

Jude in the Christian Canon

The acceptance of Jude into the canon of Christian scripture followed a peculiar route: accepted early but then questioned later. The letter is listed without qualification in the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210), but a hundred years later, Eusebius listed it as one of the “disputed books.”

What would explain this? Scholars think that the letter was initially accepted because it was believed to have been written by a member of Jesus’ family. It was never very popular, however, and its references to Jewish legends and nonbiblical materials made it problematic. Thus, by the fourth century, many Christians were reluctant to regard Jude as scripture even if it had been written by Jesus’ own brother (an ascription that does not appear to have been challenged until modern times).

By the end of the fourth century, the letter’s official acceptance as Christian scripture was well established, but Jude continued to be regarded with suspicion. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, both Martin Luther and Cardinal Cajetan (Luther’s chief opponent) questioned the legitimacy of Jude as scripture.

In the modern world, the canonical status of Jude is rarely challenged outright, but the book is often neglected or ignored. It is one of the only books of the New Testament (along with 2 John and 3 John) for which there are no assigned readings in the Revised Common Lectionary; thus, in most Christian denominations throughout the world, Jude is never read publicly in worship.