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Jude Verses 14–15, ESV.

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 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.”

1st Enoch: *The Corruption of Being Godlike.*

There is a very non-biblical book called 1st Enoch. I’m going to talk about it today, not because I think it is scriptural, which it isn’t, but because it was widely read by early Christians. The book is much longer than a typical biblical book, and it is apocalyptic in nature, in that it has to do with the violent punishment of evil people. A key reason that neither Jews nor Christians have traditionally considered it canonical or inspired by God is that it was written during the three hundred years before Jesus was born, during the so-called “silent” period when nothing in Protestant Bibles was written, but it purports to be the prophecies of Enoch, whom the Bible says lived before Noah. In other words, it was written thousands of years after its content was supposed to have happened. It also conflicts in some ways with other texts that we do consider biblical. A major exception to its rejection as canonical is that it is in the Ethiopian Bible, and in fact, the

most complete versions of the Book of 1st Enoch that we have are written in Ge'ez, an ancient version of the Ethiopian language. We believe the original was written in either Hebrew or Aramaic (remember that Jesus spoke Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew). Fragments of the Aramaic version were first discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948. It wasn't until then that we were confident that the Ethiopian version was indeed the same as the Jewish original. There are also a 2nd and a 3rd Enoch, but 1st Enoch is by far the more widely read book. Here is a key reason why we are looking at this book: it appears to be referenced in multiple places in our Bible, although there are no statements that say they come from 1st Enoch. But clearly, 1st Enoch seems to have been read by at least some of the authors of the New Testament – and they appear to have been influenced by it. There are even words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels that are very similar to passages from 1st Enoch. We strongly believe that 1st Enoch, despite it not being scriptural, was widely read by early Christians. Irenaeus, a very early Christian theologian, who lived from 130 to 202 A.D., quotes 1st Enoch in his writings.

Before we look at Enoch and its relationship to Scripture any further, I want to talk about a professor I knew a while back. He did not work at my university. He was a famous academic, in the sense that academics are famous: a community of researchers in his specialty were very familiar with his work, quoted it often, and arranged for him to get various awards. He did do important work, and he was quite gifted. He was also,

like a lot of successful academics, rather prideful. He was not in my area of research, but I knew him reasonably well. I don't want to go on about him. Let me just say that his extremely high opinion of himself caused him at times to be cruel to students. I witnessed this. He worked at a U.S. university, but he was from another country. The day came when he decided that he wanted to relocate back home to his native country, and so he took a faculty position with a university there. After he had returned home and taken up that position, he continued to negotiate rather aggressively. I don't know what he was asking for, whether it was more money, but at any regard, he apparently acted in such an arrogant fashion that he got the attention of the queen of his country. I will get back to this. It did not end well.

Who was Enoch? According to the Bible, he was a real person, but existed before the time of Noah, before the Great Flood. Here is Genesis 5:21-27:

²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

²⁵ When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. ²⁶ Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷ Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.

Note a couple of things. According to this genealogy, Enoch was two generations before Noah. This ends up being important. But equally important, notice that Methuselah died, but Enoch “walked with God” and that “God took him”. This is seen

throughout this very long genealogy: the men all died, except Enoch. The wording in Genesis is usually taken to mean that Enoch was taken up into Heaven without dying, and that since he “*walked with God*”, he was an important prophet. Keep in mind, though, that any story of Enoch and who he was, is not in the Bible. All we have is the non-canonical, pseudepigraphal (meaning written by a false author) Book of Enoch to fill in the details as to who Enoch was.

Jude is a very short biblical book, one chapter. These are verses 14 and 15 and they seem to directly refer to 1st Enoch:

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 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.”

This letter was written to an unknown congregation that was under pressure from false teachers, people who were twisting the emerging faith. The author is trying to set the readers straight about the true teachings of Jesus. The author calls himself “*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*”. This would make Jude a brother of Jesus, if we take this statement literally, since James was a brother of Jesus. Our quote from Jude says that Enoch, born seven generations after Adam, and thus before Noah, made a prophesy that God will come with ten

thousand of his holy ones to execute judgement on people who have committed ungodly deeds.

Now, here is the 9th verse of the 1st Chapter of 1st Enoch:

*⁹ And behold! God comes with ten thousand of ‹His› holy ones
To execute judgement upon all,
And to destroy ‹all› the ungodly:*

*And to convict all flesh
Of all the works ‹of their ungodliness› which they have ungodly committed,
‹And of all the hard things which› ungodly sinners ‹have spoken› against Him.*

Jude very obviously references 1st Enoch. What is Enoch about? The Book of 1st Enoch consists of five distinct books, which are called Sections, and it would take much too long for me to summarize all of them. They do not appear in 1st Enoch in a way that corresponds to the order in which these events would have taken place. Regardless, the first Book within the 1st Book of Enoch is called *The Book of the Watchers*. It tells a very gripping, graphic story about God coming to Earth to deal with evil. Here is a summary. The Watchers, who, by the way, appear to be referred to multiple times in the canonical Book of Daniel, are created by God to guide humanity in godly ways. But they abandon their assignment when they decide that they want to take human women as wives. This results in the birth of a generation of giants on Earth. They also share knowledge of magic and unnatural weapon making with humans, which they are

not supposed to do, and this results in widespread violence and wickedness on Earth. The generation of giants turn out to be monstrous individuals; they are wicked and immoral, and they proceed to corrupt and damage humanity. The work of these evil angels, who have turned against God, is seen as the reason for sin, corruption, and evil on Earth. Enoch, however, is a righteous man, and is chosen by God to be given great wisdom. He serves as a prophet, a conduit between the fallen Watchers, the evil angels, and God, as the Watchers seek forgiveness for their sins. Enoch also receives from God revelations about the nature of the universe and the impending judgement of the Watchers, who are put in prison until the day of the final judgement. The race of giants, however, are destroyed, as God commands the Earth to be flooded in what we know as the Great Flood. The giants are one of the reasons, but not the only one, for Noah's flood.

In 1st Peter, we read what appears to be a reference to the Watchers from 1st Enoch. This is from Chapter 3:

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

This is thought to be a direct reference to 1st Enoch, with the “*spirits in prison*” being the Watchers, who partly cause the Great Flood.

Near the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about the final judgement that will one day come to all those who have broken the laws of God. He talks about how people, by not helping those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, alone, or in prison, did not help God. He’s making the point that we serve God by serving those who are in need. In these words, Jesus repeats a common theme in the Bible, and something that we see in the Book of Watchers in 1st Enoch – that there are times when angels, these heavenly beings that are often sent to Earth as messengers and guides for humans, turn bad. Here are the words of Jesus:

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

This does say that God will punish evil humans the same way he punishes Satan and angels who have abandoned their mission – with an eternal fire.

Here is the underlying theme behind all of this. The Watchers in the 1st Book of Enoch reflect a significant theological tradition that was present among Jewish writers in the centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus and is reflected in many places in the New Testament, that one form of evil is when humans try to

become like God. We are to be humble. When the Watchers produce a generation of giants, when they introduce magic and unearthly weaponry to humans, people become something that they are not meant to be.

Jesus preached many times about the dangers of being prideful, of thinking we are important. At the beginning of Chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus is preaching to a large crowd and to his disciples. These are edited words of Jesus:

² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

From the second century before Christ through the first century A.D., there was an active Jewish movement called the Essenes. We learned a lot about them through the Dead Sea Scrolls. This overlaps with the time in which the Book of Enoch was written and during which a lot of apocalyptic literature was written. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls were many texts that are similar to the Book of Revelation. Scholars call a few of them the New Jerusalem Scroll, the War Scroll, and the Visions of Amram. The point is that during the age of Jesus and during the time during which the New Testament was written, people were very

concerned with the rise of arrogance and pride among humanity. They were confident that a day would come when all people who chose to live that way, who chose to see themselves as somehow above other people, as godlike, would pay for their wickedness. This is why it is a recurrent theme in the Gospels, in the lessons of Jesus Christ.

I want to get back to that professor I talked about earlier, the man who was from another nation and after becoming a well-known academic in the U.S., and then at the peak of his career, moved back to his home country to take a position at a university. He proceeded, I am told, to make some rather strong demands that might have had to do with money, perhaps a grandiose academic title, I am not sure. But in this country, where he returned to, the Queen got involved with some high dollar academic appointments. This professor apparently made rather loud and pompous demands – and it pissed off the Queen. He ended up losing that position. You have to make sure that you don't get the idea that you are somehow a queen yourself. Ultimately, it will not end well.

Here are some verses from the Watchers from 1st Enoch:

*Then wisdom will be given to all the chosen;
and they will all live
and they will sin no more through godlessness or pride.
In the enlightened man there will be light,
and in the wise man, understanding.*

*And they will transgress no more,
nor will they sin in the days of their life,
nor will they die in the heat of God's wrath.
But the number of the days of their life they will complete,
and their life will grow in peace,
and the years of their joy will increase in rejoicing and eternal peace
all the days of their life.*

We do not view this oracle from this fictional depiction of the character of Enoch from Genesis to be scriptural. But it is reflective of what Jesus was trying to teach us, and these words were quite likely known to him. They were probably written in his language and widely read in his community. The point is that God is not looking to punish. God does not revel in human suffering. However, God does want us to live with humility. We are not to strive to be godlike, to put ourselves above other people, to live with pride and arrogance. Living that way can only lead to ruin. And as the professor I knew found out, that ruin can occur in this life. This isn't just a threat of what could happen when we die or at the End Times. It's not a way to live in harmony with other people. It's not a way to live with the joy of being part of humanity. It is indeed humility, kindness, and generosity to others that gives us the most joy here and now.