

INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE

by

Revere F. Weidner
D.D., LL.D.

Note: Author's introduction in *Annotations on the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude* (New York, The Christian Literature Co., 1897). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

Author of the Epistle. The writer describes himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James" (verse 1). Some suppose that this Judas was the Judas of *James* mentioned in the list of the twelve Apostles (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13),¹ who was also known as Thaddæus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18). But the correct translation of Judas of *James* cannot be *the brother* of James, it must be *the son* of James as in the text of the Revised Version.

The James of whom Judas was a brother (Jude 1) can be no other than the distinguished James, the Head of the church at Jerusalem, and this James as we have already shown was not one of the twelve but the brother of our Lord, a son of Joseph and Mary. Judas, or Jude, the author of the Epistle, was therefore a brother of our Lord (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). This view was already held by Clement of Alexandria, and in modern times has been adopted by Bleek, Credner, Brueckner, Wiesinger, Spitta, Alford, Farrar, Lumby, Plummer, Gloag, Salmon, and others.

There is no writer in the New Testament of whose life and character we know so little. A younger brother of our Lord, Jude did not believe on Him until after Christ's resurrection (John 7:5), converted possibly by His appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7), or at the manifestation of Christ to five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor. 15:6). The traditionary accounts of Jude are very uncertain. The interesting story told by Hegesippus, preserved by Eusebius (III. 18-20), that two grandchildren of Jude who "after the flesh was called the brother of the Lord" were accused and brought before Domitian, agrees with the statement of Paul that the brethren of our Lord were married (1 Cor. 9:5).

The Authenticity of the Epistle. The external evidence is greater than might be expected in the case of so short an Epistle. The first mention of it is in the Muratorian Canon (170 A.D.), and Clement of Alexandria (190 A.D.) directly refers to it by name in several of his works. Tertullian quotes it (about 210 A.D.), and Origen a few years later speaks of Jude as having written an Epistle "of few lines indeed, but full of mighty words of heavenly wisdom." And though Eusebius (325 A.D.) places it among the books spoken against, he remarks that it was "well known and widely acknowledged." After the time of Eusebius the Epistle of Jude was universally accepted as genuine and acknowledged as canonical.

Two objections, drawn from internal evidence, have been made against its genuineness and

¹ **Special Note:** In listing the apostles, Luke 6:16 reads as follows: "Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor."

authenticity. The Tübingen School represented by Baur, Schwelger, Holtzmann, Lipsius and others, maintain that from verse 17, "remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the Apostles," we may infer that this Epistle belongs to post-Apostolic times. But all that we can infer from this passage is (1) that the writer here distinguishes himself from the Apostles, and (2) that he takes it for granted that his readers had heard the preaching of some of the Apostles.

Another objection made against the genuineness of this Epistle by some is, that there are too many apocryphal and legendary references in this Epistle, more indeed than in all the writings of the N.T. put together, and that such apocryphal references are inconsistent with the idea of inspiration. But the question arises, Are these references to apocryphal legends or to Jewish traditions? May not the Apocryphal Books, which some maintain that Jude used (like "The Assumption of Moses" and "The Book of Enoch") as well as the statements of Jude be based upon the same Jewish traditions? It is highly probable that Jude, in referring to the contention of Michael with the devil concerning the body of Moses and to the prophecy of Enoch, alludes to certain true facts handed down by Jewish tradition, well known and accepted but not recorded in the Old Testament.

This ought not to surprise us, for Paul also gives us some facts in the history of Moses not recorded in the Book of Exodus (2 Tim. 3:8). Because Jude refers to these events, it does not follow that he quotes from the two apocryphal books already mentioned which may already have existed in the time of Christ, although even this is questioned by some. These references, no matter what the true solution may be, at least furnish no objection to the genuineness of this Epistle; and the book has been accepted as genuine by such eminent writers as Bleek, DeWette, Wiesinger, Huther, Fronmueller, Keil, Alford, Farrar, Salmon, Gloag, Wordsworth, Lumby, Plummer, Plumptre, and others.

The Persons Addressed. A careful study of the Epistle shows that the letter is evidently addressed to Christian Jews who are familiar with Old Testament Scriptures and Jewish traditions. As the allusions are all Jewish, some have thought that the Epistle must have been addressed to some church or churches in Palestine, or to some particular district of the Diaspora in which nearly all the church members were converted Jews. But this question cannot be positively decided.

The Aim of the Epistle. The immediate design of the Epistle is stated in verses 3 and 4 to be the confirmation of believers in the faith, and the encouragement of them to stand up for the faith in opposition to ungodly men, who by their immoral lives and false teaching were seeking to corrupt the Church.

Relation of the Epistle of Jude to 2 Peter. A careful comparison of the two Epistles seems to establish the fact that 2 Peter was written first. Peter speaks prophetically of the false teachers who shall privily bring in heresies. The future aspect of these coming heresies seems most strongly emphasized (2 Pet. 2:1-3; 3:1-4). Jude, on the other hand, refers to these false teachers as already present and describes their teaching and its effects (Jude 4, 12, 17, 18). If we look at the characters portrayed in the two Epistles, the view that this Epistle was written the later of the two receives additional confirmation, for in this Epistle of Jude the picture has become much darker. His illustrations are even stronger and bolder than those of Peter, for the times were grown more evil, and the results of these licentious practices and heretical doctrines were already seen (Jude 4, 8, 12, 16, 19).

On account of the remarkable resemblance between 2 Pet. 2:1-3:3 and Jude 4-18, some have maintained that Jude must have made use of 2 Peter, while still others advocate the theory that Peter wrote later than Jude and made use of his Epistle. But although there is such a great resemblance, the points of difference are so great that it is highly probable that Peter and Jude wrote independently of each other.

Time and Place of Writing. The relation of this Epistle to 2 Peter determines its date. If we accept the view, which is most probable, that it was written after 2 Peter, then it must have been composed after 64 A.D., the most probable date of Peter's martyrdom. It is also clear from internal evidence that the Epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., for if Jude had written later he would not have omitted reference to this fearful example of divine judgment. We may therefore conclude that the Epistle was written between 65 and 68 A.D.

We have no means for deciding the place of composition. Most commentators favor Palestine, and on account of the Jewish tone of the Epistle even Jerusalem itself has been suggested.

The Contents of the Epistle. The contents and arrangement of the Epistle can best be shown by the following analysis:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Address and Salutation (1,2)

II. BODY OF THE EPISTLE

2. Reason for Writing (3,4)
3. Three Examples of the Punitive Justice of God (5-7)
4. Description of the Sin of these False Teachers (8-16)
5. Final Exhortations to his Readers (17-23)

III CONCLUSION

6. Doxology (24,25)