

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 43

Jude

My earliest interest in Jude came early in college when I learned that there were quotes and references in the letter from the Pseudepigrapha. These were writings composed in a time range spanning from about 400 years or so before the time of Christ, up through the first century of this era. They are sometimes confused with the “Apocrypha,” but are actually different writings.¹ The term “pseudepigrapha” comes from two Greek words “pseudo,” which means “false” and “epigraphē,” which means “inscription.”

These are writings that were falsely ascribed to “authors” that didn’t write them. The false ascriptions were probably for various reasons ranging from giving them an air of authority to simply giving the subject area of the text.

I found the idea fascinating, and was amazed that I had never heard of them. The only copy I could find was a massive volume by Oxford Press that had the translations and comments put together by famed Oxford fellow R. H. Charles. There was a copy in the Student Center library at the Bible Chair (aka college ministry building) of my home church in Lubbock, Texas. I decided I had to have my own copy to pour through.

This was in the late 1970’s well before the days of Amazon or any online activity. My only recourse was to contact the Bailey Bookstore run by a man from church and see what he could do. He had some magic catalogue that allowed him to order such things, but the cost was going to be almost three weeks of my meager earnings from the local convenience store where I worked three afternoons a week.

Some things are worth the work, however, and I decided this was one of them. I ordered the book and was stunned to study it once it came in. It still stuns me today. It informs me tremendously, and helps set the New Testament writings in an interesting milieu.

My next level of intimacy with Jude came from the song. No, not the Paul McCartney penned, “Hey Jude,” but a song by Billy Sprague, a Christian musician

¹ This can get a bit fuzzy because of the meaning of the words. The traditional Pseudepigrapha is distinct from the writings traditionally called the Apocrypha that are included in the Catholic Scriptures. There are also New Testament “apocryphal” writings that are not considered Scripture by any mainline religious group. Many of these are “pseudepigraphal” in the sense that they are written by someone other than the claimed author.

who was at our college church in Nashville for a while. He sang the Jude doxology, which one can still listen to on YouTube, should one not have the album.²

Between those two, and a short time in Greek translating Jude, one covers a good bit of the book. It has always been one of my favorite books to read and teach, in part because of who the author is!

BACKGROUND

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” authored this letter (1:1). “Jude” was a common Jewish name in Judea during New Testament times. 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.

1. Most traditional 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. Some might wonder why he doesn’t identify himself as Jesus’ brother; however, that should not be too surprising. First, the recipients likely knew precisely who he was. Furthermore, it is understandable that neither James nor Judas took the special privilege that would accompany calling themselves the brothers of Jesus, especially once they understood Jesus to be the incarnate God. We read that others referred to them as the brothers of Jesus (Matt. 13:55, Jn. 7:3-10, Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19), but we never read that they refer to themselves that way. Here and in James 1:1 (written by Jesus’ other brother) they refer to themselves simply as “servants of Jesus.”
2. Other scholars consider that the author was likely the apostle Judah/Judas, the son of James. Importantly, this is not Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, but the other Judas (see Luke 6:16). Those that discount this view point to the failure to identify himself as an apostle as well as the apparent significance of verse 17. In that verse, 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.
3. The third possible candidate mentioned is some unknown Judas. While Judas was a common name, that would seem surprising because this letter quickly held authority among the early church. Clement of Rome referenced the letter as early as 96AD when he wrote to the Corinthian church. Other apostolic fathers also accepted this letter as one that was authoritative from

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azxhdEKTfag>

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 a minor dispute 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. A Biblical example was Paul quoting Greek poets when expounding his beliefs to the Athenians on Mars Hill? (Acts 17:28).

We do not have a date for the letter, but we can fairly date it as early as 65 and as late as 80AD. 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 65AD. Furthermore, either 2 Peter depended on Jude for some of its material, or Jude relied 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. Consider the following examples:

2 Pet. 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Jude 4

For certain people have crept in unnoticed [“secretly”] who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

2 Pet. 2:4

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;

Jude 6

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—

2 Pet. 2:6

if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly

Jude 7

just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

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 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 both man and God. Writing on this subject took preeminence over the issues of salvation that Jude was eager to write about (1:3).

TEXT

After identifying himself 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. There is a flow here. Abundant mercy is the source of our relationship and calling in Christ. Abundant peace results from 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 emphasizes the fact that our faith, the Christian faith, is not some morphing, evolving, or changing faith. It is not found in new revelations. It is an ancient faith, one that Paul readily traced back to Abraham (Rom. 4). The faith was fully and totally revealed (“once and for all”) in Jesus, and then given and entrusted to the saints.

The Christian faith was never one with secrets that only a select few in the church knew. There was no special revelation to come at some later date in opposition to that already manifested to the church. There is one 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 21st 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 was inconsistent with core gospel teaching. The form of this heresy that Jude confronted was two-fold. Some were using the faith as a license for immorality. These folks were teaching that a salvation by grace eliminated any concerns over sin. The heretical idea was that a person should be able to do as dictated by one’s desires and passions without concern over consequences. All of this because of the profound forgiveness of sin. Paul confronted this same heretical idea asking,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! (Rom. 6:1-2).

The second aspect of the heresy was its denial of Jesus Christ as “our only sovereign and Lord” (verse 4). Jude was concerned about anyone diminishing the person or role of Christ. Christ is Sovereign, meaning he has power without limits. He has absolute dominion. He is our Lord.

By explaining Jesus in this way, 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’s writing indicates even more. There was an aspect of heresy that Jude addressed that was even more direct in its denial of Jesus as sovereign Lord. That heresy some scholars consider an early Gnosticism. Gnosticism flourished in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and often used a version of Platonism which left people believing that physical matter was evil, while spiritual/unseen matter was holy and good. Many Gnostics reasoned and taught that 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) were appropriate.

Jude backed up his point by using three examples of judgment that taught the importance of human responsibility and morality. Jude reminded his readers that even though the Lord delivered his people from Egypt, the Lord had no problem destroying those same people later for their lack of faith (verse 5).³ Similarly, even angels who abandoned their place of authority came under God’s curse (verse 6). Jude set forward a third example of God’s judgment over immorality, reminding the readers that Sodom and Gomorrah were punished because of sexual immorality and perversion (verse 7).

The false teachers that Jude wrote 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 “blaspheming” or “verbally abusing” angelic beings by their behavior.

³ The English Standard Version translates Jude 5 as follows:

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Many Greek manuscripts use the Greek word for “Lord” (“kurios” - κύριος) rather than “Jesus,” however since “Jesus” is clearly identified as “our only Master and Lord” in the immediately preceding verse 4, using “kurios” (κύριος) again as “Lord,” the ESV is identifying Jesus as God, the Savior of Israel.

In support of his point, Jude then referenced a current piece of fiction that circulated in the 1st 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 blaspheme or verbally abuse 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 that 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” (verses 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 in producing fruit as dead trees. 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 (ancient to us) 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 *1 Enoch*, a pseudepigraphal work likely written somewhere between the 4th century BC and the 1st century BC and very popular at the time (certainly based upon discoveries at Qumran as well as writings of the early church fathers). Jude quotes the passage from 1 Enoch 1:9,

Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14-15).

Throughout history, some have been troubled by Jude quoting from a non-canonical book. I suggest that by using this passage, Jude is not awarding the status of Scripture to the Enoch book.⁴ 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.

The passage in 1 Enoch comes in the flow of “The Great Holy One” coming forth with the host of heaven to tear up the earth, making peace with the righteous, but executing judgment on the wicked. The righteous get “mercy” and “peace,” two of the traits that Jude prays will find the readers of his letter (compare Jude 2 with 1 Enoch 1:8). The wicked are “destroyed” (1 Enoch 1:9).

Jude calls out the heretics as,

grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage (Jude 16).

This is 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 reminded the readers 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 urges the church to,

building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh (Jude 20-23).

Jude wanted 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 works as we transform into our eternal life. Everyone was encouraged to not just insulate themselves from the heretical teaching; but also to 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.

⁴ Jude does say that Enoch was “prophesying,” but that word no more ascribed “Scriptural” status to 1 Enoch than it did to the statements of the teachers in Corinth that Paul addressed in passages like 1 Cor. 14:31.

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:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

Amen indeed! This ties in nicely with the way Jude began his letter. The brother of Jesus started with the prayer that mercy, peace, and love would be multiplied to the readers, and then ends with homage to the one who would give the mercy, peace, and love. We have the one and only God lifted high as Savior. In the same sentence, we have detailed Jesus Christ (Messiah) as our Lord. Rather than dwell in the unrighteousness of heretical teaching, the readers are lifted to a place of worship ascribing all glory, all majesty, all dominion, and all authority to God.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”*
(Jude 3).

On a primary level, doctrine is important. It is truth, and truth has consequences. We also must remember that deception has consequences. We need a commitment to truth that makes it our focus and the drive for how we live.

A friend of mine emailed me while I was preparing this lesson. He was taking a young lady who is like a daughter to him, to visit a Christian college campus. My friend is an atheist, and I suspect the pseudo-daughter is too. At this campus (Pepperdine, in Malibu), the question was asked about the role of religion as it might interplay with the student who does not believe. The comment of the school official giving the tour is that “The truth has nothing to fear from investigation.” I like that. So did my friend.

We need to search truth, but once we find it, we need to contend for it! We should never hold it, but let others trounce upon it without being called to account. We have responsibilities for truth.

2. *“Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”* (Jude 5).

We do not often think of Jesus as God saving the Israelites from bondage. We tend to divide God into three beings, rather than seeing his One-ness. Jude, the

brother of Jesus, saw Jesus clearly. Jesus was the only Master and Lord to Jude or any believer. As such, Jesus is God. Jesus was God in the times of the Old Testament. When God worked, Jesus worked. The hand of God was the hand of Jesus. The breath of God was the breath of Jesus. This is why the faith of Jesus was not a new faith, even in the earliest decades of the church. This is the faith of the ages, made manifest and brought to completion in Jesus. What an awesome God we serve!

3. *“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”* (Jude 24-25).

God, the Eternal Sovereign, holds us close. He is the One who delivers us and protects us. He is the One who keeps us safe. He is the Good Shepherd that knows his sheep (Jn. 10:14).

I want to sing his praises and proclaim him daily. He should be my only Master, my only Lord, my God to whom I am eternally grateful. Amen.