

# How to Get Sideways With God

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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Tonight we have the privilege, or at least I hope it will be a privilege, of doing what we know as the book of Jude, part 2. Now lest you think why are we doing two parts to a 25 verse book of the Bible, I actually preached through the book of Jude once for 14 weeks, so you're getting a breather tonight. But the book of Jude has a very special place in my heart and, you know, it's Sunday night which is where we can kind of gather, I kind of feel like Sunday night is kind of like in the living room of the family of faith, you know? Sunday morning is more like having a backyard party. I mean, there's people coming and going everywhere, but Sunday night is kind of like everybody is sitting in the living room together and so sometimes we can get a little personal, so to speak.

When I was walking through my doctorate degree, I knew the subject matter that I wanted to do my dissertation on, in fact, at least in the academic world, I guess I coined a word called intra-evangelism. It was a study of evangelism to people who are lost church members. That's what I studied. That was my focus of my academic, I guess, dissertation, so to speak, and when you're studying a subject matter such as that and dealing with people who are not true believers but are religious in their behavior, there's a whole lot of source material in the Bible. I mean, all we have to look at is the entirety of the Pharisees, I mean, there's a whole lot of source material. But my first choice on that subject matter was the book of Jude, in fact, not just the book of Jude but in specific the verses that we're going to study tonight, verses 11 through 13, and so I wrote up a prospectus, presented it to who would be my supervising professor, looked over it, we made an appointment to come back, and I'll never forget what he said to me. He took his glasses off and he said, "Meyers, do you not like me?" I said, "What do you mean, doc? What do you mean do I not?" He said, "Do you want me to go to the grave early?" And I said, "Why would you say that?" He said, "Do you know how many dissertations have been written on Jude in the entirety of the world?" I said, "Two?" He said, "Why would we want to be the third?" He said, "There's a reason," and he said, "Please," he said, "because you love me, can we please pick a different text to utilize for the subject matter?"

So John 3 and Nicodemus became my text, but that being said, the reason that he responded the way that he did and I alluded to it briefly this morning, is that the book of Jude has a lot of what we call textual concerns. Now there's no problems, hear me very clearly, it's when you look at it from the outside, honestly when you look at it through

eyes that are not faith-centered eyes, there's a lot of struggle. We mentioned this morning all of the allusions to the Old Testament, three major stories in three verses, but there's two other stories. I briefly alluded to these this morning, these are the reason, these stories are the reason that people struggle with the book of Jude, all right? In verse 9 and 10, we have the story of Michael the archangel disputing with the devil over the body of Moses. Now I'm not here to give a message or a lesson or sermon on those verses, but you do understand in Deuteronomy 34 when Moses dies and is buried by the Lord, there is not an account of this story as written in the book of Jude. You fast forward to verse 14 and we have a man by the name of Enoch who was the seventh from Adam, that famous man who was not, just taken up to be with the Lord. There's no record in Genesis anywhere of any specific prophecies that he wrote yet here there is an allusion to them. Now the reason that Jude causes so many people so many textual struggles is there are actually what we call non-canonical books, meaning not scriptural books, one is entitled the Assumption of Moses, and one of them is titled the Book of Enoch, and they are non-canonical, they are not scriptural, they are absolutely wild if you read them, however these stories are actually mentioned in those non-canonical books. Now listen, when it's in the Bible, here's what the Lord's done: he's taken the part of those books that were true and given them to us to be ultimate truth. So there's no question about the validity of these stories, it's just that a lot of people have struggles with because there's a whole lot more to them that is out there that is not considered scripture.

Now that being said, tonight we're going to sandwich right in the middle, right between the story about Moses and the story of Enoch and his prophecies. Verses 11 through 13, in my personal opinion, wrap up the entire problem and mentality of those who are sideways with God whether it be the Israelites in the wilderness, the angels and their original rebellion, Sodom and Gomorrah, the reprobate minds, whether it be the situation over the body of Moses, the prophecies of Enoch, I believe verses 11 through 13 give us some insight in how do we no matter when we live, where we live or what we're dealing with, how do we get sideways with God? How can we find ourselves in a position where the Lord is not pleased with us?

Beginning in verse 11, and by the way, I mentioned this morning you have a single verse that has an entire Old Testament story within that one verse. You're about to get several Old Testament stories with even half of a verse. So hold on, here we go. It says, "Woe unto them!" Push pause, you do realize when God says "woe" that's not good, right? When God says, "Woe unto you," that means you're headed the wrong direction. Please stop what you're doing and pay attention.

"Woe unto them! for they," that's not just a story about Moses, that's not just the story about Sodom and Gomorrah, that's not just the story, that's all these individuals. It says,

11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. 12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit,

twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Now as we're going to see in just a few moments, there is a whole lot of the Old Testament that the Lord has packed into just a couple of verses but he's been very strategic here to share with us two things, not only the position we can find ourselves "being sideways with God," but what that looks like, the products of that. And so tonight we're going to begin with the positions we find ourselves in that we should never do so, then we're going to look at what does that look like in our lives, and hopefully tonight we'll be able to do our own personal litmus test to make sure we don't have the products that show that we're in the position that is erroneous with God.

In general, there are three different ways according to this passage in Jude that we get sideways with God, we get contrary to God, we get going on the wrong path with God. The first one is a religious reason. Now that's one of those words we expect to hear in this context but I want to share with you something you may or may not be aware. Did you know that more people have darkened the doors of hell through religion than atheism? I mean, think about it. In the history of the world, only about 2% of the population from Adam and Eve to you and I, only about 2% have claimed to be atheists, that they don't believe anything. Now are you really willing to believe that 98% of humanity is saved and in heaven right now? Of course not. In fact, the best statistics that we've got worldwide it's less than 10%. So if 2% are atheist and less than 10% are true Bible believing Jesus believers, then if I do my math right, that means we've got almost 90% of the world going to hell in religion. In other words, doing things, performing acts, believing things, singing things, that they honestly believe make them right with God, and that's exactly what's being alluded to here in verse 11.

It says, "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain." Now let me remind us Cain's way back in the book of Genesis 4. We know that Adam and Eve have two sons, one is named Cain and one is named Abel. The Bible says there in chapter 4 that they came to present themselves an offering to the Lord. We know that Abel, according to Hebrews 11, not only gave a better sacrifice but he gave of the firstfruits. What did Cain do? Cain provided that which was convenient. Cain provided that which he wanted to give. But here's the part of the story that's critical to what Jude is saying. When the Lord confronted Cain with his rebellious worship, do you remember what Cain did? Well, of course, he went and killed his brother, right? But let's read between the lines for a moment. He would not admit that even though the Lord called him on the fact that his ways were erroneous, that they were erroneous because it's what he wanted to do, he desired to do and it should be acceptable to God because it's what he wanted to give to God. The way of Cain is offering a sacrifice, doing that which looks good to us so it must be good to God. Let me give you kind of a paraphrase of that. Those that are sideways with God for religious reasons base their entirety of their "relationship" with God or the gods or whichever god most people believe in, not based on a spiritual reality but based on standards.

Can I give you some very well-known examples? I give 2% of my wealth and I pray five times a day facing in the right direction. Oh, it looks good to the flesh. Why? Because I'm sacrificial and I'm taking time out of my day. Or maybe I'm willing to take two years of my young life when I could get my career started and my family started and I'm willing to go somewhere else and knock on doors six days a week. Surely that's a standard that should be acceptable to God.

I know I've shared this story with our men's ministry, if I've shared it with the church collective forgive me. It's one of those stories that's so good you just need to hear it again if you've already heard it. I had a neighbor once in the Dallas/Fort Worth area that when I got in a gospel conversation with her, she was a retired lady, staying home with the grandkids, kind of that stage of life, got in a gospel conversation with her and I asked her if she thought that she'd be in heaven one day and she said, "Oh, absolutely." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because I was a Boy Scout leader for 25 years." And I said, "Okay, what makes you think that that's the standard?" To which she replied, "If being a Boy Scout leader for 25 years doesn't get you into heaven, nothing can." That was her standard.

So what do we do as humanity? Well, my standard is a certain amount of prayers. My standard is a certain amount of money. My standard is abstaining from certain things. My standard is doing it this way and that way but definitely not that way. And it's so easy to look outside these walls but how often, even people who claim to be under the umbrella of Christianity, are in a works-based standard mentality that has nothing to do with what the Spirit of God told us in his word. It is all about the standard – listen – that's always convenient and pleasing to ourselves. Now can I flip the script for a moment because I know you may be thinking, I know some folks like this but it's not pleasing to their flesh, it's not appetizing to their flesh. You see, that's the opposite side of it. The way of Cain that says if I make my life miserable in the name of God, then surely I must be pleasing to God. There are people who spend the majority of their existence alone on a mountaintop meditating thinking, "Well, this must make the gods pleased. I'm giving up everything that everybody else seems to so desire."

And yet all those things I've described, none of them are even remotely located in the Bible as a right relationship with God and it goes back to what it says here in Jude, it's the way of Cain. You set a standard different than God's standard and claim that because either A, you approve of it, or B, you really don't like it, whatever it may be, then it must make you right with God because in your perspective, it makes you pleasing to him. Just like Cain said, "Well, I gave you the right offering. You don't like it. Too bad. I'm going to get rid of the offering that you actually said to give."

So the first way that we get "sideways with God" is we get religious. The second way is we begin to reason within ourselves not what God's told us but what God should really be doing or what he really should have done. You do realize that you're getting off path real quick here, right? Anytime we say, "Well, if I were God, this is how I would have done it." When you begin to reason and rationalize, you're headed the wrong way and here in verse 11 it talks about the error of Balaam. Now let me describe if you're not familiar

who Balaam is. He's most famous for having a donkey that spoke very clearly to him. You may remember that story of Balaam's donkey where the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, the prophet Balaam did not, threw him off, he began to beat the donkey and then the donkey said, "Hey, what are you doing?" That is the new Jeff Revised Version of how that story went. But the donkey talked to him. I can only imagine what that would have been like in real time but nonetheless, it specifically here says the error of Balaam.

Now the story of Balaam primarily is in the book of Numbers 22 through 25, and I know the book of Numbers is one of those sections we don't spend a whole lot of time in, but it's really the story of the Israelites wandering through and navigating what we know as the wilderness. What was the reason that got him sideways with God? Well, there's another character that's involved, another man who comes to him. He's a leader of a rival nation, a rival people, and he comes to Balaam and here's what he asked him, he says, "I need you to curse the Israelites. I need you to curse them so that I can have victory over them, I can have the spoils over them, I can defeat them." Now Balaam knew what fact was, he said, "I'm sorry. I can't curse them. You can't curse that which is uncursable. I can't do it. God has blessed them. God has prospered them. I can't curse them." But as you begin to look at the story of Balaam and the famous donkey story comes up later, one of the things that you realize is that Balaam started to reason within himself that the Israelites couldn't be cursed but they deserved to be. They couldn't be cursed but, boy, if God would curse them it would be better than letting them do what they're doing now. He began to reason to himself that they deserved it even though they were never to receive it.

So what is the error of Balaam? It's real simple: you determine that God's ways are not the right ways, and your ways are better than God's ways because Balaam said, "He ought to just curse them and get this over with," but no, we've got to walk through this mess of their lives. Now here in the book of Jude, there's only this reference to the error of Balaam. You may be surprised to find out that there are two other things in your Bible in the New Testament that speak of Balaam as far as his "being sideways with God." In 2 Peter 2, it talks about the way of Balaam, the means by which he operated, and the way in which he operated is he took the office and the gift that God gave him as a prophet and he profited off of it. He received great wealth at the hands of those that wanted him to curse Israel but he said he couldn't curse them. He received great wealth from them not because of his way but because of his doctrine. The book of Revelation 2 says woe about the doctrine of Balaam, so just kind of in synthesis here, when it comes to reasoning there's the error of Balaam, that God is not right and if it were my way it would be the right way, that leads to a way of you finding a way to profit off of what you want to happen, and eventually leads to a doctrine, a belief system that essentially says, "Well, if they cannot be cursed, listen to this, then let's corrupt them." Do you know what Balaam said to this ruler of another nation? He said, "We're not going to curse them but if you will take care of me handsomely, if you will provide for me materially, I've got an idea. How about let's convince them that they marry people they shouldn't marry, have children with people they shouldn't have children with, and embrace the idolatry of other people." This other ruler said, "You think that will really work?" He said, "You haven't met them, trust me, it'll work." So what did they do? They began to entertain the idea of others that they were not to have relationships with and just like in Solomon's life, what occurred? The idols

came in, the idolatry took root, false worship manifested, and they found themselves, listen, being at the consequence of rebelling against God. He didn't curse them but he sure did bring down some serious consequences to them which allowed these other nations to have victory over them.

So you have the way of Cain which is religious, it's my standard not God. You have the error of Balaam which is this reasoning that if I can't get out of God what I really want out of him, I'll find a way to get the results I want anyway I can. And finally at the end of verse 11 it says "the gainsaying of Core," or Korah. This is one of those stories that's found in the book of Numbers again, chapter 16. Korah was one who decided that Moses was unfit as a leader, Moses should have never been called, there's no reference to a speech impediment that he spoke of of himself in Exodus 3, but he decided that everything would be better if he was in charge and not Moses, and he began to round up some folks, he got a coalition together to oppose and to fight against Moses. However an interesting event took place. It's one of those stories that if you haven't read it in the Bible, you won't believe it's there. The Lord caused the ground to open up and like 14,000 of Korah's followers got swallowed up by the earth instantaneously. Oh, it's one of those great stories. We never teach that one at Vacation Bible School but it's a great Bible story. "The gainsaying of Core." What does that mean? It's rebellion. It is a denial of the leadership structure that God has put in place.

Now if we're going to talk about how to get sideways with God, obviously there's this religious aspect of Cain, there's this reasoning of Balaam, but there's this rebellion where we say, "You know what? It doesn't matter that God's inspired his word, it doesn't matter that he's preserved his word, I'm not going to allow this to have the preeminence of my life." You see, in our context today, it's not just that single leader Moses who obviously was the one that God had appointed but rumor, what was God doing through Moses? He was giving the Israelites his word, his communication, and Korah didn't like "Thus saith the Lord," and so the gainsaying of Core, we get sideways with God and sometimes we say, "Well, at least I'm not of another religious faith, at least I'm not trying to think on behalf of God." But maybe we're making excuses, "Well, I know that it's in the Bible but it's a different day. I realize if you'll just look at it from this perspective," there are hundreds of different angles that we can take to somehow talk ourselves out of the Bible being the authority for our lives.

Now getting sideways with God is not near as hard as we may have thought it was. It happens on a regular basis with the standards that we hold, the reasoning that we enact, or the authority that is of our lives. Here's where it gets interesting. What happens when you get sideways with God? What happens when you fall into one of these traps? And beginning in verse 12 and 13, there are these interesting descriptions, very poetic in nature. The first one is actually a distraction. "They are spots in your feasts of charity." What does that mean? The idea there is that you have gone to a wedding celebration and another activity has broken out in the midst thereof. We've all been to an event of some sort that maybe while we were there, maybe a skirmish between personalities, maybe something came up and the purpose for the gathering became very quickly not the purpose of why we were there. Everybody's focus was on something else.

"They are spots in your feast of charity." What does that look like in our world today? Let me tell you one of the products of getting sideways with God, hear me clearly, you focus on the minor issues and not the major ones. Can I put it in another way? You make mountains out of molehills. You take preferences or personal things that are to your liking and you make them deal-breakers. Why? Because that's what happened in Cain's life, that's what happened in Balaam's life, that's what happened in Korah's life. In Korah's experience, he said, "Whose side are you on, his side or my side? You want to go my way or his way?" That wasn't the issue. The issue was what did God say and so he distracted them by making a minor issue the major issue. It didn't matter the vessel the Lord was using, what mattered was what was God saying. And so there are these distractions that come up. We are sideways with God when we have a propensity or a tendency to make the little minor issues major and neglect the major issues in our life.

The second product is what I call disappointment. Notice what it says, these are clouds without water and they're trees without fruit. Now this probably isn't as relevant as an illustration here in this geographical region but I'm from a very barren dry part of the world, in fact, I joke with people growing up as a young man, I've lost golf balls in the middle of the fairway. You say, "Well, how do you lose a golf ball in the middle of the fairway?" Because we had cracks in the ground that were huge, I mean, it was a dry barren place. Now I know not everybody here is a golfer but in Texas we called it Texas wedge. Do you know what Texas wedge is? You're 100 yards out from the green but you putted anyway because the ground's that hard. In Texas and in those barren parts of the world, by the way, you do realize that Israel in the context of the Bible is a very barren place. When you've gone without rain for 90 days, when the tank is dry and the ground is cracking, all you want is to see some clouds billowing on the horizon. You get excited about it. Finally some nourishment. The crops are going to grow. The grass is going to grow. The thunder roars, the clouds billow, and they pass over and nothing happens. Oh, it's frustrating. It's irritating. And he says that's the disappointment when these hosts, when you get sideways with God here's what happens, you make all these promises but nothing comes to fruition. You say, "Oh, if you'll just follow me here, if you'll just listen to this, oh, if you'll take this perspective it'll be incredible." And what happens? It's just like clouds without water. There's nothing.

Then it says they are trees without fruit. Now that's a part of that agricultural process. Sometimes trees in due seasons and over times have those barren years, but have you ever experienced the disappointment in a tree? Jesus did. In fact, it was this week in the chronology of his ministry, the Passion Week, remember he's walking down the road and he sees a fig tree and he goes and what happened? There's no figs and he curses the tree. Why? Because the disappointment. It should be producing but it's not. And maybe in our context today, it's not so much a tree without fruit, have you ever had this experience? Typically at least in my life it happens with an apple. You get a nice apple of whatever color or brand you prefer, and you bit into it and it's spoiled and it's got that soggy... You know what I'm talking about, right? It's disappointing, isn't it? Because you thought you'd be nourished. You thought you would have pleasure but much the opposite.

What does he say? You see, when you're sideways with God, it's kind of like that clouds without water, you make promises with nothing, and then there are these trees that you're hopeful that this will impact your life, you're hopeful it will make a difference but there's nothing, and what he's saying here is those people in our lives that make these promises, that make these presentations, that they come to us with all kinds of ideas and such but at the end of the day it's just disappointing. And then finally, destruction. Verse 13, these are, "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; they are wandering stars." I love these two illustrations because it's easy to dismiss the disappointment, it's easy to say, "Well, let's give it another chance." It's easy to say, "Well, maybe that was the bad apple of the bunch. Maybe I should listen to them another time or pay attention here." But then it says these are like waves that are destructive.

Now I'm going to ask forgiveness in advance for an illustration I'm going to give because it's an illustration from an old coach of mine. Now you know anytime you tell an old coach story, you're pushing the envelope, right? This old coach of mine, you know, when you're in high school and you're on the bus going to games and such, you strike up conversations and because he was not only a coach but because he was a math teacher, he knew a lot of the students that we were talking about and having conversation with, and you get a bunch of guys on a bus, they're going to be talking about who's dating who, here, what. Now this old coach one day, I'll never forget it, a young man who I played ball with was speaking about a young lady he was desiring to spend some time with and he said, "Whoa, son. That's a rough tide woman." A rough tide woman? What's a rough tide woman? He said, "Let me tell you what a rough tide woman is, son. Oh, it looks fun now and it looks exciting but you know what's gonna happen? She's gonna drag you out to sea and drown you. That's what she gonna do. That's a rough tide woman."

Raging sea of foam. Do you know what he's saying? These folks that are sideways with God, it's appealing to our standards, it's appealing to our flesh, but what is he saying? These people are facing destruction. It looks good. It feels good. It sounds good. But those raging waves will take you out to sea and they will drown you.

The second illustration, they're wandering stars. Now because of all the technology of our lives today, we have surpassed oftentimes navigation by the stars but can I ask you a relevant illustration or question? Have you ever trusted a map, GPS, or somebody's instructions and ended up in the wrong place? How did you handle that? You didn't like it, did you? Have you ever yelled at your navigation system? Have you ever yelled at your phone? You see, you're laughing because you have because that's not where I want to go. I've wasted my time. Now I'm late. I'm going to have to make... Okay, we've all been there, right? But understand 2,000 years ago navigation by the stars, they are wandering stars. You'll take all this time, all this energy, all of these years of your life walking down a path and realize it got you a path to nowhere, a path to destruction.

If you'll allow me to go full circle here, this is what breaks my heart about people who find themselves in a religious system that is false. You do realize that of all the religions of the world, most of them are more faithful to action than even we are. In fact, if you'll allow me to say this, I've heard a wise man in my life say believe like a Baptist but live



like a Mormon. They're more faithful to their family. They're more faithful to faithfulness. That being said, oftentimes they've gone to great expense, great labor and great lengths to end up in a place that's the wrong place. Now you look at what's happened here and you say, "Well, is it really that bad?" Look at the end of verse 13, "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." They are twice dead, reserved in darkness.

You know, it may seem odd to you but one of the most encouraging verses in the Bible to me is Matthew 25:41. The picture is Jesus returning in the famous battle of Armageddon, setting up his earthly kingdom, and he talks about these individuals on his right hand going to the kingdom that was prepared for them everlasting, those that are on his left hand, he says, "Go into the lake of fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels." You say, "Why is that an encouraging verse?" Because it tells me that hell was never created for me and it was never created for you. This blackness forever, this twice dead, you see, the beautiful picture in Jude is we don't have to go down that path. We shouldn't follow those who are on that path, just like we talked about this morning. If they can't get the basics of the faith right, then why would we listen to them in other aspects?

As we close, I want to fast forward to verse 24. We'll close with probably the most beautiful verse in all of the book of Jude. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." I want to focus on that for him who is able to keep you from falling. You see, when your eyes are on Jesus, you don't get sideways. When your eyes are on the truth, you don't get caught up in the lie. When your eyes are on that which is of God, you're not focusing on that which is not of God. Oftentimes we spend so much time trying to rationalize and justify what we want to be of God, rather than just accepting what is of God. Humanity spends more time trying to rationalize what God should have said or make excuses about what he did say rather than just saying, "Well, it is what he said."

I don't know about you but I'm not an advocate of getting sideways with God. I don't want to fall into the descriptions of these individuals or be a follower or an adherent thereof. May we be as verse 24 says with our eyes on Jesus who keeps us from falling and presents us faultless for the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. The book of Jude is filled with ample warnings but one final wonderful precious promise.