

The Epistle of Jude (1)

The writer: Jude/Judas/Judah were common names in NT times. There are **six** men called Judas in the NT including two apostles: *Judas Iscariot* and the other *Judas of James* (Luke 6.16, James was likely his father, not, as the text says, his brother) who was also known as *Thaddaeus* (Matthew 10.3, John 14.22). The writer of *this* epistle, however, seems to distinguish himself from the apostles (v.17) and identifies himself as the 'brother of James' (v.1). All this suggests that the Jude writing this epistle was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and full brother of James who was well-known in the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 12.17, 15.13-21, 21.18, Galatians 1.19, 2.9) and as the writer of the Epistle by James. Given Jude's position in family lists it is likely that he was the youngest or next youngest amongst the brothers in the family (Matthew 13.55, Mark 6.3). Initially the brethren of the Lord did not believe in Him (John 7.5), but it would seem that after having witnessed His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.7) James and Jude became believers and gathered in the upper room to pray with the disciples after the Lord's ascension (Acts 1.14). Very little is known of Jude. He appears to have been married (1 Corinthians 9.5) and early historians suggest he was a travelling evangelist. In his letter we glean that Jude was uncompromising in the face of error yet with a tender affection for the people of God (v.3).

The letter: It is most difficult to **date** the letter or identify its recipients. It appears that the readers had personally heard the teaching of the apostles (vv.17-18) suggesting an early date of c.67-68 AD. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) which would have provided a good example to support Jude's argument. In addition, there are marked similarities between 2 Peter 2.1-3.3 and Jude. It is likely that Peter wrote his second epistle in AD 65, perhaps just a few years before Jude who appears to quote from his letter in v.18. The **recipients** of the letter are not specified. They may have been a specific group of believers or local church given the language of v.4.

The background: As Peter had predicted (2 Peter 2.1-3) ungodly men (likely Libertines, Acts 6.9) had come in amongst the believers. They perverted the grace of God and *shamelessly abused the liberties of the gospel*, living grossly immoral lives (v.4). Although they professed Christianity, by their actions they denied the Lord Jesus as Master. It is possible they were adherents to the gnostic teaching which separated flesh and spirit and maintained that 'fleshly indulgence had no power to injure their perfection of spirit.' Jude writes to exhort the believers to earnestly contend for the faith (v.3) and be assured of impending Divine judgment upon such ungodly men.

What is the relevance of Jude today? These men were apostates, i.e. those who claimed some link to Christ or Christianity and yet had abandoned the way of truth (see 2 Peter 2.1-3, 19-21). The characteristics of these apostates as described by Peter and Jude will be seen again before the Day of the Lord can begin (2 Thessalonians 2.3). As the return of Christ is **imminent**, we might expect to see such conditions prevailing today. Secondly, these men had infiltrated the love feasts of the local church and yet denied the faith by **lip** and **life**. Let us beware and vigilant. *In our day it is the fashion to be tolerant of anything that calls itself Christian, but there are limits. It is possible to refashion the gospel so radically that it becomes another gospel. It is possible to reinterpret the Christian life so that it ceases to be too demanding and degenerates into a way of living that is no different from that of the world.*

Note. Jude's writing style is marked by triplets or **triads** of truth. For example: believers are *loved, kept* and *called* (v.1); Jude prays that *mercy, peace* and *love* might be multiplied (v.2); there are three examples of God's judgment (vv.5-7).

vv.1-2: The Calling of God

1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are ~~sanctified by~~ (beloved in) God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

Neither Jude nor James make any reference to their earthly relationship with the Lord Jesus. Their links were now with the Man in the glory and as such they were His 'servants' or 'bond slaves' (James 1.1). A bond slave is one who has become the property of his master. He is bound to his service and obligated to do his will. The dignity of the slave depended on the status of the master. The slave was the master's representative. Christian bond slaves can have no higher place of dignity, nor represent any greater Master. Before speaking of the apostates, Jude clarifies three characteristics of true believers as opposed to the false. They are:

- 'beloved in God the Father' – or 'enfolded in the sphere of God's love'. The saints are the permanent objects of the fullness of divine love which was manifested in the *past* and *continues* to be displayed (*perfect* tense).
- 'preserved in Jesus Christ' – being 'guarded', 'firmly held' or 'kept' as a precious possession. There is no preposition so the phrase can read as preserved 'in' or 'for' Jesus Christ. Both ideas are true. Christ **is** our eternal security as well as being the One **for** whom the Father secures us (cf. John 17.11-12).
- 'called' – those who have been *summoned* by and *responded* to the universal call of the gospel. This is a calling to position and service. Christians are designated 'called ones' and 'chosen ones' (elect).

2 *Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.*

Jude's prayer is that his troubled readers might more fully appreciate and enjoy the mercy, peace and love which flow freely from God. 'Mercy' is compassion which seeks to relieve an individual in distress or need. 'Peace' comes from the verb *eiro*, 'to join'. This suggests the binding together of believing sinner and a holy God resulting in the rest of conscience and an inner sense of tranquillity and well-being. Jude also prays that the saints might better appreciate God's love and therefore increase in love towards others (Romans 5.5).

vv.3-4: Contending for the Faith

3 *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once (for all) delivered unto the saints.*

Jude had a great affection for these believers which motivated his writing to them. Initially, he eagerly made every effort to write to them about the 'common salvation', i.e. the salvation shared by every believer. No believer has an inferior or superior salvation to another. However, it would seem that a report had reached Jude concerning the imminent dangers they faced from apostates. As such he was immediately constrained by the Spirit of God to write and 'exhort' or 'persuade' the saints to 'earnestly contend for the faith'. They needed to urgently take a firm stand against the danger facing them. The 'faith' is 'that which is believed', i.e. the truth as taught by Christ and His apostles and contained in the word of God. This had been (at this point in time) 'once and for all' verbally 'delivered' to the saints. In that it is **once for all**, it cannot be altered or added to. There is no new revelation. In that it has been **delivered**, it is in the *care* of and under the *management* of the saints. The truth of God's word is a sacred deposit to be guarded (2 Timothy 1.14). It is entrusted to us. Note the parable of the pounds (Luke 19)! *Our responsibility is to be faithful in studying this revealed truth and applying it to our own generation. We must then be faithful in transmitting it to others. The need is not for new revelation!*

Jude's great desire for these saints is that they might 'contend' for the faith. The word 'contend' in Greek gives rise to the English word 'agonise'. This is a **strenuous struggle** as an athlete contending in the games or a soldier engaged in hand to hand combat. Such a person would expend all their energy in order to prevail over the opponent. Are we earnestly contending? In Jude's day the faith was being assaulted by false teaching and immoral living. It is our responsibility to defensively stand 'upon' the faith by teaching the truth and living pure and holy lives. Nehemiah 4.17-18: Those who were carrying loads did so by keeping one hand on the work and the other on their weapon. The builders to a man had their swords strapped to their sides while they were building.

4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord (Master) God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The reason to contend is here given. Certain people had 'slipped in the side-door' of the local church. Their stealthy entrance suggests they presented themselves as Christians and their original behaviour did not arouse suspicion (note John 10.1), yet they soon began to teach 'destructive heresies' and promote immoral living (2 Peter 2.1-2). These men are:

- **Condemned.** They are declared guilty and facing judgment. They were 'before of old ordained' simply meaning that the judgment of such men was written down and prophesied long ago in the OT (see vv.14-15).
- **Ungodly.** They show a complete lack of respect and reverence for God.
- **Immoral.** They 'exchange' the grace of God for sexual immorality and a complete lack of moral restraint ('lasciviousness'). They believed they were liberated to do as they pleased and that living sinful lives would magnify the grace and forgiveness of God (Romans 6.1). However, *Grace* is meant to teach us other lessons (Titus 2.11-12)! *1 Corinthians 10.23: 'Everything is lawful,' but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is lawful,' but not everything builds others up. Beware of Christians who say they are 'free' to do as they please.*
- **Rebellious.** Their behaviour was a denial of the lordship of Christ. They may have claimed to be followers of Christ, but by rejecting His moral demands they disowned Him as Master and Lord. Christ is the *Master* the slave must obey (ownership) and the *Lord* who rules supreme in our lives (authority).