

The Epistle of Jude

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Structure, Form and Content

In its form, the Epistle of Jude is a classic example of an ancient letter. It begins with a greeting, continues with a theme, evolves into a body and concludes with a final doxology. Traditionally a linear structure has been suggested for the Epistle of Jude, where the theme of the letter focuses on the central content i.e. the apostates, giving the letter an outlook quite isolated from the ecclesiastical context.¹ Occasionally, a more chiasmic structure has been proposed.² Yet more attention has been given to the false teachers within the Church community than to the Church itself. Thus, traditionally more attention is given to the apostate problem rather than to the pneumatic solution in Jude. Despite the large portion of polemics, Jude is more of an ecclesiastical exhortation than an attack against the apostates.³ The Epistle of Jude has a definite chiasmic structure.

The outline clearly shows that the importance of Jude pertains to the Church and its preservation. The battle against the apostates is in the heart of the letter. The following structural outline focuses on the Church community and its strategy for overcoming the danger of false teachers:

¹ Daniel F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement and Style: Rhetoric Criticism of Jude and II Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. vii. Bo Reicke, *The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), p.8.

² S. Maxwell Coder, *Jude: The Acts of The Apostates* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 6.

³ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 497.

Assurance for the Christian (Jude 1, 2)

The believer and the faith (Jude 3)

Apostates described (Jude 4)

Apostasy in Old Testament History (Jude 5-8)

Apostates in the supernatural realm (Jude 9, 10)

An ancient trio of apostates (Jude 11)

Apostates in the natural realm (Jude 12, 13)

Apostasy in Old Testament prophesy (Jude 14 – 16)

Apostates described (Jude 17-19)

The believer and the faith (Jude 20-23)

Assurance for the Christian (Jude 24, 25).⁴

Beside the suggested chiasmic outline, two important parallel formations in the text must be noticed. The first one is within the extensive stretch of Jude 4–16 and contains a repetition of a certain formula. The formula contains four steps: (1) reference to the apostates, (2) three Torah examples, (3) a second reference to the apostates and (4) an Apocryphal example.

The second parallel surrounds this stretch and is both in the beginning and the end of the letter. It contains three points in the following order: (1) Preserved by Christ (Jude 1, 24-15), (2) Loved by God (Jude 1, 21) and (3) Faith through the Spirit (Jude 2-3, 20). Clearly this is a Trinitarian reference.

The language of Jude is unique compared to the rest of the New Testament. Out of 227 words of the Epistle, fifteen are not found anywhere else in the New Testament.⁵

⁴ Coder, p. 6.

Words like *αγιοσ* and *κλητοσ* may resemble Pauline style, however, the Epistle of Jude carries extraordinary similarities with II Peter especially in its use of the Old Testament and poetic polemics.⁶ The following parallel of similarities, which represents the literary correspondence between Jude and II Peter, may be observed in the following comparison:⁷

Jude 4	Godless men who deny the Lord	2 Pet. 2:1
Jude 6	Angles held in darkness	2 Pet. 2:4
Jude 7	Sodom and Gomorrah	2 Pet. 2:6
Jude 8	Slanderers of celestial beings	2 Pet. 2:10
Jude 9	Michael	2 Pet. 2:11
Jude 10	Blasphemers	2 Pet. 2:12
Jude 11	Followers of Balaam	2 Pet. 2:15
Jude 12	Clouds without rain	2 Pet. 2:17
Jude 13	Reserved darkness	2 Pet. 2:17
Jude 16	Lust, boast and flatter	2 Pet. 2:18
Jude 17	Apostolic prophesy	2 Pet. 3:2
Jude 18	Last days mockers	2 Pet 3:3

Although Jude is written in Greek, a close dependence to the Hebrew writings is observed. For example Jude 12-13 reads after the Hebrew Torah in a translation, which is

⁵ Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 35.

⁶ Charles Bigg, *The International Critical Commentary: Epistles of II Peter and Jude* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), p. 310-11.

⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p. 357. Watson, p. 164-69. Reicke, p. 189. An extended discussion on the grammatical, linguistically and thematic similarities of Jude and II Peter can be found in Joseph R. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. John and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. i-civ.

not supported by the LXX. In an apocryphal context a similar parallel is observed between Jude 14-15 and 1 Enoch 6, 12-16.⁸

Theological Emphasis

The theological emphases of Jude are strictly related to the situation of his readers' community. Although the latter contains only twenty-five verses, it has references to a large number of early Christian doctrines.⁹ Belonging to the "Early Catholicism", Jude's theology engages three major features: (1) no hope in the immanent Parousia; (2) institutionalization and (3) doctrinal orthodoxy.¹⁰ These are the typical characteristics of an early Christian community. The text seems to lead us through a similar list of theological emphasis.

The idea of preservation (being kept) similar to the Old Testament prayer, "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust" (Ps. 16:1) is present. It is continuously repeated in Jude though the words *θερεω* and *φιλασω*. The addressees are kept by God (Jude 1), the fallen angels are kept in chains (Jude 6), darkness is being kept for the unjust (Jude 13), the believers are to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 21) and finally God is the ultimate keeper (Jude 24).¹¹

The idea of preservation has an immediate connection to the emphasis of faith and false teachers. While the role of false teachers will be discussed later, it will be appropriate to notice that their action is both within the community and against the faith.

⁸ Richard Baukham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jude and II Peter* vol. 50 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), p. 7.

⁹ George E. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 551. Grant, p. 35-36.

¹⁰ J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977). Charles Landon, *A Text-Critical Study of the Epistle of Jude* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 35. Baukham, 8-9.

¹¹ Johnson, p. 498.

Thus, faith becomes both the subject of preservation and the means by which “the believer is preserved unto the day of presentation.”¹²

Faith employs four anti-heretical weapons: scripture, spirit and eschatological prophecy and worship. Scripture in Jude carries the characteristics not only of the Torah, but also of the Apocrypha as well. A number of Torah references are mentioned. The list contains Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah, Michael, Moses, Balaam, Cain, Korah, etc. Furthermore, a great deal of Apocryphal references is brought up. Among them are the fallen angel, *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch*.

Jude, however, does not stop there but continues to a more mystical pneumatological experience involving prayer in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). Various authors interpret this as prayer, which is initiated in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps of Luther’s early protestant interpretation, which is evident in his translation.¹³ The text, however, reads in a more radical fusion of charismatic prayer including glossolalia.¹⁴

Furthermore, this charismatic reference is in the context of the gift of prophecy exercised by the apostles with special eschatological emphasis that follows (Jude 17). The continuation of the eschatological motif is connected to the expectation of eternal life (Jude 21). In this sense, the apostolic prophecy serves not only as admonition for the apostates, but also as an encouragement for the ecclesia and the community.

Jude’s grand finale includes worship in the form of closing doxology (Jude 24-25). Worship is both the means of winning the battle against the apostates and a result

¹² James Hassting, *The Great Text of the Bible* vol. XIX (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 421.

¹³ As cited by Bigg, p. 340

¹⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 145-46.

from the victory. It focuses on God as the Protector of the church and Arranger of eternity (Jude 24).

Canonical Context

It is remarkable that although Jude is a very short letter it is not been lost and has found its place in the canon.¹⁵ The Muratorian Canon first refers to the Epistle of Jude by name as early as AD 175.¹⁶ The canonicity of the book has often been questioned because of its open mention of the Apocrypha, in particular the use of the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, till its defense by Didymus of Alexandria (c. 395).¹⁷ In the early Christian community the Epistle of Jude was placed among the seven New Testament books whose canonicity has been disputed.¹⁸

Although rejected in earlier Eastern canons (Amhleilochios – d. after 394),¹⁹ the Epistle of Jude finds its place in the Eastern Orthodox tradition immediately after the Third Epistles of John and prior to Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Jude is a continuation of John's idea of false teachers. On the other hand, Romans ch.1 continues with Jude's idea of end time perversions and apostate. Furthermore, the number of Pauline-like words may be a link to the transitional bridge, which the Letter to the Hebrews provides between Pauline tradition and the writings of the rest of the New Testament church leaders.

In the Western tradition it is placed between the Epistles of John and Revelation. Again, Jude is a continuation of John's idea of false teachers. The concluding prophecy

¹⁵ Kistemaker, p. 355. Robert Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 386.

¹⁶ Kistemaker, p. 360.

¹⁷ David Turner, *Jude: A Structural Commentary* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1957), p.9. Frank, Gebelein, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 383. Mayor, p. clii-lvii. Metzger, p. 235.

¹⁸ Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 19.

¹⁹ Metzger, p. 212.

of Jude is beautifully picked up by the prophetic purpose, structure and content of the Book of Revelation.

Original Context

Due to the Jude's brevity it is rather impossible to draw conclusions about the authorship and the date of the Epistle from its text.²⁰ Traditionally, Jude is placed in the category of early Catholic Epistles. Due to different interpretations of Jude 3, it has also been proposed that it may belong to the "Apocalyptic Jewish Christian" writings.²¹ Some modern views would argue for Jude in a late Gnostic context.²² However, since the readers know not only the Old Testament but the Jewish Apocrypha as well, this may be implying that Jude is written quite early.

Perhaps, the epistle can be dated before the fall of Jerusalem.²³ The dates vary depending on identity of Jude. Is he the brother of James or is a pseudonym of a writer who lives in later period? Undoubtedly, the author of the Epistle is Jude the brother of James (Jude 1). Origen recognizes Jude as an author in a commentary note on Matthew 10:17.²⁴ The question then is, who exactly is Jude?

It can be rather easily considered that there are five men in the New Testament by the name of Judas or Jude.²⁵ The first obvious example would be Judas Iscariot who can immediately be eliminated for obvious reasons. Judas of Damascus and Judas Barsabbas who have no obvious connection with James (Acts 9:11; 15:22) can also be eliminated.

²⁰ Johnson, p. 497. Kistemaker, p. 359.

²¹ Bauckham, pp. 8-16. Turner, p. 8. Bigg, p. 313.

²² Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 231.

²³ Tiney, p. 371.

²⁴ As quoted by Metzger, p. 138.

²⁵ John MacArthur, *Beware of the Pretenders* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980), p. 8. Turner, p.3. George L. Lawlor, *Translation and Exposition of the Epistle of Jude* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976) pp. 1-5.

The remaining two choices would be the apostle James, often referred as “Judas (not Iscariot)” and Judas the half-brother of Jesus.²⁶

Judas (not Iscariot), referred also as Thadeus and Lebbaeus (John 14:22) is called the brother of James (Lk. 6:16; Acts 1:13). However, the Genitive $\phi\iota\alpha\kappa\omega\tau\tau\beta\omicron\upsilon$ is better translated “of James” or even “of Jacob,” which clearly implies a family name. Thus, Judas (not Iscariot) is rather a son of James (Jacob) than his brother.

The remaining Jude, the brother of James and son of Joseph and Mary, seems to be the most appropriate choice for author of Jude (Mt. 13:55-56).²⁷ Although Jude is on one hand the half-brother of the Jesus (Gal. 1:19) and on the other, the brother of the general overseer of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:21), he humbly calls himself slave and servant of the Lord (Jude 1).

With such personal humility, Jude approaches his audience. While their geographical location may be impossible to locate, the Jude’s Letter wrote to them carries quite a number of characteristics of their community. A Parallel of triads in Jude 1 and Jude 2 is offered in the greeting, which both addresses and characterizes the readers.

1. *Beloved* (Jude 1) and *mercy* (Jude 2). Many letter MSS read *sanctified* instead of *beloved*.²⁸ The idea is that God has loved us and showed us His mercy.
2. *Preserved* (Jude 1) and *peace* (Jude 2). *Preserved* or *kept* is the key word in Jude. The idea is that we are kept in Christ’s peace, and thus we have protection.
3. *Called* (Jude 1) and *love* (Jude 2). We are called to love. The repetition of love from the beginning of the parallel provides inclusio to the triads.

²⁶Macarthur, p. 8.

²⁷Bauchkam, p. 14. Reicke, p. 190.

²⁸Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: II Peter and Jude* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 156.

Since the believers are loved by God, preserved by Christ and called by the Spirit this is another Trinitarian reference, which means that the readers are familiar with such theological doctrine. They are further familiar with the Old Testament writings as well as the Jewish Apocrypha. This simply means that Jude writes to a Jewish community.²⁹

The order of the salutation and the ending calls for the following conclusions. First, it is obvious that Jude writes to a community of believers whom God loves. Second, the idea of keeping implies a certain danger, which the community faces. Finally, the calling of the saints is obvious not as reference to salvation, but as a charge for the keeping of the faith from the danger.

Having established these facts, it will be appropriate to investigate the danger, which is the reason why Jude writes his letter. The danger is identified as false teachers who are within the community causing destruction with both their teachings and examples. The Apostates are presented in three different aspects: their denial, description and destruction. They deny Moses and the law Denial of Moses (Jude 8-10) as well as Christ (Jude 4, 8) on the basis of possible prophetic revelation (Jude 6-8, 10, 16).³⁰

The prevailing opinion of modern scholars that the description of the false teachers in Jude is one of Gnostics or Prognostics seems quite an appealing one.³¹ However, when we honestly look at the text such imagery is hard to detect. The opponents in Jude are different than the ones in II Peter. While there they are called “false teachers,” in Jude they are called “godless men.”³² Their teaching is not a product of strange philosophical reasoning, but rather the outcome of a sinful lifestyle. Paul uses a

²⁹ Reicke, p. 1191.

³⁰ Watson, p. 31.

³¹ J. Deryl Charles, *Literary Strategy in the Epistle of Jude* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1993), p. 49.

³² Kistemaker, p. 358.

similar description early in his writings in I Corinthians, without denoting Gnostic influence. The result is that they are “twice dead,” quite a Johannine description (Jude 12; Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

The destruction of the intruders is immanent, but certain. This is an interesting eschatological implication, through which Jude implies final solution of the problem, which both alienates the opponents and preserves the church. This paradigm is used rapidly in latter church history.

Church Context

It is rather surprising that although it is a short letter without many great theological emphases, the Epistle of Jude appears as a nominative reference in a number of medieval ecclesiastical expositions. While answering the city council of Nurnberg in 1525, Hans Denck argues of the relationship between the Bible and saving faith. Describing “the grace of God to the gall of bitterness”, Danck uses the Epistle of Jude as a reference.³³

Martin Luther disputes the authenticity of Jude and in his New Testament translation places after his least favorite book James, and before Revelation. This order appears in the first English New Testament translated by Tyndale (1525), as well as the Cloverdale Bible (1535). It remains untouched until 1539 when reverted by the authorized Great Bible. Despite his dislike, however, Martin Luther uses Jude 16 in his interpretation of Psalm 82:2.³⁴

³³ Hansk Denck, “Bekenntnis fur den Rat zu Nurnberg,” *Quellen und Forshungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* Band XXIV, 2 Teil, p.22.

³⁴ *The Words of Martin Luther* vol. IV(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 305.

Pentecostal Context

The use of Jude does not remain significant in the Reformation alone. It continues through the protestant ages of ecclesiastical history all the way to the beginning of the 20th century when Jude 3 appears in the masthead of the Apostolic Faith newspaper. Although a reference to one of the shortest and theologically “insignificant” New Testament books, the words “Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” become the motto and one of the main characteristics of the Azusa Street Revival.³⁵ They represented the restoration purpose of the Pentecostal movement and its tendency of returning to the heritage and reclaiming the primitivism and the pneumatic power of the Early Church. The faith to be contended was nothing less than the Full Gospel.³⁶

Resembling the same Pentecostal purpose and characteristics the Church of God draws parallels of its vision and the Epistle of Jude. Jude 14-15 appears as a reference to the return of Christ to the Earth and its millennial reign with the saints in the Church of God minutes under the Church of God Teachings article 18.

In 1916, an article appeared on Jude 23 that appeals to the missions. As characteristic for the early Church of God, this mission call is rather local than global.³⁷ A similar article on the same verse appeared in the following year, but this time it dealt with problems within the church. The article focuses on obstacles for sanctification and

³⁵ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 16.

³⁶ *The Apostolic Faith*, vol. 1, No. 11. September 1906.

³⁷ “To the Work in Earnest,” *The Church of God Evangel*, vol. 7, No. 44. October 28, 1916.

baptism with the Holy Spirit, mentioning tobacco use, chewing gum, jewelry and medicine.³⁸

In the Bulgarian Protestant tradition a translation of an error in Jude 20 has been drawing great attention to the pneumatology of the Epistle. While the Bulgarian Orthodox Translation traditionally translates the phrase “Pray in the Holy Spirit” as “Pray through the Holy Spirit,”³⁹ the translation used in Protestant churches clearly reads, “Pray to the Holy Spirit.” The translation where the error occurs comes from the Revised Version and is known as the 1924 Translation.⁴⁰ The 1924 Translation, also known as The Protestant Bible has been reprinted in 1937 and historically has been the most popular translation in the Bulgarian Protestantism. The problem that it creates is expressed by the simple question, “Who are we to pray to?” A limited revised edition of the New Testament was published in 1993 attempting to bring a few but much needed corrections to the text. According to it, Jude 20 reads “Pray in the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, because of the wide range of usage and authority of the Bulgarian Protestant Bible within the local Protestant Community the problem still remains unfixed. Perhaps it can be only corrected with a new authorized translation, which would penetrate the existing tradition with an improved reading of text.

³⁸ *The Church of God Evangel*, vol 8, No. 4. January 27, 1917.

³⁹ *The Bible. Bulgarian Holy Synod Edition* (Sofia: Orthodox Publishing House, 1995), p. 1387.

⁴⁰ *The Bible* (Sofia: Royal Printing House, 1924), p. 165.

⁴¹ *The New Testament* (Sofia: Veren, 1993), p. 305.

Epilogue

In conclusion, it is evident that although it is one of the smallest books in the Bible, the Epistle of Jude carries vivid New Testament characteristics. It is unique in its use of the Apocrypha and in its approach to ecclesiastical doctrines. Rejected by many through the course of Church history, the Epistle has found its canonical place and thus has become irreplaceable.

Jude's fatherly advises and mentoring concerns are valid not only for the church of the first century, but in our post-modern context as well. Twenty centuries later, when doctrines, interpretations and convictions rapidly adopt the changes of life styles, it seems appropriate for the Church once again to be "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ..."

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