

## The Letter of Jude

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As noted in the introduction to Chapter Three, the degree of overlapping material in Jude 4-18 and 2 Peter 2:1 – 3:3 motivates many critical scholars to treat 2 Peter as if it were 2 Jude, thus emphasizing the literary-historical connection between Jude and 2 Peter over the canonical connection between 1 and 2 Peter (most modern commentaries treat Jude and 2 Peter in the same volume). Rather than associating 2 Peter with Jude, and thus reordering the Catholic Epistles, the clues in the text suggest that 1 Peter and 2 Peter should be read together, which leads to the question of what connections exist between 2 Peter and 1 John – connections we considered at the beginning of chapter four. Now the following question arises: What kind of connections exist between 1 – 3 John and Jude? Whereas the theme of warning against false prophets (2 Pet 2:13; 1 Jn 4:1) draws together the letters of John with 2 Peter, in a similar way the theme of false teaching continues in Jude; however, Jude’s emphasis is not on the content of the teaching but rather the morally libertine behavior exhibited by the intruders. First John stresses that the denial of Christ come in the flesh is a key false teaching of the secessionists. In a similar fashion, Jude highlights that the intruders are “denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord” (Jude 4). Furthermore, 1 John also shares with Jude a concern for the behavior of the antichrists (1 Jn 2:19) or intruders in Jude; therefore, the theme of false teaching or false living is a common thread drawing together 2 Peter, 1 - 3 John, and Jude.

A final link connecting 1 John with Jude is that 1 John self-consciously characterizes its message as originating with apostolic eyewitness experience of Jesus (1 Jn 1:1-3). Jude not only calls to mind the teaching of the apostles (Jude 17), but also his opening charge to “contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all” and his closing exhortation to “build yourselves up in your most holy faith” (Jude 20) both refer to the apostolic faith. Thus, the centrality of the apostolic message and the authority of that message are highlighted in both 1 John and Jude.

### OCCASION AND SETTING

Jude's letter was written to a community that was being influenced by immoral leaders who had infiltrated the church. Writing with urgency, Jude instructs his readers to stand firm in "the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all" (Jude 3). The bulk of the letter is taken up with the denunciation of these intruders (Jude 5-19) and, as a consequence, the letter has been viewed as largely negative condemnation of these morally bankrupt outsiders. Though the letter, however, does offer a carefully constructed announcement of judgment against the intruders, this denunciation is framed by the positive encouragement to stand firm in the faith, to remain in the love of God, and to wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ (Jude 20-23). Thus, as will be argued more thoroughly below, Jude makes a positive theological contribution to early Christianity and bears an important theological message for today.

## **Author**

The letter claims to have been written by "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (Jude 1). The name "Jude" (or "Judah,") was a common first-century name; however, the Jude here must have been known widely enough for readers to identify him with only the further designation "a brother of James" (Jude 1). One well-known Judas in the early Christian movement was Judas Barsabbas, who accompanied Silas in delivering the letter composed by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:22, 27, 32). Though well known, however, this Judas is never associated with James. Another possibility is Judas (son) of James (*Ioudan Iakobou*, literally "Judas of James"), one of the Twelve (Lk 6:16; Jn 14:22; Acts 1:13). However, this grammatical construction is a common way of describing the father of the named individual, thus "Judas [son] of James." The majority of scholars conclude that the Judas mentioned in Jude 1 is almost certainly Judas the brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), which would also mean that Jude's brother James is "James the Just," the brother of Jesus and author of the epistle of James. We know very little about Jude. He was one of four brothers of Jesus, all of whom did not follow Jesus during his ministry (Mk 3:21, 31; Jn 7:5) but later joined the Christian movement after the resurrection (Acts 1:14).

Three issues have influenced the discussion regarding when the letter was written: the identity of the letter's opponents, the rise of "early Catholicism," and the interpretation of the phrase "remember what was predicted by the apostles" (Jude 17). The identity of Jude's opponents is raised below; here we will briefly consider the two remaining issues.

Some have understood clues from the text of Jude to indicate a time of composition when the early church had formalized its message and had developed an authoritative church structure, what J.N.D. Kelly describes as "early Catholicism." The major instruction to the audience is "to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all" (Jude 3) and to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith" (Jude 20). To some this indicates that this faith is not merely the gospel message but rather is the fixed body of formal and

orthodox church teaching that developed well after the time of the apostles. Therefore, this perspective insists, the letter was written in a time of “early Catholicism,” when the teaching and structure of the church was formalized, well after the early apostolic era. The term *faith*, however, is often used in other New Testament texts to describe the earliest Christian message, namely, the gospel. Therefore, this argument alone cannot determine the date of composition.

Those following the “early Catholicism” view also point to the chronological implications of Jude 17, where he urges, “But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The call to remember what the apostles taught, from this perspective, indicates a time well after the apostles have died, and therefore supports a much later date of writing for Jude. However, the phrase does not necessarily indicate that the apostles themselves have died, but only that their predictions belong to the past. Richard Bauckham insists that they are to remember these apostolic teachings, just as they were to remember the instruction they were given at their conversion. He argues, “The most natural meaning of verse 18 is that Jude’s readers themselves heard the apostles’ preaching,” and therefore this verse could imply “that most of the original converts were still living, and thus puts not a lower but an upper limit on the date.” The date of the letter cannot be confidently established on its use of *faith* and the reference to the apostles in Jude 17 alone. Though these factors may suggest a late date of composition and thus point away from Jude the brother of Jesus as author, it is just as plausible that the letter originated within the lifetime of Jude the brother of Jesus.

## **Audience**

There are very few clues regarding the intended audience of Jude. The author reminds his readers of the teaching they received from the apostles at their conversion (Jude 17 – 18), which likely indicates that the author was not the one who founded the Christian community to whom he writes. Because Jude does not offer any further details about his audience beyond “those who are called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude 1), many conclude that he does not address a specific audience at all. Yet, others think, because of the vivid portrayal of the false teachers and the specific danger they pose for the readers, that there is specific audience in mind.

We can assume that because the author singles out James as the brother of Jude, these readers both knew and respected James as a leading figure in the early Christian movement. It is also apparent that the author expected the readers to be familiar with the Old Testament and other Jewish documents (1 Enoch and the Testament of Moses), which circulated around Palestine in the early first century. Thus, it may be safe to think that Jude writes to a predominantly Jewish Christian group (or groups), because of the use of these Jewish documents and explicit Jewish exegetical method (see further discussion in genre below). Alongside these sparse indications of audience, we must

consider the nature of Jude's opponents. Though it seems apparent that the author never directly addresses the opponents – that is, the author rhetorically condemns the opponents so as to warn the actual readers of the text – the author's description of them does shed light on the situation of the audience.

### **The “intruders” in Jude**

Though Jude and 2 Peter share a significant amount of material, it would be wrong to conclude that the letters confront the same group of opponents. Whereas the opponents in 2 Peter were false teachers who grew up from within the community, Jude addresses a group of intruders who have infiltrated and influenced Jude's audience. Most of the indirect descriptions of the intruders in Jude revolve around their libertinism, that is, their own undisciplined moral living. It seems clear that they have “come in by stealth” from the outside (Jude 4), they influence others by their actions (Jude 11), and they are present at the community's fellowship (likely communion) meal (Jude 12), where they passed along their immoral ideas. They are motivated by greed (Jude 11 – 12), and their permissive lifestyle helps in winning followers (Jude 16).

Jude focuses his polemic against their rejection of rules for moral living. For example, they reject moral authority in the form of angels (Jude 8), Mosaic law (Jude 8-10), the apostles (Jude 17-18), and that of Christ himself (Jude 4, 8). This rejection of authority seems to be justified by an appeal to their own charismatic inspiration (Jude 8, “relying on their dreams”). In keeping with their rejection of moral authority, Jude characterizes these intruders as indulging in immoral behavior, especially sexual misconduct (Jude 6-8, 10). It is important to note that the intruders are never condemned for any specific doctrinal issue or theological teaching but rather for their immorality and rebellion.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the intruders are never directly addressed in the letter; rather, their denunciation is designed to dissuade Jude's audience from following their example. The rhetoric of the letter contrasts the audience with the intruders. The second-person plural pronoun you (Jude 5, 17, 18, 20) marks out the believing readers as holy (Jude 14), beloved (Jude 3, 17, 20), and without blemish (Jude 24). They are the ones who are both “kept for Jesus Christ” (Jude 1) and are to keep themselves “in the love of God” (Jude 21). The intruders, on the other hand, are labeled ungodly (Jude 4, 15 [3x], 18), they turn “the grace of our God into sensuality” (Jude 4), and they live “according to their desires” (Jude 16, 18). This contrast implicitly calls the audience to reject the immoral lifestyle and teaching of the intruders.

### **Genre**

Jude bears the form of a letter, with an opening that includes a named author and the identification of recipients (Jude 1-2). This characteristic opening functions as the essential marker of the letter genre. Though not a regular feature

of a Hellenistic letter, Jude also concludes with a doxology (Jude 24-25). Though clearly a letter, the main body of Jude takes the particular shape of an exhortation or sermon.

The structure of the letter indicates that there was a very specific message the author wanted to convey. Various attempts have been made to describe Jude's structure. Earle Ellis argues for understanding Jude 5-19 as a midrash taking up texts from the Old Testament, apostolic teaching, and 1 Enoch for specific commentary. Midrashim (the plural of *midrash*) are rabbinical commentaries on texts from the Old Testament, but in a looser sense, *midrash* refers to Jewish interpretation of a text. Both Ellis and Richard Bauckham argue that the particular type of midrash Jude represents is a pesher interpretation, which is an exegetical convention observed in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>1</sup> The term "pesher" is translated "solution" or "interpretation," and usually appeared after the quotation of an Old Testament text and before its interpretation. Therefore a pesher interpretation is a "text-plus-interpretation" formula that was common in Jewish exegesis.

The text-plus-interpretation formula appears in Jude throughout the section of condemnation against the intruders (Jude 5-19) and is characterized by three features typical of a pesher. First, the shift from a text (we will need to discuss the kind of texts Jude quotes) to interpretation in Jude is marked by a shift in verbal tense, from past tense in the text to present tense in the interpretation. The texts cast in the past tense are found in Jude 5-7, 9, 11, 14-15, 18, each followed by an interpretation in the present tense in Jude 8, 10, 12-13, 16, and 19. Second, the transition from text to interpretation is also marked by the phrase "these people are" (*houtoi eisin*, Jude 12, 16, 19) or just "these people" (*hytoi*, Jude 8, 10). In using this phrase, Jude takes the example cited in the text and turns to apply it to "these people," or the intruders. Thus, for example in Jude 5-7, Jude argues that the wilderness generation, the fallen angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah are all examples that find their fulfillment in the intruders. Finally, the application of the past example (or type) in the text to the present intruders is a kind of typological interpretation stressing the fulfillment of the text in the authors time and circumstance. Therefore, though framed as a letter, Jude is an exhortation or sermon calling his audience to contend for the faith (Jude 3, 20-23) by staying away from the influence of the intruders, who stand condemned (Jude 4-19).

## STRUCTURE

Rather than constituting the focal point of the letter's message, Jude 5-19 prepares "the way for the real purpose of the letter, which is Jude's appeal to his readers to fight for the faith (Jude 20-23)."<sup>2</sup> The structure of the introduction (Jude 1-2) communicates the circumstances that called for the writing of the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 4.

letter. This appears in two parts. First is an initial appeal to Jude's readers "to contend for the faith" (Jude 3). Second is the background to this appeal, namely, a warning against the adversaries who threaten that faith (Jude 4). The body of the letter (Jude 5-19) corresponds to the second element in Jude 4, giving the background to the danger of the intruders and the reason for Jude's central appeal. The central claim of the letter, which appears in Jude 3, comes to a climax in Jude 20-23.

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