

The Epistle of St. Jude to the Church – A Brief Study

Author: In Jude 1 the author identifies himself as “Jude, of Jesus Christ servant, and brother of James.” A more specific identification is not offered. Clearly Jude is well enough known to the original recipients of the epistle that no further introduction was necessary.

The name Jude or Judas is derived from the name of the fourth son of Jacob by Leah, who also gave his name to the tribe of Israelites (יהודה; Genesis 35:23), through whom the Messiah was to come (Genesis 49:8-12, Matthew 1:2-3) In the Greek the name is Ἰούδας, which we would transliterate Judas.

Judas was a common name in Palestine in the first century. Five prominent men in the New Testament bear the name Judas. The first is Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, who dies in the Gospel account of St. Matthew (Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:15-20). The second is Barsabbas, a believer, who was one of four to carry the written dictates of the first Apostolic council, and had been suggested as a replacement for Stephen (Acts 15:22, Acts 1:23). The third is Judas, the brother of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:54-56; Mark 6:3). The fourth is Judas the Galilean, who led a revolt and was killed (Acts 5:37). The last is Judas son of James, one of the Twelve (Luke 6:12-16, Acts 1:13).

Of these men, the only one matches the description “Jude ... brother of James”: the third, Judas, the brother of Jesus. James, also the brother of Jesus, was the bishop of Jerusalem after the death of Christ (Acts 15:13, note James’ authority over Peter; Galatians 1:19). James was well known to the Christian Church. James and Judas were Jews, and apparently not believers before the resurrection (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:20-21, 31-34; John 7:1-10). After the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord’s brothers were active in Christian evangelism (Acts 9:5). At the time the Epistle was written, it was enough to say “Jude, of Jesus Christ servant, and brother of James.”

Origen (of Alexandria, 185-254 A.✠ D.) wrote “Jude, the Lord’s brother, wrote an epistle of few lines but full of the strong words of heavenly grace.” Eusebius (of Cesarea, 260-340 A.✠ D.) places the Epistle of St. Jude in the antilegomena, because it was not written by an Apostle.¹

Luther, in his preface to the Epistle of St. Jude, writes: “Concerning the epistle of St. Jude, no one can deny that it is an extract or copy of St. Peter’s second epistle, so very like it are all the words. He also speaks of the apostles like a disciple who comes along after them [Jude 17] and cites sayings and incidents that are found nowhere else in the Scriptures [Jude 9, 14]. This moved the ancient fathers to exclude this epistle from the main body of the Scriptures. Moreover the Apostle Jude did not go to Greek-speaking lands, but to Persia, as it is said, so that he did not write Greek. Therefore, although I value this book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books which are supposed to lay the foundations of faith.”²

¹ For Patristic references see Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*. 1998. Hendrickson Publishers, pgs. 602-603.

² Luther, Martin. *Prefaces to the New Testament*. 1522. In *Luther’s Works, American Edition*. Vol. 35. 1960. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Pgs. 397-398.



A Quick Excursis on Canon:

Canon is a word derived from the Greek word *κανών* which means “reed” or “measuring stick.” It is used to describe the Books that the Apostolic Church held as authentic, inspired Scripture. A Biblical Book accepted by the Apostolic Church is called a “canonical Book.” Authorship is a primary consideration. Liturgical use is also reflective of how the Apostolic Church held the Book. The doctrinal content of the Book is also a factor.

Homologoumena is a Greek word that describes canonical Books that speak together. Examples are the four Gospels, and the Epistles of St. Paul.

Antilegomena is a Greek word that describes canonical Books that whose inclusion in the canon was disputed by the early church. The term was used by Eusebius (Bishop of Cesarea, the “father of church history”, 260-340 A.✠ D.). Inside the category of antilegomena Eusebius further divided the Books that were “generally recognized” (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude) from the books that were “spurious” (Acts of St. Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of St. Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Didache). The Book of Revelation has been held to belong to both categories.

Apocrypha is a Greek word that means “hidden things”. These books were received by the early church as parts of the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, but were not included in the Hebrew Bible (thereby excluded by non-Hellenistic Jews from their canon). In the Vulgate (4th c. Latin Bible) the Apocrypha are included in the Old Testament. Some modern versions place the Apocrypha between the Testaments.

Pseudepigrapha is a Greek word that means “false signature”. The term is applied to a body of Jewish writing dating from several hundred years before Christ to several hundred years after His death & resurrection.



Date: Based on the assumption that Jude was the brother of Jesus Christ, and of James the less, the Epistle can be dated after the resurrection of our Lord, and before the writing of Revelation, the last New Testament book. Because of the similarities between the Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter, it is probable that they were written about the same time (but see Acts 20:20-30, 1 Corinthians 5:1-11). Jude 17-18 is addressed to readers who personally heard the Apostles preach, and so presumably was received by those alive during that time. If Jude is citing 2 Peter, then 2 Peter was written first (note that where St. Peter uses the future tense, St. Jude uses the past: 2 Peter 2:1, 3:3; cf. Jude 4). If 2 Peter is citing Jude, then Jude was written earlier. Because of the development of the false teaching against which Jude (and 2 Peter) is written (verse 4), it is suggested by many scholars that the Epistle of St. Jude be dated between the years of 60 and 80 A.✠ D.

Original Recipients: The Epistle is addressed “To the called ones beloved by God the Father and by Jesus Christ being kept.” This is a general enough Christian greeting that it could be applied to any congregation, or the Christians in any region. Because of the

similarity of the Epistle of Jude and 2 Peter, it may be that they were written to the same recipients.

Overview: Jude 3 summarizes the general content of the Epistle.



Read Jude 1-2 (the translation provided in this study is by Pastor Braden from the Greek. Readers are encouraged to follow their own version of the Bible as well.)

“Jude, of Jesus Christ a slave, and brother of James, to the called ones beloved by God the Father and by Jesus Christ being kept. May mercy and peace and love abound to you.”

1. This section opens the Epistle, details its recipients, and greets them. How is the greeting in verse 2 the same as, or different from, that of the catholic Epistles? Read 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:1-2. On Jude, see the introduction to this study.

2. “of Jesus Christ a slave” – see James 1:1; Romans 1:1.

3. “To the called” – See Romans 1:6-7, Romans 8:28-30. How is this different than a Pastor being “called?”

Read Jude 3-4

“Beloved, all earnestness making to write to you concerning our common salvation, I was compelled to write to you exhorting to struggle in behalf of the faith once entrusted to the saints. For some men snuck in, ones whose condemnation was previously written about of old, godless, changing the grace of our God into sensuality, and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. Jude desires to write regarding the salvation common to all Christians, but is compelled by the circumstances among the recipients to write addressing a specific danger: a heresy has crept in among them which teaches that living a promiscuous life is acceptable for Christians. The same word translated “sensuality” is used in 1 Peter 4:3; and 2 Peter 2:2, 7, and 18. This reveals specifically what the problem among the recipients of Jude’s Epistle was.

5. “ones whose condemnation was previously written about of old” – see Jude 14-16, and the study notes provided by this study for those verses. Here Jude writes that the ancient prophecy of condemnation is rightly applied to those who teach and practice what these men do.

6. Note the equation that Jude builds – to practice immorality is to deny that Jesus Christ is your Master and Lord. See Mark 7:21-23; Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 12:20-21.

7. Jude writes to exhort them “to struggle in behalf of the faith once entrusted to the saints.” The sense here is that the one true Christian faith is given, once for all time, to the called ones beloved by God the Father and by Jesus Christ being kept. They are to fight to keep that faith. See 1 Timothy 6:11-12.

Read Jude 5-8

“For I want to remind you, you all have known, that once the Lord having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, second, the ones who did not believe He destroyed. Even the angels who did not keep their own principality but left their own abode, He has kept in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorra and the cities around them the same way as these living immorally and committing sexual immorality, are set forth as an example, suffering punishment of everlasting fire. In the same way also these too, dreaming, on the one hand defile the flesh, and on the other hand they set aside (heavenly) authority and blaspheme glories.

8. In this section Jude likens the sin of those who have “snuck in” to the most evil figures in the Old Testament, and likens their punishment to that of the condemned.

9. Here Jude calls to mind the single greatest salvific act of God in the Old Testament – the Exodus (see Exodus 12:31-41). Still, of those God delivered, most perished in the desert because of unbelief. (see Numbers 14:26-30; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

10. “Even the angels...He kept in everlasting chains under darkness” – (see Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9)

11. “for the judgment of the great day” – (see Ezekiel 7:15-19; Matthew 8:28-29, 24:29-31; John 12:48)

12. “Sodom and Gomorrah” – (see Genesis 19) These cities, and their fate, are invoked in condemnation of those who “snuck in”.

13. “everlasting fire” – Pastor Braden will explain the Biblical image of the valley of the sons of Hinnom – (see 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 2 Chronicles 33:6). On the consuming fire of the last day, see Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43-49; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 20:10. See also Deuteronomy 9:3, Hebrews 12:29.

14. Jude cites two specific sins committed by those who “snuck in” – they defile the flesh with promiscuity, and they speak openly against heavenly authority.

Read Jude 9

“But Michael the archangel, when disputing with the devil, he debated concerning the body of Moses, he did not dare to pronounce judgment of blasphemy but said “May the Lord rebuke you.”

15. See 2 Peter 2:10b-11.

The Archangel Michael appears in Holy Scripture. His name means “who is like unto God.” (see Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1; Revelation 12:7). Moses died, (see Deuteronomy 32:48-50, 34:1-8). According to Deuteronomy, Moses died, was buried in Moab on Mount Nebo, but no one knows the location of the grave. The dispute that Jude refers to does not occur in Scripture. It is reputedly found in *The Assumption of Moses*, an apocryphal book, although extant fragments end before the account of Moses’ death.

The Assumption of Moses was a first century Jewish document that expands on Deuteronomy 31-34. It was probably written by a patriotic Pharisee desiring to combat the secularization of his religion. The document shows similarities to the Essene writings of Qumran. Originally written in Aramaic or Hebrew, it was translated into Greek and then into Latin. The text is available in English as *The Testament of Moses*.³

Clement (Bishop of Rome, c. 96 A.✠ D.) writes that Jude here “confirms” *The Assumption of Moses*, Origen (of Alexandria, 185-254 A.✠ D.) writes that Jude “reminds” one of *The Assumption of Moses*, Didymus (of Alexandria, 313-398 A.✠ D.) writes that the same word regarding Moses is found in both Jude and *The Assumption of Moses*. None of these patristic sources allege that Jude *uses* or *copies* *The Assumption of Moses*.

Several times in the Old Testament non-Biblical literature is cited (see 1 Kings 14:19, 29). Several times in the New Testament non-Biblical literature is cited (see Acts 17:28 {Epimenides/Aratus}; 1 Corinthians 15:33 {Menander}; and Titus 1:12 {Epimenides}). Note also 2 Timothy 3:8.

Jude’s point in verse 9 is to demonstrate the reason for his restraint in not pronouncing judgment. If the archangel held back even with the devil, so here too St. Jude can only defer to God’s final judgment. He does offer, however, various examples of God’s condemnation to allow the recipients to judge for themselves whether or not to follow the men who “snuck in.” It is important to remember here that St. Jude is canonical, and to hear the Word of God in 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21. Jude’s point is in perfect concert with Matthew 7:1, and with 7:15-16.

Read Jude 10

“But these men, inasmuch as they have not known, blaspheme, inasmuch naturally they understand like the wild beasts, by these they are destroyed.”

³ See *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1. Charlesworth, James, ed. 1983. New York: Doubleday. Pgs 919-934.

16. See 2 Peter 2:12. True knowledge of God is beyond human reason and intellect. Even the wisest unbeliever is destroyed by the very thing he has not known. All men have a natural knowledge of God (Romans 1:18ff), but that is never a saving knowledge. St. Jude's statement in verse 10 can be well applied to most of what is seen in secular media today. It is critical that people of faith not be informed by those who reject God. Consider how our public schools handle the topics of creation, marriage, and abstinence from intimate relations before marriage. From where do you derive what you believe to be true of God?

Read Jude 11-13

“Woe to them, because the way of Cain they journeyed, and they have poured themselves out for the deception of Balaam for wages, and with rebellion of Korah they were destroyed. These are the ones, blemishes, in your love (feasts) feasting with you eating together, unfearing, shepherding themselves, waterless clouds blown away by winds, barren trees of harvest season, twice dying being uprooted, wild waves of a sea foaming of their own shameful deeds, straying stars for whom the gloom of everlasting darkness has been kept.”

17. The way of Cain – see Genesis 4:1-8, Hebrews 11:4.

18. The deception of Balaam for wages – see Numbers 22:4-12, 24:17, 2 Peter 2:15-16

19. ...with rebellion of Korah they were destroyed – see Numbers 16, especially verses 32-33.

20. Citing Cain, Balaam and Korah, Jude has likened the modern offenders to the worst offenders of old. They are against God, against God's appointed leaders, and against God's people, but at once are among them and trying to harm them. The issue, of course, is matters of faith and doctrine – for verse 10 introduces this section.

21. “These are the ones, blemishes, in your love (feasts) feasting with you” – In the Apostolic Church, a “love feast” or “agape meal” preceded the daily celebration of Holy Communion. See Acts 2: 42-47; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. After time, the agape meals were discontinued (perhaps as the Church got large) and Holy Communion was moved to Sundays without the agape meal.

22. Blemishes – this word, as several others in the Epistle of Jude, occurs only here in the New Testament. More than just “eye sores”, they actually ruined the event by their

presence, as a blemish would make a sacrifice unworthy – see 2 Peter 2:13; Ephesians 5:25-27 (but note that in the Greek the word is slightly different in 2 Peter and Ephesians than in Jude).

23. Jude now offers seven other metaphors for the men who have “snuck in”: *unfearing, shepherding themselves, waterless clouds blown away by winds, barren trees of harvest season, twice dying being uprooted, wild waves of a sea foaming of their own shameful deeds, straying stars for whom the gloom of everlasting darkness has been kept.*”

How would you describe these men? What is their inevitable end? See Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:13

Jude 14-16

“Also, Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied these things saying: ‘Behold, the Lord came with His holy myriads to make judgment down upon all, to convict every ungodly (man/soul) concerning all their ungodly works, which they did in an ungodly way, and concerning all of the hard things which they spoke openly against Him, ungodly sinners.’ These are habitually grumbling complainers, proceeding according to their own lusts, their boastful mouths openly speaking, flattering for the advantage of gain.”

24. Here Jude quotes *The Book of Enoch*. This book is not a Biblical book. It is an apocryphal book of approximately the first century B.C. See the discussion of the Apocrypha in our introduction, and our discussion of the Assumption of Moses in verse 9 (question 15). Just as St. Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, cites Jannes and Jambres, who occur nowhere in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:8), so here St. Jude, writing by the Holy Spirit, includes a quote by Enoch.

Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh (approx. 2700 B.C., Sumerian, cuneiform) includes the account of a man directed by his god to build a boat and place all living beings in it. A huge flood comes, and “all men turn to clay”, except those on the boat. After floating for a time, the man sends out a dove, a swallow, and a raven to see if the waters have receded. Finally the raven proves that there is dry land, and the man offers sacrifices to his god. What does this remind you of? Was there really a flood? How do you know? Should the Epic of Gilgamesh inform our understanding of Genesis 6-8? Why? (see 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21). How does this relate to Jude 14-16?

25. Enoch – See Genesis 15:21-25. In the genealogy of Noah, the “seventh from Adam” (counting Adam) is Enoch. In the genealogy of Cain, the “seventh from Adam” by the same counting is Lamech (see Genesis 4:19-24, see also Matthew 18:21-22). Two distinct “families” emerge in the Genesis genealogies: the sons of God (the Church, Noah’s descendants) and the sons of men (those outside the Church, Cain’s descendants). See Genesis 6:1-8. What is the context of Jude’s citation of Enoch? (Hint: previously Jude mentions Cain, Balaam and Korah.)

26. *“These are habitually grumbling complainers, proceeding according to their own lusts, their boastful mouths openly speaking, flattering for the advantage of gain.”* The reference is to the men who “snuck in,” see verse 4. Have you witnessed such behavior? What would the opposite of such behavior be? See Galatians 5:19-26. “By their fruits you will know them” says our Lord. (Matthew 7:15-20)

Jude 17-23

“But you, beloved, remember the words, the ones spoken before, by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they said to you: “In the last times there will be mockers according to their own desires, ones who walk in godlessness. These are the ones causing divisions, unspiritual (men), not having (the) Spirit. But you, beloved, keep building yourselves up in the sanctity of your faith, praying by means of the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto everlasting life. And, on the one hand, show mercy, discerning; but on the other hand save (others) from the fire, taking (them) by force; and be merciful in fear, hating even the tunic stained by the flesh.”

27. Read 2 Peter 3:2-4. Compare with this section.

28. Jude directs the recipients of his Epistle to the Words of the Apostles. See Acts 2:42. It is the same for us today. Where might we find these Words?

29. “...they said to you:” Regarding “the last times”, see Acts 2:17-20. Regarding the evil of those (these) days, see 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

30. The ones who cause divisions: See 1 Corinthians 1:10; Romans 16:17; 2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

31. “Unspiritual”, see James 3:14-16.

32. “Keep building yourselves up”, see Ephesians 4:11-15; Colossians 2:6-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

33. “Praying by means of the Holy Spirit”, see Ephesians 6:18, Romans 8:26-27.