

Jude: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

Introduction

There is some debate on the identity of the author of this short letter. Arguments can be made for the author being the apostle Judas, son of James (not Judas Iscariot). But most scholars believe that this is Jude, the brother of Jesus and James (see the authorship of the book of James). Since the apostle Judas was identified as the son of James in Luke, this authorship is usually attributed to Jude, the brother of James and Jesus.

The names Jude, Judas, and Judah are all related words. Judas is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Judah. Jude is a variation of that same name. Judas was a common name during the time of Jesus, but to separate this author from Judas Iscariot, the English translators use the variation Jude rather than Judas.

The date of the letter is unclear as there are no distinguishing characteristics found in the letter to give it any certainty of the time of writing. The earliest historical reference to this letter is from 96 A.D. It is often accepted that Peter referred to the letter from Jude in his second letter (2 Peter). If this is the case, then the letter would have to have been written before 65 A.D. Most scholars agree that the latest this letter could have been written would be around 80 A.D.

Jude writes this letter to no particular audience referencing “those who are called,” or Christians in verse 1, but he addresses an issue that both Peter and John address in their letters. Jude corrects the claims of false teachers that having grace from God meant that any future sins would not be held against them, and they were free to do as they please without consequence. This was an unfortunate false teaching of the era.

Chapter 1

V1-2

Jude uses a common greeting in the opening of his letter with one notable enhancement. As Christians, our mercy, peace, and love, should be multiplied amongst each other so as to show the true love of Jesus to all.

V3-8

Jude begins his address by stating that his intentions changed while writing this letter. He originally intended to share a letter describing the “common salvation” found among those in the Christian community. Even though Jude doesn’t say what event changed his mind, something caused him alarm enough to address the false teachings found in some of the churches.

What does verses 3 and 5 mean when it refers to knowing everything once and for all?

The wording used by Jude is intended to say that the gospel message has already been delivered by the apostles and that it shouldn’t be modified by new believers or false prophets. Peter, Paul, and the other apostles worked hard to establish the doctrine of salvation amongst the early church so that it could be adhered to and not questioned. However, there were those who wished to modify the teachings of Jesus and the apostles for their own selfish desires or even monetary gain.

The story of the Jews leaving Egypt and then being banished to wander the desert for 40 years was well known to most Christians since most of their teachings came from converted Jews. Jude reminds them that those that didn't keep the faith did not enter the promised land. Christianity is much the same way as the lack of faith in Jesus would cause condemnation.

One of the characteristics of the letter from Jude is the mention of obscure and even controversial topics. Jude refers to Genesis 6:2 when he mentions the angels who came to the earth in search of sexual activities with God's favored creation. Jude mentions this to remind the new church that there is judgment for those that choose to ignore the will of God and seek after their own desires.

V9-13

Verse 9 is another example of a highly debated topic found only in Jude. Deuteronomy 34:5-6 is the last mention in the Bible of Moses and where he is buried. Yet, Jude is referencing something not found in the Bible and, seemingly, not found anywhere else. Many commentators point out that despite the lack of reference, it's not what happened that Jude is using to make his point, but how Michael dealt with the devil that is important. Michael, considered to be a powerful angelic figure, used the authority of God to turn the devil away. Michael didn't fight the devil or call him names. He simply invoked the name of God.

In contrast, Jude calls out those who would speak evil about things which they do not understand. These unfortunate souls would be rejected by God. Jude presents three examples for this judgment from God. Cain was rejected due to his lack of faith (Hebrews 11:4). The prophet Balaam was struck down for his greed (Numbers 22:12). Korah and his followers were struck down for their rebellion (Numbers 16:3).

What is a "love feast" mentioned in verse 12?

These meals, or "agape feasts", were a form of potluck dinners that the church held regularly in order to provide food for those that had none. People would bring what they could and share it with the crowds. Jude is calling out those who attended these dinners with the intention of simply feeding themselves when they had the means to provide for themselves and others. These types of people are useless and fruitless, at best, but could be as difficult to manage as rough waters. They might seem appealing for a while, but their deeds would reveal them for who they were, and their judgment would be harsh.

V14-15

Who is Enoch that Jude references?

This passage is unusual in that Jude references a quote from the book of Enoch. Enoch is the descendant of Adam who is mentioned in Genesis 5 that God took to Heaven without dying. This book may or may not be considered part of the Apocrypha depending on which scholars are consulted on the matter. The early Christian scholar Tertullian believes that the Jews spitefully removed Enoch from scripture after the resurrection of Jesus because of the Messianic prophecies found within, but this is a debatable claim. It is Jewish tradition that Noah brought some of the writings of Enoch with him on the ark during the great flood.

Jude uses this quote to speak of the judgment that will fall upon the types of men described in the previous passage.

V16-21

Jude lists the character of the people who would receive this judgment and how to identify them. He then goes on to remind Christians that they are NOT to behave this way, instead showing the character of God.

V22-23

In this section, Jude gives instructions on how to deal with those who have been taken in by false and wicked teachers. Some may simply need understanding and a shoulder to cry on. Others may need to be dealt with more seriously.

V24-25

Jude closes his letter with a short praise to God and a reminder to seek Him in all things. Jesus is our Guide and our Savior and to be in His presence is heavenly joy.

References

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