

A Survey of the Letter of Jude

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Author:

The writer of Jude was undoubtedly known to the Christians of the first century, but this knowledge was not passed down to us. Basically he only references himself as a servant of Jesus and a brother of James (**Jude 1**). There were seven people named Jude (Judas) in the New Testament four are more or less conspicuously mentioned but only one had a brother named James. This was the half-brother of Jesus (**Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3**). Foxes Book of Martyrs states that Jude also went by the name Thaddeus (Lebbaeus) and was crucified at Edessa in 72 AD.

Similarly to book of James, both begin their letters by showing their humility and faith in the deity of Jesus calling themselves “bondservants,” rather than brothers. This reveals that they had changed their views after Christ’s death and resurrection. Early on in Jesus’ ministry they did not seem to be supportive and neither brother went with their mother to the cross (**John 20:25-27**).

Date:

It is generally accepted it was written in the mid to late 60’s AD. However, it could have been written as early as 50 AD or as late as 70 AD. Most scholars believe that the dating of Jude’s letter can be based on whether it preceded or succeeded II Peter. If Jude preceded II Peter, then it was written before Peter’s death in 64 AD. If it was written after II Peter, then it was written near the close of the first century. When one takes into account the influence of false prophecy it seems likely that Peter was declaring it on the horizon, while Jude talks about it as a current issue. Therefore, it is possible that II Peter was written first, though they may have been within just a few months or years apart.

Theme:

This book is about contending for the faith. The book of Jude is the third shortest biblical book. Its twenty-five verses are a panorama of the Old Testament and a challenge regarding the future of the church. We are introduced again to Sodom, angels, Cain, Moses, Balaam, Korah, Egyptian bondage, the wilderness wanderings, and Satan. Considering its size, few books present as many issues in such a short space.

One unique part of Jude is his use of extra-biblical sources (**Jude 14**, Enoch 1:9; 60:8). He also makes a statement about the body of Moses that is not recorded in the Old Testament (**Jude 9**). The story of the archangel Michael contending with Satan over the body of Moses was in an extra-biblical book written in Hebrew between 7 A.D. and 29 A.D and is also quoted by Luke in **Acts 7:36 (Jude 9, 16, 18, II Baruch, Clement of Alexandria, Origen)**. There is a fragment of this book, called the Assumption of Moses, that can be viewed today but it is damaged prior to the episode quoted by Jude.

Some people like to make an issue out of the sources mentioned above. This shouldn’t prove to be a significant issue because the Old Testament alone refers to at least fourteen extra-biblical books (**Numbers 21:14, Joshua 10:13, I Kings 11:41, I Chronicles 29:29, II Chronicles 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 20:34, 24:27**). In the New Testament Paul quotes the Hymn of Zeus from Aratus of Tarsus written around 270 BC (**Acts 17:28**). He also uses Menander (**I Corinthians 15:33**) and Epimenides (**Titus 1:12**) as sources in his writings.

Audience:

The letter is lumped with the general epistles because it was intended for a general audience. Mainly it was intended for a challenge to Christians. All of the readers shared a “common salvation” with the author (v.3), though many may have had a Jewish background. This would also reveal the reasoning behind using apocryphal books in the letter. These books were well circulated about the Jewish Christians, but not universally considered to be inspired.

There may have been a congregation the writer intended to read this letter. However, that information is hidden from us. He uses endearing terminology and passionately warned them as if showing deep personal concern for their well-being. It is possible that he served as an elder in the church in Edessa before his death and they could have been the intended recipients.

Key Verses:

Jude 3-4, 9-11, 14-15, 20-21, 24-25

Outline:

- I. *Contending For Faithful Living (1-4)*
- II. *Condemning Unfaithful Living (5-13)*
- III. *Complaining About Faithful Living (14-19)*
- IV. *Committing To Faithful Living (20-22)*
- V. *Conquering Faithful Living (23-25)*