

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**Episode 18****The Judas We Never Knew: An Interview with Jerome Van Kuiken****June 20, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

In this episode, Matt talks with Jerome Van Kuiken about his new book *The Judas We Never Knew*. Everyone is familiar with Judas in the New Testament, namely, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. But there's another Judas who many might not be familiar with at all. This Judas wrote a little book that can be found near the end of the New Testament -- the book of Jude. It's a rather short letter, and if you blink, you'll miss it altogether. Who was this Judas? What message would he have for today's world? Despite the small size of his book, it really does pack a lot of punch. Listeners will enjoy this fascinating discussion about all things Judas. And... there's even some talk about Spiderman thrown in as well.

Buy Jerome's book: [The Judas We Never Knew \(Amazon\)](#) // [Publisher \(Seedbed\) page](#)

About Jerome (from OKWU bio):

Dr. Jerome Van Kuiken earned his B.A. in Religion from Kentucky Mountain Bible College, his Master of Divinity from Wesley Biblical Seminary in Mississippi, and his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Manchester in England. He grew up as a Missionary Kid and Preacher's Kid, and brings a wealth of practical experience to his teaching, having served in local church ministries and having taught college-level courses since 2000. He is married with two children.

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Transcript:

0:00 Hi Friends. I'm excited to share this discussion I had with Dr. Jerome Van Kuiken. He's written a new book called, *The Judas We Never Knew*. And this is a fantastic book. I was delighted to be able to read it awhile back and offer an endorsement of it. And I wanted to share this with you as well. Now, Judas. You know about Judas in the New Testament. I'll bet you are thinking about Judas Iscariot. The infamous disciple of Jesus who betrayed Jesus. Well, that's not the Judas we're talking about and that's not the Judas that Jerome has written about. No, we are talking about Judas, Jesus's brother. And there was a book in the New Testament that was written by him. It's the book of Jude. A little bitty book in the New Testament. A book that's often neglected or not read much, which is unfortunate because despite its little size, it packs a lot of punch. And Jerome has written a book talking about that punch that Jude packs. And there's a lot of theology there. There is a lot of good messages for the church today. So I sat down with

Jerome and I chat with him about all of that. It's a fascinating conversation filled with history and intrigue and all sorts of fun things. So I am excited to share this with you and I hope you enjoy it.

1:15 MH Well its pleasure to be with my friend and great New Testament scholar and theologian, Dr. Jerome Van Kuiken. He has professor of Christian thought at Oklahoma Wesleyan University and it's a joy to have you here. Jerome, thank you so much for joining us.

JVK Yes, thanks for inviting me on.

MH Now, you and I have known each other for several years. We met officially, I think, when Gary Habermas was speaking at my church. This was several years ago, when I was a pastor. So apologetics, in some way brought us together - our love for apologetics and Gary's ministry and so forth. And that led to a friendship and you actually came to my church at one point and preached. I was pastoring a Baptist church, and I think you might be the first Wesleyan minister to preach in that church. (Chuckles)

JVK Inaudible

MH Yeah, and it was great! The people loved it. You just gave a wonderful message and you could tell instantly your love for scripture, your love for Jesus. Ever since then we stayed in contact. You recently wrote a book on Jude and I love the title, *The Judas We Never Knew*. Did I get that right? *The Judas We Never Knew*.

JVK Yes...

MH And I love the title because immediately people are going to be bringing their assumptions to that text – "Oh yeah, Judas Iscariot..." But that's not who this book is about. So tell us a little bit about the motives in writing this book. And tell us a little bit about *what* this book is all about and *who* it's about.

JVK Right, sure. Well, the background is that when I was in seminary, my New Testament professor told all of us in class that everybody needs to have their own special book of the Bible. That they kind of make their own, camp out in, and become as much of an expert on as possible. And my main training is in theology rather than biblical studies, so I needed something that was fairly short, that was manageable. And Jude is short. It's so short that it doesn't even have chapters, only verses. It's also really intriguing, quirky and neglected. So, a few years back in 2018 I was invited to lead Bible studies at a camp meeting in Portland, Oregon. So I thought, now is my chance to really dive in and I'm going to do a week's worth of Bible studies on the book of Jude. So, I did those and then I also got to do some presentations at a theological society relating Jude to technology, which was really creative and fun to do. So then out of that, I decided that I want to write this down. So the following year I started writing on it and got the manuscript done, and now it's finally getting published. But, really what your listeners and viewers need to know, the book of Jude and the man behind it – Jude, the relative of Jesus; his is a voice that has been marginalized for centuries. And there is a lot of interest out there now days about lost gospels that didn't make it into the New Testament Canon, and lost Christianity, and people are intrigued with things that are off the beaten path. But here is a letter that is in the New Testament, but people neglect it and ignore it. And here's a man who represent a variety, a variation of Christianity, Palestinian Jewish Christianity that is pretty much a lost Christianity. It's been ignored. It's been marginalized for centuries. And a lot of the time when we look at the New Testament or listen to preaching from the New Testament, people are more familiar with the gospels. They like the stories of Jesus. That makes for good preaching. And then there's Paul. You know, Protestants love Paul. And then we are fascinated by the book of Revelation. And we just sort of skip over what's in between Paul and Revelation. It's just kind of fly over territory. And so, I'm really interested in elevating this voice that has been marginalized and rediscovering this man and his letter who really, he has a message that is relevant for us today.

6:18 MH Yeah. That's really good. I like how you describe that as fly over territory and Jude is definitely a book that we do just glaze over to jump to Revelation. And I have to be reminded of that myself. I'm a Paul guy, and I do stuff on Revelation, too, and I have to catch myself and think that I have to read the other stuff too. You know, I need to read Hebrews...I don't think Paul wrote Hebrews. But that's the point, I need to read more Hebrews and your book really helps us to see the need of how this little book contains a big punch. It packs a big punch theologically and in terms of our Christian life, ethics, and so forth.

Well let's talk a little bit about, before we get into the book of Jude itself, I want to talk a little bit about the historical Judas. When we say Judas, 99% of every Christian is going to think – "Oh the guy who betrayed Jesus." But there was another Judas around in the pages of the New Testament. Tell us who that person is, who the focus is. Give us the historical outline of this person.

JVK Yeah. And actually the name Judas is pretty common and pretty popular in New Testament times. So there are several Judases who show up in the pages of the New Testament. And one of them is this guy who is a relative of Jesus. Part of our confusion is that he is called Judas when he shows up in the gospels, but when you get to the letter, he is called Jude in English. It's the very same word, very same name in Greek, in the original language. But in English for whatever reason, one place we call him Judas and another place we call him Jude. So that makes things confusing and it helps us to miss the fact that, no, this is the same person. So, what we know about him is that he is a close relative of Jesus. And there are debates that go back virtually to the beginning of Christianity about exactly how. But he is called one of the brothers of the Lord in the New Testament. And so he and his older brother James, and a couple of others – Joseph – or Joses – and Simon, are listed and called brothers of the Lord. They are associated with Jesus's immediate family. With Mary in particular. And the evidence that we have from the gospels is that during Jesus's ministry, they don't buy in. They are not disciples. They are skeptical. At one point they even think that Jesus has lost his mind and so they go and try and take custody of him and get him out of the limelight for fear that he will embarrass them and ruin the family name and reputation. But, then after Jesus's resurrection we discover that they come to faith and become key leaders in the early church. Especially James, we have a letter from him in the New Testament. But he also becomes the key leader of the church in Jerusalem. And then we find out from 1 Corinthians 9:5, the apostle Paul mentions that there are brothers of the Lord who are traveling around with their wives – like traveling evangelists. And then we have this letter of Jude or Judas right near the end of the New Testament as well. So, apparently Jesus's resurrection flipped a switch in their lives. And we also know from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to James, one of the brothers of the Lord, after his resurrection. And so we don't know if Jesus appeared to any other members of the family or just the appearing to James was enough to make them *all* change their minds and come to faith. It's pretty remarkable his backstory – from not buying in to Jesus's claims and ministry, during Jesus's earthly career. To after his resurrection, becoming a key leader, evangelist and spokesperson in the early church.

11:08: MH Yeah, we hear a lot about James as a leader in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem church. And of course, it's due to resurrection and the appearances and him overcoming his doubt and becoming a believer. So something switched, something happened. And a lot of people joke about this and it's funny, but something would really have to jolt you to go from being a little brother who has problems with your big brother...going from that, to claiming he is divine. (Both chuckle) Something has happened. And of course that's a big reason for thinking seriously about the big claims of the resurrection of Jesus and so forth. We hear about James, we hear about Paul, but we don't hear a lot about Judas. But he's presumably he is not a leader in the Jerusalem church like James is, but in your book...and I've read your book...By the way, let me just pause for a moment. The book is so well written. There is humor, there is depth. And the reader is just guided along to find these great nuggets of truth in the New Testament book of Jude in a way that is so inviting. In many ways, you just can't put the book down. So I just want to say that for listeners – will definitely love reading this book. But...in your book you talk a little bit about the family of Judas. Which is pretty fascinating. Can you share a little bit about that? And how does knowing about his grandchildren – what does that tell us a little bit about him, perhaps?

JVK Right, well. So, there's the story that Eusebius of Caesarea, who is kind of the father of church history. Eusebius is writing in the fourth century AD, but he is drawing on records, historical records, from earlier writers. So he includes this story about during the time of Emperor Domitian, around the late 80's or early 90's AD. Domitian gets concerned about threats to his throne and the possibility of revolt in Palestine, and so he hauls in some of the descendants of Jude. And these are actually two of Jude's grandsons who appear before Domitian and are interrogated, basically. So Domitian is trying to figure out, are these guys are threats. Are they revolutionaries? Are they trying to press their claims to the throne of Israel? Because we have to remember that Jesus is not the only one in that family who have connections through his genealogy back to the royal line. To the throne of David. His family, his brothers do too. So in many ways the genealogy that we find in Matthew and in Luke is also their genealogy, minus the virgin birth part. So Domitian brings these guys in, the grandsons of Jude. And he interrogates them. But they show him their hands and how calloused their hands are to prove that they are men of the soil. They are just farmers. And they tell him that they own a little bit of land up in Galilee. And that's about it. That's their only real claim to fame. And so when Domitian realizes that basically they are just farmers, he despises them, kicks them out and doesn't prosecute them or execute them or anything like that. But, I think what this shows us is that, 1.) Like you mentioned James tends to camp out in Jerusalem and that's his sphere of ministry and authority, it appears that Jude or Judas and maybe his other siblings stayed up in Galilee, around Nazareth and worked the family property there while also doing ministry. And Eusebius also records that Jesus's brothers were traveling around that vicinity. Around Galilee preaching and doing ministry there. So, 1.) Shows us that Galilee seems to be more of Jude's, or his family sphere of influence. But 2.) It also shows us that he was also able to pass on his faith to his children and his grandchildren.

16:05 MH Yeah, it's fascinating because I think there is a huge interest, even today in... even pop culture, like even just in Jesus's family. And you know we've seen a lot of really bad fiction (laughs) through the years. And you've mentioned the *Di Vinci Code*, which might make for an interesting movie, but it was just terrible historically. So there is kind of this draw to get back to the "historical Jesus" even in popular culture, but what's fascinating is that there can be a genuine interest here...there is something genuinely interesting here even as Orthodox Christians who maintain Orthodox Christianity. It's fascinating because these two grandsons...I mean if you just stop and think about their family stories (laughs)...their grandfather is Jude who has his own story of following Jesus and living with Jesus. Then their great uncle would have been James – a very, very important leader in the church... the first century of course. And then there other great uncle, is well, you know...God... (Both laugh). So can you imagine the stories they told. Their family was sort of... I mean in some sense, I don't know if this is such a good comparison... kind of like what the Kennedy family is such a big, important political family in the United States, I could imagine on some level, their family being... people take a second look at them as they pass them on the street. I guess I could understand just being farmers... you know, "I just want to live the quiet life here guys." I just want to mention all that because there's a genuine story here that is worth investigating and you don't have to go down the path of *Di Vinci Code*

JVK Yes, again. That is part of the intrigue of this. Not only has Jude's letter been marginalized, not only has Jude been marginalize, but like you say, there is this whole real story. Actual historical records that we have that help fill out who Jesus's real extended family was. We don't have to go with just fantasy fiction in order to explore those ideas.

MH Yeah. I think that's why I liked your book. I was telling you before we started, that one, well many reasons I love your book, but one thing I really liked about it is that it's really accessible for people to read. You could hand it to anybody in the pew – anybody who is interested in the family of Jesus. And it would be easily understood. It's not...you know, you're an academic, you're a theologian, you have a PhD, but you've written a book that you don't have to have any theological training to read. It's super fascinating in that way. But there is a level of good scholarly attention and depth to the book that you see that this... you really do a good job of unpacking how this little, itty bitty, neglected book of Jude is a gold mine that you could spend hours digging into. We could get into some of the theology of Jude and some

of that in a moment, but I just want to ask you a quick question about before we get into that, about the Canonicity of Jude. Because a lot of people don't that history especially with respect with Martin Luther. Could you kind of go through some of that as well?

20:00 LVK Yeah...And that was another interesting thing. If people were concerned about which books made it into the New Testament and which ones didn't, here's another story that's truth. It's not made up. And that is when Martin Luther kicked off the Protestant reformation, he was concerned about having the Bible in the language of the people. It's actually a really colorful story – if would make a great movie in its own right. He is hiding out. He's trying to avoid getting captured and executed, so he is disguised as a knight, hiding out in this castle in rural Germany. And he translates the New Testament into German. But when that new testament, that German New Testament, comes out in September of 1522, what you find there is that Luther is not real crazy about some of the books of the New Testament. He has kind of his hierarchy of which ones are the really good ones and which ones he's kind of skeptical about. And so he takes those books, four books of the New Testament that he really does not think much of, and he shoves them to the end. And they're: Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. And he separates them out from all the other books of the New Testament. He writes introductions to the various books of the New Testament and he explains that he doesn't think these four books really preach the gospel that he can't find Jesus in them, much about salvation in them. He doesn't think that the authors are apostles so in his mind that disqualifies them, too. So, he just kind of sidelines them. Well, Luther's influence is so powerful then on the reformation that from then on, basically, Protestant biblical scholars tended to sideline those books in general. And Jude in particular. So for about 450 years, the book of Jude has been ignored, neglected, and even scorned and despised. It wasn't until around 1975 that Protestant biblical scholars started reassessing the value of the book of Jude. So part of the reason for writing this, for me, was that I was aware of some of this new scholarship and was reaffirming the value the book of Jude and the historical figure of Jude, or Judas. Yet that hadn't really trickled down to the pulpit and the pews. And part of the reason for my writing this was trying to translate that scholarship into a really accessible form. But yeah, for 450 years the book of Jude was basically blacklisted.

MH Yes, that's interesting. I remember reading the original preface of Luther's commentary of Revelation. The first preface he didn't really have good things to say about Revelation. I think he said something like he doesn't discern that Christ is even taught in it. I can't remember the exact words. He later changed his mind and wrote another preface though, which I was thankful for. But, you know, Luther is an interesting figure and it's just fascinating how his influence continues even today. Like you mentioned earlier in our conversation how we like to prioritize certain books of the Bible over others in the Bible. We have a Canon within the Canon almost. And I'm a Paul guy. I love Paul, but I don't think we should take Romans and read that first. I actually don't think that would be a good idea to do. But we tend to prioritize Paul. Sometimes you have people who prioritize the gospels. Actually, I think it's due to Luther's influence that Romans became sort of *the thing* in all Protestant evangelical churches, when the gospels, arguably, should have been the starting place for our reading and our liturgies. Anyway, long story short, I think you may be right that Jude is an unfortunate victim of that. I think it's that's good why you wrote this book because you make it interesting. I just can't reiterate that enough. You make this little book interesting. Let me back up...you don't make it interesting, you show it to be interesting. I think that's a good way to put it.

25:05 Become a Patreon member! <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted>

26:20 MH Okay, so let's just jump into the text. The cool thing about your book, too, is that you offer a fresh translation that you have given and I think it was really helpful. I loved your translation. The text itself, you offer some thoughts on how it could speak to us today, and some of the challenges that the church today is facing. And I think every Christian would agree...we might disagree on what the challenges are, but we are facing a lot of challenges. So, I'm curious, what are some things that Jude could speak into for the church today on a practical level? Like what question does it answer in today's world? I know you

have a heart for that – apologetics, and cultural engagement. So I would be interested to hear your thoughts on that.

JVK One way that I think about Jude. The letter or the book of Jude is...as you mentioned it's got a lot in it and it actually speaks and connects with people if we actually just take the time and pay attention to it. I kind of like to think of it as being a public service announcement. Or like the All State commercial with the mayhem guy running around. And you think about those sorts of commercials. Or you and I are probably old enough to remember the crash test dummies warning about needing to buckle up your seat belt. Things like that. That's what the book of Jude is. It is a warning, a very colorful and energetic and intriguing warning to watch out for spiritual scam artists. And if you think about what the last few years have brought us in terms of the news.... Public figure after public figure is church related, whether it's mega-church pastors, or international apologist or evangelists, or university presidents, or the denominational leaders, or anything along those lines...the news has been full of these sorts of stories about people who have spiritual authority positions of leadership, but who turn out to be abusive, manipulative, false teacher, and all that kind of thing. So the book of Jude is really written as a public service announcement or as an All State commercial warning about how we need to be vigilant. We need to not get scammed. But at the same time, just like the crash test dummy ads, worked because there are seat belts in cars that we can use. And the All State ad is not just saying that disaster is going to strike, but they are saying that you are in good hands. There is insurance there. And in the same way, Jude is not just gloom and doom. He is saying watch out for these scam artists, but there is a seat belt that you need to buckle. There are good hands that you need to keep yourselves in. He says keep yourselves in the love of God and you're being kept by God. And so, there's a positive note underneath there too, that you can rest in God and in the gospel. Stay faithful to God, because God is going to stay faithful to us. So I think one of the reactions that is really tempting for us in our culture with all the constant news about failures in the church and in church leadership – or even on the opposite side of things that even the whole world seems to be turning against us on whatever issue you want to pick. – the temptation is to despair, to get discouraged, to get cynical, to throw in the towel, maybe to kind of throw away our faith and become doubtful and skeptics. But what Jude tells us, is you need to be discerning but not just quit. Not just despair. Because God is still there. And there's hope and there's faith, and there's love, and there's the mercy of God, and there's the glory of God to come if you just hang in there.

31:22 MH Yeah, I'm curious. What do you think...how does Jude the person and his experiences, or Judas the brother of Jesus...how did that impact his message? What do you think? Is he speaking from personal experience? What is he drawing on? Because presumably, he's not writing in a vacuum, right? There is a context. What do you think that personal context might be?

JVK You know it's interesting... right near the end of his letter, after he's warned about these scam artists, these spiritual con men, he's warning his audience that he's writing to, to keep the faith, but he's also goes on to say, and show mercy to those who are doubting, to those who are disputing, those who have been contaminated, defiled, by these sins that he is warning against, show mercy to them, even as you are waiting for the mercy of God to lead you to eternal life. And I have to think that some of that echoes some of his own experience as someone who had doubts during Jesus's ministry. Who wasn't on board and yet in God's great mercy, he comes around, Judas comes around to believing in Jesus finally. And even as somebody who was standing on the sidelines, as an onlooker, who wasn't buying into Jesus's ministry, he knew what Jesus's ministry was like. That here is Jesus showing mercy to people who have been marginalized, people like the tax collectors, the prostitutes, and the other people who are classified as sinners, who is touching the lepers and talk to Gentiles, talking to Samaritans, healing Roman's centurion's servant. Jesus is reaching out and showing mercy to people who have been despised, and rejected and who are on the outside looking in. So, Judas brings that with him into his letter

33:37 MH As an academic, as a theologian, how is this study on Jude helped you as an academic? That might be kind of a weird question, but I'm always interested in the relationship between biblical studies

and theology. And I'm curious as a theologian yourself, who writes on theology, and does a lot of that, how is studying this text helped you academically in terms of your profession? That's kind of a weird question, but I'm just curious.

JVK It has struck me that the book of Jude is all about the issue of boundary lines, of boarder lines, and the balance, the tightrope that has to be walked between holding on to those boarders...keeping those lines bright on the one hand, not blurring them. But on the other hand being willing to reach across those boarder in appropriate ways. So there are lines that we shouldn't cross in some ways... heed the no trespassing sign, right? Don't transgress these boundaries in inappropriate ways, improper ways. But at the same time there are appropriate ways to reach across those boarders in order to show mercy and in order to bring salvation.

MH Yeah, that's good, that's good. Another question. And you have a section in your book on this. And I know that people who are familiar with Jude are probably curious about this. Let me just ask you, what's up with Enoch? And I think most of the listeners here are probably going to be familiar with Enoch, I don't know, but let's have that conversation. What's going on with Enoch?

JVK Right. One of things that makes the book of Jude quirky is the fact that he uses this material, this literature that's floating around in Second Temple Judaism, that's floating around in this first century Jewish context. The book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch is one of the two, and the other one is the Testament of Moses or the Assumption of Moses. There is some debate over exactly the title of it. At one point in the letter he is talking about this argument, this showdown between Michael and the devil over the body of Moses and if you look back in the Old Testament, if you look back in Deuteronomy, you'd be like, "Where is this story?" It's not there. And so, the essentially the approach that I take to it, is to say I think of it as being like fan fiction. That just like for any series of literature, or movies, or anything like that – you have the Canon, you have the official authoritative movies, or books, or incidents in history or whatever. But then you also have fan fiction where people who love the story, love the movies, or love the books, they're asking themselves, "Well, what happened in between these stories, or what if..." You know Marvel Cinematic Universe just had a whole series of "what if" that spun out different possibilities in alternative universes. Same sort of thing here. Where we ask the question, "What if" or "What happened between, or before or after these incidents?" And so that people developed this fan fiction to answer these questions. Or just kind of come up with their own creative variations or riffs on the authoritative stories. What I would say is that these two accounts here, 1 Enoch, the book of Enoch and the Testament of Moses, are basically fan fiction that build off of stories that we find in the Pentateuch and the books of Moses. And Jude makes use of those because they are floating around, they are accessible, people are interested in them. They are his way of being culturally engaged. Just like if I use, you know, this fall when I teach my undergraduates, I will probably make references to the *Spider-Man Across the Spider-Verse* movie. I will probably, and this is a little more closely related to what Jude is doing, I will probably make some reference to the *Mrs. Davis* series that *Peacock Plus* ran that has Jesus as a fictional character in the story. So notice what that TV series is doing, they are taking somebody who has authoritative religious accounts about them in the Bible but then they are doing creative non-canonical things with that character. Or, if you think about *The Chosen* TV series, you have parts of it that are clearly related to what we find in the gospels, and then they have creative license with things that the characters are doing that we don't have any record of. And so in the same way, it is using this popular literature in order to make important theological, spiritual, ethical points.

39:55 MH Yeah, I think there are some books in the new testament that really help us get a glimpse into the world of new testament and I think Jude is one of them. And it gives us a peek behind the veil, so to speak of the other texts, the other traditions, and stories that people were interested in, like you say. And I think that's one of the advantages of thinking of the way that Jude interacts with these texts to form and shape his own hopes and eschatology even. I think that's important. And if we could talk a little bit more about that. And I'm just thinking off the cuff here. You and I are both within Protestant camps, we both hold to a high view of scripture, we love scripture, it's God's word, it's authoritative, you know all of that.

You know, what's the value, in your mind, of reading some of these other texts for modern day Christians? I mean, obviously, both of us would say we would want our churches today be grounded in scripture as God's Word, we would disciple and instruct from scripture first, and that's our foundation, but should people read these other texts? And if so, how should they read them? What value do they hold?

JVK I think it is valuable to read them in order to get some perspective the kinds of stories that the New Testament authors would've grown up with. I think they make use of them more than just sort of a casual reading of the New Testament might indicate. That a lot of times it's operating behind the scenes. Because this is just part of their world. And so just like if somebody a different culture or an archeologist from the future would come to or dig up material from our present time period here in the US, there are a lot things they would need to know in order to interpret accurately what's going on. And so reading this literature that is surrounding the New Testament helps us understand what's going on in people's minds, what questions they're asking, what answers are the options for them out there. It helps us understand the culture of the New Testament better. At the same time, I do think we do need to be careful not treat these extra texts as authoritative. Sometimes there is a danger of sort of forcing the biblical texts into the mold of these other texts. And so, if you want a goofy example – it would be like for instance, if an archeologist or someone from another culture, for example, were to encounter like the *Stargate* series. This wildly fanciful series about where the pyramids came from, that there were aliens behind it. Or you think of other examples of these sorts of theories. The Apollo missions. What did the Apollo missions really do when they were out of radio contact? You know there are all these conspiracy theories in fun sci-fi type scenarios that float around in our culture that get used – you think of like the *Independence Day* movie. You can think of plenty of other ways that these ideas play out in our culture. Well, they are out there. Somebody from another society, another culture, or another civilization or from the future, from an archeologist would need to be aware of those to interpret our culture rightly. But at the same time, they would need to be able to distinguish between okay, this is actual history versus this is just the fanciful way that we adapt those stories in our culture.

MH Yeah, there would need to be discernment between the actual history versus the stories that we tell. Even in the fanciful science fiction stories, like you mentioned *Independence Day*, the truth of that – the reason we like that movie isn't necessarily that we think it's depicting or going to depict anything real. It's just that heroism, courage, bravery and sacrifice are all elements. And those are true virtues that Christians would want to emulate in our culture at large. But we wouldn't want to confuse that with... We would hope that archeologist wouldn't say, "Oh wow, this looks like to have been a documentary, or a news special." But yeah, that makes perfect sense. I think that was a really good example in many senses.

JVK Well, and if you want to an example of when that line got blurred unhelpfully, think about Orson Wells recording of *The War of the Worlds*. And because people couldn't distinguish between fiction and reality, you ended up with people committing suicide.

MH Yeah, and for people who aren't familiar with that story...it's a pretty fascinating story. And I don't remember the year, but it was a public radio show that was reading that the war of the worlds – it was completely fiction of course, but it was read in such a way as if it was an actual breaking news, right? And it alarmed people. I guess people thought there was a legit alien invasion or something like that. But yeah, that's a really good example.

JVK Yeah – it was the beginning of the great depression.

MH around the 30's?

JVK Right around the early 30's or so.

MH Yeah...I was thinking 30's too. Something like that.

46:25 MH You know, back a Jude for just a moment. So, he interacts with stories of his day to convey truths of scripture. I think that might be a good way to put it. I feel like when a person reads your book, you're constantly interacting with stories. You're interacting, if I remember right, with Marvel movies and I think Harry Potter makes a scene somewhere in there. And you just start off your chapters with these ways of touching base with our culture. And I'm just curious, I think you contributed to a volume something like "Spider-man and Theology"...is that correct?

JVK Yeah... *Theology and Spider-man*.

MH Yeah – *Theology and Spider-man*. I have not read any of this yet, but can you give us a taste of your contribution to that? And what has theology to do with Spider-man? I think we would all be interested in that answer. (Laughs)

JVK Yeah, yeah. There's a whole series on "Theology and..." Areas and elements of pop-culture. And so, I contributed to the one volume that is *Theology and Spider-man*, and specifically what I did was I looked at the Toby Maguire trilogy, or Sam Raimi trilogy. Sam Raimi was the director and Toby Maguire was the actor who played Peter Parker, Spider-man in that trilogy. And when those movies first came out years ago, I was teaching undergraduate college courses at a Bible college and I used some of the material from those films in order to communicate theological points to my students. And so when the call for contributors went out for this volume, *Theology and Spider-man*, I thought "Oh great! I can recycle those ideas that I had that I never actually published anything about." I just used them in class. And it was a great opportunity. And so basically what I did was I just looked for Christian themes in the Toby Maguire trilogy. And specifically there's a classic idea in Christian tradition about the three sources of sin and temptation – the world, the flesh, and the devil. And so my argument in this chapter was that those three movies of the Toby Maguire Spider-Man trilogy illustrate the three sources of sin and temptation. So the first film, the main villain is the Green Goblin. And he is portrayed, his costuming, his posturing, everything, is very devilish, very demon-like. And so he illustrates very nicely, classic Christian teaching about the devil is a source of temptation. In the second film, you have Dr. Octopus. And for reasons that you'll need to read the chapter to get into, I argue in that particular film, Spider-Man 2 makes a really good illustration of the idea of the world as a key source of temptation. And then finally, you have the same view, you have Venom. And he illustrates the temptations of the flesh really, really well. But basically I use Thomas Aquinas, this classic, great theologian of the Christian tradition and his teaching on the three sources of sin and temptation. I put Thomas Aquinas and Toby Maguire (MH laughs) ...JVK inaudible... conversation with each other. It's a lot of fun, but it also manages to make some really, I think, serious and significant theological points.

MH That's fascinating. I really like that approach. I think where theology or theologians sometimes go wrong is, the readers of theology fail to connect it to the real world. So you have this, you know, unfortunate ivory tower idea. I mean I don't know any theologians who are purposely trying to be in the ivory tower – I just don't – but sometimes our work can be so far out that we think, "What use is this book?" And so, it's really cool, I think, and I am absolutely convinced that we have to do better at acting with the stories we are talking about today - our own fiction, our film, and our culture. Because I think the gospel was made to impact the culture. I mean, if the gospel doesn't speak afresh to our world and to our questions, then there is something wrong with the gospel people because then we are not speaking the language of the people.

JVK Yeah, we have Jude's, we have Paul's and we have Jesus's example to follow. Yeah – this okay to do. This is right to do. And it's effective. And it also kind of makes it more fun.

MH It really does. It does. Thinking of Luke's account of Paul in Athens. It's a classic example of using the language and the stories of the day – the poets of the day to communicate the gospel. Of course Jude is drawing from a very rich tradition of Jewish storytelling and texts, and what not. And I just want

to say I appreciate what you've done in your work and your research. And now in the latest with not just Spider-man but with the Judas stuff. Because throughout this book, and I've read the book and I know the listeners probably haven't yet, but as you read there is constant connection with the culture using those stories and such. And I think that's one of the great, many virtues of your book. So just wrapping things up here, I'm curious, what do you hope readers walk away believing and thinking after reading your book?

JVK You know, well.... I hope they have a better appreciation for this book (Jude) that maybe they've never read, never heard preached from, or anything like that. That they have a sense that, "Wow, this is something that is a buried treasure. An overlooked treasure that I found here." More than that, I hope they walk away saying, "I have a deeper appreciation for how to balance grace and truth. And how important it is to hold on to the gospel, what I believe. But without getting angry, frustrated, and defensive and ugly about it. That I can hold on to the truth and reach out to people who may be struggling, who may come from a different viewpoint, and show mercy and grace to them too." And then, above all that they come away with a greater love for Jesus and a greater vision of God and his church and what he's calling his people to be. And the future he has for us as we follow him.

MH Yeah, that's great. And I definitely think every reader is going to enjoy this book. I can't wait to get it and let my wife read it. I am just really excited about it. I am glad it's being released out into the wild so that folks can get their hands on it. The book is called, *The Judas We Never Knew*, and I highly recommend everybody go pick it up. You can find it on Amazon and Jerome, remind me, is it available for pre-order now, or is it about to be available for pre-order? Is that correct?

JVK Yeah – you should be able to pre-order it now at Amazon. Once it's released, June 22nd is the release date. And once it's released, you should be able to find it at seedbed.com as well, because that's the publisher. And I'll just mention that each chapter ends with a set of discussion questions. So it's useful for book study groups, or that kind of thing. And I've recorded a series of teaching videos that have sort of bonus material. It's not just a rehash of the chapters, its bonus material that Seedbed is going to be releasing as well. So, watch for that, too.

MH Oh, that's wonderful I wasn't aware of that. That's super cool. So, this is going to be really good for small groups, Sunday school, you know all of the above. Okay – that's great. That's wonderful. Yeah, I'm very familiar with Seedbed. They put out a lot of good material. And you've done videos for them before too, if I'm not mistaken. Was it on Christology...and I can't remember.

JVK And the trinity.

MH And the trinity – yeah. Super cool. Well, Jerome, thank you so much for being here with us today. It's always good to talk with you. I learn a lot every time I hear you speak. So I really appreciate your time.

JVK Well, thank you so much once again for having me on this podcast.

55:55 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.

