

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE

***Introduction and overview:** The epistle as noted in its title was written by one Jude (or Judas). He may have been one of the twelve apostles who was also known as Lebbeaus or Thaddaeus. The name 'Jude' is one and the same as the more common name 'Judas.' An alternate view is that he was the half brother of Jesus along with James. The latter may be more likely in that the half brothers of Jesus were James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. Moreover, this Judas does not identify himself as an apostle if he indeed was one of the twelve.*

The epistle is thought to have been written in about A.D. 66, though there is no conclusive proof thereto. However, what is clear is the theme of this small epistle. Jude deals with the subject of apostasy. He forewarned of its development. Moreover, it quite apparently had already set in. Thus, the thrust of the epistle is to earnestly contend for the faith (verse 3). The key concept is loyalty to the truth once delivered to the saints.

The recipients of the epistle are not demonstrably noted other than that they were sanctified, preserved, and called of God. The Epistle of Jude uses very pointed, and even pungent language in describing and warning against the gathering apostasy. James has nothing good to say about those who depart from the truth.

1:1-2 The epistle begins with the author's introduction, **Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: 2 Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.** As noted in the introductory comments above, Jude (Judas) may have been a half brother of Jesus. However, he here modestly and humbly refers to himself merely as "the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." The recipients of this small epistle are only described as "them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and called.*"

Three spiritual categories are thus indicated. (1) The first is them who are **sanctified**. The word thus translated (*ἁγιαζω hagiazo*) essentially means to be made holy. Intrinsic in its definition are those who have separated themselves from the world and have dedicated themselves to God. Jude, however, likely is touching upon the matter of positional sanctification wherein each believer has been made holy in Christ in his standing before God. (2) Jude also notes them who are "preserved in Jesus Christ."

The word translated as **preserved** (*τηρεω tereo*) is in the passive voice and has the thought to be 'guarded' or 'kept.' Jude thus touches, if only in passing, upon the blessed truth how that every born-again Christian is preserved (or kept) by Jesus Christ. It is not we who keep our salvation. It is He. The sacred writer thus relates the recipients of his epistle with their preservation in Christ. In so doing, he touches upon the security of the believer and the assurance of our salvation. Finally, (3) Jude addresses his epistle to those who are *called*. The thought clearly hearkens to our calling in Christ Jesus. He indeed has issued a universal call: "Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The writer thus invokes God's mercy to his readers along with His peace and love. Jude furthermore implores God to multiply each of these to his readers.

1:2 Jude therefore launches immediately into the occasion of his writing. **Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.** The verb tense in the first phrase of the Authorized Version here implies the past tense hinting at a prior writing. However, the phrase “when I gave all diligence” actually involves a present participle. The first phrase of the verse could thus be rendered, ‘Beloved, in making all diligence to write unto you.’ Jude simply notes that he wrote with diligence (or with urgency). He further refers to his readers as *beloved*, indicating he likely knew them personally and they thus were beloved unto him.

Having established that, he wrote that it was needful (or necessary) for him to write to them concerning “the common salvation.” His reference to salvation (and by extension the gospel) being *common* likely refers to how it is for both Jew and gentile alike. The gospel is the same regardless. Thus, the occasion of Jude’s writing was in regard to the basic principles of the gospel itself—the “common salvation.”

His concern was that the recipients of his epistle might “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The word translated as **earnestly contend** (επαγωνιζομαι *epagonizomai*) has as its root the word (αγωνιζομαι) *agonizomai*. The latter refers to contending, whether in a context as athletes or more seriously as in battle. The general thought is to ‘fight for’ or in this context to ‘defend’ the faith. The faith to which he refers clearly is the gospel of salvation in particular and the body of revealed truth in general. In short, he urged his readers to defend the faith and the Scriptures in which they were contained.

He further notes that this faith was “once delivered unto the saints.” The thought likely is that Jesus Christ, with the

assistance of the Holy Spirit, delivered the truth of the faith, the gospel of salvation, to the *saints*. The latter likely refers to the apostles. That truth was not subject to revision or alteration. Though the New Testament was yet to be completed, the truth of the gospel was already established. Jude's point was the entrance of apostate teachers already coming up with new and peculiar alterations to the common salvation thus delivered.

Moreover, that gospel was delivered **once**. The essence of the word translated as such (*ἅπαξ hapax*) can also have the sense of 'once for all.' The gospel is not subject to revision. Even in Jude's day, it had already been long established. It was not open to alternative options by aspiring apostates. It was the common salvation already delivered. It is this faith (and the gospel undergirding it) which Jude exhorts his readers to rise up and defend. He thus so wrote this epistle.

1:4 More specifically he warned, **For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.** One of Satan's long established practices is here revealed: that of infiltration. By this early time of church history, Satan had already learned that the gates of hell could not prevail against the church. The more he sought to stamp it out, the more it spread. The blood of the saints became the seed of the church. Therefore, the devil adopted another tactic already tried and proven. If you can't fight them, join them. Ever since, the devil has sought to infiltrate the church and in so doing to pervert the truth.

Jude thus notes how even in that day, certain men had "crept in unawares" into unsuspecting churches. He goes on to note that these "were before of old ordained to this condemnation." The thought is that such apostasy and apostates were fore-written to judgment. The word translated as **before**

ordained (προγραφω *prographo*) literally means ‘written before.’ He adds “of old” which has the idea of long before. Jude is in all likelihood referring to Old Testament prophecy, if not New Testament warning of the same. In verses 14-15, reference is made to long-lost writings of Enoch who warned of judgment upon coming apostates. In verse 17, Jude also refers to similar warning uttered by the Apostles.

Comment concerning the terms *apostasy* and *apostate* bear making. Though neither word appears in the Authorized Version, the Greek word (αποστασια) *apostasia* does appear several times in the Received Text. See Acts 21:21 and II Thessalonians 2:3 wherein it is translated as to ‘forsake’ and ‘falling away’ respectively. The thought is of defection or departure from the truth. Though Jude does not use the word as such, the entire epistle deals with the principle thereof. An *apostate* is one who has known the truth but forsaken or departed from it. Thus, apostasy is an unscriptural gospel. It is another Jesus and another gospel. See II Corinthians 11:4. It manifested itself in Jude’s day in deviant doctrine ranging from attempts to Judaize the gospel, to Gnosticism denying the incarnation of Christ, to the developing encroachment of paganism into early churches. Today, the same spirit manifests itself in modern theological liberalism and its many permutations.

Jude minces no words. He describes those of his day guilty of such as “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude attacks both the character as well as the message of such false apostles. They were ungodly. One form of early apostasy was antinomianism which was the rebelling against any kind of standards of righteousness. Such apostates twisted the principle of Christian liberty to accuse any standards of righteousness as ‘legalism.’

They thus perverted liberty into license. Some even kicked over any standards of sexual morality, wallowing in the worst

forms of sexual immorality—all in the name of grace and Christian liberty. It is likely these to whom Jude refers as “turning the grace of our God into **lasciviousness**.” The latter word (*ασελγεια aselgeia*), of course, refers to unbridled and unrestricted sexual lust and practices. The antinomians held that the spirit was not influenced by acts of the body. These moreover, denied the very person of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

One clear indicator of all apostasy and cults is a diminution of the person of Jesus Christ. The Gnostics claimed He was not incarnated. The Arians claimed He was created and thus not part of the Godhead. The same error continues to this day in its various modern permutations. Witness the mysticism of the new-age movement, the denial of the Deity of Christ by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, or mainline modernism which claims Jesus Christ was merely a good man. The more things change, the more they stay the same. The devil simply repackages his old devices into more modern forms.

1:5 To such apostasy, old or new, Jude therefore sets forth three examples how God has judged departure from the truth in earlier history. He thus warns, **I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.** The illustration is of Old Testament Israel. As Israel early on rebelled against their God and ignored His promises, God dealt with them. One example is in Numbers 14:27-37 and the unbelief of the majority of the twelve spies. Anyone with any grasp of the Old Testament surely would recall how God dealt with His own people for their idolatry, disobedience, and departure from His truth. The Assyrian as well as Babylonian captivities illustrate all too well how God dealt with His people when they departed from the truth.

1:6 The sacred writer then reminds how **the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.**

A rare glimpse into the rebellion of angels in heaven with Lucifer is here at hinted. Scripture gives little ink to the details of what took place then in ages past. But Jude here refers to “angels which kept not their first estate.” The word translated as **first estate** (*αρχη arche*) literally means, ‘beginnings,’ or by extension, ‘origins.’ Clearly implied is that an unspecified number of angels chose to abandon their original state of holiness and side with Lucifer in his rebellion against God. They thus chose to leave their rare and privileged abode in heaven. Jude thus uses them as a second example of departing from the place of holiness and truth they once occupied.

God has therefore reserved for them “everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” It may be that the everlasting chains and darkness referred to here are allegorical of the eternal judgment and spiritual darkness these fallen angels have brought down upon themselves. Or, alternatively, it very well may refer to some of these being literally bound to this hour awaiting judgment. It is clear that a significant number of unclean spirits are loose and active in the world. Moreover, various references in the Book of Revelation indicate that others are bound at least until the Tribulation. The greater point is that they all will face the impending judgment of God in being cast into the Lake of Fire forever.

In so using the example of fallen angels and their ultimate doom as a warning against apostasy, Jude also gives insight into hell itself. He writes of “everlasting chains under darkness.” He also speaks of the “judgment of the great day.” This may well refer to Satan’s final judgment after the battle of Gog and Magog when he is cast into the Lake of Fire forever. Implied is that his minions will likewise be so damned at that time as well.

See Revelation 20:10. Apostates are thus put on warning of a similar fate.

1:7 Jude then uses another Old Testament example to warn against the impending apostasy of the hour. **Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.** The inspired writer next uses the example of the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrha and how God judged them. Clearly implied is that they knew the truth, but turned from it. They thus have been eternally set forth as an example of undergoing the vengeance of eternal fire. Implied is that apostates to this hour will face the same fate.

Jude therefore warns in these three examples (unbelieving Israel, fallen angels, and the perversity of Sodom and Gomorrha) how God can and has judged departure from the truth. Sobering indeed is the prospectus of being placed in the same category of fallen angels, Sodomites, and unbelievers. However, apostates are therewith identified.

1:8 Jude now shifts back to the apostates of his day. He continues, **Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.** He therefore describes apostates in three ways. (1) The word translated as **filthy dreamers** (ενυπνιαζομαι *enupniazomai*) has the sense to ‘dream sensual dreams.’ In modern parlance, it refers to immoral sexual fantasies. Once again the immorality of apostates is implied. They not only fantasize of impure acts, they in fact “defile the flesh.” Their impure thoughts become reality. History overflows with record of the moral impurity of those who depart from the spiritual truth. (2) Apostates likewise “despise dominion.” The thought simply is of those who have no respect for authority. They rebel against it. Such an attitude

is luciferian in its origins. Finally, (3) those given to apostasy “speak evil of dignities.” The thought is that they verbally attack those in places of spiritual leadership.

There are ominous parallels to the more generic rebellion which to this day goes on against spiritual leadership. Jude implies that those who undercut duly-appointed spiritual leadership will also have tendencies to be immoral if not in act, certainly in thought. They have little respect for authority and are not shy about verbally attacking those in leadership, usually behind their backs.

1:9 The sacred writer thus makes an amazing comment. **Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.** The verse is pregnant with thought. The term *archangel* is used only twice in Scripture and here applied to Michael. See also I Thessalonians 4:16. Michael is also the great prince in Daniel 12:1. He clearly is one of the chief angels in glory.

The Scripture gives no indication of Michael contending with the devil over the body of Moses. However, Jewish tradition held that the burial place of Moses was placed under the charge of Michael and that Satan in some unspecified fashion had confronted Michael over it. Jude by virtue of inspiration therefore gives credence to such an event.

However, Jude’s point is that even one of such high rank (Michael) would not openly attack one of such known ill-repute as the devil himself. Implied is the godly deference and self-restraint of Michael. He held his tongue. He accordingly “durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.” Rather than get into a verbal fight with the devil, Michael wisely deferred the matter to God Himself. Rather than seek vindication, he committed the problem to God to rebuke the devil. Clearly implied is a discipline of tongue and temper