

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF JUDE AND 2 PETER: THE USE OF ANCIENT JEWISH TRADITIONS

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Like many a preacher after him the writer of the epistle of Jude spent most of his time on his introduction and his illustrations, closing out the rest of his homily in just a few lines and reserving only enough space to include a beautiful benediction. Whatever commentators have seen in Jude it is the section of illustrations that has captivated their attention, not the least due to the generous inclusion of materials outside the (later) declared canon of Scripture.

I would like to center this study particularly on the epistle of Jude, with an occasional tie-in with 2 Peter. Because of the evident relation between the two letters in general structure and language it will not be necessary to deal with each separately.

### I. HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

The heart of the epistle of Jude is found in vv 5-19, a section excoriating false teachers. A twofold division has been discerned in the body of the letter: (1) Verse 3 contains the appeal to the readers, an appeal not spelled out until vv 20-23, and (2) v 4 contains the background for the appeal, developed in vv 5-19 in a series of texts and interpretations.<sup>1</sup> This lengthy series is drawn from various sources in Jewish literature and provides the occasion for a discussion of Jude's hermeneutical principles and procedures.

Some of Jude's material is drawn from books found in the Hebrew Scriptures, while some is drawn from other sources—primarily, it appears, the Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses, included now among writings called the Pseudepigrapha.

This calls for a brief treatment of basic terminology. The term "Scripture" refers to writings that are in some sense authoritative. These are "inspired" writings—that is, books composed under divine inspiration. "Canon" refers to writings considered authoritative for religious practice and doctrine, representing a closed collection to which nothing can be added or subtracted. Thus according to some a canonical book need not be inspired (e.g. Esther or Ecclesiastes), an inspired book need not be canonical (e.g. as seen in *1 Enoch*), and a book can at once be canonical and inspired (as in the current canon).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>A. C. Sundberg, "The Bible Canon and the Christian Doctrine of Inspiration," *Int* 29 (1975) 356.

What books were considered "canonical" (a later term) in the first century A.D.? Some have argued that before the end of that century there was not a fixed collection. While the Law and the Prophets were recognized as a body, the Writings were a large, undifferentiated group. Thus the early Christians received this fluid group of materials.<sup>3</sup> This view has been contested on the basis of the testimony of 4 Ezra 14:45 ff. and Josephus with regard to the extent of the canon—that is, 24 and 22 books respectively. In addition there is the lack of citations from apocryphal literature in Jewish and Christian sources between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. The NT reflects a more or less limited canon, although the precise contents cannot be determined.<sup>4</sup>

As far as Jude is concerned, what use was made of various sources? First, there is the use of materials from the Torah (i.e. the accounts of the exodus, of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the examples of Cain, Balaam and Korah). Then other sources were drawn on, such as the Book of Enoch (i.e. the judgment of God upon the angels, the figure of the "wandering stars," and the prophecy of Enoch regarding God's judgment on the ungodly) and the Assumption of Moses (i.e. the dispute between Michael and the devil). In addition, terminology similar to that occurring in books like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Apocalypse of Baruch (e.g. 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 24:1) occurs in Jude (see vv 6, 7, 13, 14, 16). Some examples: "deny our only Master and Lord" (v 4; 1 *Enoch* 48:10); "who long ago were designated" (v 4; *T. Reub.* 5:5; 1 *Enoch* 108:7); "flattering people to gain advantage" (v 16; *As. Mos.* 5:5).

More specifically, in Jude's references to the angels (v 6) the writer would most likely have been aware of the story of "the sons of God" (Gen 6:1-4) as background, then supplemented it with the materials from the Book of Enoch. Added elements are (1) the identity of the sinners (viz. the angels or watchers, 6:2 ff.); (2) their sin (viz. leaving the holy eternal place and corrupting themselves with women, 12:4; 15:3); (3) their punishment (viz. bound and cast into darkness, 10:4-5; 13:1).

Again, in the story of Michael and the devil (Jude 9) Jude supplied more specific references than are found in the parallel passage in 2 Pet 2:11:

<i>Jude</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>
the name Michael	refers to "angels"
use of aorist verbs	use of one present verb
concrete response ("the Lord rebuke you")	a general statement of rebuke

Relating then to Jude's procedure, the issue is not so much whether the writer quoted "inspired" materials. Rather, it is how and why he used his sources to reveal the truth and accomplish his purpose in writing.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 355; *The Old Testament and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1964) 82, 102-103.

<sup>4</sup>S. Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of the Hebrew Scripture*.

<sup>5</sup>D. J. Rowston, "The Most Neglected Book in the New Testament," *NTS* 21 (1975) 555.

1. *How did Jude use these materials?* Four ways may be suggested: (1) quotations (see v 9 and the Assumption of Moses, according to the testimony of Clement of Alexandria, *Fragments* 2, and v 14, where *1 Enoch* 1:9 is cited); (2) allusions (see v 4, where “deny our only Master and Lord” is similar to *1 Enoch* 48:10, “for they denied the Lord of Spirits and his Messiah”; v 14, where Enoch is called “the seventh from Adam,” an expression found in *1 Enoch* 60:8; and vv 15–16, where “harsh words” spoken against the Lord appears to echo *1 Enoch* 5:4; 27:2); (3) reminiscences (see v 7 on the disregard of morality, similar to the tenor of *T. Naph.* 3:2–5; and on “wandering stars” [v 13] see *1 Enoch* 18:14–16); (4) catchwords (see vv 4, 15, 18 on “ungodly people” with references in *1 Enoch* to “sinners” and “impious”).

It is not that Jude was simply a borrower. The epistle shows many signs of his own choice of words and patterns of arrangement. For example, he employs catchwords that were part of current language: (1) his use of *houtoi* (“these,” vv 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19) for the false teachers; (2) the repetition of *agapētoi* (“beloved” or “dear friends,” vv 3, 17, 20); and (3) the emphatic use of *hymeis* (“you,” vv 17, 20). He is fond of triads, such as “called, beloved . . . and kept” (v 1); or groups of examples given in threes, as in vv 5–7 and v 11.

2. *Why did Jude use these varied materials?* To begin with, these sources are mainly apocalyptic writings. In the early apostolic proclamation there was already an apocalyptic tenor, a tenor opposed to rising gnosticism (as seen in Colossians or 1 John). In Jude we observe the utilization of apocalyptic materials against antinomian or libertarian proponents. This is evident in the letter in vv 4, 8, 10, 12–13, 16, 19, 22–23. One aspect of his strategy was the use of Jewish religious literature, apparently familiar to his readers (see vv 4, 6–7, 9, 12–16, 18).

Jude’s hermeneutic included the principle that inspired Scripture speaks of the last days in which the interpreter is living (a concept not unlike that found in the Qumran community in, say, the Habakkuk commentary). This is most evident in the use of the text of *1 Enoch* 1:9. It is striking that the opening word in the Greek text of Jude 14 is *propheteusen*—that is, “(Enoch) prophesied.” And that inspired utterance of Enoch is directed against the false teachers of Jude’s day. By referring to Enoch “prophesying” Jude clearly accepted it as an inspired, apparently historical, and true utterance, without necessarily placing approval on the entire content of the Book of Enoch.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to 2 Peter, which “is very careful to excise all of the allusions to the Pseudepigrapha,”<sup>7</sup> Jude’s procedure was to utilize these writings for their impact on his readers, who presumably would be familiar with this range of writings. It appears that in the early Church there existed the problem of the propriety or impropriety of citing this sort of literature in public documents. Very likely Jude and 2 Peter, respectively, reflect different views regarding this issue.

<sup>6</sup>D. E. Hiebert, “An Exposition of Jude 12–16,” *BSac* 142 (1985) 244–245.

<sup>7</sup>J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2. ix.

One might argue further for the importance of a living community of believers always making decisions about the nature and use of religious writings—a decision based upon their circumstances. Their life experience caused certain books to “come to life.” While it is difficult to date the epistle of Jude, two periods during the first century might provide a milieu. Some place Jude in the period A.D. 55–65,<sup>8</sup> seeing a connection between Paul, Judas of Jerusalem and the meeting of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). This period was also the doorway to a time of threat and terror in Jerusalem during A.D. 66–74. Others place Jude in the period c. A.D. 90, a time that saw the growth of forms of gnosticism and possibly also the threat of Roman persecution.<sup>9</sup>

Thus apocalyptic writings such as the Book of Enoch, Jubilees and the Assumption of Moses took on added significance. In more recent times one might recall the period of Martin Luther when there was perceived great power in the central focus of the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians (as opposed, say, to the epistle of James or the Apocalypse). People in those days needed that message through Paul. Or again, during the Hitler era in Germany, for one like Hans Lilje the Apocalypse became important. These were days not unlike those described in such writings as 1 and 2 Maccabees or the Assumption of Moses. The story of Taxo and his seven sons (*As. Mos.* 9:1–7), or the tales of the widow and her seven sons along with those of the aged Eleazar (as told in 2 and 4 Maccabees), were also set in days characterized by persecution under tyrants.

Jews of the first century A.D. were accustomed to accept rabbinical explanations or additions to Scripture as possessing authority. *Pirque Abot*, for example, affirms that both the written Torah and the oral are of equal antiquity and authority. Paul’s use of rabbinic interpretations appears to indicate acceptance along with Biblical texts (e.g. 1 Cor 10:4 on the “traveling rock” in the wilderness; Gal 3:19 on angels as intermediaries at Sinai; 2 Tim 3:8 on Jannes and Jambres opposing Moses). In Pseudo-Philo (first century A.D.) a clear distinction is not made between the text of Scripture and its interpretation. Rather, the two are interwoven.

The fact that both Enoch and his writings were so highly regarded both in Jewish literature and in the early Church fathers is significant for our purpose. *Jub.* 4:16–23 refers to Enoch writing the calendar (see *1 Enoch* 72–80). In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs reference is made to the writing, or the book(s), or the words of Enoch at least seven times (*T. Sim.* 5:4; *T. Levi* 14:1; *T. Judah* 18:1; *T. Zeb.* 3:4; *T. Dan* 5:6; *T. Naph.* 4:1; *T. Benj.* 9:1). Worth noting in this connection is that the stories of the watchers and of Sodom occur several times in this same collection (*T. Reub.* 5:6–7; *T. Naph.* 3:4–5; 4:1; *T. Asher* 7:1). In the Testament of Abraham Enoch is called “the scribe of righteousness” and he writes “the sins of souls” (13:21–27). According to Pseudo-Eupolemus, Enoch discovered astrology (9.17.8–9).

Turning to the literature of the early Church, we find the epistle of Barnabas citing a passage from *1 Enoch* (89:56). It is introduced with the

<sup>8</sup>E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 230–236.

<sup>9</sup>Rowston, “Neglected” 563.

formula "For the Scripture says," and the quotation is followed by the words "And it took place according to what the Lord said" (*Barn.* 16:5). Tertullian writes of "the Scripture of Enoch," referring to the passage quoted in Jude 14-15, saying that "Enoch in the same Scripture has preached likewise concerning the Lord . . . and we read that 'every Scripture suitable for edification is divinely inspired' [citing 2 Tim 3:16]" (*On the Apparel of Women*, 1.3). Jude's use of material from the Assumption of Moses is noted by Origen (*On First Principles* 3.2.1), and he quotes Enoch as a prophet (4.1.35). Yet he acknowledges that the books bearing Enoch's name "do not at all circulate in the church as divine" (*Against Celsus* 5.54). Augustine was willing to credit some of Enoch's writings as divine due to Jude's use of them, yet he denied the canonical status of the book of Enoch as a whole (see *The City of God* 15.23). Surveying this evidence Theodore Zahn apparently felt that Jude's use of several pseudepigraphic works seemed to indicate that these works "were regarded in this worthy circle (of the apostles) as reliable witnesses of genuine tradition and true prophecy."<sup>10</sup>

To sum up Jude's hermeneutical procedures, then, we make the following observations: (1) Jude appears to have affirmed some degree of continuity between the generally recognized Jewish Scriptures, some of these intertestamental writings, and the Christian writings; (2) Jude appears to have been more concerned about message than source and thus showed flexibility in his use of materials; (3) Jude appears to allow for a distinction between "Scripture" and "canon."

## II. PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

How did Jude approach his readership, and what effect did he expect (or hope) his words would have upon them?

First, he used materials that both he and his readers were familiar with and that they respected. "He is speaking to them in language which they will readily understand, and that remains one of the most important elements in the communication of Christian truth."<sup>11</sup>

Second, the sense of urgency in his statement of intent is arresting: "I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend (*epagōnizesthai*) for the faith that was once for all (*hapax*) delivered to the saints" (v 3). He wrote with urgency, and he appealed to them to fight or to struggle on behalf of the faith. The present infinitive, based on the root *agōnizō*, is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. Yet there is an example in 1 Tim 6:12 that comes close to the tenor of Jude's words: "Fight (*agōnizou*) the good fight (*agōna*) of faith."

Third, Jude encouraged his readers to stay true to their Christian heritage by emphasizing the consistency of God's judgments against those who turn away from God and his commandments (vv 5, 6, 8, 11, 12-13, 15, 16, 18b, 19). This has proved to be so in history and will be repeated in the future.

Finally, there is the appeal to attain a higher level of faith and experience. Both Jude's penchant for triadic arrangements and a keen sense of the

<sup>10</sup>T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1953), 2. 269 ff.

<sup>11</sup>M. Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 177-178.

common hortatory tradition of early Christianity are evident in vv 20-21. The four injunctions here are composed of three present-tense participial clauses and one containing an aorist imperative verb, which contain two sets of triads: (1) one setting forth faith, hope and love; and (2) the other an informal trinitarian combination—namely, the Holy Spirit, God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Here the readers are exhorted to “build up themselves” in that “most holy faith” that earlier had been “once for all delivered to the saints” (v 3); to pray in the Holy Spirit; to keep themselves in “the love of God” (here probably a subjective genitive, similar to John 15:9, “remain in my love”); and to wait for the mercy of the Lord (here probably used in the usual eschatological sense found in both Jewish and early Christian literature, e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 10:4; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 82:2; 1 *Enoch* 1:8; 2 *Tim* 1:18; 1 *Clem.* 28:1). To remain faithful is tied to the expectation of salvation, not condemnation, at the *parousia*.

### III. THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The theological character of this brief epistle is a combination of God-centered activities and Christological interpretation of Jewish traditional affirmations about God. Two observations must suffice. First, whereas in 1 *Enoch* God is frequently described as “the Lord of Spirits,” whom the sinners of the earth deny (38:2; 41:2; 45:2; 46:7; 48:10; 67:8; cf. Titus 1:16), in Jude the ungodly persons “deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v 4). Does Jude mean to apply both titles of Jesus or to apply “Master” to God and “Lord” to Jesus? Two factors appear to favor the former option: (1) The construction of the Greek phrase is a single article (*ton*) with two nouns joined by “and” (*kai*); (2) the use of “Master” (*despoten*) in a closely related text (2 *Pet* 2:1) appears to refer to Jesus—namely, “the Master who bought them” (cf. *Rev* 5:9; 1 *Pet* 1:18).

Second, the text of 1 *Enoch* indicates that “the Holy and Great One” (1:3) and “the Eternal God” (1:4) provide the antecedents for the pronoun “he” of 1:9. This is the text quoted by Jude. Enoch reiterates that “the holy Lord” will come in anger (91:7). Yet it appears that Jude has used “Lord” (*kyrios*) of Jesus as the Judge of the ungodly. This practice of early Christian writers—of taking prophetic statements of God’s eschatological visitation and applying them to Jesus’ second advent—is seen a number of times in the NT (see Isa 40:10/*Rev* 22:12; Isa 63:1-6/*Rev* 19:13, 15; Zech 14:5/1 *Thess* 3:13). A remarkable example of this practice occurs in 2 *Thess* 1:7-10 where the phraseology found in a whole series of OT passages describing Yahweh’s activities is applied to the Lord Jesus in his eschatological advent (see Ps 103:20; Dan 7:9-10; Isa 66:15-16; Ps 36:10; Isa 2:10, 19, 21; Ps 96:13; 68:35).

Thus Jude’s hermeneutical principles led him to use a variety of sources in the interest of reaching his readers with urgent words concerning “the faith” and “the Lord Jesus” within a framework of strong apocalyptic overtones.