



## *Texts in Context*

# To See the Canon in a Grain of Sand: Preaching Jude

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Jude might appear an odd choice for a preaching text in relationship to the theme of canon. Its place for most preachers is marginal. It never appears as a reading in the Revised Common Lectionary, and with the possible exception of the closing doxology (vv. 24–25), its words are rarely spoken in worship. In short, it is easy to overlook this biblical postcard, a writing Douglas J. Rowston labeled “the most neglected book in the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet it is precisely its place on the margins of Christian proclamation that makes reflection on Jude and the canon so fruitful, for this “epistolary sermon” acutely raises questions about canon that all who proclaim the gospel should engage.<sup>2</sup> If William Blake could aspire “to see the world in a grain of sand...and eternity in an hour,”<sup>3</sup> then perhaps this small, abrasive epistle can help us see the larger significance of canon for preaching in new and fresh ways. To that end, after a brief review of Jude’s form and content, we turn to examine the letter’s use of Hebrew Scriptures, its use of extracanonical sources, its relation to other New Testament writings, its place in the process of the formation of the New Testament canon, and its canonical function.

<sup>1</sup>Douglas J. Rowston, “The Most Neglected Book in the Bible,” *New Testament Studies* 21/4 (1975) 554–563.

<sup>2</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983): We might regard Jude, he notes, as “a work whose main content could have been delivered as a homily if Jude and his readers had been able to meet” (3).

<sup>3</sup>William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence.” Blake’s entire nineteenth-century poem is available often online; for example, <http://www.artofeurope.com/blake/bla3.htm> (accessed 24 August 2009).

*Through its bold use of canonical and extracanonical resources, the small epistle of Jude offers many lessons for the preacher on the use of texts in ways to make sermons biblically literate, rhetorically vibrant, and courageously engaged.*

## JUDE: FORM AND CONTENT

The letter begins with a traditional salutation that identifies the author as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (v. 1). The recipients are “those who are called, who are beloved” (v. 1); the author provides no further identification of the audience. The salutation concludes with a wish for “mercy, peace, and love” (v. 2). There is no prayer of thanksgiving or blessing, an omission that underscores the writer’s urgency.<sup>4</sup>

The next two verses (vv. 3–4) provide a thematic statement about the letter’s occasion and purpose. Though Jude had been preparing to write “about the salvation we share” (v. 3), the presence of “certain intruders” (v. 4) compels him to write a different kind of letter. He must now urge his audience “to contend for the faith” (v. 3) against the false teaching of those who practice and teach immorality, having taken God’s grace as license to indulge their desires (v. 4).

In the place of the traditional body of the letter, Jude develops a series of scriptural references and texts that focuses on the theme of disobedience and subsequent judgment (vv. 5–16).<sup>5</sup> Having applied these examples to the current situation, Jude then advises his readers of their own course of action (vv. 17–23). They must remember the apostolic predictions of scoffers who cause division (vv. 17–19) and nurture true godliness as a means of resisting false teaching (vv. 20–21), while seeking to reclaim those who waver in faith (vv. 22–23). The letter then concludes with a doxology (vv. 24–25) that reminds the readers of God’s power to preserve and establish them even in the midst of their current conflict.

## JUDE AND THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Even in the brief space of twenty-five verses, Jude crafts an argument rich in allusion to the Hebrew Scriptures. The clearest references appear in two groups of triads that provide examples of disobedience, but additional allusions appear throughout the letter.

The first triad (vv. 5–7) follows immediately from Jude’s introduction of the “intruders” (v. 4). He uses the three examples to illustrate the character of these false teachers and the judgment that awaits them. He does not proceed chronologically but in order of increasing depravity, moving from the wilderness generation to the angels, to Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>6</sup> For each example, Jude stresses the divine initiative to establish a relationship, the group’s refusal to respond to that offer in obedience, and the ensuing judgment.<sup>7</sup> In the first example, Jude focuses on the people whom God had “once for all” (v. 5) delivered from Egypt. The people did

<sup>4</sup>Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) 729.

<sup>5</sup>Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002) 18.

<sup>6</sup>Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 729. Bauckham, *Jude*, 55, examines similar lists in other Second Temple Jewish writings and notes that this arrangement is unusual, as lists in other sources generally follow a chronological sequence.

<sup>7</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 35.

not continue to trust in God's provision, however, and their murmuring reached a climax in the rebellion at Kadesh (Num 14:1–4). As a consequence, the faithless members of the wilderness generation died in the wilderness (Num 14:22–23; 26:64–65).

The second example (v. 6) concerns the angels who “left their proper dwelling” (6). Here the author draws upon the story of “the sons of God” who mate with human women (Gen 6:1–4) as interpreted in *1 En.* 6–19. *First Enoch* interprets “the sons of God” as renegade angels who left heaven to teach humans and to have illicit intercourse with them. Impiety, fornication, and corruption resulted (*1 En.* 8:2), with the consequence that God flooded the earth and imprisoned the angels in darkness until the day of judgment (*1 En.* 10).<sup>8</sup>

The final example of this first triad is that of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7). Here Jude alludes to Gen 19:4–11, a second story about illicit relationships between angels and humans. In contrast to the second example, in which angels mated with humans, it was the men of Sodom who sought to rape the angels staying at the home of Lot.<sup>9</sup> This attempted transgression resulted in the punishment of eternal fire.

After applying these examples to the false teachers and supplying a counter-example (vv. 8–10), Jude provides a second series of examples from the Hebrew Scriptures (v. 11). In contrast to the first triad, Jude treats these examples summarily in the context of a woe oracle. Once again, however, the arrangement is not chronological. Rather, the disobedient behaviors and consequent judgments become increasingly worse as the writer evokes the examples of Cain, Balaam, and Korah.<sup>10</sup> Jude's purpose here is to portray the intruders not simply as sinners, but as false teachers whose teaching leads others into sin.<sup>11</sup>

The first reference is to Cain, evoking the story of the first murder (Gen 4:1–16), but the full significance of this example becomes clear only in light of postbiblical interpretation of Cain. Josephus and Philo stressed Cain's role in enticing others to sin, and the Targums portrayed him as the first heretic, one who argued against the existence of any future judgment to punish immorality.<sup>12</sup> As those who “go the way of Cain” (v. 11), the false teachers follow his example both in their life and in their teaching.

Jude's second example is Balaam. Once again, the key to understanding Jude's choice of Balaam lies not simply with the biblical text (Num 22–24) but in the subsequent interpretation of this seer. Numbers 31:16 attributes the apostasy at Peor (Num 25:1–3) to Balaam's advice that leads the men of Israel to have sexual relations with the women of Moab and to worship Baal. Later interpreters elaborate this idea so that Balaam, driven by greed, advises Balak how to entice Israel to sin.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 38–39; Bauckham, *Jude*, 50–53.

<sup>9</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 39–40.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 46–47.

<sup>11</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 79.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 79–81; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.52–66; Philo, *That the Worse Attacks the Better* 32, 78; *On the Posterity of Cain* 38–39.

This interpretation of Balaam stresses that he led people into sexual immorality for the sake of financial reward.<sup>13</sup>

The final example in the triad is Korah, who led a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron (Num 16:1–35; 26:9–10). Because Num 16:2 implies that Korah led others to rebel, he thus proved a natural type for the false teachers Jude opposes. Again, later interpretation makes Jude’s choice of Korah clearer. Jewish tradition connected the rebellion with the law of the fringes (Num 15:37–41), to portray Korah as an opponent of the authority of Torah.<sup>14</sup>

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Yet the six examples of disobedience are not the only references Jude makes to the Hebrew Scriptures. The condemnation of the false teachers as “shepherds who care only for themselves” (v. 12 NRSV alternate reading) echoes Ezek 34:2, where Ezekiel speaks against the leaders of Israel who are feeding themselves instead of feeding the sheep.<sup>15</sup> When Jude compares the false teachers to “waterless clouds” (v. 12), he recalls Prov 25:14, and his description of them as “wild waves of the sea” (v. 13) calls to mind Isa 57:20, a verse that the Qumran hymns also echo.<sup>16</sup> Finally, there are multiple connections between Jude and Zech 3. The words of Michael to Satan (“The Lord rebuke you!” v. 9) are the same as Zech 3:2.<sup>17</sup> The image of snatching the wavering “out of the fire” (v. 23) recalls the deliverance of Joshua in Zech 3:3 as well as the original source of the image in Amos 4:11,<sup>18</sup> and the phrase “hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies” echoes the “filthy clothes” of Joshua in Zech 3:3–4.

Jude’s use of the Hebrew Scriptures suggests two observations. First, Jude demonstrates in a brief space a wide and deep knowledge of biblical traditions, including both the Law and the Prophets. His epistolary sermon’s texture is profoundly biblical, and that density of reference challenges the scriptural thinness of much twenty-first-century proclamation. Taking Jude as our model, we would do well to infuse our sermons with scriptural language, illustrations, and examples. Given the biblical illiteracy of many contemporary congregations, that task may prove more difficult for us than it was for Jude. We will not be able simply to refer to Cain, Balaam, and Korah. We will need to find new ways to narrate their stories and make them available to and applicable for our hearers.

<sup>13</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 81; *Targums* Num 22:7; Philo, *Moses* 1.266–268; *Migration* 114; *Abot de Rabbi Nathan* 1.29; *Numbers Rabbah* 20:10.

<sup>14</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 83.

<sup>15</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 49; Bauckham, *Jude*, 7, 87.

<sup>16</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 52; Bauckham, *Jude*, 87–88. For the Qumran hymns, see 1QH 2:12–13 and 1QH 8:15.

<sup>17</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 44; Bauckham, *Jude*, 65.

<sup>18</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 7, 114–117, rightly notes that the cluster of references to Zech 3 suggests that Zech 3:3 rather than Amos 4:11 is the source for the image in Jude.

Second, Jude's interpretations rely, not simply on canonical texts, but on the subsequent interpretation of those texts in postbiblical Judaism. The allusions Jude provides are not simply echoes of scripture. They are rather, in the words of Craig A. Evans, "echoes of interpreted scripture."<sup>19</sup> Jude thus reminds us that the meanings of texts are communally constructed. There is no interpretation apart from a community of readers. We do not come to the text alone, and we do not read alone.

That awareness joins our conversation about canonical texts to the study of interpretative traditions that shape our reading. The various readers of biblical texts—from Jude's time to our own—bring their own perspectives or horizons to interpretation, and meaning occurs in what Hans-Georg Gadamer has called the "fusion of horizons."<sup>20</sup> Jude's use of traditions of interpretation thus challenges us to study the history of exegesis in order to become more effective preachers.<sup>21</sup>

#### JUDE AND EXTRACANONICAL LITERATURE

The canonical documents of the Hebrew Scriptures are not the only writings to which Jude refers, however. He alludes to and quotes from *1 Enoch* and uses material from the *Testament of Moses* as well. The allusions to *1 Enoch* are extensive. The account of the fall of the Watchers in *1 En.* 6–19 provides the framework through which Jude reads Gen 6:1–4. He draws his images of clouds, winds, trees, and stars (vv. 12–13) from *1 En.* 2:1–5:4 and 80:2–8.<sup>22</sup> The discussion of the false teachers as "wandering stars" (v. 13) finds its source in *1 En.* 80:6, and their condemnation to "deepest darkness" (v. 13) draws on the language of *1 En.* 21.<sup>23</sup> The clearest reference to *1 Enoch*, however, is the explicit citation of *1 En.* 1:9 (vv. 14–15). This reference is Jude's only formal quotation from a written text, paralleling his quotation from the words of the apostles (v. 18).

Jude also contains three references to the *Testament of Moses*. Jude 3 echoes the language of *T. Mos.* 4:8, while Jude 16 relies on *T. Mos.* 5:5.<sup>24</sup> The most intriguing connection is Jude's recounting of the story of the dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil over the body of Moses (v. 9). Here Jude draws on the now lost ending of the *Testament of Moses*. Although this ending is no longer ex-

<sup>19</sup>Craig A. Evans, "Listening for Echoes of Interpreted Scripture," in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1993) 47–51.

<sup>20</sup>For this discussion of Gadamer's understanding of tradition and biblical interpretation, see Charles J. Scalise, *From Scripture to Theology: A Canonical Journey into Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 61–62. For additional perspectives on the communal nature of interpretation in light of the pragmatism of C. S. Peirce, see Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 24–41.

<sup>21</sup>For resources in such study, see, for example, James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), as well as the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* volumes published by InterVarsity Press.

<sup>22</sup>J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 42; Kraftchick, *Jude*, 50; Bauckham, *Jude*, 88–91.

<sup>23</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 52–53; Bauckham, *Jude*, 89–91; Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 733, n. 6.

<sup>24</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 34, 100.

tant, other sources preserve its substance and support the conclusion that the *Testament of Moses* supplied the source for Jude 9.<sup>25</sup>

Jude's use of these sources raises several questions for reflection about the canon, for here, as in his use of traditions of interpretation, Jude broadens the conversation to include writings that never became part of the Jewish canon. Two observations are pertinent. First, the label "extracanonical" for this literature is somewhat misleading in the case of *1 Enoch*, because it remains a part of the broader canon of the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) church.<sup>26</sup> Engagement with Jude reminds us that not all Christians share the same canon. The conversation about canon thus becomes less simple and straightforward.

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Second, Jude considered these writings in some sense authoritative and inspired. Carl Holladay concludes that Jude's use of these texts "reflects an admirable independence of spirit, if not a gift for originality."<sup>27</sup> In that sense, Jude models boldness in preaching, a call for creativity and gumption in proclaiming the faith. He reminds us that there is knowledge broader than the limits of the canon and challenges us to engage a broader range of texts in our reading so that we might gain a more capacious sense of Jewish and Christian traditions to inform our preaching.<sup>28</sup>

#### JUDE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Jude shares much in common with a range of New Testament writings, but its connection to 2 Peter is unique. The two writings share extensive material that is so close in wording that appeal to a common oral tradition does not explain the extent of the similarity. There are four possibilities: (1) either the same person wrote both Jude and 2 Peter, or (2) both utilize a common written precursor, or (3) Jude borrows from 2 Peter, or (4) 2 Peter borrows from Jude. The first option, that of a common author, falters because the two writings differ markedly in style and because they use common images for different purposes.<sup>29</sup> Positing a written precursor introduces a common hypothetical source, requiring a more complicated theory with no clear advantages over direct dependence.<sup>30</sup> The position that Jude

<sup>25</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 43; Bauckham, *Jude*, 65–76.

<sup>26</sup>Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 841–842; Daniel J. Harrington, *Jude and 2 Peter* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003) 178.

<sup>27</sup>Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 726.

<sup>28</sup>Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin, *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 86.

<sup>29</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 79, lists the comparison of Jude 13 to 2 Pet 2:17 as an example.

<sup>30</sup>Bauckham, *Jude*, 142.

copies from 2 Peter was an attractive one for ancient commentators, who reasoned on the basis of the comparative status of the authors: the more prominent apostle Peter would logically be the source for the lesser known Jude.<sup>31</sup> With a few exceptions, however, modern scholars have drawn the opposite conclusion, arguing that Jude is the source for 2 Peter. While Jude 5–16 is a carefully constructed series of examples and applications, 2 Pet 2:1–3:3 uses the material in a piecemeal fashion, adding positive examples about Noah and Lot to stress God’s mercy toward the righteous while omitting any reference to extracanonical material.<sup>32</sup> It is easier to understand how the writer of 2 Peter could decide to select content from Jude while adding additional material than it is to understand how Jude could take the scattered and loosely structured parts of 2 Peter and craft a tightly constructed argument whose words and structure are “composed with exquisite care.”<sup>33</sup>

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Second Peter’s use of Jude suggests at least two observations about the canon and proclamation. First, it underscores that two forms of conversation about authoritative texts—of which preaching is one example—are imitation and revision. Sometimes our preaching should simply imitate biblical language, thoughts, arguments, stories, and narratives. At other times, our preaching should function as variations on a theme, recasting biblical material in new forms and figures. On other occasions, our preaching should revise and recontextualize biblical material for the situation of our congregations, as 2 Peter recasts material from Jude’s Palestinian forms and arguments into ones that better fit the broader Hellenistic environment of his audience.<sup>34</sup>

Second, 2 Peter’s use of Jude reminds us that our preaching, like Jude’s, may itself become a resource for imitation and revision by those who hear our sermons. Preaching is not an end in itself, and its fruits are not confined to one hour on Sunday mornings. Effective preaching prompts further conversation, engagement, and transformation in human hearts that seek wisdom and courage to love God and neighbor more fully.

<sup>31</sup>Kraftchick, *Jude*, 80; Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 740.

<sup>32</sup>Harrington, *Jude*, 162; Kraftchick, *Jude*, 80.

<sup>33</sup>Bauchham, *Jude*, 142. See also Kraftchick, *Jude*, 80; Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 740–741; and Duane F. Watson, “The Letter of Jude: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 328–329.

<sup>34</sup>I am indebted to Steve Kraftchick for these insights about canon as conversation.

## JUDE AND CANON FORMATION

Apart from its early use by 2 Peter, we know nothing about Jude's circulation and reception in the second century. By contrast, at the beginning of the third century, we find Jude attested across a broad geographic spectrum from Egypt to Italy to North Africa, a remarkable range of reception and use for such a short writing.<sup>35</sup> Clement, Origen, and Didymus the Blind attest to its use in Alexandria. It appears in the Muratorian Canon, and Ambrose, Jerome, and other Latin fathers cite it as Scripture. Writing from Carthage, Tertullian quotes from Jude and argues that Jude's use of *1 Enoch* supports that writing's canonicity. Yet even given this range of acceptance, there are notable gaps in Jude's use among the Antiochenes and the Syrian church. Even some of those who embrace Jude—like Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome—note its disputed status, pointing in particular to the controversy that Jude's use of *1 Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses* creates. Despite its contested status, however, Jude eventually gains acceptance throughout the church as part of the New Testament canon.

Two observations follow from the church's decision to include this sermonic letter in the canon. The first is that Jude is problematic, messy, and controversial. It provokes. It raises questions we would prefer not to engage and presents us with puzzles we cannot solve: Who wrote Jude, and why did he appeal to extracanonical materials? What should the role of those sources be for Christian reflection and discipleship? Who are the false teachers, and what precisely was the content of their teaching that earns condemnation? How do we establish parameters for community life and belief? Jude leaves us to struggle over these issues and more.

The second observation is that—despite its challenges, or perhaps because of them—we need Jude. Though it never spoke with a unanimous voice, the consensus of the church was that Jude should be a part of its working bibliography, one of the writings necessary to secure its identity and well-being. The difficulty for most of us is that Jude does not function as part of our canon. Chances are that we find Jude problematic, not so much due to its disputed authorship or use of extracanonical sources, but due to its obscurity and its harsh denunciation of false teachers. For whatever reason, we neglect it. The decision to include Jude in the canon means that, at the least, we should read it, study it, and proclaim it so that its voice may shape and reshape our own lives and those of our congregations.

## JUDE'S CANONICAL FUNCTION

Brevard Childs has argued that the canonical role of Jude is to address heresy, “not simply as an historical danger confronting a particular congregation,” but as a theological referent, a phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> Childs is wrong to insist that Jude is not an

<sup>35</sup>Joseph Chaine, *Les Épîtres catholiques: La seconde épître de saint Pierre, les épîtres de saint Jean, l'épître de saint Jude* (Paris: Gabalda, 1939) 266–267. The following discussion draws primarily from Chaine (263–267) as well as Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 731–732; and Bauckham, *Jude*, 16–17.

<sup>36</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 492.



occasional letter addressed to a specific congregation. But given the minimal description of the opponents, the letter does come to function as “a theological description of the phenomenon of heresy” when read later by a more catholic audience. Childs’s observation is apt, not for the first readers of this epistolary sermon, but for subsequent ones. Jude does remind us that proclamation requires us to sound a clear word against false teaching, to speak in the service of truth to ensure vitality of faith and congregational health and harmony.

But perhaps Jude has a further function, as well as that of an abrasive grain of sand that calls us to preaching that is biblically literate, rhetorically vibrant, and courageously engaged. As we have seen, careful examination of this letter reminds us that our traditions shape our readings of texts and that the boundaries of canon are complex and contested. Lest we think we have the dynamics of canon figured out, Jude reminds us of the refrain of Kenneth Burke’s TL (“The Lord”): “But it’s more complicated than that.”<sup>37</sup> Those complications energize our preaching, inviting us into the vital conversations about canon and sound teaching and moral living that Jude embodies. Jude stands, as it were, in midstream, interpreting older texts and traditions from Genesis to *1 Enoch*, while being interpreted by later writers like 2 Peter, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and twenty-first-century readers as well. As a hermeneutical model, this epistolary sermon invites us into the conversation that is the canon, that we too may take our place in preaching, in contending “for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3). ⊕

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<sup>37</sup>Kenneth Burke, “Prologue in Heaven,” in *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970) 273–316, at 294.