

AN INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

Jude 1-4

(NASB): "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: ² May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. ³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to 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 handed down to the saints. ⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

INTRODUCTION

Few Christians today are familiar with Jude's letter. One modern writer says **Jude** is "probably" "the most neglected book in the New Testament." Two possible reasons are that it's brief (just 25 verses), and its content seems strange. **Jude** cites apocalyptic (end times), non-Biblical documents mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. A third reason **Jude** is not popular today is its message. It seems intolerant and unloving to modern readers to declare God's judgment upon corrupters of Christianity *within* the Church. Thus, many people today think little more about **Jude** than that it is buried somewhere near the end of their Bible and it's the last stop before launching into the Book of **Revelation**. When was the last time you read **Jude**?

Revelation captures our interest because it describes *events* that will occur in the last days: ungodly forces will seek to destroy the Christian Church from *without*, prior to the dramatic Second Coming of **Jesus**. **Jude** describes *behavior* that will occur in the last days: the "ungodly" will seek to destroy the Christian Church from within. "Ungodly" or "godless" (NIV) translates a Greek word meaning "destitute of reverential awe towards God." We are "ungodly" when we act as though God really isn't our holy Creator and Judge, as He claims. In **II Timothy 3:1-5** (GNT), the Apostle Paul voiced a warning similar to what we find in **Jude**: "Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days. People will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited; . . . they will love pleasure rather than God; *they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power*. Keep away from such people" (emphasis added).

Jesus Himself declared in **Matthew 7:15-16** (NLT): "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit." A famous world leader made free use of Christian vocabulary to gain power. He regularly talked about the blessings he'd received from almighty God. He spoke highly of the Christian confessions of faith and promised to make them the pillars of the new government he sought to form. He issued religious stories to the press. Churches frequently printed his writings and articles in their church papers. On occasion, he showed his tattered Bible with its badly worn pages and torn cover. He confessed he drew strength for his great work from its pages. Many in his day welcomed him as a man sent from God. For a time, from a distance, he played the role of a saint well. His name? Adolf Hitler.

Today's sermon will introduce the Book of **Jude**. The two Outline Points are Identification of the Person of Jude and Identification of the Problem of Jude.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PERSON OF JUDE

The Greek language of the New Testament designates this Book by the title, "Of Jude." The author's name was really Judas, one of the four earthly brothers of our Lord. Because the name of the disciple who betrayed **Jesus** was also "Judas," it probably seemed awkward to have a book in the New Testament book named "Judas." Therefore, this book has been known throughout history as "Jude" rather than "Judas." "Judas" was a popular Jewish name; the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "Judah."

Matthew 13:55 and **Mark 6:3** name "Judas" as one of **Jesus'** four "brothers." "James," a leader of the early Church in Jerusalem (**Acts 21:18**) appears first in both texts. James was next oldest to **Jesus** and His most prominent brother. Judas' name appears third or fourth, suggesting he was one of **Jesus'** youngest brothers. **John 7:5** says that during **Jesus'** earthly life, "not even His brothers believed in Him" as the Christ-Savior foretold in the Old Testament. But **Acts 1:14** reveals "His brothers" were by that time members of the fledgling Christian Church, most likely being fully persuaded by the convincing proof of **Jesus'** Resurrection He was indeed the Christ (Messiah) and our Savior. Our last piece of biographical information about Jude is supplied by Paul in **I Corinthians 9:5** (NASB): "The brothers of the Lord," including Jude, became traveling missionaries spreading the Gospel in the eastern Mediterranean world.

The few words Jude used to identify himself in his letter speak volumes about what he thought about himself. He describes himself simply as "a bond-servant of Jesus Christ," as Paul often did (as in **Romans 1:1**). In Biblical days, "a bond-servant" described anyone "owned by a master," either legally or by choice. Jude identifies "Jesus Christ" as his "only Master and Lord" in **vs. 4**. Like his brother James in his own letter, Jude saw no point in claiming special privileges based upon his physical relationship to **Jesus** as His earthly brother. He had by then realized what **Jesus** meant in **Matthew 12:50**: "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, that person is My brother and sister and mother."

Due to the striking similarities between **Jude** and **II Peter**, the Apostle Peter likely drew upon **Jude** when writing **II Peter** shortly before his death at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero in A. D. 66. This fact magnifies the high regard Christ's apostles had for Jude's words. Jude's recipients were most likely the churches Jude visited during his missionary tours. Jude felt compelled to write to them with a burning message from the Lord. Jude wrote them of real dangers to the Church and sought to spur them into action.

On Sunday night, October 30, 1938, Orson Welles caused a nationwide panic as narrator of the updated realistic broadcast of H. G. Wells' 19th-century fiction novel, *The War of the Worlds*. The program began at 8:00 p.m. EDT, but most who tuned in Orson Welles on the CBS radio network waited until ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's popular *Charlie McCarthy* show ended on the NBC network at 8:12 p.m. This was at the height of the golden age of radio prior to the coming of television. Millions of listeners missed the opening disclaimer of the program being a fictional dramatization. The broadcast mentioned so many living people and real locations witnessing a full-scale Martian invasion that panic broke out across the land. In New Jersey, terrified civilians jammed highways seeking to escape the alien marauders. Many begged police for gas masks to save them from toxic fumes or asked electric companies to turn their power off so Martians wouldn't see their lights. One woman ran into an Indianapolis church with evening services underway and yelled, "New York has been destroyed! It's the end of the world! Go home and prepare to die!" Jude's letter is not an attempt at sensationalism. He wrote to warn us of what to expect at the true end of our world.

II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM OF JUDE

Jude's language in **vs. 3** indicates he intended to write a general letter explaining essential beliefs and practices of "our common salvation." But news apparently recently reached him of such a disturbing nature that he ditched his original plans for this letter and "felt the necessity" to address a specific problem rather than general issues. One of Christianity's foremost words is almost entirely missing from **Jude**. This gives us a major clue about the key problem Jude felt compelled to address.

Most New Testament letters do not convey God's "mercy and peace and love" to the readers, as does **Jude 2**, but "mercy and peace and" a word that starts with "g." What is it? "Grace." People of every other religious faith believe they must earn God's favor. Christianity alone declares God offers us forgiveness by His *gift* of Christ's sacrifice in our behalf. Yet, **Jude** mentions the word "grace" but once (**vs. 4**), when describing "certain . . . ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness." The NIV translates "licentiousness" as "a license for immorality." The Greek word means "to live without moral

absolutes or restraints." Can we as professed Christians take God's grace of forgiveness and love so for granted that we "turn the grace of God into a license for immorality?" Yes! A man determined to lose weight thought it best not to drive past his favorite bakery to and from work each day. He took an alternate route. This worked well for some time and he began to trim down. But one day he absentmindedly took his old route to work. When he realized what he was doing, he thought, "This must be a sign from the Lord." But just to make sure he wasn't deceiving himself he said, "I'll drive past, and if there's a parking spot in front of the bakery, I'll take it as a sign from the Lord He wants me to buy something there." And the funny thing was, on the eighth time around the block, he received the "sign from the Lord" he wanted.

Jude places great emphasis upon the importance of *love* in our relationship with the Lord. In **vs. 1**, we are described as "beloved *in* God the Father." This translation (NASB, ESV) is preferable to "loved *by* God the Father" (NIV). To correct those who would pervert God's grace into a "license for immorality," Jude seeks to emphasize we are guaranteed the *blessings of God's love* only to the extent we *obey Him in love*. We abuse God's grace when we view the Lord more as a dispenser of goodies to enjoy regardless of what's in our heart toward Him, instead of as our Heavenly Father who offers us a deepening experience of the transforming and uplifting power of His love as our greatest good. As we shall explore in coming weeks, Jude declares it is our responsibility to "keep ourselves in the love of God" (**vs. 21**) and not presume upon God's love for us. **Jesus** told us in **John 14:21**, "The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him." Jude describes Christians over and over again as "beloved" of God (**vss. 1, 3, 17, and 20**), but he balances this privilege with a responsibility: "keep yourselves in the love of God."

When I was 18 and a new Christian, my Sunday School teacher, Chuck, was a husky former marine. Years earlier, he'd taught a boys Sunday School class. One day, he went to the home of a boy age 10 who was ill. The boy's father, in the Air Force, was overseas. As my friend left the boy's room after praying for him, his mother greeted him with a drink in her hand wearing a flimsy nightgown and said, "Let's go to bed." He put his head down and ran out the door as fast as he could. All the way home, and when Chuck shared this incident with his wife Carol, the love they shared never seemed sweeter or more wondrous! This can be our experience of the Lord's wondrous love when we flee ungodly temptations into His arms.

Jude describes professed Christians with a far different approach to faithful love than what my friend demonstrated. They believed they could redefine "faithfulness" to Christ based upon their current passions. Jude warns such people "crept in unnoticed" ("wormed their way in," TLB) to leadership positions in many churches. Such "ungodly persons" never truly submitted themselves to "Jesus Christ" as their "only Master and Lord." "Master" translates the Greek word behind our English word "despot." A "despot" is anyone who exercises the absolute, sovereign authority of a king. If we truly are among those whom God the Father has "called" effectively into a saving relationship with "Jesus Christ" (**vs. 1**), we've enthroned Christ as King in our hearts. **Revelation 17:14**, when speaking of the impotency of the antichrist's forces against **Jesus**, says, "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers" (NIV).

Jude exhorts us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." The Greek word for "once for all" appears just this once in the New Testament. This underscores that Christian beliefs and practices set down by **Jesus** and His apostles are not subject to revision based on our wishes or changing cultural standards. Each person's eternal destiny depends upon gaining God's forgiveness through a saving relationship with Christ in this life. The stakes could not be higher. This is why we must "contend earnestly" to preserve the Christian doctrines "delivered" ("entrusted") to the Church. "Contend" is an intensive form of the Greek word from which we get our word "agonize." Even as an athlete or soldier is willing to struggle through agony to achieve victory, our Lord appeals to us to be equally motivated to gain victory over false Christians who threaten to ruin the Church from within its ranks, rather than from without.

The critical issue about which **Jude** warns us is that we may not recognize "ungodly" saboteurs of our Christian faith by their words; by what they profess to believe. Talk is cheap! We must scrutinize their actions. They seek to exploit the name of **Jesus** and their positions of trust within Christian ranks for their own selfish gain. They may hypocritically *appear* to be more devoted to the Lord than are many devout believers (except in areas where they indulged their lusts). Phony Christians can be quite deceiving. Some years ago an artist exhibited a remarkable picture in London to demonstrate how easily we can be deceived by appearances. When looking at this painting from a distance, you seem to see a monk engaged in prayer; his hands clasped; his head bowed. But if you came near enough to examine the painting more closely, you saw the monk was really squeezing a lemon into a punch bowl! Hypocrites may profess to follow Christ in their attempt to squeeze something from God's people they want: votes, money, praise, sexual favors, etc.

A secondary application of **Jude's** warning is how we damage Christianity's reputation in the world and confuse people about who **Jesus** is if we knowingly "turn the grace of God into a license for immorality"; if we excuse behavior in our lives that God detests. **Jude** warns corrupting influences within the Church will proliferate the closer we get to the return of Christ. We have a responsibility to **Jesus** and to ourselves not to contribute to such corruption.

CONCLUSION

Can we be rotting morally and spiritually within, even while fooling many people who know us because of how carefully we keep up outward appearances of being godly and honorable?

Were we to visit Long Beach Harbor, we could tour the legendary ocean liner, the Queen Mary. She set sail on her maiden voyage from England to New York City in 1936 as the largest ship afloat. She weighed more than 80,000 tons and stretched longer than three football fields end-to-end. She served as a passenger ship through four decades and in World War II as a troop carrier. Upon its retirement as an ocean liner in 1967, the Queen Mary was converted into a hotel and museum. Her three massive smokestacks were then taken off to be scraped down and repainted. Once on the dock, they crumbled nearly to nothingness. Little was left of the $\frac{3}{4}$ " steel plate from which the stacks had been molded. More than 30 coats of paint had been applied to the metal over the years without the underlying rust being scraped away and treated. The time finally came when the corruption at work behind the bright paint on these smokestacks could no longer be hidden. Left untreated, rust destroyed the steel and reduced the smokestacks to ruins.

Regardless of our efforts to paint over our moral rot, certain doom awaits all professed Christians who do not repent of spiritual hypocrisy and submit to God's Spirit scraping sin's presence from our hearts. We may keep up a deceitful appearance for a time that Christ is our Master and Lord, but not forever.