

Buzz King

buzz@BuzzKing.com

<https://BuzzKing.com>

Jude 14-25 ESV, edited slightly.

14 It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him." 16 These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters. 17 But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18 They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." 19 It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. 24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Being vigilant.

When I was a fourteen, my father decided to move us from a poorer, largely Hispanic neighborhood in a town called Oxnard in Ventura County, well north of L.A., south to a growing, solidly middleclass area in the far northeast corner of L.A. County, on the edge of the desert. It was an area that would soon be inhabited by hundreds of thousands of mega-commuters who drive a couple of hours each way into work in the L.A. area. We had been living near the ocean in Oxnard, but

one June day, I suddenly found myself transplanted far inland, to a place where, the first day we were there, I successfully cooked an egg on the sidewalk. Our asphalt driveway would melt in the midday heat, sticking to the bottoms of our shoes. Because of the heat, I found it difficult to walk a full block, when I used to run and bike wildly around coastal Oxnard with my friends. There was virtually no one outdoors during the day in the summer. This desert area back then was largely undeveloped, and outside our house there was nothing but acres and acres of flat, hot dirt. I thought that my parents had gone crazy, moving us there.

But my father had had a valid reason for moving us. It had to do with me. My physical safety was why we moved, although my father didn't tell me this until I was well into adulthood. The problem was that Oxnard was becoming dangerous. There were guns and switchblades and gangs moving into town. I was a straight-A student who avoided trouble. My father, who had grown up with violence and who had seen a lot of horrible things in his life, had been growing nervous watching our neighborhood change. He worried that I would get hurt. I, of course, as kids do, had incrementally and innocently adapted, accepting things the way they were, and had grown comfortable with the danger around me. Importantly, I say I was comfortable - but not complacent. I was vigilant when I

was outside. I avoided the sidewalks if there were older kids there. Sometimes I walked along the tops of walls or through backyards. I'll get back to this.

Let's look at the Book of Jude. It's very short; most translations have about 461 words. You should be surprised that I didn't include all of it as our reading today – you're supposed to laugh at this. Interestingly, the author identifies himself as Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Note that it is the same as the Greek name Judas, but it was not the Apostle Judas. In Hebrew, the name is Judah, and one of the twelve tribes of Israel was named Judah. Judah was also the name of the southern part of Israel and it contained Jerusalem. But the Jude who wrote the Book, this person who says he is the brother of James, who was this? We don't know for sure. A very popular theory is that James is the James who led the community of Jesus-followers in Jerusalem from at least 40 AD until his execution in 62 AD; this James was the oldest brother of Jesus, and this would make Jude the youngest brother of Jesus. So why didn't the author of Jude just come out and say he was the kid brother of Jesus? Perhaps he was being modest. But Jude is written in literate Greek, and only a tiny fraction of the population would have been able to fluidly write Greek – and this would probably not have included uneducated tradespeople like Joseph, Jesus, and Jesus' siblings. And, the Greek in Jude is very good, with a large vocabulary, although it is not

highly literate. So, perhaps Jude had help writing the letter, or maybe it was some other Jude – and yes, Jude was very common name. Or maybe it was a person who simply chose to attribute the letter to Jude the brother of Jesus.

The Book of Jude is a letter that has the same structure as the letters of Paul and of most letters written during that day, where the author first identifies himself, delivers his or her message, and then closes with a blessing. This letter is intended for all believers, both Jewish and Gentile. While the Book is structured as a letter, it feels like a sermon. The letter has a single focus: It warns believers about the influence of people who are trying to corrupt the faith, condemns people who do this, and strongly encourages believers to work to keep their faith alive and vibrant. The letter also compels believers to help other believers keep their faith strong. It is written in such a strident rhetorical fashion that many scholars see an influence of Greek and Latin speeches. Indeed, the author is more concerned with conveying a powerful message of spiritual warning than giving comfort or support to his readers. It is no casual pastoral letter.

Let's look at a condensed version of our passage: *14 It was about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken*

against him.” 17 Remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18 They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” 19 It is these who cause divisions, people devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire. 24 God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, will present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. This is the heart of this short Book. It says 1) We should remember that Jesus predicted that there will be non-believers who laugh at our faith and hold disdain for it. These people will do great harm to the collective faith of Christians. 2) By praying and accepting the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can stay close to God and remain on the path of Christ-like lives that end in eternal life with God. 3) We should reach out for people who have fallen away and begun to question their faith. 4) God will always be there to support us, to keep us strong as we fight to keep our faith vibrant.

There is a parallel between the situation of the people Jude was writing to – all believers of his day – and the situation that we face today. Jude lived in a society that was vehemently and often very vocally anti-Christian. These aggressive non-believers of Jude’s day were the daily associates of the people

Jude was preaching to. Jude is telling his readers that they have to work hard and continuously in order to keep their faith alive and to not let the people around them draw them away. Believers have to understand that they don't have the support of the community around them, and they must focus on being proud of their faith. They need to be vigilant in protecting themselves. Interestingly, there were people in the society of Jude's day who did not consider themselves Jewish or Christian but felt that they were "spiritual but not religious"; they held in disdain people who believed in any sort of organized or Scripture-based religion. This sure sounds familiar to me. I certainly know a lot of people who say they are very spiritual but believe that religion is a hoax or a fantasy.

Now, it is the part about having to continuously work to keep our faith alive, the necessity of remaining vigilant, that made me think of the way I used to move around my hometown as it was descending into poverty and gang activity. I avoided trouble. I didn't walk down alleys. I was careful about the kids I spent time with. If I saw the cops dealing with some situation, I gave them a wide berth. One day, I was up on the roof of a car port, cutting off a corner, where a cop was questioning a group of boys who were older than me, when the cop looked up and saw me. I had gone up an outdoor flight of stairs of an apartment building and climbed onto the roof of the car port, so that I wouldn't have to walk past

those boys and that cop; but the officer got the idea that I was one of them - and that I was escaping. So, he shouted up at me to get my butt down there right now. I of course obeyed. As I came down the stairs, though, I could see the officer look me up and down slowly. My first reaction was that he realized that I was younger than the kids he was talking to. But then he said something like, "Oh, you're a Catholic school kid." Then, I realized that, of course, I was wearing my salt and pepper corduroy pants, my blue button-down shirt, and my V-neck sweater, obviously marking me as a Catholic school student. I almost always wore my uniform, even when I wasn't in school. The officer then waved me off and told me to go do whatever I was doing. Later, I discovered that I could walk right down the street, past gang members, and they wouldn't bother me at all. I simply wasn't one of them and they knew it. The point is that I learned that I didn't need to walk along walls or on the roofs of carports – because my uniform declared that I was a kid of faith. Vigilance, in my case, meant that I made sure everyone knew just what I was. My uniform was my vigilance. I of course had to be careful, but for the most part, I was left alone because they knew I was different.

I'm not saying that my father didn't need to move us to the desert to protect me. Oxnard was becoming a dangerous place. But I was safer than my father realized because of this intriguing form of vigilance. Other kids knew that I

wasn't going to carry a gun or steal cars or even skip school. I was a good kid and my uniform yelled this out at the world. That's why I think it's important for us to be upfront about our faith. Rather than concealing our faith because we sense that the folks around us might not approve, we should be very open about our spiritual beliefs. This gives us confidence, but it also marks us as someone who is not going to appreciate hearing anti-Christian banter. That way we don't get exposed to stuff that will cause us to doubt ourselves. It also gives us a chance to display the patient, caring way a Christian lives – because as Christians, we know that the Holy Spirit is always within us. We don't need to be hateful or angry, like so many people in this world, because we are people of faith.

It doesn't relate to this sermon, but if you were wondering about the name Enoch in the beginning of our quote, this is something that many people have wondered about over the last two millennia. Verses 14 and 15 say this: *It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."* What is this reference to Enoch? This is not a reference to the Bible. He seems to be referencing a Jewish book written around

300 B.C. Enoch is supposedly the great-grandfather of Noah. Enoch is mentioned in Genesis. There are other non-biblical references in the Bible, as it turns out.

What really matters is that Jude writes about people who blaspheme, who disrespectfully deny, things that they don't understand – namely, faith. These are the people we must guard against. We must be vigilant, not by completely separating ourselves from society, no, not at all. We must make it clear that we are not one of them by being upfront about our faith, and by displaying for others what it means to be a Christian. To this day, I wear a cross around my neck so that people know what I am and what I am not. But remember, we all have a uniform, and it's not what we wear. This is our form of vigilance: the way we live. It shows the world who and what we are: the faithful. Please pray with me.

God, it is through you that we can be giving, empathetic people who do not live for the things of this world, but rather for the things of your world. Let us remember that the Kingdom of God is everywhere, that we do not have to die to get there, and that those who live in the Kingdom of God serve the weak, the poor, the sick and disabled, and those who struggle to survive. Help us keep our faith strong. Help us prevent our fellow faithful from drifting away from their belief in God. Let us remain vigilant and never doubt your existence and your benevolence. Let us be a shining example of what it means to be a Christian. Amen.