I. Introduction

I intended to write that the present commentary was an attempt to address the status of the letters of James and Jude as "overlooked, ignored, and forgotten." As the Suggested Reading list shows, this is really no longer the case. And now, following the announcement in November 2002 that an Israeli antiquities dealer was in possession of an ossuary, or bone box, with an inscription reading "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," James is enjoying unprecedented publicity.[1]

James then, and to a lesser extent Jude, may now be said to be well studied and fairly treated. To be sure, both letters still suffer from a traditional tendency to read them along with the wrong conversation partners – James and Paul, Jude and 2 Peter – as if the only questions of importance were the relationship of the apostles Paul and Peter and the letters James and Jude, respectively. But the work of Richard Bauckham, Luke T. Johnson, and Jerome Neyrey, among others, has done much to correct biases even as longstanding as these.

Why and for whom is this volume written? It is written for the Church by one who has spent most of the last quarter century as a parish pastor and as a seminary professor, not always balancing the two roles as well as might be wished but always trying to allow each role to inform, question, and shape the other. This reading of the letters of James and Jude is very much indebted to the readings, formal and informal, emerging from the Church in years past and is submitted not as a corrective but in the hope of furthering the conversation

[1] See Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Significance of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 2003). Having viewed the ossuary myself I have no doubt about its antiquity but recognize there are disagreements over its authenticity and over the claims of some for its significance. A few years earlier a smaller splash was made by Robert Eisenman with the publication of *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1997). Eisenman argued, to almost universal rejection and no small amount of ridicule, that James was the "teacher of righteousness" in the documents of Qumran.

and encouraging others to attend more seriously to what James and Jude say to us today. It is also an attempt to read the letters in light of the insights of sociorhetorical interpretation, particularly as found in the work of Vernon Robbins, a method that will be presented more fully at the end of the Introduction, following consideration of authorship, dating, occasion, and other customary issues. The commentary likewise brings to bear the significant insights of a generation of biblical criticism informed by the social sciences, particularly cultural anthropology, something that Neyrey has done for Jude but that has largely not been applied to James.

Bauckham notes, "Most introductory issues can really only be settled as a result of detailed exegesis."[2] One must start somewhere, however, and because my conclusions about the authorship of the letters of James and Jude both keep with the tradition and step outside of much current scholarship, it is a good place to begin. That said, conclusions about authorship, dates, and occasions of composition are interrelated, and the reader is invited to consider all three before making an evaluation of any one.

AUTHORS

Trends in scholarly opinion ebb and flow. As we will see in the section on reception and interpretation, Martin Luther was not the first to have questions about the letter of James, and the letter of Jude seems to have received a mixed reception almost from its composition. There were also early doubts about the identity of the letters' authors. Nevertheless, conventional opinion identified both letters with one or another of the New Testament (NT) personages bearing the name James (Gk. *Iakōbos*) or Jude (Gk. *Ioudas*), traditionally the two brothers of the Lord.

Fairly early in the history of modern, critical, biblical scholarship, and certainly by the time of F. C. Baur and the flourishing of the Tübingen School (mid-nineteenth century), conventional opinion changed, largely as a result of the late dating of both letters, the topic of the next section. The reasoning was, and remains, clear-cut: because the letters of James and Jude were understood to show evidence of concern for issues thought to be "early Catholic" (dulled eschatological expectations and organizational, *episcopal* concerns, etc.), they must be dated in the nineties CE or after, making it impossible for James, who was executed in 62, and unlikely for Jude to be the authors. Additionally, because James was generally read as if written in conversation and/or dispute with Paul, the letter has been held to be in response to Paul, and so again dated to a time after the death of James. And because Jude is read largely with regard to its

[2] Richard Bauckham, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 3.

relationship to 2 Peter, it is often dated alongside (or after, depending on the decision about priority of Jude/2 Peter) the usual late dating of that letter.

Questions of authorship seem often answered in tandem with questions of dating, and because there is generally held to be more "evidence" within the letters suggestive of date, authorship is circumscribed by date. But what happens if one separates the two? Moreover, what happens when one reads the letters of James and Jude on their own merits and not in light of any real or imagined relationship to the letters of Paul and Peter? Then the question changes, and the presumption returns to more traditional identifications. One is compelled to ask, what are the reasons to deny authorship to James and Jude, the brothers of the Lord?[3] First, one must identify the "James" and "Jude" in question.

Jude is the conventional rendering of Judas in the first verse of the epistle, but the Greek is *Ioudas*, so the task is to distinguish, or identify, the Judas of the letter from the other Judases in the NT, for the name occurs thirty-six times.

- twenty-two times the reference is to Judas ("Iscariot"), the betrayer.
- two times (Lk 6:16, Acts 1:13) the reference is to "Judas of James" (*Ioudas Iakōbou*) in Luke's list of the twelve.
- three times in Acts 15 the reference is to "Judas Barsabbas."
- Acts (9:11) mentions a Judas who hosts Saul before his sight is restored and a "Judas the Galilean" (5:37) whose revolt against the census in 6 CE is discussed by Josephus.
- Jn (14:22) includes a question from Judas identified in the Greek text as *ouch ho Iskariōtēs* ("not the Iscariot"), a phrase omitted in New Standard Revised Version (NRSV).
- Mt 13:55 and Mk 6:3 relate the Nazarean synagogue member's identification of Jesus as the "brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon."

While from time to time one or another writer has argued otherwise, the vast majority of scholars agree that the letter of Jude intends its author to be understood as one of the brothers of Jesus.

Is this identification authentic? I conclude that it is, insofar as one can identify any biblical author with a historical person. First, removing the late dating limits the reasons not to accept this identification to one or another version of the "early Catholic" canard and to the objection that a Galilean farmer or craftsman could

[3] While I understand the Marian issues that bear upon discussions of the fraternal relationship of Jesus, James, and Jude, there is not room to discuss them, nor does it impact the commentary to follow. The interested reader may turn to Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp. 19–32.

not write sophisticated Greek. As we will see in the commentary, there is nothing "early Catholic" about Jude.[4] The letter pulses throughout with anticipation of the Lord's return, cares nothing for office or position, and deals with a dispute easily understood as possible in earliest Jewish Christianity. As for writing Greek, Sevenster[5] and others have seriously called into question the depiction of the apostles as "illiterate Galilean fishermen," and if that does not convince, one always has recourse to the use of scribes, something we know happened in at least some NT writings (2 Th 3:17). In other words, there is no good reason *not* to accept the letter of Jude as coming from the brother of James. But did *this* brother write the letter attributed to him? And why did neither come right out and self-identify as a "brother of the Lord"?

"James" (*Iakōbos*) occurs forty-two times in the NT.

- twenty-one references are to the "son of Zebedee, brother of John," whose execution in 44 CE is recorded in Acts 12:2, the last mention of this member of the inner circle of the twelve.
- four references are to the "son of Alphaeus," one of the twelve.
- four references are to the "son of Mary" and "brother of Joses/Joseph" at the burial of Jesus.
- two references are to the father of Judas.
- two references are to the brother of Jesus by the Nazarean synagogue members.
- eight references are without designation.
- one reference, Gal 1:19, is to James, "the Lord's brother."

The last three sets are all accepted as one and the same person, for in early Christian history there is only one "James" who needed no further introduction: James, the brother of the Lord, who according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.200) was executed in 62 CE.

Did this James compose the letter of the same name? Certainly, as in the case of Jude, the letter was understood by its author to have been written by someone who needed no further introduction. On this everyone agrees. The letter of James purports to have been written by the brother of the Lord. But was it in fact? Here the burden, it seems to me, shifts to those who think that it was not, and they of course are many. But their reasons are few and generally cluster around a late dating, which will be discussed, a "tension" between the concerns of James found in the letter and the depiction of James's concerns in Acts and Galatians, and the sophisticated level of composition, which is denied, almost in

4 This is not to assume that the designation "early Catholic" is still useful. Recent research into the trajectories of early Christianity have largely put aside this nineteenth-century interpretation.

5 "Do You Know Greek? How Much Greek Could the First Jewish Christians Have Known?" *Novum Testamentum Supplement* 19 (1968).

the spirit of Nathaniel's "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46), to James. As seen with regard to Jude, the argument about composition is not telling. Nor, I think, is the very small glimpse of James found in Acts 15 and 21 and Gal 1–2 decisive. That Paul's rhetoric in Galatians and likely his attitude were tendentious, is indisputable. The danger of allowing Paul to have the deciding vote about the character and priorities of James is well evidenced by Luther. To say that the concerns evidenced in Acts do not match those of the letter is to forget that Paul is the center of the second half of Acts, so that James is likely to have been somewhat caricatured. There is also a tendency to overstate the significance of the two-part requirement of Acts 15:29 and 21:25 (abstain from certain meats and from fornication), and in turn to read the ethical concerns in the letter of James as if James had no interest in purity issues, thereby creating a tension between the depiction of "James" in Acts and the "James" apparent in the letter. That this tension is an artificial creation is evidenced, for example, by the very real purity concerns in James 3:17 and 4:8.

Among authors who have influenced this commentary, Martin Dibelius, Hubert Frankemölle, Sophie Laws, Pheme Perkins, and Bo Reicke deny authorship to James, and Ralph Martin and Robert Wall make recourse to later editing of Jacobean tradition, while James Adamson, Richard Bauckham, Patrick Hartin, Luke Johnson, and Douglas Moo affirm the traditional designation. Because I am unconvinced by arguments for a late dating and, as will be indicated in the commentary, hold that the work itself shows every evidence of being very early indeed, and because I am not persuaded that we know enough to deny authorship based on theories of what early Christians could or could not write, with or without use of a scribe, I accept the traditional designation as the basis for my reading. *James and Jude, the authors of the letters bearing their names, were the brothers of Jesus.* The really interesting question is what happens when one reads the letters based on this position.

DATES

Having claimed that our authors are "the brothers of the Lord" I have implicitly accepted a *terminus ad quem* of 62 CE for James and presumably not much later for Jude. I believe the internal evidence of both letters supports this conclusion. Johnson outlines six points in favor of an early date for James. The first four are most telling.

1. "James lacks any of the classic signs of late, pseudonymous authorship" (elaboration of author's identity, rationalization for delay of "parousia," tradition viewed as "deposit" rather than process, etc.).
2. "James reflects the social realities and outlooks appropriate to a sect in the early stages of life."

3. The shape of Jesus' sayings in James is similar to that of Q, so the arguments for placing Q within early Palestinian Christianity should also apply to James.
4. "The best way to account for the similarity and difference" between the language of James and Paul "is to view them both as first generation Jewish Christians deeply affected by Greco-Roman moral traditions yet fundamentally defined by an allegiance to the symbols and story of Torah."[6]

In the present commentary particular attention will be given to the sociocultural realities (2) and to the way James uses material we now identify as sayings of Jesus (3). The ecclesial and cultural realities seem best dated before the fall of Jerusalem and placed within Palestine, while the rather nonchalant handling of Jesus material is evidence of a time very early in the tradition. For these reasons I join with Adamson, Bauckham, Hartin, and Johnson in *dating the composition of the letter of James to the fifties* CE, *making it one of the earliest writings in the NT*.[7]

Jude is likely not dated quite so early and has one internal piece of evidence that must be explained.[8] Jude 17 says, "But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." The verse will be considered in detail in the commentary, but the idea that predictions said by apostles must be remembered suggests to many an *apostolic age* that is past, even long past, by the time the letter of Jude is written. Yet there is nothing in the construction itself that suggests a distant past, just a prior action, in this case action by apostles, perhaps but likely not including the author. Moreover, Paul calls to mind prior teachings (1 Th 4:1–2; Gal 1:9; 1 Cor 15:1) and refers to a central portion of his own teaching as "received from the Lord" (1 Cor 11:23); yet this is not thought to suggest a late date for his letters. When the objections to v. 17 are removed, and one appreciates that the words and actions of the opponents are hardly inconsistent with that of Paul's descriptions of the Corinthians, for example, what stands out is the sense of being in "the last times" (v. 18) when readers should "look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life" (v. 21) – in other words, an expectation usually identified with earliest Christianity. While it is not possible to offer a precise date, nor is there a *terminus* provided by the date of Jude's death, which is not mentioned in any source, *it seems best to interpret the letter as*

6 Luke T. Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Anchor Bible 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 118–21.

7 John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 118–39, attempted to place James on "the frontier between Judaism and Christianity" and dated it to before the Jerusalem council, i.e., 47–8.

8 Scholarship's more sophisticated understanding of gnosticism has resulted in setting aside the idea that Jude's opponents were either gnostic or proto-gnostic. See R. Bauckham, *Jude and 2 Peter* (1983), pp. 11–13.

having been written prior to the fall of Jerusalem and thus sometime before 70 CE.[9]

OCCASIONS

Jude makes it easy. Whatever one concludes about who he was, when he wrote, and to whom he was writing, he tells us why he wrote. He even tells us why he was going to write a letter he apparently never got around to writing. "Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v. 3). In form (sender, v. 1a; addressee, v. 1b; blessing, v. 2; thesis, vv. 3–4; body, vv. 5–23; doxology, vv. 24–5) Jude is clearly a letter, and by the letter's own admission it was written as warning, condemnation, and encouragement to a community confronted with suspect teachers and/or leaders.

The genre of the letter of Jude is clear, but what of its character? A fuller discussion must wait for the commentary. To anticipate the conclusions, Jude can be fairly characterized in rhetorical terms as exhibiting a mixed species of deliberative (giving advice and encouraging or discouraging a specific course of action) and epideictic (praise and blame, seeking assent to some value) rhetoric (Duane Watson). In sociocultural terms it may be characterized as a response, or riposte, to a challenge to the author's honor (Neyrey) and in ideological terms as an expression of early Christian apocalyptic, particularly as opposed to prior declarations that the letter's ideology was "early Catholic" (Bauckham).

While there are few if any clues as to provenance, recent interpreters have returned to Jerusalem as a likely location, given the identification of the family of Jesus with the Jerusalem church. As we will see in the commentary, however, little of this matters to the interpretation and appreciation of the letter.

The letter of James is another matter altogether. Although the most recent and best interpreters have begun to lay such questions to rest, it is still necessary to consider to whom (Jews, Christians, Jewish Christians?) and why (correction, reproof, encouragement?) James was writing, where author and audience were located, and whether the letter of James is even a letter.

Is the letter of James a letter, and if not, what is the genre of James?[10] The text itself purports to be a letter. In classic form it begins with the sender, then the addressee, followed by the traditional greeting, *chairein* (greetings). Is that enough to qualify James as a letter? Yes. First, despite the pervasive influence of Paul, there is not a single model in the NT of what a letter looks like. NT letters

[9] J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (1976), pp. 169–99, dates Jude (and 2 Pet) to "61–2" (p. 198).

[10] Throughout this commentary I use the designation "letter" to avoid any echo of the once popular debate distinguishing "letter" and "epistle" fostered by Gustav Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911).

vary in length, audience, outline, and topics, from the "letters" in Acts to the "letter to the Romans." To argue that James cannot be a letter because it lacks final greetings is like arguing that Mark is not a gospel because it originally had no resurrection appearance, nor John because it has no birth narrative.[11] Second, to disqualify James as a letter because the majority of its verses are devoted to *paranesis* (traditional moral instruction) and *diatribe* (moral exhortation) is to confuse form and content. By this standard one would also disqualify Romans. Johnson's solution is simple and persuasive, even if one may disagree with his final designation that James "can be appropriately considered protreptic discourse in the form of a letter."[12] More generally, and particularly in light of the discussion of homiletical texture in the final section of the Introduction, James may be thought of as a homiletical letter intended to be circulated and read aloud (as were all letters) by early Christian communities influenced by the Jerusalem church. Whether one thinks of it as a letter in the form of a sermon or as a sermon in the form of a letter, it was a vehicle for sharing the teaching of James with the extended early Jewish Christian community – the "twelve tribes of the Dispersion" (Gk *diaspora*).

This latter designation is explicitly metaphorical[13] and bridges a divide (Jew–Christian) experienced more in our day than in James's. Certainly it is a divide experienced more sharply. That James uses a traditional designation for the children of Israel, "the twelve tribes," and extends it to the early Christian community in a way that also speaks to the realities of the Jewish diaspora (a population that even in James's day far outnumbered that of Judah and Galilee) speaks to the absence of a boundary we have come to take for granted but cannot clearly place: the boundary between prerabbinic Judaism and earliest Christianity. Further evidence is found in debates over whether James is a "Christian" or "Jewish" writing, for Jesus is only mentioned by name at 1:1 and 2:1, and these verses have from time to time been held as insertions to an originally Jewish document. Such proof texting proves little, except the inadequacy of the categories to describe a newly emerging reality. What seems clear in the twenty-first century was hardly so in the middle of the first. Was James a Jew? Yes. Was James a Christian? Yes. Little wonder his letter reads as if written by a Jewish Christian. It was.

11 William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) follows Deissmann in denying that James and Jude are "real letters" (p. 68). That he devotes his longest chapter entirely to Paul and discusses James and Jude in less than a paragraph is comment enough. The much more thorough treatment by Stowers classifies James among "letters of exhortation and advice" (pp. 96–7) but does not treat Jude. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

12 L. T. Johnson, *Letter of James* (1995), p. 24.

13 See Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 11–18.

The geographical location of James and his audience is also hard to fix. To the extent that James intended his designation of addressee to mean at some level those outside Judah and Galilee, his own traditional location in Jerusalem is confirmed. But if "twelve tribes of the Dispersion" is wholly metaphorical, referring as Wall and others suggest to their social location and not to their geographical location within Jewish Christianity, no support for the traditional identification of Jerusalem as James's place of writing can be adduced. Discussion of the character of the letter of James is deferred to the section on literary relationships.

To summarize: Jude and James are both real letters written to real audiences with real issues in mind, another reason the designation "general" or "catholic" is not apt. Jude wrote to warn a beloved community to be careful of certain teachers/leaders and to hold firm to the teaching they had already received. James wrote to encourage a community or communities, reminding them of key features of his teaching, using the letter as a sermon in absentia.

There are two names notably missing from this brief discussion of the occasion for the writing of the letters of James and Jude: Paul and Peter. As we will see in the next section, I do not believe that James was written with Paul in mind, nor Jude with Peter, and I endeavor to read each letter accordingly.

LITERARY RELATIONSHIPS

In discussion of intertexture in the last section of the Introduction and in our examination of intertexture in the Commentary, literary relationships are understood to run in two directions. The focus in this section is on the textual traditions that have impacted the works under consideration.

The most obvious influence is the Hebrew Bible, for James in translation (LXX [Septuagint]) and for Jude perhaps not.[14] Whether in Hebrew or Greek, in the text both authors are deeply indebted to the tradition. Jude's references are fewer in number and so are easier to identify. As with James, they are discussed in detail in the Commentary, with citations and references, and need only be listed here to give the reader some sense of just how thoroughly imbued both books are with OT (Old Testament) tradition. Jude's biblical references tend to come from the Torah, and James draws on Torah, prophets, and, to an even greater extent, the full range of the Wisdom tradition.

Citations and References in Jude	*Citations and References in James*
Gen 4:3–8; 19:4–25	Gen 1:26–7; 4:10; 22:9, 12
Ex 12:51; 34:8	Ex 20:5, 13, 14; 34:6
Num 14:29–30, 35; 22:7; 31:16	Lev 19:13–18
Isa 57:20	Deut 5:17–18; 11:14; 24:14–15

[14] See R. Bauckham, *Jude and 2 Peter* (1983), p. 7.

Eze 34:8
Amos 4:11
Zech 3:2; 14:5

Josh 2:4, 15; 6:17
1 Kgs 17:1; 18:42–5
Job 5:11; 34:19
Psa 18:6; 21:9; 34:13; 39:1; 102:4, 11; 103:8; 111:4; 140:3; 141:3
Prov 3:34; 10:12; 27:1
Eccl 7:9
Isa 5:9; 40:6–7
Jer 5:24
Dan 12:12
Zech 1:3
Mal 3:5, 7
Sir 5:11; 15:11–13

Biblical citations hardly exhaust the literary relationships of Jude and James. Jude famously cites from two apocryphal, pseudepigraphical works – *1 Enoch* and *Testament of Moses* – along with an otherwise unrecorded saying of "the apostles." Johnson details a wealth of influences and possible parallels, if not precisely literary relationships, that form an important backdrop to James.[15] Two are key: the traditions of OT and Jewish Wisdom literature and the teachings/sayings of Jesus.

OT and Jewish Wisdom traditions are, of course, important to the entire NT but perhaps not to the extent of the letter of James. Bauckham has shown in *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* the full extent of this influence, for as is the case with all the influences on James it is not simply a matter of citation. James obviously felt it unnecessary to give chapter and verse. Nor is it limited to possible parallels, such as those included in the lists just provided. Instead it is the way in which the spirit of OT and Jewish Wisdom traditions imbue the entire letter, so that it would be fair to characterize the ideology of this homiletical letter as very much a part of the sapiential tradition, yet with strong "alternative wisdom" leanings.[16]

No doubt the most intriguing question in any discussion of the literary relationships of James is the relationship of James to the sayings of Jesus. The most thorough examination of Jesus' sayings in the letter of James is found in

15 L. T. Johnson, *Letter of James* (1995), pp. 26–46.

16 On OT and Jewish Wisdom, see the introductions by Anthony R. Ceresko, OSFS, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) and James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998). Crenshaw is the standard introduction, while Ceresko's approach emphasizes the ideological stream of wisdom that the letter of James itself reflects. On wisdom and James, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 236–47. In the Commentary I will argue against Witherington in finding that James's ideology more closely fits the model of alternative wisdom than is recognized in *Jesus the Sage*.