INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDE

AUTHOR: Jude.

Jude is a shortened form of the word Judas. Jude describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (v.1). There was only one James who was well-known by all the community. This was James¹, the half-brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19; 1 Cor. 15:7) which would also make Jude a half-brother of Jesus {see Matt. 12:46-47}. The fact that Jude does not mention that he is the half-brother of Jesus is probably because he is being humble. A study in James will show that James also was very humble and does not mention the fact he is the half-brother of Jesus. In Jam. 1:1 James refers to himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude seems to be using the same formula.

Two of the 12 disciples were also named James², but it is very unlikely that Jude was related to them because the only Judas-James pairings in Scripture (1) are among the siblings of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3) and (2) a reference to one of these James as the father of Judas (not Iscariot); see Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. He is obviously not the Judas who betrayed Jesus.

There was also another disciple named Judas who was also called Thaddeus (Matt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18). But our Jude could not have been an apostle because he uses the 3rd person reference to the apostles in v.17.

Finally, some scholars try to suggest that the Epistle of Jude is a “pseudepigraph,” that is a writing put out after the death of a great man, published under his name as containing the kind of things he would have said in that situation. This view is unacceptable because the pseudo-author would have accented Jude’s relationship with Jesus in order to gain acceptance for his writing which is something Jude does not do.

THEME AND OCCASION:

Contending for the Faith. Jude is writing to warn his Christian readers of the dangers of succumbing to the errors of false teachers. These false teachers are immoral and they pervert the truth (v.4), they are sensual and self-indulgent (vv. 4, 16, 18, 19) and they reject the leadership of the church (v.8). Verses 14 and 15 indicate that these false teachers will be judged and verse 19 indicates that they do not have the Spirit of God. Perhaps they claimed special revelation and authority from God (v.8, cf. 19) for their aberrant teachings.

The doctrine of these false teachers was antinomianism³, the belief that Christians are not bound by the moral law, particularly that of the Old Testament (v.4) and thus compromising the message of the Gospel. Antinomianism is condemned many places in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:9 and Gal. 5:13).

THE BOOK OF JUDE IS A PASSIONATE DEFENSE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND IT IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT FOR US TODAY BECAUSE IT STRESSES FIDELITY TO CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF A PLURALISTIC AND PERMISSIVE PAGAN SOCIETY.

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¹ This is the same James who wrote the Epistle stressing Christian maturity and practical Christianity. You will recall that James was the leader of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21).
² James the son of Zebedee (one of the inner circle: Peter, James and John) and James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3) were two disciples of Jesus Christ.
³ Literally, “against/instead of the law”.

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DATE OF WRITING:
A.D. 65-80. The date of the epistle depends on whether Jude is (a) dependent on 2 Peter, (b) 2 Peter is dependent on Jude or (c) both are dependent on some common source (e.g., a Christian catechism against false teachers).

SOURCES FOR JUDE:
Jude quotes both from the Old Testament and from Jewish apocryphal writings. His apparent references to the Jewish apocrypha (e.g., Testament of Moses—v.9 and 1 Enoch—vv.14-15) has concerned some throughout history because of the danger in concluding that Jude was implicitly endorsing their inspiration. However, in context, Jude’s use of these sources is similar to a modern preacher using a quote or illustration from a contemporary book or movie. It does not automatically constitute an endorsement.

Note Paul borrows anonymously from pagan sources in 1 Cor. 10:7; 15:32-33; 2 Tim. 3:8 and Titus 1:12 (cf. Acts 17:28) to demonstrate a point, but this does not imply a tacit approval of the source.

Because at least 15 of Jude’s verses can be found in whole or in part in 2 Peter, the importance of Jude has been downplayed. It is possible that both Peter and Jude may have adapted Christian material that was widespread in the early Church. That one copied from the other is unlikely considering the fact that 70% of the vocabulary is different.

It should also be remembered that there are just so many ways to use words to describe the problem of false teachers and both men were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

STRUCTURE:
Jude encourages his readers to contend earnestly for the Faith (v.3). He writes his letter using a three-fold formula. That is, he uses groups of threes to introduce himself and many of his points. The table below summarizes this writing style.

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<th>Verse</th>
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Most scholars assume that Jude was written after 2 Peter.
OUTLINE
I. Introduction, Salutation and Greeting (1-2)
II. The Purpose of the Letter: A Petition to Contend for the Faith (3-4)
III. Exposing False Teachers: Proving that they are Ungodly and Subject to Judgment (5-16)
   A. Reminders of God’s Punishment for Past Disobedience (5-7)
   B. Denunciation of False Teachers (8-13)
   C. Enoch’s Prophecy and Judgment of False Teachers (14-16)
IV. Exhorting the True Believers (17-23)
V. Doxology (24-25)