

An Introduction to Jude

The Author of the Book

The authorship of this epistle has been the subject of much debate. For many years it was not accepted as part of the inspired writings of the New Testament. Several of the early church historians were reluctant to accept it because it was so short, its author was not well known and it included quotations from books that were not part of the Bible. By the time the list of New Testament books was finalized, though, it was generally accepted as an inspired book.

There are seven men in the New Testament who are named Jude. They are: one of the physical ancestors of Jesus (Luke 3:30); the apostle who betrayed Jesus (Mark 3:19); the son or brother of James, also called Thaddaeus, one of the 12 apostles (Luke 6:16; John 14:22; Acts 1:13); an insurrectionist from Galilee (Acts 5:37); a native of Damascus in whose house Paul stayed and prayed before his conversion (Acts 9:11); a messenger from the church in Jerusalem who, along with Silas, told the church at Antioch the results of the Jerusalem council on circumcision (Acts 15:22, 27, 32); and the brother of James and half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3).

“It is quite evident that the last-mentioned person (Jude the brother of James, half-brother of Jesus – GT) wrote the book. He identified himself as : ‘Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James’ (1). If he had been an apostle, Judas Thaddaeus, he would have used that official title. If he had been one of the other possibilities, he would have further identified himself (e.g., Barsabbas, or of Damascus). Since he indicated his relationship to James, he must have referred to the half-brother of Jesus who was the author of the book of James. He apparently did not consider himself to be a commissioned apostle (1, 17-18). As one of the younger brothers of James, he did not believe in the messiahship of Jesus during the latter’s earthly ministry (Mark 6:3; John 7:3-8). Since he was associated with Mary, his brothers, and the apostles in the upper room after the ascension of Christ, he must have been converted during the forty days of Christ’s postresurrection ministry, perhaps through a personal appearance of the Savior (Acts 1:14). Later, he had an itinerant preaching ministry during which he was accompanied by his wife (1 Cor. 9:5). Nothing certain is known about his death.” (Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 385-386)

The Time and Place of Writing

“Jude was written during the second half of the first century, as indicated by the contents of the letter, which speak of itinerant false prophets gaining entrance to the churches – a situation less likely in the more structured church context of the second century. Exactly when Jude is dated depends to some extent on the literary relationship with 2 Peter. There is a marked similarity between Jude 4-19 and 2 Pet. 2:1 – 3:3, and because the wording is so similar, most scholars believe that Peter borrowed from Jude, or Jude used Peter’s words, or both used ideas from a common source no longer extant. If Jude used 2 Peter, then it would be dated between the writing of 2 Peter (c. A.D. 64-66) and c. A.D. 80. If 2 Peter used Jude, then Jude could be dated between 60 and 65 A.D.” (*Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*, 478)

Comparing the Book of Jude to the Book of Second Peter

There are obvious similarities between the major content of Jude (4-19) and the second chapter of 2 Peter (2:1 - 3:3). It is possible, but highly unlikely because of the great number of similarities, that they wrote on the same subject independent of each other. It is possible they both used a common source but there is no objective manuscript evidence of such a document. The most likely view is that one writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, incorporated some material from the other's book into his own epistle.

It is more likely that 2 Peter was written before Jude wrote his letter. Jude indicated his purpose had suddenly changed (3). Possibly reading 2 Peter caused this change. Peter placed the false teachers in the future (2 Pet. 2:1) while Jude saw them as already present (4). Jude's reference to the apostolic warning about mockers (17-18) seems to refer to the warnings given by Peter (2 Peter 3:2-4) and Paul (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim. 3:1-9).

Why This Book Was Written

“There is no obscurity in Jude's purpose. He had wished to discuss the doctrine of salvation, but the threat of subversive teachers compelled him to write and exhort his readers ‘to contend earnestly for the faith’ (v. 3). Thus the entire epistle is an assessment of false teachers, focusing particularly on the judgment to which they are doomed, and a strong warning to recipients. The false teachers reject Christ's authority, but Jude stresses that Jesus is Lord, now and forever.” (*Nelson's*, 478, 480)

A reading of the book shows that it was written to:

- Urge Christians to contend earnestly for the faith. (3)
- Warn against the tactics of the apostates. (4)
- Describe the characteristics of false teachers and their subsequent judgment. (5-16)
- Remind its readers of previous warnings concerning the rise of apostasy. (17-19)
- Stimulate spiritual growth. (20-23)
- Assure Christians of God's protection. (24-25)