



INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDE

The Book of Jude is a concise yet potent epistle within the New Testament, often overlooked due to its brevity and placement near the end of the biblical canon. Despite its small size, it carries a powerful message, urging believers to earnestly contend for the faith against the insidious influence of false teachers and apostasy. The letter serves as a stark warning and a call to steadfastness in a world increasingly swayed by ungodly doctrines and practices.

HISTORICAL AND PASTORAL OVERVIEW

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The author identifies himself simply as Jude, a “bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” [1]. This identification strongly suggests that the author is Jude (Judah), the half-brother of Jesus, as mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. Like his older brother James, Jude did not initially believe in Jesus as the Messiah during Jesus’ earthly ministry but became a follower after the resurrection [2]. His humility is evident in his self-designation as a “bondservant” rather than emphasizing his familial relationship with Jesus [2].

The exact date of writing is debated among scholars, but it is generally placed between AD 60 and 80 [3]. Some scholars suggest an earlier date, possibly as early as AD 50, based on its use of Jewish apocalyptic style [4]. The letter’s striking similarities to 2 Peter lead many to believe it was written around the same time, with 2 Peter often assumed to be written first (AD 64–66), placing Jude sometime between AD 67 and 80 [2].

AUDIENCE AND CONTEXT

Jude’s letter was likely addressed to a community primarily composed of Jewish Christians, given his extensive use of Old Testament examples and references to popular Jewish literature, such as the Book of Enoch and the Testament of Moses [1]. This suggests an audience familiar with these texts, which Jude employs to underscore his warnings without necessarily endorsing their canonical authority [1].

The primary context for Jude’s writing was the infiltration of false teachers into the Christian community. Jude had initially intended to write a more expansive letter about their “common salvation” but felt compelled to address the urgent threat posed by these individuals [2]. These false teachers were characterized not only by their erroneous doctrines but, more significantly, by their immoral lifestyles. They were accused of distorting God’s grace to justify licentiousness, denying the Lord by their actions, and rejecting authority [3].

PURPOSE AND THEMES

Jude’s twofold purpose was to expose these false teachers and to exhort believers to stand firm in the faith and contend for the truth [3]. The letter emphasizes the importance of actively defending the core tenets of Christianity, which were “once for all delivered to the saints” [2].

KEY THEMES INCLUDE:

Contending for the Faith: This is the central call of the epistle, urging believers to actively and diligently guard the truth against corruption [2].

God’s Judgment: Jude frequently references historical examples of divine judgment (e.g., the Israelites in the wilderness, fallen angels, Sodom and Gomorrah) to demonstrate that God will indeed punish the ungodly [1] [3].

Apostasy and False Teachers: The letter provides vivid descriptions of the character and conduct of those who deviate from sound doctrine, highlighting their destructive influence [1].

Preservation and Perseverance: While God is able to keep His people from stumbling, believers are also called to actively keep themselves in God’s love, building themselves up in their most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Spirit [3].



EXEGESIS OF JUDE 1-4: A FAITH WORTH FIGHTING FOR

JUDE 1:1-2 - GREETING AND IDENTIFICATION

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. [5]

Jude's opening immediately establishes his identity and the recipients of his letter. His self description as a "bondservant" (Greek: *doulos*) signifies a deep commitment and submission to Jesus Christ, prioritizing his spiritual relationship over his physical kinship [2]. By identifying himself as the "brother of James," he likely refers to James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, lending apostolic authority to his message [2]. The recipients are described with three significant attributes: "called," "beloved in God the Father," and "kept for Jesus Christ." These phrases emphasize God's sovereign initiative in salvation—He calls, loves, and preserves His people. The prayer for "mercy, peace, and love to be multiplied" is a rich blessing, particularly relevant given the challenges the believers were facing [2].

JUDE 1:3 - THE URGENT CALL TO CONTEND

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. [5]

This verse reveals Jude's original intention to write about the "common salvation" shared by believers, a theme of unity and shared blessings. However, an urgent situation compelled him to shift his focus. The phrase "I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend earnestly for the faith" (as translated in some versions) highlights the critical nature of the threat [2].

The Greek word for "contend earnestly" (*epagonizomai*) is a strong term, derived from the athletic world, suggesting intense struggle, like an athlete striving for victory [2]. It implies a continuous, diligent effort. The object of this contention is "the faith"—not personal belief, but the body of essential truths of the gospel, the doctrine that defines Christianity [2]. This faith was "once for all delivered to the saints," signifying its completeness, finality, and universal application. There is no new revelation that supersedes this foundational truth [2].

JUDE 1:4 - THE REASON FOR THE URGENCY: FALSE TEACHERS

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who change the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. [5]

Here, Jude explains why the call to contend is so urgent. "Certain people have crept in unnoticed"—these false teachers infiltrated the church subtly, without drawing immediate attention to their true intentions [3]. Jude describes them as "ungodly people" who pervert the true meaning of God's grace. They twist the concept of grace, using it as a license for "sensuality" (licentiousness or immoral behavior), effectively turning God's liberating grace into an excuse for sin [3].

Furthermore, they "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." This denial is not necessarily an explicit verbal rejection of Jesus' deity or humanity, but rather a practical denial through their ungodly conduct and rejection of His authority [3]. Their actions betray their claims of faith, demonstrating that their theology is fundamentally flawed and dangerous [1]. Jude asserts that these individuals were "long ago designated for this condemnation," indicating that their judgment is certain and predetermined by God [3].



STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What does Jude's self-identification as a "bondservant of Jesus Christ" tell us about his priorities and relationship with Jesus?

2. How do the three descriptions of the recipients ("called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ") emphasize God's role in their salvation?

3. What was Jude's original intention for his letter, and what caused him to change his focus?

4. Explain the meaning of "contend for the faith." What kind of effort does this imply?

5. What does it mean that "the faith was once for all delivered to the saints"? Why is this significant?

6. Who are the "certain people" Jude refers to in verse 4, and how did they enter the church?

7. How did these false teachers "change the grace of our God into sensuality"?

8. In what ways might someone "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" without explicitly saying so?

9. What is the connection between sound doctrine (theology) and a believer's lifestyle, as implied by Jude 1-4?

10. Based on these verses, what is the primary danger facing the church that Jude is addressing?



PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Jude 1-4 calls us to a vigilant and active defense of the Christian faith. In our contemporary context, this means being discerning about the teachings we encounter, both within and outside the church. We must not only understand the core truths of the gospel but also live them out consistently. When we see doctrines or practices that undermine the authority of Christ or promote immorality under the guise of grace, we are called to lovingly but firmly challenge them. This contention is not for personal gain or argument's sake, but for the preservation of the pure gospel and the spiritual well-being of the community.

TAKE-HOME CHALLENGE

Over the coming week, identify one area in your life or in the broader Christian discourse where you see a potential compromise of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” Reflect on how you can, in a Christ-like manner, “contend” for that truth through your words, actions, or prayers. This might involve studying a particular doctrine more deeply, engaging in a respectful conversation, or simply living out your faith with greater integrity as a witness against error.

POINTS OF REFLECTION

How does Jude's urgency resonate with the challenges facing the church today?
What aspects of “the faith” do you feel are most under attack or being subtly undermined in your context?
How can we contend for the faith with both conviction and compassion?
What does it look like to truly live as a “bondservant of Jesus Christ” in your daily life?

References

[1] BibleProject. “Jude.” BibleProject Guides, <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-jude/>. [2] Enduring Word. “Jude – Contending for the Faith.” Enduring Word Bible Commentary, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/jude-1/>. [3] The Gospel Coalition. “Jude.” Commentary by Thomas Schreiner, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/jude/>. [4] Reading Acts. “When was Jude Written?” Reading Acts, 28 Mar. 2018, <https://readingacts.com/2018/03/28/when-was-jude-written/>. [5] The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. (Used for direct scripture quotes for accuracy and consistency).