

# NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## *Lesson 75*

### Jude

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” authored this letter (1:1). “Jude” was a common name. It was a form of the Hebrew name “Judah.” The Greek version of the name was “Judas.”

Who was “Jude/Judah/Judas?” Scholars debate among three possible candidates. Most scholars see this Jude as Judah, the brother of Jesus. We know Jesus had brothers, including James and Judas. This Jude identifies himself as the brother of James. That he no reference to himself as the brother of Jesus is not surprising. Neither James nor Judas ever took the special privilege that would accompany calling themselves the brothers of Jesus. Others referred to them that way (Matt. 13:55, Jn 7:3-10, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19), but they would refer to themselves as servants of Jesus (here and James 1:1).

Other scholars consider that the author was likely the apostle Judah/Judas (NOT Judas Iscariot, of course, but the other Judas (“Judas the son of James,” see Luke 6:16). This view is not as likely in light of verse 17 in Jude where Jude tells his readers to “remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.” Jude seems to distinguish himself from those who were apostles.

The third possible candidate mentioned is simply an unknown Judas. That would be surprising in that this letter quickly had authority among the early church. Clement of Rome referenced the letter as early as 96 A.D. in his writing to the Corinthian church. Other apostolic fathers also accepted this letter as one that was authoritative from very early times. For the letter to be from some unknown Jude would be very surprising considering its early acceptance and use by the church.

Later in church history, there was minor disputing over whether Jude belonged in the New Testament. The concern, however, was not centered on who wrote the letter. Rather, the concern was the way the letter used non-biblical writings in multiple places. Ultimately, the church recognized that many used extra-biblical sources to communicate their biblical truths (Remember Paul quoting Greek poets when expounding his beliefs to the Athenians on Mars Hill?).

We do not have a date for the letter, but we can fairly date it as early as 65 and as late as 80 A.D. Why these dates? Several reasons! First, the letter confronts many of the same heresies as 2 Peter. That suggests a date in the range of 2 Peter, around 65 A.D. Furthermore, either 2 Peter depended on Jude for some of its material, or Jude relies on 2 Peter. The letters have much in common, causing many scholars to conclude that Peter had Jude when writing 2 Peter (although, many scholars consider the obverse true, that Jude had 2 Peter before him). 2 Peter 2 and Jude 4-18 echo each other repeatedly. This commonality leads to the dating range discussed above.

Jude addresses his letter to “those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ” (1:1). This general identification of the recipients gives little information as to whom Jude was writing. Most likely, this indicates that the letter was written for general distribution within the church. There was no particular person or congregation targeted. The target was the church overall. This makes sense in that the heresies made subject of the letter were no doubt heresies that challenged more than just one congregation. Jude wants the heresies stopped wherever they might break out.

This reason also gives us the “occasion” for the letter (*i.e.*, Why did Jude write the letter?). Jude was writing to confront the same type heresy that Peter wrote of in 2 Peter. This was an early Gnostic type belief that challenged whether Jesus was in fact man and God. Writing on this subject took preeminence over the issues of salvation that Jude was eager to write on (1:3).

## **II. TEXT**

After identifying his self and the recipients, Jude greets his readers with “mercy, peace and love...in abundance” (1:2). This is a natural greeting for those who are “called” and “loved” by God as well as those “kept” by Jesus. Abundant mercy is at the source of the relationship and calling. Abundant peace is a result of the relationship. Abundant love is the eternal sustenance of the relationship (*see* 1 Cor. 13).

Jude then informs his readers that in spite of his eagerness to write to them about the salvation they all share, he was compelled to write about other matters instead. Jude felt he must write to urge the readers to contend for the faith that was “once and for all entrusted to the saints.” This concern trumpets the fact that our faith, the Christian faith, is some morphing,

evolving or changing faith. It is not found in new revelations. It is a faith that was fully and totally revealed (“once and for all”) and then given/entrusted to the saints. There is no secret that only a select few in the church knew. There is no special revelation to come at some later date in opposition to that already manifested to the church. There is our faith, once and for all entrusted to the saints. The recipients needed this message. This message would speak volumes to the church in the coming centuries. This message still speaks loudly to those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we confront those who teach a new revelation of the gospel message that is at odds with that entrusted to the church.

Jude recognized that some teaching in the church were inconsistent with core gospel teaching. The form of this heresy that Jude confronts is two-fold. Some are using the faith as a license for immorality. These folks were teaching that our salvation by grace eliminates any concern over sin. We can do as dictated by our desires and passions without concern over consequences because of our forgiveness. In Paul’s terminology, we might as well sin so grace may abound! The second aspect of the heresy is its denial of Jesus Christ as “our only sovereign and Lord” (1:4). Jude is concerned about anyone diminishing the person or role of Christ. He is Sovereign, meaning power without limits, or absolute domination. He is our Lord.

By writing of Jesus as thus, Jude teaches that using grace as a license to sin is a denial of the person and role of Jesus as our Lord. But, Jude writes in a way that means even more. There was an aspect of heresy that Jude addresses that was even more direct in its denial of Jesus as sovereign Lord. That heresy was the early Gnosticism we discussed in earlier lessons. This teaching left people believing that physical matter was evil, while spiritual/unseen matter was holy and good. Gnostics, therefore, taught the extremes of pure asceticism (denying the evil body of its evil desires) and full immorality (letting the evil body do as it wills since it is not the part of a person that is holy anyway.)

Jude backs up his point by going to several examples that taught the importance of human responsibility and morality. Jude reminds his readers that God delivered his people from Egypt, but had no problem destroying those same people later for their lack of faith (1:5). Similarly, even angels who abandoned their place of authority came under God’s curse (1:6). Jude sets forward a third example of God’s judgment over immorality. Jude reminds the readers that Sodom and Gomorrah were punished because of sexual immorality and perversion (1:7).

The false teachers that Jude writes of were similar in the ways they would pollute their own bodies through their “license to sin” approach. The “dreamers” were not only polluting their own bodies through the immorality but also were rejecting authority and “slandering” angelic beings by their behavior. In support of his point, Jude then references a current piece of fiction that circulated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Called *The Testament of Moses*, this non-canonical work had the archangel Michael disputing with the devil over the body of Moses. Yet, Michael does not himself slander Satan. Instead, Michael rebukes Satan in the name of the Lord. This is an important comparison because the “dreamer heretics” were slandering those who taught truth against their heresy. Jude wants his readers to see how far out of line the dreamers were.

Pronouncing “woe” to the heretics, Jude then goes back to the Old Testament to label their condemnation. He cites the heretics as taking “the way of Cain,” rushing in to “Balaam’s error” for profit, and being destroyed in “Korah’s rebellion.” We can read our Old Testament to see Cain followed a jealous heart of selfishness and greed as he murdered his brother in hatred. Balaam was also one bent on greed and personal gain, while Korah rose up in rebellion to God’s appointed leaders (Num. 16).

Jude considers these heretics “blemishes” at the love feasts (meals that surrounded the Lord’s Supper in the early church.) These heretics offer no “food” to others, even in the context of the Agape meals. They are “clouds without rain,” “autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead,” and “wild waves of the sea foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (1:12-13). This is not the way I would like to be described!

These are teachers who feed no one but themselves. They offer none of the blessings of rain upon land, merely moving as clouds. They are as worthless as dead trees for giving fruit. Just as waves churn up the garbage in the sea, these heretics churn up garbage and problems in the church. They have the stability and future of a shooting star headed to darkness.

Jude then uses another current writing to make his point. Jude references “Enoch, the seventh from Adam” as prophesying about these types of people. The quote Jude uses here comes from a book called *The Secrets of Enoch*, a pseudepigraphal work written perhaps a hundred years earlier and very popular at the time. Jude quotes the passage, “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to

convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” Again, by using this passage, Jude is not according scripture status to the Enoch book. Instead, we see Jude taking a known work and using a part of it to make a point. This would be similar to a preacher today taking an example from another sermon or book. It does not mean the example is considered on a par with scripture. It is merely a recognition that God speaks truth in a number of places that can be seized for his purposes.

Jude considers the heretics grumblers and faultfinders who follow their own evil desires, boasting about themselves and flattering others for their own gain. Not a flattering picture!

Jude then tells his readers they should not be shocked that some parade themselves within the church as teachers of truth when in fact they teach damaging heresy. In fact, Jude reminds that the Apostles taught that there would be scoffers who follow their own desires rather than the Spirit. Instead of following those false teachers, Jude reminds the church to “build yourself up in the most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will prompt us to pray and empower us to pray. In that vein, Jude wants the church to follow the Spirit’s truth rather than the heresies of evil. This is our stance while we remain in God’s love awaiting the mercy that will ultimately build into our eternal life (1:20).

The readers should not just insulate themselves from the heretical teaching; they should also implement their own acts of holiness. They are to “be merciful to those who doubt.” They should “snatch others from the fire and save them” (1:23).

Jude closes his brief letter with a doxology of praise that is among the most profound and beautiful in the Bible. Full of faith and the Spirit, Jude writes:

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more! Amen. (1:25)*

Amen indeed!

### **III. POINTS FOR HOME**

1. Doctrine is important. It is truth.
2. Truth has consequences; so does deception.
3. God eternal sovereign holds us close.
4. To God be glory.