

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

Summary

- Greeting to those who are sanctified and preserved in faithfulness (verses 1–3).
- The conduct of apostates is to be seen generally as having been foreordained and as rejecting God, turning God’s gift of grace into unbridled license, and denying the existence of God (verse 4).
- Three examples of apostasy are mentioned: during the Exodus from Egypt (verse 5), in premortality (verse 6), and in Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 7).
- The conduct of the shameless apostates who now speak evil of the leaders of the Church is worse than that of Satan, who shamelessly and ignorantly tried to claim the body of Moses by arguing with the archangel Michael, or Adam (verses 8–10).
- Three more examples of apostasy are listed: Cain killing Abel, people like Balaam chasing after rewards, and Korah’s usurpation of priesthood authority (verse 11).
- The conduct of apostates is likened to four natural failures: clouds that bring no rain, trees that bear no fruit, waves that crash pointlessly on the shore, and stars that wander in outer darkness (verses 12–13).
- Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied that God will come with His host of heaven to convince the apostates of their ungodly behaviors, murmuring, complaining, following selfish desires, overstating exaggerated claims, seeking power, and taking advantage of people (verses 14–16).
- Church members are to remember that the Lord’s Apostles have forewarned them about people who mock, follow their physical lusts, cut themselves off from the Church, are worldly, and do not have the Spirit (verses 17–19).

- All who are beloved of God are invited to build their spiritual home upon holy faithfulness, praying with the Holy Ghost, keeping themselves in the pure love of God, reaching out to the mercy of the Lord unto eternal life, and rescuing and loving sinners while hating sinfulness (verses 20–23).
- Give praise to the Savior, who can keep us from stumbling and will introduce us into the presence God, the one with glory, magnificence, power, and authority in this world and throughout all eternity (verses 24–25).

Authorship, Date, and Background

The origins of the short Epistle of Jude have been debated for centuries. The author of the text identifies himself as “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.” The name Jude or Judas (renderings of the Greek *Ioudas*, based on the Hebrew name Judah or Yehudah) appears thirty-six times in the New Testament, most often referring to Judas Iscariot and to another Apostle named Judas (Judas the brother/son of James).¹ However, this epistle is understood by most scholars to be the Jude or Judas who is mentioned as one of the brothers of Jesus, among whom James is also numbered.²

As he is listed as one of the last of the brothers, Jude is generally considered to be the younger sibling of Jesus and James the Just, who was described in some sources as having been appointed as the first bishop of Jerusalem by the Apostles Peter, James, and John.³ Although Jude was a half-brother of the Lord, neither he nor James mentions this relationship, perhaps out of modesty or reverence or perhaps preferring to stress the subservience and subordination to the Lord that he held in common with his readers and not to use the familial relationship with Jesus to gain recognition.

The self-identifying title “servant of the Lord” may also identify Jude as one who has authority to preach and represent Jesus.⁴ Unlike for James, few resources inform us of what positions Jude may have held in the early Church or what services he performed. He was likely in the upper room with the Apostles, his brothers, and Jesus’s mother Mary after the Ascension (Acts 1:14). We can probably assume that he was a leader in the Church after Christ’s Resurrection and may have been a missionary or a traveling preacher, doing work similar to that of the Apostles and the seventy, as is implied by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Jude was quite likely still a young man when Jesus died, and although he did not follow Jesus during His ministry, we may assume that he was an ardent defender of the gospel from the time of the Resurrection to the end of his life.⁵ It is also possible that Jude was married. According to Eusebius, Jude’s grandchildren were questioned by the emperor Domitian because he thought their Davidic heritage may have been a political threat to him.⁶

The obscurity of Jude himself as well as the brevity of the text and relative lack of ancient commentaries on it have led some people to conclude that this epistle could not have been written by Jude himself and that it must have been written after his lifetime—some even date it to the second century. Their allegations include the following:

- The heretics Jude criticizes are teachers of some form of Gnosticism, which did not appear as a rival to mainstream Christianity until the second century. (But by the middle of the first century, similar opposing teachers had already been present in Corinth and elsewhere, rejecting God’s laws and indulging in sexual license.)⁷
- Jude’s reference to “the faith that was once delivered unto the saints” in verse 3 implies a codified body of Christian teaching that would assumedly not have been in place until after the first century and probably not until the third century. (But the Sermon on the Mount was certainly known from the early years of Christianity, as is attested by numerous uses of Matthew 5–7 in epistles such as James, Romans, and 1 Peter.)
- Jude’s comment in verse 17 about the words of the Apostles that were spoken before is a reference to a past apostolic age that supposedly has now ended and that he is calling on his readers to remember. (But the word *prolekein*, meaning “spoken beforehand,” need not imply that those words were spoken long before.)
- Jude is dependent on 2 Peter, which some commentators further assume to have been written in the second century. (But 2 Peter appears to be a classic farewell speech compatible with first-century benedictory addresses, and Peter may actually be quoting from Jude.)
- The quality of the Greek in the Epistle of Jude is beyond that of what a poor Semitic speaker from Galilee could be expected to produce. (But scholars today more widely recognize that people in the Eastern Mediterranean spoke higher levels of Greek, especially in areas of Galilee, than people have previously assumed.)

Moreover, nothing in Jude’s description of the false teachers necessarily leads one to conclude that they were late Gnostics, and some of the main characteristics of Gnosticism are clearly missing from his description, including cosmological dualism and extreme immaterialism. These enemies are teachers who have infiltrated the churches of Jude’s audience and begun to reject all forms of moral and ecclesiastical authority, including that of the angels and of Christ Himself (see Jude 1:4, 8). As Richard Bauckham has noted regarding Jude’s arguments against the false teachers, “if his polemic is really aimed against Gnosticism it is singularly inept” as it fails to identify and rebuke some of the main tenets associated with that Gnostic ideology.⁸

Also, the reference in verse 3 to “the faith that was once delivered unto the saints” has been taken by some commentators to imply a later date when Christianity had become more structured and formalized than it is assumed to have been in the first decades after Christ’s ministry. But the word *faith* (*pistis*) in the first century seems to have been used as a shorthand reference to the relationship established between God and His people by Christ’s new covenant.⁹ As Ruth Anne Reese has argued, there is nothing in the context of the Epistle of Jude that indicates that his use of the word *faith* implies the characteristics that were later associated with the second-century Church.¹⁰ And Peter Davids argues that references to the faith also occur in

the 50s of the first century.¹¹ Thus, the faith (*pistis*) or new covenant that was delivered seems to be based on the covenant-inspiring words of the Apostles that Jude's audience clearly understood.

Thus, alternative arguments supporting the idea that the letter is early and authentic are more persuasive. As a number of scholars have asked, why should anyone living decades later want to compose a letter under the name of the relatively obscure figure of Jude? If someone were attempting to draw attention to their message by associating it with the name of a prominent leader, there would have been many more influential figures to name besides Jude.

Moreover, the letter has a number of characteristics that would suggest an early Jewish rather than later gentile or Hellenistic authorship. The author uses some Semitisms and many references to Hebrew literature. Beyond containing numerous references to the Old Testament, this letter quotes from or alludes to Jewish texts, notably 1 Enoch. Bauckham points out the similarity in approach between Jude's midrashic method of scriptural interpretation and the thematic *pesharim* found at Qumran. Jude uses these ancient texts as eschatological prophecies, applying their prophetic words to their current times. Summing up his conclusions about the character of this epistle, Bauckham states, "Finally, we should notice that the genial character of the letter, its Jewishness, its debt to Palestinian Jewish literature and haggadic traditions, its apocalyptic perspective and exegetical methods, its concern for ethical practice more than for doctrinal belief are all entirely consistent with authorship by Jude the brother of Jesus."¹²

Thus, William F. Brodson II concludes that there is "no good reason *not* to accept the letter of Jude as coming from the brother of James," and Daniel Keating, writing in 2011, asserts that "the majority of scholars today" assume "that Jude himself is the author of this short letter," dating its composition to around the end of the first century at the latest.¹³ The earliest date that the text could have been written is more speculative, although we are probably safe in saying that it could have been written in the 40s or 50s, at the earlier end of the spectrum of possibilities.

In addition, the date and authorship of the Epistle of James has some bearing on the date given to Jude. If one sees James as being penned by the implied author himself, then Jude should arguably not be dated later than AD 62, which is when, according to Josephus, James was martyred. After his death, James became known as James the Great or James the Just. If James were already dead at the time Jude was written, we could expect to see the author making use of one of these honorific titles for James.¹⁴ Some scholars suggest that the conditions described in Jude were to be found in Corinth in the 50s of the first century, and thus Bauckham concludes that the letter's "character is such that it might very plausibly be dated in the 50s, and nothing requires a later date."¹⁵

Regarding Jude's audience, it is unknown to whom Jude is writing and whether that community's struggles with false teachers preceded or came after those of the Corinthians. Jude simply refers to his readers as "beloveds" (*agapetoi*, verses 3, 17, 20) and indicates that they are a group that "are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called," which could refer to essentially any group

of baptized Christians. For this reason, it has always been clustered among the General Epistles, addressed to all members and congregations of the Church.

Although we do not know where Jude wrote this epistle, it is possible to assume that he wrote it from Jerusalem to a group of Saints that perhaps some of the Apostles and Jude himself had visited and taught.¹⁶ As Harrington states, the text was composed “obviously for readers who were familiar with biblical and Jewish traditions and impressed by their importance.”¹⁷ As discussed previously, due to the Jewishness of the epistle, one can imagine that Jude’s audience consisted principally of Jewish converts to Christianity.

Although this group may have been located somewhere in Palestine, it is just as plausible and perhaps more likely that they were converted Jews of the diaspora living in a Greek-speaking gentile nation, possibly “in one of the surrounding areas of the Eastern Mediterranean.”¹⁸ Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor are the most commonly suggested areas. Some think that Egypt is the most likely location due to the epistle’s mention in the earliest list of authoritative Christian texts, called the Muratorian Canon, which was composed in Egypt toward the end of the second century.¹⁹ Jude was also notably used by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, both located in Egypt. Syria, with its proximity to Palestine, is a popular candidate, but as Bauckham points out, Syria was the one area where the later Church did not accept Jude as canonical. This might make it less likely as a candidate, but the harsh warnings may just as well have been embarrassing for people there. Because the type of heretics depicted in Jude are generally similar to those described in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and others in Asia Minor, many regions can be favored as the location of Jude’s audience.²⁰ Regardless, the nonspecific nature of Jude’s address and warnings allows it to be read and applied universally.

Purposes

The Epistle of Jude calls upon its readers, those who have been sanctified by God the Father and preserved by the Lord Jesus Christ, to now defend Jesus’s new covenant and not turn away from Christ’s true gospel (Jude 1:3). Jude had intended to write regarding salvation but decided to respond, apparently, to news that he received regarding these dangers to their community. He hoped to help them correct the doctrinal errors that had entered their community before he could proceed with their further spiritual education. He desired that his readers would keep close to the things that had been taught to them by the Apostles and contend against detractors and apostates. He reminds them of what they already know from the stories of the scriptures: that God is able to save His people, as He did in the Exodus from Egypt, but also that He does not tolerate the actions of those that turn from Him in disbelief and sin (verse 5). He also recalls for his audience that the Apostles, in the spirit of prophecy, had warned them that such mockers would come among them, and he gives them guidance as to how they can avoid falling prey to the mockers’ deceptions (verses 17–25).

Another purpose of the Epistle of Jude, as Ruth Anne Reese argues, is to “shame the opponents who are denying Jesus and acting for their own benefit.”²¹ Jude delineates, in no uncertain terms and with poignant

language, the many sins of these apostates. These efforts to discredit the offenders would have been very effective in Jude's day, as ancient societies greatly valued honor and went to great extents to avoid bringing shame upon themselves and their social groups.

Latter-day Saint Uses of Jude

For a book that has often been treated in the Christian world with “benign neglect,” as Peter Davids states, Jude has been quoted and used by Latter-day Saints more than one would initially expect.²² It has been used to refer to apostasy from the truth (including the Great Apostasy), the need to defend the Jesus's new covenant community, and the need for a restoration of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Joseph Smith and many other early Latter-day Saint leaders knew the Epistles of Jude and Peter well, seamlessly weaving parts of them into their discourses. The *Journal of Discourses* is full of references to Jude, including by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, George Q. Cannon, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Orson Hyde.

Regarding the rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ by many of the Jews and then by many of the Gentiles, Joseph Smith declared, citing Jude 1:3, “Thus after this chosen family had rejected Christ and His proposals, the heralds of salvation said to them, ‘Lo we turn unto the Gentiles;’ and the Gentiles received the covenant, and were grafted in from whence the chosen family were broken off; but the Gentiles have not continued in the goodness of God, but have departed from *the faith that was once delivered to the Saints*.”²³ Apostle John Taylor, in a message in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1872, referred to Jude 1:3 when he said, “I presume that that exhortation which was made eighteen hundred years ago to certain Saints, would be just as applicable to us today as it was to them. They were exhorted to ‘contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints.’”²⁴

Joseph Smith, in his memorable discourse from the Nauvoo Temple site on April 6, 1844, utilized another phrase from Jude 1:3, employing Jude's remark regarding the concept of common salvation to enhance his teachings on salvation for the dead. Joseph declared, “You cannot be perfect without [the dead]. It is necessary that those who are gone before and those who come after us should have *salvation in common* with us.”²⁵

The epistles of 2 Peter and Jude have been cited in recent general conference addresses. As conditions in the world become more challenging, one might expect to see even more use of Peter's and Jude's straightforward warnings and inspired counsel to strengthen the faithful in trying times.

Verse-by-Verse Comments

1:4. Not much is known about who the heretics mentioned here actually were. Jude refers to them obliquely as “certain men” who have “crept in unawares” and who seek to corrupt the traditional teachings

that have been taught to the members of Christ's Church whom he is addressing. Scholars sometimes refer to those disrupters as itinerant charismatic preachers, but apparently they were (or are purported to have been) members of the Church since they participated with members in their "feasts of charity."²⁶ They wanted to be teachers or, as Jude refers to them, public speakers that could influence others (see verses 12, 16). However, they are far from teachers of truth. Jude levels a long list of accusations against them, including the claims that they are rebellious and reject authority (even that of the angels and Christ); that they are immoral, greedy, worldly, unspiritual; that they take advantage of the believers; and that they follow after their own desires instead of God's law. In verse 4, Jude says that they were anciently programmed (literally, *palai progegrammenoi*) to receive this indictment (*krima*). Jude accuses them of creating divisions in the Church and mocking the faith of the believers, turning the *charis* (an obliging, relational gift, or grace) of God into unbridled lust and licentiousness (*aselgeia*).

1:5–7. Jude declares that God's judgment will come upon these false teachers, comparing them to the unbelievers in the Exodus story, the rebellious angels who did not keep their first estate, and the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, all of whom were punished or destroyed by God's wrath (verses 5–7).

1:8–9. The intruders defile their bodies (*sarka*), they despise the Lord's leaders (*kyrioteta*), and they even blaspheme against glorious, celestial beings (*doxa*), even though not even the archangel Michael would dare to insult the devil when he and Satan disputed over who could claim the body of Moses (verse 9). Enoch and the Apostles spoke of these wicked deeds, and Enoch declared that the Lord would come with His myriad of angels to punish such (in the pseudepigraphal book of 1 Enoch 1:9).

1:10–16. For many reasons, these intruders and offenders are to be guarded against. They do not know, meaning they do not know God, do not know the truth, and probably do not really understand what they are doing to harm themselves.

1:17–19. Jude ends by encouraging the beloved members of the Church to remember the warnings given by Jesus and His Apostles: that difficult times would be coming and that some would mock, lust, and not have the Spirit. But the faithful would prevail by building on holy faithfulness, by praying with the Holy Ghost, and by keeping themselves "in the love of God," reaching out to the mercy of Christ unto eternal life (verses 19–21). Jude says that in some cases, the righteous can effectively reach out with compassion to those who are causing problems, but some cases must be approached with fear (*phoboi*), fire, and great caution (verses 22–23).

1:20–21. After Jude had warned his readers that "certain men [apostate teachers who were leading converts astray] crept in unawares," he offered helpful advice to fortify his readers against falling into apostate ways by overcoming the world and maintaining their good standing before God. Jude's list is applicable today—maybe even more so than it was in Jude's day:

1. Jude invited all to fortify themselves "in your most sacred faith," or in the words of the Joseph Smith Translation, to "build up yourselves on your most sacred covenant." The Greek word *pistei*, as noted by the renowned classicist Teresa Morgan, refers here to a covenant and not just to faith

alone. As an essential part of the new covenant, faithfulness is active, relational, and covenantal, not passive, mystical, or emotional.

2. Next, the Saints should continue to pray “in the power of the Holy Ghost.” Significantly, even so long ago, the importance of having the guidance of the Holy Ghost and the spirit of revelation with us was cited as one of the main bulwarks of faithful living. Doctrine and Covenants 21:2 similarly advises, “Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith.”
3. “We all should keep ourselves in the love of God.” Elder Uchtdorf spoke in a recent general conference in April 2023 about the love of God, wonderfully elaborating this same principle and testifying of how it will be a protection for us and our families. His theme was to “help your children build faith in Jesus Christ, love His gospel and His Church, and prepare for a lifetime of righteous choices.”²⁷
4. Finally, Jude warns his audience to look forward to the day when Jesus, in mercy, will give you eternal life. He is the only one who can keep you from falling and He will set you in the presence of God “in due time.” As modern wisdom advises, “keep your eye on the goal.” In doing so, we can develop a relationship with the Savior that will assist us in reaching celestial glory in God’s presence.

1:24–25. Jude concludes by praising God as the only one who, through the Lord Jesus Christ, is able to keep us from stumbling or being led into temptation. His brief letter then ends with a doxology that is similar to the familiar ending of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:13, which Jesus concludes with the words, “For thine is the power, and the kingdom, and the glory, for ever, amen.” Jude similarly praises God’s “glory, greatness, strength, and authority, for all of this age, both now and in all the eternities, amen.”

Notes

1 Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13. Although some translations (including the KJV) assume that Judas brother of James is the figure being referred to here, that phrase should more likely be understood to mean “Judas son of James,” who is not likely the author of the Epistle of Jude.

2 Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55. James the brother of Jesus is not to be confused with James the brother of John, one of the leading Apostles.

3 Jude 1:1. Eusebius cites Clement of Alexandria as saying, “For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Saviour, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just bishop of Jerusalem.” See Eusebius, *Church History* 2.1.2–3, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), 2/1:104.

4 As Richard Bauckham notes, “It is perfectly credible that they (James and Jude) should have been more conscious than their followers of the fact that mere blood-relationship to Jesus could give them no authority (cf. Mark 3:33–35). It is not so much because of modesty, as many commentators have suggested, that they refrain from

mentioning their relationship to Jesus. The point is rather that the self-designation in the letter-opening must establish their authority to address their readers.” Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 24. The designation “servant of the Lord” is also used by James (James 1:1), Paul (Romans 1:1; Philemon 1:1; JST, 1 Thessalonians 1:1; JST, 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Titus 1:1), and Peter (2 Peter 1:1), sometimes with other titles as well as appropriate.

5 On Jude’s age, see the argument in Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 11. On Jude’s lack of discipleship during Jesus’s mortal ministry, see John 7:5; compare Mark 3:31.

6 Eusebius, *Church History* 3.19–20, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2/1:148–149.

7 See 1 Corinthians 5:1–6; 6:12–20; compare Revelation 2:20–23; see also, for example, Richard Wolff, *General Epistles of James and Jude* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 1969), 93; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 13.

8 Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 12.

9 For examples of *pistis* being a covenant in the New Testament, see Brent J. Schmidt, *Relational Faith: The Transformation and Restorations of Pistis as Knowledge, Trust, Confidence, and Covenantal Faithfulness* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2022).

10 Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 19.

11 Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 14–15; see also Wolff, *James and Jude*, 93.

12 Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 5, 16.

13 William F. Brosend, *James and Jude* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4; Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 192.

14 See related argument in Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 23.

15 Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 16.

16 Jude 1:17–18. Interestingly, Sidebottom notes that Streeter (no reference given) proposed that the author was bishop of Jerusalem during the reign of the emperor Trajan. E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude and 2 Peter*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 74.

17 Daniel J. Harrington, “Jude and 2 Peter,” in *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 183.

18 Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 192.

19 Sidebottom, *James, Jude and 2 Peter*, 73.

20 Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 16.

21 Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter & Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 22.

22 Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 7.

23 Joseph Fielding Smith and John Galbraith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1993), 15; emphasis added.

24 John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London, UK: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 15:21–22.

25 “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Published in Times and Seasons,” p. 616, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-published-in-times-and-seasons/5>; emphasis added.

26 Jude 1:12. On the charismatic preachers, see Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 10–11; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 10.

27 Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Jesus Christ Is the Strength of Parents,” April 2023 general conference, online at church ofjesuschrist.org.

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