

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH BY PRAYING IN TONGUES?
The Unifying Power of Praying in the Holy Spirit
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Introduction

Jude is an oblique epistle. As an enigmatic work, it is eclipsed only by the book of Revelation. Jude's audience is obscured. Jude's use of the Old Testament is brief and opaque. Jude quotes apocryphal works unfamiliar to readers. Jude shares about 70% of its content with 2 Peter (only the synoptic gospels boast such high percentages of agreement). Jude only uniquely contributes to the New Testament at the beginning and the ending of the letter.

Aside from these difficulties, Jude's conclusion is one of the most beautifully written and often quoted doxologies in the NT. Indeed, Jude's contribution to Christian thought has been evaluated as limited to its doxology.¹ The primary focus of this commentary is to shift the focus of Jude away from his doxology and to uncover Jude's unique contribution to the NT – his closing exhortation in verses 17 - 23.

Audience/Background

This paper will presume that Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, is the author of the book of Jude. It will also presume that the date of writing was between 62 and 67 AD.² The matter of audience and occasion for writing requires some discussion. Two audiences could be considered. His audience could be Gentile Christians living near Syria or Asia Minor. Alternatively, his audience could be Jewish Christians living in or around Palestine.

¹ Peter Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 8.

² See Craig Grigson III, "Contend for the Faith: An Exegetical Study of Jude 17 - 23," August 2020 for a complete discussion. It is unpublished so if you would like a copy please email the author at cgrigson@bcc.edu.

The book of Jude itself gives scant evidence as to his audience calling them “beloved” but giving no indication of their ethnicity or geographical makeup. Arguing for a primarily Jewish Christian audience is the overwhelming amount of Old Testament and contemporary apocryphal writings (e.g. Enoch 1 and Testament of Moses).³ As a counter-argument it could be said that when a modern Christian is converted we teach them the Old Testament and give them lessons from contemporary authors.⁴ Therefore, there is no reason to believe that Jude’s book would have gone over the head of a Gentile audience.

Further compounding the issue is the lascivious nature of the background issues of the book of Jude. His warnings do not seem appropriate for the kinds of temptations that a pious Jewish audience would tolerate in their midst.⁵ A Gentile audience would seem more appropriate to lay allegations of licentiousness and rebellion against. Determining the audience is impossible based on the content of Jude alone and a close look at the background issues is necessary to determine the audience of Jude.⁶

If a Gentile audience is presumed then two background issues could be considered – proto-Gnosticism and Christian false teachers.⁷ Incipient Gnosticism (nor the early date this commentary concludes) is not supported by the text of Jude.⁸ Jude’s vitriol is not directed at a

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, v. 37 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 410.

⁴ Schreiner, 410.

⁵ David deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 869.

⁶ Herbert Bateman, *Jude*, ed. Wayne House, Hall Harris, and Andrew Pitts, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 50.

⁷ Alfred Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, trans. Joseph Cunningham (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1958), 488.

⁸ Bateman, *Jude*, 49.

proto-mystery religion.⁹ His opponents are immoral and rebellious but Jude gives no doctrinal defense to any false doctrine whatsoever. This observation also negates the claim that false teachers had slipped into the church and were teaching false doctrines (possibly antinomianism or libertarianism).¹⁰ Jude spends no time combating these or any other doctrinal issues.

What clues about the background issues can be sussed out if we presume a Jewish audience? The vast majority of commentators that conclude Jude the half-brother of Jesus is the author of the book of Jude point to false teachers infiltrating the church as the primary issue Jude seeks to address.¹¹ As mentioned above, it seems hard to reconcile a pious Jewish audience being infiltrated by immorality and rebellion. However, a closer study of the socio-political climate of Palestine during the proposed date of the writing of Jude (62-67AD) reveals a third possibility for the background issues of Jude.

A Third Possibility - Historical Considerations

Only a single commentator consulted saw Jude addressing the background issue of Jewish Christians joining the cause of the Zealots (seemingly due to the recent development of the idea).¹² The Zealots were an anti-Roman group of Jews who were passionate about religious separation from the corrupt High Priests in Israel.¹³ Even more hated than the corruption of the Priesthood, was their hatred of Rome.¹⁴ God alone was the ruler of Israel. This explains the

⁹ Bateman, 49.

¹⁰ Bateman, 49.

¹¹ Werner Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Kee, Revised (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1975), 425.

¹² Bateman, *Jude*, 51.

¹³ Bateman, 53.

¹⁴ Bateman, 53.

rebellion issues addressed in Jude. To see the issue of immorality a consultation of a first-century Roman and Jewish source is necessary.

Josephus described the Zealots like this:

With an insatiable lust for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy; the murder of men and the violation of women were their sport; they caroused on their spoils, with blood to wash them down, and from mere satiety unscrupulously indulged in effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and attiring themselves in women's apparel, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to enhance their beauty. And not only did they imitate the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of lasciviousness unlawful pleasures and wallowing as in a brothel in the city, which they polluted from end to end with their foul deeds. Yet, while they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous, and approaching with mincing steps they would suddenly become warriors and whipping out their swords from under their dyed mantles transfix whomsoever they met.¹⁵

This shortened description fits the strong reaction found in Jude's short letter (Jude 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 19). It is the position of this commentary that the internal and external evidence of Jude's letter points to Zealotism being the background issue that Jude is warning Jewish Christians in the region of Palestine against.

Thus the purpose of Jude and the urgency for which he felt necessary to step in and write to the church could be the rising swell of rebellion against Rome and the Priesthood. Zealots who were known for debauchery and rebellion infiltrating the church would be a significant cause for Jude to put pen to paper in warning the church to avoid their sin while seeking to convert them to the Way of Christ.

¹⁵ Bateman, 70.

A Linguistic Consideration

This paper will provide a summary of the conclusions reached. There is not enough space or time to fully document the thought process or analysis conducted to reach these conclusions.¹⁶ The first step in untangling this knot is to determine how διακρινομένων should be translated. This is a more difficult task than it seems. The construction of διακρινομένων is unique to Jude's letter. It is present, middle, participle, plural, accusative, and masculine.¹⁷ Here it will suffice to say a few things. First, the NT usage of διακρίνω is novel. That is, the classical, koine, and Septuagint do not use the word to mean doubt. Secondly, lexical support for Jude 22 being translated doubt is non-existent in any of the lexicons consulted for this commentary. Third, the lens of a Jewish rebellion movement pushes the sense of the word to align more with "separate" or "dispute" (both of which are well supported in lexicons). Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, the word is middle voice and plural; most translators view this as a collective plural. That is, the individualistic modern lens emphasizes the individuals in the group rather than the group as a whole. However, Jude seems to emphasize both the individual *and the group* in his letter. Shifting the emphasis towards a balanced translation between the individuals in the group (collective plural) and the group itself (a group being treated together as one) leads to something like "those who are separating (or are disputing with) themselves from the group." The middle voice is either reflexive, indirect, intensive, or dynamic. Reflexive makes the most sense here and combined with shifting the emphasis to the group rather than the individuals in the group the meaning of διακρινομένων is much more clear. *The group is acting on itself to*

¹⁶ See Grigson III, "Contend for the Faith" for a complete discussion. It is unpublished so if you would like a copy please email the author at cgrigson@bcc.edu.

¹⁷ The lexical study found in Grigson III "Contend for the Faith" contains a full analysis.

separate from itself (or dispute with itself). Unfortunately, this leads to discarding a great volume of commentary on these two verses because it eliminates or modifies the progressive stages of those who have a “crossed-the-line” interpretation of Jude 22 - 23 (cf. below). One of the starting points of this paper is interpreting the epistle of Jude through the lens of Zealot activity, however, the same conclusion (translating διακρινομένου in the sense of separation or disputing) can be reached through a purely lexical lens as well.

Summary

Compiling the above conclusions yields the following summary statement: Jude the half-brother of Jesus and full brother of James (an early leader of the Jerusalem church) wrote the letter of Jude to Jewish Christians in the Palestine region who were in danger of being recruited to the cause of the Zealots after the death of James (62 AD) and before the death of Peter (67 AD). Ultimately, reading Jude with Zelotism in mind may be part of the hermeneutical spiral and the concept of separatists (discussed in more detail below) may be reasonably substituted. With this in mind, verses 22-23 will be the focus of the below exegesis.¹⁸

Praying in the Holy Spirit

Jude has been ratcheting up the pressure in his letter until this point and these four verses (20-23) are the climatic release of pressure. They are the resolution to the entire letter. The analysis of the entire letter in light of the Jewish Rebellion through verse 19 contributes to a fuller understanding of these verses; the nuances of the entire letter of Jude can lead to radically different interpretations of these two verses. Finally, after all of this analysis, the ultimate command given by Jude is perhaps as challenging to live by as some of the commands that Jesus

¹⁸ See Grigson III “Contend for the Faith” for a complete discussion. It is unpublished so if you would like a copy please email the author at cgrigson@bcc.edu.

gives in the Sermon on the Mount. Not only are these verses technically challenging they are spiritually challenging as well. Before exploring the phrase “Praying in the Holy Spirit,” the surrounding context must be unpacked.

We come now to the climax of the dense epistle. Jude has been building up to this moment the entire letter. He has shown how these intruders were ungodly (verses 5 - 8), he has shown from scripture the standard to judge their actions by (verses 9 - 10), he has pronounced condemnation upon them (verse 11), he has shown what their effects on the church are (verse 12 - 13), he has described their fate (verse 14 - 16), he has reminded the church of New Testament predictions made by the apostles that these people would come and have indeed come (verse 17 - 19), and now, in climax, he tells the church what to do about it. The purpose of the letter is to exhort the church to “contend” for the faith. Here he issues several challenging commands that the church will find difficult to follow (verses 20 - 23) before commending them to God’s preserving power (verses 24 - 25). Verse 20 - 23 is the *pièce de résistance* of the entire letter.

How should the church contend for their faith in the face of such vile intruders who seek to cause division in the church? Fittingly, it is the most challenging section to defend textually, translate with certainty, and interpret consistently. Wading through these exegetical challenges provides commands to the church of monumental challenge. Some of the most spiritually challenging material of the entire New Testament is found here in these four verses (author’s subjective opinion). Like much of God’s scripture, it becomes more challenging the deeper the exegesis is taken – not less.

It is here in these verses that the payoff for consistently applying the lens of Jewish political revolt is realized. It is in these short commands that the biblical themes of hope, mercy, forgiveness, God’s choosing the church as His agents, and reversal of fate are realized.

Contend Against Division (vv. 20 - 23)

Keep Yourself Together in God's Love (vv. 20 - 21)

Verses 20 and 21 are one sentence. Functionally it is a single command with three elaborating clauses. Two before the command and one after. Jude's syntactical structure allows for numerous possible translations and interpretations. The twenty-nine words in these two verses contain no less than 89 syntactical decisions that need to be made. Given the density of the epistle, the likelihood that Jude intended several nuanced meanings piled up one on another is high. Meaning that the density of information and nuance from grammar and syntax alone is considerable. To make sense of this sentence with any consistency and to keep focus on a particular aspect of Jude's epistle a brief digression on the methods used to make syntactical decisions for Jude 20 - 23 must be made here.

Concerning the translation, and with the hermeneutical spiral in mind; two starting points should be stated. With these two starting points in mind, there will be a departure from the traditional interpretation (slippy slope) of Jude 20 - 23. 1. The key verse of Jude is verse 3. Deciding whether vv. 20-23 are descriptive or prescriptive. Based on the above key verse if Jude is trying to cause his audience to "contend for the faith" it seems logical to conclude that vv. 20-23 is prescriptive. Adding to this argument is the prevalent use of imperative verbs. An argument against this could be that Jude has very little "how to" content in the warning section. Additionally, Jude writes very little (or no) didactic material before vv. 20-23. There is a clear shift of purpose between vv. 20-23 and the rest of the letter, so a change from primarily warning/descriptive material to imperative/prescriptive material is not unsurprising. In conclusion, choosing to translate vv. 20-23 as prescriptive material does have exegetical consequences which will be explored. 2. As discussed in the introduction to Jude, if the letter

does not directly address Zealotism as one of its background issues then it certainly was in Jude's mind as he was writing it. Especially, considering the date concluded in the introduction of 62-67 AD. Even if Zealotism is not the background then linguistically the same interpretive angle can be achieved by translating διακρινομένους as "separatists." Taken together the translation of vv. 20-23 and the interpretation are affected.

Build Up Your Faith (vs. 20a)

Jude begins by shifting the focus of the letter away from the intruders to the church by addressing them directly (Ὑμεῖς). There can be no question as to who Jude is speaking because he modifies "you" with "beloved." This is the church. God's beloved that he began writing the letter to (verse 3). The subject (Ὑμεῖς) of the sentence is interrupted by two clauses before he tells the audience what he wants them to do. This is called a left dislocation and alerts the audience that there is something between the subject and the predicate (in this case two participle phrases).¹⁹ Both clauses are preparatory material framing the following command by giving the method for accomplishing the command prior to actually giving the command. This is not dissimilar to commands that we see in everyday life. Often the person giving the command wishes to avoid the person receiving the command running off and doing it in a way that the speaker had no intention of the listener doing. This preparatory material is like saying to your kids, "By sweeping and taking out the trash, clean the kitchen." In the military, all formation commands have two components the preparatory command and the actual command. For example: To get a military formation to turn to the left the command given is, "Left. Face." "Left" is the preparatory portion of the command and alerts the formation about what command

¹⁹ Steven E. Runge, *Discourse grammar of the Greek New Testament: a practical introduction for teaching and exegesis*, Lexham Bible reference series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2010).

is coming next. “Face” upon receiving this command the entire formation would in unison pivot to face left. Without the preparatory portion of the command, the formation would not execute the command in unison. Similarly, Jude prepares his audience for the upcoming command by explaining how he wants them to accomplish the next command and then follows it with what the results of following the command should look like.

This leads to translating ἐποικοδομοῦντες as a modal participle (or a participle of means) “by building up yourselves.” The idea of “building up” is found elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 20:32, Col 2:7, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 12, 14) and is in line with the apostolic idea of what it means to follow Christ’s ways. Building up implies the idea of building upon something that is already in existence.²⁰ This metaphor is poignant in the New Testament in the context of building a new Temple. Not one of stone in Jerusalem but one that is built in the hearts of God’s true worshipers. Jesus himself used the metaphor (John 2:19, Mark 14:58) to shift the spiritual dwelling place of God from a building made by human hands into a building made by the hands of God himself in the hearts of humans. This is the metaphorical understanding that the audience of Jude would have understood him to mean. Furthermore, Jude’s usage of the metaphor of building up a dwelling place for the Spirit of God is in line with the eschatological theme of Jude. God’s dwelling began in physical presence with Adam and Eve in the Garden and progressed to physical structures of the tabernacle and temple and then into the incarnation of Christ followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His people and culminating in the second coming of Christ. Jude is clearly interested in building the individual heart temples

²⁰ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English lexicon*, Rev. and augm. throughout (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 675.

of the church for the Spirit to dwell in. There is no need to aid the national ethnic Israel rebels in their war against Rome.

This is not the end of the metaphor, however. God's dwelling with humankind is relational. When God establishes His ultimate dwelling with people in the end times he will do it in a community of His faithful saints. There is unity in the idea of being built up. This building is fashioned by members of a community acting in teamwork with one another. Thus the meaning of ἐποικοδομοῦντες being a plural word is fully realized. Jude is once again combating the separatist movement of Judean rebels pulling Christ's followers away from the faith in support of earthly things.

Jude is saying that the individuals in the community should build their hearts up and that the community as a whole should be built up.

But what is the foundation of the edifice to be built upon? "Your most holy faith." The very thing that the purpose of the letter (v. 3) has been written to urge the congregation to contend for. How should the church defend the faith? By building it up. Not tearing it down. By strengthening its walls and structures. By adding to its numbers not subtracting from the numbers. And on an individual level, each one should build a temple for God to live inside them and dwell with them in their hearts. They should build upon the foundation of faith that had been delivered to them once by the apostles. Strengthening their individual and community faith is one of the methods for contending for the faith that Jude encourages them toward.

Pray in the Holy Spirit (vs. 20b)

Building a building is hard work. Building a spiritual building is difficult and labor-some. Certainly, we as humans fall short of building such magnificent buildings as befitting the Creator

God. So Jude immediately offers the power behind the effort the church must put into building the church – “Praying with the Holy Spirit.”

Again Jude presents an adverbial participle with numerous translation and syntactical choices available. Like ἐποικοδομοῦντες, προσευχόμενοι is a participle of means preparing the audience for *how* Jude expects them to carry out the command he is about to issue. Again the audience knows that these are preparatory participles because grammatically the subject (ὁμεῖς) has not yet been resolved.²¹

The prepositional phrase “ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ” is a dative construction. Of the five syntactical choices available the instrumental of manner makes the most sense in light of the two hermeneutical spiral considerations above (this section is prescriptive and interpreted in light of zealots). By translating the phrase “with the Holy Spirit” the manner of praying is less vague than “in or by”. “To” is also allowed by the syntax but would be utterly redundant since the person to whom Jude is prescribing that they pray is God Himself. Thus the syntactical choice that provides the most prescriptive clarity is the dative of manner utilizing the preposition “with.” Thus the clause taken as a whole is “by praying with the Holy Spirit.”

This is in keeping with the relational aspects of building up discussed above. God is a relational God. We cooperate with Him as He prays with us. This preparatory clause is the second way that the church must keep themselves together.

What did Jude mean by praying with the Holy Spirit? Especially, in light of the separatists? *Praying in tongues is the first and most obvious meaning.* Jude would most certainly have been present in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Jude’s brother James was the leader of the

²¹ Runge, *Discourse grammar of the Greek New Testament*.

church in Jerusalem during the Jerusalem council which accepted Gentiles into the Church **based on their speaking in tongues**. This was the definitive spiritual mark of being part of the Church. *Speaking in tongues is the single most unifying event in Church history*. In the face of separation and rebellion Jude's instruction pointed them back to the most fundamentally unifying event of the early church. Many commentaries either gloss over tongues completely or state that Jude's reference is not confined to speaking in tongues.²² This may very well be true, however, the unifying power of the Holy Spirit as expressed by the common experience of the Church praying in tongues cannot be overlooked.

Three other brief considerations must be made. First, it has long been argued that the Acts accounts of being filled with the Holy Spirit were accompanied by speaking in Tongues. It was normative.²³ Furthermore, because of the authenticity of the experience it could not be faked. This is not to say that it cannot be studied and attempts made to fake it today. This is to say that during the events of Acts, tongues were seen as authoritatively authentic. An undeniable seal of approval from the Holy Spirit who Jesus said would come after His ascension. The point is that if Jude is combating those who "crept in unawares" then the unfakeable action of praying in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues would be a good way to build trust among the saints. Lastly, it can be seen for sure that Jude considered those who crept in unawares as being devoid of the Holy Spirit so there could be no greater contrast among believers than that of speaking in tongues.

In any case, the subject of their prayer is found in the next clause. They now have in their mind that they are supposed to be praying, but for what? This follows in Verse 21. The same is

²² **Green1987?**, p 213.

²³ Waverly Nunnaly, "Acts," Lecture (Springfield, MO, 2019).

true of building themselves up in their faith. They know how they are supposed to accomplish the forthcoming command but they do not yet know what these two things will accomplish.

Persevere Until the Ultimate Reward (vs. 21)

Fortunately, the answer is in the next clause. Here the resolution of the interrupted subject is to be found. The command to keep themselves stresses the plural nature of the community (ἐαυτοὺς) they are supposed to be keeping. Jude is saying both to the collective individuals to keep themselves in the love of God *and* that the community should keep itself in the love of God. In the warning section Jude points to individual and collective members of the community that are condemned. Now here in the exhortation portion of the letter he emphasizes both the individuality and communal nature of his commands.

Of significant exegetical significance is the phrase ἀγάπη θεοῦ. This phrase has distinction as being able to be translated in numerous ways (see grammatical chart for all possible options). Jude could be saying that they need to keep themselves in the love that they have for God. He could also be saying that they must keep themselves in the love that God has for them. He could also be saying that they must keep themselves in the love that comes from God. These three options focus on translating ἀγάπη in the locative of logical sphere and the three genitive options that come from θεοῦ. However it is possible that ἀγάπη could be translated syntactically in three additional ways! This two word phrase is loaded with possibility and it is likely that NT authors loaded this phrase with theological and practical significance intentionally.

Seen through the lens of divisive intruders into the church Jude is telling the church that they must take action to keep the church firmly planted in a specific location (by building up the church, and praying in the Holy Spirit). The place that he tells them to keep themselves is in the domain (logical sphere) of the love that comes from God (ablative of source). Given the divisive

problems that the church was facing being able to get outside their four walls to gain some objectivity was vital to their unity. Keep themselves in the love that comes from God. By highlighting the source of the love that they must keep themselves in Jude points them back to the redemptive history that God has had for His people. This is confirmed unquestionably in the following clause where Jude confirms that the result of their following this command through will be eternal life. The source of God's love is highlighted and the results of God's love are stated as the mercy of Christ (I.e. eternal life).

Although trinitarian thought is far removed from the time period that Jude wrote during it is worth a small digression here to point out that in one sentence Jude has mentioned praying in the Holy Spirit as the method for achieving eternal life, love coming from God (the Father) as the source of eternal life, and the mercy of Christ as the instrument leading to eternal life. Jude may not have been a trinitarian *per se* but this is as close as any other scriptural evidence for the doctrine that can be found. Furthermore, the Christian is not absent from this sentence and has been commanded to “keep themselves” indicating that action is also required. Building a full doctrine of faith and works (Jude's brother's phraseology) is not possible from this single sentence but it can be stated that the Holy Spirit, the Father, the Son, and the Christian all have a part to play leading to eternal salvation. To what degree those parts are varies on theological tradition and other scriptural data, of course, but all four persons have a hand in the eternal life of the community of believers.

Returning from this trinitarian digression to the final phrase of verse 21, a wordy phrase packed with meaning awaits. It is possible to translate the participle προσδεχόμενοι as a temporal participle (CEV, ISV, NIV, NLT, TEV) but this seems somewhat redundant. Jude has already given the command to “keep” indicating an ongoing action. Other translations pick up this

participle as an imperative (NAB, NJB, NRSV, REB) but this takes away from the imperative already given and participles translated as imperatives are rare.[brooks and wineberry] It makes the most sense to translate it as a result or purpose (the telic participle). This can be somewhat uncomfortable for translators. Presumably, because it gets a little close to works resulting in salvation formulations. These fears are unfounded, however, as scripture balances itself out and the sovereign role of the Spirit, Father, and Son are clearly stated in this very sentence. Without thinking about theological constraints, however, grammatically it makes the most sense to break the entire sentence down into how-to clauses, a command, and a purpose clause. This make the entire sentence flow into one coherent thought and contribute to the purpose of the letter meaningfully.

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