

The Literary Dependence Between 2 Peter and Jude

by

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An initial approach to 2 Peter’s and Jude’s literary matters begins with analyzing both epistles’ relationships. Even to the casual reader, the notable parallels between both epistles are evident in comparing 2 Peter 2:1-3-3, 14, 18 with Jude 4-18; 24-25. A common theme in both letters is their denunciation of false teachers, most notably in similar language. At this juncture, one does not emphasize the genuineness of either epistle’s authorship but instead aims to provide empirical proof of the literary relationship between the two by examining the rarity and order of the language found nowhere else in the Bible, structure, vocabulary, and their Greek grammar usage. Here, one provides the comparisons of both epistles:

2 Peter	Jude
their [false teachers] condemnation from long ago (2:3)	for certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation (4)
denying the Master who bought them (2:1)	[they] deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (4)
God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness (2:4)	angels kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness ( <i>zophos</i> ) until the judgment (4)
By turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction (2:6)	Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example [of evil] by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire (7)
despise authority (2:10)	these people reject authority (8)
whereas angels do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them (2:11)	the archangel Michael did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment (9)
[the false teachers] are blots and blemishes (2:13)	[the false teachers are] hidden reefs (blemishes) (12)
waterless springs and mists driven by a storm (2:17)	waterless clouds, swept along by winds (12)
scoffers will come following their own sinful desires (3:3)	scoffers following their own ungodly passions (18)

None of the parallels identified in both epistles is exceptionally lengthy. However, taking them together, they are unique, implicating words and idioms not discovered elsewhere in the Bible. As cited in the verse table above, the occurrence of these expressions is ordered identically in both epistles.

The similarities of rare language, structure, and vocabulary provide the probability of an existing literary relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. First, the likelihood of the same

authorship has been argued by a few scholars. For example, one hypothesis provides that Peter employed Jude, the scribe (or amanuensis), to write his letter. Jude, in turn, adds to Peter's warnings his own original notes. Proving the hypothesis of Jude's relationship to 2 Peter is difficult and begs the question of why Jude would have written an epistle in the first place due to its similarities with Peter's. Thus, as most scholars explain, the parallels exist because Peter and Jude borrow from one another in three different ways:

1. Peter may have used ideas from the epistle of Jude
2. Jude may have borrowed from Peter's second epistle
3. Peter and Jude used ideas from another source that is no longer available.

The final proposal by Michael Green<sup>1</sup> of another source's usage is unlikely, though well-argued, and adds nothing to alter what is usually favored as more straightforward explanations. The unanimity of the early church fathers is that Jude borrowed from 2 Peter. Peter's apostolic status is agreement rather than any substantial tradition. On the other hand, most modern scholars argue that 2 Peter uses Jude believing that it made perfect sense for the apostle to want to expand on the epistle. Whereas, if it were the other way around, there would have been no need for Jude if 2 Peter existed. Those advocating from this position offer three additional points:

1. Peter fails to reference non-canonical books in Jude. Therefore, Peter was written after Jude when the church had a stronger canonical consciousness.
2. Jude is assumably freely written due to its tight structure and probability of not being based on another document.
3. Peter's reference to false teaching probably occurs later— the shorter epistle of Jude may have been used to combat the situation presented with those guilty parties who are not easily identifiable. The likelihood of either epistle's canon-consciousness is that both are written too early for consideration, though the structural argument does provide weight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter, and the General Epistle of Jude*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 50-55.

<sup>2</sup> Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBLDS 104 (Atlanta, GA: SP, 1988), 163-87.

Carson and Moo<sup>3</sup> suggest though current scholarship does not favor the hypothesis of Jude using 2 Peter, the idea should be critically evaluated when viewing Peter's epistle as the castigation of false teachers from a specific community—having communicated these particulars with Jude, who then willingly embraces those parts of 2 Peter relevant to a similar situation occurring in his community, maybe possibly explained for the borrowing in 2 Peter 3:3 and Jude 17-18. Therefore, the appropriated use evidenced in these two epistles is exceptional. Jude 17-18 reads like a direct quote of 2 Peter 3:3:

2 Peter 3:3: “Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.”

Jude 17-18: “But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’”

Schreiner<sup>4</sup>, on the other hand, suggests that one should study both epistles together due to the plausibility that Peter adapted what he found in Jude for his circumstances, further suggesting that both epistles provide an understanding of abiding under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Though these scholarly proposals differ, neither suggests that Scriptural inerrancy nor inspiration is questioned, as one will discuss later in this essay on the implications of authorship.

2 Peter's Greek usage provides a more grandiloquent writing style, and some suggest that the presumed author deliberately chose to do so when considering Jude's somewhat plain style. In contrast, others have contended that the writer heeded the traditions of a grander or Asiatic style. Though these assertions cannot be known, one can rely on Greek grammarians' testimonies about the writer's quality of Greek. An examination can also determine the effect and potential assistance of a grand or Asiatic style in this regard.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 656-57.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 608.

A further examination of 2 Peter's writing finds the overuse of preferential phrases recurrent throughout the letter, along with lengthy, weighty sentences, the misunderstanding of the Greek article, and the variable use of participles with some having no finite verb connecting them. In many ways, a variety of these irregularities has been documented. For examples, Edwin Abbott refers to the linguistic mishaps as "Baboo Greek... a vulgar pomposity, and verbose pedantry."<sup>5</sup> Mayor said that the author's style was "defective," Howard stated that the writing was indicative of a book learner who later acquired the Greek language, while Robertson stated the epistle of 2 Peter's "style" was rough. At the same time, Wallace considered it "relatively poor Greek" with an "impoverished style."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the employment of poor Greek grammar and style in 2 Peter is modern scholarship's consensus.

Contrary theories endeavor to categorize 2 Peter's Greek as Asian rhetoric while others suggest the author employs the Greco-Roman traditions of grand style. These views attempt to explain the structural and style differences between 2 Peter and Jude affirming Jude's emphasis.

As discussed previously, the appearance of false teachers in the community was the main reason behind Peter's writing, though the guilty are not easily identifiable. Conflicting proposals in identifying them suggest that there is not enough evidence, and one may be misguided by attempting to identify a particular group. Given today's appearance of false teachers considering the ancient world's view, many misguided people try to blitz the culture with differing philosophical and religious perspectives. This idea is a reality in today's world as it was in Peter's, suggesting that Epicureanism, Gnosticism, and others may have been significant. Indeed, these ideas and their similarities with 2 Peter and Jude move one to explore the authorship question.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark D. Matthews, "The Literary Relationship of 2 Peter and Jude: Does the Synoptic Tradition Resolve This Synoptic Problem?" *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 1 (2010): 47–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43048736>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthews, "The Literary Relationship of 2 Peter and Jude," 47–66.

The authorship of Jude is confirmed as “a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (v.1), although five names in the New Testament are translated as “Judah” and “Judas.” However, this Jude (or James) is almost unquestionably identified as the obvious leader of the early church (Acts 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9) and author of the NT epistle bearing his name, which the early church confirmed. Eusebius, though, lists Jude as contested writing, perhaps by the book’s non-canonical references (*H.E.* 2.23.25; 3.25.3). The arguments by scholars claiming Jude as pseudonymous are irrelevant based on the scarcity of information concerning the author and the lack of other biblical letters he authored in the NT.

Given 2 Peter’s authorship declaration of “Simon Peter, a servant, and apostle of Jesus Christ,” delivers a personal signature that the epistle is indeed the writer himself (1:13-14; 1:15-16). However, most modern scholars would disagree regarding the apostle’s authorship. This standing is most significant for challenging the authorship of any other New Testament letter. Six arguments are cited mainly:

1. The Greek usage and style (as discussed earlier) are not Peter’s but an amanuensis' whose elaborate style is different from writing in the NT.
2. 2nd-century Gnosticism is perhaps the false teaching in question
3. Peter references Pau’s letters as γραφή, graphé (Scriptures) in 3:15-16. Scholars assume a collection of epistles. However, canonization occurs after the apostle Peter's time.
4. The idea of delayed Parousia in 3:8 and interpretation of the death of the earliest Christian generation as “our fathers.” “There are some things in them [Pauline epistles] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction” in 3:16 emphasizes the importance of teachings from the position of apostolic tradition.
5. The early church questioned 2 Peter’s authenticity. “No NT document had a longer or tougher struggle to win acceptance than 2 Peter.”<sup>7</sup> Eusebius classified the writing as disputed (*H.E.* 3.3.1).
6. 2 Peter’s literary form is questioned (see 1:12-15) and classified as a “testament” in shape after the pseudonymous writing of Second Temple Judaism.

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<sup>7</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London, WC1R 4JH: Adams and Black, 1983), 224.

Those scholars concluding that 2 Peter is pseudonymous are persuaded by these assertions, usually agreeing that the letter's form of "a testament" is a well-known literary device of the "Petrine school."<sup>8</sup> This idea is one of many hypotheses.

Concluding thoughts of 2 Peter's authorship provide that though the Greek used in the epistle is not the usual style of the Peter known throughout the NT, the use of an Asiatic stylized Greek is not as distinctive as many scholars conclude. One could ask the question: Would it be unreasonable for Peter to write in a style that would draw him closer to his audience? One believes this idea is not uncommon, though Peter's identity as a Galilean fisherman was not as sophisticated as perhaps the highly educated Pharisee Paul. One notes that Peter spent about thirty years between abandoning his fishing nets and ministry in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. Without knowing more about the man, himself, how can one conclude that a particular writing style could not be associated with the apostle? He very well could have received training in Greek and the rhetorical style of that day.

As Carson and Moo note, Gnosticism cannot be identified as the particular heresy of the day<sup>9</sup>, the false teaching reference in 2 Peter. What is known is that the apostles carried an authority in their words considered tantamount to Scripture— they were inspired by the Holy Spirit that also inspired the prophets of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 5:3; 2 Cor. 10:11; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). "Therefore, while somewhat unexpected, the description of Paul's letters as "Scripture," especially since the reference is allusive, is possible by the end of Peter's life."<sup>10</sup> More importantly, the attestation of 2 Peter is overstated. According to Green, there were many Petrine forgeries existing that the early church Fathers moved guardedly in separating 2 Peter from these other counterfeits.<sup>11</sup> Thus, one is at a crossroads in

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<sup>8</sup> M. L. Soards, "1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude as Evidence for a Petrine School," *ANRW* 2.25.5 (1988), 3827-49.

<sup>9</sup> Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 661.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter*, 13.

choosing to accept 2 Peter's *prima facie* claim of Petrine authorship or viewing it as undeserving of canonicity based on the usual arguments since its existence.



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