



Jude 1-16

INTRODUCTION

Jude's short letter has been called by at least one scholar as the "most neglected book in the New Testament." That may be due in part to how short it is and its being tucked away near the back of the New Testament. Nevertheless, this short letter contains God's very words which are given to us for our good, and therefore we should pay close attention to it.

MAIN POINT

Since God has given us everything we need to know in his word, we should fight to preserve it.

REFLECT

Some individuals are so well-known that you only have to use their first name for people to know who you're talking about. In the early church, James was one such person. When someone referred to "James" without any other qualifier ("James, son of..."), everyone understood that they were referring to Jesus' brother, who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

And by calling himself a "brother of James", we learn that Jude was also one of Jesus' earthly brothers. Yet Jude doesn't mention that. Part of the reason for that might be the fact that during Jesus' ministry, Jude and the rest of his brothers didn't believe in him (see John 7:5; Mark 3:21). Plus, while Jude's relationship to Jesus might be a helpful credential if he were writing a biography of Jesus, the fact that he's writing a pastoral letter as a Christian leader demands that he be more than just Jesus' brother. What qualifies Jude to write this letter isn't that he is Jesus' brother but that he is Jesus' "servant" (v. 1).

We don't know who exactly Jude is writing to, but it's obviously a church that he knows and loves. Apparently he had been planning to write a more joyful letter to this congregation, but news that false teachers had "crept in unnoticed" caused him to shift course and instead urge them to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints". Whatever precisely it was that they were teaching, they were using God's grace as an excuse to live sinful lives (vv. 3-4).

Jude begins his rebuke of these teachers by reminding the church of three Old Testament stories they would have been familiar with (vv. 5-7). One thing that these examples have in common is that the groups in each all enjoyed privileged positions. The Israelites had been redeemed from Egypt. The angels had been with God in positions of authority. And the people of Sodom and Gomorrah lived a land that was like the garden of Eden (Gen. 13:10). But despite being given such privileges, God's judgment still came upon them when they rebelled against his authority.

Jude puts the current false teachers in the same category as these three groups (v. 8) and then proceeds to bring in an extra-biblical story that was probably popular in this church to reinforce his point (vv. 9-10). And then, as if to drive home his point even further, he equates them with three notorious biblical individuals: Cain, who murdered his brother and defied God; Balaam, who tried to lead God's people astray for a profit; and Korah, who rebelled against Moses, God's appointed leader, and was destroyed (v. 11).

In a string of vivid images (vv. 12-13), Jude says that these false teachers destroy those who get near them, look out only for themselves, fail to deliver what they promise, bear no fruit in their lives, create a mess wherever they go, and lead those who follow them astray. After bringing in another familiar extra-biblical story to reinforce his point (vv. 14-15), Jude highlights their character: they complain; they're always finding fault; they're their own moral compass; they're proud; and they're selfish.

So in verses 5-16, Jude wants to remind us of two things. First, the problem of false teachers has always been a problem for God's people, and therefore they should always fight ("contend" or "agonize") to preserve the gospel message that has been given to us by God. And second, since God has always brought judgment on false teachers, we shouldn't be tempted to follow them.

- Jude devotes a lot of space to describing the character of these false teachers. How does he describe them? What kind of people are they? How important is it to evaluate not only a teacher's message but also their character?
- Jude's audience wasn't facing an obvious threat but a subtle one (see v. 4). How do you see the Christian faith being subtly threatened in our own day?
- What does it look like to "contend for the faith" today?

MEMORIZE

Jude 3 – *"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."*