Jude makes no appearance in standard Sunday lectionaries.

I imagine it is rarely the subject of book studies in churches. It doesn't exactly lend itself to personal times of devotion. Were Bible publishers to stop printing Jude, it might take some a good while before they noticed.

The letter of Jude presents several challenges to the modern reader. The first is its brevity. We have a very narrow window of a mere 25 verses through which to peer into the life of its addressees and enter into the situation the author addresses.

We're never going to know this author nearly as well as we can know Paul or even James or the elder who gave us 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. And thus, he will remain more of a canonical acquaintance than a friend. The second is the letter's focus on judgment and condemnation.

It is essentially a rant against certain people who have come into a congregation and begun to take advantage of its members, the author alleges, for the sake of satisfying their own greed and self-centered desires. Promoting God's judgment and hard and fast lines around Christian practice is hardly in keeping with 21st-century values of tolerance and pluralism. The third is the author's often obscure references both to Old Testament episodes and images in extra-biblical texts.

The reader needs to have mental access to a wide swath of earlier Jewish literature if he or she hopes to fully appreciate this very brief letter. The fourth is the checkered reception of Jude over the course of church history. The early church was divided as to its authority.

In large measure because of its appeal to extra-biblical texts. Luther was not certain that it was sufficiently valuable to be included in the New Testament. What does Jude offer to justify its inclusion in our canon, even near its tail end? Throughout this short course, I hope to demonstrate that Jude makes at least three vital contributions to the ongoing work of discipleship and ministry.

First, Jude reinforces the conviction promoted throughout the New Testament that God's grace in Jesus Christ has a purpose: our liberation from the passions and cravings of our old self and our transformation into a new self that will stand blameless in God's sight. Any other response to God's grace, any other use of God's grace, amounts to denying our only master and Lord Jesus Christ, as far as Jude is concerned. Jude would have approved John Wesley's emphasis that God works to save us not only from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin, so that we may indeed live in holiness and righteousness before him.

Second, Jude keeps us aware of our accountability before God, that is, of the certainty of God's judgment. He links this particularly with ministerial integrity, and thus holds ever before us the important question, are we in the business of religion to serve God's purposes for the people God has entrusted to us, or are we in the business of religion to serve our own interests, whether the more obvious lusts or the more subtle temptations of ego and daily bread? The scandals that have rocked so many denominations and some non-denominational churches, bringing widespread shame upon the gospel, remind us that these dangers are ever-present. Third, Jude reminds us of our accountability to one another and our responsibility toward one another to hold each other accountable.

This cuts against the grain, particularly of 21st-century Western churches, where an individual's right to self-determination free from the oppressive intervention of other people is an increasingly prominent value. Jude speaks a countercultural word to us, emboldening us to intervene to restore brothers and sisters in the Lord who are moving in a direction contrary to the direction in which God's grace would impel us, humbling us to listen when we are the object of such interventions. For these contributions alone, the letter of Jude would continue to merit a careful and attentive hearing.

The first word of the epistle is the most hotly debated: Judas, Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. Judas was a very common name, carrying on the name of one of the 12 patriarchs, one who, in fact, gave his name to the longest surviving political entity within ancient Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah. We encounter several people named Judas in the New Testament.

Judas the Galilean was a revolutionary. Judas, the son of James, one of the disciples. Judas, not Iscariot, as we read in John.

Of course, Judas Iscariot shows up. But we also find in the Book of Acts, Judas of Damascus, Judas Barsabbas, and again in the Gospels, Judas, the half-brother of Jesus and the brother of James, Joseph, and Simon, as well as the brother of two or more unnamed sisters. The author's presentation of himself as a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James most clearly points to the last of these Jews, since one would only identify oneself in connection with a brother rather than a father if the brother were remarkably prominent in one's circles.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, appears not to have been securely in the circle of Jesus' followers until after the resurrection, after Jesus appeared to him, risen from the dead, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 7. James quickly emerged, however, as a leader in the Jerusalem Church, certainly by the time of Paul's visit to Jerusalem that he relates in Galatians 2:1-10. James also appears in a leading role in the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15, in which he pronounces the final word. And again in Acts 21, where he gives Paul instructions meant to dissipate Jewish Christian suspicion of Paul and his mission.

Particularly during the 19th century, the rise of historical criticism invited scholars to reopen questions of authorship for all New Testament writings. Jude was no exception. It is common now to find commentaries that suggest that this brief letter was not composed by Jude himself, but rather by a later author in Jude's name.

We will briefly review the arguments against the letter's authenticity, and my own reasons for reading this as an authentic composition from Jesus' half-brother, Jude. The first argument against the authenticity of this short letter involves allegations that it shows the telltale signs of late 1st-century or early 2nd-century authorship. Three characteristics in particular.

This argument, however, strikes me as the least cogent, and indeed, one that ought simply to have been dropped long ago, since Jude actually shares none of the characteristics alleged to reflect post-apostolic compositions. The first characteristic is a waning expectation of Christ's return. Jude, however, exhibits a lively expectation, at least of God's decisive intervention, to judge the world.

While Jude does not insist upon its proximity in terms of time, there is also nothing to suggest otherwise, and certainly nothing to suggest a delay in the fulfillment of these expectations, as we find, for example, in 2nd Peter, which explicitly addresses the problem of a perceived delay in Christ's return and God's judgment. The second characteristic is an appeal to church hierarchy to solve problems in local congregations, such as one finds in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote his letters around 110 AD. But no such appeals appear in Jude's letter.

There is not even any mention of church offices. The third characteristic is the alleged degeneration of the use of the word faith from a dynamic relational term into a term that refers to a body of doctrines. This is a particularly problematic criterion for two reasons.

First, the faith is used to describe a set of convictions and a way of life very early in the history of the Church. It appears in this sense already in Galatians chapter 1, verses 23 and 24, where Paul recalls how Judean Christians spoke of him as early as 40 AD. I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

They only were hearing it said, he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. The faith here is clearly not a relational term, but a term denoting a body of convictions and a pattern of practice that defines the movement Paul had formerly opposed. This particular criterion also privileges Paul's more typical usage of faith as a relational term of trust between the Christian and Jesus over against other uses, as early and more vibrant versus late and more petrified.

Note, however, that even Paul can use the faith in the same sense as those Judean Christians he quoted in Galatians 1:23. In Philippians 1:27, for example, we read, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Using faith to denote the content of the gospel message was appropriate then in any period, whether quite early or late.

Wherever opposition to or defense of the gospel, the faith is the context. The letter's level of Greek is also often cited as a sign that someone other than the historical Jude wrote the letter. Would a Galilean craftsman's son have been able to write Greek such as we find in this letter? We actually have no direct knowledge of Jude's own craft and profession prior to, and possibly alongside, his ministry work, whether it might have been such as required him to gain a greater fluency in the second language of Galilee, namely, Greek.

We might assume that he took part in the family business of construction and carpentry, but that remains merely an assumption. It was not a given that all the members of one's family would participate in the father's business, and there might well not have been enough business to sustain that many family members. Some scholars also regularly fail to take into account Jude's experience in Jerusalem at the center of leading a religious movement in a multilingual city.

James, Jude, and the other leaders of the early Christian movement would have had regular contact with Greek-speaking diaspora Jews who were either resident in Jerusalem or who came sporadically to the great pilgrimage festivals. Jude also had experience as a missionary. Eusebius, citing the third-century figure Julius Africanus, speaks of the relatives of Jesus as missionaries in Galilee.

There were several cities in Galilee where preaching and teaching in Greek would have been immensely useful, if not essential, such as Sepphoris, Tiberias, and Bethsaida Julius. If their mission extended to the Decapolis cities, like Scythopolis, which Galilean Jews passed on the way to Jerusalem if they didn't go through Samaria, or Gadara or Hippos, both of which fronted the Sea of Galilee, growing in facility in Greek would have indeed been required. Paul suggests that the brothers of Jesus had an even wider-ranging mission.

He speaks to his Corinthian converts of the other apostles and brothers of the Lord operating as itinerant missionaries and teachers, accompanied in their travels by their wives, for whom the churches were also providing support, expecting these Corinthian believers to be familiar with this practice. You can find that in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 5. Ministry in any of these areas would have forced Jude, whatever his earlier vocation, to grow in his grasp of Greek. Jude's letter displays a wide Greek vocabulary, but not exceptional Greek style.

And it is generally acknowledged to be easier to acquire vocabulary than to attain naturalness of expression in a second language. There is also the possibility, indeed the probability, that Jude would avail himself of the help of other Christians who were themselves more familiar with the Greek language and composition, as Jude wrote to Greek-speaking converts. Finally, some scholars have objected to the letter's authenticity on the grounds that Jude, verses 17 and 18, look back upon the deaths of the apostles when it tells the audience.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, in the last time, there will be scoffers following their ungodly passions. A closer reading shows, however, that the audience is explicitly told to remember what the apostles had said, not to remember the apostles as if they were dead.

The latter is a possible inference, but nothing makes it probable, let alone necessary. There is, therefore, no implication in these verses for the date. Moreover, the author presumes that his audience will have heard these words from the apostles' own lips, placing at least some of them, most naturally, in the first generation of the Church's existence.

A potentially positive indication of authenticity shows up in the letter's rootedness in Palestinian Jewish traditions. The biblical phrases that the author incorporates tend to

reflect the Hebrew text of the Old Testament more closely than the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was broadly used among Greek-speaking Jews throughout the eastern Mediterranean. For example, Jude 12 speaks of the intruders as, quote, waterless clouds being driven on by winds.

In the Hebrew text of Proverbs 25:14, the boastful person is compared to clouds and winds without rain. In the Septuagint, however, the boastful person is simply like winds and clouds and rains, omitting the main feature of the original image, a blustery storm that yields nothing useful. In Jude verse 13, the intruders are called wild waves of the sea, dredging up their degradation-like sea foam.

Again, this reflects the Hebrew text of Isaiah 57, verse 20, where wicked people are compared to the tossing sea whose waters toss up mire and mud. The Septuagint version of this verse lacks the powerful image of a restless sea churning up the muck on the bottom. There in the Septuagint, the wicked simply, quote, will be tossed to and fro by waves and shall not be able to rest.

Most dramatic is the author's use of First Enoch, a text that appears to have been composed and most widely read in Palestine. This is a subject to which we'll return later in some depth as we work through the letter. The author also appears to have been acquainted with extra-biblical traditions about biblical figures like Cain, otherwise found in Palestinian texts, like the Aramaic targumim, Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew scriptures.

In regard to the date of the letter, there are no clear internal indications, save for the prominence of James, thus presuming a time after Peter's departure from Jerusalem and James's accession to the role of leadership. And then on the other side, the likely lifespan of a younger brother of Jesus. We could therefore imagine this text being written any time between about 50 and 80 AD.

The absence of any reference to the temple's standing or its destruction is not useful for dating. Arguments from silence are always precarious, but especially when applied to a letter the length of a postcard. We will treat this, then, as a genuine letter from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James, as the author says in the first verse.

We might note, on the one hand, the modesty of calling himself a brother only of James, though this also connects him with the head of the Jesus movement in Judea, and a slave, rather than a brother of Jesus, the one who is the Lord, both of the author and the audience. While slavery represents the lowest status in the social order of the first century, a slave can also function as an honorific title for people who claimed both to serve God with a particularly single-minded devotion and who claimed to belong to God. Moses, Joshua, and David are all identified as slaves of God in the Jewish scriptures.

Christian prophets are, in general, God's slaves in the book of Revelation, giving them a claim to authority as people advancing God's purposes on earth. Paul, James, and John, the author of Revelation, also identify themselves as such. Jude addresses those who are summoned, who are beloved in God the Father, and kept in Jesus Christ.

Jude tells us very little about his audience. He gives us no location for their congregations, as Paul does fairly consistently. He gives no direct information about their ethnic constituency.

The contents of this short letter assume that the audience will be familiar with Jewish traditions about Cain, the fallen angels, and Moses, not found in the canonical scriptures. They also assume some degree of familiarity with and respect for First Enoch, which originated in and was known to have carried authority in Palestinian Jewish circles. It was, for example, an authoritative text in the Qumran community, and thus likely authoritative throughout the larger Essene movement.

This might lead one to suspect that the audience was composed largely of Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who would have greater exposure to these traditions, although there might well also have been a substantial presence of Gentile converts, people like Cornelius and his household, who we encounter in Acts 10, a resident in Caesarea by the sea. An audience in Palestine would also accord well with the sphere of influence and oversight exercised by the relatives of Jesus. While people in the more rural villages of Palestine would likely not have been susceptible to the relaxation of moral standards that Jude addresses, Christians in the urban centers of Galilee or the coastal plains, surrounded by and in some instances themselves leaving behind Greek and other non-Jewish lifestyle practices, might well have been tempted to experiment.

It would have been in the urban centers that a move toward introducing the culture of Greek symposia, involving a freer indulgence of eating, drinking, and companionship into the agape meal of the Christians, would have been more enticing. An urban audience within Palestine would also explain why Jude wrote in Greek rather than Aramaic. This is, of course, all a matter of scholars' best guesses, as once again Jude himself tells us very little about his addressees.

What he does tell us about his audience is what he tells them about themselves. They are, quote, those who are summoned or called, invited, who are beloved in God the Father and kept in Jesus Christ. As is pervasive throughout the early church, Jude uses language once applied to historic Israel to describe the particular body gathered together around faith in Jesus, around the faith entrusted once for all to the saints.

Israel is often spoken of as the people whom God has called or invited to be God's own people. God is often said to love Israel or hold it to be beloved. But the addressees are also kept in Jesus Christ.

The idea of being kept with a particular end in view will emerge as a prominent theme in this short letter. In verse 21, Jude will urge the hearers to keep themselves in the love of God that they currently enjoy. The intruding teachers, on the other hand, are also kept by God, but for the dark gloom of the underworld in verse 13, since they are operating in the same spirit as the fallen angels who did not keep to their realm, but crossed the lines God had drawn, and so are now kept in eternal chains in that same gloom, as we find in verse 6. With the second verse, may mercy and peace and love be multiplied toward you, Jude completes the typical formula that opens a letter in the first-century world.

This formula, sender to recipient, greetings, was most often very tersely expressed, as we find in the Hellenistic letters very excessively preserved throughout 1 and 2 Maccabees, for example, but also throughout hundreds of non-literary papyrus letters that have come to light from the sands of Egypt. Jude, like other early Christian leaders, expands on each

element. Here, the simple single word, greetings, is replaced by a wish for mercy, peace, and love, presumably with God as the source of each experience, to rest upon the hearers.

Coupled with Jude's encouraging description of the audience as kept and beloved, this wish gives strong assurance of Jude's own goodwill toward those to whom his letter will be read aloud, incidentally also disposing them well toward him and towards his warning. Both love and mercy also initiate a series of resonances throughout the brief letter. Jude returns to the theme of mercy in the concluding exhortations, directing the hearers both to keep their hopes fixed on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, leading to eternal life, and to extend mercy to their sisters and brothers whom they see straying from the path that leads to life.

Similarly, the description of the hearers as beloved and the wish for them to continue to experience God's love at the outset are answered by repeated addresses to the audience as beloved throughout the letter and the exhortation to them to keep yourselves in God's love by walking in the ways of holiness and faithfulness into which and for which God's grace called them. These opening verses serve, therefore, to clearly mark the writing's genre as that of a letter, but also to accomplish two principal requirements of a strong opening of any address. First, establishing the authority and goodwill of the speaker, and second, sounding some of the key themes of the address.

While lumped together with the so-called Catholic epistles, those that, like James and 1 Peter, are truly written to a broad audience, Jude actually addresses a very specific problem and situation, the appearance of teachers from outside a particular congregation or group of congregations. Beloved, while engaged diligently in writing to you concerning the salvation that we share, it became necessary for me to write to you, to urge you to contend for the faith that has been handed down to the saints once for all. For certain people have wormed their way in, people who were set down long ago for this condemnation, ungodly people transforming the grace of our God into shameless self-indulgence, and denying our only Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Jude calls his hearers beloved several times in this short letter, here and again in verses 17 and 20. Such affirmations of his affective bonds with them will likely serve to reinforce trust and assurance of Jude's goodwill, in pointed contrast to these other teachers who are acting from self-serving motives rather than genuine love for the believers. Jude gives the impression that he had been composing a very different kind of letter, one that we should very much like to have received, as it would have contained a fuller statement concerning what Jesus' half-brother understood as the gospel message and the hope that it brought.

This, too, is a token of Jude's goodwill toward the hearers. He had already had them and their faith in mind, and had already been investing himself in their grounding in the same. Current developments, however, namely the arrival and impact of itinerant teachers among the congregations that were Jude's sphere of concern, now drew forth a more urgent intervention on his part for the believers whose spiritual well-being is of great concern to him.

There were always a variety of teachers moving about among the network of Christian congregations. We find in Galatians notice of Paul's rival teachers establishing themselves or trying to establish themselves among his converts in the province of Galatia. In 2

Corinthians, we encounter again rival teachers who are seeking to embed themselves in Paul's congregations in Corinth.

We find teachers again behind the situation of Jude, and we would find them also in the situation behind 2 Peter. When we turn to Revelation, we see teachers whom the seer names Jezebel or the Nicolaitans asserting themselves and their vision for Christian practice among the churches of the Roman province of Asia. Jude's use of the images of these teachers sneaking in or worming their way in, in verse 4, clearly indicates that these teachers came from outside the congregation or congregations.

In verse 8, Jude speaks of these teachers' errors stemming from their dreaming, which suggests that they, like so many spiritual gurus in the Greco-Roman world, based their teaching and their authority in ecstasy-based revelation, in the claim to be in direct contact with the divine and to receive direct authoritative communications from the divine. The image of shepherding that will appear in verse 12 suggests that these interlopers are people who present themselves and act as teachers or spiritual leaders. Jude rouses his hearers to the urgency of contending for the faith, the convictions about God's interventions and about the way of life that finds mercy before God that they have shared, all the more as this represents God's own deposit of God's revelatory truth to the community of the Holy Ones, the saints.

We might notice how the way Jude has formulated verses 3 and 4 positions the hearers alongside Jude and over against these interlopers. Jude and the addressees enjoy a shared salvation that, as the letter unfolds, is not shared by these teachers. Jude also casts himself and his hearers in the roles of defenders of the faith, while the interlopers emerge as a clear and present danger to the integrity of the faith, again hearing faith here as a body of revealed teaching that shapes both convictions and practice.

Jude will, in fact, take issue more with the teacher's ethical practice than with their doctrine. It was common in the 19th and 20th centuries to paint Jude's adversaries as Gnostics, but on the basis of far too little evidence and a rather flawed understanding of how Gnosticism actually developed. There is no real evidence of a Christological controversy behind the letter of Jude, such as we see behind 1 and 2 John.

Denying our only master and Lord Jesus Christ is more likely a reflection of these teachers' lack of interest in obeying Jesus, rather than confessing Jesus. Jesus himself was remembered to affirm the inseparability of confession and practical obedience. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you? Their presence at the love feasts of the believers strongly suggests that these teachers would self-identify as Christians themselves.

But, Jude asserts, the trajectory of their lives suggests otherwise. Verse 4 identifies their principal failure, and thus the principal danger that they posed to Jude's congregations. This is their refusal to align themselves with God's purposes for the favor that God had extended to the disobedient.

God's grace does not give license for self-indulgence. Rather, it provides the opportunity and the wherewithal for deliverance at the last judgment. God offers his grace with a view, as Jude puts it in verse 24, to keeping you from stumbling and to making you stand blameless with great joy before his glory.

Jude's hearers would have appreciated the injustice, the affront inherent in taking advantage of a giver's generosity and using a giver's favor to ends contrary to that giver's intentions and purposes. We 21st-century Christians are culturally alienated from the ethic of giving and returning favor, the ethic of giving well and receiving well, both by honoring the gift and honoring the bond of loyalty to the giver through seeking to advance the giver's interests in return. Jude accuses the interlopers of violating this sacred bond, of perverting God's generous kindness in forgiving rather than punishing sins by making room in their lives and quite possibly encouraging other believers also to make room in their lives for self-indulgent rather than God-honoring practices.

The notion that God's grace implied indulgence, though far removed from the apostolic gospel, was nevertheless fairly widespread in first-century churches. Paul himself had to correct the implications his own converts drew from his law-free gospel. One might recall how, for example, he had to address sexual license taken by some parties in Corinth as well as excessive liberty in regard to participating again in the banquets held on the grounds of idols' temples.

Prophets and teachers in some of the churches addressed by revelation, like those believers in Paul's Corinth, would also teach that believers could make room for participation in idolatry, for the sake of getting along with their neighbors. Paul himself was accused of promoting such self-indulgence, against which he defends himself vigorously in his letter to the Christians in Rome by foregrounding the moral transformation that his gospel promoted. The interlopers against whom Jude writes may have been of such a mindset as well, or they might merely have been charismatic sponges looking for a free ride and more from gullible Christians.

The second-century pagan author, Lucian, tells of a certain Peregrinus, who was able to take advantage of a Christian congregation in this fashion for quite some time before his insincerity was found out. Jude presents these interlopers as no better than the many other windbags peddling their philosophies or religions in the marketplace, seeking a means of profit from their marks, never above indulging both the belly and the loins. Identifying these intruders as ungodly in verse 4 introduces a verbal link that connects them with the objects of God's judgment in the predictions of First Enoch that we'll encounter in the 15th verse of Jude's letter, and with the false teachers against whom the apostles had warned, such as we encounter in verse 18 of this letter.

Jude adds that these intruders were, quote, marked out long ago for this condemnation in verse 4. The claim that they stand under and are destined to experience God's judgment obviously serves to raise questions, at the very least, about the advantage of continuing to tolerate their influence. Jude marks them out as erring and short-sighted people to be re-evangelized and redeemed rather than as voices to heed. Much of Jude's letter will be occupied with demonstrating through historical example, the examples being chiefly taken from their shared scriptures, that those who behave as these interlopers are behaving come to a bad end when God intervenes to hold them accountable.

Cain, Balaam, Korah and his party, the rebel angels, the people of Sodom, the Exodus generation, these all stand as warnings against walking in the way of these interlopers and

as a warning to these interlopers of the end for which they are destined if they continue on their path. Jude may also suggest, with a strong language of destiny here, that the interlopers are playing out a role for which they were, in fact, destined because the apostles had predicted that such people would emerge among the faithful.

Their script had been written prior to their emergence among the faithful that Jude addresses. The end of their plot arc is well-known already from history. The situation that called forth this letter from Jude reflects the wider background of the resurgence of prophecy within the early Christian movement.

The early church was convinced that it had experienced, in every place that it was formed, a fresh outpouring of the Spirit and its manifestation in charismatic gifts, notably praying or speaking in strange languages, uttering prophetic words ostensibly from the Lord, and so forth. This is reflected in such passages as Galatians 3, verses 1 to 4, 1 Corinthians 2, verses 1 to 5, and Hebrews chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, all of which recall the heightened awareness of the Holy Spirit's activity in a congregation's midst. It is reflected as well throughout Acts, especially highlighted in Pentecost and Peter's Pentecost sermon, or the ministries of the apostles in Samaria, or the Cornelius episode in Acts chapter 10.

It became important, therefore, to test what was spoken in the Spirit to certify that it was, in fact, a reliable word from the Lord. And so we find in Paul's letters, Do not despise prophecies, but test everything. Hold fast to what is good.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. Jesus himself had warned against false prophets whose words might have aligned with the truth, but whose motives were self-seeking and harmful to the health of the community. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. The disciples are to examine the results of these prophets' work in their midst to determine if they are genuine.

Paul warned Christians in Colossae that a teacher's boasting of having had visions of angels or even living an austere lifestyle was sufficient to guarantee against fraud. Genuine authority came only from a teacher's connection with Christ. The author, 1 John, writing in the wake of a painful church split, offered both ethical and doctrinal tests.

Teachers who failed to acknowledge that Jesus was the Christ incarnate or who failed to reflect a sincere love of the brothers and sisters were not moved by God's spirit. Later in the first or early in the second century, a manual on Christian liturgy to the Holy Spirit and the three church order and ethics known as the Didache, which is Greek for the teaching, devoted three out of 16 chapters to the matter of welcoming, supporting, and testing itinerant prophets. They were to be given significant freedom and respect, but if they solicited money or gifts while pretending to speak in the spirit, they were to be booted out.

Also, they were limited to three days' sustenance at community expense so that they would not settle in as permanent sponges or potential disruptions of local leadership. Spiritual gifts were not to become permanent meal tickets. The letter of Jude is one more window into this phenomenon of helping congregations discern and learn how they themselves can discern the reliable teacher from the one who will lead them astray from the faith once for all passed down to the saints and lead them astray from the direction in which this faith would impel them in their own lives.