



# Y'hudah

## Informative, but Uninspired

by Bruce MacLearnsberry

In previous studies, we have noted how compositions running directly afoul with the Torah render themselves unfit for consideration as holy scripture. Their status as conferred by Catholicism is irrelevant to us. Galatians and 2 Peter are notorious in this regard.

Nothing in Y'hudah (Jude) reaches such depths, yet it, too, fails the inspired scripture litmus test. As it does so, it discloses crucial information about the emerging disparity between Yehoshua's first generation disciples versus many of those who followed.

The composition opens, "Y'hudah, a slave of Yehoshua Moshiach, and brother of Ya'akov, to the ones called in God the Father, having been set apart, and having been kept to Yehoshua Moshiach."

Who this Y'hudah was is unknown. Early tradition clumsily identified him as a brother of Yehoshua simply because the latter had among his brothers a Y'hudah and a Ya'akov. He has also been identified as among the twelve disciples—the "Y'hudah of Ya'akov" of Luke 6:16. Because of how very common were both names, Y'hudah and Ya'akov (two of each among the twelve disciples, for instance), we see no need for serious concern that this author was feigning identification with either of the above. In fact, this Y'hudah clearly identifies himself as of the following generation or two when he writes, ". . . remember the words spoken before by the emissaries of our Master Yehoshua Moshiach," (vs. 17), yet he is not further removed—that particular instruction being striking because it refers, not to words written, but to those *spoken* by the emissaries. (There is quite a chasm between this and how the author of 2 Peter refers to Paul's writings, which is important information in itself.)

Also as a noteworthy aside, in dating itself to a later, but not much later, generation—in, fact, precisely because of this—Y'hudah reveals a "Christology" predating and contrary to that of the so-called church fathers that persisted beyond the first generations of disciples, even as they strayed in other ways. God the Father and Yehoshua Moshiach are clearly distinguished from one another rather than blended and confused as was subsequently done—a delineation persistent in all the New Testament writings, including even the spurious Galatians and 2 Peter.

Y'hudah's mention of Michael contending with the satan over the body of Moshe gives us pause, for he is drawing from Jewish oral tradition unverifiable in the Tanach. This is not necessarily problematic because, though Yehoshua railed on a number of

oral traditions, he supported others. In truth, some of Torah's written instructions, such as when to determine the first day of a month, are not sufficiently described in the Tanakh and must be implemented according to oral tradition or not at all.

The idea of an alleged confrontation of the Satan and Michael over Moshe's body does not, in itself, challenge Torah veracity or implementation. However, where it was eventually written down in other Jewish sources, we find ridiculous assertions in their parallel narratives. For example, D'varim Rabbah (c. 450 CE to as late as 800 CE) claims Moshe was born circumcised!

Favorable affirmations of various practices based on Jewish oral traditions are actually well represented in the New Testament. The outliers are those such as the one at hand that are accepting a purely oral account as historical fact. Another example would be the mention in 2 Timothy 3:8 of Yannes and Yambres, the Egyptian magicians supposedly challenging Moshe.<sup>2</sup> We simply have no way to verify their historicity. A parallel account such as the one noted might be so absurd as to undermine a New Testament reference and its credibility, but it does not necessarily demonstrate falsehood. In other words, that a truly historical kernel might be transmitted in a thoroughly corrupt work certainly raises necessary incredulity, but it does not render historical facts as themselves fables.

What is problematic is Yehuda's citation of Chanoch (Enoch), which reads as follows:

“the seventh from Adam,” Chanoch, also prophesied to these men, saying, “See, the Lord came with myriads of his saints,” “to do judgment against all, and to rebuke all” the ungodly of them concerning all their ungodly works which they ungodly did, “and concerning all the hard things ungodly sinners spoke against him.” (vss. 14-15)

These are quotes of 1 Chanoch 1:9, 5:4 and 60:8.

The first five chapters of 1 Chanoch appear fully compatible with the Tanakh. It is with Chapter 6 that questionable interpretive material debuts regarding the sons of God who consorted with the daughters of men. For example, Chapter 7:1-3 of 1 Chanoch read as follows:

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells.

If we use the most conservative ell—that of Egypt—Chanoch's figure would be roughly 4,430 feet. If the matter were as simple as dropping a couple zeros, all remaining factors of ten remain outlandish.

All this is aside from the fact that “bnei elohim” in Bereshit (Genesis) 6:2 simply refers to “the sons of the rulers,” who exerted controlled procreation.

One may counter that the first book of Chanoch was transmitted with significant variations, so perhaps Y'hudah's text did not contain such fictions. Though its transmission was, indeed, varied, the difficulty of this observation is that the oldest and most reliable manuscript we have of 1 Chanoch is from among the Qumran scrolls, and it contains this preposterous material. These being older than Y'hudah, he is, thus, found to be a less than discriminating historian, and his own credibility suffers. The situation becomes not unlike Clement, who cites the legend of the phoenix as though it were fact.

Where Y'hudah most incriminates himself is by citing a specific, fabulous and clearly unreliable composition as his source.

To be clear, drawing from a book from the Jewish Apocrypha is not intrinsically incriminating. For example, we know from Yochanan 10:22 that Yehoshua celebrated Chanukah. Ourselves two millennia hence from the actual events that holiday commemorates, our best, contemporary sources are the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees, not without their flaws. However, each apocryphal book is different, and the way any particular one is alluded to or, in this unique case, cited, is, itself, telling.

The problem with the undermined credibility of Y'hudah is that, if his writing is ignorantly or stubbornly held as holy scripture, the credibility of the entire collection is eroded—and that is absolutely unacceptable. It is essentially the same as mixing nativity scenes with Santa Claus—a well-represented recipe in Christianity that sows, not faith, but doubt.

When we consider this, it comes as no surprise that Y'hudah is among what 4<sup>th</sup> century historian Eusebius called “the disputed books.”<sup>3</sup>

Before closing, we should acknowledge and address the Hebrew manuscript of the New Testament taken from a synagogue in Cochin, India by British officer Claudius Buchanan in 1806. Though most of it is deemed as translated from the Greek, Ya'akov (James), Y'hudah and Revelation<sup>4</sup> are considered to represent the Hebrew source text. Does this validate Y'hudah as authoritative scripture? It does so no more than the fact Chanoch being written originally in Hebrew commends itself.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its defects, Yehudah discloses important information about the transition from the first disciples to the movement that coopted them.

As already noted, it affirms a clear differentiation between God the Father and Yehoshua Moshiach.

It also discloses the emergence of operatives compromising the integrity of the holy community from within.

For these disclosures, we can be grateful.

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<sup>2</sup> The first written record of Yannes and Yambres appear in the Targum of Yonatan ben Uziel. As apparently the most illustrious disciple of Hillel the Elder, ben Uziel would have been a contemporary of both Yehoshua and Sha'ul, though likely about one generation older than Sha'ul.

<sup>3</sup> Writing about 325 CE in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Vol. 3, 25:3), Eusebius wrote, "Of the disputed books, which are nevertheless familiar to the majority, there are extant the Letter of Ya'akov, as it is called; and that of Y'hudah; and the second Letter of Peter" (As we have noted elsewhere, the uncertainty about Ya'akov is hardly surprising given the incompatibility between it and Galatians.)

<sup>4</sup> (Ms. Oo.1.16 & Oo.1.32, Cambridge University Library)

<sup>5</sup> Even as gentiles were being misled by a grossly counterfeit interpretation of the Bible and barred on pain of death from possessing copies of scripture or translating it into their various vernacular languages, Jews were studying and transmitting portions of the New Testament in their own language--sometimes untranslated, sometimes translated—wherein is buried a remarkable story of Jewish interest in the collection. Sometimes, as with Ibn Shaprut's polemic *Evan Bochan*, from which comes the entirety of the so-called *Shem-Tov Hebrew Matityahu*, Jewish familiarity with New Testament writings was maintained as an anti-missionary defense. Yet, even the perceived need for such an effort implies significant, persistent and genuine Jewish interest in its message.