

LEARNING TO LOVE THE BOOK OF JUDE

Peter James Cousins, 2019

We are so used to recounting the Christmas story in our churches that we overlook the wider family of Jesus beyond Joseph and Mary. A careful examination of the Biblical texts, however, reveals the complex interaction of the family of Jesus and the Early Church.ⁱ The fact that the first verse of this book informs us that it is written by Jude, the brother of James, immediately launches us into the world of Jesus' family connections in Palestine which were an important network in the early days of the organized Church. It is this connection which, for me, is the charm of the Book of Jude. To be honest, I have never heard anyone else claim to be charmed by this epistle, with its vehement denunciations, strange references and obscure background. Nevertheless I find it satisfying to have in my hand something emanating from a man who, as a child, played on the hills of Nazareth with his brother James, and more importantly, their brother Jesus. No matter how difficult it can be to explain its message, I love its proximity to Jesus.

I cannot say that the Early Church Fathers all shared my enthusiasm. Some leading figures questioned its place in the New Testament canon because it quotes without any reservations from books we do not recognise as inspired. Origen, Eusebius, Chrysostom and Jerome were among them, so you will appreciate that it had some powerful doubters. In more modern times Luther chose not to include it in his list of true, certain, chief books of the NT. Frankly, most modern preachers would unconsciously make the same judgement and avoid preaching from it. Having tackled it on a number of occasions from the pulpit I can testify that it is very hard to motivate a modern congregation to engage with it. But I love it because I find myself drawn close to the Palestinian cradle of our Faith, the Jewish roots of the first theologians and the untiring work of the first generation which held the family of Jesus at its heart. So let us examine who the author was.

WHO WAS JUDE?

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ,” he begins. James must be the brother of Jesus who led the Jerusalem church and penned the New Testament letter of James. “The only man in the early church who could be called simply James without risk of ambiguity was James the Lord's brother,” Says Richard Bauckham.ⁱⁱ James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem who served in that capacity until meeting a violent death by stoning in 62AD at the hands of the priestly authorities, as recorded by Josephus.ⁱⁱⁱ Confirmation comes from Mark 6:3: “Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him,” and Matthew 13:55: “Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?” *Jude*, of course, is just our English version of the original *Judas* in the Greek text. However, his brothers opposed Jesus in his lifetime (Mark 3:21,31; John 7:3-10, “for even his own brothers did not believe in him.”) At some point, we presume at the Resurrection, they changed their minds.

We know that the brothers of Jesus were probably present in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost: “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (Acts 1:14). James was to assume the leadership of the Jerusalem church, but when he died the mantle passed not to Jude, his brother, but to a cousin of Jesus called Simeon.^{iv} Perhaps Jude was already dead, but more likely he was an itinerant minister rather than one tied to a particular church. Paul gives us this clue in 1 Corinthians 9:5 where he says “Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?”

The conclusion that Jude was a roving teacher and evangelist among the Jews of Palestine is strengthened by a tradition passed on by Julius Africanus (ca. 160 - 240 AD) from Emmaus who penned a five-volume chronology of world history from the creation of the world down to 221 AD. It is largely lost, but some of it is to be found in the later writings of Eusebius. In the midst of a long passage in which Julius unpicks the apparent contradictions between the genealogies in Matthew and

Luke he mentions that the family of Jesus was among those who assiduously traced their roots back to David: “A few of the careful, however, having obtained private records of their own, either by remembering the names or by getting them in some other way from the registers, pride themselves on preserving the memory of their noble extraction. Among these are those already mentioned, called Desposyni, on account of their connection with the family of the Saviour. Coming from Nazara and Cochaba, villages of Judea, into other parts of the world, they drew the aforesaid genealogy from memory and from the book of daily records (i.e. Chronicles) as faithfully as possible.”^v Kokhaba was a small town some ten miles from Nazareth. Clearly the family used their genealogy to strengthen their case that Jesus was a true Son of David, designated the Messiah.

Jude most certainly had a “believing wife” because two of his grandsons appear in the later history of the church. Hegesippus^{vi} tells us that they Zoker and James,^{vii} came under suspicion for being descendants of David, and were brought before the emperor Domitian himself. When asked about their possessions they said that between the two of them they had only nine thousand denarii, half belonging to each of them; and this they asserted they had not as money, but only in thirty-nine plethra of land from which they paid taxes and supported themselves. It is likely that the appearance was not before Domitian himself – Hegesippus was trying to make a strong argument for the Christian Faith being a law-abiding religion. However, it is clear that the Christian community knew about their farm and as a small holding would have been held by the whole family rather than divided. So it is possible that it had originally been jointly owned by Joseph and his brother Clopas near Nazareth, and that Jesus, James, Jude and the other children would have regularly met there. It also explains why Joseph needed a “day job” in the family building business because the farm was not big enough to support them all.

It is clear that the family of Jesus were prominent in the Early Church, not just James and his cousin Simeon who presided over the Jerusalem Church for decades, but also the wider family including Jude and his descendants. It seems clear that their ability to trace their roots back to King David played a key part in their evangelistic message, affirming that Jesus was the true Messiah, a genuine Son of David. In such a context the book of Jude would have been valued not just for its content but for its authorship. Jude was a very important person and his letter is valued precisely for that reason, the strongest argument for its inclusion in the canon.

THE STATUS OF JUDE

I believe that further confirmation of the importance of Jude is to be found in a comparison with the book of 2 Peter with which there is a close relationship. These similarities are most obvious when we compare 2 Peter chapter 2 and Jude:

the false prophets secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord (have secretly slipped in among you ... and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord);

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment (the angels who did not keep their positions of authority . . . these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day);

he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly (Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire);

The false prophets despise authority (reject authority), slander celestial beings (slander celestial beings), blaspheme in matters they do not understand. (speak abusively against whatever they do not understand), are like brute beasts, (unreasoning animals), follow the way of Balaam (have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error), are blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you (are blemishes at your love feasts), are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them (are clouds without rain . . . for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever), mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful

desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error (follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage);

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires (remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires").

Add to this the fact that two words *empaiktes* (someone who derides) and *huperogka* (bombastic, vain words) are found only in these two books, factor in the identical concerns and numerous other linguistic similarities, and it becomes plain that one has influenced the other. The scholastic consensus is that Peter has based his book on Jude, mainly because, it is argued, he has abbreviated the quotations from it, which would be the usual way to buy a work on another. However, nothing with this book is as clear cut as that, and it is worth noting that Michael Green argues strongly that both Peter and Jude are based on an already existent document.^{viii} This would mean that Jude just topped and tailed it with his own introduction and conclusion, which seems unlikely, but cannot be excluded as a possibility. It is worth noting that there are also correspondences with the book of James with 93 cases of verbal agreement. Whether the author of 2 Peter^{ix} has included Jude or used the same document it is clear that Jude sits firmly at the heart of first century Christianity and strengthens the case that it was associated with the brother of Jesus and James.

In a nutshell, this is why I love the book of Jude: not because of its content, which is a struggle to understand, but because of its author. As I read it I am taking back to the hillside of Nazareth, and a young boy playing with his older brothers who will grow up with them to be leaders of the first churches.

JUDE AND ITS INCLUSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We are accustomed to finding the book nestling at the end of our Bibles just before we tumble into the turmoil of the book of Revelation, but it might not have been so. However strong the desire to include it in the New Testament because of the prominence of its author, there were strong doubts abroad in the first couple of hundred years of the Church. I imagine that it would have slipped easily enough into the New Testament canon were it not for a couple of offending references. Here they are:

In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' (verses 8 and 9)

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.' (verses 14 and 15)

These stories will be unfamiliar to those of us who do not read the early Jewish literature from the inter-testamental period which were deemed as being inspirational, although not accorded full status as being part of inspired Scripture. To anyone brought up in the first synagogues, however, they would have been familiar because they were read out in services. Clearly, Jude knows them well and is comfortable with them. He does not specifically differentiate them from the established Old Testament books, but there again I am not sure that the leaders of the synagogues would have made much distinction either. I have several times had the privilege of participating in a Roman Catholic funeral service and have read from the Book of Wisdom which is not in the Old Testament. I have never drawn attention to the fact that it is a deuterocanonical text. It fits nicely into the service and is followed by a New Testament reading.

Jude's first quotation appears to come from *The Assumption of Moses*. The original book itself is lost to history apart from some sixth century fragments, but Clement of Alexandria, Origen

and Gelasius (5th century) identify it as the source. It was an apocryphal work of the first century AD or perhaps slightly earlier, purporting to be secret teachings which Moses passed on to Joshua. However, Donald Guthrie offers a word of caution: "He may, on the other hand, be citing a traditional story, which was the basis of the apocryphal book. The evidence is insufficient to be certain."^x

The second comes from the book of 1 Enoch (also known as *The Book of Enoch*), a pseudographical work compiling material written between 300 and 100BC. It was never included in the Jewish canon and did not make it into the deuterocanonical list of books either. Nevertheless it was well known and would have been read out aloud occasionally in Sabbath services. Its fascination with angels and the Messianic reign would have interested the first Christians, so it is not particularly surprising that Jude refers to it, choosing to use its examples as reinforcement to his denunciation of the false teachers.^{xi}

1 Enoch was treated sympathetically by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, although one suspects that its inclusion by Jude bears strongly on their reception of it. Ultimately, though, its influence waned. Augustine is typical of this reaction, arguing against its inclusion in the canon of scripture because it contained false statements and was clearly not written before the flood as it is claimed to be. But did Jude believe it be part of accepted scripture? Here we are on difficult ground. We do not know how clearly what we call the Old Testament canon was defined before the first century, much less how the various Christian congregations decided what to use and what not. As the books of the New Testament were only just beginning to circulate slowly between the churches, and as some of them had yet to be written when Jude put stylus to papyrus the Jewish works of literature were effectively their only scripture, and one would hazard a guess that an individual congregation's library would have been extremely limited. It was going to be a long time before the question of which books are considered authoritative and which are not.^{xii} Guthrie's cautious statement is worth noting: "Nevertheless, if it cannot be demonstrated that Jude regards 1 Enoch as Scripture, he clearly holds it in high esteem and considers it legitimate to cite it in support of his argument".^{xiii}

All of the above does not resolve the question which will be in the more conservative minds among us: How can a book of the New Testament treat such an obviously apocryphal work as true? A good number of conservative commentators argue that he may be selecting an example of what he considers to be mythical to make his point. Michael Green, for example, says "even if he knew it to be a myth, he might readily use it as an illustrative argument, seeing that it was so familiar to his readers. Paul does not mind using a heathen poet in this way (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor.15:32-33; Titus 1:12)."^{xiv} In any case most conservative commentators these days will point out that Jude's technique is typical of the way that first century Jews might have argued from an ancient text (we call this a 'midrashic technique'), with similar methods to be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is arguing that ancient prophecies have been fulfilled in this situation: "Jude exhibits a combination of text and commentary (i.e. sacred text and sacred tradition) . . . it involves "a contemporizing or midrashic way of handling the text, such that one can say "this is that" or "this is just like that."^{xv}

To all the above I think I would add one more point. It may well be that Jude's opponents were using the book of Enoch themselves, so he would have happily quoted it back to them. We know that the early churches were besieged by contemporary fervour concerning angels. Paul warned the Colossians "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you." (Col 2:18), and he advised Timothy to avoid those who "devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." (1 Tim 1:4). Later he suggests that Titus to "avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless," (Titus 3:9). Clearly the early Christians were much affected by contemporary Jewish speculations and theological conjecture where the Book of Enoch would certainly feature strongly. While Jude alludes to Old Testament stories, with which he assumes his listeners would be familiar, he specifically quotes Enoch which they might not know as well, but which could possibly appear in a theological debate with his enemies.^{xvi}

In conclusion, then: Yes, Jude cites an apocryphal book or two, but we cannot know if he included it in some sort of canon of scripture, nor even if he believed it to relate a true story. On balance, I suspect that he was flexible in what he deemed to be authoritative scripture, and he may even have believed that the stories he tells to be true. As a child of his time he would have believed much which we now discount, such as the sun circling the earth and perhaps even a flat earth. I do not

think it is a hugely important consideration, and certainly not sufficient to deny his letter a place in our New Testament canon.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF JUDE

It is worth considering in all our perusal of the book's contents that it was, as Ben Witherington III points out in his commentary, that it was written to be read out aloud in church, not studied in a quiet corner of a theological library. It is polemical and direct, assumes that its listeners know who the infiltrators of the church are, and uses the writer's own authority to press the point rather than intricate analysis of the arguments in discussion. This certainly fits well with person of Jude as the author, but makes it notoriously difficult to preach from. I have found the commentaries very helpful, particularly those by Green and Witherington, and wish you well if you have chosen to preach a sermon or two from it. If you would like to treat your congregation to a very nice seven minute video downloadable introduction to the book I can commend The Bible Project which you will find on YouTube.

CONCLUSION

When we read the Book of Jude we are transported back into the milieu of First Century Palestinian Christianity. No matter that we cannot identify the opponents he refers to, suffice it to say that their arguments and obsessions were typically Jewish and would have spilt over into many, if not most, Palestinian congregations of their time. Jude uses not just Old Testament stories to demonstrate that the presence of such people is expected and has been prophesied, but also dips into the non-Old Testament stories that they were using, turning their own material against them. Above all, this book rests not on the long list of analogies and examples which it uses as ammunition, but on the character and person of Jude himself. We are introduced to a brother of Jesus, an itinerant leader, whose ministry was to extend into the second half of the century. When we read it and study it we are immersed in the first generation of church authorities who, without a fully written New Testament, hundreds of years before Ecumenical Councils would become possible, relied on their own intimate association with Jesus as they struggled to iron out problems and keep the churches true to the Gospel as they had received it. When we read Jude we are seated on the floor of a first century house hearing the voice of Jesus transmitted by his brother. If it is polemical and seems rather bad-tempered we can be sure it authentically transmits to us what it must have felt like in those early days of church history.

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ⁱ There is an excellent free study of this on line, R. Bauckham "The Relatives of Jesus" reprinted from *Themelios* 21.2 (January 1996) pp. 18-21 :

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_relatives_bauckham.html .

This is a short version of his book R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990).

ⁱⁱ Richard Bauckham, "Jude, Epistle of." Vol 3, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et.al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p.1101.

ⁱⁱⁱ Flavius Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews* Book 20, Chapter 9, 1.

^{iv} Simeon was the son of Clopas and led the Jerusalem church - for decades until his martyrdom

^v Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.7.14.

^{vi} Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.19.1-3.20.7; 3.32.5-6.

“But when this same Domitian had commanded that the descendants of David should be slain, an ancient tradition says that some of the heretics brought accusation against the descendants of Jude, on the ground that they were of the lineage of David and were related to Christ himself. Hegesippus relates these facts in the following words.

“Of the family of the Lord there were still living the grandchildren of Jude, who is said to have been the Lord's brother according to the flesh. Information was given that they belonged to the family of David, and they were brought to the Emperor Domitian by the Evocatus (a Roman soldier). For Domitian feared the coming of Christ as Herod also had feared it. And he asked them if they were descendants of David, and they confessed that they were. Then he asked them how much property they had, or how much money they owned. And both of them answered that they had only nine thousand denarii, half of which belonged to each of them; and this property did not consist of silver, but of a piece of land which contained only thirty-nine acres, and from which they raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labour. Then they showed their hands, exhibiting the hardness of their bodies and the callousness produced upon their hands by continuous toil as evidence of their own labour. And when they were asked concerning Christ and his kingdom, of what sort it was and where and when it was to appear, they, answered that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and angelic one, which would appear at the end of the world, when he should come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and to give unto every one according to his works. Upon hearing this, Domitian did not pass judgment against them, but, despising them as of no account, he let them go, and by a decree put a stop to the persecution of the Church. But when they were released they ruled the churches because they were witnesses and were also relatives of the Lord. And peace being established, they lived until the time of Trojan. These things are related by Hegesippus.”

^{vii} Bauckham's online article informs that “their names are not preserved in Eusebius's quotations from Hegesippus, but in another ancient summary of Hegesippus's account of them (Paris MS 1555A and Bodleian MS Barocc. 142).”

^{viii} Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: IVP, 1968), pp. 50-55.

^{ix} The question of the origin of 2 Peter is one of the most difficult subjects in New Testament study.

^x Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction, 3rd Ed., revised* (London: IVP, 1974), p. 918.

^{xi} Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “The *Book of Enoch*: Its Reception in Second Temple Jewish and in Christian Tradition,” *Early Christianity* 4 (2013): 7–40. He argues that echoes of Enoch are found in 1 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation as well as the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the writings of Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine.

^{xii} They had generally agreed on the contents of the Law and the Prophets, the third division of scriptures known as the Writings may well have been less defined: cf. Craig A. Evans, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Canon of Scripture in the Time of Jesus,” *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 67-79.

^{xiii} *Op. cit.*, p.917.

^{xiv} *Op. cit.*, p.49.

^{xv} Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove/Nottingham UK: IVP, 2007), p.605. See also Green (2nd ed., p 176), and Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), p.4.

^{xvi} “Jude's mind is full of Old Testament allusions although he does not directly cite from it.” Guthrie, *op.cit.*, p.927.