

6 Jude. Celebrating the Love-feasts, Subverting the Canon

Outline

Greeting, vv. 1-2

Reason for the letter: intrusion of ungodly leaders, 3-4

False prophets: three paradigms of divine punishment, 5-7

 Their blasphemies: three sinful precedents, 8-11

 Their intrusion into the love-feasts brings judgment: four images, 12-13

 Enoch prophesied against them, 14-16; so did the apostles, 17-19

Three virtues (faith, love, hope) and three obligations of community love, 20-23

 Doxology: walking on the way without falling, 24-25

Traditionally, the letter of Jude is attributed to Jude, the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55) and of James (Jude 1). Jude, James and Simon Peter were the only three authors of New Testament books said to be married (1 Corinthians 9:5). That is to say, more than 90% of the New Testament represents writings of unmarried men (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul [plus Apollos, author of Hebrews?]) who, consequently, do not reflect the ideology and values of the modern nuclear family dominant in cultures and churches today.

Jude was not an apostle but a prominent leader and itinerant missionary in the early Palestinian Judeo-Christian movement (1 Cor. 9:5). The letter may be one of the earliest writings of the New Testament, perhaps in the decade of 50-60 AD. Although Jude differs greatly from James, it reflects well the apocalyptic theology of early Christianity. Many scholars

question whether the letter really comes from Jude, but the recent research supports the traditional attribution of the letter to him. (Such is not the case with --> 2 Peter, which has much in common with Jude but appears to come from a disciple of Peter around 90 AD).

1. The Poor: Salvation/Liberation and “Love-feast” Banquets (v. 12). Like 2 John, Jude insists on the limits of hospitality in regard to false teachers who had succeeded in infiltrating the community’s “love-feasts” (ἀγάπαις, v. 12). In the entire New Testament only Jude calls the Lord’s Supper a love-feast (cf. “feasting along with you,” 2 Peter 2:13), but the designation became very common in the patristic literature after the New Testament, reminding us that the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper, was an actual meal. Paul’s description shows us how the rich abused the poor and the slaves on such an occasion when love was lacking. When the slaves arrived late from their work they found that the rich had eaten all the food and gotten drunk after drinking all the wine! (--> 1 Cor. 11:17-22; cf. Acts 2:46.) To eliminate such “class struggles” in the very heart of the church, after a few centuries the love-feasts were reduced to a religious ritual, with tiny symbols of the original meal, in almost all the churches until the present day. However, Jude reminds us the original practice was a love-feast, and Paul enables us to see how the poor enjoyed this banquet before abuses set in.

Reflecting its early Palestinian origin (50-60 AD), Jude avoids justice terminology ([a]dik-terms), containing only one such reference--to the fiery “eternal vengeance/punishment” (δίκεν, v. 7) of Sodom and Gomorrah (see similarly Jesus teaching in our earliest Gospel --> Mark and the Q source). Jude prefers to speak of “salvation” in the sense of an integral liberation, as in the Exodus paradigm (vv. 3, 5, 23, 25). In contrast, --> 2 Peter (80-90 AD) refers to injustice/ oppression (ἀδικ-terms) four times and liberating justice (δικ-terms) eight times (total 12!).

2. Feminist Critique of Jude's "Patriarchal Limitations." As Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt points out, "Jude typifies a patriarchal focus that excludes the mention of women and renders women's presence, voice, contributions, and roles invisible."¹ She suggests, however, that women prophets were among the false leaders that infiltrated the church! While this is possible, an alternative approach is preferable. Not a word in Jude excludes the possibility that in the inclusive house-churches he addresses the women prepared and administered the Eucharist in its early form as a love-feast, especially since the early churches often met in homes headed by women. Why not insist on the presence of women, quite possibly as the dominant majority in the churches that received this letter and hosted the meals? Jude would then be exhorting mainly women leaders to teach the truth against the errors of male intruders (vv. 3-4; cf. 2 Timothy 3:6-7)--and to carry out their pastoral work (vv. 22-23), empowered by the glorious promises of the final doxology (vv. 24-25).

True, Jude's examples of impious sinners are limited to infamous males in Israel's Scriptures: Cain, Balaam, Korah (v. 11) and the males of Sodom (v. 7). And as positive examples Jude also names only males: Jesus Christ, his brothers James and Jude, Adam, Enoch, Moses, in addition to the angel Michael. However, Jude's "apostles" (v. 17) may well have included leaders such as Mary Magdalene and Junias (Matthew 28:1-10; Romans 16:7). Jude makes no attempt to blame women (such as Eve or false prophetesses) for the existence of evil in human history nor in the church, nor does he impose any limitation on women's leadership in the church in response to his letter.

3. The Subversion (Opening) of the Canon. To warn against false teachers (vv. 3-19) who wanted to infiltrate the house-churches where the love-feasts were celebrated, Jude (vv. 6, 9, 14-15) cites two pseudepigraphal books (1 Enoch and The Testament of Moses) popular among first century Jews, but which did not form part of the Hebrew canon. In this way Jude allows us

to see the early Christians' freedom in terms of the canon. The value of the traditional canon could be to avoid the loss or neglect of books normative for Jews and Christians, but such positive, inclusive value does not eliminate the possibility of recognizing significant truths in other books, as various modern feminist and womanist theologians insist (see also Titus 1:12).

4. Jude, Jesus and Sodom: Homosexuality in Animals, Homophobia in Humans.

“And those angels who did not maintain their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, God has maintained in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day. Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as the angels, indulged in irresponsible sex (ékporneúsasai) and going in pursuit of different flesh (sarkós hetéras), serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 6-7).

Among our common English translations, only the Authorized (King James) Version preserves the literal meaning of the Greek, which refers to the flesh of angels as “strange flesh” (see our modern word “heterosexual,” from the Greek hetéras, different). Translated literally in this way, we can see how Jude follows the teaching of his brother Jesus and saw no condemnation of “homosexuality” in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Jewish literature of the day commonly cited God’s judgment against Sodom as a condemnation of sexual love between persons of the same gender. In this way the Jews sought to make propaganda against the Greek and Roman Empires which oppressed them for so many centuries. The Jews claimed that such sexual practices were common among their oppressors but not among Jews. Jesus broke with this popular Jewish xenophobic and homophobic tradition and returned to the original meaning of Genesis, where Sodom is punished for refusing hospitality and then attempting violence instead (Matthew 10:15; Luke 10:12).

Jude is quite clear in the original Greek. In verse 6 he refers to angels who, before the flood, came down to earth and sired children (“giants”) with human women (Genesis 6:1-4). Then in v. 7 Jude speaks of the other account (Gen. 19) where the men of Sodom sought to rape the angel visitors. Jude describes these angels as “other flesh”. The dominance of homophobia in society and the church is evidenced by the fact that many who promote violence against sexual minorities cite this text of Jude as a condemnation of “homosexuality” (when the original Greek actually contains the word “hetéras,” from which the modern term heterosexual is derived!). Both the word and concept of “homosexuality” are of modern origin, dating only from the nineteenth century. However, medieval laws that condemn “sodomy” and the modern propaganda that attacks “homosexuals” do not refer to sexual males attempting sexual violation of angels! Unlike the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), certain New Testament texts describe “angels” as “spirits” (Hebrews 1:7, 14) that do not marry (Mark 12:25). Jude, however, stands closer to early (mythological?) traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures, where angels are considered capable of sexual relations with human beings (see also Paul in 1 Cor. 11:10). Homophobic translation of Jude 7 is exemplified in the NRSV, which even drags in the concept of “unnatural” lust (from Romans 1; cf. “perversion” in the NIV). The NRSV admits in a footnote that the original Greek of Jude 7 says “went after other flesh.” The original French Jerusalem Bible translated Jude 7 properly and the JB footnote in English is correct.

Significantly, Jude does refer to actions done “naturally” (v. 10, “phusikós), and of instincts that are “natural” (v. 19, psuchikoí). However, translations commonly avoid the concepts of nature in these texts (v. 10, “by instinct,” NRSV, NIV; v. 10, “worldly,” NRSV), where acting according to “nature” is condemned as sinful and (v. 10) “irrational.” Confusion is created by the fact that in Romans 1 Paul condemns anal sex (without condoms) as “against nature” (pará phúsin), both when females offer themselves to males (Rom. 1:26) and similarly,

when males penetrate other males (1:27). Here in Romans Paul thus implies that to act “naturally” is good, while for Jude, to act “naturally” is characteristic of irrational animals and sinful, implying that humans ought to avoid the natural and act against their natural, animal instincts. However, in Romans 11:24 Paul himself celebrates the fact that God acts “against nature” (again, pará phúsin) by engrafting Gentiles into the olive tree (Israel; and see all of Jesus’ miracles). Neither the Hebrew Bible nor Jesus speak of “nature” (a Greek philosophical concept), but rather of creation and God as creator. When Paul and Judas appropriate the philosophical vocabulary of “nature,” modern readers easily get confused by the contradictory senses--and all the more when translators (with apparent homophobic bias) introduce the term “unnatural” when it is not in the original Greek, but avoid the term “nature” when it is present in the Greek (see under Romans).

As John Boswell’s classic study made clear (1980), observation of same-sex erotic behavior and pair-bonding in animals goes back at least to Aristotle. Nevertheless, heterosexist bigotry has so darkened minds that philosophers and theologians continually have contradicted themselves about whether such behavior actually occurs in animals and the “moral/ethical” conclusions to be purportedly deduced from it. Bruce Bagemihl’s recent study documents homosexual behavior in more than 450 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and insects.²

German scientist and theologian Volker Sommer has nicely diagrammed the two contradictory affirmations about animals commonly made and the two illogical conclusions theologians have leaped to:³

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 “Homosexuality is against nature -----> ?
(does not occur among animals)” | 3 “Homosexuality should be rejected” |
| 2 “Homosexuality is natural -----> ?
(does occur among animals)” | 4 “Homosexuality should be accepted” |

The Apostle Paul traditionally has been misinterpreted as arguing from affirmation #1 to #3 (Romans 1:26-27), even though later in the same Epistle he celebrates God's acts "against nature" (see Romans chapter). Although Jude does not qualify the attempted gang rape of angels as "against nature," (v. 7), his later conclusion that humans should avoid imitating the "natural" behavior of irrational animals (v. 10) logically would make him the church father of later theologians who admitted the occurrence of same-gender erotic behavior in animals, but still leaped to conclusion #3. In this ridiculous history that Boswell and others have traced on these questions, homophobic prejudice has swamped both sound science and coherent theology. Bagemihl's documentation involving 450 species hardly makes any leap from #2 to #4 any more logically compelling than traditional spurious arguments. But the very diversity of meaning and rhetoric in the New Testament involving the term "nature" (Romans 1 vs. Romans 11 and Jude, v. 10) ought to warn us against repeating the common simplistic errors of the past. Fundamentalists like to argue that God created only Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, and permitted only heterosexual animal pairs to enter Noah's ark. Now we may at least respond by inquiring where Bagemihl's 450 species came from. Undoubtedly from that same place over/under Noah's rainbow where Cain found a wife!

5. Anti-Semitism and Illness. Although traditionally neglected by theologians, Jude ought to have functioned in the church as a bulwark against anti-Semitism. Like James, Jude exemplifies the continuity of the churches with Judaism, with Jude even citing as authorities two Jewish books not in the Hebrew canon. Jude includes no reference to illness, but see the reference to strengthening in the final doxology (vv. 24-25).

6. Jude and the Hope of the Poor. Jude kept alive the "apocalyptic" hope of the early churches (vv. 14-25; --> Mark 13; Matthew 24-25; Luke 17:20-37; Luke 21; 1-2 Thessalonians; James; Revelation). This apocalyptic perspective and theology is highly significant for

evaluating the common New Testament approach to human institutions. New Testament authors looked for the second coming of Jesus shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, in order to overthrow the violent and oppressive system of the Roman Empire and to establish on earth God's new order, characterized by freedom, justice, wisdom and love (2 Peter 3:13). With this goal in view, New Testament authors carefully "chose their battles." They thought Jesus' return depended on the worldwide establishment of ecclesiastical communities, which would serve as first fruits of the new order and countercultural paradigms in the face of an oppressive empire (Mark 13:10; Matthew 24:14; Romans 11--12, 15--16). Consequently, they did not give priority to applying band-aid patches to reform the old order a bit. Having experienced the first fruits of the new order, they struggled whole-heartedly to see it triumph decisively with Jesus' expected triumphal return.

Obviously, for Christians today, such apocalyptic theology has its limitations, but it would be unfair to criticize early Christians as resigning themselves to the continued dominance of the status quo. The prominent Greek philosophies hoped only that the nonmaterial soul would escape from the material body to then participate in the nonmaterial celestial sphere. With similar resignation, pantheistic Oriental religions expected the soul at death to be dissolved in an impersonal divine cosmic sea, perhaps to be reincarnated. In marked contrast, the apocalyptic hope of the Hebrew prophets, in common with the New Testament, is a hope based on 1) a personal God, creator of the entire material cosmos, and 2) the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus into a material heaven. Consequently, the apocalyptic Christian hope encompasses the human body together with all the earth and the cosmos (Matthew 5:5; Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21--22).

Our long history and the modern sciences obviously enable us to transcend apocalyptic theology in certain aspects. When the biblical authors contemplated the past, they projected a

universe created some 4,000 years BC; regarding the future, they hoped for the coming of Jesus within a generation. We can now count nearly 2,000 years of history after the life of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem, with the gradual expansion of the church throughout the world. According to socio-economic analyses, with churches with millions of members, especially in democratic countries, we are able to accomplish much human liberation and justice that remained outside the early apocalyptic vision that sustained the hope of the tiny persecuted communities in the first century.

However, to recognize such limitations does not justify despising the primitive apocalyptic theology that maintained alive the hope of the early Christian communities. The apocalyptic hope motivated these early churches to plant nonviolent counterculture communities throughout the Roman Empire. From the very beginning the new house-churches established a kind of dialectic tension with traditional institutions: first with the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 2) but soon extending to synagogues and imperial institutions elsewhere. As a strategy to upset a powerful empire, it would be difficult to imagine anything more effective than the house-church strategy in this dialectic, since no one wasted any energy struggling to put band-aids on an empire doomed to collapse. Early Christian praxis weakened and failed only when it increasingly conformed itself with the injustices, oppressions and violence of the order it sought to undermine. Jude and other New Testament writers struggled tenaciously against the beginnings of this tendency to conformity to the dominant oppressive world order. In modern history we may compare the nonviolent strategies of Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

7. Intertextuality: the later use of Jude in 2 Peter

Jude (50-60 AD, early Jewish) --> 2 Peter (90 AD, more Hellenized)

v. 4

2:1-3a

5-8

3b-10a

8-9	10b-11
10	12-13a
11...	...[15-16]
12	13b-14
[11]...	...15-16
12-13	17
16	18
17-18	3:1-3

When 2 Peter condemns false teachers (2:1 --3:3), the author incorporates 13 of Jude's 25 verses (partly or totally). Only Jude 1-3, 14-15 and 19-25 are left unused! While Jude had denounced certain intruders who denied that God judges sin (vv. 4, 15), 2 Peter condemns mockers who denied that Jesus would return to judge the world (1:16-17; 3:3-4). Other notable changes include the following:

a. Of Jude's three examples of punishment (vv. 5-8: (1) Israel in the desert, (2) the angels of Genesis 6:1-4 and (3) Sodom), 2 Peter substitutes the Flood (Genesis 6:5--8:22) for Israel in the desert and also rearranges the three examples to follow the chronological order of Genesis, thus eliminating the Exodus paradigm.

b. Jude 5-8 insists in God's capacity to judge (throughout history and in the final judgment), while 2 Peter 2:4-9 emphasizes rather God's capacity to save from judgment (Noah and Lot exemplify those whom God rescues from judgment).

c. 2 Peter eliminates the two citations from Jewish pseudepigraphal works (the dispute over Moses' body and the prophecy of Enoch; cf. Jude 9, 14-15); thus in 2 Peter the importance of the human body after death and the flexibility of the canon disappear (though adding the letters of Paul to the canon is another kind of opening!).

d. 2 Peter 2:4 provides for a more Hellenized punishment (NRSV note: “Tartaros,” from Greek mythology; cf. Jude 6, “eternal chains in deepest darkness”).

e. In the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, 2 Peter 2:6-8 eliminates Jude’s specific indication of the intent to rape the visiting angels (v. 7, “other flesh”); angelic capacity for sexual relations is thus obscured, while the sins of Sodom become more general and common: impiety, violence, oppression, excesses, lack of scruples and principles, legal infractions (but without reference to Moses’ Law).

f. 2 Peter’s “banqueting” (2:13) replaces Jude’s specific reference to the “ágape” meal (v. 12).

g. Jude’s three examples of sinners from the Hebrew Bible (v. 11: Cain, Balaam, Korah) are reduced in 2 Peter to only Balaam (2:15-16, but with the addition of his speaking donkey’s unnatural feat).

h. 2 Peter 2:19-22 (with no parallels in Jude) develops certain aspects of the false teachers’ sins and adds the proverbs of the dog (from Proverbs 26:11) and another about a sow (common in Greek literature).

Bibliography: Homosexuality in Animals

Bagemihl, Bruce. Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity. New York: St. Martin’s, 1999.

Boswell, John. Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980, 12-16, 137-143, 152-156, 201-202, 303-332.

Sommer, Volker. Wider die Natur: Homosexualität un Evolution. München: C. H. Beck, 1990, 110-131, 160-174.

James D. Weinrich. Sexual Landscapes. New York: Scribners, 1987, 282-309.

Bibliography: Jude

- Bauckham, Richard J. Jude, 2 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary 50. Dallas: Word, 1983.
- . Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990.
- . "Jude, Epistle of." In The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman. Vol. 3. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Dowd, Sharon. "Jude." In The Women's Bible Commentary, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.
- Gamble, Harry Y. "Canon, New Testament." In The Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Noel Freedman. Vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Neyrey, Jerome H. 2 Peter, Jude. Anchor Bible 37C. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Rosenblatt, Marie-Eloise. "Jude." In Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Vol. 2. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- Thurén, L. "Hey Jude! Asking for the Original Situation and Message of a Catholic Epistle." New Testament Studies 43 (1997): 451-465.