

New Testament Studies

Jude (*RVS Notes*)

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Jude—Contending for the Faith

Introduction—

Author and recipients—Jude identifies himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and a brother of James (1). This James is presumably the Lord's brother and author of the epistle bearing his name. Thus, Jude is the physical half-brother of the Lord and the second such brother to author a New Testament book.

In the gospels, Judas is mentioned as one of the brothers of Jesus (see Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). None of the Lord's brothers initially believed Jesus to be the Messiah (Mt 12:46-50; Jn 7:1-5). Jude came to faith soon after the Lord's resurrection for we find him with the disciples in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14). He was married and his wife accompanied him on itinerant preaching journeys (1 Cor 9:5). Jude seems to have been a leader, along with his brother James, of the church in Palestine. Eusebius, the fourth century church historian, records that Jude's grandsons were also leaders of the church in their day and were interrogated by the Emperor Domitian but released when they informed the emperor that Jesus's kingdom was coming at the end of the age and thus not a threat to the current Roman rule.

Some scholars reject Jude's authorship of this letter for the same reasons they reject Peter's authorship of 2 Peter. However, there are no compelling reasons for rejecting the straightforward testimony of the book. Criticism arises from what critics describe as the Hellenistic language of Jude (he uses a number of ornate and rare words not found elsewhere in the New Testament). Critics discount that Jude could have facility in the Greek language and culture. However, Greek was the common tongue of the eastern Mediterranean at the time and Jude's ministry would have provided good reason to develop facility in that tongue and culture.

The letter was intended to be circulated among various house churches to warn the believers against deceivers who were smuggling false teaching into the churches.

Date—Those accepting Jude's authorship think that he wrote somewhere between 60 and 80 and probably from Palestine where he ministered.

Guiding concepts and curious references

False teaching—Jude writes to believers to contend for the truth. There were those who were denying Jesus as Sovereign and Lord, presumably an attack on his deity and/or humanity of his person. Such rejection was not only an intellectual attack but also involved an undermining of Christian morality. Jude warns his readers against the godless evildoers of his day (4-16). He denounces false teachers in no uncertain terms. He obviously has the idea of a fixed core of truth that modern audiences ought to sit up and consider. Moderns seem increasingly indifferent to fixed objective truth, moving truth statement exclusively to the subjective realm. Maintaining the purity and objective truth of the Christian faith is necessary today to counteract the relativity and syncretism of our age.

The false teachers may have been an early version of what later emerged as Gnosticism. Full blown Gnosticism was a creature of the second and third centuries, but its incipient ideas were around in the syncretistic culture of the first century Greco-Roman world. These ideas were hostile to human physicality. Only the spirit could transcend this world. Thus, the humanity of the Lord Jesus was attacked and the early church needed to defend that the Lord Jesus came in the flesh (4). More than this, full blown Gnosticism would locate evil in matter and good in the spirit which was entombed in the body and needed to be liberated by secret knowledge and esoteric rituals. Thus, matter was

irrelevant to one's spirituality. The predecessor to Gnosticism that Jude is dealing with seems to have been of the libertine variety. If matter does not matter, why not enjoy your matter. This led to deplorable ethics which the false teachers discounted as irrelevant. You could live like a pig and still be spiritual. These teachers in Jude did not observe Christian ethics (8, 12, 16), slandered celestial beings (8-9), were greedy and unconcerned about others (11, 16), rebellious (11), abusive of the truth (4, 10, 15), cynical, boastful, flatterers after their own advantage (16).

Relation to 2 Peter—The similarities between Jude and 2 Peter 2 are striking. See the Introduction to 2 Peter.

Use of extra-biblical references—Jude uses extra-biblical references to support his argument in the book. He relates a story about angels in the *Assumption of Moses* in verses 8 and 9 and cites the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* in verse 14. Like the apostle Paul, he uses non-biblical ideas to make his biblical point (see Paul's use of rabbinical midrash in 1 Cor 10:4, his appeal to a Greek poet in Acts 17:28, and to tradition in 2 Timothy 3:8). Such use does not put these sources on a par with Scripture as authoritative writing.

Summary Outline

Salutation and reason for writing (1-4)

Warning against false teachers (5-16)

 Examples of past judgment (5-7)

 Present characteristics of false teachers (8-13)

 Future judgment described (14-16)

Exhortation of believers (17-23)

Doxology (24-25)

Key Idea: Contending for the Faith

Verses: Jude 24-25

Jude—Contending for the Faith

Salutation and reason for writing (1-4)—Jude identifies himself as the brother of James and the servant of the Lord Jesus. While Jude or Judas was a common name, the brevity of this salutation suggests that the author was a prominent person in the Christian community, indeed the well-known brother of James, a prominent leader of the Jerusalem church and the half-brother of the Lord Jesus.

Jude was initially eager to write of the “salvation we share” but was detoured by the need to warn the recipients of false teaching. The false teachers changed the grace of God into a license for immorality. They felt free to indulge in all forms of sexual depravity (4, see 2 Pt. 2:2). They also denied the Lord and Sovereign Jesus Christ. How exactly, Jude does not specify.

3—Jude urges the believers to contend or struggle (*epagonizesthai*) for the faith. This was an athletic term from which we get our English word “agonize.” Its basic meaning is that of an intense effort in a wrestling match. The present tense conveys the need for a continuous struggle.

Warning against false teachers (5-16)—This segment is a stern warning against false teaching. Jude reminds his readers that God judges and condemns those who rebel against him and play fast and loose with his rule and his requirements. This segment contains examples of God's judgment in the past (5-7), a description of the doom of the false teachers (8-13), and a description of Enoch's prophecy of future judgment (14-16).

Moderns have trouble with this type of passage. Surely, he is too judgmental. Surely, he exaggerates. However, he is not being either of these things. The false teachers were arrogantly rejecting divine authority (8-11) and resorting to deliberate hypocrisy (12-13, 16). Their licentious and hypocritical deceit richly earned the judgment awaiting them (14-15).

Examples of past judgment (5-7)—Jude provides three examples of judgment from history:

- Israel of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings (see also 1 Cor. 10; Heb. 3-4). This was the sin of rebellious unbelief.
- In Jewish tradition, the fallen angels who “did not keep their position” were the “sons of God” who had intercourse with human women (cf. Gen. 6:2-4). Others disagree, thinking that the incident in Genesis 6 speaks of the sons of Seth intermarrying with the daughters of Cain and polluting the human stock. Whatever this reference pertains to, the sin seems to be one of rebellion against the sovereign rule of God.
- Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) were viewed as the epitome of wickedness engaging in arrogant, sexual immorality in general, and homosexual sin in particular. The false teachers were guilty of sexual sin.

Present characteristics of false teachers (8-13)—Jude links the past examples of God's judgment to the situation of the false teachers. They were polluting their own bodies in various forms of sexual excess, they rejected authority, including the Lordship of Jesus, and that they slandered celestial beings in ways that even the highest of archangels backed away from.

9-10—These false teachers mouthed off against celestial beings that exposed their utterly arrogant ignorance. Jewish literature, in the Assumption of Moses, records an incident in which the devil allegedly claimed the body of Moses because of his sin of murder (Ex. 2:12). The archangel Michael did not presume to rebuke the evil one but left the incident to the sovereign exercise of God. What the archangel backed away from, the false teachers swaggered into.

11—This text supplies another triad of examples of woe on the false teachers:

- The false teachers have taken the way of Cain, a murderer and creator a variant religion by offering a sacrifice of his own invention (see Heb. 11:4).
- They had abandoned themselves to the error of Balaam, that of greedy religious profiteering.
- They were the rebellious kin of Korah (Num. 16) and destined for destruction.

Even more than in the Old Testament, Jewish tradition demonized Cain and Balaam and characterized Korah, the leader of the rebellion against Moses in Numbers 16, as a principal example of rebelling against the God's law.

12-13—These verses describe the false teachers more fully:

- They were blemishes at the believer's love feasts. They were using God's grace as an excuse for their licentiousness.
- Shepherds who fed only themselves.
- Clouds that promised rain but never delivered.
- Fruit trees, long past harvest, bearing no fruit.
- Restless waves of the sea, being themselves untamed, restless, and unproductive.
- Wandering stars that provided no guidance, being useless and untrustworthy.

Future judgment described (14-16)—Jude quotes from the book of Enoch, a non-canonical book, that supplies a general description of the Lord's return in judgment. The Lord is coming with his holy ones. But the false teachers only continue in pleasure seeking, their arrogance, and their greed. The reality of this false teaching is very apropos for our age—rejection of proper authority, denial of the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus, and the encouragement of sexual immorality. Verse 16 completes Jude's denunciation of the false teachers. He describes them as grumblers, faultfinders, followers of their own evil desires, boastful, and flatterers for their own advantage. Note that Paul also quoted approvingly from non-canonical sources (see Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Tit. 1:12).

Exhortation of believers (17-23)—He comes to the necessary struggle for truth that is the task of the believers, remembering that in the last times, false teachers would arise (17-19). They were to oppose the false teachers who divide them, follow their own carnal instincts, and lack the Spirit. The believers were to—

- Build themselves up in the most holy faith (20). They were to be vigilant to pay attention to the body of truth and practice delivered by the apostles, the whole counsel of God's Word and a heart-felt commitment to it.
- Pray in the Spirit (20). One of the Spirit's important ministries in the life of believers is to call out prayer in the depths of our being (Rom. 8:26-27; Gal. 4:6).
- Keep themselves in God's love (21), that is to adhere to the truth, obey the commands, and love the brethren.
- Keep their attention fixed on the mercy of the Lord Jesus, waiting patiently for the Lord to bring them to their eternal reward (21).

What is the bottom line here? Jude wants the believers to understand the grave danger they were in and to learn and immerse themselves in the heart-habits of genuine discipleship.

22-23—What about the casualties and potential casualties of false teaching? Jude mentions three groups with instructions for each:

- Show mercy to those who the false teachers had caused to doubt and waver.
- To attempt to rescue those deceived, snatching them from judgmental fires.
- Show mercy with fear and trembling to those who plunged wholesale into the sin and depravity of the false teachers. The mixed with fear comment is a cautionary word. The believers were to

beware. The possibly of being deceived themselves was always present.

Doxology (24-25)—A wonderful doxology for the ages.

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