

EPISTLE OF JUDE

Approximate date: 50s or 60s C.E.; or 80s C.E.

Time period: intense season of instability and uncertainty

Author: Jude, the brother of James and half-brother of Yeshua

Location of author: Judea (early composition); Diaspora (later composition)

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Mediterranean basin

People:

Jude, James

People mentioned:

Yeshua the Messiah, Archangel Michael, Moses, Cain, Balaam, Korah, Enoch, Adam

Places mentioned:

Egypt, Sodom, Gomorrah

Key themes:

contending for the faith / introduction of lawless persons into the Body of Messiah / spread of gross sin / judgment of God upon sinners

Key Scriptures: Jude 3, 20-22 / **Greeting** (vs. 1-2); **The Reason for Writing** (vs. 3-4); **Reminders from the Past** (vs. 5-7); **The Ungodly Persons** (vs. 8-19); **Exhortation to the Believers** (vs. 20-23); **Doxology** (vs. 24-25)¹

Theological Summary: The Epistle of Jude, due to the uniqueness of its approach and message, can be one of the most controversial texts in the Apostolic Scriptures. The author identifies himself as “a bond-servant of Yeshua the Messiah, and brother of James” (v. 1). He does not claim to be an apostle, but rather a brother of James, connecting this letter to the authority of James. If indeed true, this would have to make the author a younger half-brother of Yeshua’s (cf. Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3),² the one listed as “Judas.” The name Judah (Heb. *Yehudah*, יהודה; Grk. *Ioudas*, Ἰούδας) appears in a variety of derivative forms in our English Bibles, including Judas and Jude. Many conservatives accept genuine authorship of this letter

¹ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 927-928.

² Cf. David H. Wheaton, “Jude,” in *NBCR*, 1274; R.L. Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 616 for an evaluation of the authorship options.

from Jude the brother of James.³ Liberals tend to consider the Epistle of Jude a pseudonymous work in some way attributed to Jude the brother of James.

There are few surviving traditions in ancient Christian history concerning Jude's activity.⁴ The Fourth Century Church historian Eusebius records the view of the Second Century Hegesippus, how in the late First Century, two of Jude's grandsons had to appear before the Emperor Dometian in Rome. Reporting themselves to be Believers in Yeshua, Dometian released them as commoners, not thinking them to be a threat (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.19.1-20.6).⁵ While there are those who have challenged the veracity of this,⁶ the little usage of the name "Jude," in other ancient Christian writings, can in the estimation of some point to a genuine composition of the Epistle of Jude by the brother of James. A relatively liberal resource like *ABD*, surprisingly explains, "That this title is not used is much more easily explained if the letter is authentic" (Bauckham).⁷ McKnight further observes, "It is probable that Jude is not typical of either Jewish or Christian pseudographs, which would favor the view that the brother of Jesus wrote the Letter" (*ECB*).⁸

There are various allusions to the Epistle of Jude witnessed in early Christian writings, including references as early as the late First Century. "There are traces of Jude in the letter of Clement of Rome, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, Polycarp, *Barnabas*, and perhaps the *Didache*, although it is impossible to say whether the slight allusions found in these writings are due to literary acquaintance. Polycarp's allusions are perhaps the most certain..." (Guthrie).⁹ The Epistle of Jude was actually included in the earliest known lists of New Testament works, but was not specifically quoted until the late Second Century, when it appears in the works of Clement of Alexandria.¹⁰ In spite of the connections that can be witnessed between the Epistle of Jude and these various materials, Eusebius indicated how Jude was among the disputed texts (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.3).

There is some kind of a relationship between Jude and 2 Peter, per the overlap of their contents, begging the question of which letter preceded the other. There is no agreement as to whether Jude or 2 Peter were written first, among either conservatives or liberals.¹¹ It is certainly possible that Jude's intended audience actually heard the Apostles themselves "speak" (vs. 17-18), or were at least reported teachings by them while they were still living. If this be the case, then the statement of 2 Peter 3:2 was made *before* that of Jude 17-18.

If the Epistle of Jude actually preceded the Epistle of 2 Peter, then 2 Peter is the earliest extant witness we have to Jude. If 2 Peter borrows from Jude, than an early date for Jude is

³ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 902-905; Carson and Moo, pp 691-692.

⁴ J.C. Beker, "Jude, Letter of," in *IDB*, 2:1009; F.W. Danker, "Jude, Epistle of," in *ISBE*, 2:1154.

⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, pp 84-85.

⁶ Beker, "Jude, Letter of," in *IDB*, 3:1102; Danker, "Jude, Epistle of," in *ISBE*, 2:1153-1154.

⁷ Richard Bauckham, "Jude, Epistle of," in *ABD*, 3:1102; cf. Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 616-617.

⁸ Scot McKnight, "Jude," in *ECB*, 1529.

⁹ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 901.

¹⁰ J.D. Douglas, "Jude, Letter of," in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 554.

¹¹ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 916-925; Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 614.

likely. But, if Jude borrows from 2 Peter, a later date for Jude is likely. Some of the main options are theological, as Guthrie explains how those who would argue in favor of Jude preceding 2 Peter, may argue that “Jude is harsher than 2 Peter, which suggests that the latter recognized the need to tone down the model.”¹² Those who think that Jude was written after 2 Peter would countermand this with, “What 2 Peter foresaw, Jude has now experienced” (Guthrie),¹³ requiring firmer language.

Conservatives who accept that Jude genuinely composed this text are actually not in full agreement as to Jude’s date, although more tend to argue for Jude being composed *after* 2 Peter. Gundry argues, “the epistle of Jude polemicizes against false teachers who have penetrated the church—in greater numbers, it would appear, than at the time 2 Peter was written.”¹⁴ If the letter is treated as being some kind of authentic work from Jude the brother of James, then a broad dating between 50-100 C.E. can be allowed, with many choosing to date the epistle in the 50s-60s C.E., or the 80s.¹⁵ Carson and Moo actually propose that Jude has used 2 Peter, but they date the letters at about the same time, thinking, “the similar descriptions of the false teaching in the letters suggests that they were written at about the same time. We should probably date Jude also in the middle-to-late 60s.”¹⁶

The majority of scholars today, conservative and liberal, date the Epistle of Jude to definitely being composed by the late First Century.¹⁷ If Jude were composed in the 80s, by the brother of James himself, this would necessarily make him very old.

A wide target audience for Jude has to be assumed, as its warnings against false teachers and teachings are fairly universal for all, even though the epistle possesses some major Jewish characteristics. “In line with the later Jewish view that everything that happens to Israel has been anticipated long before by God...the writer affirms that the judgment of these wicked deceivers has been duly prophesied” (Danker, *ISBE*).¹⁸ The timing of Jude’s composition, perhaps more than anything else, would determine where this letter was written and to whom it was written. An earlier dating would suggest a composition location in or near Judea. As the dating gets later and later, this would suggest somewhere in the Diaspora, especially if Jude’s grandsons made it to Rome. Some places proposed by examiners are Judea, Syrian Antioch, Egypt, or Asia Minor, but this is all speculation.¹⁹ Bauckham suggests a target audience for the Epistle of Jude, which included a large non-Jewish group, in places such as Corinth or the assemblies addressed in the Book of Revelation, where antinomianism had been allowed to creep in.²⁰ The “form of [its] closing suggests that the letter [is] being read to the Christian community gathered in worship, and that [the author] is addressing [Believers]

¹² Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 918.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 921.

¹⁴ Gundry, “The Catholic, or General, Epistles,” in *A Survey of the New Testament*, 446.

¹⁵ Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1101; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 907-908; Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 617-618.

¹⁶ Carson and Moo, 692.

¹⁷ Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1001; cf. Carroll D. Osburn, “Jude, Letter of,” in *EDB*, 750.

¹⁸ Danker, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1153.

¹⁹ Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 914; Carson and Moo, 693.

²⁰ Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1102.

with a sermon in letter form” (Webb).²¹ An audience within the Mediterranean basin, which to some degree was likely to overlap with that of 2 Peter, is all that can really be deduced for certain.

No Hebrew or Aramaic origin has ever been proposed by scholars for the composition of Jude,²² and Jude was actually excluded from the Syriac Peshitta canon of the Fourth-Fifth Century C.E. In spite of what some Messianics might want to believe, there is strong evidence for a Greek composition of this letter. What we see in Jude’s writing is generally good Greek, but one certainly influenced by Hebraic composition: “He uses some standard items of Jewish Greek vocabulary and idiom, which are found in the LXX [Septuagint], but none of his many allusions to specific verses of the OT echoes the language of the LXX. Moreover, some of his allusions depend on a meaning of the Hebrew text which is not rendered in the LXX...It seems, therefore, that it was the Hebrew Bible that Jude was really familiar” (Bauckham, *ABD*).²³ This would mean that while possibly writing in a Septuagintal *style* of Greek, consistent with Jews who used Greek as a second language, Jude makes all of his allusions to the Tanach from the Hebrew Bible itself, and not any unique renderings found in the LXX. In spite of this, “his command of literary Greek is quite impressive...if [Jude’s] missionary career took him among Greek-speaking Jews, there seems no reason why he should not have later acquired the degree of competence displayed in this letter” (Bauckham, *ABD*).²⁴

From the linguistic evidence witnessed in the Epistle of Jude, a wide Diaspora Jewish audience is something thought to be the main readership,²⁵ although a non-Jewish readership cannot at all be excluded.²⁶ A reasonable level of Greek composition should never cause a reader of Jude to dismiss the significant place of the Tanach Scriptures within the epistle.²⁷ The Epistle of Jude is also frequently thought to contain various forms of ancient Jewish midrash.²⁸

There was debate in the emerging Christian Church of the Second and Third Centuries over the Epistle of Jude,²⁹ because the author quotes from, or at least alludes to, material found in extra-Biblical works like the Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses³⁰ (the latter of which today is only extant in fragments). The question that is often asked from this, is to what extent the community of faith should consider these works in its theology, if at all. For approaching Jude’s usage of these extra-Biblical works, “That such points are made...suggests

²¹ Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 612.

²² Cf. Osburn, “Jude, Letter of,” in *EDB*, 751.

²³ Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1099.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:1102.

²⁵ Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 618.

²⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 913-914.

²⁷ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 925; Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 613-614.

²⁸ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 912-913; Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1098; Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 613.

²⁹ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 902.

³⁰ Beker, “Jude, Letter of,” in *IDB*, 2:1009; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 914-916; Bauckham, “Jude, Epistle of,” in *ABD*, 3:1099-1100; Webb, “Jude,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 614.

that such Jewish traditions were a natural part of the milieu of Jude's readers" (Webb).³¹ It is not uncommon to see in other Apostolic texts, references to extra-Biblical works. Paul refers to a Rabbinical midrash in 1 Corinthians 10:4, he quotes from pagan works in his sermon at Athens (Acts 17:28), and he borrows information from the Aramaic Targums in 2 Timothy 3:8.³² Gundry makes the poignant observation, "Quotations from such material do not imply belief in its divine inspiration."³³ Carson and Moo also state, "it is even possible that Jude simply cites this material because it is well known to his audience without himself making any commitment to its truthfulness."³⁴

The theological thrust of the Epistle of Jude is to address false teachers and teachings that had entered into the assembly, perverting the grace of God (v. 4). Jude urges his readers "to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3, RSV). Jude uses apocalyptic language reminiscent of God's judging sinners in the Hebrew Tanach, notably the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7).

It is often thought that the false teaching, countered in the Epistle of Jude, was associated with some kind of Gnosticism. Was it? Many different proponents have actually been suggested by examiners, ranging from some kind of Gnostics, various Romans interfering with the *ekklēsia*, Essenes, and libertines.³⁵ What can be known for certain from reading Jude is that the false teachers disregarded any kind of moral instruction. Bauckham directs us, "Their [the false teachers'] immorality must have been real, not a polemical slur, since it is the sole reason for Jude's attack on them...Everything he says about them can be directly related to their antinomianism. This antinomianism could have been one of the streams which flowed into later Gnosticism, but it is not itself distinctively Gnostic" (*ABD*).³⁶ Guthrie echoes this, by saying of the false teachers, "we must regard them as embryonic forms of later developments."³⁷ A more general thought on the false teachers is, "Jude's opponents are most likely itinerant prophets whose charismatic experience led them to reject moral authority and to practice immorality" (Webb).³⁸ General false teaching, leading to antinomianism and grossly inappropriate behavior, is what all readers of the Epistle of Jude can agree was a problem addressed by its contents.³⁹

Due to its shortness at only twenty-five verses, today's evangelical Christians and Messianic Believers, tend to only encounter Jude in only two or three verse quotes, here and there (i.e., v. 3). More improvement with the Epistle of Jude on the whole, is doubtlessly needed for all Bible readers. "Although Jude is one of the smallest letters of the NT, analysis...reveals a carefully composed literary gem" (Webb).⁴⁰ Guthrie excellently guides us,

³¹ Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 614.

³² Gundry, in *A Survey of the New Testament*, pp 447-448; cf. Wheaton, in *NBCR*, 1274.

³³ Gundry, in *A Survey of the New Testament*, 448.

³⁴ Carson and Moo, pp 694-695.

³⁵ Cf. Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 615.

³⁶ Bauckham, "Jude, Epistle of," in *ABD*, 3:1110.

³⁷ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 911.

³⁸ Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 615.

³⁹ Carson and Moo, 690.

⁴⁰ Webb, "Jude," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 612.

“to deny a permanent spiritual value to the letter is to miss its main message, which is relevant to any period of history. Indeed, Jude illustrates his theme of divine judgment on evil practices by quoting examples from the past. If the examples Jude cites for his own day (Israelites, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah) had relevance then, his whole epistle must have relevance now, until the nature of divine justice and the character of human lasciviousness and kindred evils has changed.”⁴¹ For a contemporary Christian audience, Carson and Moo are those who think, “The atmosphere of postmodernism in which the church now lives requires us to guard vigilantly against the temptation to welcome heresy in the name of ‘tolerance.’”⁴²

For our Messianic faith community, the Epistle of Jude is not under-appreciated, as its warnings against licentious behavior (v. 4), are often taken as a confirmation that Messiah followers need to respect the Torah or Law of Moses, and its code of conduct for God’s people. When examining Jude today as Messianic Believers, we need to approach the text as a definite warning against false teachers and teachers in our own midst. This can include various Christian persons who oppose the relevance and significance of God’s commandments. *Or*, it can include various fringe Messianic teachers, who pervert the grace of God, and may teach an oxymoronic form of Torah-lawlessness—overlooking the Torah’s key thrusts of love and holiness and respect for others.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON JUDE:

1. Do you think that Jude is too harsh in his language toward sinners? Why might he be so “blunt” in condemning them?

⁴¹ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 926.

⁴² Carson and Moo, 694.

2. Which do you believe was composed first? Does 2 Peter rely on Jude? Or, does Jude rely on 2 Peter? Formulate an opinion.

3. Do you see any present application of Jude's warnings today for either mainstream Christianity *or* the Messianic movement?

REFLECTION ON JUDE'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Epistle of Jude: