

Little Letters with Big Messages The Epistle of Jude

Intro: Let's consider another little letter with a big message—the epistle of Jude.

Authorship and Recipients

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1-2)

The author of this epistle is Jude, one of the Lord's own earthly brothers. He identifies himself in a humble way. He is the brother of James, another of the Lord's brothers who became a leader in the Jerusalem church; but he is the slave of Jesus (his physical brother, but far more to him now).

Jude's letter is not sent to a particular group but perhaps is a general letter to all disciples everywhere; simply stated they are "*all those who are called by God*", i.e. those who have obeyed the gospel.

What is the big message of Jude's letter? First let's consider the opening and closing:

We have a God who can keep us from stumbling!

Jude's greeting focuses on the love and keeping power of God.

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1-2)

Notice two essential features of the people of God

They are loved by God

They are kept for Christ

Jude's closing focuses on the keeping power of God.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Notice now the emphasis on God's active role in preventing the apostasy of His people.

He is able to keep you from stumbling

He is able to make you stand

So just as Jude's opening and closing stress the love and protection of God, the body of his message exhorts believers to yield to God's keeping power.

But we must respond to God's keeping power!

Contend earnestly for the faith

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that

you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

The faith has been revealed “once for all”, an expression meaning once for all time and indicating that it needs no revision. The fact that it had been delivered means that there is no need for continuous revelation. Instead believers are urged to contend earnestly for it, that is, to fight the good fight of faith by living out the truth and combating the sources of error that would undermine it.

One of the greatest defenses against apostasy is an active offense against what undermines the truth.

Remember those who have fallen in the past

Jude presents his case by reminding his readers of those in the past who stumbled in their or who turned away into unbelief.

The unbelieving Israelites

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 5)

Angels who sinned

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6)

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire

All of these groups serve as object lessons to the people of God. In each case there was a deliberate rebellion against the will of God which brought upon them God’s wrath. The choice of angels, God’s people, and pagans might suggest all under the authority of God; all are expected to obey Him or be punished.

Identify those who have fallen in the present

Jude’s exhortation to “contend earnestly” implies that there were already present a group of teachers who would undermine and destroy the faith once for all revealed. Now he explicitly describes these false teachers:

Their irreverence

Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like

unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

Here we see the manifestations of an animal like comprehension of the sublime principles of divine rule. These false teachers show absolute contempt for the authority of God.

Their motivations

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Students who know these Bible stories can see that they represent cases of disobedience or rebellion against God growing out of self-interest.

Their character

These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

Through these vivid metaphors Jude suggests that these false teachers are dangerous, unfruitful, impudent, and misguided.

Their judgment

And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

Enoch's prophecy given long before the flood that destroyed the rebellious evil world of Noah's day has its continued fulfillment in those who imbibe the spirit of those who were destroyed by the flood.

Their activity

These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

Jude shows us the kinds of things that false teachers will do to manipulate disciples into following them. They will sow seeds of dissatisfaction, criticize the godly, seek their own desires, act selfishly, and use flattery for self-serving purposes.

Their anticipation

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. (Jude 17-19)

The apostle Peter had warned in his second epistle of such false teachers.

Take active steps to prevent apostasy

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. (Jude 20-23)

For Jude, avoiding apostasy was not only about seeing the possibility and identifying the fallen. It was about taking active steps to prevent it from happening.

That meant that disciples must keep growing in their knowledge which is the basis for faith.

They must exercise their faith in prayer according to the Holy Spirit's teaching.

They must live a life of obedience to God so that we can keep ourselves in His love.

They must live with anticipation of the coming of the Lord who would mercifully reward those who had served Him faithfully with eternal life.

Help others in danger of apostasy

And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

We are not only to be aware of the need to save ourselves from apostasy, we must also be active in seeking to save others. Again, the focus on the salvation of others is an effective antidote against apostasy.

Jude realizes that people will be in different conditions:

Some will be suffering from doubts and need our mercy.

Some will need to be rescued from the danger

Some will have already succumbed to transgression but we must fearfully try to restore them while avoiding being corrupted by their sinful behavior.

Conclusion: The big message of Jude is an important one. Apostasy is an ever-present danger for the people of God; but we have a loving and protective God who can keep us from stumbling. If we keep ourselves in His love, we will not fall away.

All of these books deserve more time and attention than we have given them in these one-sermon overviews. Take time to read them and ponder them more closely. You'll be rewarded for your effort.

