

The Book of Jude from a Jewish Perspective

To Antonietta, our faithful editor. She continues to love the Lord and minister tirelessly on His behalf. Her devotion to God's Word is unceasing. Her desire for Him to be known to others in her neighborhood and around the world is her passion.

She is a true warrior on the front lines for ADONAI.

The beginning of the dispensation of the Church Age, made up of Jewish and Gentile believers (**Ephesians 2:14**), is described in the **Acts** of the Apostles. The end of the Church Age is set forth in the book of **Jude**, which might be called the Acts of the Apostates. The first book, which can be said to contain Church history that describes the deeds and teachings of the men of **God** through whom **the Messiah** began to build **His Church**. This letter relates the deeds and teachings of evil men and women who will be living on the earth as the Dispensation of the Church comes to an end.

Jude is the only book in all **God's Word** entirely devoted to the great apostasy which is to come upon the world just before the Rapture of the Church (see my commentary on **Revelation By - The Rapture of the Church**), and the beginning of the Great Tribulation. This brief message of twenty-five verses is the doorway to the book of **Revelation**, introducing us to the apocalyptic judgments found there.¹

Author

The New Testament lists eight men named **Judas**. **Jude** is the English form of the Greek word **Judas**, which translated the Hebrew name **Judah**. The name was tremendously popular for two reasons. First, because **Judah** was the founder of the tribe of **Judah**, and secondly, because the hero of the Maccabees revolt against the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC was named **Judah**. Of the eight men mentioned in the B'rit Chadashah only two were associated with **James (Jude 1)**: The apostle **Jude**, and **Jude** the half brother of **James**. It could not be the apostle **Jude** because he was the son, and not **the brother, of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13)**. In addition, if **Judas** the son of **James** were the author, he would have correctly identified himself as an apostle. But, the writer of **Jude** distinguished himself from **the apostles in Jude 17**.

The **James** with whom **Jude** identified himself was **the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19)**, leader of the messianic community in Jerusalem and author of the book of **James**. After the martyrdom of the apostle **James (Acts 12:2)**, there was no other **James** in the early church

who could be referred to merely by name without being more specific. Therefore, **Jude**, like **James**, was one of the half brothers of **Yeshua (Matthew 13:55)**. **Jude** is the only New Covenant writer who identifies **himself** by family relationship.

Ironically, the human author who wrote the most pointed condemnation of apostates in the Bible shares the same name as the most infamous of all apostates, Judas Iscariot. That may help explain why nearly all modern English translations use **Jude** instead of Judas.

Little is known about **Jude** apart from this letter. According to **First Corinthians 9:5** he was married and had an itinerant ministry as an evangelist. **Jude** does what other biblical writers did not, **he** quoted from apocryphal literature. It did not mean **he** thought those apocryphal books were Scripture; **he** merely made reference to those elements in the apocryphal books that contain truths. This is similar to Paul's quotations of Greek pagan poets and philosophers of Crete (**Titus 1:12-13**) and Athens (**Acts 17:28**). **Jude 9** refers to the assumption of Moses, and **Jude 14** and **15** refer to *the book of Enoch*. **Nonetheless, Jude neither verified that everything in the assumption of Moses was true, nor did he verify that everything in the book of Enoch was true. Yet, there were true elements contained in both those books, and he authenticated only those true elements.**²

According to Hegesippus, as quoted by Eusebius, **Jude** had sons and grandsons. Because the grandsons were members of the house of David, the Emperor Domitian viewed them as potential leaders of a revolt against Rome and had them brought before his judgment seat. But when they showed Domitian their calloused hands, proving that they were simple farmers, he dismissed them with contempt. Apart from that, Church history is silent concerning **Jude**.³

Date

Second Peter makes use of **Jude** to a very large degree (see **Ad - The Similarities Between Jude and Second Peter**). It seems obvious that one of these writers was borrowing from the other. It is much more likely that **Peter** would incorporate the whole of **Jude** into his book than **Jude** would, for no apparent reason, leave out large sections of **Second Peter**. The antinomian Gnostic heresy, to which **Jude** was responding, was beginning to make its influence felt in the first century.

Original Readers

Jude was written to the same body of Jewish believers - the same messianic Jewish audience - to whom **First** and **Second Peter** were written. The reference made to the TaNaKh and the Jewish apocrypha identified the original readers as those who would understand these references with no need of explanation. The references to Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses, Cain, Balaam, Korah, Enoch, Adam and the fallen angels of **Genesis 6** all point to a people familiar with TaNaKh history and apocryphal literature.⁴

Occasion

Jude had initially planned to write an encouraging letter, celebrating the **common salvation** that **he** shared with **his** readers (**Jude 3**). But **false teachers** had, like **wolves in sheep's clothing**, **secretly slipped in among** the messianic synagogues to which **he** wrote, threatening the salvation of truth (**Jude 4**), compelling **him** to change **his** strategy. Consequently, **he** wrote a strong indictment of **the false teachers** and **their** godless lifestyle. **He** warned **his** readers and urging them to **contend for the faith that was once for all passed on to God's people** (**Jude 3c-d**), so as to protect **the salvation that they** shared (**Jude 3b**). The magnificent concluding blessing (**Jude 24-25**) reveals **Jude's** confidence that **his** readers would stand firm in the grace of **ADONAI**.

The picture **Jude** paints of **the false teachers** reveals the shocking depths of **their** decadence. **They** perverted **the grace of God into a license for debauchery** (**4c**), turning the very **grace** that teaches believers to say **"No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives** (**Titus 2:11-12**) into an excuse to sin. **They** were so corrupt that **Jude** compared **them** to such infamous sinners as fallen **angels**, the men of **Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam**, and the rebels led by **Korah** (**Jude 6-7 and 11**). Simply put, they were like **unreasoning animals** (**Jude 10**). In **their** shameless audacity, they rejected **authority** and slandered **celestial beings** (**Jude 8b-c**), something even the powerful **archangel Michael** did not do (**Jude 9**). Because of **their** arrogant pride, those **men** spoke **abusively against whatever they did not understand** (**Jude 10**).

In short, although they infiltrated the messianic synagogues, **they** were not a part of it. **They did not have the Spirit of God** (**Jude 19**), and for that reason **they** were not saved, for **anyone who doesn't have the Spirit of the Messiah doesn't belong to Him** (**Romans 8:9**). The reality of **their** wicked hypocrisy and resulting danger **they** created, summoned **Jude's** strongest possible condemnation and warning for the believers of all dispensations.

Style

Jude wrote in a dynamic style, using many figures of speech. He thought in terms of threes. As a result, there are a total of **fifteen triads**:

- (1)** To those who have been called, loved by the Father, kept for Jesus (Jude 1:1c-d).
- (2)** God's blessings consist of a generous supply of His mercy, peace and love (Jude 2).
- (3)** their condemnation was written about long ago, they pervert the grace of our God into a license for debauchery, and they deny Yeshua Messiah our Lord (Jude 4a, c-e).
- (4)** ADONAI delivered His people out of Egypt (Jude 5a), the angels did not keep their positions of authority (Jude 6a), and like Sodom and Gomorrah, they gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion (Jude 7a).
- (5)** they pollute their own bodies (Jude 8a), reject and despise authority (Jude 8b), and being bold and arrogant, these people slander celestial beings (Jude 8c).
- (6)** they have taken the way of Cain (Jude 11a), rushed [headlong] for profit into Balaam's error (Jude 11b), and have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion (Jude 11c).
- (7)** They are like hidden rocks that shipwreck many (Jude 12a), counterfeit shepherds who only feed themselves (Jude 12b), they are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind (Jude 12c).
- (8)** uprooted trees, twice dead (Jude 12d-e), wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame (Jude 13a), and wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever (Jude 13b).
- (9)** Jesus Christ is coming to judge everyone (Jude 15a), to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way (Jude 15b), and to convict the ungodly of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him (Jude 15c).
- (10)** These men are grumblers (Jude 16a), and faultfinders against God (Jude 16b), they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage (Jude 16c).

(11) These are the men who divide you (Jude 19a), these are the men who follow mere natural instincts (Jude 19b), and do not have the Spirit of God (Jude 19c).

(12) And pray in union with the Spirit (Jude 20b), keep yourselves in God's love (Jude 20c), as you wait for the mercy of our Lord to bring you to eternal life (Jude 21).

(13) Be merciful to those who doubt (Jude 22), snatch others from the fire and save them (Jude 23a), to others show mercy, mixed with fear - hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh (Jude 23b).

(14) To the One who can keep you from stumbling (Jude 24a CJB), and present you without defect and full of joy (Jude 24b CJB), in the presence of His Shechinah glory (Jude 24c CJB).

(15) To the only God our Savior (Jude 25a), all glory, majesty, power, and authority are His (Jude 25b), through Jesus Christ, our Lord, now and forever more (Jude 25c).

In addition, **Jude** frequently referred to the TaNaKh. He spoke of the Exodus (Jude 5), the death of many Israelites in the wilderness (Jude 7), Moses' body (Jude 9), Cain (Jude 11), Balaam (Jude 11), Korah (Jude 11), Enoch (Jude 14) and Adam (Jude 14).

Purpose

The purpose of **Jude** is to warn the recipients that the prophecy of **Second Peter** has now been fulfilled. One thought characterizes this letter: **beware of the apostates**. In keeping with this warning, **Jude** encouraged his readers to **contend for the faith** (Jude 3). These were antinomians, people who believed that the moral law of the universe did not apply to **them**. Antinomians have existed in every dispensation. **They** pervert grace. **Their** position is that the moral law is dead and **they** are under grace. The restrictions of the moral law may apply to others, but not to **them**. They feel like **they** can do anything **they** want. **Their** belief is that grace is supreme, and it can forgive any sin. In fact, the greater the sin, the more opportunities for **grace to increase** (Romans 6). **Their** creed is that the body is not important; what really matters is the inward heart. **They** believe that all things belong to **the Messiah**, and, as a result, all things are **theirs**. And so, for **them**, *nothing* is forbidden.

Accordingly, **Jude's false teachers** turned the grace of **God** into an excuse for blatant immorality (**Jude 4**). They even engaged in shameless unnatural **sexual immorality and perversion**, like the people of **Sodom and Gomorrah** did (**Jude 7**). They polluted **their own bodies** and did not consider it to be a sin (**Jude 8**). With **their** sensual ways, **they** were likely to destroy **the love feasts** of the early Church (**Jude 12**). They were led by **their own evil desires** and not by the **Holy Spirit** (**Jude 16**).

Jude makes two charges against them. In the closing triad of the book, **Jude** praises **the only God** (**25a**), a phrase that also occurs in **Romans 16:27** and **First Timothy 1:17**. In addition, **Jude** also claims that they **denied our only Master and Lord, Yeshua the Messiah** (**Jude 4**). The recurrence of the word **only** is important. If **Jude** talks about **our only Master and Lord** and about **the only God**, it is natural to think that the apostates questioned the oneness of **God**, and the uniqueness of **Jesus Christ**.

First, the apostates questioned the oneness of God. In the New Covenant this kind of thinking came to be known as Gnosticism (the *G* is silent). Although full-blown Gnosticism was not yet in existence (and would not be until the second century), Gnostic-like ideas began in the first century. Its basic idea was that this is a dualistic universe with two eternal principles. Gnostics believe that from the beginning of time, there had always been a dualism between spirit and matter. The spirit was essentially good, and the matter was essentially evil. Then the world was created out of this flawed matter. Because **God** is pure spirit and, therefore, could not possibly have any contact with matter because it was pure evil. Consequently, **these false teachers** had no qualms about engaging in a wild orgy before going to a **love feast**. They could sin with impunity and suffer no consequences because, after all, the flesh was evil. What could **they** do? In fact, **they** believed that the more they sinned, the more **that grace** could increase (**Romans 6:1**)!

How then was creation brought about? They believe that **God** put out a series of aeons or divine powers; each of these aeons was further and further away from **Him**. At the end of this long chain of aeons, remote from **God**, there was an aeon who was able to touch matter. And it was this aeon, this distant and secondary **God**, who actually created the world.

Not only that, but as the chain of aeons grew more and more distant from **God**, they grew more and more ignorant of **Him** - and hostile toward **Him**. The creating aeon at the end of the chain was both totally ignorant and hostile to **God**.

Having gone that far, the Gnostics took one more step. They identified **the true God** as **the God** of the B'rit Chadashah, and they identified the secondary, ignorant and hostile **God** with **the God** of **the TaNaKh**. As they saw it, **the God** of creation was totally different than **the God** of revelation and redemption. Jewish and Gentile believers on the other hand, believe in **the only God**, **the one God** of creation, revelation and redemption.

This was the Gnostic explanation of sin. They believe that because creation was carried out from evil matter by an ignorant god, that sin, suffering and all imperfection existed. This Gnostic way of thinking had one bizarre, but perfectly logical result. If the **God** of **the TaNaKh** was ignorant and hostile to the true **God**, it must follow that the people whom that ignorant **God** hurt were, in fact, *good* people. Clearly, the hostile **God** would be hostile to the people who were true servants of the true **God**. The Gnostics, therefore, turned **the TaNaKh** (so to speak) upside down and considered its heroes as villains, and its villains as heroes. As a result, there was a sect of Gnostics called Ophites, because they worshiped the serpent of Eden (the Greek word for snake is *ophis*). There were others who regarded Cain, Korah and Balaam as great heroes; however, it was Cain, Korah and Balaam whom **Jude** uses as terrible and tragic example of sin.

Consequently, **the heretics** whom **Jude** attacks were the Gnostics who (1) denied the oneness of **ADONAI**, (2) regarded **the God** of creation as being different from **the God** of redemption, (3) who saw in **the God** of **the TaNaKh** an ignorant enemy of **the true God**, and (4) who, therefore, turned **the TaNaKh** upside down to regard its sinners as servants of **the true God** and its believers as servants of **the hostile God**.

Secondly, the apostates denied the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. That is to say they denied our *only Master and Lord*, **Yeshua the Messiah (Jude 4)**. According to Gnostic belief, **God** put out a series of aeons between **Himself** and the world. They regarded **Jesus Christ** as one of these aeons. They did not regard **Him** as our *only Master and Lord*; **He** was merely one among the many who were linked between **God** and human beings, although **He** might be the highest and closest of all.

But there was still one other point about those Gnostics in **Jude**. **He** describes them as **men who divide you (Jude 19)**. The Gnostics setup distinctions within the fellowship of believers. As we have seen, they believed that there was an infinite series of aeons stretching between humans and **the LORD**. The aim of humans was to achieve contact with **ADONAI**. To obtain this, their doctrine was that their souls must cross that infinite series of aeon links. To achieve this, Gnostics alleged that a very special and secret knowledge was

required (if this sounds a little like scientology, don't be shocked). This knowledge was so deep that only very few could attain it.

As a result, the Gnostics divided people into two classes: the *pneumatikos* and the *psuchikos*. The *pneuma* was the human spirit, that which made human beings akin to **God**; and the *pneumatikos* were the spiritual **people**. The **people** whose spirits were so highly developed and intellectual that they were able to climb the long ladder of aeon links and reach **God**. The Gnostics claimed that those *pneumatikos* were so spiritually and intellectually equipped that **they** could actually become as good as **God**. This was similar to the perfectionism movement in the mid-nineteenth century by Charles Finley and his friends. To combat that heresy, B. B. Warfield wrote his classic apologetic book *Perfectionism*, contending for the faith that was once for all passed on to **God's people (Jude 3d CJB)**.

On the other hand, the *psuche* was simply the principle of physical life. All things that lived had *psuche*. The Gnostics believed that it was something that humans shared with animals and even growing plants. The *psuchikos* were common **people**. They had a physical life, but their *pneuma* was under developed and **they** were incapable of ever gaining the intellectual wisdom that would enable them to climb the long chain of aeons to **God**. The *pneumatikos* were a very small and select minority, while the *psuchikos* were the vast majority of common people, who were physically alive, but intellectually and spiritually dead. We might call them *the fleshly creatures*. All **they** possessed was flesh and blood life, but intellectual progress and spiritual experience was beyond **them**.

Then there were the *pneumatikos*, who believed that **they** alone were really capable of real intellectual knowledge, real knowledge of **God**, and real spiritual experience. They created an intellectual and spiritual aristocracy against the common mass of **people**. Not stopping there, **they** believed they were exempt from all the ordinary laws governing conduct. Ordinary **people**, common riffraff might have to observe accepted standards, but they were above that. For them, sin did not exist; **they** were so advanced that **they** could do anything **they** wanted and suffer no consequences. **They** are still around today.

It is clear that this Gnostic doctrine inevitably produced spiritual snobbery and pride. Once introduced into a fellowship of believers, it created the worst kind of elitism. So, the Gnostics whom **Jude** attacks were wolves in sheep's clothing. **They** denied the oneness of **ADONAI** and split **Him** into an ignorant creating **God** and a truly spiritual **God**. **They** denied the uniqueness of **the LORD** and created class distinctions with the **people of God**. **They** limited fellowship with **God** to the intellectual few.⁶

For the wisdom of this world is nonsense, as far as God is concerned; inasmuch as the TaNaKh says, "He traps the wise in their own cleverness," and again, "ADONAI knows that the thoughts of the wise are worthless (First Corinthians 3:19-20 CJB).

Quoting from Extra Biblical Books

Jude quotes from several extra biblical books. They are found in:

Ao - **Michael Disputed with the Devil about the Body of Moses:** *The Assumption of Moses*. **Jude's** inclusion of this event verifies only that this one incident found in *the Assumption* is a true statement. He is not verifying the truth of *the Assumption of Moses* as a whole.

As - **They are Autumn Trees Without Fruit, Wild Waves of the Sea Foaming Up Their Shame, Wandering Star:** *First Enoch 19:14*. **Jude's** use of *First Enoch 19:14* verifies only that this one example of the fallen angels is a true statement. He is not verifying the truth of *First Enoch* as a whole.

At - **Enoch, the Seventh Generation from Adam, also Prophesied about These People:** *First Enoch 1:9* and *5:4*. The fact is that **Jude**, a pious Jew, knew and loved *First Enoch* and had grown up in a community where it was regarded with respect and even reverence; and **he** took his quotation from it quite naturally, knowing that his readers would recognize and respect it. **He** did not verify the whole book, **he** was simply doing what all the New Covenant writers did, speaking to people in language that they recognized and understood.

Application

The book is a solemn warning to believers everywhere, since all are subject to the same doctrinal and practical errors. Though its theme regarding apostasy was specifically directed to the righteous of **the TaNaKh** in the first century, its message is just as applicable today. All believers need to avoid the pitfalls of denying the Lordship of **the Messiah**, following the desires of the flesh, rejecting authority, and living for self.⁷