



# Reflections on Jude

Don Merritt

## Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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## **Jude: An Introduction**

Jude is a strange little letter, nestled between 3 John and Revelation. It is seldom quoted, and sermons and studies of it are rarer still. It could be that it is neglected because of its size, only 25 verses, or its location, or because it is so similar to 2 Peter 2. A more likely reason could be that it is just strange.

We don't know for sure who wrote it, nor can we be certain of when it was written, nor can we quite understand some of its quotations, but we do know why it was written, for it was written to warn against false teachers. We will consider these unanswered questions as we continue through it, and we'll begin with author and date right here and now.

### ***Who was Jude?***

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James*

#### Jude 1a

Jude and Judas are forms of the name Judah, and we know Judah was one of the sons of Jacob and one of the tribes of Israel. There are four men mentioned in the New Testament named Jude or Judas who could be the author.

1. He could be Jude, brother of Jesus. Mark 6:3 lists four brothers of Jesus, including Jude and James.
2. Judas son of James is mentioned in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13; this guy was an apostle. Some have suggested that the Greek is a little tricky and he could be the brother of James rather than the son of James, but personally, I don't think so. Even if the Greek was tricky, the author of Jude doesn't say he is an apostle; in fact he speaks of the apostles in v. 17 as though he weren't one of them.
3. Judas Barnabas is mentioned in Acts 15:22 and maybe he was a "brother" of James in the sense of a brother in Christ rather than as a literal physical brother. That idea seems unlikely since "brother of" in the Greek appears more of an identification used to identify a literal brother.
4. Judas of Damascus from Acts 9 is the other one, but it would seem that he is way too obscure to have written an authoritative letter to a church, and oh, by the way, was he even a believer?

With these choices, it seems to me that our author must have been a half-brother of Jesus and brother of James. Some have also suggested that "Jude" could be a pen name for someone, but for me that involves way too much speculation to be considered, unless someone can find some evidence somewhere.

## **When was *this* written?**

Beats me! If we are right about which Jude wrote it, then it must have been between 55 and 80. Since he identified himself as the brother of James, we might think it would have been within James' lifetime, so that narrows it down to 62 or before. Some have even suggested it might have been written in the second century by an entirely different Jude. I doubt that, but the truth is we really can't be certain.

## **Off to a quick start!**

Jude gives us a typical greeting in the first 2 verses, telling us who is writing and extending his good wishes in love to his recipients. Then he quickly moves to his purpose for writing:

*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*

### Jude 3-4

Although he wanted to write to them about the salvation we share in Christ, events have intervened. Notice the words he uses here, he felt "compelled" to write them to "urge" them to "contend" for the faith; words that imply a crisis of some sort. "Contend" comes from a word that would normally be used in either a military or athletic contest. Yes, there would seem to be a crisis at hand.

That faith he wants them to contend for is the faith that was "once for all" entrusted to "God's holy people."

This statement is reminiscent of John's "as you have heard from the beginning" the message of faith had been given to them by others when they came to believe the gospel; it does not change. You could say that Jude isn't going for any of the present-day notions of progressive revelation wherein the message changes or evolves over time. The gospel is the gospel, once and for all time.

There seems to have been certain people who have come within the church who have ideas about changing the message. We can clearly see two things from verse 4: These people wish to abuse the liberty we have in Christ to engage in immoral practices, and to deny Christ. At this point, they sound quite a bit like "antichrist" in 1 and 2 John, and you will recall that they were Gnostics.

There is always a tension between liberty and going too far. We have a great freedom in Christ, since the Law is gone and His laws are "written on their hearts." Can you have one "law" and I another— scholars have debated this for centuries: What really is the difference between

"liberty" and "license"? In verse 4 it would appear that one field of conflict was that of sexual immorality, one that will be repeated in the verses that follow, and one that is very much under discussion in our day. Where is that line?

In recent centuries in Western culture, particularly in the US, that line was well-defined with lists of things you mustn't do: "Don't smoke or chew or go with girls who do" is one of the more amusing of these. I prefer another approach: Does an action glorify God? Does it build up His Kingdom, or will it tear the Kingdom apart? Apparently Jude felt strongly that the Kingdom was in jeopardy.

### **It's Getting Serious**

*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

#### Jude 5-7

Jude isn't messing around in this letter; he gets right into his indictment of false teachers and frauds. In this paragraph, he cites three Old Testament examples to make the point that his recipients had best not listen to these people. There is an underlying premise in all of this that isn't entirely expressed, at least not for a modern audience. The only "new truth" comes from false teachers. Their new morality is little more than an old immorality (cf. Galatians 1:9; 1 John 2:19-28) If you are like most modern people, your defenses are up and there are warning lights going off in your head, but hang with me for a moment.

Jude mentioned in verses 3-4 that there are people in his readers' midst who are trying to pervert the gospel message they have been entrusted with, just as John told his readers that they should hold to the gospel teachings they heard in the beginning and Paul also gave to his readers similar warnings. So, if someone comes up with a different gospel, then it can't be right, for the gospel is "once for all". Leaving the gospel behind, along with the teachings of Christ will have certain consequences; Jude begins to make his case here with three examples from the past:

The first example comes from the story of the Exodus. God saved the people from Egypt and delivered the promised land to them, but they were too afraid to enter it. Only Joshua and Caleb entered the land ultimately, for God led the people through the Wilderness for the next 40 years in punishment for their disobedience. You might recall that this same example was used in Hebrews 3 and 4 to make the same point.

The next example is that of angels who rebelled against God. They fell from their high position and await their doom.

Finally, he uses the example of Sodom and Gomorrah where the people turned their backs on God's ways and fell into immorality, the result apparently of a "new truth" discovery. They lost their relationship with God and were consumed by His judgment.

I would like to call to your attention something that might not have occurred to some: In each of these three cases, those involved turned their backs on a relationship with God that they had. The Israelites refused to accept the promised land, a covenant promise God made to Abraham and his descendants who turned their backs on the covenant when they refused to enter. The angels mentioned had a high place in heaven, but they turned their backs on this relationship when they decided they would take God's place. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had favor with God until they turned their backs on Him and decided that they would decide what is right and what is wrong.

Do you remember how verse 4 ends? Here's the whole verse, pay special attention to the end:

*For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord*

Jude's point is that these teachers with their "new truth" are trying to make the people deny Jesus Christ by their actions which would amount to a repudiation of their covenant relationship. In Scripture, this is always a very big deal: In life, it is the way to destruction.

### **Powerful Stuff!**

Jude 8-10

These verses are quite something; Jude has an interesting way with words...

*In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings.*

### Jude 8

Our journey begins with connective language indicating that Jude's opponents are doing the same thing that was being done in the previous verses, separating people from their relationships with God. Please keep in mind as we continue, that the issue here for Jude isn't so much that these people are doing improper things, but that they are encouraging others to turn their backs on their covenant relationship with Christ.

These dreamers (or on the strength of their dreams) is another interesting turn of phrase. The Israelites were warned against prophets and dreamers who would lead them into rebellion against God. (Deut. 13:15; Jer. 27:9) It seems that these false prophets, based upon dreams were leading the people away from their covenant relationship, just as Jude is claiming about the first century false teachers. Further, these people are "ungodly" and "pollute their own

bodies" and do not respect authority. This pollution is a reference to their immoral sexual practices.

They also reject authority. The word rendered "authority" here is *kyriotēs* meaning "dominion, power, lordship" and is rendered "powers" in Col. 1:16 and "dominion" in Eph. 1:21. This is a reference to angelic beings, like those spoken of in Heb. 2:2 "message spoken by angels". In short, the "authority" they are rejecting is that of the angels of God who brought the Law to the people; the very morality they are flaunting in their behavior. These people are heaping abuse on the messengers of God Himself!

*But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"*

#### Jude 9

These people are so out of line in heaping their abuse on angels, they are doing something that the Archangel Michael wouldn't even do to Satan. Jude is recalling a story that is not found anywhere in Scripture. According to the early writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Didymus, Jude found this account in *The Assumption of Moses*, a Jewish work dating from the first century that currently exists in fragment form.

*Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them.*

#### Jude 10

These characters slander what they don't understand. I would think that a Christian of our age would understand exactly what is meant here, for we deal with that almost every day in the popular media. What these characters understand by instinct, like any animal would, will destroy them. Yes, they apparently understand sex, and their immorality will be their undoing.

#### **Woe!**

*Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.*

#### Jude 11

Jude has been giving his readers a strong warning about false teachers in their midst, and in the process of doing so, he has made the case that these teachers are in danger of severe and lasting consequences; destruction, in fact. Here in verse 11, Jude turns up the heat another notch, using three more Biblical examples to illustrate his point.

The word "woe" is used many times in the Old Testament to indicate God's judgment. In the New Testament, Jesus uses it in the same way in Matthew 11:21; 23:13-32; and Luke 11:42-52. Woe = judgment.

The first example in this verse is that of Cain. This is particularly interesting in that we don't usually associate the story of Cain in Genesis 4:1-16 as an example of a false teacher. It's hard to say exactly what Jude was thinking, but there are a couple of possibilities that come to mind.

By the first century, there was a strong Jewish rabbinical tradition that identified Cain as the first heretic, as discussed in the writings of Philo (20 B.C. - 50 A.D.). In this tradition, Cain's way is portrayed as one of selfishness and sensuality. It is also possible that Jude was thinking of Cain here as an example of one who brought harm to his brother, as he has portrayed the false teachers as men bringing harm to their brethren. It is important for us to note here that heresy is much more than a sincere error in understanding. As was the case with Cain, it is the willful and deliberate disobedience of God with very harmful consequences to others.

The next example mentioned is Balaam's error. This comes from Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16. Jude's false teachers, like Balaam, have claimed to be prophets ("dreamers" v. 8) have led others into sexual immorality (vv. 4, 8) and out of their own greed have rushed into error, committing idolatry by denying Christ (v. 4).

Finally, he cites Korah's rebellion from Numbers 16. Korah and his followers rebelled against Moses and God, and promoting self by resisting authority is a characteristic of false teachers. (cf. Titus 1:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:19; 3 John 9-10) Korah's rebellion was destroyed by God with fire, and Jude has certainly made the case that the false teachers he is opposing will be destroyed by God.

Cain, Balaam and Korah are all examples of rebellion against God, and all three caused great harm to their brothers. All three faced destruction, and Jude's whole point is that false teachers were doing the same thing, with the same consequences in the church. It's a worthwhile exercise for us to ask ourselves who brought this judgment upon these people. Today we sometimes hear people complain that God is way too vengeful, that He is not a loving God because He wants to judge people harshly, they might even say that He is a vengeful and angry God always on the lookout for someone to smite.

Such statements are nothing more than the devil's lie! Our God is most definitely a God of love; He IS love! Did God lead people into rebellion? Did God not warn that these kinds of things bring problems? Did He not send prophet after prophet to warn the people in the Old Testament? Did He not send His Son to die for our sins to save us? Who chose the wrong path, God or the people involved? Who refused to listen to reason, preferring to stick their middle fingers in God's face in reply to His pleadings that they turn around and come back to His love?

It wasn't God who chose the path of destruction, that's for sure; it was the people with their fingers in the air who made all of the choices. Why is Jude going on so about all of this? Is it because he's oppressive, repressive and intolerant? Hardly! He was God's agent bringing

God's warning and pleading with the people to come back to God's love. Did he succeed? I don't know, I'd guess that some responded and others did not. A more relevant question is this: What will we do?

### **Bonus Topic: Jude and Peter**

Why are Jude 4-16 and 2 Peter 2:1-18 so similar?

There are many parallel passages in Scripture, but these two are more than just parallel, they are almost the same, close enough anyway that this deserves a look. Over the centuries there have been many theories and discussions among scholars of various doctrinal views, and while I'm happy to let them speak for themselves, I guess I should toss my thoughts out for your consideration, and then let you decide for yourself what you think. If your ultimate conclusion is something like "Who cares? I'll just study His Word and do my best to be like Jesus" then you are probably wiser than the scholars...

It would seem to me there are four reasonable possibilities for this similarity:

First this could just be a coincidence. Jude and Peter both wanted to address a similar problem and came up with almost the same discussion. Maybe God inspired them both to write the same thing... We should probably not assume that inspiration is quite the same thing as dictation, however. This really isn't likely when you consider how close the two passages are.

Second. Jude and Peter could both have taken this material from a third document. Say for instance that Bob sent them both the same letter, and then each one re-wrote it and sent it to their friends. If something like that happened, Bob's letter is nowhere to be found, and have you ever heard of Bob? (OK, I made that one up, but you get the idea) This scenario strikes me as pretty unlikely, especially since it would have made up nearly all of Jude's letter.

Third. Jude could have read Peter's letter and adapted 2:1-18 into his own letter; quite a few scholars like this one. However, it is unusual for one writer to adapt something from another writer and shorten a passage in the process; they usually expand on the original. Having some practical experience in this area myself, I can attest to the fact that unless the original is excessively wordy, that's hard to do.

Fourth. Peter could have read Jude's letter and expanded on it in his second letter to fit a slightly different situation. I'm not a betting man, but if I were, this would be my choice.

I flipped through a few respected commentaries on this topic before I wrote this, commentaries from more than one doctrinal view, and I was amazed at how certain commentators will announce to their readers that such and such is an obvious fact as though they knew the

answer for a fact; such confidence! The only problem with this is that they don't know it for a fact; no one does. If you are a "regular" Christian, and by that I mean a "non-academic" Christian, as opposed to one with a wall full of degrees from seminaries, I have a valuable tip for you, ready?

Beware commentators, preachers and teachers who always "know" every answer and who cannot or will not admit that sometimes they are going with their best guess. The truth is that there are some little issues, such as this one, that we just don't know for certain.

(No extra charge for the tip, it's your lucky day)

### **Bonus Topic: Extra-Biblical Sources in Jude**

Jude does an interesting thing in his letter, he uses a non-Biblical source as though it were from Scripture, and he does so not once, but twice in a 25 verse letter. Why does he do that? Should that place the letter in doubt as to its inerrancy? Let's take a look...

We've already seen the first of these in verse 9 when he mentions the story of Michael the Archangel struggling with Satan over the body of Moses. No doubt you will recall that this is found in a paragraph connected with a series of Biblical examples and connected by "in the same way" an unusual context to say the least. As I mentioned at the time, this story is found in a work called *The Assumption of Moses* written early in the first century. The second use of a non-Biblical account is to be found in verses 14-15 where Jude actually quotes from the *Book of Enoch*, sometimes called *1 Enoch*, which was written by multiple authors in the second century B.C.

These two books are part of what scholars call the *pseudepigrapha*, which is comprised of writings that are attributed to Old Testament characters but actually written at a later date by other authors. These works were well-known in the first century, and other New Testament writers may have been familiar with them, and may even have been influenced by them, but Jude alone quotes directly from one of them and identifies it as a prophecy. Many people have been disturbed by this over the years, and it has produced some interesting discussion. For instance, Tertullian ((A.D. 160-220) argued that *1 Enoch* should be considered inspired since Jude quoted it. On the other hand, Jerome (A.D. 342-420) reported that there were those who rejected Jude's letter because he quoted it. Personally, I think they might have both been operating under a false premise, that Jude quoted it as inspired at all; this isn't necessarily the case.

Other New Testament writers quoted non-inspired authors because they considered them to be right and useful, if not inspired. Paul for instance, quoted three Greek poets. In Titus 1:12 he calls the Greek poet Epimenides a prophet since Cretans accepted him as such. The particular quote "Cretans are always liars..." was also an accurate statement. He also quoted Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Aratus in Acts 17:28.

It's quite likely that Jude respected *The Book of Enoch* and considered the "prophecy" to be an accurate one without accepting it as divinely inspired, just as we might quote C.S. Lewis or R.C. Sproul today in making a point. Indeed, I myself have quoted Harry Truman in my writings more than once, because I felt that the remark I quoted was one of great truth and insight: "*The only thing worth knowing is what you learn after you already know it all.*" President Truman was no prophet and I have never suspected his comments were divinely inspired, and if I had been around back in 1948, I probably would have voted for Dewey, but he sure got that one right!

At any rate, I do not think Jude's quotes should lessen our respect for the authority of his letter; his message is a vitally important one for us, as it was in the first century: Beware of false teachers!

### **Tell Us How You Really Feel!**

*These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

Jude 12-13

As Jude begins to wrap up his indictment of the false teachers in the church, he uses a battery of metaphors to describe them, beginning with "blemishes at your love feasts." This is the only place in the New Testament where the expression "love feast" is used, but the practice is discussed in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22. In the first century many congregations observed communion in the context of a larger meal where fellowship among believers was expressed and the poor were fed. Indications are that in the second century, these meals were separated from communion into two different occasions.

Other than that, I think Jude's metaphors are pretty self-explanatory, and we easily can see his disdain for false teachers. In the next short paragraph, things get interesting...

*Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.*

Jude 14-16

This is one of Jude's uses of extra-Biblical source I mentioned earlier; it might help you with this section to go back to it if you don't remember it. Here Jude uses this quote from *1 Enoch*, and in so doing, he is summing up his case against the false teachers. That these people have run well

afoul of the Lord is made abundantly clear with the reminder that they are headed for a fiery judgment.

That there is false teaching in the world around us should come as no surprise. Since "the world around us" is generally understood to mean that which is apart from Christ and the community of believers is clear enough, so apart from Him what kind of teaching would we expect to find? The thing that has Jude writing a letter of this sort is that these false teachers are within the Body of believers, passing themselves off as followers of Christ, while teaching people to rebel against Him. Ah yes, this is a different matter entirely.

Do we have such people within the larger Christian community today? Before you answer that one, please keep in mind that Jude isn't accusing them of making mistakes, being confused or being in error unintentionally. His whole premise is that they are deliberately trying to pry people away from the truth for the purpose of deceiving them into turning their backs on their relationship with Christ; serious indeed, the devil's work. So, do we have this problem today? If so, how will we respond to it?

Something to carefully consider.

In the next section, Jude moves into his closing in a wonderful way.

**"But dear friends..."**

*But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

Jude 17-19

Jude is sharing his final thoughts now, thoughts that are both encouraging and practical. The first of these is to remember what the Apostles have taught, with a characterization reminiscent of both Paul and John, not to mention of Jesus Himself. There will be "scoffers". Jude has already stated that they scoff at Christ, authority, angels and at anything they don't understand. Having rejected any authority, what are they left with? Only their own evil desires with the result that they are teaching others to engage in sexual immorality; how convenient! At the risk of stating the obvious, if a person wants to be sexually immoral, he or she will need someone to do it with... These are people who cause division in the church as they pry some away from the Truth of Christ, and away from godly teaching.

*But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

Jude 20-21

Now Jude turns to the practical: When faced with false teaching of any sort, we have a choice. This is true with any kind of temptation; there is always a choice. We can choose to build ourselves up in our faith and by praying in the Spirit we can keep ourselves in God's loving presence. Over the years I've had conversations with quite a number of people who were struggling with temptations and sin; they just can't seem to shake them off. When I ask how their prayer life is going, they always tell me how strong it is and how great their relationship is with the Lord. At first, this would confuse me, but then I learned to listen more carefully, to ask more questions, and sooner or later they always reveal whether intentionally or not, that they don't have much of a prayer life, if any at all, and that they really don't have much of a relationship with Christ. It always comes down to the same thing in the end, for they are focused almost entirely on themselves.

It doesn't have to be that way!

Start talking to God; work on that relationship. It doesn't need to be anything so formal and difficult, just start talking to Him.

### **To God be the Glory!**

*Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

Jude 22-23

This is Jude's final instruction to his readers. It is a message of love and mercy... and caution. Many will be confused and misled by false teaching, and to them we need to have grace and mercy. We need to help them in love, to recognize the error of the falsehoods they may have fallen prey to, lest they should face an eternal consequence. These are not the teachers; they are the false teachers' victims. Yet in doing this, we should take care that we aren't ourselves victimized by those teachings, for false teaching is contagious. To hammer down this point, Jude engages in a bit of hyperbole when he tells us to hate the clothes stained by "corrupted flesh." I really don't think his intention is to have us "hate" inanimate objects, but rather to take caution as though we were dealing with an infectious disease. If the person had smallpox, they would need care; love and lots of help, for example, but the caregiver would need to be careful to avoid catching the infection themselves.

*To him who is able to keep you from stumbling 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 forevermore! Amen.*

Jude 24-25

Jude concludes with a short Doxology, which is an expression of praise to God. He is the One who can prevent us from stumbling and falling prey to false teaching. He is the One who will

cause us to appear before God holy and pure. Glory, majesty and power to Him through Jesus Christ!

And no more of these false teachers and their nonsense!