

Jude

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Author

The author identifies himself as Jude in verse 1. The Greek (Ιουδᾶς, Ioudas) is literally, Judas. Traditionally, English versions use Jude to distinguish him from Judas who betrayed Jesus. He also identifies himself as the servant (Greek, δούλος, doulos) of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Some versions translate doulos as “bond-servant” to indicate being indebted to the master and not just a servant working for wages. Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 both refer to a Judas as the half-brother of Jesus. (“Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” Mark 6:3)

Jude, like James, was half-brother of Jesus, but he humbly associates himself with James, his full brother rather than try to gain attention from his family ties. By first calling himself a slave of Jesus Christ, it is evident that he wants everyone to focus on that rather than any physical tie to Jesus. At the same time, he must identify himself further because Judas was a common name in the first century. Two of Jesus’ disciples were named Judas, and we especially remember the one who betrayed him.

While Jesus was walking with his disciples and teaching and healing people, his brothers didn’t believe in him (John 7:5). According to the Apostle Paul, his brother James became a believer after Jesus’ resurrection (1 Cor 15:7-8 “then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me.”) We may assume that Jude and the rest of his family believed at that time. That probably means Jude and the family were part of the group on the day of Pentecost who were praying and waiting the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1).

Audience

Jude doesn’t seem to write to a specific group of people, but simply addresses “the called ones who are sanctified in God the Father and being kept (for or by) Jesus Christ.” In verse 3 he addresses them as “beloved” or “dear friends.” So he is writing not just to a specific group about some matter but to all believers who would get to read or hear his letter. Because there are many allusions to the Old Testament and the book of Enoch, of which the Jews would have been familiar, many scholars think it was originally written to Jewish believers.

Date

Jude’s subject matter is similar to 2 Peter where Peter warns that false teachers would arise and to 1 John where John warns of false teachers that have gone out among believers. Since Jude says in verse 4 that they have crept in, that would indicate Jude was written near the time of 2 Peter and 1 John. 2 Peter is dated about 66 to 68 AD and 1 John is dated about 65 to 68 AD, so Jude might have been written around 68 to 70 AD.

Purpose

Jude says in verse 3 that he intended to write about their common salvation, but because of these false teachers and the danger threatening the church, he was compelled to write to encourage believers to contend earnestly for the faith delivered (entrusted) to the saints. Evidently, these false teachings were a form of Gnosticism which says there is a secret knowledge known only to those teachers from which you need to learn it so you can live according to God’s will. The Gnostics viewed everything material as evil and everything spiritual as good. Some Gnostics believed you had to deny the desires of the physical body (material world) so that the spirit might grow. These are the ascetics who would go live in the desert to deny their body so they could focus on their spirit. Another group believed that the material world wasn’t important so they cultivated their “spiritual” lives and allowed their flesh to do anything it liked. The result was that they were libertines, guilty of all kinds of lawlessness, lewdness, and immorality.

Jude says in verse 4 that these libertine Gnostics who had slipped in among the saints (believers) were changing the grace of God into a license to be immoral and denying that Jesus is the only Sovereign and Lord.

From this, two major purposes can be seen in Jude: (1) To condemn the practices of the libertines who were infesting the churches and corrupting believers, and (2) counsel believers to stand fast, continue to grow in faith while contending for the truth that had been handed down to the saints by the apostles who had walked with Jesus.

Verses 1 – 2. This opens like a normal letter of the time by identifying the author as Jude, who was a brother of James and a therefore a half-brother of Jesus. But rather emphasizing that relationship he emphasizes his being a fellow bond servant of the Messiah (Christ). This is important for the message that he intends to deliver to his readers who are fellow believers. He tells them they are loved by God, the Father, and kept (preserved) by Jesus, the Messiah. Then he offers a prayer for them to have an abundance of mercy (forgiveness of God), peace (the Jewish concept of Shalom which was a wholeness of relationship with God), and love (that character of God which shows sacrificial concern for people). These are things God gives through his Spirit to those who trust Jesus' death to restore them to a right relationship with God and attempt to live according to how God has revealed through his written word and the life of Jesus.

Verses 3 – 4. Just as John addressed his readers in his letters, Jude calls his readers “beloved” (which some translations translate the Greek, *agapetoi* as “dear friends”). Although Jude wanted to write about the salvation they share with him through Jesus, he felt (was led by the Holy Spirit) to write and encourage them to contend for the faith that was once entrusted to the saints. That faith is the truth of God's word, revealed over the centuries and especially by Jesus, about God's love for mankind and his work to restore them to a right relationship with him that they lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden of Eden. Now, about 40 years after Jesus' death on the cross to restore that relationship, some people have distorted God's word and what Jesus taught. Jude says that these individuals and their false teaching would appear as if written about long ago (the Old Testament prophets). And he says they have slipped in among the believers secretly. Those individuals are godless (do not have the truth of God and live showing it). Those individuals have turned the grace of God (unmerited favor which results in a freedom from being bound by the curse of disobeying God) into the supposed freedom to do whatever you want (that was the lie of Satan to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden).

Verses 5 – 7. Now Jude says his readers already know what he is going to write but that he is doing it to remind them. Then he gives past examples of these kinds of individuals and what God did to them. He delivered his chosen people out of bondage in Egypt, but those who later rejected his authority, he disciplined. The created angels who abandoned their places of authority to follow Satan, he bound with chains and has kept them in darkness awaiting the day of judgment. Sodom and Gomorrah and the towns around them who polluted their bodies with sexual immorality, God judged with destruction by raining down fiery sulfur on them. And Jude says these are examples of the punishment of eternal fire that awaits those godless ones who have slipped in among the believers.

Verses 8 – 13. Now he describes how these godless ones are doing the same things. He calls them dreamers because they think they have all the right answers. But, he says they pollute their bodies, reject authority, and even think it is OK to slander celestial beings (angels). But he says even the archangel Michael, when disputing with Satan about the body of Moses, didn't dare bring a slanderous accusation against him. Yet these godless people speak abusively against whatever they don't understand. And what they do understand, ungodly living, is exactly what destroys them. Then he pronounces a “woe” over them because they have taken the way of Cain (deciding for themselves what is right and wrong), rushed for profit into Balaam's error (greed motivating his actions to try and curse God's people), and have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion (opposed Moses' leadership because they wanted to lead in their own way).

He says these godless people are blemishes at your “love feasts” (gatherings of believers), and that they participate without any qualms that they are doing wrong. When he calls them shepherds who only feed themselves, that indicates that some of them have slipped into places of leadership in local gatherings (churches). His reference to clouds without rain and autumn trees without fruit indicates that they promise refreshing of the body and spirit but they don’t provide it. His reference to wild waves of the sea indicates that they toss up the waste that is within them. His reference to wandering stars indicates their unreliability as guides for what to believe or how to live.

Verses 14 – 16. These godless ones have been forewarned of their judgment. He refers to a prophecy from Enoch, the seventh generation of people after Adam was created. The prophecy is that the Lord is coming to judge the ungodly for their ungodly way of living and all the harsh words they have spoken. Jude describes these people as grumblers and faultfinders who follow their own evil desires, boasting about themselves and flattering others for their advantage. Some writing that was called the book of Enoch apparently was available to the believers in the First Century because other of the early church leaders quoted it just as Jude did.

Verses 17 – 23. Jude exhorts his readers to remember what the apostles have foretold to them – that in the last times there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires. He says such men will divide you, especially those who follow natural instincts and do not have the Spirit in them. He encourages believers to keep the faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep themselves in God’s love as they wait for Jesus to bring them to eternal life, be merciful to those who doubt and snatch them safely from the fire, but hate everything that is corrupt, even the clothing that is stained by it.

Verses 24 – 25. In this closing of his letter, Jude gives glory to God who is able to keep us from falling and to present us before himself without fault. And he declares that all glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to God through Jesus who is our Lord from before all ages, now, and forever.

The key idea of the book is “contend for the faith.” Jude focuses our attention on the believer’s security in Christ (v. 24), on the eternal life He gives (v. 21), and on His sure coming again (v. 21). It is Jesus Christ our Lord who gives us access into God’s presence (v. 25).