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AN UNORTHODOX ARGUMENT AND JUDE'S NON-CANONICAL SOURCES

Roger Dutcher

1. Introduction

Jude was not among the first books the Church accepted as canonical, but it appears to have gained wide acceptance by the end of the second century.[1] Though brief, his epistle contains two references to sources not found in the canon and he draws his theology from varied accounts that, on the surface, do not seem to have a logical connection. Today most scholars accept Jude as canonical, and so one can say he was dealing with real and imminent issues in the first-century church. Yet, why does he use non-canonical writings to refute these problems? What are the raw materials he used? Scholars have criticized both his choice of raw materials and his severe tone. While his approach to contemporary issues was somewhat unorthodox, in the sense that he used some unusual sources, it was not unprecedented. While his tone might have been harsh compared to most other New Testament writings, he addressed similar problems and was thus in keeping with the unity of the canon.

2. Early Church Issues

To understand the issues and get a sense of the contemporary setting, it is ideal to get a sense of the time in which Jude wrote and to whom he wrote. While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact time, one can conclude that Jude was writing to people who had personally "heard the apostles' preaching," which means it could be written anywhere from

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[1] D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (reprint, Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature, 1992), 461.

the mid-first to early-second century.[2] If Peter borrowed from Jude, as some scholars contend, it would suggest that Jude wrote no later than the late 60s. The issue he addresses is difficult to place within a specific time, as it shares some sentiments with both James' and John's writings, as explained below. Jude, similar to other New Testament writers, addresses issues that, if not explicitly mentioned in other letters, are implicit in the problems other writers address. The audience and setting "is more likely to be early Palestinian Christianity than a period in the second century."[3]

The crux of the problem Jude confronts is antinomianism. The name is a later derivation of the Greek words ἀντι& and νο&μος, referring to those who believed grace replaced the law.[4] Therefore, Jude's gospel sets out to dispel the notion that the grace of God frees Christians to act on their impulses without any restraint. Matera notes that Jude writes in order to combat this heresy perpetrated by the false teachers,' indicating that it was not merely the personal belief of a few individuals who had no bearing on the church but rather influential people who were leading others astray. It might have been "itinerant prophets or teachers" that "successfully attempted to gather a following for its own gain."[6] This, however, is merely the background or the key theme of Jude, which is "contending for the faith."[7] The word "contend," from the Greek ἐπαγωνι&ζεσθαι, "is that of the intense effort in a wrestling match," and its form indicates that the "struggle is to be continuous."[8] In other words, Jude saw this threat as constant and was concerned for the spiritual stability and growth of the believers. This is the beginning of his defense for using such a severe tone.

As with other writings, this letter indicates the urgency and significance of the problem and the need to combat it. There is a clear

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[2] Richard J. Bauckham, "Jude, Epistle of," in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, ***NY:*** Doubleday, 1992), 1101.

[3] Andrew Chester, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter and Jude* (New York: ***NY:*** Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66.

[4] Robert W. Wall, "Antinomianism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, ***NY:*** Doubleday, 1992). 263.

[5] Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville, *KY:* Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 392.

[6] Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 29.

[7] Bauckham, 1098.

[8] Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., Jude, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 388.

contrast between the acts of the faithful and the wicked, as well as the fare of each. The simple fact that Jude wrote to address the problem suggests its importance, but he goes beyond many other New Testament writers in his condemnation of those who are creating problems in the church.

3. Jude's Theological Perspective

It is difficult to obtain a clear picture of Jude's theology for a number of reasons. His epistle is only 25 verses long and borrows from a variety of sources, some of which are unusual. It is often called "a catholic epistle," which itself is a term that has more than one meaning. It might simply refer to a letter addressed to the church in general, or it might "describe extracanonical letters."[9] Eusebius included the letter of Jude among the "catholic epistles," saying its authenticity was denied, "since few of the ancients quote it."[10] Kelly states that the term "catholic" in this case refers to the fact that it is among the "circulars addressed to the Christian world at large,"[11] whereas Brosend defines it "as less-heightened eschatological expectations, emphasis on organizational, ecclesial concerns, and stress on 'right belief.'"[12] Carson, Moo, and Morris consider the elements defining "early catholic" and they say, "none of these is to be found in Jude."[13] They also argue against the idea that Jude was "written at a time when Gnosticism flourished."[14]

Bauckham sees verses 14-16, the quote from Enoch, as "Jude's key text in his midrash," which "speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus to judge the wicked."[15] Here we see similarities to other New Testament writers. It is similar to James in that the "true gospel" must be "lived out in a way of Christian life"[16] and similar to John's epistles and

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[9] Robert L. Webb, "Epistles, Catholic," in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 569.
[10] Ibid.
[11] J. N. D. Kelly, The Epistle of Peter and of Jude, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1969), 227.
[12] William Brosend, "The Letter of Jude: A Rhetoric of Excess or an Excess of Rhetoric?" Database on-line, ATLA, *ATLA0001526770.*
[13] Carson, Moo, and Morris, 462.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Richard J. Bauckham, Jude, 2 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books. Publisher, 1986), 100.
[16] Bauckham, "Jude, Epistle of," 1103.

Revelation in that it describes the fate of the wicked and exhorts the church during times of negative influence from without and within.

Watson labels this epistle "deliberate rhetoric" stating that it has both a present and future focus, meaning the offenders and the faithful would eventually be judged, so the time to implement change or stay the course is now.[17] Though his style is unique – with the obvious exception to the repetition in 2 Peter – Jude's theology is similar in some aspects to other New Testament writers, demonstrating a unity of purpose. Its placement in the canon just prior to Revelation is interesting in that, Like Revelation, it serves both a contemporary and eschatological purpose and paints a vivid picture of what the future holds for saints and sinners alike. Just as John warns the churches in his day and he also draws a parallel to Jesus' return, so Jude argues that Christ's return should cause his followers to live godly lives rather than live in lawlessness while thinking themselves secure in their faith.

One of the reasons for debate about this epistle is its emphasis on apocalypse, eschatology, and works.[18] Kelly states that Jude's style is "straightforward...vigorous and colorful; and the author...writes smooth-flowing, excellent Greek interspersed with occasional Semitisms."[19] Some critics find Jude's style too straightforward and colorful, while others appreciate the candor.

Wiersbe summarizes Jude's accusations against the apostates in three statements, "they reject divine authority,"[20] "they resort to deliberate hypocrisy,"[21] and "they receive their due penalty."[22] This assessment is pointed, perhaps too blunt for some, who believe that the lack of love demonstrated in Jude's epistle is one reason it does not fit within the canon. Scholars have said the same about the book of Revelation.

While Jude emphasizes the severity of the offenses, he contrasts it with a real freedom that comes from submission to Christ. Jude's epistle, despite the imagery of angels and prophets, is ultimately theocentric, and, one could argue, Christocentric. His denunciation of the heretics and exhortation to the faithful culminates in a call to persevere and then explains the only way to achieve that victory. His

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[17] Watson, 32-33.
[18] Kelly, 223.
[19] Ibid., 228.
[20] Warren Wiersbe, Be Alert: Beware of the Religious Imposters (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), 144.
[21] Ibid., 148.
[22] Ibid., 152.

doxology puts everything in perspective. The faithful are able to persevere because God, through Jesus, is able to keep them from falling. This demonstrates that true spirituality comes from a relationship with Christ. Those who maintain that relationship he will present "before his glorious presence" and those who do not will receive their due punishment. I will elaborate on Jude's theology in the following section.

4. The Epistle's Raw Materials

Jude's letter is short and structured according to four arguments, though it mainly addresses one issue.[23] The structure – text followed by interpretation – is reminiscent of John's gospel, in which the apostle presents a cycle of signs followed by discourse to explain each of the signs. [24] Jude, again combining elements found in other letters, illustrates the gifts of the Spirit and fruit of the Spirit as complementary, even though he rarely makes direct reference to the Holy Spirit.[25]

One way in which Jude differs from other New Testament writers is in his choice of raw materials. True to his name, Jude's epistle seems to be more Jewish than Greek, following the Hebrew Scriptures rather the Septuagint, [26] as well as emphasizing outward behavior. However, despite focusing on Hebrew culture and law, Jude does not use only Old Testament sources in his epistle. Instead, he goes beyond the written canon to select his material. Brosend argues that the examples the author uses, at least according to the modem perspective, "are chosen eccentrically."[27] While New Testament writers borrowed from both secular and Scripture sources, Jude's materials stand out as perhaps the most unusual.

What does the fact that he quoted from extra-biblical sources say about Jude's letter? Does it affect its authenticity? Matera says that Jude viewed 1 Enoch as "a prophetic work since its purported author had been taken up to heaven, where he heard and saw heavenly

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[23] Bauckham, , "Jude, Epistle of," 1098.
[24] Signs are found in John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:1-15; 6:16-21; 9:1-41; and 11:1-57, while corresponding discourses are found in 3:1-21; 4:1-42; 5:19-47; 6:22-65; 7:1-52; 8:12-59 and 10:1-42.
[25] Rebecca Skaggs, The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude (London, T&T Clark International, 2004). 154-155.
[26] Bauckharn, "Jude, Epistle of," 1099.
[27] Brosend, 296.

mysteries."[28] Firstly, that alone would not convince me that the work is prophetic, and secondly, even if it were prophetic, it does not follow that the work is inspired. Regardless, works need not be inspired (canon) for canonical books to use them. The New Testament elsewhere includes several allusions to non-canonical sources (e.g. Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, 1 Cor 15:33).

Manton says "the same Spirit who spoke in Enoch also inspired our apostle."[29] As to why Jude would use a prophecy that "was handed down" rather than "authentic books of Scripture," Matera argues that it was "to preserve this for the church."[30] Again, I find this argument weak, yet I believe Jude could rightfully quote from this source, as long as he does not refer to it as Scripture.

Jude also alludes to a text called "The Assumption of Moses" or some related text or oral source referring to the death of Moses.[31] Chester asserts that Jude's labeling of the offenders as "these dreamers," shows that they were caught up in "trance-like ecstasies" that bridged the world of angels and humans.[32] They felt that they were like the angels, and therefore not held to human moral standards. He goes further to equate this with the situation in Corinth, where pride (1 Cor 5:2, 6) and "sexual/bodily indulgence" (1 Cor 6:12-20) were the result.[33] There seems to be more support for Chester's claim in the first case than in the second, but it is clear that Paul did address a sort of superior attitude that led to conflict and heretical teaching.

It is not merely Jude's use of these materials that stands out, but the prominence of these sources in Jude's theology. As noted earlier, Enoch's prophecy is central to Jude's epistle, and it is preceded by one of the more unusual and controversial passages, the dispute with angels. While he could have limited his references to Old Testament Scripture, his choice of material is not without relevance. Jude's audience would have been familiar with the story of the fallen angels.

Despite Brosend's claim that these examples vary so widely that the offense is unclear, Skaggs argues that each of the passages is connected to the idea of rightful authority. "Jude relates the example of Michael to the situation of the false teachers: whereas Michael leaves

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[28] Matera, 397.
[29] Thomas Manton, Jude, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 177.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Bauckham, Jude, 2 ***Peter,*** 76.
[32] Chester, 69.
[33] Ibid.

judgment to God, the teachers out of their ignorance 'slander whatever they do not understand.'"[34] She further states, "These examples portray the major problems of the false teachers as being greedy, challenging authority, and leading others astray."[35]

Brosend has a suggestion about why Jude chose such diverse materials to make such a brief defense. "Because intruders are among us, and must be stopped, according to Jude."[36] Brosend makes this observation derisively, however, following it with the jibe, "Twenty-five charges in twenty-five verses is a high rate of accusation. Even Paul cannot work up that level of indignation against his opponents."[37] Brosend then concludes, as did Skaggs, that Jude was defending attacks against authority, though according to Brosend, it is Jude's own authority that he is defending.[38] This gives the reader a much different view of this early saint. Hence, this letter is "mean-spirited, improperly personal, and evidence of little more than the author's knowledge of the very worst characterizations in the biblical and extra-canonical tradition."[39] Carson, Moo, and Morris say simply that Jude uses "a variety of sinners" to point out that these apostates are even worse.[40] There is no disputing the harshness of Jude's epistle, and perhaps it does appear that he does not extend his forgiveness to the offenders, but as Matera notes, his letter is a warning to believers "to become familiar with the errors of the past in order not to repeat them in the future."[41]

Wiersbe "sympathizes" with Jude, admitting that while it is more appealing to exhort the believers than condemn the apostates, "the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground."[42] Christians are not always at liberty to be gentle about matters of faith, especially when the unity and integrity of the church is at stake. He expresses that Jude's warning was not only applicable for his own day but still remains important for us today. Carson, Moo, and Morris echo his sentiment, though they take a balanced approach, saying, "tolerance is important...but Jude reminds us that there are limits. It is possible to reinterpret Christian life so that it ceases to be too demanding and

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[34] Skaggs, 162.
[35] Ibid., 164.
[36] Brosend, 300.
[37] Ibid., 301.
[38] bid., 302.
[39] bid., 304.
[40] Carson: Moo, and Morris, 459.
[41] Matera, 399.
[42] Wiersbe, 133.

degenerates into a way of living indistinguishable from that of the world."[43]

5. Implications for Today

How does the Christian, particularly the Pentecostal believer who faces these issues, balance expressions of both godly love and holiness? Jude does not leave this question unanswered, but rather incorporates it into his exhortation to the faithful in his closing verses as he refers to his earlier exhortation to fight for the faith. Bauckham speaks of the "four injunctions" included in this portion of the letter that are part of a "common paraenetic tradition of primitive Christianity,"[44] adding weight to the argument that Jude was not so unlike others in his approach.

This fight for the faith is not within the believer's own strength, and the first injunction, "build yourselves up" (v. 20)[45] means to "contribute to the spiritual growth of the whole community," as opposed to breaking it apart as the false teachers were doing.[46] Pentecostal churches have traditionally presented a more personal atmosphere than some of the older denominations and one that incorporates the contributions of every believer. When everyone contributes, the church is indeed built up and better able to carry out the work of God. Still, the strength does not come from other believers but rather ultimately from God.

From a Pentecostal perspective, the injunction to "pray in the Holy Spirit" (v. 20) should have special significance. Meaning to pray "in the control of the Spirit" or "under the inspiration of the Spirit," it likely refers to glossolalia.[47] Skaggs notes that Jude is contrasting this prayer in the Holy Spirit "vividly with the claims of the false teachers that they are led by the Spirit. Unlike (Jude's audience), the teachers' claims are discredited by their immoral and lawless behavior by God."[48] As mentioned above, one should understand the gifts of the Spirit and fruit of the Spirit as equally important. This is yet another reminder to believers that they must accompany their proclamation of faith with a lifestyle pleasing to God, which leads into the next

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[43] Carson, Moo, and Morris, 463.
[44] Bauckham, 111.
[45] All Bible verses are from the New Revised Standard Version.
[46] Bauckham, 113.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Skaggs, 171.

injunction: "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (v. 21), revealing that it is not only God's power but also His love that sustains the church amid the turmoil caused by false teaching. However, we must abide in this love in order to be effective in the church and avoid problems such as Jude describes.

These injunctions, without lessening the demands for holiness, couch these demands in humility, the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit and a proper relationship with God. The fourth injunction makes that clear. "Look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life" (v. 21). It is by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus that the church still stands.

Pentecostalism in Asia enjoys a spiritual freedom seldom found in many areas of the West today, and this openness to the move of God allows Him to do great works. Nevertheless, the church must keep that power in perspective, realizing that the ultimate goal is God's glory, not the glory of any individual believer.

6. Conclusion

I have shown that Jude drew from many and varied sources for his spistle, and I concede that some of these sources could be considered "eccentric." I will also concede that his tone is harsh and straightforward. However, neither his choice of raw materials nor his harsh tone should detract from the belief that his message was important both at the time of his writing and for the church today. From the perspective of New Testament theology, I have also shown how his writings reflect some of the common problems found in other parts of the canon – false teachers, lawlessness and rebellion against divine (or divinely appointed) authority. Jude brought the full force of his argument to the forefront in his urgent attempt to maintain order in the church and protect the believers for the sake of the young church. His warnings, as peculiar and harsh as they might be, were necessary then and are still of great value for the church today.

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