

JUDE

Author and Date

Jude identifies himself as a “servant” of Jesus Christ and “brother” of James. We know from Matthew 13:55 that Jesus had brothers named James and Jude, and we know that James, the older of the two, became head of the Jerusalem Church and is attributed with the writing of the epistle of James. Jude is claiming to be his brother, which makes him a brother of Jesus as well. But given that Jesus is confessed as the Christ of God, Jude chooses to call himself a “servant” of Christ rather than a brother of Christ. This is clearly a reflection of the reverence he has for Jesus as much more than just his brother by birth. Jesus is the “Son of God,” the representation in the flesh of God eternal.

If Jude is the writer, the letter couldn't have been written very late. Also, 2 Peter 2 has many parallel references to the letter of Jude, indicating a familiarity between the two. Thus, an early dating of 64-68 AD is suggested (although some scholars suggest much later dates).

Message

Like many other letters written by the apostles, Jude is concerned about churches being swayed by false teachers. Either such teachers have arisen in the congregation, or they have come from elsewhere. Through their teaching they divide congregations and cause questioning and doubt among the faithful. What do these false teachers teach? By their words and actions, they deny “our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (4) We already encountered the Gnostics who denied the flesh and blood humanity of Jesus. There would have been those who also encouraged a more morally lax version of Christian commitment (which we encountered in the letters of John as well).

Many non-Jews were coming into the church, and leaders were challenged to find a middle ground between a strictly Jewish and highly moral standard of life according to Jewish law on the one hand, and an “anything-goes” immorality out of which many non-Jews were coming into the church from the pagan world, on the other. The apostles came to a broad consensus that non-Jews didn't have to become Jewish in all the observances of the law (e.g. fasting, dietary laws, washing rituals, circumcision, etc). However, Christians had to come together as one on: 1) Confessing Christ as Saviour through his life, death and resurrection, in body-spirit as the basis of forgiveness and new life; 2) living the demands of love which had to overcome class, gender, economic, racial and other divisions; 3) living according to the 10 commandments in personal, sexual and communal morality.

False teachers stirred up trouble by creating doubts and questions about these core beliefs and practices, and they did this not only by encouraging certain behaviour, but by questioning the authority of the apostles like Peter and Paul.

Jude reminds his readers that Jesus predicted false teachers would come in the last days (before the second coming of Christ and the last judgment). They are also reminded to rekindle their faith, remember what they have learned, who they learned it from, and practice love above all else.

We would do well to be reminded of the same.