

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE LETTER OF JUDE

Imagine growing up with Jesus as your big brother! When Jude finally discovered the true identity of his half-brother, consider how proud he would have been. Then why when he came to write his short letter did he not make sure everyone knew how important he was? He gave us just two clues to his family connection. He described himself as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, a common title early Christian leaders used, (Rom. 1:1) to compare themselves to the slaves in Israel who had been freed but chose to continue to serve the Master because they wanted to. (Exod. 21:5,6) The second clue was 'the brother of James'. But which James? James the son of Zebedee is only recorded as having one brother, the apostle John, and that James was an early martyr at the hands of Herod. (Acts 12:2) James the son of Alphaeus was another apostle but there is no mention of him having a brother. The leading James through the book of Acts was James, the Lord's brother. (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19) He later also became a New Testament writer. (James 1:1) The final answer is in the list of Jesus' brothers – 'James, and Joseph, and Simon and Judas.' (Matt. 13:55) Jude is an alternative spelling of Judas.

Jude has an interesting way of describing his fellow believers, 'called, beloved and kept for Jesus Christ'. (v.1) This would have special meaning for him as he thought back on the way he and his brothers had initially refused God's calling, regarding Jesus as crazy and wanting to stop Him being a family embarrassment. (Mk. 3:21; Jn. 7:3-5) Jesus had continued to love him and included him in the little group who later would be waiting for the giving of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:14)

Like many other New Testament writers he chose several words to sum up the gospel. His preference was for - mercy - we escape the judgement we richly deserve, - peace – the war with God is over, and - love – the love of God which is boundless and conditional only on our willingness to receive it. All three are multiplied to us, not sparingly rationed out. (v.2)

All of us are saved in the same way by faith. Being one of Jesus' birth family had not made Jude a favourite. But all of us as saints, those belonging only to God, will have to fight for the faith we have once and for all received. The rest of the letter describes the battle to be fought. The enemies are insiders who have quietly crept into the church, known to God but often unrecognised by us. There are two hallmarks of their strategy, their attitude to grace and their attitude to Jesus. Some religious people had rejected grace as given by God, preferring their own effort under the Law but others had perverted grace into a licence to do what they like instead of being God's resource to live as He wants. The other enemy weapon was to deny Jesus in one or more aspects whether His work as Creator, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His teaching, His death in our place on the cross, His bodily resurrection, His return to heaven, His coming into believers as the Holy Spirit or His promised return. (v.3,4)

Jude used a series of Old Testament stories to illustrate the twin attacks on grace and the Lordship of Jesus. The whole Israelite nation had walked through the Red Sea to escape the land of Egypt but then time and again some of them doubted God, rebelled and grumbled

against God and Moses.(Exod.15,16,17,32) In the same way, unseen on earth, even angels led by Satan decided to do things their way and so faced ultimate judgement and exclusion from heaven.(Isa.14:12; Ezek.28:12-19, II Pet.2:4; Rev.20:2) The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah,(Gen.18,19) chose so to pervert God's purpose in creating them from a sexual point of view that they too would face the judgment of God.(v.5-7) The false teachers of Jude's time had the same attitude. They thought they knew better than God. By doing so they 'defile the flesh.' Defile is to 'stain'. They 'reject authority'. Reject is to 'set aside'. They 'revile angelic majesties'. Revile is to 'blaspheme, or slander'. False teaching has always taken the same three steps, first to attack human life, then the relationship with God and finally God Himself.

Faced with such outrageous behaviour by false teachers how are we to respond? We might have assumed that we were entitled to hit out at them in whatever way we chose. Jude refers to the 'behind the scenes' conflict for the body of Moses. We are told that the Lord Himself buried Moses in an unmarked grave.(Deut.34:6) The Holy Spirit revealed to Jude the battle which went on to achieve this between the Devil and the archangel Michael, a battle which was recorded on other occasions.(Dan.10:13,21; 12:1) Very simply let God deal with Satan; don't try to do it yourself! Jude compares these false teachers to dangerous untameable animals.(v.8-10)

Jude now uses three more Old Testament stories to show how seriously God takes it when men deny grace and the Lordship of Jesus. The first is in the story of Cain who insisted on offering the grain he grew instead of the lamb God had commanded. When God refused to let him do it his way he saw it as justification to murder his brother.(Gen.4:3-15) The second story is of Balaam who was asked to speak against Israel, refused at first but changed his mind when the price was right, until the Lord spoke through a donkey to warn him.(Num.22,23,31; II Pet.2:15,16; Rev.2:14) The third warning was from the story of Korah who challenged the leadership of Moses and appointed himself and his friends in Moses' place.(Num.16) All three faced judgement and so would the rebels of Jude's day who are vividly compared to a hidden reef in the ocean, clouds that bring no rain, autumn leaves from a tree which had no fruit, wild foaming waves, or wandering stars with no orbit or purpose.(v.11-13)

Again the Spirit gave Jude privileged information not recorded in scripture, this time about the ministry of Enoch who by faith had a special relationship with God, walked with Him and was eventually taken straight to heaven.(Gen.5:21-24; Heb.11:5) It is reasonable to assume that Enoch was God's faithful mouthpiece to all the generations from Adam to Lamech, Noah's father. As well as the good news of salvation through Jesus he had to tell them the bad news of judgement on all men for what they have said and done against Him. This outright opposition to God begins with grumbling and fault finding, following our own opinions, and flattering people to control them.(v.14-16)

Nothing, said Jude, had changed. Peter, Paul, James and John had all warned how the giving of the Holy Spirit would be followed by attack from those who refused the Spirit. The enemies are described as 'mockers', like those Roman soldiers who ridiculed

Jesus.(Matt.27:27-31) Peter said they would particularly rubbish the ideas of creation and the flood and therefore that Jesus would soon return, preferring an endless past and an unknown future.(II Pet.3:3) Their messages would come from their own 'lusts', in other words they would reject God's revelation preferring their own opinions and those of the world around them. They are described as 'worldly-minded' which simply means that their thinking comes from the soul of man rather than the Spirit of God. Their messages would divide men and women instead of uniting them as one in Christ. So how are we to respond? Grow in faith, through listening to God in His word and in prayer, discovering how much the Lord loves us. How are we to deal with the trouble makers? Hate what they teach but at the same time show them mercy because we just might be God's means of rescuing them from hell. Fear God but not false teachers. Reject their messages but love them.(v.17-23)

The Lord alone can protect us from being trapped in man-made nonsense so that we can stand confidently and with a clear conscience before Him. It will be all His doing so He alone should have all the credit, now and forever.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What according to Jude is the heart of our relationship with God? What special advantage had his early life given him in appreciating this message? What warning did he give the people of his day about the threats they would face? What forms do these challenges take these days?(v.1-4)
2. What are the first three examples Jude uses from the Old Testament to illustrate his warning? What was the point of each one? How do the same issues still threaten us today?(v.5-8)
3. In what way do we have to be cautious about dealing with the enemies of the gospel? What further three Old Testament stories does Jude give us to teach us what we are up against? Again relate each warning to today?(v.9-13)
4. What was Enoch's message to the pre-flood generations? Why was it so important? What techniques are used by false teachers to win over their audiences? How are we to respond to them? What is our protection as we seek to do so?(v.14-25)