

THE LETTER OF JUDE

AUTHOR AND DATE

This last letter of the New Testament claims to be written by Jude (or Judas) "brother of James." Mark 3.6 lists both Judas and James as brothers of Jesus. By the second century, Judas Didymus Thomas (Didymus and Thomas mean "twin" in Greek and Aramaic, respectively) was associated with extra-canonical documents such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas* (the latter sees him as Jesus' twin brother; e.g., 11, 34, 45). By referring so obliquely to a Judas who may be Jesus' brother, this letter's author may have been attempting to reclaim the figure of Jude from other Christian groups who claimed his authority. Some scholars suggest that the epistle may actually have been written by Jesus' brother in the 50s. Others insist that the letter is later (perhaps early second century) and pseudonymous; the reference (v. 17) to "the apostles" as established authorities suggests institutional hierarchies already in place.

CONTEXT

The letter warns of immoral "intruders" whose laxity challenges institutional authority. Echoes of Paul's opponents in Corinth (see 1–2 Cor) and Gnostic libertine groups suggest ongoing conflicts over how to understand God's gift of salvation from sin ("grace," v. 4). Some Christians taught that, thanks to God's salvation, they were no longer bound to earthly authority and morality. Thus they could not imperil their salvation by any action, since spiritually they were safe.

It is also possible that vague and stereotypical accusations of "licentiousness" rhetorically echo prophetic literature, which equated sexual license with impiety generally (see, in a well-known passage, Ezek 16).

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The letter draws heavily on popular, late Second Temple Jewish cosmic narratives (e.g., 1 *Enoch*) to shape its understanding of the moral order of the universe. The Torah was elaborated in this period by creative narratives filling in the words and deeds of the patriarchs and great leaders of the Israelites (for instance, in *Jubilees*, which consists mostly of instructions to Moses from an angelic presence on the mountain at the time of the giving of the Torah). The author refers, for instance, to a story of the angel Michael and the devil battling over Moses' corpse. Particularly the focus on angels as historical and moral agents (vv. 6, 8–9) ties this letter to patterns of thought common among first-century Jews. The vast collection of stories known as 1 *Enoch*, cited directly in v. 14, created an elaborate angelology and promoted apocalyptic expectations. This book interpreted the "sons of God" in Gen 6.2 as fallen angels whose interactions with humanity initiated a division between godly and godless humans, which would last until the end of the world. The author of Jude couples this Jewish apocalyptic worldview with the more stabilizing "predictions of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17), thereby linking it to Christian tradition. Nonetheless, the prophetic language and angelic outlook of this letter attach it closely, almost intimately, to the Jesus movement's Jewish roots.

The author of 2 Peter used substantial portions of Jude, particularly the idea that present-day religious divisions are simply the latest act in a cosmic drama pitting the pious against their devious and immoral opponents. Jude and 2 Peter remain certain that, as in the past, present, and future, participants in this struggle will receive appropriate rewards and punishments.

Andrew S. Jacobs

¹Jude, a servant^b of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To those who are called, who are beloved^c in^d God the Father and kept safe for^d Jesus Christ:

²May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.

³Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.^e

⁵Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved^f a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And the angels who did not keep

their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day.

⁷Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust,^g serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

⁸Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones.^h ⁹But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and

^a Gk *Judas*

^b Gk *slave*

^c Other ancient authorities read *sanctified*

^d Or *by*

^e Or *the only Master and our Lord Jesus Christ*

^f Other ancient authorities read *though you were once for all fully informed, that Jesus (or Joshua) who saved*

^g Gk *went after other flesh*

^h Or *angels; Gk glories*

1–2: Salutation. *Jude* (Heb "Yehudah"), lit., "Jewish man" or "Judean," the name of several NT figures, including Judas Iscariot (Mk 3:19) and another "Judas" who, along with James, is listed as one of the brothers of Jesus (Mk 6:3). Lk 6:16 and Acts 1:13 refer to "Judas son of James"; although this phrase is normally understood as "son of James" it could also be translated as *brother of James*, if James is a sufficiently well-known figure. The letter-writer refers to himself only as the *servant* (lit., "slave") of Jesus; yet since James was well known as "the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19) and leader of the Christians in Jerusalem (Gal 4: Acts 15), it is likely the author is also indirectly claiming to be Jesus' brother. *Beloved* . . . *kept safe* . . . *love*, the standard letter salutation is expanded with blessings and prayers for well-being of the recipients.

3–4: Reason for the letter. An otherwise commendable community must be warned against devious intruders. The community is "saved" from being *ungodly* and from *licentiousness*, but also for *the faith* . . . *entrusted to the saints*. *Salvation we share*, communal salvation was a hope shared in this period by Jews (whose covenant bound them through history) and followers of Jesus (who understood God's saving acts as binding them together as a new people). *Long ago* . . . *designated for this condemnation*, as in many apocalyptic communities, like that at Qumran (which divided humanity into "children of light" and "children of darkness," 1QS 1.9–11), humanity has already been divided into camps of saved and condemned. *Licentiousness*, accusations against the intruders are vague but suggest sexual immorality.

5–7: Disobedience is punished. Reminders of divine punishment from sacred history; cf. 2 Pet. 2.4–6. 5: *Destroyed those who did not believe*, see Num 14:35. 6: *And the angels*, refers to common legends of the "fall of angels" based on Gen 6.1–4 (see Introduction). 7: *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Gen 19.4–11, ties disobedience to licentiousness and fiery punishment. Although this passage has traditionally been taken as a condemnation of homosexuality, it may in fact be a further denunciation of unhealthy spiritual practices; *unnatural lust*, Gk "sarkos heteras," "other flesh" (see translators' note g), referring to those who had, or wish to have, intercourse with angels. In the Tanakh, the "sin of Sodom" was seen as injustice and economic exploitation (e.g., Ezek 16.49).

8–13: Accusations against intruders. 8: *Dreamers* might imply that the false teachers have replaced apostolic authority (see v. 17) with personal visions and revelation. *Glorious ones* (or "glories"), possibly angels, understood as intermediaries (e.g., Dan 9.20–22) between the divine and human realms, and conveyors of insight, moral exhortation, and steadfastness among Second Temple Jews. 9: *Michael contended with the devil*, the story of Moses' body probably drawn from the 7. *Moses*, an incomplete text giving Moses' last words to Joshua. As it stands the text does

disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander^a against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"¹⁰ But these people slander whatever they do not understand, and they are destroyed by those things that, like irrational animals, they know by instinct.¹¹ Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion.¹² These are blemishes^b on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves.^c They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted;¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "See, the Lord is coming^d with ten thousands of his holy ones,¹⁵ to execute judgment on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."¹⁶ These are grumblers and malcontents; they indulge their own lusts; they are bombastic in speech, flattering people to their own advantage.

not depict the assumption, that is, taking Moses bodily into heaven. The legend that the angel Michael and the devil fought over Moses' body has no known clear source. It is used here to combine references to good and bad angels (see vv. 6,8) with overall concern for authority, morality, and truth. 11: Three villains from the Tanakh: Cain, fratricide (Gen 4:1-16), also considered in Jewish midrash (*Tg. Ps.-j.*; Gen 4:1) a son of Eve and the devil; *Balaam* (Num 22), a false prophet; *Korah* (Num 16), a rebel against Moses. 12-13: These intruders are selfish blemishes, fruitless, destructive, and misleading; cf. 2 Pet 2:17-18. *Love-feasts*, eucharists that may have included meals for the community (cf. 1 Cor 11:20-21), they were presumably intended to increase the bonds of love in the community. *Twice dead*, those baptized who have fallen away; they have died once in baptism (cf. Rom 6:3), and again by betraying their faith.

14-19: Intruders foretold. 14: *Enoch*, descendant of Adam (Gen 5:18-24); his prophecy comes from 1 En. 1:9. Jude takes "the Lord" to be Jesus. 17-18: *Predications of the apostles*, otherwise unattested (though perhaps meaning those such as 2 Thess 2:3); *the last time* reinforces the author's apocalyptic worldview (cf. 2 Pet 3:3).

20-23: Exhortation. The recipients should hold firm, trust in their reward, and keep those *wavering* from following the defiling teaching of the enemies. 20: *Faith*, the teaching of the community, not a relationship of trust. *Pray in the Holy Spirit*, perhaps a reference to the worship practice of ecstatic utterance of words presumed to be from God (cf. 1 Cor 12:3,10). 21-22: *Mercy... eternal life, the love of God* as expressed in the compassion of Jesus brings the believers into the kingdom (*eternal life, the life of God*). *Have mercy*, show mercy as you are yourselves shown mercy.

24-25: Doxology. An extended, concluding praise of God (cf. Rom 16:27). *Without blemish*, language of sacrifice, in which both those serving in the Temple (Lev 21:17-18) and the offered animal (Lev 22:20-21) must be free from defect. *God... Savior, through Jesus Christ*, God saves by the agency of Jesus; the text may reflect views of the status of the messiah that do not yet see him as divine.

¹⁷ But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;¹⁸ for they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts."¹⁹ It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.²⁰ But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.²² And have mercy on some who are wavering;²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.^f

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

- a Or *condemnation for blasphemy*
 b Or *reefs*
 c Or *without fear. They are shepherds who care only for themselves*
 d *Gk came*
 e *Gk Christ to*
 f *Gk by the flesh. The Greek text of verses 22-23 is uncertain at several points*

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

This writing, attributed to an otherwise unknown prophet "John" in Asia Minor, calls itself both an *apocalypse*, a literary disclosure of heavenly secrets, and a prophecy, an oral communication of divine intentions. One of the tantalizing features of the book is its creative combination of these two genres.

While the author's name and the title "Lamb" for the risen Christ might suggest some relationship to the "Johannine tradition" represented by the Gospel, epistles, and the extra-canonical *Acts of John*, the language and interests of Revelation bear little in common with these other texts.

Revelation has been dated to various points in the second half of the first century, based on the author's interest in the emperor Nero (see annotations on 13.3 and 13.18), who was assassinated in 68; while his bitterness toward Rome (17-18) and elevation of blood-martyrdom (6.9-11; 20.4) might suggest imperial persecution of Jesus-believers. One period favored by scholars is the reign of the emperor Domitian (81-96), depicted as especially horrendous by the fourth-century historian Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3:17-18), who also quotes the second-century church father Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 5:30.3) as attributing Revelation to late in Domitian's reign. Yet modern historians have found little evidence that Domitian instigated any greater degree of persecution than other first-century emperors. The scenes of eschatological battles (19.11-21; 20.7-9) might reflect the Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE, while the image of a holy city without a Temple (21.22) could imply a date after the historical Temple's destruction in 70 CE.

Some critics have sought to reconcile the range of possible dates by proposing a series of literary stages: an original apocalypse composed at about the time of the death of Nero (68), which was re-edited with an "epistolary" introduction (chs 1-3) in the later first century. But there has been no agreement on what such a "proto-apocalypse" would have looked like.

LITERARY HISTORY

While Revelation's striking juxtapositions of vision and letter, song and list, oracle and narrative might suggest stages of compilation, and certain phrases seem to represent an editor's glossing of an earlier text (11.14; 13.6c,18; 14.12), early manuscripts provide no evidence of prior versions. Revelation is best seen, like so many ancient documents, as a complex composition of one author, stimulated by his literary and historical context, with perhaps another's additions soon afterwards.

OUTLINE

- I. Introductory vision (1.1-20)
- II. Heavenly letters dictated to seven congregations (2.1-3.22)
- III. Vision of heavenly throne (4.1-11)
- IV. Delivery of the scroll with seven seals to the Lamb (5.1-14)
- V. Opening of the first six seals (6.1-17)
 - A. Seals of destruction (6.1-8)
 - B. Seals of judgment (6.9-17)
- VI. Vision of the 144, 000 sealed (7.1-17)
- VII. Opening of the seventh seal and emergence of seven trumpeter angels (8.1-11.19)
 - A. Trumpets 1-6 and the eschatological woes they cause (8.1-9.21)
 - B. Appearance of new angel to herald the final trumpet (10.1-11)
 - C. Excursion: measurement of the current temple and the eschatological appearance and acts of Moses and Elijah. (11.1-14)
 - D. Seventh trumpet declares the new reign (11.15-19)
- VIII. Vision of the heavenly woman and child and dragon (12.1-18)
- IX. Emergence of eschatological chaos-monsters (13.1-18)
 - A. From the sea (13.1-10)
 - B. From the earth (13.11-18)
- X. Visions of heavenly beings preparing for eschatological destruction (14.1-20)
- XI. Priestly angels with seven bowls (15.1-16.21)