

Jon:

Welcome to BibleProject podcast. Todaym we're starting a short series on a New Testament letter you might not have read a lot. It's the Letter of Jude.

Tim:

One page of the New Testament. Pure dynamite. This is one of the most unique documents out of early Christianity.

Jon:

We call him Jude, but that's the English version of the Greek version of his Hebrew name.

Tim:

In Greek it's *louidas*, the Greekified version of the Hebrew name, *Y'hudah*, which is Judah, who was identified, elsewhere in the New Testament, as the brother of the Lord.

Jon:

In this episode, we'll explore what it means to be a brother of Jesus. Were they actual brothers? Were they stepbrothers, cousins? We'll get into it. But regardless, in the Gospels, they don't think highly of Jesus.

Tim:

His relatives thought he was crazy. He's lost his mind. He's like claiming he's the Son of Man, bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. We grew up with him.

Jon:

But then, something remarkable happens, and the brothers of Jesus become some of the first missionaries, planting churches, and spreading the news that their brother is the ruler over Heaven and Earth. And this letter, the Letter of Jude, is one of the only records we have of their ministry, giving us a unique look into their faith.

Tim:

The scriptural text in his library will surprise us, how he makes connections in hyperlinks, how did they worship Jesus, how did they talk about him. It's all on display, and it's so fascinating.

Jon:

Judah reads the Bible a lot like we do, here at BibleProject. He sees it as one unified story that leads to Jesus, and he meditates on it, and he finds God's wisdom in it for his own circumstances.

Tim:

This Judah was a Bible nerd. He writes in this kind of Tanakh code-speak, and his language is saturated with hyperlinked language and images from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jon:

Today, we begin to explore the literary nerdiness of the Letter of Jude, and we'll begin by looking at who Jude was, and what it meant that he was a brother of Jesus. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break]

Jon:

Hey, Tim.

Tim:

Jon Collins, hello.

Jon:

Hello.

Tim:

Hi.

Jon:

Here we go.

Tim:

Here we go.

Jon:

What's happening?

Tim:

Man, we're doing something kind of different, but kind of cool. The Letter of Jude, in the New Testament. One page of the New Testament that is pure dynamite. Like fireworks display kind of dynamite. This is one of the most unique documents, out of early Christianity, in the New Testament. So what I'd like to do is take the first few minutes, and give my explanation for why I think this is such an amazing privilege, that we have this document. Period. And then, we're just going to take the next episodes to read and talk our way through it. That's the goal.

Jon:

Read through Jude.

Tim:

Yeah.

Jon:

Great.

Tim:

Are you ready?

Jon:  
I'm ready.

Tim:  
You ready?

Jon:  
Nope. Not really.

Tim:  
You're just like, what's about to happen? So first things first. Jude, in Greek, it's *Ioudas*. It's actually Judas. It's spelled exactly the same way as the character in the Gospels, that's one of Jesus' disciples, named Judas. But the Greek name, *Ioudas*, is the Greekified version of the Hebrew name, *Y'hudah*, which is just Judah.

Jon:  
Judah.

Tim:  
One of the twelve sons of Jacob. Judah, the fourth born. So what I'm going to do in our conversations, just to kind of, you know, de-familiarize us with this, is just call him Judah.

Jon:  
By his Hebrew name. Not Judas. Judah.

Tim:  
Well, I know. He probably was known by both names. You know, this is totally the case. Those of you listening, who have grown up with a bi-cultural, or maybe tricultural identity, you're used to this, of kind of your name shifting based on what group of people you're with.

Jon:  
Right. He was Jewish, so his name was Judah. But in Greek circles, they would say Judas.

Tim:  
They would say Judas, *Y'hudah*.

Jon:  
*Y'hudah*.

Tim:  
*Y'hudah*. And Judas.

Jon:  
But we'll say Judah.

Tim:  
We'll say they're—

Jon:  
We'll say they're like, anglicized.

Tim:  
I know. Yeah, I know.

Jon:  
I get it now.

Tim:  
Okay. So Judah identifies himself in three ways, in the opening of this letter. Judah, a slave of Jesus Messiah, and a brother of James, in our English translations. In Greek, it's *Ya'kob*, which reflects in Hebrew, *Ya'kov*.

Jon:  
Jacob.

Tim:  
Jacob. Yes. And then, as it went into translation history, in a number of European languages, the B shifted to an M, in how people pronounced it, and the K of *Ya'kob* went away. So it's a dramatic transformation in the pronunciation of the name, for how you get from—

Jon:  
Jacob to James.

Tim:  
*Ya'kob* to James. There's a popular myth that it was King James, who in the English King James translation—

Jon:  
Oh, he's like, I want my name in there.

Tim:  
Right. And that he, like, flexed his muscle to get his name in there.

Jon:  
That's not true?

Tim:  
I want to believe that that's true, but there's no evidence for that being true.

Jon:  
That's too bad.

Tim:

Okay. Three designations. He names himself as Judah, a slave of Jesus Messiah, brother of Jacob. So Judah and Jacob were among the most popular male names, in first century Judaism, Jewish culture. So what kind of community, in first century Judaism, could you write a letter to a group of people?

Jon:  
And they know that Jacob?

Tim:  
They know that Judah, and they know that Jacob. So what are we talking about, here? This document is one of two windows that we have in the New Testament, into a separate subculture stream, from the early Christian movement, that was uniquely connected to, as we're going to see, the brothers of Jesus, and their missionary movement in Jerusalem, and then up in Galilee. This is the Judas who was identified, elsewhere, in the New Testament as the brother of the Lord. And so, this is just a precious little window into the life and language, the thought, the theology, of a either Jerusalem, or up in Galilee, based Jesus community, entirely Jewish people, who would have grown up around Jesus. And it just feels different than the rest of the New Testament. It reads exactly like the kind of literature you find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in other Second Temple Jewish literature. This Judah was a Bible nerd. He writes in this kind of Tanakh code-speak, and his language is saturated with hyperlinked language, and images from the Hebrew Scriptures. And he assumes his readers will know exactly what he's talking about.

Jon:  
It's a very Jewish audience.

Tim:  
Yeah. So basically, here's what's awesome about this letter. This text comes to us by someone who grew up with Jesus. He grew up with Jesus. And he went back to the towns where Jesus grew up, and he went back there, after he became a disciple of his brother. And he became a church planter, and a church leader. And that's the crew that he's writing to. It's a very unique document. And it just feels and sounds like, whoa, this is an under-explored version of early Christianity.

Jon:  
Cool.

Tim:  
So let's talk about what it means to be a brother of James. And then, why am I saying that he's the brother of the Lord? What does this mean?

Jon:  
Yeah, let's figure that out.

Tim:  
Okay. All right.

[Musical Break]

Tim:

So Paul, traveling missionary, writing to a group of Christians, in the city of Corinth, which is over, like, in Greece.

Jon:

Right.

Tim:

And in this section, he is talking about how he works, and makes leather tents in the marketplaces, to fund his own life, so that he doesn't have to take money from churches that he plants, and then teaches in. But he says, actually, the Apostles and other traveling missionaries from the early church, they don't do that. And that's fine. He's like, that's cool. They don't have to do it the way I do it, but I do it for my reasons. And then he just mentions, in 1 Corinthians chapter nine, verse five, he says, "Listen, even some Apostles take along their wives and their families, who were also believers on the road." And he said, "Like the rest of the Apostles, and also, the brothers of the Lord, and also Cephas, that is Peter."

Jon:

The brothers of the Lord.

Tim:

So he mentions that there's the Apostles, which in Paul's mind, isn't just the twelve. It's actually the twelve, and anybody who encountered the risen Jesus, and was commissioned by him to go spread the goodness. That's what Apostle seems to mean in Paul. And notice how he separates out of the Apostles a couple subgroups, as it were. He mentions Simon Peter. Well, actually, he is one of the twelve, but he singles him out.

Jon:

That's Cephas.

Tim:

That's Cephas, Simon Peter. And then he mentions the brothers of the Lord, plural. She's like, whoa, they were known as traveling missionaries in the early church. And Paul can just throw that out there like, those guys, we all know about them. So what he's referring to, here, this phrase, "brothers of the Lord" is referring to the same group that appear also in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, there's a scene where Jesus teaching, and we're told that his mother and brothers were standing outside, wanting to talk to him. They're just called brothers. And in both Matthew and Mark, there's a list given of their names. In Mark, here's the list. It's four: Jacob, Joses, Judah, and Simon. There's the four. And then, when you look at the list, Matthew, in the same story, the parallel story, in Matthew chapter 13, he gives the same list, and he lists four brothers: Jacob, Joseph, Simon, and Judah. There's a couple differences between these two lists.

Jon:

Yeah. Joses is Joseph.

Tim:

Exactly. Yep. That's the shortened nickname. So Matthew changed it back to the original, full name. So Jacob and Joseph. And then, he switched the order of the names. Mark had Judah and Simon. Judah's in the third spot. Matthew has shifted it from Simon to Judah.

And there's lots of ink spilled on, like, was that because Matthew knew the birth order, Judah's the youngest son, you know, we don't know. But there's the four brothers. Mark also names Jesus's sisters, plural. And their names are not found in the New Testament. Their names are preserved, in a fourth-century, early Christian historian source, a guy named Epiphanius, who claims that he has a source where he's seen the names of the sisters, that there were two sisters, named Mariam and Salome—

Jon:

I didn't know that.

Tim:

Which were among the most popular girl names, in the first century Judaism.

Jon:

What's Salome?

Tim:

Comes from Shalom.

Jon:

Comes from Shalom?

Tim:

Yeah. Peace. So we got four brothers.

Jon:

Four brothers.

Tim:

And they're just called the brothers.

Jon:

The brothers.

Tim:

The brothers of the Lord.

Jon:

Now, in Catholic tradition, these are considered step brothers.

Tim:

Yep. One of, actually, the oldest views, goes back to the fourth century. I believe the first source was a Christian scholar named Jerome, who was one of the few Christians, in the fourth

century, who cared to learn Hebrew, so he could read the Bible in Hebrew. But he translated the Bible into Latin. And he puts together that list, and that this is naming Jesus's cousins.

Jon:

Oh, I see, okay, but they get the designation of brother.

Tim:

But they're called brother, in the broader sense, which is totally true in Hebrew Bible, and early Judaism. Brother didn't technically mean biological brother. You could use it for that. And you could use it for a cousin. You could use it for a nephew. An uncle could call each other brothers. So he reads these two passages that have the list of brothers. And he thinks that people are saying, isn't this the son of Mary, that is, you know, mom, and isn't he the brother, in quote marks, in Jerome's mind, the cousins, of Jacob, Joses, Judah, and Simon? So that's one view.

Jon:

That's one view.

Tim:

That's one view.

Jon:

They're cousins.

Tim:

Yes. Here's what's super interesting. Actually, the oldest view, that we have on record, is that these are Jesus's stepbrothers. And that they are children of Joseph, who adopted Jesus, the Joseph who features in like, the famous Christmas stories. The oldest view that we have, from second-century sources, is that Joseph was married to another woman.

Jon:

Previously?

Tim:

Previously. And that that woman died. And that his marriage to Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a second marriage. This view appears in a number of second-century sources. One is from an early, post-New Testament Christian work called the Gospel of James, or Bible nerds call it the proto-Gospel of James. Super fascinating document, from the mid-second century. And it's kind of a fan-fiction, like retelling the stories of the New Testament, with lots of gaps filled, and so on. It records a conversation that a priest in Jerusalem is having with Joseph. But Joseph, in this story, says that he has children, that he's an old man, and that Mary, you know, who's pregnant with Jesus, is a very young girl. And he says that he doesn't want to, like, get engaged to her, so that he doesn't become, he says a laughing stock, to the sons of Israel. This would be like a late, middle-aged man, who already has four sons, and two daughters. And he's marrying like a 14-year-old girl, Jesus's mom.

Jon:

Who's already pregnant.

Tim:

Who's already pregnant. Yeah. So this story is imagining that.

But it also says that Joseph is the one who found a cave, in the Gospel of James, that mentions that they found a cave for Jesus to be born in. And that, when Joseph went to find a midwife, for when Mary went into labor, he left two of his sons with Mary.

Jon:

In the birth story, the kids were there?

Tim:

Yeah. So these would be older brothers. Now—

Jon:

This doesn't feel like a super reliable document.

Tim:

Totally. I'm with you. But it's, what I'm saying is, this is a second century document where this idea is already in the air—

Jon:

Right.

Tim:

That Joseph had children.

Jon:

Children.

Tim:

That's all I'm saying. So in the late second century, there's a biblical scholar named Origen, down in Alexandria, Egypt. And he says that he has a book in his library, called the Gospel of James. It's the same document that I just read to you, from. And he says that he reads in this document that the brothers of Jesus were sons of Joseph, by a previous wife, that he married, before Mary. And then he goes on, and he says, listen, there is a dispute, and issue going on, in our midst. But he says there are people, and it's a very prominent view, that people believe Mary and Joseph didn't have sex to produce Jesus, and that they didn't have sex then, afterwards, either. And so, that her virginity was, ongoing. So that is an idea that many people might know today, perpetual virginity of Mary, as a doctrine, you know, that's really important in Catholic tradition, still, today. But it's really old. Like, it has roots in first and second century literature.

There's another early Christian bishop, from the second century, Clement of Alexandria, who, it was actually for him, theologically, very important, that Mary never had sex with Joseph, before or after. And then, oh, this is interesting. That guy, Epiphanius, he was a historian of early Christianity, who lived in the 300s. He had a big library, of like, sources, that he talks about. So he gives some background data on Joseph.

He says that Joseph took his first wife from the tribe of Judah, and she bore him six children, four boys, two girls, just like in the Gospel of Mark and John.

His firstborn son was James, it was Jacob, whose nickname was Oblius, that is, wall, like a strong, defensive wall. He was also surnamed the righteous one, or the just one, James, the just. And he was a Nazarite, a holy man. He was also the first to receive the seat of bishop, or in this translation, the Episcopal throne, that is, the seat of leadership, in the Jerusalem church. He was also called the Lord's brother, as the Apostles agree, by saying, and then he quotes from the Apostle Paul, by saying he went up to Jerusalem, and didn't meet with any other Apostles. He went to James, the brother of the Lord, first. That's something Paul says, in Galatians. And then he goes on, he says, but he's called the brother of the Lord, not by nature, but by grace, because he was brought up with him. And then, he goes on to retell the Gospel stories of Jesus' birth. But Joseph was already married, that his first wife had died, and then, he brought six children into the marriage, with Mary. So, I guess, all that to say is, this is not a later, theological idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, but it is actually rooted in, like, early second century material.

Here's what we also know about the relatives of Jesus. Other than Mary, the rest of his relatives thought he was crazy. There's an important story, in Mark, chapter three, where one day, Jesus is by a house, up in Galilee, a crowd is around him. And there's so many people, that can't get out of the crowd. In fact, they can't even sit down, and have a meal, Jesus, and his disciples. So, when his family heard about this, this is Mark chapter three, verse 21, "They went to take charge of him, for they said, 'Jesus is out of his mind.'" He's lost his mind. He's claiming he's like

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Jon:

Yeah. The Son of Man.

Tim:

The Son of Man bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. The time is fulfilled. That's, like, we grew up with him. He's out of his mind. So, clearly they don't have a very favorable or trusting view of like, Jesus' claims.

Jesus, later in the Gospel of Mark, chapter six, after he gets rejected in his hometown of Nazareth, what he says, this famous saying, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own town, and among his own relatives, and in his own home." So, we know Jesus—

Jon:

The family is going to call you crazy.

Tim:

Yeah. So we know that Jesus himself experienced estrangement from his relatives, in those days. This is reflected also in the Gospel According to John. There's a story in John seven, where, Jesus had already been down to Jerusalem. He was up in Galilee, at the beginning of John chapter seven, and it was in the fall festival of Sukkot, Tabernacles. And everybody goes down south, to Jerusalem.

And so, in John seven, verse three, his brothers say to him, "Let's go down to Judea and Jerusalem, so all your followers can see, you know, your miracle show." And they say, "Listen, nobody does what they do in secret, if they want to get publicly recognized." So, if you're, you know, doing this thing, Jesus, go show yourself to the world.

And then John pauses the story, and whispers in the ear of the reader and says, his brothers did not believe in him.

Jon:  
Go prove yourself, basically.

Tim:  
Yeah. And on either reading of what you think his brothers are, you know, stepbrothers, cousins —They would be older than him.  
So, this would be like the, you know, the little stepbrother, the little cousin, the little brother.

Jon:  
Because he would go out, outside of Nazareth, do miracles, have a following, come back, and they'd be like—

Tim:  
They're like fishing and farming.

Jon:  
And he comes back and they're just like, what the kid?

Tim:  
They're like, what are you doing out there? And so, here, they're kind of mocking him. They're like, listen, we're all about to go down to Jerusalem for the feast. Why don't you go down there, and do your show down there, if you're so big, you know, that kind of thing. So, that's the two windows we get from John and Mark, is that his brothers are not down to follow him.

Jon:  
Skeptical, yeah.

Tim:  
Something changed. And it's one of the most fascinating, untold stories, in the New Testament. Something changed.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, the Apostle Paul is passing on like an oral, memorized tradition about the resurrection appearances of Jesus, that Jesus was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. And then, he has this list of resurrection appearances. The risen Jesus appeared to Cephas, that's Simon Peter, then to the twelve, then to more than 500 of our siblings, at one time, the majority of whom are alive right now. Some of them have died, that is, fallen asleep. Then, Paul says, "He appeared to Jacobus, to James, the eldest brother. Then, to all of the Apostles—" Like, a whole bunch of other more people—"Then, as it were, to someone born at the wrong time, me—" He appeared to me. That is Paul. So, there's some moment, that is in wide circulation now, a memory that Jesus appeared to James, that is, one of the brothers of the Lord, who's the leader of the Jerusalem church. That has to be who he's mentioning here, in 1 Corinthians 15.

[Musical Break]

Tim:

So, speaking of that James, here's what's interesting. That James was so influential in the early Jesus movement, he's actually mentioned in other historical sources. There's a Jewish historian named Josephus, pretty well-known historian, was not a follower of Jesus. He knew about James, that is, Jacob, the brother of Jesus, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, and actually was executed, and put to death, by the temple leaders.

And that is mentioned in the Book of Acts. There is, okay, here's the historian of all historians, for the church, a guy named Eusebius, who wrote a massive, five-volume work, that is one of our most important sources for the history of early Christianity. It's so cool, so interesting.

Jon:

I'm not familiar with that.

Tim:

It's epic. I had read it in snippets, but earlier this spring, I just sat down and worked through the whole thing.

Jon:

You did?

Tim:

Yeah. He goes from right before the time of Jesus, all up through Jesus. And then, he has all these historical sources, from the first century, second century.

And he gives you, right up to his own time, which is the time of Emperor Constantine, who was the first Christian emperor. And so, he provides like, lists of leaders in the Jerusalem church. And it's sort of like a little window that we don't have, from elsewhere.

So he actually remembers all this stuff in his sources about James, the brother of the Lord, leader of the early Jerusalem church. I'll just highlight the fact that he was known as having calluses on his knees, so that his knees were hard, like those of a camel. He was known as camel knees, because he prayed so much. Come on. What an amazing reputation to have. Your knees, because you pray so much.

Jon:

Because that's how you pray, you pray on your knees.

Tim:

Pray on your, of course.

Jon:

Of course.

Tim:

Of course. And also, he took on the life of a Nazarite. That is, the life of one of the priests. He took on a priestly life. And then, the account of his murder and execution, he was thrown off a building, tall building, in Jerusalem. And then he lived, for a little bit longer, like minutes. And then, there are memories of him repeating the words of his brother, saying, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."

Then, Eusebius tells us who became the leader of the Jerusalem church after Jesus's brother. And it was Jesus's cousin, a guy named Simeon, who was the son of Jesus's uncle, Clopas, he tells us, or Cleopas. So he says, after the martyrdom of James, and then, also, after the fall of Jerusalem, in 70 AD—Actually, this is interesting—It said that those of the Apostles and the disciples of the Lord who were still living, came together, with those related to the Lord, according to the flesh, because most of them were still alive. They took counsel as to who was worthy to succeed James. And they all, with one consent, pronounced Simeon, son of Clopas, of whom the Gospel mentions, to be worthy of the Episcopal throne, that is, the seat of bishop leader, in Jerusalem. He was a cousin, as they say, of the Savior.

And then, Eusebius names his source for all things second century, a guy named Hegesippus, whose book we don't have, we just have his long excerpts of it. Dude, this gets even more interesting. So those are the memories of James. And then, of the leadership of the Jerusalem church. But what about Judah? Like, where did he go? Well, if James was based in Jerusalem, and if Paul knows that the brothers of the Lord, back to 1 Corinthians nine, were among the early missionaries, then we've got three other brothers, Joses, Simon, and Judah, who were known as traveling missionaries.

It is so interesting. This is from Eusebius' church history, too. This is in book one, chapter seven, "For the relatives of our Lord, according to the flesh, whether with the desire of boasting, or simply wishing to state the facts, they have handed down to us the following account—" And what he goes into is he's trying to solve the riddle of the two genealogies in the New Testament, Luke's genealogy, and Matthew's genealogy, that are different. And how do you account for their difference? So Eusebius goes to that guy, Hegesippus' work. And Hegesippus says, yeah, I wanted to sort this out. So I went on a field trip to Galilee, and I went and I interviewed all, like, the relatives of Jesus. And he provides this whole account for like, why the two genealogies are different. It's super cool. I won't get into the details, but it's super interesting.

Jon:

And that account is preserved by Eusebius?

Tim:

Yes. It's in book one, chapter seven. Then he goes, and says this, he says, "Listen, a few of these people were really careful having obtained private records, either by remembering the names, or by getting them in some other way, from registers. And this group of Christians, up in Galilee, pride themselves on preserving the memory of their noble lineage, their noble extraction. And among them, are those I already mentioned, who are called the *desposini*." So this is a Greek term. It comes from the Greek word *despos* or *despot*, which means, like a master, or a ruler. And then *desposini* is a little term, meaning, those who belong to a master. So there's a crew of Christians, up in Galilee, Eusebius is relaying, who call themselves those who belong to the Lord, or the master. And they call themselves this, on account of their connection with the family of the Savior. They come from Nazara, that is Nazareth, and Kokoba villages of Judea, and they went into other parts of the world. And they drew the genealogy, that he was discussing, from memory, and from the book of daily records, as faithfully as possible. So this is Eusebius saying this guy, Hagesippus, went, and he met all these relatives of Jesus. And they have a unique term for themselves. And that they all still live in the towns where Jesus grew up. And he says that, from there, they actually launched a missionary movement, out into other parts of Galilee, and beyond.

So what do we know about the early missionary movement in Galilee, and beyond? Messianic Jewish relatives of Jesus, going to other synagogues? What do we know about this? Nothing. Nothing.

Jon:

We know they existed.

Tim:

Luke mentions, one time, in Acts nine, verse 31, "The church, throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, had peace, and was strengthened." And he doesn't ever tell a story. He just doesn't recount it. So this little quote from Eusebius, quoting Hgasippus, is one of the few pieces of evidence we have.

Jon:

Hmm. And they had their own identity, and they were out there, spreading the church, in their own way.

Tim:

And then there's this. This is the crown jewel, right here. This is so cool.

Jon:

What's this?

Tim:

All right. So this is Eusebius, quoting again from this second century, Christian historian, named Hgasippus. And he recounts this story.

So think, after 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

Jon:

Right.

Tim:

And you had Jewish communities that had given their allegiance to Jesus.

They would have had a kind of precarious situation, there, in and around Jerusalem. And also, the Roman government would have been watching, and we know, did watch, Jewish leadership circles with an eagle eye, had them under the microscope, because they're like, never again will a rebellion happen, like what led to the destruction of Jerusalem.

So we have this record, here. This is Eusebius church history, book three, chapter twenty. And he remembers he has this record of the emperor, Domitian. He was the Roman emperor, around 95 AD, 25 years after the disaster. And Domitian had commanded that all the descendants of David should be found, and executed.

Jon:

So that's meaning Jewish people?

Tim:

Jewish people who claim, or come from the lineage connected all the way back to King David.

Jon:

Okay. So just that tribe.

Tim:

Why would that be relevant?

Jon:

Because that's the Messianic tribe.

Tim:

Yes. And that's connected as a political threat. Basically, you're killing off your—

Jon:

The line of the kings.

Tim:

You're killing off anybody who could say, I'm from David, out with Rome, gather to me, everybody, rebels in the hills. So this is a very shrewd Roman emperor, who's trying to root out anybody that could even say they're related to the kings of ancient Israel, find them, put them to death. So there's a tradition that says, there were heretics, which is, people opposed to anything to do with Jesus and his people, who brought an accusation against the descendants of Judah. So we're like, whoa, this is like talking about the kids of Judah, the brother of the Lord, which is what he says. The Judah, who was said to have been a brother of the Savior, according to the flesh. So they were accused, on the grounds that they were of the lineage of David, and related to the Messiah, that is, Jesus, himself.

So this is fascinating. This is either the sons or grandsons of Jude, who's mentioned as a brother of Jesus in the Gospels, whose letter we're going to finally read, in the next episodes, that he had sons or grandsons, who got arrested. So, Hegesippus tells us that these were the grandsons of Jude, who was the Lord's brother, according to the flesh, and they belong to the family of David. So notice, they're not accused of being Christians, they're accused of being Jewish descendants of David. And so, they get brought before the emperor.

So this is so interesting. He tells this whole story, and as, you know, whether you believe its testimony, how would he have known the conversations, and so on. But this is cool. What he says is, the emperor asked them how much property they had, or how much money they owned. Both of them answered they had about 9,000 denarii, half of which belonged to each of them. And the property they owned didn't consist of silver, but a piece of land, about 39 acres, from which they raised their taxes, and supported themselves, by their labor. Then they showed their hands, exhibiting the hardness of their bodies, and the calluses produced on their hands, by continuous toil, evidence of their labor.

Then they were asked about Christ, and his Kingdom, what sort it was? You could see why they would want to know about that question. Like, hold on, you say you're descendants, right? Like siblings. of that guy who 40, 50 years ago, said he was the Messiah. And what they said was, it was not a temporal or earthly Kingdom, but a heavenly and angelic one, that would appear at the end of the world, when he, that is, their granduncle, Jesus, would come in glory, to judge the dead, and give everyone, according to his works. Upon hearing this, Domitian did not pass

judgment. Rather, despising them as of no account, he let them go. He even put out a decree to stop the persecution.

Jon:

He's like, these guys are harmless?

Tim:

Yeah. He's basically like, these guys are no threat, whatsoever.

Jon:

Okay. Interesting.

Tim:

And when they were released, they went out, and he says they led or ruled the churches, because they were witnesses and relatives of the Lord. So interesting. So this is, truly, this is all we have, in terms of early evidence of the memory of the relatives of Jesus.

But you can put together this picture of the relatives of Jesus, as traveling missionaries, among whom were Judah, going back to the towns where they grew up, out of which, they begin telling all their relatives, and their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters, using synagogue networks, to spread the Good News. And that Judah emerged, as one of these leaders. And here are two of his grandsons, who are still like leaders of house church networks, up there, in Galilee.

And what I'm showing you is the only evidence we have of this network of Messianic Jewish communities connected to the *desposini*, the family of the master.

And this is the context out of which the Letter of Judah and the Letter of James in the New Testament come.

Jon:

And you're saying that, how remarkable it is, that in the Gospel accounts, they're always skeptical. And then, there's some sort of shift.

Tim::

There's some shift.

Jon:

They see the resurrected Jesus. They experience something, and then, they're just all in. And they take the church to Galilee, and they start missionary journeys, in that general area.

Tim:

Yeah. You got it. And there's just so much we don't know. But it's beautiful to imagine. There's so much from early Christianity, that we'll have to meet them in the new creation, and hear their stories. And maybe this is not as interesting to anybody else, as it is to me.

But we're talking about the relatives of Jesus, and the role that they played in that first couple generations of the Jesus movement.

Jon:

The people who grew up with Jesus.

Tim:  
Yes.

Jon:  
The Gospels paint them as being kind of snarky.

Tim:  
Super snarky.

Jon:  
And just skeptical. And then, something happens, transformation.  
And they start leading the Jews.

Tim:  
They were among the people that Jesus chose to specially appear to, the risen Jesus. Imagine that. And Paul mentions James, but it would have been, has to have been, for the others—

Jon:  
Right.

Tim:  
Whoa. Imagine that moment for them. The kid you grew up with, that you thought was crazy, gets executed by the Romans. And then, he appears to you, in glory. And you're just, the conversion of the imagination, just in that experience, right there.  
And then, of course they were then compelled, to go start telling, right, their family members, and friends, and synagogue networks, about Jesus Messiah.

Jon:  
Yeah. They would need something remarkable, to go back to the people who were like, we know this guy. We grew up with this guy. We've been skeptical of this guy, from the beginning. Go back and be like, you know, this is happening.

Tim:  
Yeah. Exactly.

Jon:  
This is legit.

Tim:  
Yeah. And then, do we have any firsthand evidence, then, of how they thought, what they would have talked about? How did they teach?  
And this is the broader context for this one page of the New Testament. It's a window of an early, Messianic Jewish Christianity, that, where one of the teachers was the brother of the Lord. And the Scriptural text in his library will surprise us, how he interprets them, how he makes connections, and hyperlinks. It's all on display. And it's so fascinating.

Jon:

I see. So you're creating this little world.

Tim:

I'm trying to create a little story world.

Jon:

It's like, these guys were doing the Jesus thing, in their own, special way. And we don't know a lot about it, but we have this letter.

Tim:

Yeah. How did these early Jewish Christians, relatives of the Lord, and their house church networks, how did they worship Jesus? How did they talk about him? How did they talk about the Good News? How did they read the Scriptures?

And all of this is on full display, in—

Jon:

In this short letter.

Tim:

Short letter. Yeah.

Jon:

And then, just to go back to that first sentence, then, he introduces himself, Judah, slave of Jesus Messiah, brother of James.

Tim:

He doesn't call himself the brother of Jesus Messiah. Which is interesting. But he does call himself brother Jacob. That is, of James.

So I think, if I discovered that my, either cousin, stepbrother, biological brother, whatever view you take, was the incarnation of the creator of the universe—

I think I would probably just call myself servant, as well. I think that's what's going on, here. So what we're going to do, in the handful of episodes that follow, is just work our way through this fascinating letter, that does not feel or sound like Paul, or Peter, or Hebrews. It's just different. This little letter breathes a different air, from early Christianity.

Jon:

Thanks for listening to BibleProject podcast. Next week, we begin reading the Letter of Jude, where he refers to his audience with three special words, rooted in the Hebrew Bible, loved by the Father, kept by Messiah Jesus, and called.

Tim:

Those words kept, love, and called, it's vocabulary that was used to describe the whole covenant community of Israel. Here in Jude, that vocabulary is getting applied to the followers of Jesus Messiah.

Jon:

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Carl:

Hello, my name is Carl. I'm from Winter Park, Florida.

Jen:

Hey, y'all, this is Jen. I'm from Austin, Texas. I first heard about BibleProject from my husband, who introduced me to the podcast.

Carl:

I first heard about BibleProject when it released. Found it on YouTube, just stumbled across the creativity. I use BibleProject for my own personal study, and sharing with friends.

Jen:

I use BibleProject for— Everything they offer, I use. My favorite thing about BibleProject is classroom.

Carl:

My favorite thing about BibleProject is when Tim and Jon talk deeply about the different aspects of what they're studying, and getting to see it show up on film, for the presentations. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

Jen:

BibleProject is a nonprofit, funded by people like me.

Carl:

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Jen:

And at [BibleProject.com](http://BibleProject.com).

Terry:

Hey, everyone, this is Terry, and I'm part of our patron care team, here at BibleProject. I've been working at BibleProject for a year, now, and my favorite part about my work is getting to spend time with our patron community, and just hearing stories of what God is doing in their lives. There's a whole team of people that bring the podcast to life every week, and for a full list of everyone who's involved, check out the show credits in the episode description wherever you stream the podcast, and on our website.