
Contend for the Faith

DAVE BAST

Very near the end of our bibles is a series of short letters that are addressed to the Church in general, rather than usually to individuals or specific congregations; and some of these general, or catholic in the sense of universal, epistles, as they are called, are very short indeed – just one chapter – basically a single page. They are almost more like New Testament memos than New Testament letters, but they still have a message worth listening to, which is what we are doing today on Groundwork with the little letter of Jude. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we worked our way through three of these letters – one-chapter letters in the New Testament: Philemon, II John, III John, and today we come to Jude, or as we might say: Jude the Obscure, maybe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; way, way back in the New Testament; it is the last thing before the book of the Revelation, and it is not a terribly well-known letter, I think, in today's Church; and as we are going to see in this program, people maybe shy away from it a little bit because of the stranger elements in it. We will get to that, but for now, who wrote this? Jude identifies himself a little bit, but we are not one hundred percent sure who he is, but we have some pretty good clues. He identifies himself, what, as a brother of James. James is a brother of Jesus; so the question is, is Jude a brother of Jesus? And there is some evidence that he might be.

DAVE BAST

Well, he is listed – at least the name is listed among the brothers and sisters of Jesus that are mentioned in the Gospels; so Matthew 13:55, for example, lists Jesus' brothers as James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Now we would say because we are orthodox Christians that they were half-brothers. At all accounts, he is either a half-brother of Jesus – most likely – or has some kind of familial relationship with Him. Then the question would be: Why doesn't he just come out and say that? Why doesn't he say: Hey, you know what? I am Jesus' brother. I am writing you here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and James does not either in his epistle, and it seems like you could in one sense say: Well, they don't want to be a name dropper; and boy, that would be the ultimate name dropper, you know: I am Jesus' brother; but it could also be a reflection on how even the brothers and even the family and even the mother of Jesus came to believe that He, you know, really was this Messiah, the Son of God, and it probably was not real obvious to them growing up. I mean, we do believe Jesus was fully human, and so, although we believe He was without sin, He was still an ordinary kid, and you grow up in a family and you know how it goes; and so, it seems like... and there are several passages in the Gospels that indicate this... that it was hard for the family of Jesus to come to figure out who He was. There are passages where they decide to go in and get Jesus because they said He is out of His mind...

DAVE BAST

Yes, He is crazy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He has lost it; and there are other passages where Jesus kind of dismisses His own family and says: Look, I don't have any brothers or sisters; My disciples are My real family now. So there was this tug-of-war in the Gospels.

DAVE BAST

There was, and I mean, you can just imagine what it must have been like when Jesus is your big brother. Yes, sure, He is fully human; He is a regular person, but yes, not a regular person either. He never sinned. How hard is that to live up to? Come on. So, as you pointed out, Scott, there is a kind of tension that is reflected throughout the Gospels between Jesus' closest blood relatives and His disciples that He viewed as His real family. So there would be occasions when someone would come up to Him as He was teaching and would say to Him: Hey, your mother and brothers are outside; and He just said, pointing to the people listening to Him: These are My mother and brothers. Or near the end of His life as He is approaching Jerusalem there was a woman who cried out from the crowd: Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts that nursed You; and Jesus says: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and do it. So, it almost seems like He is distancing Himself or dismissing Himself from those natural human ties.

Now we know that His mother believed in Him and followed Him all the way to the cross, but it had to have been His resurrection that finally convinced His brothers that He was actually the Son of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So for James and for Jude – assuming that Jude is the Judas – Jude would be short for Judas, who was identified in Matthew 13:55 as a brother – assuming that they came to faith, they came to the faith the same way as everybody else; not because they grew up in the same house and had dinner around the same table; they came to it because the Holy Spirit revealed the truth of the resurrection to them. The Spirit came on them at Pentecost along with the others, and they believed; not because of the family ties... what was the phrase that you were talking about, Dave, when we were talking about this program? We often say that blood is thicker than water, but in this case, water is thicker than blood – the waters of baptism are thicker than blood; so, the family ties were secondary to the Holy Spirit ties of the new family of God.

DAVE BAST

That is actually a pretty good line. I am going to have to remember that one...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, you are going to have to write that down; that is yours.

DAVE BAST

Water is thicker than blood... Now, admittedly this little letter of Jude is another one of the contested books of the New Testament. Someday probably we ought to do a program on that – on the formation of the canon of scripture. Get a real expert in here to talk about that. It is an interesting thing. You will sometimes hear people claim in certain circles that the Church created the New Testament – the Church kind of voted on it, or the Church decided long after the fact – maybe three, four hundred years after Jesus which books were in, and they destroyed all the others; and that is actually very far from the truth. It is much more true to say that the Church was created by the New Testament; that the documents found their way eventually into mass circulation, and that it was a matter of perceiving and listening to them and hearing God's word through them by the power of the Spirit that led the Church to agree finally – the early Church – on which were indeed the inspired books of the New Testament; and finally Jude did make the cut, obviously.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as we are going to see next, there are things in Jude that still challenge us today. There are some things in Jude that are not like the other books in the New Testament. So we will look at that next; but first, here is

Josh Larsen of thinkchristian.net on a new offering from Think Christian.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are going to dig into the little letter of Jude; the second to the last book in the New Testament. We have just kind of talked quite a bit about who Jude was, and some of his reasons for the way he does and does not identify himself, but the problem that he addresses is one that we have seen frequently in these New Testament memos, particularly in other letters, too, from Paul and I John, and it is the problem of false teachers who have infiltrated the Church, and how that impacts the Church in devastating ways. So here is how Jude begins. I will pick it up at verse 3:

Dear friends; although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (or to God's holy people).⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, he did not want to have to write a negative letter. He was going to write something positive – something lyric – something celebrating the Gospel...

DAVE BAST

Yes, wouldn't it have been nice to get *that* letter – too bad.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes; but he got cut off... Maybe he wrote it later and we don't have it anymore, but he got cut off from doing that when he got reports back that, oh no, some of the churches Jude knew about, some of the congregations Jude loved, had been, as you said a minute ago, had been infiltrated by false teachers; and he says they are godless; they do not have any real love or commitment to the Lord, and he really identifies two main problems – two main things that Jude identifies in these verses you just read, Dave; and that is, first of all, they were *antinomians*, which is a big word. It is the theological word for being anti-law. They were doing what the Apostle Paul sometimes encountered. You can read this in Romans 6, where Paul writes: Shall we sin more so that grace may abound? Of course not; grace should not... The Good News of the Gospel is we are saved by grace alone, but there were people already in the earliest days of the Church that said: Well, then that means we can live it up.

DAVE BAST

Yes; party on... party on. It is a delicate balancing act for any preacher or teacher to affirm the reality of grace without sliding away into: Well then, it does not matter what you do, God... The old line of one cynic who said: I like to sin; God likes to forgive; everything is admirably arranged; and this is a theme that goes way back, even into the Old Testament, where God warns about teachers, now. It makes me think of James, another one of our Groundwork series where James warns people: You don't necessarily want to be a teacher in the Church because they are going to be held to a stricter accountability. You have to be really careful that you hold up both sides of the equation: Salvation by grace, but grace is meant to lead to a good life – to good works.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I once read somebody – a theologian – I cannot remember who it was; it might have been John Stott, the great British preacher, but I cannot be sure about that; but somebody who once said: If you as a preacher are never accused of quite possibly running the risk of people using the Gospel as a license to sin, you are probably not preaching grace forcefully enough; because the more you preach grace, there is always that risk; so some of these teachers – these false teachers that Jude is concerned about – were doing exactly that.

DAVE BAST

Check this out in the context of Jude's warning about these false teachers who promote immorality. This is way back in Jeremiah, where God is telling Jeremiah about the false prophets in Judah in these words: ^{23:16}Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. ¹⁷They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you," and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart they say, "No disaster shall come upon you." So, way back there we get this warning about *not* warning people that, hey, there are consequences to the way we live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So that was their first problem. They were antinomians – anti-law – turning grace into an excuse to live it up.

DAVE BAST

A license for immorality, Jude says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And their second problem had to do with their Christology – their doctrine of Jesus; and we have seen this before in II John in this series, where John talked about the antichrist. Anybody who gets Jesus wrong... that was the height of heresy in the early Church, and here he says that these false teachers denied Jesus Christ as our only sovereign and Lord; so maybe they were suggesting there are other ways to salvation, or Jesus is just one good person among many. They were taking the uniqueness of Jesus away from Him, and that is heresy.

DAVE BAST

Well, and most likely they were denying that Jesus was both God and man in the fullest sense, because Jude actually comes from late in the New Testament period and we know that there was a tendency going on into the second century to this kind of super spiritualized teaching that denigrated the physical...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Gnosticism.

DAVE BAST

And that denied Jesus was human in any real sense because that is messy; so probably the milieu from which Jude comes is this later period after most of the apostles were dead and gone, and that kind of teaching was going on; but how do we respond to that, whether it is the doctrinal problem or the moral problem? Well, we respond, says Jude in one of his most memorable phrases, by contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints – or to the holy people of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Church is built on the Apostolic teachings of people like James and John and Jude and Paul and Peter and the Apostles. If they got it wrong we have been wrong from the beginning, but we believe they didn't. We believe that the Apostles had it right in the beginning, and so we contend for that, even today, against anybody who waters down Jesus or denies His uniqueness; even today we have to rebuke those people; and Jude goes on, and he does not like these people at all. Let's get a little flavor of his language, starting in verse 12 here. He says:

These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm; shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown by the wind; autumn trees without fruit, uprooted, twice dead. ¹³They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude does not like these people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but what do you really think, Jude? What do you really think about them? Come on...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't pull any punches.

DAVE BAST

Yes, come on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is a real threat, and so Jude is not going to pull any punches; but then he goes on and he says: Look, these heretics, you have to deal with them very, very directly; and then he has some very, very strange verses... A little bit earlier he says:

⁸In the very same way, in the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority, heap abuse on celestial beings; ⁹but even the archangel, Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses did not dare to condemn him for slander, but said, "The Lord rebuke you," ¹⁰ and yet these people slander whatever they do not understand.

One of the things about Jude that has perplexed people is that this is a quote from an apocryphal book called the Assumption of Moses. This is not in our bibles today. We know nothing about this except for this reference here, and it can throw people off.

DAVE BAST

Well, where to begin, you know. How do you unpack that? Apparently, these false teachers, among their other problems and errors and missteps, was the fact that they heaped abuse on angels. They sort of... okay, I wonder how that worked... and then Jude sort of counteracts that by pointing to this example: Well, you know, when the archangel Michael was fighting Satan over Moses' body and they got into this shouting match and shoving match apparently, Michael was very restrained, and he did not damn Satan to hell; he simply said, "The Lord rebuke you;" and we go, huh? What?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, what he was saying there is that even the archangel would not take God's place, right?

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, we get his argument, but we just... it is just so bizarre, and we think: Did that actually happen?

SCOTT HOEZEE

He also – we won't read it right now – but he also, in verse 14 goes on to quote a pseudepigraphical book, which is also part of the apocryphal books, from Enoch; and there is a quote in there. So, there are some things in here that are a little bit unsettling, but the core of it all is that false teachers need to be confronted because the truth – the Gospel – the core deposit once for all delivered to the saints has to remain. It is so vital.

DAVE BAST

This is absolutely the takeaway: You have to contend for the truth of the Gospel. It is possible, I think, to do it without being contentious. Jude we believe was inspired. He had an authority that we don't have. I am not going to call those who differ from me, you know, a bunch of names; but, the fact remains that you cannot be a Christian and just believe that faith is fluid – that as long as you are a nice person... You know, we talked a lot about love and the need to walk in it and walk in the truth and put it into practice. That is all very well and good, and very important; but it does not change the fact that there is a core content to Christian faith, and not everyone believes it; and if you don't believe it, you should not call yourself a Christian. You should not be in the Church.

The problem in Jude is that these were people in the Church who were presenting themselves as the authoritative – the authentic voice of the Christian faith; and Jude says: No, uh... it ain't so. It is all about

Jesus and the apostolic witness to Him, and if you don't accept that, go start your own religion. Leave ours to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But Jude will end with a note of encouragement, too, with his followers and those who were contending for the faith; and we will consider that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are concluding a look in this series on New Testament memos, and we are concluding a look at Jude particularly today; and Jude is going to end with some encouragement for his readers, and a very great doxology as well. So, he has had to write a hard letter. He said he wanted to write a nice letter celebrating the Gospel, but these false teachers who are living right in the midst of the Church and watering down the identity of Jesus and encouraging bad behavior have to be confronted; and Jude says this is going to happen in what he calls the last days.

DAVE BAST

Yes; actually that is very interesting because he goes on to say: ¹⁷Dear friends, remember what the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold; (and Jude himself was not an apostle, of course, because he was not a believer until after Jesus rose from the dead); but the Apostles said in the last times there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires, which is a quote from II Peter, and brings up this phrase: The last days; and it is a reminder to us that this is something that has been true from the New Testament time right through ours. It is all the last days from the perspective of New Testament Christianity. The last days began when Jesus came into the world on His rescue mission, and they will continue until He returns again; and we don't know how long that period will be, but during this time, there is going to be a time of division; and so, we need to be aware of that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That continues right up to today. By the way, this is one of only two places in the New Testament where a writer refers to the other writers that were then writing epistles at the time; so Jude here is quoting from Peter and invoking his apostolic authority. So the end times... well, we are still in the end times, right? We have been in the end times from the beginning – basically from the New Testament; and there will always be people who divide us, but there is also always hope, which is why Jude concludes with a wonderful doxology:

²⁴To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy. ²⁵To the only God our savior be glory, majesty, power, authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.

DAVE BAST

Amen indeed, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Finally something familiar, by the way.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; after all this weird stuff, and stuff we don't understand, something we get right away. It is a doxology or a blessing or an ascription of praise – that is what the word doxology means – a word of praise; praise to the Lord, the only God our savior, but through Jesus Christ our Lord; so there is sort of the Trinitarian emphasis of the rest of the New Testament here; but how God is described: The one who is able to

keep you from stumbling; or maybe a more familiar translation: To keep you from falling. You know, God is the one who holds us up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; leaning on the everlasting arms; and it is lovely here, too. Here is a wonderful note of grace. If there is one thing we know from even these short memos that we have been looking at in this series – Philemon and II and III John and now Jude – one thing we know is that the Church has never been trouble free; it has never been a quarrel-free zone. People always struggle. People were always imperfect, right? We are all on our way to being saints, but we don't quite make it; and yet, what a wonderful note of grace in verse 24, that Jesus is going to be able to present you without fault.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not because we live that way, it is because we have been washed with the waters of baptism and we will be without fault, and with great joy He is going to show us off to His Father. What a wonderful thing!

DAVE BAST

I love that added phrase: With great joy – I mean: Without fault – I am looking forward to that! I hope it is not too painful. I don't know how that is going to work; if it is going to be over in a flash or if I am going to have to have a rerun of my life, you know, shown to me like a movie, and all the bad things pointed out, and God says: Okay, I will wipe that out... I will wipe that out... I will leave that up to Him, but the “without fault” is great... without blemish... without spot, Peter says in his first letter; but with great joy, as you pointed out Scott. Does that mean we will be filled with joy? I think so, but I think it also means Jesus is going to be filled with joy. It is almost a pride because He is going to show us to the Father and say: Hey, look; here is what I took and this is what I have made of them. This is what made my sacrifice worthwhile. Here they are, and it is all for Your glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of a verse from Zephaniah – a lovely little image in Zephaniah in the Old Testament, where there is this line where Zephaniah says: You know, God takes delight in you. I remember in a sermon one time I said it is like taking out your wallet and showing off pictures of your kids or your grandkids. That is what God is like, and that is what Jesus is going to be like: These are My people, O Father. With great joy, here they are, washed in My blood, washed in baptism so they are now without fault; and so, that is our hope, right? Through all the struggles... This was a difficult letter of Jude. It was a harsh letter about these false teachers, and if the people to whom Jude wrote did what he said, that had to be difficult; but the hope remains that the Church is not finally about us, it is finally about God's glory – His power through Jesus – and He is the one who gets it done.

DAVE BAST

And to Him, Jude says, be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

As we sometimes sing in the Gloria Patri: As it was in the beginning, as it is now and ever shall be... glory to God and joy for us. Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen; what a wonderful...

DAVE BAST

What more can you say? That is the end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A great way to end our series.

DAVE BAST

Yes. Thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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