



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.08.06*

**George W. E. Nickelsburg.** *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch 1, Chapters 1–36; 81–108.* Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. Pp. 662. ISBN: 9780800660741. Hardcover. \$90.00

**George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam.** *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 37–82.* Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 640. ISBN: 9780800698379. Hardcover. \$82.00.

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The year 2001 has proven to be an important moment in the history of the study of Second Temple Judaism. That year witnessed the First Enoch Seminar meeting, an academic gathering from both sides of the Atlantic and beyond of specialists in Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins. The initiative, led by Gabriele Boccaccini, created a place for the study of Second Temple Judaism in its own right, a field that has often been overshadowed by the discipline of biblical studies, sandwiched in between the study of the “Old and New Testaments.” The Enoch Seminar met for the first time in Florence, June 19–23, 2001. Papers were circulated in advance and discussed by its participants. The proceedings were eventually published in the journal *Henoch* (vol. 24.1–2 [2002]). Since then, the Enoch Seminar has multiplied and mutated into various academic encounters and ventures, generating wide interest in the study of Second Temple Judaism.

The year 2001 also saw the publication of the Hermeneia commentary *1 Enoch 1*. This volume includes a commentary and new translation of the Book of Watchers (*1 En.* 1–36), Dream Visions (chs. 83–90), The Epistle of Enoch (chs. 92–105), The Birth of Noah (chs. 106–107), and Another Book of Enoch (ch. 108). The author of this first volume, George W. E. Nickelsburg, who also attended the First Enoch Seminar, makes the following observation on *1 Enoch*: “The sheer size, as well as the contents, historical contexts, and ongoing influence, of this collection make it arguably the most important text in the corpus of Jewish literature from the Hellenistic and Roman periods” (1). Yet until 2001, no up-to-date, exhaustive commentary had been written on this early Jewish work. The publication of the first volume filled part of that void, providing the specialist and interested reader alike with a contemporary commentary impressively broad in its presentation of *1 Enoch* as a whole and detailed in the exposition of its particular contents. The release of the second volume, *1 Enoch 2*, means that the entire work of *1*

*Enoch* has finally been commented on in an accessible way for a wider audience. The second volume includes the participation of James C. VanderKam, who translates and expounds The Book of the Luminaries (chs. 72–82). Nickelsburg deals in this second volume with The Book of Parables (chs. 37–81).

Each constituent writing within *I Enoch* is introduced by a general presentation of its literary and historical aspects, and each passage includes a new translation accompanied by a textual apparatus (with the Ethiopic mercifully transliterated for the non-specialist), philological comments, and exegetical observations. An abundance of references to sources from Second Temple Jewish documents, early rabbinic texts, early Christian writings, classical literature, and Near Eastern works appears throughout the two volumes. Readers will also find the plethora of excursuses on topics ranging from “Angels as Mediators (1:208–210), to “Hell in the Gospel Tradition” (1:556–59), to “Traditions 1 Enoch about Noah and the Flood” (2:278–81) that permeate both volumes extremely helpful and illuminating.

Nickelsburg does not shy away from making historical proposals on the circles and circumstances lying behind this intriguing text (VanderKam does not do this as much, perhaps in part because of the unique nature of the Book of the Luminaries). For example, Nickelsburg relates the myth of the Watchers to the wars of the Diadochoi, which took place from 323–302 BCE (1:25). Accordingly, he reads the myth in a very specific way:

A large cast of Macedonian chieftains corresponds to the giants. These two decades are a period of continued war, bloodshed, and assassination. . . . The image of divine begetting is reminiscent of claims that some of the Diadochoi had gods as their fathers. If this similarity is to the point, the myth would be an answer to these claims in the form of a kind of parody. The author would be saying, “Yes, their fathers were divine; however, they were not gods, but demons—angels who rebelled against the authority of God.” (1:170)

Nickelsburg also suggests that a “community” (the term itself is not precisely defined) stands behind the texts that now form the literary body of *I Enoch*. He sees evidence for this in passages such as *I Enoch* 5:8, 10:1–3; 93:10, and 104:12–13 (1:64). Positing the existence of some kind of Enochic community or communities would, in Nickelsburg’s opinion, help explain how such a composite literary corpus developed and was transmitted over the span of three centuries (1:64). Nevertheless, as he connects the dots between the Book of Watchers and the Parables in the second volume of the commentary, Nickelsburg concludes with some caution: “Like the majority of Jewish texts that have been preserved from antiquity, the Parables derive from a provenance different from any of the persons, groups, sects, or communities known to us by name. Their close relationship to the Book of the Watchers suggests some sort of communal continuity. While we might call this ‘Enochic Judaism,’ the use of the adjective reflects only the fact that all the texts have in common an orientation around revelations ascribed to that ancient patriarch” (2:66).

These points and others have been (and may always be) intensely debated. It is questionable, for example, whether the *myth* of the Watchers should be associated with any particular political event. Myths need not always be equated with particular social conflicts or political

circumstances. Myths, be they the stories of Gilgamesh or the creation accounts of Genesis, can stand on their own feet, and remind us that ancient people were just as human as we are, in search of meaning, coping as finite beings with a world full of unforeseeable circumstances.

The existence of an Enochic community, for its part, has become the nexus of an even more intensive debate within the subfield of Enochic studies. This problem is related to another equally complex issue: Is *1 Enoch* anti-Mosaic or pro-Mosaic? Or should the Enochic tradition be viewed as some kind of supplement to the Mosaic Torah? Nickelsburg notes the exceptional disinterest *1 Enoch* takes in the Mosaic Torah, pointing out that the figure of authoritative revelation in this work is Enoch rather than Moses and that the Enochic wisdom is exalted above Moses' teachings (1:50–52). Nickelsburg also observes that *1 En.* 93:6 represents the only explicit reference to the Mosaic covenant in the entire Enochic corpus (1:446). Other possible references tend to be downplayed (see comments on *1 En.* 99:2, 14 in 1:489, 498), while the poem in *1 En.* 42 is even viewed as an anti-Torah polemic, presuming the invalidity of the Mosaic Torah as divine revelation (2:139; see also 1:50). Yet Nickelsburg also concedes with respect to *1 En.* 1:4 and its reference to God's eschatological descent to Mt. Sinai that "the Torah given on Sinai would be the basis of that judgment" (1:145; see also 1:50). In a similar vein, Nickelsburg states in the second volume that although the Book of Parables makes no reference to the covenant of the Torah, "it is not demonstrable that the author denigrates the role of Moses as lawgiver and executor of the covenant, as is the case in some passages in the rest of *1 Enoch*" (54). The composite and complex nature of the book of *1 Enoch* reminds us of the difficulty of the question at hand. Nickelsburg's comments also remind us to remain open to the possibility that Second Temple Jewish thought was more diverse than previously thought.

The contents of the two-volume commentary are indispensable not only for the study of *1 Enoch* in its own right but essential for the understanding of early Judaism and Christianity. As someone who works with early Christian documents, I have found the commentary to be of immense value. Notably, Nickelsburg contends that the Book of Parables is a non-Christian work written between 40 BCE and 70 CE, now a position shared by most scholars of Second Temple literature (2:62). This finding is of fundamental importance for any New Testament scholar seeking to comprehend the phrase "Son of Man," which is used in reference to Jesus in the canonical gospels but also appears in the Parables (the Son of Man is even equated with the figure of Enoch in *1 En.* 71:14). Possible correspondences and influences on early Christian understandings of the concept are further noted and discussed in 2:70–75.

But the relevance of *1 Enoch* for the understanding of early Christian writings does not end with the obvious terminological parallels between the two. An abundance of other possible connections are discussed in the exegetical, literary, and historical notes of the commentary (see, for example, the excursus on 1 Peter and *1 Enoch* 108 in 1:560). The indexes of primary sources in both volumes are extremely helpful in this regard. At least one prominent theme stands out to this reader: the number of passages *throughout* the corpus of *1 Enoch* that express a universal concern for the fate of humanity. Universal statements in *1 Enoch* include, 1:9; 10:21–22; 48:4–5; 50:1–5; 90:37–38; 91:14; 100:6; 105:1–2, to name a few. This observation is important for correcting an unfortunate aspect of Jewish-Christian relations that has tended to depict Christianity as a "universalistic" faith, concerned with the fate of the nations, in contrast to a Judaism seen as "particularistic" and focused only on its own needs. The fact that not only

Jewish works of a more Hellenistic type written in Greek but also a very apocalyptic and Semitic work like *1 Enoch* could embrace such a universal scope should put to rest persisting false dichotomies that present the unprecedented rise of Christian universalism out of a Jewry chained in its supposedly narrow-minded shackles of nationalistic and particularistic pretensions. Furthermore, the universal statements that describe the effects of evil upon *all* of humanity and the future cleansing of *all* remaining human beings (e.g., *1 En.* 10:21–22) as well as the cosmic depiction of a final judgment awaiting humans and angels alike are, in my opinion, particularly important for Pauline studies, given the discussion noted above concerning the role, if any, of the Mosaic Torah within the Enochic corpus. Paul, in other words, might not have been the first apocalyptic Jew to engage critically with the Mosaic Torah and the ills of humanity and the cosmos, but would have been preceded by those who wrote the traditions contained in *1 Enoch*. This point brings us back to the question of the diversity of early Judaism, including E. P. Sanders' influential rubric of "covenantal nomism," from which he excluded Paul but included *1 Enoch* (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [London: SCM, 1977]). Concerning these matters and more, Nickelsburg has much to offer (see e.g., 1:143, 224, 535; 2:48, 101, etc.).

One horizon this fine commentary does not consider is the world of early Islam and the Quran. The introduction to the first volume includes no less than sixty pages discussing points of contact between *1 Enoch* and Second Temple, rabbinic, New Testament, early Christian, Byzantine, Gnostic, and Manichaean sources as well as the reception of *1 Enoch* by the Ethiopian Church and its reappearance in the West (pp. 68–118). The introduction to the first volume also thoroughly discusses the texts and manuscripts of *1 Enoch* in diverse languages such as Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic (9–20). However, the question of possible points of contact between the Enochic tradition and early Islam is not addressed. But could the Abyssinian Christian Empire standing in the vicinity of the Arabian Peninsula have had any impact on the formation of early Islam? Quite interestingly, early Islamic tradition reports an encounter, dubious as it may be from a historical point of view, between Muhammad's followers and the king of Ethiopia (see Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* in A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* [Oxford University Press, 1955], 146). As the Enoch Seminar continues its expanding academic endeavors to explore not only Second Temple Judaism but also Christian, Rabbinic, and Islamic origins, this issue will have to be examined more carefully. It is hoped that the burgeoning cooperation between the Enoch Seminar and the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS) will bear fruit and open new paths of historical inquiry on the three "Abrahamic traditions."

New discoveries of Ethiopic manuscripts, thanks to the ongoing efforts of Loren Stuckenbruck and Ted Erho, means that the translation and textual apparatus of the Hermeneia commentary of *1 Enoch* will have to be updated one day. In the meantime, researchers in early Judaism and Christianity will want to include this indispensable publication in their libraries. The commentary is not only indispensable for the study of *1 Enoch* but invaluable for the understanding of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity in general. This two-volume set will leave a permanent mark in the field of Enochic studies and will line itself with those other great expositions of *1 Enoch* that have been made in modern times by the likes of Dilmann, Charles, and others.