

Citing the Encyclopedia  
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.  
August 12, 2019

Jude 9

(NA 28<sup>th</sup> ed.)

Ὁ δὲ Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος,  
ὅτε τῷ διαβόλῳ διακρινόμενος  
διελέγετο περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως σώματος,  
οὐκ ἐτόλμησεν  
κρίσιν ἐπενεγκεῖν βλασφημίας  
ἀλλ' εἶπεν, ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος.

(Darby)

But Michael the archangel,  
when disputing with the devil  
he reasoned about the body of Moses,  
did not dare  
to bring a railing judgment against [him],  
but said, [The] Lord rebuke thee.

Okay, lots of these words are easily recognizable. Michael and archangel are self-evident. Devil is *diabolos* of course. In line 3, see “dialog” in *dialegomai*. “Body” is *soma*, as in psychosomatic. In line 5, see “crisis” in *krisis*, “judgment.” Of course, you recognize “blaspheme.”

Someone new to the Bible encounters verses like this, and naively thinks that Jude is citing the Old Testament. However, he actually quotes *The Assumption of Moses*, a pseudepigraphic work—a collection that no one today remotely considers divinely inspired. He does it again in v14 – 15. Nothing like this is in the OT. So what is going on?

Jude is uncritically using various pseudonymous tales—that his audience knew and sanctioned—to illustrate his points. He is *not* arguing from an exegesis of biblical texts. Instead of warning against these legends as spurious and extra-biblical, he uses them positively in his homiletic to a receptive audience. He speaks their language.

This sort of thing is more common in the Bible than you might think. We read the NT *assuming* that what we are getting is “exegesis” of the OT, but in fact, in any given case the author may not be directly citing the OT at all.

Another example is 1 Cor 10:4, where Paul mentions a rock that followed the Israelites in the wilderness—like a great boulder rolling with them. Read Numbers all you like, and you will never find this. Paul is not actually referring to the OT there, but to a Jewish tradition that had become associated with the text. He presses that imaginative embellishment into service for the gospel.

By the way, this is one explanation of Matt 23:35. There, Jesus preaches at a certain town. He lists the first and last martyrs in Scripture, Abel and Zechariah (2 Chr 24:22), “upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah.” But in Scripture the son of Barachiah is the minor prophet—not the Zechariah who was killed.

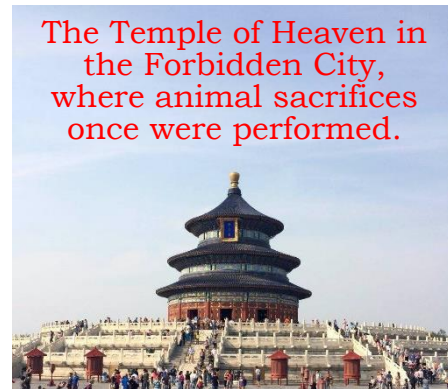
Is it possible that Jesus was not referring to 2 Chronicles at all? Could he have unerringly cited a local scroll, called the “Wisdom of God” in Luke 11:49, which named an otherwise-unknown martyr? Maybe Jesus uncritically used a ready illustration from a source those townspeople esteemed—perhaps existing only in their synagogue—without asserting its canonicity?

I just gave you four examples of the NT making theological arguments using unauthenticated materials. Paul even quotes pagan philosophers to help get his point across (Acts 17:28)! “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

To me, this connects with evangelism and missions. You probably have heard about the "[Peace-child](#)," Don Richardson's story of how he explained the gospel to the Sawi people of New Guinea, using a cultural artifact they accepted and understood. Christ is framed as God's Peace-child to humanity.

One Buddhist said that insensitivity to the pain of others is the ultimate evil, and empathy was the ultimate good. I could point out that, by this model, his goal of nirvana is the ultimate evil, and the cross is the ultimate good.

Before atheism, the Chinese were Buddhist. But before that they practiced their true indigenous religion, which included animal sacrifice. Chinese Christians use this point of contact successfully to help explain the gospel.



I know a man who didn't believe Jesus ever even existed. I said, "Have you looked him up in an encyclopedia?" He was surprised to find Jesus there, and eventually became a Christian. (I do pretty well with left-brain types.

[Francis Schaeffer](#) was highly influential on me in this respect. Take their own flawed worldview and use it to help them see Jesus.)

Navajo are best at [reaching Navajo](#). Athletes convert athletes. And Jude knew how to address his own community. There is a type of person out there, and you understand how they think, you "get" them. You are good at explaining the gospel to that particular sort. Go for it! Use their own natural way of thinking to show them Jesus!

And pray!