

**Exegesis of II Peter and Jude****by Elodie Ballantine Emig (Denver Theological Seminary)**

The final references to homosexuality, or should I say to Sodom and Gomorrah, we shall study are II Peter 2:6-8 and Jude 7. We will examine them together because the second chapter of II Pet. is so similar to Jude. In fact, most scholars believe that there is literary dependence between them. Most compelling to me is the notion that Peter used Jude as the springboard for part of his letter.

Having mentioned Peter as the author of II Pet., I should address, albeit briefly, the question of authorship. Fairly few modern scholars think the apostle Peter wrote the second epistle bearing his name. The general and liberal consensus is that the letter is a pseudonymous product of the late first, or early second, century. Since as far back as the beginning of the third century, there has been doubt concerning II Pet. Therefore, "more hesitancy accompanied its acceptance into the New Testament canon than any other book" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1989), 1).

Perhaps the reason the early Church expressed some doubt is due to the marked difference in style between I and II Peter. (I say perhaps because Origen, the earliest writer to mention doubt, did not explain the reason(s) for it.) Unlike the alleged differences between the undisputed Pauline corpus and the pastorals, those between I and II Pet. are undeniable. Well before the advent of modern, liberal scholarship, Jerome noted the stylistic differences, and both Erasmus and Calvin recognized that someone other than Peter must have written his second letter for him. Calvin, if not Erasmus, however, was convinced that the letter was written under Peter's direction (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), footnote 1, p. 820). Many conservative scholars today concur. It is certainly possible that Peter directed a disciple, or a secretary to write II Pet. Variations on the theme are that Peter changed secretaries between his two letters or used a secretary for one (most likely the first), but not the other, of his letters. Although I favor this last option, I am not convinced that it matters which one chooses, as long as the Petrine origin of both epistles attributed to him is maintained. To this point we shall return in due course.

Along with stylistic differences, many moderns find another key discrepancy between the two Petrine epistles. It has been argued that the theologies of I and II Pet. are irreconcilable (*Ibid.*, 826). Additionally it has been said that Peter: would never have depended upon Jude; "the lifetime of Peter was too early for Christians to be referring to their early leaders as 'the fathers'" (Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1992), 436); it was also too early for the Gnosticism the book apparently combats; and finally, it was too early for Paul's letters to have been considered as Scripture.

Before answering these objections, I think it wise to state first that it does matter who wrote II Pet. As I said in my article on I Timothy, if a book was accepted into the canon under false pretenses, I don't believe that it has anything authoritative to say to us. Despite early doubt concerning it, II Pet. was admitted into the canon as Petrine. And it was never attributed to anyone else in early Church tradition. It is significant "that while no other book of the New Testament is as poorly attested in the early church

as 2 Peter, this epistle 'has incomparably better support for its inclusion than the best attested of the rejected books'" (Ibid., 434). It is also noteworthy that a number of those rejected books falsely bore Peter's name. It is quite likely that II Pet. received an extra measure of early scrutiny precisely because the Gospel, Acts and Apocalypse of Peter were clearly spurious and heretical (Guthrie, 818).

The question remains whether or not there are any insurmountable objections to a Petrine origin of II Pet. Bottom line, my answer is no. That the key doctrinal themes of I Pet. do not reappear in II Pet. does not argue against Petrine authorship, but rather for a change in focus. More problematic is the allegation that the books view the parousia, the key theme of II Pet., differently. If, though, as is universally agreed, II Pet. was written after I Pet., moreover to quell certain fears concerning Christ's return, there is every reason to expect that Peter would have narrowed his focus on the parousia in his second letter.

Some argue that Peter, an apostle, would not have based any of his writing on the work of a non-apostle. This makes absolutely no sense to me, especially since early tradition acknowledges Jude as the brother of James, from whose work II Pet. also seems to have borrowed, and the half-brother of Jesus. Others say that Peter could not have used Jude, because the latter can not be dated as early as Peter's death circa A.D. 68. To this we may reply that there is no absolute proof that Peter did use Jude. I happen to think that it is the best explanation for the literary parallels; but if someone were to establish that Jude was written in the 70's, I would abandon the theory without second thought.

I will agree with Carson, Moo and Morris that there is nothing in the context of II Pet. which demands that his mention of "the fathers" (3:4) refers to Christians. It is far more likely that the reference is to the Old Testament Patriarchs (Carson et al., 436). Nor, as we found with I Timothy, is there anything in II Pet. that demands that we take the heresy it combats as full-blown, second-century Gnosticism. The seeds of Gnosticism had been sown in the first century. Finally, there is no need to assume that Peter's labeling of Paul's writing as Scripture (3:15-16) means that there was "an authoritative collection of the Pauline Epistles" that early (Ibid., 435). Perhaps more decisive is the fact that Peter called Paul's writings difficult. This seems to argue more for Petrine authorship than for pseudonymity.

Though we have barely scratched the surface here, it seems that enough has been said to place the burden of proof on those who would deny that Peter wrote II Pet. If his letter was genuine and authoritative, it remains to take a brief look at Jude's credentials before moving on to the biblical texts. As with II Pet., a number of modern scholars think that Jude is pseudonymous. This option is easily dismissed, however, because there is no clear reason why anyone would have wanted to assume the obscure name of Jude. In the short letter he claims to have been the brother of James; there is no compelling reason to doubt him. James, the half-brother of Jesus, is the only New Testament James well enough known to have been so designated. Thus, Jude is the half-brother of our Lord and, although virtually unknown to us, intimately acquainted with Him.

Another non-literary parallel between II Pet. and Jude is that the early church expressed some doubt before admitting it into the canon. This time the reason was that Jude makes reference to the apocryphal books of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. The question is whether an inspired author

would make reference to uninspired works. The easiest answer is that one could. Just because Jude alluded to the apocrypha does not mean that he recognized it as inspired Scripture. "[T]he allusion tells us nothing about Jude's view of Jewish pseudepigrapha generally, but only of his acceptance of the validity of the particular incident to which he alludes" (Guthrie, 919). In other words, all we can reasonably be sure of is that Jude believed that Enoch was an historical figure who prophesied and that the archangel Michael fought with Satan over the body of Moses. There is no Scripture which teaches to the contrary.

Like II Pet., Jude was admitted to the canon; the arguments against it were surmounted. For our purposes, then, the two books are authentic documents from an apostle and a half-brother of Jesus. The fact that both of them make mention of Sodom and Gomorrah and their destruction should be of great interest to us.

There is good reason to believe that II Peter was written to essentially the same audience as I Peter. Peter mentions a previous letter that is most easily understood as I Peter, the recipients of which are named. Some scholars point out that II Peter is more general in character than the earlier epistle, so I think we are safe in accepting that Peter intended his second letter for the churches in Asia Minor as a whole.

In terms of date, those scholars who hold to Petrine authorship of II Peter place it no later than A.D. 68. Peter indicates in the first chapter of the letter that the Lord has made it clear to him that he would soon die. If the letter was written toward the end of his life, it remains only to establish the date of Peter's death. That, alas, we cannot do with absolute precision. The historian Eusebius claimed that Peter was put to death during the Neronian persecutions of A.D. 64-68, leaving us with a time span of five years or so. Even by a date as early as A.D. 63, the churches in Asia Minor had unfortunately experienced enough problems with false teachers to warrant such a letter as II Peter.

Certainly dealing with false teachers is a key theme of II Peter. Peter is nearing the end of his life and wants to give some last words of encouragement and admonition to the churches of Asia Minor. In the first chapter of his second letter, he encourages the readers to spiritual growth. In the second chapter, he deals with false teachers, the sure judgment they will receive from God and God's faithfulness to rescue the righteous. Finally, in the third chapter he turns to the Day of the Lord. Regardless of what the false teachers say, Jesus will return in power. Peter wants his readers to be ready for that return and for the judgment to follow; he wants them to "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him" (II Pet. 3:14).

Turning to the immediate context of the passage, we find Peter's mention of Sodom and Gomorrah as part of his argument that false teachers will be judged. In 1:16 comes an allusion to the presence of false teaching among his readers. He affirms that he and his fellow apostles "did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Gospel of Christ is not some incipient Gnostic myth, cleverly invented to deceive God's people, but the good news that God Himself has acted in history to save them. Peter makes a great deal of the fact that he was an eyewitness to God's saving activity. He was there on the Mount of Transfiguration when God

pronounced His blessing on His son. He saw and heard "the word of prophecy made more certain" (1:19).

From a brief discussion of the divine origin of the prophetic word, Peter moves to his second chapter's treatment of false prophets and false teachers. Having made the point that false prophets have been and false teachers will be among us, Peter confirms that their condemnation is sure. As evidence for his case, Peter brings up three historical examples of God's judgment. First, God did not spare the angels who sinned, presumably in Genesis 6 (God did not send the angels who sinned in the pre-Adamic fall to Hell as far as we know), but punished them. Second, God did not spare the antediluvian population, but annihilated it, with the exception of the righteous Noah and seven of his family. Third, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the exception of Lot and part of his family, to destruction by fire because of the ungodliness of their inhabitants.

Peter did not specifically name the sin(s) for which any of the three were judged. We may assume that he chose the examples because they were well known to his readers and needed no further explanation. However obscure the allusion to Genesis 6 may be to us, the belief that angels cohabited with humans was widely held by intertestamental Judaism and Jews of the first century. Moreover later Judaism speculated quite freely as to the exact extent and nature of the punishment of those evil angels. Regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter did note that Lot was "distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men" (2:7). The word translated "filthy" in the NIV was perhaps better translated "lascivious" in the KJV. The word has to do with license, "mostly in the physical sphere" (Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 490).

There is no mention of homosexuality in II Peter. That the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were lascivious says nothing concerning their sexual orientation. We must return to the Genesis account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for evidence that homosexuality was among the reasons for that destruction. Not wishing to do so here, it will suffice to say that both II Peter and Jude must be read in light of the Genesis account. We have already demonstrated in an earlier article that homosexuality was a factor in the destruction of the cities of the plain. We have also mentioned that the passages which deal with homosexuality must be taken together. If pro-gay, revisionist theology can prove that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was in no way homosexual, then II Peter and Jude have nothing to add to the subject. Because, to my mind at least, no such proof is yet established, II Peter remains a link in a chain.

As was said above, Peter chose his examples, all from the early chapters of Genesis, to make an irrefutable case that God punishes sin and rescues the righteous. He chose stories well known to all of his readers. It was certainly well known in the first century that Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for outrageous sin, part and parcel of which was homosexuality. I think it bears repeating here that in my opinion homosexuality was a sin among the many for which the cities of the plain were destroyed (the references to Sodom and Gomorrah in the prophets confirm as much). I remain among the few conservatives who do not believe that homosexuality was even the "crowning" sin of the cities, unless, of course, we also believe idolatry was the "foundational" sin.

If we look at Genesis 19 alongside Romans 1, I think we will see exactly what Paul was getting at. God intended that men and women would worship Him; we rebelled and became idolaters. God intended men and women for each other to complement one another; we rebelled and became homosexual. Just as idolatry is an indication in the spiritual realm, homosexuality is an indication in the physical realm that humans have chosen to worship the creature rather than the creator.

Peter's audience knew that Sodom and Gomorrah had been judged for sins of every kind, from disregard of the poor to homosexuality. Peter's audience knew that evil angels, the people of Noah's day and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had rejected God's way in favor of their own. They also knew that God judged such flagrant rejection of Himself. Peter's point was that just as God has punished those who utterly rejected His ways in the past, He will do so in the present and the future. His words were to be both a warning and a comfort to his first readers as well as to us. The warning is that we must be careful to avoid any teaching which obscures or alters the Gospel of Christ. The comfort is that He is just and will return for His people at the end of the age and to set all things right. Homosexuality is not the big issue of II Peter; being ready for the glorious return of Christ is. At the same time, if we are going to be ready, we must deal with homosexuality as one among the many sins plaguing fallen humanity.

It has already been mentioned that it is difficult to date the book of Jude. If Peter did not use it as the springboard for the second chapter of his second letter, it could have been written as late as the turn of the second century. The apostle John wrote in the 90's, so it is assumed that the youngest brother of our Lord could have written a bit later still. It is also possible that he wrote as early as A.D. 65. The only clue as to date in the letter itself is the fact that it combats heresy, something that took at least a few years to develop in the early church (Carson, Moo, and Morris, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 460).

Some scholars believe that Jude 17 "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold." requires the latest possible date. They argue that the verse "clearly looks back to the apostles as belonging to the past" (J.N.D. Kelly, The Epistles of Peter and Jude (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 233). When scholars say, "clearly," it is often because whatever point they are trying to make couldn't be less clear. As Kistemaker rejoins, "The emphasis in verse 17 is not on the life span of the apostles but on the necessity of remembering their teaching" (Simon Kistemaker, Peter and Jude (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 360). In the final analysis, we really don't know when Jude was written. As I have already stated, my preference is for an early date and Petrine dependence upon Jude. Still, I must admit that my notion that it is more likely that the shorter and more vehement Jude was the model for the longer and more positive II Peter may be no more than modern, Western nonsense.

Not only are we unsure as to the date of Jude, we are also unable to pinpoint its recipients. We may assume, as long as we are willing to be wrong, that the very Jewish character of the letter is evidence of its having been sent to Jewish Christians. James, Jude's brother, wrote to a Jewish Christian audience. Apparently Jude did as well. More than that is impossible to say. We don't know where these Jewish Christians lived, or even if Jude had a particular geographical location in mind. Jude is included among the general epistles for the very reason that it is addressed to no specified, local body of believers. At the same time, we concur with Carson et al. that Jude's mention of false teachers slipping in among

believers "looks like a reference to a specific situation rather than a description of the church as a whole" (Carson, Moo, and Morris, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1992), 460).

However tentative we may be concerning the date, recipients, and overall background of the book of Jude, we may be certain of its passion. Fortunately, given our purposes, the content of the letter is far more significant than the background issues. Jude is according to many the most vehement and polemical book in the New Testament. His tone is severe, so much so that it has been regarded as "the least valuable of the New Testament writings" and of "little abiding spiritual significance" (Scott and Henshaw in D. Edmond Hiebert, Second Peter and Jude (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1989), 205). I will agree with Donald Guthrie that as long as the church combats false teachers and the havoc they wreak, we do well to remind ourselves that our God is one who judges evil.

If the examples Jude cites for his own day (Israelites, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah) had relevance then, his whole Epistle must have relevance now, unless the nature of divine justice and the character of human lasciviousness and kindred evils has changed. As long as [people] need stern rebukes for their practices, the Epistle of Jude will remain relevant (Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove: IVP, 1970), 928).

There is some indication in verse 3 that Jude had intended to write a different sort of letter. Because of the presence of false teachers among the recipients, however, he wrote "to urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." The short letter had an over arching purpose: to denounce those teaching error and predict their destruction. In order to convince the readers to contend for the faith, Jude painted a stark picture of what happens to those who do not. As did Peter, Jude employed Old Testament examples to support his case that God judges disobedience.

Having delivered Israel out of Egypt, God judged, "destroyed" in Jude's words, the generation which did not believe the report of the spies, who said that although the promised land was filled with fortified cities, God's people could certainly take it (Num. 13). Of that generation, God allowed only Caleb and Joshua to enter the land. As his second example, Jude cited the angels of Genesis 6 who abandoned their proper place and went after "the daughters of men." Like Peter, he spoke of those angels as already in chains, awaiting the final judgment to come. And like Peter he used the example of Sodom, Gomorrah and the cities of the plain.

Jude says that in a similar way to that of the angels previously mentioned, Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to sexual immorality and went after "other flesh." The word translated "gave themselves over to sexual immorality" (ekporneusasai) and from which we get the prefix of the term pornography, is straightforward enough (though Gagnon says it is ambiguous because it is only a probable reference to homosexuality [Robert Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice (Nashville, Abingdon, 2001), 87]). There is considerable debate, though, concerning "other flesh." The NIV has glossed over the problem by rendering "went after other flesh" as "perversion." Clearly (ambiguity intended), this is the general sense of Jude's statement. But Jude's actual word choice demands attention.

Some have chosen to translate "other" as "strange." This is an odd choice since no other place is the adjective so rendered. The importance of all of this for us is that many conservative scholars see in "other flesh" a reference to homosexuality. That the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were sexually immoral few would dispute. But, as we have seen, revisionists dispute that homosexuality per se was a sin for which the cities were destroyed.

We need, therefore, to return to the word "other." This particular Greek term, heteros, had in classical Greek the meaning of "another of a different kind." For "another of the same kind," the Greeks used the adjective "allos." Assuming that Jude intended such a distinction the question is "Why?" Many conservatives maintain that Jude meant that homosexuality is other than what God had in mind for human sexuality. This is certainly possible.

It is also possible that Jude was thinking of angels as other when he wrote. Kelly, by no means a revisionist, for example, states:

The Biblical narrative (Gen. xix.1-25, esp. 5-9) describes the licentiousness of the men of Sodom, and particularly their eagerness to have sexual relations with the two angels whom Lot was entertaining. This being the allusion here, many have interpreted lusted after different flesh (heteras sarkas) as meaning 'indulged in sodomy'. The Greek, however, does not tolerate this: it simply states that the flesh they desired was different (these good angels appeared in human form, but their flesh presumably was a different kind), whereas in homosexuality, as J. Chaine aptly remarks, 'the natures are only too alike' (J.N.D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 258).

In favor of Kelly's view is the fact that Jude says that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah sinned in a similar way to the angels of Genesis 6 in their going after "other flesh." It is possible that although the men of Sodom and Gomorrah did not know of the angels' true identity, Jude did and made his comments accordingly. Yet it bears repeating that the men did not know just how "other" the flesh they were after really was. They thought they were seeking relations with mortal men. It should be noted that similarity does not mean identity. Jude may have meant that the situations were parallel because they were sexual, not identical with both involving angelic/human intercourse. In other words, a pretty good case can be made either way. Although I consider it as the more likely of the two options, I do not think that one can defend a dogmatic position that Jude had homosexuality in mind when he wrote "other flesh." I do, however, think homosexuality was in mind when he wrote of the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah. The point is in one sense, then, moot. Whether Jude was thinking in terms of angels as "other," or men sleeping with men as "other" than God's intent, he was certain that immorality would be judged.

The question remains for many whether or not homosexuality is immoral. For us the answer is clear. If the witness of Scripture is consistent, it does not matter if Jude includes an explicit reference to homosexuality. Homosexuality is among the many sins for which Sodom and Gomorrah were judged. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that Jude had homosexuality in mind when he wrote of their destruction. Again, the place to go for proof here is not to Jude, but to Genesis. I suspect that

homosexuality was not the big issue as Jude tried to convince his readers to contend for the faith: immorality in general was. The same should be true for us. All immorality will be judged by God, heterosexual, homosexual (even though it can be construed as the flip-side of idolatry and both together, as a complete rejection of God's intent for humanity) and any "other" we can come up with. It is our job to contend for the faith against any immoral invasion, not to decide which sins should be judged more harshly than others. Let us contend for the faith, without compromising truth, moreover with the heart and compassion of Jesus.