

# Michael Disputed with the Devil about the Body of Moses

## Jude 9 and Second Peter 2:11

**DIG:** What is *the Assumption of Moses* and what does it have to do with Jude's account here? What is the Pseudepigrapha? Does Jude's quote verify the entire book as being inspired? How did Michael's response anticipate that of the Angel of the LORD in Zechariah 3:2? Why was the Adversary interested in the body of Moses? What did Satan want with it? And what reason would God have to hide it?

**REFLECT:** Can you contend for the faith without being contentious? How so? How can you contend with the Adversary today? How can the devil be defeated?

But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses did not dare bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "May Adonai rebuke you" (Jude 9)!

Yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord (2 Peter 2:11).

The false teachers Jude spoke of had no respect for authority or God's holy angels. The apostates slandering of them in verse 8 stands in stark contrast to the chief angelic being, Michael the archangel, who would not dare to slander Satan, the chief of the fallen angels. The word archangel is *archaggelos*, from *arche*, meaning *first in rank*. Michael the archangel is spoken of in Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1; First Thessalonians 4:16. His name means *who is like God*, and is regarded as the special protector of the Jewish nation.

Although modern Jewish popular ideology holds that angels are a Christian invention reflecting a departure from pure monotheism, actually the TaNaKh speaks of them often. Here Jude alludes to a story in *the Assumption of Moses*. Although some portions of it have survived, the relevant ones have not. However, elements of the legend can also be found elsewhere. Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:10 reports a dispute an hour before Moses' death between Samuel - regarded in Judaism as the angel of death and often identified with the Adversary (Satan the accuser in Matthew 4:1) - and Michael, who is regarded in Jewish tradition as Israel's defender and Satan's opponent. The *Targum Yonatan* says that Moses' tomb was put under Michael's authority. *The Assumption* must have added that God assigned Michael to bury the corpse of Moses, but when Satan claimed it as his, Michael took issue with him.<sup>56</sup>

*The Assumption of Moses* is part of the Pseudepigrapha, a collection of books falsely ascribed to eminent biblical figures from the past such as Enoch, Noah and **Moses**. These are Jewish writings from the second-temple period (538 BC to AD 70), resembling the Apocrypha in general character included in the TaNaKh, the fourteen books of the Apocrypha, or other rabbinic literature. It is a retelling of the events of **Deuteronomy 31-34**. The book records **Moses'** farewell address to **Joshua** and foretells the history of Isra'el from the entrance into the Land to the end of the age. The only existing copy today, discovered in 1861, is a Latin translation of the Greek. This copy is incomplete, corrupt, and illegible in some places. The Church fathers were familiar with the entire book.<sup>57</sup> Such quotations may seem strange to us today, but the Pseudepigrapha were widely used at the time **Jude** was writing and this quote would be very effective in communicating his message.

In summarizing the different fragments from the burial of **Moses**: First, **Michael** is sent by **God** to bury **Moses**, and second, **Satan** opposes his burial on two grounds; (a) **the devil** claimed to have authority over all physical matter, so **Moses' body**, of course, fell under that category. To this **Michael** responded, "**May Adonai rebuke you**, for it was **God's Spirit** which created the world and all mankind." The word **rebuke** is in the optative mode in Greek, which expresses a wish or desire. The particular word for **rebuke** here is *epitimaō*, which means *to rebuke another but without any effect on the person rebuked, either because the person believes they are innocent, or because they are incorrigible*. **Satan** was, and is, *incorrigible*. **Jude** knew it, and as a result, used that specific word. There is another word in Greek, *elegeho*, which speaks of a **rebuke** that brings either conviction or confession of sin, but **he** did not use that word in this case.<sup>58</sup>

(b) And from *the Assumption of Moses*, we learn **Satan's** second charge was because **Moses** became a murderer when **he** killed the Egyptian overseer (see my commentary on **Exodus AI - Moses Fled From Pharaoh and Went to Live in Midian**), and therefore **his body** belonged, so to speak, to **the devil**. In other words, **Satan** accused **Moses** of being unworthy of such an honorable burial.

**Jude's inclusion of this event verifies only that this one incident found in the Assumption is a true statement. He is not verifying the truth of the Assumption of Moses as a whole.** But we regard the book of **Jude** as being part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore inspired in such a way that the work of **the Holy Spirit** in directing **Jude** to the thoughts or concepts **he** should have, and allowing **his** own distinctive personality to come into play in the choice of words and expressions. Thus, **the human author** gave expression to the divinely directed thoughts in a way that was uniquely characteristic of **him**.<sup>59</sup>

This verse is a new revelation, not previously inspired to be written, like the prophecy of Enoch recorded in **Jude 14-15**. This should not surprise us. Sha'ul quotes words of **Christ** not found in the Gospels (**Acts 20:35**). He also mentions the names of two of the magicians in Egypt, although the recorded history of **Moses** is silent on the subject (**Second Timothy 3:8**). **James 5:17** informs us that Elijah prayed that it might not rain for three and one-half years, and faith accepts it without question, even though **First Kings 17:1** and **18:1** do not reveal that the prayers of the prophet had anything to do with the long drought during Ahab's reign. **Therefore, because Jude treats this confrontation between Michael and Satan over the body of Moses as fact, we should regard it as such.**

Although **Michael** is the archangel, the Adversary is greater than him because **Satan** is a cherub (**Ezekiel 28:14**) and **Michael** is an angel. **Cherubs** are positionally greater than angels. **Michael**, although he is the archangel - the one who has authority over all other angels, knew his place in the angelic hierarchy; therefore, he did not rail against someone greater than himself even though **Satan** was a fallen creature. Since the **Serpent**, even though fallen, was the anointed cherub and he still had positional dignity that **Michael** respected. Instead of scolding **Satan**, **Michael** simply committed the situation to **God**. This demonstrates it is possible to contend for the faith (**Jude 3**) without being contentious.<sup>60</sup>

But even the archangel **Michael**, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of **Moses**, did not dare bring a slanderous accusation against the Adversary. **Michael** had every right, it would seem, to criticize the Adversary since he was wicked and his motives were evil, but **Michael** was respectful and did not criticize him because, positionally, the devil is greater than **Michael**, so he did not dare bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "May Adonai rebuke you" (9b), echoing the LORD's own rebuke of **Satan** (**Zechariah 3:1-5**). When **Michael** contended with the devil about the body of **Moses**, he did just what the Angel of the LORD did. And his appeal to Adonai ELOHIM apparently ended the dispute with **Satan**.

The context of **Zechariah** is significant, for the account there represents another incident in which **Satan** attempted to establish the guilt of one of ADONAI's servants; Joshua, the high priest, was accused by the devil in ADONAI's presence (**Zechariah 3:1**). In the prophet **Zechariah's** vision, **Joshua** - along with Zerubbabel led the first group of Jews back from Babylon - was standing in heaven before the Angel of the LORD. The devil was also there, at the right hand of **Joshua**, accusing **Joshua** and the nation of Isra'el whom he represented. **Michael's** response anticipated the example of the Angel of the LORD in **Zechariah 3:2**, "May Adonai rebuke you, Satan! ADONAI, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire" of the Babylonian captivity (**Zechariah 3:2**)?

We might think that **the old dragon** was right in accusing **Joshua** since his **filthy clothes** represented his sinful nature (**Zechariah 3:3-4a**). But **God's Word** brings forgiveness, pictured by the clean **garments** with which the high priest was allowed to change into. Then **the Angel** said to **Joshua**, "**See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.**" It is important to understand that **ADONAI** was not simply reprimanding **Satan** so that the story could end with a verbal **rebuke**. Instead, the **LORD's** words vindicated **Joshua**, and at the same time, sealed **Satan's** doom (**Zechariah 3:4b-5**).

**Michael's** words in **Jude** do not merely indicate a desire for **God** to reprimand **Satan** verbally for bringing an accusation against **Moses**, as if **the devil** would receive only a verbal **rebuke**. On the contrary, the reprimand of **ADONAI** would function as an effective response to **Satan's** accusation so **Moses** would be vindicated, and his vindication would guarantee his proper burial. **Michael** never denied that **Moses** had sinned or defended his behavior in killing the Egyptian overseer. But, **he** appealed to **the Lord's rebuke** with confidence knowing that **Moses** would receive forgiveness and that **God** would remove his defilement.<sup>61</sup>

There is a tendency in **Second Peter**, shown here in the story of **Michael** and **Satan**, for him to put in general terms what **Jude** states with more detail. **Yet even** righteous **angels**, **although they are stronger and more powerful**, **do not bring slanderous accusations against** the false teachers (of **Second Peter 2:10**) in the presence of the Lord (**Second Peter 2:11**). Since there is no modifier, the term **angels** refers to **the holy angels** who are certainly **stronger and more powerful** than either fallen men or demons. But even though they are superior in every way, **the righteous angels** do not speak disrespectfully to their fallen counterparts like **the arrogant false teachers** do (**Jude 9**).

The TaNaKh provides no details about the death of **Moses** other than to say: **And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as ADONAI had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where he is buried (Deuteronomy 34:5-6)**. Because **God** did not want anyone to preserve **Moses' body** and worship it or turn his gravesite into a shrine, **He** gave **Michael** the responsibility of burying it where no one - including **Satan** - could find it.<sup>62</sup>

So how can you **contend** with **Satan** today? **Submit yourselves, then, to God (James 4:7a)**. **Submit** is a military term meaning *to be subordinated or to render obedience*. Submitting to **ADONAI** is obeying His Word about **Yeshua** and the fullness of the Good News, as well as being obedient to **Jesus as Lord and God (Romans 10:9-10)**. **Messiah** said: **Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:39)**. There is simply no such thing as trusting in **Christ as Savior** without, at the same time, submitting to **Him as Lord**. Whereas you were once under the lordship of **the Adversary**, through saving faith you eagerly place yourself under the lordship of **Yeshua**

**Messiah.** Whereas you were once an enemy of God (James 4:4) and a slave to sin, you are now a loyal subject of your Lord and Master. Therefore, to submit to God, your new Lord, is to resist the devil, your old lord.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7b). Resist means to take a stand against. There is no middle ground. As James has made clear: Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world (Satan's sphere of influence) becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4b; First John 2:15-17). To stand with Adonai is to stand against everything sinful and worldly that used to seem appealing (Ephesians 2:1-3; Hebrews 2:14-15). Just as the devil left Jesus after the temptations in the wilderness (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ B1 - Then Jesus Was Led by the Spirit into the Desert to be Tested by the Devil](#)), he will flee from all those who resist him. As powerful as he is, here is the pledge that the Adversary can be defeated. Messiah defeated Satan at His temptation and on the cross (John 12:31-33) and left him defenseless. He cannot hold you against your will. He cannot even lead you into sin without your consent. When confronted and resisted with the truth of the Good News, he flees with his proverbial tail between his legs. After you are saved, he comes again and again through the world and your flesh to tempt you, but he can be defeated again and again if you take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18).