

INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

Key Verse 3b

“I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.”

Author, Date and Place of Writing

The author identifies himself clearly as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.”^[1] Jude, called “Judas” was a brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55). Jude did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah before his glorification (Jn 7:5). But after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Jude believed in him as the Christ and his personal Savior (1,4,25; Ac 1:14). He acknowledged Jesus as the only Sovereign and Lord (4,25). While Jude was not one of the Twelve Apostles, he called himself “a servant of Jesus Christ.” This denotes that he belonged to Christ and represented him in proclaiming apostolic teaching as his servant. Jude was also a brother of James, a prominent leader in the early church (Gal 2:9). Early church tradition recognizes this Jude as the author of the letter.

Many scholars have noted a literal connection between Jude and 2 Peter, in terms of the false teachers and heresies they addressed, and the warnings they gave. Jude was written in the same time period as 2 Peter, sometime in the mid to late 60’s A.D. There is neither internal evidence or external support which indicates where the letter was written from.

Recipients

Although Jude is categorized as a general epistle, it was written to a specific church. Frequent, specific references to the Old Testament and to non-canonized material without explanation, indicate that his audience was familiar with Jewish literature and were therefore Jewish Christians living in an ungodly Gentile culture

(4,8). The repeated use of “dear friends” (beloved 3,17,20) reveals that Jude had an intimate relationship with them.

Occasion and Purpose of Writing

The general spiritual atmosphere of those times was characterized by ungodliness (4,8,15[3],18). Some false teachers had infiltrated the Christian fellowship and were teaching destructive heresies. In that Greek culture, based on dualism (material is evil, and spirit is good) sexual immorality was permissible and rampant. Consequently, the false teachers perverted the grace of God into a license for immorality. Furthermore, the false teachers denied that Jesus Christ was the only Sovereign and Lord. They rejected authority and lived ungodly lives. They became enemies of gospel truth and their bad influence became a source of danger to lead God’s people astray.

Jude was very eager to write to them about the salvation they shared in order to strengthen their faith. He was concerned, however, about false teachers who were trying to draw them away from this salvation. So he was compelled to urge them to contend for the faith that was entrusted once for all to God’s holy people (3). Jude gave a strong warning of God’s impending judgment on ungodliness and exhorted believers to build themselves up in their most holy faith.

Main Theme

The main idea of this book is that believers must contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. Now this faith--that is the gospel truth from God--is the only way of salvation and it is non-negotiable (3,25). Salvation was given by God our Savior. It came only by God’s grace through faith in Jesus who paid the full price for all our sins. However, Jude mentions two threats to the gospel truth. One was that the gospel of God’s grace may be abused (4). Christians are vulnerable to ungodly culture which promotes sexual immorality and ungodly living. So it was tempting to misuse God’s grace. The second was to Jesus’ Deity, who is the only Sovereign and Lord (4b). This unique declaration of his authority as the Son of God was being undermined by false

teachings. God's people must not tolerate false teachings, but contend for the faith and keep themselves in God's love by the help of the Holy Spirit (1,20,21,24).

Characteristics

Jesus Christ our Sovereign and Lord

The author mentions "Jesus Christ" six times (1[2],4,17,21,25 NIV). Four times he includes the word "Lord"^[2] and once, "only Sovereign and Lord" (4,17,21,25). In this way the author emphasized that Jesus is the Messiah and the Sovereign Lord, refuting false teaching.

Judgment Oracle

The majority of the text is a judgment oracle against false teachers and the ungodly (5-16). God never tolerates the ungodly, but will surely judge them. To emphasize this, the author gives warning examples: the judgment of unbelieving Israel (5), fallen angels (6), Sodom and Gomorrah (7), Cain, Balaam and Korah (11), and the people of Enoch's time (14-15). Those who lived in rebellious enmity against God were all destroyed. The judgment is dire and is vividly described as eternal fire and the blackest darkness forever (7,13). Fallen angels are kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great day (6). Those being judged are described allegorically as irrational animals, blemishes, shepherds who feed only themselves, clouds without rain, autumn trees without fruit and uprooted--twice dead, wild waves, grumblers and fault finders (12-13,16).

Old Testament and Non-canonized references

The author used Old Testament references (5,6,7,11) and Jewish literature that was not canonized (9,14,15)^[3] to give warning examples to the ungodly. The author uses these references freely without explanation to readers who understood their context. Though the non-canonized literature should not be regarded as Scripture, it was permissible to be used as a warning example.

Fallen angels

The degeneration of fallen angels is described in this book in a rare occurrence. Angels were created to serve God, but these angels did not keep their positions of authority. They abandoned their proper dwelling and became God's enemies. They are bound, awaiting the final judgment.

Unique Expressions about Faith

The following expressions about faith: "the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (3), and "most holy faith" (20), uniquely appear in this book. This faith originated from God and singularly refers to the gospel truth. The gospel truth was not fabricated by human beings and should be held unequivocally. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. This most holy faith must be kept, built up and passed on without compromise throughout the generations. If this faith comes under attack, we are called to contend for this faith as a matter of life and death.

Ending Doxology

Usually epistles end with greetings. But this epistle ends with a heart-moving doxology. It expresses the author's conviction that God will protect his people from stumbling and his pastoral care for God's people.

Purpose of our Study

We are living in a multicultural, relativistic society in which the concept of "faith" is fluid, changing and subjective. Yet faith in Jesus Christ is the timeless truth and the only way of salvation; it cannot be compromised. As this faith increasingly comes under attack, we should learn how to stand firm and keep it and contend for it. Contending is not only a matter of words, but of living a godly life and proclaiming the gospel with our actions.

Outline

1. Greeting (1-2)
2. Purpose of the letter (3-4)
 1. Contend for the faith (3)
 2. False teachers pervert the grace of God and deny Jesus Christ (4)
3. Historical examples of punishment of the ungodly (5-7)
 1. God who delivered the Israelites punished the unbelieving (5)
 2. Corrupted angels are kept in darkness, bound for judgment (6)
 3. Sodom and Gomorrah were punished for immorality (7)
4. Judgment on ungodly sinners (8-16)
 1. Polluted own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings (8-10)
 2. Woe to them: Followed in the way of Cain, Ballam and Korah (11)
 3. Blemished shepherds doomed to destruction (12-13)
 4. Enoch prophesied the Lord's judgment on ungodly sinners (14-16)
5. Exhortations regarding false teaching (17-23)
 1. Remember the apostles' warning (17-19)
 2. Keep yourselves in God's love, save others and show mercy (20-23)
6. Doxology (24-25)

^[1] The Greek form of "Jude" is "Judas" or "Judah." In the New Testament there are several people named "Judas" or "Judah." Two of Jesus' first disciples were: "Judas son of James," (called Thaddaeus) and "Judas Iscariot," who betrayed Jesus (Mt 10:3; Lk 6:16). Among the early church leaders was "Judas" also called Barsabbas (Ac 15:22). "Judas the Galilean" was a revolutionary (Ac 5:37). English translators chose the word "Jude" to distinguish the author from all other Judases in the Bible, especially Judas Iscariot.

^[2] It is noteworthy that in verse 5 the word "Lord" is also rendered "Jesus" in the ESV and other translations. This implies that Jesus is identified as Yahweh, who was involved in the salvation of Israel.

^[3] Jude quotes from two apocryphal books, "The Assumption of Moses" and "1 Enoch" (Jude 9,14). The apocryphal books were regarded as personal devotional guides for early Jewish Christians, but not as Old Testament canon--which was passed down only in Hebrew. The non-canonical apocryphal books were preserved only in Greek which made them accessible. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that Jude was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he quoted from these books to explain the meaning of his teaching.