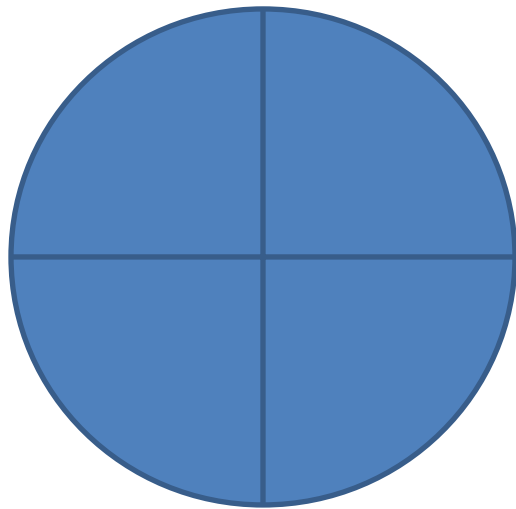


Jude

“The Acts of the Apostates”



Jude’s Warning and the Battle for Truth

Grace Baptist Church
Winterset, Iowa

2019

Jude – “The Acts of the Apostates”

| | |
|--|----|
| Background..... | 1 |
| Writer..... | 1 |
| Theme and Purpose..... | 2 |
| Message..... | 2 |
| Application..... | 2 |
| Jude 1-2: Salutation..... | 3 |
| Jude 3-4: Purpose..... | 4 |
| Jude 5-7: Warning..... | 6 |
| Jude 8-10: Apostates Identified..... | 8 |
| Jude 11-13: Apostate’s Hypocrisy..... | 10 |
| Jude 14-16: Apostate’s Judgment Reaffirmed..... | 12 |
| Jude 17-19: Warning – Remember..... | 14 |
| Jude 20-23: Instruction – Maintain Your Life with God..... | 15 |
| Jude 24-25: Doxology/Benediction..... | 19 |
| References..... | 22 |

Jude – “The Acts of the Apostates”

Background: Jude introduced his epistle (a letter) to believers with a direct reference to those who are called of God to salvation and its fruits (vs. 1-2) with a possible intention of writing a letter about the common salvation shared by believers (vs. 3a). Then he quickly changes his thought as the Holy Spirit directs him to write about apostasy (the desertion of and departure from the principles of true Biblical doctrine and faith) in the rest of this short letter (vs. 3b-25). The central portion of Jude’s letter, vs. 5-16, is a judgment pronouncement: it has an object of attack, a multi-faceted description of the attack, a discernable harsh tone, and a standard to which the attack is being conducted. The only N.T. passage that surpasses Jude in these traits is Jesus’ denunciation of the religious leaders in Matt. 23.

Jude lived at a time when believers (Christians) were under severe political attack from Rome; and the believer’s church was experiencing aggressive infiltration from apostates (Gnostics = superior knowledge / Libertines =morally unrestrained) who were sowing doctrinal error. All the Apostles were now dead by martyrdom except for John. It is a common thought that Christianity was in a vulnerable position at this time because of outside persecution and internal division due to infiltration of error. It appears that Jude was presented with a situation or circumstance from a believer or church that needed immediate attention; and he responds by penning this short letter calling the church to fight for truth.

Writer: Jude (English form of Judas), brother of James and half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55). Jude was Jewish Christian that was a Hellenized Galilean, meaning that he write with a cultivated Greek style of writing but alluded to the Hebrew scriptures rather than the Greek Septuagint. Jude writes with a heart of love as well as understanding for the believers in Christ; and with that heart he writes an authoritative letter that warns the believers of apostasy.

[1]

Theme and Purpose of Jude: *Theme:* Jude writes to challenge the true believers within the church that they must contend for the one true faith once for all delivered to them (vs.3); and that they must persevere to the end by resisting false teachers and following the truth.

Purpose: Jude warns believers within a church about the dangers of apostasy; as apostates (here identified as Gnostics and libertines as a single group) are ones who depart from the true doctrine and faith. The apostates believed that the spirit within man was good and was to be nurtured and fed, which led them to a spiritual state where the Lordship of Christ is denied and created a state where they turned the grace of God into a license to live lasciviously in sin. Jude challenges the believers within the church to avoid doctrinal error that leads to: 1) denying Christ’s lordship, 2) following fleshy desires, 3) rejecting authority, 4) being divisive and 5) living self-centered lives. It is this condition of doctrinal error and divisiveness within the young church that led Jude to challenge the true believer within the church to guard against apostasy.

Message of Jude: Jude is in the Bible to teach believers that they must be careful to remain faithful to the true faith. Jude warns of the danger of departing from the “once-for-all” true faith (vs. 3). The subject of Jude is the peril of apostasy, which is a permanent departure from the truth by repudiating a major doctrine of the faith. Jude presents the character of apostasy and how it develops (vs.4). Apostasy begins with ungodliness (the refusal to submit to God’s authority, no fear), moves to licentiousness (lust, pursuit of fleshly satisfaction, no shame) and then to denial (rationalizes and justifies behavior, convinces self that what is “wrong” is really “right”) of the truth of God’s Word (in essence denying God Himself). The three aspects of loving the Lord your God with all of one’s heart, mind and strength (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30) are actively and directly countered by the apostate.

Application: Jude is a solemn warning to all believers everywhere and is applicable to today’s believer as all churches that follow the true faith and the fundamental doctrines of God’s Word are subject

[2]

to the same infiltration of unbelievers and doctrinal error. Jude “command’s” us to “contend earnestly for the faith” by “building yourselves up”, by “praying in the Holy Spirit” and by “looking” to the future (hope). The application of Jude is self-examination of one’s life and a commitment to contend for the one true faith (being faithful).

Jude 1-2: Salutation / Greeting to the Called

V.1: Jude begins the letter with a simple greeting that he was the slave of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. This was in sharp contrast to his earlier position as he had denied that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3, John 7:5); as he was the half-brother of Jesus and full-brother to James. But later he would accept Christ as Savior and Lord of his life; as evidenced by this initial greeting.

Jude made no appeal to the readers of his letter about the basis of his authority for writing the letter. His letter was not written on the basis of “physical” authority (family relationship) but rather on the “spiritual” relationship he had with Christ.

Jude wrote his letter to; 1) “those who have been called”, 2) “who are beloved by God the Father”, 3) “and kept by Jesus Christ.” This three-fold description of those to whom Jude is writing is one of many “triads” Jude uses in his letter. Jude’s use of triads is a distinguishing style of his letter. Triads are used to express completeness and well-rounded thoughts. Here the triad is a three-fold description of the individuals he is addressing: 1) “called” is a reference to the past where God sovereignly used His electing grace and the active calling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:6-7, 8:30; I Cor. 1:23-24; II Thess. 2:13-14; II Pet. 1:3); 2) “beloved / sanctified” is a reference to the present as unconditional, unending love continues to flow from God the Father (John 13:1, 14:23, 16:27 17:20-23; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4; I John 3:1); and 3) “kept/preserved” is a reference to the future as God preserves those who trust in Him through the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son (I Thess. 5:23-24; II Tim. 1:12; I Peter 1:3-5).

V.2: Jude’s greeting continues with another triad that identifies God’s provisions of 1) “mercy”, 2) “peace”, and 3) “love”; which were needed daily in the life of a believer. These virtues are not self-acquired but are gifts from God bestowed on the believer. Only here in the N.T. do these three qualities appear so closely together.

“Mercy and peace” was a common Jewish greeting in Jude’s day; “love” was added by Jude (through the leading of the Holy Spirit) to make this distinctively Christian.

For a believer living in the atmosphere of apostate teaching these virtues are needed. It is God’s mercy that sustains the believer in times of difficulty (Heb. 4:16). It is God’s peace that gives the believer calmness and hope when evil abounds (Rom. 15:13; Phil. 4:6-7). It is God’s love that protects and assures the believer in times of trial and peril (Rom. 5:1-5; I John 4:15-19).

Jude’s greeting reflects his compassion and heartfelt concern for the genuine believers in the churches where the letter would be read. He wants them to know the fullest measure of God’s “mercy, peace and love.” And he does this by warning them about those within the church who were destroying the church by a departure from the true doctrine and faith. Jude was keenly aware that where law, works and disobedience prevail, there is only failure and death. Where grace prevails, there is mercy (Eph. 2:4; Heb. 4:16), peace (Rom. 5:1) and love (Rom. 5:5) in abundance.

Jude 3-4: Purpose of Letter, Warnings Concerning Apostates

V.3: Jude wanted to write (“I was very diligent” – meaning “I earnestly and eagerly desired to write to you”) about the believer’s common salvation, but the Holy Spirit directed him to write about a more urgent need, the infiltration of error within the church through the apostates. Jude was compelled (“I found it necessary” – meaning this as an issue that needed immediate attention) to write this letter to believers to warn them about the apostates within the church and the need to battle for truth.

Jude gets directly to the point – “exhorting you (‘I urge you’) to contend earnestly for the faith”. Jude’s focus was the protection of the “faith”, “which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The “faith...delivered to the saints” is the body of truth that is to be believed because it comes directly from God through God’s special revelation (Gal. 1:23; I Tim. 4:1). Jude is exhorting believers to recognize that the faith they believe in is God’s truth (doctrine, the whole of the Word of God) and it needs to be fought for and defended. Also, the argument (the reasons for or against) for “faith” is not the argument of words, but it is the argument of life because it is a life or death issue for each human being.

The Greek word ‘epagonizesthai’, translated as “contend earnestly”, only appears here in the New Testament. This word (in the Greek) was commonly used within a Greek stadium to describe a ‘strenuous struggle to overcome an opponent in a wrestling match’. The intent of the word is to indicate ‘the expenditure of all one’s energy in order to prevail’. The picture presented here by Jude is of a person standing on or for something that an adversary desires to take away; and fighting to defend and retain it. Jude is urging believers to focus their all of their energy and life on standing for and defending God’s truth!

The phrase “once for all delivered” stresses the unalterable character of the “faith”. Today this means that God’s special revelation is found intact as one unit in the Word of God. Scripture is the Word of God; and is not to be altered or modified in any way (Deut. 4:2, 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). The Word of God is fixed for all time; it is complete, sufficient and finished. It now becomes a responsibility of ours to study it, live it, proclaim it, preserve it, and defend it. How are we doing?

Jude’s call is to know sound doctrine, to be discerning in sorting out truth from error, and then confront and attack known error. As the writer of Hebrews wrote in Heb. 4:14: “Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” If we are indifferent to error, it is a sign of compromise and a lack of genuineness in our life in trusting in Christ; it is a major weakness.

V.4: Jude warns that “certain men have crept in unnoticed”. The Greek word “pareisedusan” translated as ‘unnoticed’ means “a secret, stealthy and subtle insertion of something evil”. The apostates (‘certain men’) Jude is referring to were not followers of Christ who had erred, but were individuals who were intentionally seeking to destroy the believer’s faith. These were individuals who pretended to be true believers but their intention was to lead people astray from their faith.

The apostates were “ungodly men”; men who lacked reverence (fear) for God, which they demonstrated by their intention to destroy the faith of the believers. These men were ‘condemned...long ago’ by God and they would receive the judgment of God. These men were charmers and influencers, which blinded the discretion of the believers.

An apostate perverts God’s grace and rejects Christ. One, they use the ‘liberty’ from the Law as the opportunity for open and unchecked sensual indulgence (‘unrestricted vice / gross immorality’). Two, they deny Christ as their ‘Master, God and Lord’. They claim to know Christ but they in fact disown Him by rejecting His moral commands thereby repudiating His authority as Lord. Apostates deny the truth of God’s word with their lifestyle, as their deviation from truth is used by them to justify their ethical and moral sin. We hear this today when individuals claim ‘liberty in Christ’ to justify their fleshly behavior to do what they want to do without discipline, restriction or true understanding of the Word.

Jude 5-7: Warning – Examples of Apostasy and God’s Judgment

Jude begins his warning to the true believers about apostasy by citing three (triad) historical examples of apostates and the judgment that comes when one departs from God’s truth. Jude uses historical truth and facts to eliminate any question anyone may have about God’s judgment of one departing from His revealed truth.

V.5: Israel. It has been said that “biblical teaching is not designed to teach us something new; but to put us in remembrance, to call to mind things that we have forgotten.” Jude takes that approach when calling the believer to remember the history of the Israelites after they were liberated from Egypt by God. God judged Israel when they did not believe (they made an idol and worshipped it – Ex. 32:1–33:6; they refused to believe God to enter the promised land – Num. 13:1- 14:12) as an entire generation of unbelieving Israelites died before the nation was allowed to enter the promised land (Heb. 3:16-19). The principle being taught here by Jude is that the willful departure from God and His truth by an apostate will always result in the judgment of God; as the readers knew about God’s judgment on Israel when they departed from His truth and commands.

NOTE: “Lord / Jesus”. The oldest and most reliable manuscripts of Jude use ‘Jesus’ here, not ‘Lord’. Later Greek manuscripts used ‘Lord’. This is an example of the apostolic understanding of the O.T., according to which the Son of God (Jesus), in His eternal nature and being, was existing and active from the beginning of creation, long before his incarnation (Luke 24:27; John 1:3, 8:56-58, 12:41; O Cor. 10:4,9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:8-12, 11:26).

V.6: Angels. Jude’s next example is angels that did not stay within their own position of authority as they were created for and commanded of God. Jude’s reference to angels indicates this was a subject that the believing reader was familiar with. The angels Jude refers to were either the possibly referenced in Gen. 6:1-6 (“the sons of God” ...cohabiting with.... “the daughters of men”, which is supported by Jude’s reference to the apocryphal Book of Enoch (Jude 14-15)); or they were the angels who rebelled against God and followed Satan (Satan – Ezek. 28:2-15; fallen angels – Rev. 12:3-4, 7-9). In either case, the angels Jude refers to are now in bondage and awaiting their final judgement from God, which is eternity in hell (Matt. 25:41, Rev. 20:10). The principle being taught here by Jude is that the apostates, as God’s created being, have abandoned and rejected a position of great privilege and honor of knowing the truth; and God will severely judge them for eternity for their rejection of Him.

[7]

V.7: Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude closes with a clear example of God’s judgment on those who reject Him and His truth – the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who clearly rebelled against God’s will and His design (His truth). The apostates were teaching (and living) a lifestyle that permitted (and encouraged) immorality, homosexuality and sexual perversion (“strange flesh”); it was a sin of rebellion against God’s commands for mankind (Rom. 1:26-27; Lev. 18:22-25). God punished Sodom and Gomorrah for their sexual immorality and perversion – a judgment of fire and brimstone. It has been noted that “smoke” from God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah could still be seen at the time Jude wrote his letter (Philo, On Abraham 141; Philo, Life of Moses 2:56; Wisdom of Solomon 10:7 – historical writings with such a reference). God’s judgment on the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an illustration of God’s eternal punishment on those who reject Him and His truth. The principle being taught here by Jude is that the apostates, who were rebelling against God’s truth (His commands) by living and teaching a lifestyle of immorality and sexual perversion (via “liberty in Christ”), would be severely judged by God for eternity for their rejection of His truth.

Jude is teaching us that apostasy begins with unbelief and ungodliness (the refusal to submit to God’s authority, no fear); then moves to licentiousness (lust, pursuit of fleshly satisfaction, no shame); then finally to denial (rationalizes and justifies behavior, convinces self that what is “wrong” is really “right”) of the truth of God’s Word, which is denying God Himself; and that apostasy will result in God’s severe and eternal judgment.

Jude 8-10: Warning – Apostates Identified

Jude continues his warning to the true believers about apostasy by identifying three errors (a triad) of an apostate; 1) the rejection of authority (the willful refusal to submit to God’s authority), 2) the pursuit of licentiousness (lust, pursuit of fleshly satisfaction, no shame), and 3) the denial of the truth of God’s Word (rationalizes and justifies behavior, convinces self that what is “wrong” is really “right”), which is exhibited by speaking evil of God-placed authorities.

[8]

Vs. 8: “Dreamers”. Jude refers to the apostates as “these dreamers”, which indicates the confused state of their being and their abnormal, lust-driven imagination. This confused state (“dreamers”) may refer to drug-induced visions or dreams, or visions or dreams they claimed to have had, or presumptuously assumed to have had based on their “self-assumed, self-declared authority” over the established, recognized authority within the church. Specifically Jude calls out the three identifiable characteristics of an apostate within the church, they were the ones who: 1) “defile the flesh” (pollute their own bodies) – an apostate exhibits few, if any, moral restraints by living an immoral lifestyle; 2) “reject authority” (despise dominion) - an apostate rejects legitimate, established authority as established by God, thereby denying God Himself; and 3) “speak evil of dignities” – an apostate actively protests against the rules and those in authority and/or actively slanders angels. These three characteristics causes an apostate to become numb (unresponsive) to the truth of God’s Word – unrealistic, blind and deaf to reality and truth. The result of an apostate in the church is the destruction of the church from within, because an apostate creates division within a church thereby destroying it from within.

Vs. 9: “Michael the archangel”. Jude uses an unusual illustration to demonstrate the proper respect for God-given authority, Michael the archangel. Michael the archangel is the chief angel of God (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; Rev. 12:7). Michael was sent by God to bury the body of Moses when he encountered Satan (Lucifer, a guardian cherub angel created by God – Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:12-19). According to Jewish tradition (found in the book entitled “The Assumption of Moses”) Satan argued with Michael about the body of Moses claiming it was his body to dispose of since he was the prince and power of the earth, the master of all material and matter (it has been suggested that Satan wanted to bury the body to hinder the later appearance of Moses at the Mount of Transfiguration). But Michael, though a powerful and authoritative angel sent by God to do this specific task, did not dispute with Satan. He was not rude or condescending and he did not utter a single word to impugn the authority or dignity or position of Satan. Michael understood his

position and the position of Satan in God’s design. He understood that he was not a judge of Satan’s behavior (based on God’s sovereign authority over all); so his response to Satan was “The Lord rebuke you!” Rather than engaging in a controversy or fight with Satan, Michael deferred to the ultimate, sovereign power of God to deal with and respond to Satan; he left the matter in God’s hands to deal with Satan. The point Jude is making is that no one is a law to himself or an autonomous moral authority, so when we deal with apostates in the church, always seek God’s intervening power to be used against them.

Vs. 10: Apostates. Whereas Michael did not dare accuse Satan, the apostates spoke abusively against what they did not understand. One commentator wrote; “Apostates, in their brash, bold, egotistical infatuation with their imagined power and authority, speak against that which they don’t understand.” The things that the apostates did not understand and railed against was God’s revealed truth and will, which they chose to reject (I Cor. 2:7-16). What the apostates did understand and know was natural instinct, which centered on the gratification of the flesh – and that gratification would ultimately destroy them. An apostate has lost all sense of and awareness of true spiritual things, such as God’s truth; instead they act upon their natural fleshly instincts, which have become their standard and reality. The point Jude is making is that following natural feelings and desires, for someone whose conscience is not trained, subjected to and governed by God’s Word, will lead that person to be ultimately destroyed by their own sinful actions.

Jude 11-13: Warning – Apostate’s Hypocrisy

Jude continues his warning to the true believers about apostasy by identifying three aspects and results of the errors (a triad) of an apostate; 1) their walk and the results, (2) their leadership and the results, and (3) their fruit and the results. These errors are based on their rejection of God instituted authority, 2) their pursuit of self-centered, fleshly interest, and 3) the denial of the truth of God’s Word.

Vs. 11: “Woe”. Jude declares “woe” to the apostates, which is a declaration of spiritual judgment upon them. This judgment will come upon them because they follow the way of Cain, the error of Balaam, and the rebellion of Korah (another triad).

They have followed the way of Cain, which means that they, like Cain, were 1) openly rebellious against God’s stated command by disobeying by devising their own way of worshipping God; 2) that they were envious of those who worshipped God as He commanded them to; and 3) they hated those who worshipped God as He commanded with a murderous spirit.

They have rushed greedily (rushed for profit) like Balaam; who, under the guise of serving God, encouraged others to sin against God while selfishly, greedily seeking to gain monetarily from the sin of others (Num. 22-25; II Pet. 2:15-16).

They have been destroyed (the destruction of the apostates and those who follow the apostates by God was so certain that Jude stated the judgment in past-tense form) like those involved in Korah’s rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:1-32). Korah’s rebellion was not recognizing God’s delegated authority to Moses and Aaron; meaning that Korah’s rebellion was actually against God Himself.

Vs. 12: “False Leadership”. Jude points out how craftily the apostates had moved into the church; they had made their way into the “love feasts” (Lord’s Supper and other common meal activities – I Cor. 11:20-30) posing as Christians (believers); they were only serving themselves and what they could get for themselves. They were outwardly participating as believers but were inwardly denying the Lord Himself; and they were doing this without any qualm or inhibition. They had become like: 1) “spots (blemishes or stains) /hidden reefs” that will destroy the integrity of a cloth ruining clothing or will destroy ships that run aground on hidden reefs, the apostate will destroy the unity of the church; 2) “clouds without rain” meaning the apostates promise a good spiritual life that brings hope and fulfillment but they deliver nothing but dryness and death; and 3) “trees without fruit” meaning they promoted that they could provide a spiritual feast when in reality they delivered famine; these trees (the apostates) will never deliver

fruit because autumn had come when fruit bearing was over and the tree’s roots are uprooted and dead meaning these trees were doubly dead. The apostate does not deliver good fruit because they are without true spiritual roots themselves. Jude is teaching that the apostates are false leaders whose leadership is false, deceptive, hardened and selfish, promising much but delivering nothing but emptiness and destruction.

Vs. 13: “Empty Leadership”. Jude continues to clearly define the fruit of apostates. The apostates promise much but deliver nothing. The apostate delivers: 1) “raging sea waves” meaning they promise a powerful ministry but deliver nothing solid, edifying, helpful or nourishing, they only deliver worthless shame like the worthless foam created by the waves of the sea along the shoreline, 2) “wandering stars” meaning they lead followers astray by pretending to be something they are not as they are provide misleading guidance to those who follow them like the moving planets, meteorites or comets would provide misleading guidance to sailors, and like “shooting stars” they shine briefly but provide no guidance to sailors, and 3) “gloom (blackness) of darkness forever” meaning that the result of following an apostate is eternal condemnation. The apostate will promise many “good things” if people follow them but they deliver nothing but emptiness and destruction. The apostates Jude writes about are imposters, pretenders, who will be judged according to their false and empty leadership.

Jude 14-16: Warning – Apostate’s Judgment Reaffirmed

Jude continues his warning to the true believers about apostasy by confirming the judgment which will occur to the apostates, which he has already mentioned in verses 4-7 and 13.

Vs. 14-15: “Enoch”. Jude turns his primary focus of his warning back to the judgment that the apostates are assuredly going to receive from God for their departure from the truth. Jude refers to an extrabiblical source (I Enoch) to make his point (Note: In my opinion, Jude’s reference to Enoch as the “seventh generation from Adam” supports the historical authenticity of the Genesis record but

that is debated by a number of good scholars). Though God did not inspire the book of I Enoch, He led Jude to quote Enoch's prophecy from it – and this referenced prophecy is authored by the Holy Spirit through Jude so it is an inspired and infallible prophecy even though it was recorded in the non-biblical book of I Enoch. The prophecy of Enoch that Jude referenced stated that there would be apostates, men who depart from the truth; and that Christ, as Messiah, would be coming again with His saints (this is the second coming of Christ) to judge and execute judgment on all ungodly men.

“Saints” can refer to angels or believers; since both will accompany Christ at His Second Coming, it may refer to both (Matt. 24:31, 25:31; Rev. 19:14). The focus of vs. 15 is the execution of judgment it may be that “saints” here may be a primary reference to angels who are the executioners of God's judgment at the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-33; II Thess. 1: 6-10). The judgment to be executed against the apostates is an eternity in hell.

The 4-fold use of “ungodly” identifies the core iniquity of the apostates; they are blasphemers against God, deniers of God and His authority, and without any fear of God. Apostates were men who have a form of godliness in their enticing, flattering words but their actions are ungodly; it must be noted that every action that proceeds from an unrepentant heart is an ungodly action.

Vs. 16: “Apostates”. Jude uses a 4-fold description to identify an apostate; and these descriptions reinforce and justify Enoch's and Jude's calling them “ungodly”. One – the apostate is a “grumbler and faultfinder (complainer)”; they find fault in others but see no fault in themselves. The apostate often vents dissatisfaction against God's will and God-given and established authority. Two – the apostate follows their own fleshly desires. They follow their own fleshly lusts often using “liberty in Christ” as their validation for their immoral or ungodly behavior against the commands of Christ. Apostates are driven by a desire for sinful self-satisfaction. Three – the apostate brags about themselves (the word translated as “swelling words / brag / boast” is only used here and in II Pet. 2:18 meaning “puffed up” or “swollen”). The apostate speaks arrogantly and pompously but their words have no value spiritually because

they are hypocritical and empty. Four – the apostate works to flatter others so they can gain favor when it is to their advantage to do so; meaning they tell people what they want to hear for their own future profit and/or advantage.

Jude has clearly identified apostates as men (or women) who will be judged by God and that judgment is certain. Jude has also identified apostates by exposing their character so believers have a clear description of an apostate's nature. The apostate is one who has established themselves as a self-appointed authority and who is vocally discontented with God's commands and God's established authority, with no fear of God; they are sinfully self-centered with no understanding of their own faults but are highly critical of others; they are arrogantly egotistical with a focus on themselves and their own desires without regard to or understanding of God's will; and finally, they are deceitful and flattering to gain future advantage for themselves and their plans. Such were apostates in the day of Jude.....and such are apostates today.

Jude 17-19: Warning – Remember!

Jude, having identified the characteristics of an apostate, now gives the believers guidelines on how to avoid the errors the apostates are teaching. It is not enough to recognize an apostate, it is also necessary not to fall into their errors.

Vs. 17-18: “Remember”. “Remember” is the first imperative Jude has used in his letter, and it heads up a number of times this imperative is used. “Remember” as an imperative indicates that forgetfulness of the teachings and warnings of God in Scripture is a major cause of spiritual failure, lack of discernment, and apostasy. Paul, John and Peter had warned the believers (and future believers) about apostates so they would be prepared and not taken by surprise (Acts 20:28-31; I Tim 4:1-2; II Tim 3:1-5, 4:1-3; II Pet. 2:1-3:4; I John 2:18; II John 7:11). The use of the term “apostles” indicates that the other 8 apostles (plus Jude) were also issuing warnings to believers to be on guard against apostasy.

The apostles warned against “mockers”, who were individuals that scoff at God’s will and His future judgment; as the object of their scoffing seems to be the revealed will of God and His judgment (II Pet. 3:3; II Tim. 3:1-7). Mockers (unbelievers within a church who do not know the truth) live to satisfy their own ungodly desires (lusts); and as a result they cause division within a church because they live self-centered lives focused on their own will and pleasure. Mockers will increase (and many times prevail) until Christ returns the second time to judge and rule here on earth.

The “last time” refers to the chronological end of the current season (II Tim. 3:1); which we believe is the end of the historical period that encompasses the Church Age and Tribulation. After this “last time” Christ will come a second time as the promised Messiah to rule directly over mankind in the Millennium.

Vs. 19: “Apostates”. Jude once again defines the characteristics of an apostate. They are teachers or leaders within a church that create division within a church by dividing the church into two groups – one group that follows the teaching of scripture, the other group that departs from the teaching of scripture. The apostate will claim to have great spiritual knowledge and understanding; but they are really “worldly minded” because they are attracted to the lifestyle of the world and actively seek after it. They share the viewpoint and lifestyle of the world and show no evidence of the influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Bottom line – apostates are unbelievers professing themselves to be believers, but they do not have the Holy Spirit indwelling within them.

Jude 20-23: Positive Instruction – Maintain Your Life with God!

Jude turns his attention to the true believers who are reading his letter. Jude’s writing in verses 20-23 form a core message to the believers to ‘build’, ‘pray’ and ‘wait expectantly’ (‘look’); coupled with a command to ‘keep’. Also, the believers were to exercise their faith within the community of believers by being active in edifying and encouraging one another in their Christian walk.

Vs. 20: “But”. Jude’s use of “But” creates a contrast between the true believers (“you, beloved”) and the apostates. From this point Jude addresses the need for each believer to “build...up” their “most holy faith”. This is the first of several commands given by Jude to the believers.

“**Building...up**” in the Greek depicts this as ‘growth under the familiar figure of the erection of a house or building’; it points to a structure being built on an existing foundation. Believers have a sure foundation (I Cor. 3:11) and cornerstone (Eph. 2:20) in Christ. The ‘present tense’ of the Greek word translated as “building ...up”, establishes the fact that this “building...up” is an ongoing process (it is a continuous progressing in the knowledge of the faith). Therefore, the truths of the Christian faith that have been provided in the teaching of the prophets and apostles (Eph. 2:19-22) are to be continuously studied so that believers can build themselves up through the Word of God (Acts 20:32; II Tim. 2:15). “Most holy faith” is a reference to the faith that was “once delivered to the saints” (vs.3).

“**Praying in the Holy Spirit**” means the believer can ‘pray in Him’ as the believers greatest resource is God Himself; it is Jude’s call to the believer to consistently pray in the will and power of the Holy Spirit. The focus of Jude is that the believer is to be praying for God’s help to align their desire with the Holy Spirit’s desire (Rom. 8: 26-27; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 6:18). The spiritual maturity of a believer is directly related to their prayer life.

Vs. 21: “Keep”. Jude uses the imperative ‘keep’ establishing the responsibility of the believer to be obedient and faithful to God, which is a demonstration of loving God (it is a ‘keeping of yourself in the love of God’ – John 15:9-10; Rom. 5:1-5, 8:37-39). The believer ‘keeping themselves in the love of God’ is an indication that they are in fellowship with God; they are in a place where God can bless them as His children and they look forward to being with Him (I John 2:28). To ‘keep yourself in the love of God’ means that the believer must remain in the place of obedience where God’s love can be poured out on His children (cf. I Cor. 11:27-31; Heb. 12:5-11). When believers depart from God’s Word and His will – then barriers are built that block the free flow of God’s love to the believer.

The imperative ‘keep’ is a direct reference to the perseverance of the believer, which is accomplished by a continual: 1) building one’s self up in the Word of God; 2) praying in the Holy Spirit; and 3) looking (waiting expectantly) for eternal life through Christ.

“**Looking**” is the eager anticipation of Christ’s Second Coming to provide eternal life to the believer (cf. II Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:11-14; I John 3:1-4). Each believer is to keep in their mind and consciously look forward to eternal life – it is the believer’s hope. Eternal life is the supreme expression of God’s mercy on the believer, to whom Christ’s righteousness has undeservedly been imputed (cf. I Pet. 1:1-9).

Jude has presented the believer with a synopsis of the Christian life in vs. 20-21; we are to have an inward look in the development of our spiritual life (v.20), we are to have an upward look in our relationship with God (vv. 20-21), and we are to have a forward look in having an eternal life with God (v.21). The reality is that we, as believers, only have a short time to ‘build’, ‘pray’ and ‘look’; therefore we only have a short time to ‘keep’. How are we doing? How are you doing?

In Jude 22-23 there are several textual variations that indicate that there may be three different groups identified in these verses. Given that Jude uses triads in his letter to the believers, we will look at these identified groups as being three distinct groups.

Vs. 22: “Compassion”. The first group is identified and defined by the words “compassion” and “distinction”. Jude indicates this group is true believers who are sincere doubters. The believers who are not doubters are to have compassion on those who are in doubt because they deserve compassion. Why this distinction? These believers are victims of the apostate teachers. They deserve and need mercy and patience because they have not yet received solid teaching to establish a firm foundation about Christ and eternal life. They are doubters that can be swayed to the truth – because they are looking to make distinctions. True believers should attempt to save these sincere doubters from their error before judgment falls on them.

Vs. 23: “Others”. Jude seems to indicate by his writing in v.23 that there are two separate groups of people (“others”) being addressed here. The textual variations indicate a “second group” of true believers who are committed to the errors taught by the apostate teachers. They are doubters who are going deeper into unbelief (going away from the truth) that urgently need to be pulled away from the fire. They need immediate and forthright attention before they become entrenched into the error which will lead them to God’s judgment as the result of embracing and believing lies (cf. Amos 4:4-12 / v.11 “plucked...fire; Zech. 3:1-4 / v. 2 “plucked...fire”).

Also the textual variations indicate a “third group” of individuals who are unbelievers that are dedicated disciples of the apostate teachers. The true believers are to have pity on them. These dedicated disciples of the apostate teacher deserve mercy (“save”); they deserve mercy even though they are thoroughly engaged and believing in the apostates teaching. But they should be handled with much fear (“have mercy with fear”) by the true believer. Why, because the rescuer (the true believer) could be drawn in to the false teaching of the apostate. The individuals in this third group are to be given the true gospel but with great fear lest the messenger of the gospel be contaminated by the false teaching of the apostate (allowed to be corrupted by the apostate’s words and actions). The result of this unbelief in the truth of the gospel will be God’s judgement in hell because they are unbelievers (cf. I Cor. 5:9-11; II Thess. 3:13-15).

Jude illustrates the possible occurrence of being contaminated by false teaching through the use of a garment being defiled by flesh. The use of the term “garment” appears to have the meaning of things affected by fleshy behavior such as habits/practices/speech/companions/conduct that were so corrupt that the smell of death pollutes the garment and it reeks of the odor of death (decaying flesh). This illustration supports the care that a true believer must use in approaching an apostate and their followers as the apostate’s defiled life can spread its contamination to the well-meaning believer who is delivering the true message to the apostate and his followers.

The observed use of triads by Jude supports the interpretation of having three groups here in vs. 22 and 23. It is notable that Jude does not give his readers a command to confront the apostate (only to avoid them) nor to discipline them; they are not to be slandered or criticized by the believer - but active opposition to their teaching is to be undertaken by telling the truth of the gospel to those influenced by the false teacher. Jude concludes that the doubters are under the condemnation of God. Several commenters noted that we are to love the apostates and those following them while we contend against their errors. It is biblical to hate the sin of the apostate but love the person who is the apostate.

Jude 24-25: Doxology/Benediction.

Jude concludes his letter with a formal doxology ('words that ascribe praise to God'). Many consider this doxology as one of the great benedictions ('a pronounced blessing, mercy, or benefit at the end of a conversation, letter or religious service') of Scripture. Jude, in his writing of this doxology/benediction, returns to the theme of salvation, which he had hoped to write about at the beginning of his letter (v.3). He writes this doxology/benediction to encourage and assure the true believers of God's ability to help them remain faithful in spite of the apostasy that is confronting and attacking them. This doxology/benediction stresses the security of the true believer in the midst of apostasy because Christ will protect them. It brings Jude's letter to an encouraging conclusion.

A literal translation of Jude 24-25 is: "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and present you before the presence of His glory with great rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, might, and authority before all time, both now and forever. Amen". This concluding doxology/benediction is universally considered as one of the fullest and most beautiful in Scripture.

Vs. 24: Confidence. Jude answers an unexpressed question by the believers – "Who will deliver us from the apostates and their false teaching?" The true believer's confidence rests in God's ability to "keep" the believer safe and faithful.

God is able to save (Heb. 7:25); able to establish (Rom. 16:25-26); able to assist/aid (Heb. 2:18); able to subdue (Phil. 3:20-21); and able to keep (Jude 24).

The Greek word translated as "stumbling" implies "the result of tripping, losing one's balance then falling." Jude is indicating that the power of Christ is able to sustain and protect the sincere believer from falling into the error being taught by the apostates. The Greek word translated as "blameless/faultless" means "having no justifiable ground for accusation" (cf. II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:21-22; II Pet. 3:14; Rev. 14:4-5). Jude is not indicating that God will keep all believers from stumbling; it is not an unconditional promise from God. What Jude is indicating is that believers possess Christ's imputed righteousness and will be presented to God as "blameless/faultless" through the person and work of Jesus Christ; the believer is justified by faith in Christ and has been made worthy of an eternity in heaven with God. An interesting change in Jude's doxology/benediction occurs with the phrase "with exceeding joy", as this is primarily a reference to the joy Jesus Christ has as He presents the true believer to God as "blameless/faultless"; secondarily it also includes the joy of the believer to be presented as "blameless/faultless" before God. This statement indicates that this is an action that will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ (I Cor. 3:9-15; II Cor. 5:9-11).

Vs. 25: God. Jude concludes his letter by focusing on the truth about God and Jesus Christ ("Savior"). Through his use of "God our Savior" Jude is stating that God is a "saving God", unlike false deities that have no power to save anyone or anything. God "alone is wise" (cf. I Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:2-3), divine wisdom is His alone and no human person or group has His wisdom (therefore apostates are not wise). Jude concludes his letter with the statement that ascribes to God the qualities of "glory" (the radiance of God), "majesty" (the transcendence of God), "dominion" (the absolute power of God), and "power" (the freedom of God to do as He wills). These qualities (attributes) of God belong to Him for eternity ("both now and forever").

In view of God's character, we, as true believers, should remain faithful to Him and His truth. In Christ there is hope and victory, therefore we must have a personal relationship with Christ and be found faithful in our study of His Word so we have the correct discernment of what is truth and what is error coming from teachers within our church.

References Used

John MacArthur Study Bible – NKJV
Thomas Nelson: 1997

The Bible Knowledge Commentary – NT (NIV)
John F. Walvoord / Roy B. Zuck
Victor: 1983

Jude
J. Vernon McGee: 1991

Dr. Constable' Notes on Jude
2019 Edition

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible
James Strong
Thomas Nelson: 1995

Holman Christian Standard Bible
Holman Publishing: 2010

English Standard Version Study Bible
Crossway Bibles: 2008

The Jeremiah Study Bible (NKJV)
David Jeremiah
Worthy: 2013