Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jude
Scripture: Jude
Code: MSB65

Title

Jude, which is rendered “Judah” in Hebrew and “Judas” in Greek, was named after its author (v. 1), one of the 4 half-brothers of Christ (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). As the fourth shortest NT book (Philem., 2 John, and 3 John are shorter), Jude is the last of 8 general epistles. Jude does not quote the OT directly, but there are at least 9 obvious allusions to it. Contextually, this “epistolary sermon” could be called “The Acts of the Apostates.”

Author and Date

Although Jude (Judas) was a common name in Palestine (at least 8 are named in the NT), the author of Jude generally has been accepted as Jude, Christ’s half-brother. He is to be differentiated from the Apostle Judas, the son of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). Several lines of thought lead to this conclusion: 1) Jude’s appeal to being the “brother of James,” the leader of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and another half-brother of Jesus (v. 1; cf. Gal. 1:19); 2) Jude’s salutation being similar to James (cf. James 1:1); and 3) Jude’s not identifying himself as an apostle (v. 1), but rather distinguishing between himself and the apostles (v. 17).

The doctrinal and moral apostasy discussed by Jude (vv. 4–18) closely parallels that of 2 Peter (2:1–3:4), and it is believed that Peter’s writing predated Jude for several reasons: 1) 2 Peter anticipates the coming of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1,2; 3:3), while Jude deals with their arrival (vv. 4,11,12,17,18); and 2) Jude quotes directly from 2 Pet. 3:3 and acknowledges that it is from an apostle (vv. 17,18). Since no mention of Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70 was made by Jude, though Jude most likely came after 2 Peter (ca. A.D. 68–70), it was almost certainly written before the destruction of Jerusalem. Although Jude did travel on missionary trips with other brothers and their wives (1 Cor. 9:5), it is most likely that he wrote from Jerusalem. The exact audience of believers with whom Jude corresponded is unknown, but seems to be Jewish in light of Jude’s illustrations. He undoubtedly wrote to a region recently plagued by false teachers.

Although Jude had earlier rejected Jesus as Messiah (John 7:1–9), he, along with other half-brothers of our Lord, was converted after Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:14). Because of his relation to Jesus, his eye-witness knowledge of the resurrected Christ, and the content of this epistle, it was acknowledged as inspired and was included in the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170).

The early questions about its canonicity also tend to support that it was written after 2 Peter. If Peter had quoted Jude, there would have been no question about canonicity, since Peter would thereby have given Jude apostolic affirmation. Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 96) plus Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200) also alluded to the authenticity of Jude. Its diminutive size and Jude's quotations from uninspired writings, account for any misplaced questions about its canonicity.

Background and Setting

Jude lived at a time when Christianity was under severe political attack from Rome and aggressive spiritual infiltration from gnostic-like apostates and libertines who sowed abundant seed for a gigantic harvest of doctrinal error. It could be that this was the forerunner to full blown Gnosticism which the Apostle John would confront over 25 years later in his epistles. Except for John, who lived at the close of the century, all of the other apostles had been martyred, and Christianity was thought to be extremely vulnerable. Thus, Jude called the church to fight, in the midst of intense spiritual warfare, for the truth.

Historical and Theological Themes

Jude is the only NT book devoted exclusively to confronting "apostasy," meaning defection from the true, biblical faith (vv. 3,17). Apostates are described elsewhere in 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1–22; 1 John 2:18–23. He wrote to condemn the apostates and to urge believers to contend for the faith. He called for discernment on the part of the church and a rigorous defense of biblical truth. He followed the earlier examples of: 1) Christ (Matt. 7:15ff.; 16:6–12; 24:11ff; Rev. 2,3); 2) Paul (Acts 20:29,30; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; 4:3,4); 3) Peter (2 Pet. 2:1,2; 3:3,4); and 4) John (1 John 4:1–6; 2 John 6–11).

Jude is replete with historical illustrations from the OT which include: 1) the Exodus (v. 5); 2) Satan's rebellion (v. 6); 3) Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7); 4) Moses' death (v. 9); 5) Cain (v. 11); 6) Balaam (v. 11); 7) Korah (v. 11); 8) Enoch (vv. 14,15); and 9) Adam (v. 14).

Jude also vividly described the apostates in terms of their character and unconscionable activities (vv. 4,8,10,16,18,19). Additionally, he borrowed from nature to illustrate the futility of their teaching (vv. 12,13). While Jude never commented on the specific content of their false teaching, it was enough to demonstrate that their degenerate personal lives and fruitless ministries betrayed their attempts to teach error as though it were truth. This emphasis on character repeats the constant theme regarding false teachers—their personal corruption. While their teaching is clever, subtle, deceptive, enticing, and delivered in myriads of forms, the common way to recognize them is to look behind their false spiritual fronts and see their wicked lives (2 Pet. 2:10,12,18,19).

Interpretive Challenges

Because there are no doctrinal issues discussed, the challenges of this letter have to do with interpretation in the normal process of discerning the meaning of the text. Jude does quote from non-canonical, pseudepigraphal (i.e., the actual author was not the one named in its title) sources such as 1 Enoch (v. 14) and the Assumption of Moses (v. 9) to support his points. Was this acceptable? Since Jude was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20,21) and included material that was accurate and true in its affirmations, he did no differently than Paul (cf. Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12).

Outline

I. Desires of Jude (1,2)

II. Declaration of War Against Apostates (3,4)

III. Damnable Outcome of Apostates (5–7)

IV. Denunciation of Apostates (8–16)

V. Defenses Against Apostates (17–23)

VI. Doxology of Jude (24,25)

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).