

Shepherding Notes

Jude

By Caleb Bunch

Who Wrote Jude?

Jude was written by the half-brother of Jesus. However, just like James (the author of James), he does not use that earthly relationship as a point of authority. He simply refers to himself as the brother of James and a servant of Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus' brothers opposed His ministry — Mark 3:21 tells us that they thought Jesus was "out of his mind." Jude was not a follower of Jesus until after the crucifixion. But it is clear that sometime after the Resurrection, he believed and became a leader within the church.

Why Was This Book Written?

In verse 3, Jude states that it was his desire to write about soteriology (the theology of salvation). However, he found it necessary to write this letter to protect the church from false believers who have "crept in unnoticed." This short book is designed to help true Christians identify false teachers, and to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." (vs. 2)

Jude's Writing Style: Triads

Jude loves to write in "triads" or "triplets" in order to make his point. Here are the triplets to notice as you read through the chapter.

- Jude calls his audience called, beloved, and kept. (vs. 1)
- He prays for the multiplication of mercy, peace, and love. (vs. 2)
- He uses three examples of God's judgment against rebels: the faithless generation in the wilderness, fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah. (vs. 5-7)
- He explains that false teachers use their "dreams" as grounds to defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. (vs. 8)
- He compares false teachers to three specific men who rejected the Lord: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. (vs. 11)
- He marks false teachers' characteristics of being grumblers, malcontents, and loud-mouthed boasters. (vs. 16)

- He describes the false teachers' actions as divisive, worldly, and devoid of the Spirit. (vs. 19)
- A double triad: Jude exhorts believers to pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourself in the love of God, and await the mercy of Jesus. Notice the Trinitarian nature of these three commands. (vs. 20–21)
- Jude wants his faithful readers to assist those being drawn away by having mercy on doubters, snatching them out of the fire, and showing mercy to others while hating their sin. (vs. 22–23)
- Finally, God is to receive glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, now, and forever. (vs. 25)

Jude Is a Richly Christological Book

The most repeated word in the book — other than common words like "and" and "the" — is the word Jesus. Jude's favorite way to describe Him is "the Lord Jesus Christ." One special thing to note, as we have been reading about the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, is that Jude gives all the credit to Jesus: "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." (vs. 5) He notes that the biggest problem with the false teachers is that they "pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (vs. 4) At the very root of true Christianity is submission to Jesus. At the core of all false religions is a rejection of Christ and His teachings.

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God Calls Christians to Persevere in Both Action and Belief

You will always act in accordance with what you believe to be true. This is why the false teacher's lives result in wicked actions — they do what they believe. Jude is calling us to know truth in order to guard against the lies. We are called to build ourselves up (vs. 20) and keep ourselves in the love of God (vs. 21). We build ourselves up by knowing and understanding the Scripture. And we keep ourselves in the love of God by remaining near the cross of Jesus and trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit each day.

God Is the One Who Ultimately Holds You Fast

We hold the previous point in balance with the fact that if our salvation relied on us, we would be doomed. Jude highlights the preserving work of God in our salvation on many occasions. This book is written to those who are "called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." Those are precious truths that cannot be quickly overlooked. Jude also dedicates the book to the Lord by referring to Him as "Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy." Thank the Lord for His keeping, sustaining, preserving, and protecting love.

You and I Are Called to Defend the Faith

Jude states that his purpose is to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." We do this by calling out those who are teaching heresy. We cannot control what is taught and said in all places at all times. But we can ensure that we carefully guard our local body by observing the warnings in this book. As a church, part of your job is to ensure that your pastors never even inch in the direction of these false teachers. As elders, we are called to guard the flock. But as church members, you also have a role to play in keeping watch for any ungodly teaching or action that might "creep in unnoticed."

False Teachers Often Seem to Start Well, Then Depart from Orthodoxy

Consider a few of the ways that Jude describes these false teachers.

- Hidden Reefs — When you are in a boat, a hidden reef is one that is just below the surface and ready to sink you at a moment's notice. The water appears fine, but it is hiding a dangerous secret. Jude further refers to them as shepherds who feed themselves — leaders who are in it for personal gain.
- Waterless Clouds — In the ancient Near East, rain was never viewed as an inconvenience — it was always celebrated because of the life it brought to the land. Therefore, clouds were a welcome sight. But false teachers promise to bring good news, but it never comes. These are preachers who sound good but are void of the gospel. All show, no substance. They are swept along by winds of philosophy as it comes and goes.

- Fruitless Trees — This indicates that the false teachers will not be producing spiritual fruit. Their personal lives are marked by a notable lack of spiritual growth. "Twice dead" indicates that they are dead by nature of their lack of fruit, and dead by nature of being dug up and thrown out. This is the end result of heretics. Jesus says in John 15:6, "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."
- Wild Waves — Jude is highlighting these leaders' arrogance and uncontrolled lifestyles. The result of their sin is to produce nothing of lasting value — just foam on the seashore.
- Wandering Stars — Jude is using nautical terminology. Before compasses or GPS, sailors navigated by following the stars at night. Sometimes a ship would set its course to follow a star through the night, only to be led astray — because it was actually a planet or comet, not a fixed star. They look like stars, but they drift. Likewise, a false teacher may start well, but they will drift slowly, and sometimes almost imperceptibly, into "utter darkness."

"Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy." — Jude 24