

1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

Jude is actually short for Judas. There are several other Judas's in the New Testament, including the Judas that betrayed Jesus. The early church took to calling this Judas Jude to separate him from the other Judas. This Judas simply identifies himself as the brother of James. In the early church, there was only one James he could mean that needed no further introduction, and that was James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church.

But if James and Jesus are brothers, and Jude and James are brothers, then you know what that means? Jude was the brother of Jesus. In Matthew 13:55 we read this, *"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas."* Jude grew up with Jesus as his older brother. Imagine that pressure. "Why can't you be more like your brother?" But Jude doesn't introduce himself saying, "Hey, I'm the brother of Jesus. You need to listen to me. No, he calls himself "a servant of Jesus." Literally, a bond-slave of Jesus.

Jude and his brothers didn't believe in Jesus during his earthly ministry. In John 7 Jesus' brothers, probably including Jude and James, tell Jesus to leave town and go to Judea. They make it sound like they are looking out for him, but it seems the real reason is they're just trying to get Jesus out of their hair. John writes in verse 5, *"For even his own brothers did not believe in him."*

But everything changed after the resurrection. They became believers. They became sold-out followers of Jesus. They knew him better than anyone, and they believed in him. They became respected church leaders, and according to church tradition, Jude was killed for his faith by being clubbed to death in Beirut. That's who Jude is. Who's he writing to:

To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for[a] Jesus Christ: 2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

We don't know the specific church he was writing to, but it seems fairly obvious he's writing to Jewish believers because Jude refers to a lot of Old Testament characters and Jewish tradition. But he is writing to believers. He says three things about them. 1.) They are called. 3. They are loved in God, and 3.) They are kept for Jesus. That's their identity in Christ, and you know what? That's your identity in Christ. You are called. You are loved and you are kept. And you know what else? In Christ you have mercy and peace and love in abundance.

As we continue reading, we discover why this isn't the letter Jude wanted to write.

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Jude wanted to write a nice letter about our salvation, but he couldn't write that letter. The church was being threatened. One of the common themes we've found as we've gone through

these little letters that make up the shortest books of the Bible is that they were written to correct problems. They were written to combat false teaching that was threatening the truth.

It's no different here. Jude says he had to write this letter to urge them to contend for the faith. He's not talking about faith in the subjective sense. He's not telling them how much they need to believe personally. He's talking about The Faith in an objective sense. The Faith as Truth. This is why he calls it the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." As believers, through the apostles and prophets and through the inspired word of God we have been handed a body of Truth, a collection of timeless, universal principles for which we have been entrusted as caretakers. In here is truth. In here is life. In here is salvation. In here is intimacy with God. In here is eternity. Guard it. Keep it. Watch it. Know it. Live it.

And we are to contend for it. That's a combat term. It's a struggle, a fight. Some of you know this all too well. Maybe you're in a struggle for your faith right now. The struggle is worth it. Don't give in. Don't give up. Contend for the faith.

The challenge for Jude's readers and for us many times though is this. Their enemy isn't always out there. The devil doesn't always come at you with horns and pitchfork. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that he "*masquerades as an angel of light.*"

That's what's going here. Jude talks about false leaders who *have secretly slipped in among you*. They're sneaky little weasels who worm their way in where they do not belong.

Jude will have many harsh things to say about these false teachers over the next several verses, but for right now he highlights two glaring errors. The first, is they change the truth about Morality. Vs. 4 says, *they pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality*. If God's grace is such a good thing, and if he is so merciful and willing to forgive, then why not enjoy his grace all the more, by sinning even more.

Instead of seeing grace as a motivation to leave sin behind, it was used as an excuse to indulge in it even more. Beware of anyone who uses grace as an allowance for sin. It's common to hear people say things like, "Well, God is a loving God, and this won't make him stop loving us." While it's true that God loves us while we're sinners, and in spite of our sin, that's never a justification for sin. The apostle Paul dealt with this very issue in Romans, and in Romans 6:1-2 he says, "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin' how can we live in it any longer?*" He uses the strongest possible no he can.

God's patience with our sin, his indulgence of our disobedience and his mercy toward our rebellion should never be confused with acceptance and approval.

The second error of these false teachers is they change the truth about Jesus. Vs. 4 also says *they deny Jesus Christ*. Jude doesn't specify exactly what they deny about Jesus, but one thing almost all false teachings have in common is that they deny some truth about Jesus. Josh McDowell writes in *A Concise Guide to Today's Religions*, "No matter what the particular beliefs of any cult may be, the one common denominator they all possess is a denial of the Biblical teaching on the deity of Jesus Christ."

They claim to believe in Jesus, to teach Jesus, but they deny something about him. If anyone claiming to be a Christian doesn't believe Jesus is God, or they don't believe he really became

human in the flesh, or they don't believe he really died on the cross for our sins, or they don't believe he rose physically from the grave, or they don't believe he's the only way to heaven, then they don't really believe in the Jesus of the Bible. They have been sucked in by false teaching.

5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord[c] at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Just like today, there were those in the 1st Century who would have said, "What's the big deal?" So what, if they have a different viewpoint? Can't we just accept those with different opinions?" Sure, we can. In Romans 14, Paul makes it very clear that there are some things we can disagree about and it's still okay. We can have different opinions about a lot of things.

But there are some things that are non-negotiable. We aren't free to take the truths God has revealed to us and change them to suit our own desires. There is no such thing as designer truth. You don't get your own customized reality. We can't make truth fit with what we want, and Jude here reminds these believers of what happened to three different groups in the O.T. when they tried to change God's timeless truth.

His first example is the children of Israel who were delivered from slavery in Egypt. They saw amazing miracles with their own eyes. They saw God's power deliver them. They walked across the Red Sea on dry ground, but in only a few short months they were building an idol of a golden calf that they made from their own jewelry. They worshipped it, and said this is the god who delivered us from Egypt. Only two of them ever made it to the Promised Land. All the rest died in the wilderness because of unbelief.

This second reference is a little more mysterious. He talks about angels who abandoned their proper dwelling and who are being kept for judgment. What's he talking about here? There are various interpretations of this admittedly mysterious reference. The bottom line, though, is there were some angels who weren't content with their positions of authority given by God, and they went and did their own thing. 2 Peter 2:4 says, "*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgement...*"

Whoever these angels are and whatever it is they did, the point is that even angels can't change God's truth and get away with it. If you're curious about this verse, talk to me later, and I'll be happy to share, but this is one rabbit hole we don't have time to chase.

Jude's third example is Sodom and Gomorrah who ignored God's truth of morality. Genesis tells us that men from all over the city surrounded Lot's house, and demanded to have sex with Lot's guests spending the night. Lot's guests were actually angels appearing as men. So determined were they in their perversion, they wouldn't even accept Lot's virgin daughters as a substitute. The angels had to strike them blind. Jude's point is this— if the children of Israel, if the cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah, if even the angels can't get away with changing God's truth, then we can't either.

8 In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. 9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"[d] 10 Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them.

Jude goes back to talking about these false teachers and the things they do. This is another of those references in Jude that causes a lot of confusion. I've read through the Bible many times, and I've never found a story about the archangel Michael and the devil fighting over the body of Moses. There's a good reason I couldn't find this story— it's not in the Bible.

There are a couple of instances in Jude where he alludes to things not written in the Bible, but they come from a couple of Jewish books that were very popular in the 1st Century. This story comes from a book called *The Assumption of Moses*. Jude is using a familiar story to illustrate an important point— spiritual powers such as angels and demons aren't trivial matters. Apparently, these false teachers were dabbling in spiritual things they didn't understand. They were claiming spiritual powers they didn't have.

Jude calls them dreamers. They were using so-called visions to exert authority over people. False teachers often claim to have sort of special access to God. They have spiritual knowledge available only to them.

When you get into false teaching, especially false teaching that messes with things in the spirit realm, you are playing with dangerous things that have eternal consequences. It's like letting a toddler loose in the control room of a nuclear reactor. It's just not a good idea.

Next, Jude pronounces judgement on these false teachers and compares their judgment to some famous false teachers in the O.T.

11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

Woe is a pronouncement of doom. Woe means bad news. Another way to translate it would be, "Oh, no!" If you remember, Cain, was one of two brothers, Cain and Abel who both presented sacrifices to God. Abel offered a blood sacrifice of his firstlings of his flock, the first and best of his herd, but Cain tried to pass off his offering as something it wasn't, and God rejected his offering. Instead of getting things right with God, he got angry with his brother and murdered him. We're no different. When our own stuff isn't right with God, we hurt our brothers and sisters. We want to blame them for our own spiritual problems.

Balaam was a prophet for profit. He tried to sell the blessing of God. Apparently, these false teachers were saying and doing things to line their own pockets. But God's truth is never for sale to the highest bidder. The church can never change what she teaches based on who puts the most money in the plate. That is a path to judgement for both sides of that deal.

Korah was a Levite whose clan was responsible for carrying the temple artifacts whenever the children of Israel moved their camp. He and some others didn't think it was fair that they had to do all this heavy lifting, while only Moses' brother, Aaron and his sons, were eligible to be high priests. So, Korah led a rebellion of 250 men against Moses and Aaron. Moses had Korah and all his supporters burn incense before God to see if God would accept their offerings. The earth opened up and swallowed Korah whole. Fire came out from the ground and consumed his 250 buddies who supported his rebellion. Popular support doesn't change God's truth either. It doesn't matter how many people your poll shows support your position, because it's not what they say that matters. It's what God says.

12 These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. 13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

The love feast was when the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper. Combine a church potluck and communion and you get the idea. These false teachers were making a mockery of the Lord's Supper. When Jude says they feed only themselves, there's a bit of a play on words here. A true church leader feeds his flock spiritually. These false leaders; however, do not. Although they were stuffing themselves silly during these love feasts. They were using it as an opportunity to pig out.

Jude calls them a whole host of insulting names. They are like dark clouds in August that promise water for your dry, thirsty garden, but they never produce a drop of rain. They are fruit trees that never produce a single apple, and single cherry, a single peach, nothing. They are mighty ocean waves that accomplish nothing but leave their foam upon the beach.

The wandering star here is actually the Greek word for planet. In John's day the visible planets were called wandering stars because they moved around in the night sky. In the ancient world, stars were essential to navigation. In the night sky a planet looked like a star, but it could not be used for navigation because from our point of view, its movement in the sky was erratic and unpredictable. If you based your navigation on a wandering star, you would find yourself hopelessly lost. Such is the case with following false teachers. Their untruth is erratic and unpredictable and if you use it to navigate your life, you will become hopelessly lost.

14 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones 15 to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." 16 These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

Once again Jude is quoting, not from the Bible, but from a popular Jewish book of the day. It's like quoting from a character in a story. It is an illustration Jude is using to bring his point home— judgement is coming. Every one of these self-seeking, false spiritual leaders will be held accountable. His warning to his readers and to us is this: don't fall into their trap. No matter what they promise you, there is nothing but death and destruction down their road.

We can see now why this isn't the letter Jude wanted to write, but he wraps everything up in a more positive, encouraging note.

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

He asks us to do three things. One: build yourself up in the faith. Continue to grow spiritually. Stay in the word and mature. Two: Pray. Prayer is powerful. Prayer works. So, many times it feels like there is nothing we can do, but there is always one thing we can do— PRAY. Three: keep yourself in God's love. How do we do that? Jesus tells us in John 15:10, *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love."* We can't keep his commands, if we don't know his commands. We can't know his commands, if we don't know his truth. We can't know his truth, if we don't know his word.

Two questions each of us needs to answer this morning? How's your prayer life, and how's your time in the word? That's the answer to most of what ails us spiritually. Just like the answer to most of what ails us physically is diet and exercise, the answer to what ails us spiritually is a diet of the Word and an exercise of prayer. If you were to do a spiritual checkup today, what would the doctor say?

We might think after all the harsh things Jude has to say about these false teachers, that he would tell the people to go get 'em. If you find anyone struggling with these things, let 'em have it. Fire away with both barrels. Go put them in their place, but that's not what he says. Listen to this.

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

He calls for mercy. Absolutely, engage them with the truth, you might very well snatch them from the fire, but do it with gentleness. A gentle rebuke or correction may save someone from the fire of hell. After all, your goal isn't to win an argument. It is to win a soul. Those are two very different goals.

Mercy and gentleness though, don't mean a squishy tolerance for false teaching. There is a holy fear we must have for false teaching. His reference here to hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh has to do with the false teacher's teaching and practice of sexual immorality. Jude is saying don't have anything to do with their false teaching, even if it's indirect.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ who sometimes fall under the influence and sway of bad teaching: they are not the enemy. They are victims of the enemy. They don't need to be defeated. They need to be rescued. We in the church don't need to be spiritual vigilantes

dispensing our own justice to anyone we think strays from the truth. Let God take care of the justice and judgment. Our job is to love and teach them back into the fold.

Jude ends his letter with a promise of assurance. We might think with all of these false teachers that our ultimate salvation is precarious if not impossible. Yes, false teaching is dangerous, Jude says, but you are safe. It can threaten you, only if you leave the safe protection of the truth. Listen to these comforting words of assurance.

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

No matter what anyone else says or does, God is able to keep you. No matter what strategy Satan uses you will stand before God as pure and holy, free from accusation or shame. Jesus did that for you on the cross, and what Jesus does for you doesn't stop on the cross. His power continues to keep you and hold you even now.

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”[a]*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[b] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.