

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** Jude's Cain–Balaam–Korah triad as a single escalating trajectory of apostasy (direction → acceleration → destruction) and trace how the three verbs ("gone / rushed headlong / perished") function as one unified argument (Jude 11).
2. **Evaluate** why Jude frames this warning as a prophetic-judicial "woe" (sentence, not sigh) and demonstrate that force from the biblical use of "woe" as formal denunciation (Jude 11a).
3. **Analyze** how motive ("for pay") turns doctrinal drift into moral seduction and then fuels open rebellion, following the internal logic of Jude's indictment (Jude 11b–c).
4. **Defend** why softening any element of Jude's construction (pattern, motive, authority) collapses his argument and turns a legal summary into three disconnected illustrations (Jude 11).
5. **Synthesize** Jude 11 with parallel New Testament warnings to demonstrate that Jude's road-to-ruin framework assumes real responsibility and real danger, not harmless drift (Jude 11; 2 Pet 2:15–17; Heb 3:12).
6. **Evaluate** personal and congregational vulnerability to Cain-like self-will, Balaam-like pay-pressure, and Korah-like counter-speech, and specify one Scripture-grounded correction that directly contradicts that trajectory (Jude 11).

Lesson 06 — Three Roads to Ruin: Cain, Balaam, Korah (Jude 11)

Text

Verse

Jude 11 (NASB 1995)

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Big Idea

Jude proves—and pronounces—that apostasy follows a predictable, escalating path: **self-willed religion** (Cain), **greed-driven corruption that seduces others and bends truth for advantage** (Balaam), and **open counter-speech against God's authority** (Korah). This is **one unified road** with **one destination: certain destruction**—so certain Jude speaks of it as already settled.

Flow of the Passage & NT Context

Jude 11 is the formal **sentence** of heaven's court inside the central indictment (Jude 8–16). Jude has already identified intruders who:

- “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 4),
- defile, reject authority, and revile (vv. 8–10),
- poison the fellowship while remaining socially welcomed at the love-feasts (v. 12),

- and reveal themselves as grumblers, complainers, flattering for advantage (v. 16).

Now Jude stops describing and pronounces sentence: **“Woe to them!”** The “woe” (*οὐαί, ouai*) is not sentiment; it is **prophetic-judicial language**—a formal denunciation. It aligns Jude with the prophetic oracles, especially **Isaiah’s covenant “woes”** (e.g., **Isa 5:8, 11, 18, 20–23; 10:1**), where God does not merely caution but **announces judgment** on settled rebellion. The same courtroom tone appears in the Lord’s own denunciations (**Matt 23**). In that tradition, “woe” is not lament; it is **verdict**. Jude is not expressing grief over what might happen—he is declaring condemnation over a course already under judgment. ^[1]

Jude 11 also functions as a hinge:

- Jude moves from **character exposure** (vv. 8–10),
- to **legal summary** (v. 11),
- into **vivid metaphors of devastation** (vv. 12–13),
- and then into the **announced certainty of judgment** (vv. 14–15).

Jude 11 is the legal summary: **three precedents, one outcome**. Jude is not giving three historical curiosities; he is naming **one road** with **three mile markers**—so the church recognizes the path before it reaches the end.

The New Testament echoes reinforce Jude’s point:

- Peter uses Balaam as the paradigm of false teachers who “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15–16), and continues the portrait of such men as **“waterless springs”** (2 Pet 2:17), matching Jude’s “clouds without water” imagery (Jude 12).

- Hebrews insists apostasy is real: “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

Jude’s logic is unrelenting: these men are not anomalies; they are heirs to a long-documented Scriptural pattern of ruin. They were “long beforehand marked out for this condemnation” (v. 4)—not as an excuse for their sin, but as Scripture’s prior testimony that this road has always ended the same way.

Ed’s Gems

Profile

The road determines the destination. You cannot walk in Cain’s way and arrive with the faithful, rush into Balaam’s error and receive the crown, or gainsay God like Korah and stand in the judgment. These are not three unrelated kinds of men; they are three stages of the same disease—**pride** that rejects God’s pattern, **greed** that exploits God’s people, and **rebellion** that brings down God’s wrath.

Profile

Jude writes their end as settled. “Gone ... poured out / rushed headlong ... perished” is not a minor stumble. It is direction chosen, restraint collapsed, ruin certain—so the church stops treating error as harmless and starts treating it as lethal.

Profile

There is no harmless apostasy—only delayed judgment. Jude does not leave room for “safe” rebellion. The moment a man chooses the road, Scripture already knows the destination.

Exegetical Study (Meat First)

Jude 11 strikes like a gavel: **“Woe to them!”** (*ouai autois*). This is God’s courtroom language—a **formal declaration of judgment**. Jude is not speaking in possibilities. He is equipping the church to recognize that these intruders have crossed from danger into doom.

Then Jude gives the grounds—three precedents, one verdict—through tight, progressive grammar:

- **they have gone** (*ἐπορεύθησαν, eporeuthēsan*) — deliberate direction; a chosen course,
- **they have been poured out / rushed headlong** (*ἐξεχύθησαν, exechythēsan*) — restraint collapses; they pour themselves into error, taking the shape of whatever serves their advantage,
- **they have perished** (*ἀπώλοντο, apōlonto*) — settled outcome; destruction spoken of as certain.

This progression is not three isolated sins. It is one unified pathology of apostasy.

1) “They have gone the way of Cain” — Direction: Self-authorized religion that hardens into hostility

The first clause fixes **direction**: “they have gone the way of Cain.”

- The verb is not a stumble. It is a walked path.

- “Way” means a chosen course of life—an adopted posture.

Cain’s sin (Gen 4:3–8) was not atheism. Cain was religious. His sin was **self-authorized religion**—approaching God on his own terms, resenting God’s verdict, and turning hostile toward the righteous.

The movement matters:

- When Cain is corrected, he does not repent; he hardens.
- When God rejects what Cain brings, Cain does not submit; he becomes angry.
- Anger toward God’s decision becomes hatred toward the obedient man (Abel), and hatred becomes violence.

Jude selects Cain because Cain exposes the root that breeds everything else: pride that refuses God’s terms. That posture fits Jude’s intruders:

- they “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” (v. 4),
- they treat grace as permission rather than the ground of holy obedience,
- they defile (v. 8), reject authority (v. 8), and speak with ignorant arrogance (v. 10).

The “way of Cain” names the posture: *I will decide what is acceptable; God must accept my version.* Once that posture is embraced, the righteous become offensive because obedience exposes rebellion. The intruder does not merely differ; he despises the constraints of Scripture and resents those who live within them.

Self-willed worship is not a style preference; it is the first mile-marker on a road God has already condemned.

2) “For pay they have rushed headlong / been poured out into the error of Balaam” — Motive and acceleration: Greed weaponizes religion into seduction

The second clause exposes motive and acceleration: “and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam.”

“For pay” strips away the costume. Jude is not describing sincere confusion. He is describing **profit-shaped corruption**.

- “For pay” (*misthou*) makes greed explicit.
- *Exechythēsan* (“poured out / rushed headlong”) depicts restraint abandoned—life emptied into the pursuit of gain.

Balaam (Num 22–25; 31:16) is not remembered merely as a man who spoke strangely; he is remembered as a man who knew God’s word yet loved wages, and who—unable to curse Israel directly—counseled a strategy of moral seduction that produced spiritual collapse. Balaam shows how greed weaponizes religion:

- the false teacher may still speak religiously,
- but the controlling interest is advantage,
- and when direct attack fails, seduction succeeds.

Jude has already hinted at this inside the congregation:

- “shepherding themselves” (v. 12) — using the flock rather than serving it,
- flattering for advantage (v. 16),
- turning grace into license (v. 4).

This is why Jude refuses to treat “error” (*πλάνη, planē*) as merely intellectual. Balaam’s “error” is moral and strategic: truth is bent to secure pay, and the flock is steered into weakness and compromise.

Profit-ruled ministry is not unfortunate; it is predatory—and it drags souls with it.

3) “They perished in the rebellion of Korah” — Outcome: Open gainsaying against God’s order invites judgment

The final clause states the outcome as settled: “and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”

Korah’s sin (Num 16) was not a small disagreement with Moses. It was open contradiction of what God had arranged—wrapped in moral language about fairness and equality: “All the congregation are holy.”

Jude’s term for “rebellion” is *ἀντιλογία (antilogia)*—**contradiction, counter-speech, gainsaying**. That matters because Jude’s intruders are marked by speech:

- they revile (v. 8),
- they speak arrogantly about what they do not understand (v. 10),
- they grumble and complain (v. 16),
- they use words to undermine constraints and normalize defiance.

Jude is not critiquing their manners; he is exposing their treason. Their speech is a theological weapon: it contradicts authority. It teaches the church to treat boundaries as oppression and submission as weakness. That is Korah’s legacy: rebellion dressed up as spiritual equality.

And Jude speaks their end as accomplished:

- Jude describes their destruction as already accomplished, not because it has happened yet, but because their course makes the outcome certain.
- Just as Korah's company was swallowed by the earth, these men are already "swallowed in principle" by the judgment their course guarantees.

Anti-authority rhetoric is not healthy conversation; it is gainsaying that invites judgment.

Read as One Unified Case: One road, three stages, one destruction

Cain shows how apostasy begins: **self-will in religion—God on my terms.**

Balaam shows how it accelerates: **greed takes control, and corruption becomes contagious through seduction.**

Korah shows how it culminates: **open contradiction of God's order—counter-speech against authority—producing division and inviting judgment.**

This is why softening even one element shatters Jude's entire argument:

- If Cain is reduced to mere jealousy, Jude's real target—self-authorized religion—vanishes, and rebellion gets rebranded as a personality flaw.
- If Balaam is treated as a minor lapse, the driving engine of "for pay" and the deliberate strategy of seduction are excused, and greed is baptized as "practical ministry."

- If Korah is framed as a leadership squabble, Jude’s direct assault on anti-authority ideology is neutralized, and open gainsaying is disguised as “healthy discussion.”

Jude is not giving a sermon about bad attitudes. He is issuing a verdict. He is tracing a road of rebellion with a guaranteed end—so the church stops tolerating people who walk that road and starts contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (v. 3).

This is not optional. This is survival doctrine.

Doctrinal Warnings

Alert

Charge: The way of Cain is self-made worship God rejects.

The “way of Cain” is the spirit that says, “I will worship and obey on my terms.” God does not accept preference as authority. Where Scripture speaks, obedience is demanded; where Scripture is silent, men have no right to legislate their inventions as faith. Whenever men demand that God accept their preferences—whether in worship, morality, or doctrine—they repeat Cain’s sin. The faith once for all delivered does not negotiate with taste, trend, or human tradition.

Example

Illustration: Cain and Ahaz’s Borrowed Altar

The “way of Cain” is on full display in King Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:10–16). Ahaz does not abandon the temple—he redesigns it. After seeing a pagan altar in Damascus, he sends its pattern to Jerusalem and has

it copied, then moves the LORD's altar aside to make room for his preferred version. The sacrifices continue. The priests remain. God's name is still used. But God's design is displaced. Ahaz keeps the language of worship while rewriting the terms of obedience. That is Cain's sin at the level of policy: not rejection of God, but replacement of God's authority with taste, convenience, and politics. Scripture's verdict is clear—when men adjust God's worship to fit what seems impressive or useful, God records it as Cain's way.

Alert

Charge: The error of Balaam is profit-driven seduction.

"For pay" names a motive that turns teaching into trade. When repentance is softened, obedience is minimized, or truth is withheld to preserve advantage, the error is not harmless—it is Balaam's pattern: using religious language while steering souls into compromise. When repentance is muted or error is ignored to protect crowds, comfort, branding, or contributions, grace is not being preached—it is being sold. And sold grace never stays quiet; it rushes headlong into seduction and takes people with it.

Example

Illustration: Balaam and the Temple Tables

Jude's "for pay" exposes the same heart Jesus confronted when He drove the money changers out of the temple (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; John 2:13–17). In both cases, the issue is not money—it is profit reshaping the things of God. Balaam knew God's word but wanted the reward; when he could not curse Israel, he made

compromise profitable (Num 31:16). The money changers did the same: they kept the religious setting but rebuilt worship around revenue and convenience. Jesus did not negotiate—He overturned tables. Jude does the same with words. When ministry becomes market, grace becomes product, and repentance becomes bad for business, God names it Balaam's error.

Alert

Charge: The rebellion of Korah is counter-speech against God's order.

Korah's rebellion was contradiction of God's order dressed as holiness and fairness. When people use "questions," "new perspectives," or "all are holy" rhetoric to nullify what God has established, they are not maturing. They are gainsaying (*antilogia*). There is no "democratized" holiness that grants permission to ignore the New Testament pattern. No councils, synods, or outside authorities can override Christ's headship and the local congregation's duty to submit to His word.

Example

Illustration: Korah and Absalom at the Gate

The spirit of Korah reappears in Absalom (2 Sam 15). Absalom does not storm the throne—he undermines it with words. He stands at the gate, listens to complaints, affirms the people, and then plants the thought: "Oh that I were judge in the land." The text is explicit: he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. This is *antilogia* in political form—counter-speech that sounds compassionate but works

against God's established order. Absalom never denies David outright; he questions, reframes, and promises improvement until loyalty shifts and authority collapses. Like Korah, he wraps rebellion in the language of fairness and reform, but the result is the same—division, disorder, and bloodshed. Scripture's warning is plain: when rhetoric replaces submission and influence replaces obedience, heaven names it Korah's gainsaying.

Applications

Write

Work through the following questions carefully. Answer with Scripture, not impressions. Treat this like the witness stand: state what the text proves, and render a verdict.

1. **Structure and Order:** Why does Jude stack Cain, Balaam, and Korah in this order instead of naming only one? What does the sequence reveal about how error develops when a congregation refuses to contend?
2. **The Progression of Verbs:** Analyze the movement from *gone* (a chosen direction) to *rushed headlong / poured out* (restraint collapsed) to *perished* (a settled end). How does Jude force you to read these men as one unified case rather than three isolated comparisons?
3. **Self-authorization (Cain):** Cain was not an atheist; he was a worshiper who insisted on his own terms. In congregational life, how do you distinguish between "liberty in matters of opinion" and Cain-like self-will that rejects God's revealed pattern? Where does opinion end and rebellion begin?

4. **The Balaam Syndrome:** Jude says they were poured out “for pay.” What does it mean for restraint to collapse under the pressure of advantage? When teachers avoid confronting sin or reshape obedience to keep peace, crowds, or support, how is that functionally Balaam’s error?
5. **Moral Seduction vs. Open Persecution:** Balaam’s most effective weapon was not a curse but a compromise that led God’s people into immorality. Why is turning grace into licentiousness (v. 4) a more effective method of destruction than direct attack?
6. **Democratizing Holiness (Korah):** Korah claimed “all the congregation are holy” (Num 16:3) to overthrow God’s order. How does this spirit appear when people argue against Scripture’s boundaries and roles—especially when those boundaries limit personal ambition?
7. **Counter-speech (Antilogia):** How can “just asking questions” become gainsaying when Scripture has already spoken plainly? When does discussion become contradiction?
8. **Comparative Danger:** Which is more dangerous to a congregation in the long run: prideful innovation (Cain) or profit-driven compromise (Balaam)? Defend your answer from Jude 11 and Jude’s surrounding portrait (vv. 4, 8, 12, 16).
9. **Greed and Acceleration:** Why does greed cause a person to lose restraint more effectively than other sins? How does “for pay” turn a teacher into a seducer?
10. **Point of No Return:** Compare the three verbs—*gone*, *rushed*, *perished*. At what point does a person lose the ability to turn back? How does this progression warn us about the “small” first steps of religious compromise?

11. **Modern Confrontation:** In what ways does the “error of Balaam” confront contemporary ministries that prioritize growth, branding, or financial stability over gospel fidelity? What theological consequences follow if we treat such greed as “practical” rather than condemn it as seduction?

Homework / Next-Step Practice

Action

- Reading:** Read **Genesis 4:3–8**, **Numbers 16**, and **Numbers 22–25** (note also **Numbers 31:16**). Record motive, method, and outcome in each account.
- Reading extension:** Read **Jude 12–16** and mark how Jude’s descriptions amplify the Cain–Balaam–Korah verdict (especially selfishness, speech, and danger to the fellowship).
- Memory:** Memorize **Jude 11 (NASB 1995)**, emphasizing the verbal progression.
- Thinking (written):** Write one page answering: “How does greed turn doctrinal drift into moral seduction and then into open rebellion?”
- Applied obedience:**
 - Identify one area of your worship or service that is based on “it feels right” rather than “it is written,” and correct it.
 - Eliminate one source of Balaam-style influence (teacher/media) that sells comfort over repentance.
 - Encourage one faithful act of shepherding this week that upholds God’s word and refuses compromise.

Test	Diagnostic Question	1	2	3	4	5	6
	boundaries God has set?						

Study Resources (Reference Tables)

Word Studies

Original	Pronunciation	English	Jude Context	Notes
οὐαί	ouai	Woe	Jude 11a	Prophetic/judicial denunciation; verdict of doom; declares operative judgment
ἐπορεύθησαν	eporeuthēsan	they went / they have gone	Jude 11b	Aorist; deliberate, chosen course; not a slip, a path
ἐξεχύθησαν	exechythēsan	they were poured out / rushed headlong	Jude 11c	Restraint abandoned; poured into error; driven by "for pay"
πλάνη (πλάνη)	planē	error / wandering	Jude 11c	Deviation that misleads; not mere wandering but active deception; in Balaam's case a moral strategy for gain and seduction

Original	Pronunciation	English	Jude Context	Notes
ἀπώλοντο	apōlonto	they perished / have perished	Jude 11d	Ruin presented as certain; future destruction treated as settled because the course guarantees the outcome
ἀντιλογία (ἀντιλογία)	antilogia	rebellion / contradiction / gainsaying	Jude 11d	Counter-speech against authority; verbal and practical opposition to what God establishes

Cross References

Passage	Connection to Jude
Genesis 4:3–8	Cain's self-willed approach to God; unauthorized religion; hostility toward the righteous
1 John 3:12	Cain's evil works contrasted with righteous obedience; hatred linked to wickedness
Numbers 22–25; 31:16	Balaam's greed and counsel that led God's people into moral compromise / seduction
Numbers 16:1–35	Korah's revolt: contradiction of God's order under the guise of holiness/equality; judgment swallowing rebels
2 Peter 2:15–17	Balaam's wages of unrighteousness within the broader false-teacher portrait; "waterless springs" (parallel to Jude's waterless imagery)
Hebrews 3:12	Apostasy is a real danger; falling away comes from an unbelieving heart

Passage	Connection to Jude
Matthew 23	"Woe" language as formal denunciation of hardened hypocrisy and judgment
Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20–23; 10:1	Isaiah's covenant "woes" as judicial declarations of judgment
Isaiah 3:11	"Woe" as sentence: the wicked receive what they deserve

1. Isaiah uses "woe" as **sentence, not sentiment**. See **Isaiah 3:11** — "*Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, for what he deserves will be done to him*" (NASB 1995). This shows that "woe" functions as a **judicial pronouncement**, not a lament over possible outcomes—exactly the sense in which Jude employs it in **Jude 11**. ↩