

The Defense Against Apostates

Jude 17-23

Jude is known for his condemnation of **apostate teachers**. As a result, many people instantly think of his letter as basically having a negative message - and one not very applicable to believers who are not involved in any false teaching. That is very understandable because **Jude 5-16** does nothing but criticize and condemn people who are **wolves in sheep's clothing**, teaching false doctrine and leading ungodly lives.

But **Jude** does much more than this. **We should not forget that his letter was not written to apostate teachers - it was written to faithful believers**. They were faced with a tsunami of false teaching in the congregations of **God**, and needed reassurance and instruction. This is exactly what **Jude** provided for them. Thus, the long central, negative section of the letter, must be seen as serving the bigger picture of **Jude 3-4** and **17-23**.

The two passages above have much in common. Both begin with the words: **God's Beloved ones**. Both talk about **godless people (Jude 4 and 18-19)**. Both appeal to past teaching to make their points: The condemnation of **the apostates** was **written about long ago (Jude 4)**, and the coming of **the false teachers** was **foretold** by the apostles (**Jude 17**). And just as **Jude** urged believers to **contend for the faith that was once for all passed on to God's people (Jude 3)**, he now encourages them to **build yourselves up in your most holy faith (Jude 20a)**. By these means, **Jude** demonstrates that **he** is now returning to the topic that **he** had started at the beginning: the way we should respond to **false** teaching.

Specifically, **Jude** tells his original readers to do three things: (1) They are to remember that the apostles themselves had predicted the kind of **false** teaching they were experiencing (**Jude 17-19**). From a strictly human viewpoint, those **false teachers** had **secretly slipped in (Jude 4)**. But **ADONAI** knew all along that **they** were coming. It was no surprise to **Him**. **He** was still in control. Therefore, this reminder would reassure **Jude's** readers that **the LORD** knew what was happening in their midst. (2) **Jude's** original readers were to devote themselves to their own spiritual growth (**Jude 20-21**). They must not allow **the apostates** to sidetrack them from their own development in the faith. (3) **Jude's** original readers were to reach out to those infected by the false teaching (**Jude 22-23**). Withdrawal into their own spiritual cave was not enough, his readers needed to do what they could to reclaim those people before it was too late.¹⁰⁰