

Contend for the Faith

The Opening Greeting

Jude 1-2

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Scripture

Last week I began a new series of studies on the Letter of Jude which I have titled, “Contend for the Faith.”

The Letter of Jude is the second-last book in the Bible, just before the book of Revelation. It is the fourth-shortest book in the New Testament, after 2 John, 3 John, and Philemon.

Unfortunately, the Letter of Jude is one of the most neglected books in the New Testament. That is a pity, because it is a tremendously helpful part of God’s revelation to his people.

As we shall see more fully in the coming weeks, Jude was going to write a letter about the wonderful truths of our common salvation. However, word reached him that error and heresy was creeping in to the church, and so he found it necessary to write appealing to God’s people to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

So, let us begin our study of this marvelous letter by looking at the opening greeting, found in Jude 1-2. Let’s read Jude 1-2:

**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. (Jude
1-2)**

Introduction

When you and I write a letter to a friend, there are certain normative conventions that guide us as we write that letter. We usually begin with our address, followed by the date. Then there is the opening greeting. This is followed by the body of the letter, and concluded with a closing comment and our name.

In New Testament times, people also had certain normative conventions to guide them as they wrote their letters. Letters in New Testament times began with the author's name. Sometimes he said something about himself to identify himself to his audience. Then, the letter had the recipient's name, which was often followed by some prayer or good wish. The body of the letter came next. The letter often concluded with some kind of closing prayer.

Lesson

Jude's letter followed the letter-writing convention of the New Testament. Today, I want to examine the opening greeting and look at Jude's background, Jude's audience, and Jude's prayer.

I. Jude's Background (1a-b)

So, first, let's look at Jude's background.

Jude began his letter in the standard New Testament way of writing a letter. He began by identifying himself. He said, "**Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James**" (1).

A. *A Brother of James (1b)*

The New Testament lists several different 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 1b as the “**brother of James.**” Well, the only **Jude** whose brother was named **James** was also the half-brother of Jesus. We read in Matthew’s gospel that 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 letter was the **brother of James** and Jesus’ half-brother.

Why were **Jude** and James called *half-brothers* of Jesus? The reason **Jude** and James were half-brothers of Jesus is that they all had the same mother, Mary, but they did not have the same father. Joseph was the father of **Jude** and James, whereas Jesus had no earthly father.

B. A Servant of Jesus Christ (1a)

Interestingly, Jude’s brother James also wrote a letter that is part of the New Testament canon. And what I find fascinating is that his opening greeting is very similar to the opening greeting of Jude—at least, in terms of identifying himself. James began his letter by writing, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Chr-

ist” (James 1:1a). And notice again what Jude wrote, **“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ”** (1a).

Why do both brothers identify themselves as **“a servant of Jesus Christ”**? Why don’t they say something like, “a half-brother of Jesus”? Surely being Jesus’ half-brother was a very special relationship?

Jude (and James) introduced himself as **“a servant of Jesus Christ”** because his *spiritual* relationship was now far more important than his *family* relationship.

The Bible states that Jesus had at least four half-brothers and two half-sisters (Matthew 13:54-55). The apostle John noted that while Jesus was alive on earth his brothers did not believe that he was the Son of God and Savior of sinners (John 7:5). It was not until after Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection that Jude (and James) believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Acts 1:14). And from that moment on his entire relationship to Jesus was different. Jesus was not merely his half-brother; Jesus was God! He was Jude’s Savior and Lord.

That is why Jude humbly began his letter by saying that he was now **“a servant of Jesus Christ.”**

II. Jude’s Audience (1c-e)

Second, let’s look at Jude’s audience.

Jude wrote, **“To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ”** (1c-e).

Nowhere in Jude’s letter do we get a clear indication of the original recipients. Some believe that because of the many Jewish references in his letter Jude wrote primarily to Jewish Christians. But that is surely more a reflection of Jude’s own background rather than the background of his recipients.

The apostle Paul indicated that the other apostles and Jesus’ half-brothers carried on an itinerant ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5). I think it is likely that Jude, having received reports of heresy infiltrating various churches, wrote this letter as a circular letter to a

number of different churches. And that is why there is not a specific local church that is identified as the recipient of this letter.

Although there is no clear identification of the recipients, it is nevertheless clear that Jude wrote this letter to Christian believers. He noted three reasons why they were Christians.

A. *They Were Called (1c)*

First, they were called.

Jude wrote, **“To those who are called”** (1c).

A Christian is someone who is called. Specifically, a Christian is someone who is called by God. Christians don't call themselves to salvation. God calls people to salvation.

Theologians distinguish between two kinds of call. First, there is the *general, external call* of God that goes to all who hear the good news of the gospel (cf. Isaiah 45:22; 55:6; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 11:28; Luke 14:16-19; John 7:37; Revelation 22:17). This call often goes unheeded and rejected.

I went to a very fine Baptist Church during my High School years in Port Elizabeth. The good news of the gospel was faithfully proclaimed each Sunday. The general call went out. But I did not heed it; indeed, I rejected the general call of God at that time.

In this letter, Jude is not talking about God's general, external call.

There is a second call that theologians identify as the *special, internal call*. This is the call about which Jude is speaking. God's special, internal call awakens new life in the sinner (cf. John 5:21; Acts 16:14; Ephesians 2:5). It is the work of the Holy Spirit enabling a person to believe the good news of the gospel.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers in the 19th century in London, England. He described the general call of the gospel as lightning we sometimes see on a summer's evening—beautiful, grand—but it is something we see and are not touched by it. “But the special call of the gospel,” he said, “is the

forked flash from heaven; it strikes somewhere.”¹ And it strikes us, as it were. When a person hears a general presentation of the gospel, which is the general, external call, he normally rejects it. But, when the Holy Spirit moves in and opens that person’s spiritual ears, he responds to the special, internal call and becomes one of **“those who are called.”** The person who receives the special, internal call of God is then transformed, converted, justified, sanctified, and will be glorified—nothing can break down that process.

“But,” someone says, “what if I am not called?”

That’s a good question.

Spurgeon was once asked, “Why don’t you just preach to those who are called, the ones who are elect?”

Spurgeon replied, “If God had somehow marked those who are called—the elect—with a yellow stripe down their backs, I would immediately go around lifting shirt-tails to find those who are called so that I could tell them the good news of the gospel. But since God has not marked those who are called in some special way, I simply do what he has told me to do. And that is to preach the good news of the gospel to all people.”

You see, Spurgeon understood that the preacher’s task is to preach the good news of the gospel to all. That is the general, external call of the gospel. But it is the Holy Spirit’s job to apply the gospel to those who are called. That is the special, internal call.

Our finite minds don’t understand how that works, so we simply accept it as the revelation of God. Jesus once said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). In other words, Jesus was saying, “Don’t worry about whether or not you are called. If you want to come to me, I will receive you.”

Aren’t you glad that Jesus did not say, “If you are called, please come to me”? No. Jesus said, “Anyone who wants to come to me can come to me. I will take care of how that works out in the sovereign decree. Don’t worry about the process; just come to me.”

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *Beware the Pretenders* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984), 11.

B. *They Were Loved (1d)*

Second, they were loved.

Jude wrote, “**To those who are. . . beloved in God the Father**” (1d).

The reason God saves a person is because he loves that person. There is nothing at all in any single person that makes us lovable to God. But rather, based solely on his sovereign pleasure for reasons beyond human comprehension, **God the Father** purposed to set his love on a certain select number of sinners and save them (Matthew 11:27; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4).

By nature all people are sinners and rebels against God. But because of his sovereign, distinguishing love, God chose a vast number, beyond our ability to count (Revelation 7:9), to be saved.

The apostle Paul put it this way, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

And the apostle John put it this way, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are” (1 John 3:1a, *NASB95*).

Christians have done nothing to gain the love of God. In fact, before our salvation we were under his righteous wrath. But **God the Father** now loves Christians with the same love that he has for his Son, Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus prayed in John 17:26, “I made known to them [Christians] your name, and I will continue to make it known, *that the love with which you have loved me may be in them*, and I in them.”

And further, nothing in all creation can ever separate Christians from God’s love, as the apostle Paul declared in Romans 8:38-39, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

C. *They Were Kept (1e)*

And third, they were kept.

Jude wrote, “**To those who are called. . . kept for Jesus Christ**” (1e).

Christians not only receive the special, internal call of God (which then transforms them), and are loved by God with the same love he has for Jesus and will forever rest on them, but they are **kept for Jesus Christ** for all eternity.

This is what theologians call the perseverance of the saints, or, better, the *preservation of the saints*.

Listen to how Jesus put it in John 10:27-29, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and *they will never perish*, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, Christians can rest assured that they can never lose their salvation. It is impossible.

So, Jude writes to Christians who are completely secure in their salvation. They have received the special, internal call of God to salvation, they enjoy the special love of God, and they will be preserved for all eternity. Only those who are secure in this knowledge are ready to fight heresy.

III. Jude’s Prayer (2)

And third, let’s look at Jude’s prayer.

Jude wrote, “**May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you**” (2).

Jude has several triplets in his letter. He has already written to those who are called, loved, and kept. Now, he prays that God’s **mercy, peace, and love will be multiplied to them**.

Mercy and peace was a common Jewish greeting (cf. 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2 John 3). Jude adds **love** to remind his

readers of God's love for them. This threefold expression is found only here in the New Testament.

So, Jude's prayer is for three blessings that will **be multiplied** to his readers. "**Be multiplied**" means "to grow, to increase greatly, to multiply."² His prayer is that his readers would continue to experience the Lord's blessing, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

A. *For Mercy (2a)*

First, Jude's prayer is for mercy.

Mercy is "compassion for the miserable."³ Christians still sin. Even though they are justified, they still sin. And when they sin, they are miserable. But the glorious good news is that God has compassion on those who are miserable because of their sin, and acknowledge it.

B. *For Peace (2b)*

Second, Jude's prayer is for peace.

Peace is "freedom from disturbance; tranquility; freedom from or the cessation of war."⁴ Before becoming Christians, we were at war with God. But having received God's mercy, we are now at peace *with* God. And because we are at peace with God we can also experience the peace *of* God.

C. *For Love (2c)*

And third, Jude's prayer is for love.

Love is "an intense feeling of deep affection."⁵ God blesses

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 601.

³ M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁴ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Christians with constant outpourings of his **love**. The apostle Paul said, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5b).

Conclusion

Let me conclude with three points of application.

First, if you are a Christian, you are also a servant of Jesus Christ. Some of us are interested in family trees. Contrary to Dan Brown’s heretical assertion in *The Da Vinci Code* no one today has a family (or biological) relationship to Jesus Christ. All Christians are servants of Jesus Christ. Spiros Zodhiates defined a servant as “one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other (Matthew 8:9; 20:27; 24:45, 46).”⁶ Becoming a Christian means receiving Jesus not only as Savior but also as Lord and Master.

Second, if you are a Christian, you are called, loved, and kept. You heard the general, external call of God when the gospel was presented to you. You also heard the special, internal call of the Holy Spirit when he drew you to himself. You received this special, internal call because God the Father in eternity past set his love upon you. And that love is exactly the same love he has for his Son. Nothing in all of creation will ever be able to separate you from the love of God. And Jesus will preserve you for all eternity. Isn’t that a fantastic blessing?

And third, if you are not yet a Christian, the blessings that belong to Christians can be yours too. All you need to do is come to Jesus for salvation. Acknowledge that God is holy and that you are a sinner. Believe that Jesus is God’s provision for your sin. And then confess your sin and believe that Jesus paid the penalty for all your sin. Do it today. Amen.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
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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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PRAYER:

Our Father, I thank you for the opening greeting of Jude. It is so rich in theology that I have only just scratched the surface of the opening greeting.

We who are Christians thank you that we are called, loved and kept for Jesus Christ. What wonderful truths are contained in those terms! I pray that every Christian will rest secure in your call, your love, and your preservation.

And for those who are not yet Christians, call them to yourself in faith and repentance.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

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