

**Xenos Christian Fellowship**  
**Christian Ministry 2**  
**Week 5 – Epistles Inductive Study**

Editors' note:

- *Italics (lower case or ALL CAPS) show what students should write in their student outline.*
- **Bold (including bold italics and bold ALL CAPS) shows what appears in the student outline.**
- Regular text is used for lecture notes; ALL CAPS are used for emphasis.

### **Introduction - What is Inductive Study?**

Inductive reasoning is "**the act or process of reasoning from a part to a whole, from particulars to generals, or from the individual to the universal.**"<sup>1</sup>

**Inductive Bible Study is utilizing the details of the text (the particulars) to arrive at the author's intended meaning (the generals).**

### **What is an epistle?**

- **A letter**

When we read an epistle, we're reading someone else's mail! The New Testament Epistles were written by Apostles (e.g. Paul, Peter, John) to individuals (e.g. Timothy, Titus) and to churches in various towns (e.g. Colossae, Philippi) and regions (Galatians). Despite the personal nature of these letters, they are God's Word, just like the rest of scripture (1 Cor. 14:37,38; 2 Pet. 3:15,16).

- **An "occasional document"** – *a document written to address the specific situation, questions & needs of an individual or group.*

Letter writing is usually prompted by a specific *occasion*—circumstances arising in the lives of the recipients or the author. The epistles often contain clues that help us understand what prompted the author to write his letter.

e.g. Paul's letter to the Galatians was prompted by the damaging effect of false teaching on the churches of Galatia. People in these churches were being led into doctrinal error by Judaizers who were insisting that certain Jewish practices were still binding on Christians. See 1:6,7 and 5:7-10.

### **Studying the Epistles**

**The basic unit of study in the epistles is a paragraph.** The original letters didn't

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998.

have paragraph divisions; they were added later. And different translations use different paragraph breakdowns. But if you read the epistles, you can see that they are a series of thoughts/commands, expressed in paragraphs, that work together to make an overall argument.

In order to correctly interpret and apply a paragraph in an epistle, you must study *both* the paragraph itself and the book that contains it. In other words, you have to understand the details in the paragraph AND how the paragraph fits into the book as a whole. Both steps are necessary.

If you were from outer space, and you landed your spaceship on one of the greens of a golf course, you could do a very careful analysis of the type of grass used on the green, the soil beneath it, the burn around the green, the surrounding bunkers, the hole, the flag, and so on. You might even be able to tell that the green is periodically struck by small spherical objects that leave deep impressions in the grass.

This detailed study would be useful, but incomplete. To really understand what a golf green is, you would need to survey the entire golf course. That would help you grasp how a green is the final destination for a golf ball being struck from the tee box. Without that “big picture” you couldn’t fully appreciate the function of different parts of the green (e.g. protective bunkers, the flag, the cup).

We want you to do the same thing with the epistles. We want you to carefully study the paragraph itself and everything in it. But we also want you to understand the book that contains the paragraph. This will help you better understand the content of the paragraph.

To help you reach these two objectives, we will show you how to perform an “Epistle Overview” and a “Paragraph Study.” These simple inductive study techniques will yield rich insights into the passage you are studying. We will practice this inductive method in class over the next four weeks to help you gain confidence in using it.

## **Epistle Overview**

**What are we trying to learn?** An epistle overview will help you grasp the big picture. You will learn...

- *The flow of thought in the book.*
- *The historical situation* – what was happening in the life of the author and his audience that provoked him to write the letter.
- *Why the letter was written.*

The overview will not provide deeper insight into a particular doctrine, nor will it reveal how to apply an individual passage to your own life. In fact, we want to purposefully stay away from these things. But it will give you the background needed to understand individual paragraphs.

Doing an overview takes some time, but it is very easy to do. If you can master this technique alone, your understanding of the epistles will grow enormously.

**1. Paragraph titles:** Read the book all the way through, writing down titles for each paragraph. This reveals the general thought development of the book. You may disagree with your Bible's paragraph divisions. Titles should meet the following requirements:

- **The titles should be short.** Avoid long titles. A phrase or short sentence is the maximum length.
- **The titles should cover most of the significant content in the paragraph.**

**2. Information about the author, audience, and 3rd parties:** The author is the person who wrote the letter. The audience is the individual or group of people to whom the letter was written. Key third parties are PEOPLE (not God, angels, Satan, etc.) that the author mentions more than once in his letter. These can be groups (e.g. false teachers) or individuals (e.g. Euodia and Syntyche in Phil. 4; Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1). There is usually one key third party.

Draw three or more columns on a sheet of paper – one for the author, one for the audience, and one or more for key third parties. Reference each observation with the chapter and verse. If your observation is implied rather than stated, mark your observation with an asterisk.

**NOTE: Do steps 1 and 2 together as you read through the letter paragraph-by-paragraph.**

**3. Summary of the historical situation:** When you are finished filling out each column, draw on the observations you have made and write a one paragraph summary of each person or group in your chart. Observations marked with an asterisk should be stated tentatively (e.g. "Paul may have..."). Now you have a better understanding of what was happening to the author and his audience when the letter was written. This will help you more accurately interpret the details of the paragraph you are about to study.

**4. Author's purpose for writing the letter:** Record your conclusions about the author's reason(s) for writing the book.

## **Jude Overview**

Let's try this technique with the book of Jude. It's just 25 verses long, so we should be able to do this together in class.

### **1. Paragraph titles**

**Vs. 1,2:** *Greetings.*

**V. 3:** *Fight for the faith!*

- V. 4:** *God has written about judgment of licentious false teachers*  
**Vs. 5-7:** *God judged such people in Old Testament times*  
**Vs. 8-13:** *God will also judge these false teachers*  
**Vs. 14-16:** *God predicted in “Enoch” that He will judge such people*  
**Vs. 17-19:** *The apostles warned of people like this*  
**Vs. 20,21:** *Keep yourselves in God’s love!*  
**Vs. 22,23:** *Reach out to those harmed by the false teachers*  
**Vs. 24,25:** *Farewell*

## 2. Information about the author, audience and 3rd parties

- **Author:** *Jude (1:1)*
- **Audience:** *Believers in a local church or area (1:2)*
- **3<sup>rd</sup> parties:** *The primary 3rd party in this book is a group of false teachers.*

Paragraph Titles	Author: Jude	Audience: A Church	3 <sup>rd</sup> Party: False Teachers
<b>Vs. 1,2:</b> <i>Greeting</i>	<b>V. 1:</b> <i>servant of Jesus &amp; brother of James</i>	<b>V. 1:</b> <i>believers in Jesus Christ</i>	
<b>V. 3:</b> <i>Fight for the faith!</i>	<b>V. 3:</b> <i>was going to write a more general letter, but then decided to write this exhortation</i>		
<b>V. 4:</b> <i>God has written about judgment of licentious false teachers</i>			<b>V. 4:</b> <i>crept in unnoticed</i> <b>V. 5:</b> <i>pervert grace into license &amp; deny Jesus Christ</i>
<b>Vs. 5-7:</b> <i>God judged such people in Old Testament times</i>		<b>V. 5:</b> <i>already instructed in doctrine</i>	
<b>Vs. 8-13:</b> <i>God will also judge these false teachers</i>			<b>V. 8:</b> <i>promote sexual immorality</i> <b>V. 8:</b> <i>reject (apostolic) authority &amp; cite dreams as basis of authority</i> <b>V. 8:</b> <i>revile angels(?)</i> <b>V. 10:</b> <i>revile doctrine that they are unable to understand, while they advocate destructive sensuality</i> <b>V. 11:</b> <i>repeat the sins of Old Testament rebels</i>

			<b>V. 12:</b> <i>subtle; bold; selfish; appear "spiritual"</i>
<b>Vs. 14-16:</b> <i>God predicted in "Enoch" that He will judge such people</i>			<b>V. 16:</b> <i>cut down existing leadership</i> <b>V. 16:</b> <i>motivated by lust</i> <b>V. 16:</b> <i>boastful &amp; flattering people to use them</i>
<b>Vs. 17-19:</b> <i>The apostles warned of people like this</i>		<b>V. 17:</b> <i>already instructed in doctrine</i> <b>V. 19*:</b> <i>divided</i>	<b>V. 19:</b> <i>cause divisions</i> <b>V. 19:</b> <i>do not possess the Holy Spirit</i>
<b>Vs. 20,21:</b> <i>Keep yourselves in God's love!</i>			
<b>Vs. 22,23:</b> <i>Reach out to those harmed by the false teachers!</i>		<b>Vs. 22,23:</b> <i>some are wavering &amp; some have been picked off by the false teachers</i>	
<b>Vs. 24,25:</b> <i>Farewell</i>			

### 3. Summary of the historical situation

Jude	Church	False Teachers
Jude is a Christian leader and brother of James (evidently a well-known leader). He was going to write them a general doctrinal letter, but wrote this instead when news of their peril reached him.	They are Christians who have been instructed in Christian doctrine, but have been weakened by false teachers. They have evidently lost some of their own to the false teachers.	They teach license (sexual immorality, etc.), deny Jesus as Lord and Master, and advocate rebellion against God. They reject apostolic authority, citing dreams as their source. They pass themselves off as Christian leaders, but they are actually unregenerate.

### 4. Author's purpose for writing the letter

To urge the audience to contend for the gospel against certain false teachers.

### Paragraph Study

Now that we're armed with a fuller understanding of the book as a whole, we're ready to

take a closer look at specific paragraphs. Here are six questions we recommend asking in a thorough paragraph study:

### 1. Language

- **What key words and/or phrases are unfamiliar to me?** Perform word studies *only* on key words that are unfamiliar to you. Look for parallel passages to help explain phrases.

One easy way to perform a word study is to go to [www.biblos.com](http://www.biblos.com). Key in the verse (upper-left). Then click on the “interlinear” tab, and find the word you want to study. Then click on the number above that word. This will take you to a screen that shows the other places in the Bible where this word is used (right side). It will also show you the range of meaning for the word from several reference works.

Remember that every word has a range of meaning (semantic range). This is what the above study will establish for you. The immediate context is the most important clue to the word’s meaning in your passage. After that, consider the way the same author uses the word (if applicable). Last of all, consider how other biblical authors use the word.

- If the author employs a non-straightforward style, does this affect the interpretation? For example, when Paul uses ironic sarcasm in 2 Cor. 11:4,19,20; 12:13, his meaning is actually the opposite of what he says. The use of parable, diatribe or poetry might also affect your understanding of the passage. This is rarely an issue in epistles.

### 2. Historical

- **What does this paragraph tell me about the author, audience, or third party?** This is a quick review of your inductive overview, which reminds you of the letter’s original setting.
- **What do I need to research in order to understand the historical/cultural context?**

If relevant, use a Bible dictionary to explain other historical references not covered by your overview (e.g., “praetorian guard” in Phil. 1:13).

### 3. Theological

- **What does this paragraph teach about theological truths such as the nature of God, sin, man, Satan, salvation, the church, and the Christian life?** This is the key information we’re trying to learn in the paragraph study. It is important to limit your observations to the information in the paragraph at hand and the preceding paragraphs.
- **Look especially for the theological truth(s) that the paragraph is emphasizing.** Clues for finding the main truth include:

Answers the “What?” question (e.g., Phil. 2:12b)

Is a command (e.g. Phil. 2:12b)

Is at the beginning of the paragraph (e.g., Eph. 1:3)

Is repeated in the paragraph (e.g., ???)

#### 4. Strategic

- **How does this paragraph fit into the purpose(s) of the author for this book?**  
How does it follow from preceding paragraphs and/or prepare for following paragraphs? This question often gives depth to your interpretation and ensures that your application is legitimate. Skimming your paragraph titles and author’s purpose (inductive overview) may help you here.

#### 5. Contemporary Application

- **How does the theology in this paragraph apply to our world today?** What current lies (e.g., culturally accepted values or practices, philosophical systems, psychological assumptions, religious beliefs and practices [including the Church]) does the theological content of this paragraph refute? This question helps you to see and feel the importance and relevance of the theological content. This will change depending on your awareness of and spiritual sensitivity to the state of the culture and the Church.

#### 6. Personal Application

- **How does the theology of this paragraph apply to my own life and ministry?**  
What are its implications for my sin-problems, relationships and general spiritual growth? What are its implications in the same areas for the people in your ministry? What steps of faith does it call me/others to take? This will change depending on the specific conditions of your spiritual life, God’s personal conviction, etc.

### Paragraph Study: Jude 1:20-23

#### 1. Language

- **“your most holy faith”** probably refers to the content of the gospel (1:3 “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints”)
- **“fire”** is probably used figuratively to refer to God’s judgment
- **“garment polluted by the flesh”** is figurative for sinful deeds, lifestyle, etc.

#### 2. Historical

- **The audience is “beloved” by Jude and refers to faithful Christians.**
- **Three kinds of people who need the church’s help:** “doubters” (still in fellowship, but wavering?), those in the “fire” (non-Christians), and those whose “garments are polluted by the flesh” (deeply damaged/deceived by sinful lifestyle, false doctrine, etc.)

### 3. Theological

- **A key responsibility for Christians is to “keep ourselves in the love of God” – staying focused on and anchored in God’s love for us.** The fact that Jude strongly urges this implies that true Christians can easily stray from this focus! Three ways of doing this are building ourselves up with the gospel (the message of God’s love for us), praying with the help of the Holy Spirit (talking to the One who loves us), and looking forward to Christ’s return (meeting face-to-face the One who loves us). Since Jude calls the church do this, this involves being in community with other Christians (not just in our private spiritual lives).
- **A key responsibility for Christians is to reach out to those outside the church –** not only Christians who have strayed, but also people are deeply immersed in falsehood and life-destroying sin. The fact that Jude strongly urges this implies that true Christians can easily stray from this focus, especially when they are fighting against apostasy in the church. It is possible and necessary to “hate the sin” and still “love the sinner” (1:23b).

### 4. Strategic

- **Jude’s commitment to help this church includes not only helping them identify and reject false teachers, but also urging them to stay focused on God’s love and reach out to non-Christians.** Full-orbed church health always involves faithfulness to sound doctrine, a healthy focus on God’s grace, and reaching out with the gospel to outsiders.

### 5. Contemporary Application

- **Much of the American evangelical church is very weak at these three key responsibilities.** Some churches (i.e., fundamentalism) remain orthodox, but lack spiritual vitality and love for sinners. Others are tolerating doctrinal compromise (e.g., emergent) and lack of clear verbal witness outreach. How we need churches that are deeply grace-focused, doctrinally discerning, and sacrificially reaching out to the lost people around them!

### 6. Personal Application

- God has recently convicted me of my need to recall and focus on my eternal destiny, because by default I get obsessed by temporal problems and comforts. I also see this

as a big problem for many adults in our church. Meditating on key biblical passages like 2 Cor. 4:16-5:6, reading sound Christian books on this subject, praising God by faith for this and asking Him for illumination (i.e. Eph. 1:18), and talking about this with other Christian friends has been helpful for me. I am also teaching on this subject more than I did before.

### **Memory Verses**

**None this week. There will be a quiz next week.**

### **Assignment**

**Do an overview of Titus based on the method above. This assignment must be turned in at the beginning of our next lecture. For your benefit, this assignment must be turned in to complete this course.**