

Jude

Fact Sheet

General Background:

Many passages of the letter of Jude are a form of writing known as "apocalyptic literature." "Apocalypse" (in the Greek, *αποκάλυψις*) literally means revelation, disclosure, usually related to the portrayal of the end of the world and human history. Judgment is often prominent. The main instances of apocalyptic writing in the Bible are Revelation and Daniel, and there are strains of it in many of the prophets, and also in parts of Jesus' teaching. Most apocalyptic literature, though, was written in *intertestamental* times, and can be found in Bibles which contain "Apocrypha." Jude, for instance, references scriptures like 1 Enoch and the Testament of Moses, neither of which are found in the Bibles we typically use. One helpful way I have heard on how to understand apocalyptic literature: it is like Ebenezer Scrooge's visions in Charles' Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." Scrooge does receive a glimpse of his future, but his lonely death is not yet set in stone. Similarly, apocalyptic literature does provide a glimpse of the future, but it also, through its shocking images, offers its readers the opportunity to repent and change in the present. Prophecy in the Bible is not something you approach with a decoder ring.

Oftentimes ancient writings were given a well-known person's name to add credibility to their content. No one batted an eye at this practice - it was not considered illegal in any way. For instance, there is doubt among Greek scholars that the "Timothy's" were really written by Paul. This does not decrease in any way their significance or call into question their place in Christian Scripture. With regards to the letter of Jude, however, although it too might just have Jude's name on it, it is also entirely plausible that Jude is really Jude, the brother of James and Jesus (v. 1).

General background:

- The date Jude was written is not known; but it could be one of the earliest-written parts of the New Testament.
- Likewise, it is also not known where and to whom Jude was written, but it is thought that it comes out of Palestine, from a community of Jewish Christians (or Christian Jews).
- The general aim of the letter of Jude is to warn its readers/hearers about the danger being posed by a form of teaching cropping up in their churches, and it advises them on how to respond to this teaching. Here's a summary of the dangerous teaching from a study Bible: "The proponents of this teaching claim to be inspired prophets whose visionary revelations exempt them and all truly spiritual people (i.e., their followers) from any form of moral authority (v. 8). They claim that the grace of God in Christ liberates them to do as they please (v. 4) and apparently demonstrate this freedom especially by sexual indulgence." In short, the danger comes in that these folks are encouraging *deliberate* immorality, putting their salvation at risk. What Jude is saying is that faith in the Christian gospel

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should include a natural response of moral obedience to Christ. Jude goes on to remind folks of the kinds of judgments God passed on others on similar paths.

- Jude is full of references to the Old Testament and intertestamental literature, according to the Jewish tradition of that time's method of interpreting scripture, which makes sense given the community's strong Jewish roots.

General Notes:

Verse 1: Jude - in Greek, "Judas." One of the brothers of Jesus, who according to tradition was a prominent leader and a traveling missionary

Verse 1: James - another brother of Jesus

Verse 3: "Contend for the faith" - Jude is not only warning of danger in this letter, but also encouraging folks to positively live out the gospel in faith, hope, and love, as a way of combating the false teaching.

Verse 3: "saints" - probably the original apostles who founded the churches, the first "passers-on" of the faith

Verse 4: "this condemnation" - the content of verses 5-19, which consists of past examples (5-13) and prophecies (14-19) concerning God's judgment on the wicked and ungodly

Verse 6: "angels who did not keep their own position" - is a reference to Genesis 6:1-4, as interpreted by 1 Enoch 16-19.

Verse 7: "fire" = divine judgment (not in their favor)

Verse 8: "dreamers" - refers to the visions that these opponents claimed authorized their behavior.

Verse 8: "glorious ones" - a common term for angels. Angels were seen as the guardians of the moral order of creation, thus these opponents were disrespecting them.

Verse 9: This is a reference to "The Testament of Moses," a work of apocalyptic literature, which describes a legal dispute between Michael and the devil about Moses' burial. The devil makes some slanderous charges, but rather than condemning the devil on his own authority, Michael refers the matter to the authority of the divine Judge - the Lord. Jude's opponents are making claims based on their own authority (based on their visions) and not on Christ's.

Verse 11: Three examples of people who led others into sin. Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) was considered in Jewish tradition to be the first heretic, getting the ball rolling. "Balaam's error" refers to the prophet Balaam giving advice to Israel that led them into rebellion and

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a falling away from faith (Numbers 25:1-4, 31:16). "Korah's rebellion" refers to Korah leading a rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16:1-35).

Verse 12: "blemishes" - literally, "reefs," hidden dangers

Verse 12: "love-feasts" - fellowship meals where all the teaching in the house churches occurred; related to/predecessors of the Lord's Supper

Verse 14-15: "Enoch" and his prophecy - a descendant of Adam (Genesis 5:18-24), and the subject of the apocalyptic work 1 Enoch. The prophecy is from 1:9.

Verses 20-23: Jude's counsel on how to live out the appeal he made in verse 3 (contend for the faith); how to resist the danger of the false teaching; and how to attempt to reclaim the false teachers and their followers.

Reading list:

Genesis 6:1-4

1 Enoch 16-19 (check your library or the internet)

Genesis 4:1-16

Numbers 25:1-4, 31:16

Numbers 16:1-35

Genesis 5:18-24

1 Enoch 1:9

And, in reference to folks who use grace as an excuse for sin, read Romans 6:1-4, 15-18, and Martin Luther's "Freedom of a Christian": "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Sources: HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Paul Achtemeier, Ed.; HarperCollins Study Bible, esp. article on Jude by Richard J. Bauckham. Analogy of apocalyptic literature to Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" borrowed from *The Rapture Exposed* by Barbara Rossing, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

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Additional Discussion Questions

Do we ever use *God's grace* as an excuse to sin?

What are our temptations today that draw us away from faith in the gospel?

Who are the prophets/what are the prophecies today that get our attention, show us what our future might be like if we don't make some changes now?

Luther thought of the Scriptures as containing both *Law* and *Gospel* throughout, convicting us of our failures and then showing us *God's grace*. So...

Where in this book do you hear the *Law*? That is, what shows our sin, convicting us, driving us to seek *God's grace*?

Where in this book do you hear the *Gospel*? That is, what shows us *God's future* for us, our hope, *God's grace* in our lives?

Why do you think Jude "made it in" to the Bible?