

Contend for the Faith

Introduction to Jude

Jude 1-25

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Introduction to Jude

Scripture

About a year ago I read a book by pastor and author John MacArthur. The title of the book is *The Truth War*, and its sub-title is *Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception*.¹ As you can tell from the title and sub-title, Dr. MacArthur argues that we live in an age of deception, and we are engaged in a war for the truth.

I found this book compelling. I was challenged to learn about the deception that confronts us on a daily basis, and that we are called to confront deception with the truth of God's Word.

Dr. MacArthur's book is essentially an exposition of the first few verses of the Letter of Jude. So, I resolved that I wanted to preach on this marvelous book.

Jude is one of the most neglected books of the New Testament. In fact, it is difficult to find many commentaries on Jude.

It is the fourth shortest letter in the New Testament (after 2 John, 3 John, and Philemon). But it packs a powerful punch. It is extremely relevant for today, and we would do well to study this marvelous piece of God's revelation.

So, today, I would like to read the entire letter of Jude to you as we begin studying this wonderful letter. Let's read Jude 1-25:

**¹ Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,
To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and
kept for Jesus Christ:**

² May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

**³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you
about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write ap-
pealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all de-
livered to the saints. ⁴ For certain people have crept in unno-
ticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, un-**

¹ John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

godly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁵ 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. ⁶ And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

⁸ Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. ⁹ But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” ¹⁰ But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error and perished in Korah’s rebellion. ¹² These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” ¹⁶ These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In

the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.²² And have mercy on those who doubt;²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,²⁵ 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 1-25)

Introduction

As I begin this new series of messages in a series of sermons I have titled, “Contend for the Faith,” it is entirely appropriate for you to ask, “Why preach on this book? Why are you preaching on the Letter of Jude?”

That is a fair question. Let me give you my answer.

We live in an age that is often called postmodernism. The term *postmodernism* has been used since the 1980s to describe several popular trends in architecture, art, literature, history, culture, and religion. It is not an easy term to explain, because it describes a way of thinking that defies (and even rejects) any clear definition.

John MacArthur says that “postmodernism in general is marked by a tendency to dismiss the possibility of any sure and settled knowledge of the truth.”² In other words, postmodernism says that there is no such thing as objective truth. Postmodernists say, “True for you, but not for me.”³

I heard a delightful illustration of this during this past week at

² John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 10.

³ Paul Copan, *True for You, But Not for Me* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1988).

the Twin Lakes Fellowship that I attended. One of our denomination's veteran missionaries, Hugh Wessel, shared how he ran away from his New York City home in the late 1970s when he was still a teenager. He was a hippy at the time and travelled to Europe. He had rejected Christianity as a religion for people who could not think. Somehow he found himself one day at the L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. He knocked on the door and Francis Schaeffer opened the door.

“Hello,” said Dr. Schaeffer, “how may I help you?”

“My girlfriend and I are looking for a place to spend the night,” said Hugh.

“You are welcome to spend the night here,” said Dr. Schaeffer.

“What is this place?” asked Hugh.

“My wife and I are Christians, and we offer a shelter for those who are seeking the truth,” Dr. Schaeffer answered.

“I don't believe in Christianity,” said Hugh as he started to walk away.

“But Christianity is true,” said Dr. Schaeffer.

“I just don't believe that Christianity is true,” said Hugh.

“But it is true,” replied Dr. Schaeffer.

“I don't believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth,” said Hugh.

“Well, you have just made an absolute statement,” observed Dr. Schaeffer.

Hugh realized the fallacy of his comment. He was converted to truth and to Christ. Two weeks later Dr. Schaeffer married Hugh and his girlfriend, and for more than thirty years they have been serving the truth in France.

We live in an age in which truth is under assault. Dr. R. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, “[The postmodern age] is the age of no truth, an age that has reached a point of deadly fatigue when it comes to facing the truth—a generation that no longer believes truth can be known.”

Well, there is such a thing as truth, and it can be known. Jude

shows us how to know the truth and defend the truth.

Lesson

In today's lesson I simply want to capture a bird's-eye view of this extremely important letter.

I. Introductory Matters

First, let's begin with some introductory matters.

Whenever we approach a letter in the New Testament, there are five basic questions that we need to answer:

1. Who wrote the letter?
2. To whom was the letter written?
3. When was the letter written?
4. Why was the letter written? And,
5. What is the letter's message?

A. *Who Wrote the Letter?*

So, first, who wrote the letter?

The New Testament lists eight men who have the English name of Jude. "Jude" is actually the English form of the Greek "Judas" and the Hebrew "Judah."

Jude was an extremely popular name at the time of the New Testament. The founder of one of the twelve Jewish tribes was named Judah. And the hero of Maccabean revolt against the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in the 2nd century BC was named Judah.

There were actually eight men in the New Testament with the name of Jude (or the equivalent of Judah or Judas). They were:

1. Judah, the founder of the tribe of Judah (Luke 3:33);
2. Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus (Matthew 10:4);
3. Judas, son of James (Luke 6:16);
4. Judas of Damascus, at whose home Paul stayed after his

- conversion (Acts 9:11);
5. Judas, called Barsabbas, who carried a letter to the Gentile believers concerning which of the Jewish practices they should keep (Acts 15:22);
 6. Judas, a Galilean spoken of by Gamaliel as one who had gained some temporary notoriety (Acts 5:37);
 7. Judah, listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke (Luke 3:30); and
 8. Jude, the half brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55).

Jude identifies himself in verse 1a, where he says, “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” Well, the only Jude whose brother was named James is also the half brother of Jesus. We read in Matthew’s gospel when the people were astonished by Jesus’ teaching, they asked, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers *James* and Joseph and Simon and *Judas*? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matthew 13:54-56).

So, the Jude who wrote this important letter was Jesus’ half-brother.

B. To Whom Was the Letter Written?

Second, to whom was the letter written?

Jude simply says in verse 1b that the letter was written “to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.”

I think John MacArthur is correct when he says, “The specific church or churches to which Jude addressed his epistle are not known. In light of his choice of illustrations from the Old Testament and the Jewish apocrypha, his readers likely were predominantly Jewish believers.”⁴

⁴ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 144.

C. When Was the Letter Written?

Third, when was the letter written?

There is nothing in Jude's letter which indicates when it was written. Since Jude does not mention the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD, as an illustration of God's judgment on his people, it is probable that Jude wrote this letter prior to the 70 AD.

D. Why Was the Letter Written?

Fourth, why was the letter written?

Jude had originally planned to write a positive letter about the "common salvation" that he shared with the recipients of the letter. He said in Jude 3a, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation. . . ." But, he apparently received alarming news that false teachers had infiltrated the churches to which he wrote, and so he was compelled to change his plans. Indeed, he said in Jude 3b, "I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

Jude actually makes clear what had happened. He explains what the false teachers had done. He said in Jude 4, "For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." He condemns these false teachers as "ungodly" a total of six times in his letter.

So, Jude wrote his letter to address the ungodly, false teaching that was infiltrating the church.

E. What Is the Letter's Message?

And fifth, what is the letter's message?

Jude warns Christians of ungodly, false teachers, urging us to be on the lookout for them, to strengthen ourselves against false

teaching, and to be ready to help other believers who are vulnerable to these false teachings.

Even though Jude was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD to Christians and churches somewhere in the Mediterranean basin, it is still remarkably contemporary.

II. Thematic Survey

Second, let me give you a brief thematic survey.

Jude wrote a letter. The letter that he wrote was a typical letter of New Testament times. It had an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Jude began his letter with the typical salutation (1-2).

Then Jude stated his purpose for writing the letter, which is that the people of God need to contend for the faith (3-4). False teachers have crept into the church, and Jude calls the people of God to contend for the faith against the false teachers.

Jude then states that the false teachers are doomed to failure and judgment (5-7). God will protect his people who are serious about defending the truth.

Jude describes the false teachers (8-16). He gives several different examples of what false teachers look like.

Jude teaches how to defend against false teaching (17-23). He shows how the people of God are to resist false teaching, and to help others who might be taken in by false teaching.

Finally, Jude concludes his letter with a beautiful doxology (24-25). He assures the people of God that God is able to keep his people from falling into the snares of false teaching, both now and forever.

III. Concluding Thoughts

Finally, let me close with some concluding thoughts.

I mentioned earlier that Jude is one of the least-studied books of the New Testament. That is a great pity because Jude's letter is a

marvelous letter for the people of God. I hope that you will be as excited as I am about this wonderful letter by the time we have finished studying it.

There are two ways to view this marvelous letter. Only one of the ways will open us up to the full benefit that Jude can bring. So let me personalize these concluding thoughts.

A. *You Can View This As Only a Letter to the Original Recipients of Jude and Therefore Miss Its Message to You*

First, you can view this as only a letter to the original recipients of Jude and therefore miss its message to you.

If you look at Jude in this manner, you will view it as an historical document, and therefore it will be of limited interest to you. Jude is viewed as an historical artifact with little or no contemporary relevance.

I half suspect that this is how some people view Jude. After all, how else can one explain the lack of interest in this marvelous letter?

B. *You Can View This As a Personal Letter to You and Therefore Get Its Message to You*

Or second, you can view this as a personal letter to you and therefore get its message to you.

But beware! If you study Jude from this perspective, you will never be the same. You will be unable to remain neutral to its message. And that, it seems to me, is how God planned it.

God inspired Jude to write this wonderful letter to equip the people of God in all ages with the tools to face and fight false teachers. To be sure, the people of God were already facing all kinds of problems within a single generation of Jesus' resurrection. And so Jude wrote to equip them with a way to face false teaching.

In the providence of God, however, that marvelous equipping is able to help us even today. Every generation has its false teach-

ers, and every generation needs to be equipped to answer the false teaching that crops up.

So, if you view Jude as a personal message to you, you will get its message and be equipped to face the false teaching that we face in our generation.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with two points of application.

First, commit yourself to grow spiritually. Frankly, spiritually immature people are immensely more prone to fall prey to false teaching. God has given his people his Word in order to show us how to grow spiritually. Sadly, many believers do not even have a regular habit of reading God's Word. And so they are far more likely to be duped by false teaching.

And second, pay close attention to Bible teachers. Acts 17:11 says, "Now these Jews [i.e., the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." They checked to see if the apostle Paul was teaching the Word of God correctly. Listen, you need to check me. You need to know the Word of God well enough so that you can spot error when it is taught. A teacher or preacher can give you 95% of truth but it is that 5% of error that can lead into false teaching and heresy.

May God help all of us as to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Amen.

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develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Contend for the Faith

PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the letter of Jude.
Help all of us to contend for the faith that was once for all
delivered to the saints.
And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with you all, now and always. Amen.