



Nickelsburg, George W. E.

1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108

Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible

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Gerbern S. Oegema
McGill University
Montreal, QC, Canada, H3A 2A7

This book is the author's life achievement and the definite commentary on *1 Enoch* 1–36; 81–108 for the years to come. After an introduction (1–125), the commentary (129–560) forms the main body of the text, whereas “Referential Codes” (xxvii–xxxviii), a bibliography (561–71), an index on passages and names (573–616), and in total twenty-two excursuses pre- and conclude the work.

The following review will give an impression of both the introduction and the commentary parts of the book. The introduction gives a general overview of scholarship on *1 Enoch* (0.) and a short account of the contents of *1 En.* 1–36; 81–108 (1.), of the available texts and manuscripts (2.), of *1 Enoch* as a literary composition (3.), of the worldview and religious thought in it (4.), of *1 Enoch* in its historical, religious and social contexts (5.), and of the reception history of the chapters 1–36 and 81–108 of the book (6.), before it concludes with currents in the modern study of *1 Enoch* (7.) and an agenda for future study (8.).

Given the overall character of the introduction, it can only be of a general nature and merely list the issues, which are more thoroughly treated in specialized monographs. Furthermore, the complexity of the Enochic literature cannot be accounted fully in any introductory work. The more the author has to be praised for providing us with a systematic overview and summary of all relevant aspects of *1 Enoch* without going too much into details. The latter are given much more attention in the author's thirty-three publications so far on *1 Enoch* (see the bibliography on 567–69).

Nickelsburg follows, what he calls, a literary approach to *1 Enoch*, that is, by first of all concentrating on the surface structure of the text, without, however, neglecting the historical dimension of the work and without following any single method or theory. I believe this to be the best approach anyway, since it allows someone to be as close as possible to what the author of an ancient writing possibly might have meant. The basis for Nickelsburg's translation and commentary is, similarly to S. Uhlig (1984), an eclectic edition of the material available to him, whereas M. A. Knibb (1978) and E. Isaac (1983) took a single manuscript for their editions and translations. This dual option is due to the fact that *1 Enoch* has been preserved in Greek and Ethiopic with fragments in Aramaic, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac, but no authoritative critical edition has been published yet.

Despite the lengthy tradition- and composition-historical process from the fourth century B.C.E. to the turn of the Common Era, the author sees in *1 Enoch* quite a number of unifying religious themes—the coming judgment; a temporal and spatial view of reality; a temporal, cosmic, and ontological dualism; sin and rebellion against God; salvation; the Chosen One; resurrection; covenant; Torah; wisdom; apocalypticism; and eschatology—and briefly and clearly elaborates on each of them.

Although the challenge will be to situate *1 Enoch*'s religious worldview in its historical and social contexts, we cannot expect the author to answer all questions in the changing face of scholarship on Second Temple Judaism, as presently too much is needed to be looked at again, and *1 Enoch* plays a crucial role in all this. The more one appreciates the author's sober, systematic, and literary approach. A strong aspect of the book is also its attention to the reception history of *1 Enoch* in Judaism (Qumran, Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism) and Christianity (New Testament and church fathers) and the whole corpus of pseudepigraphic literature. The introduction, therefore, provides us with a thorough, though not exhaustive, and overall clearly written and up-to-date framework of modern scholarship, in which the verse-by-verse commentary will unfold its full richness.

Taking the subscription before *1 En.* 1:1 as an example, the commentary begins with a translation that, in very good English, tries to stay as close as possible to the Ethiopic text. Notes to the translation give alternative versions in the surviving Greek, Ethiopic, or Aramaic manuscripts. The commentary explains the place of the subscription in the introductory chapters of *1 En.* 1–5 from the very beginning of its transmission history and offers a helpful reference to the relevant paragraphs in his introduction. It refers to Deut 33:1 as the most plausible biblical verse the author of *1 Enoch* may have imitated and mentions other possible parallels, too, both from the Hebrew Bible, the writings found in Qumran, and the New Testament. Thus, one is able to formulate some conclusions on the genre of *1 Enoch* and the intention of its author(s), namely, to present an authoritative

Enochic testament that contains prophecies about the future from the time before Enoch was removed from the earth.

The character of the subscription to the testament is that of a blessing, similar to Deut 33 (and Gen 49 as well), but with some significant differences, and it discloses the fate of Israel on the day of tribulation, the removal of all enemies, and the salvation of the righteous. One of the differences with the aforementioned texts is the reference to the “chosen ones,” which does not appear in Deut 33 and Gen 49 and occurs only here and in *1 En.* 25:5, 37–71; 93:9–10; and 94:4. The “day of tribulation,” however, is a typical biblical expression taken over by the author(s) of *1 Enoch*. The removal of the enemies and the salvation of the righteous is especially found in apocalyptic writings from the (mostly latter part of the) Second Temple period.

The in-depth commentary on this verse (and following verses as well) provides the reader with all the necessary information necessary for a better understanding of *1 Enoch* within the framework of the parameters set in the introduction. Footnotes in the commentary mention further parallels as well as secondary literature, which is either abbreviated, if the title can be found in the bibliography, or given in full, if it is only referred to here but not found in the bibliography.

In sum, we are dealing here with the life achievement of one of the very few real specialists on *1 Enoch*, who has managed to put all his knowledge into a commentary, thus making it available to a wide audience and a future generation of scholarship. It is clearly written, systematically structured, up to date, easy to use, and a monument of critical, literary, and historical scholarship, a compliment to the Hermeneia series. It avoids the fashionable use of methodologies but, instead, treats us with an abundance of textual analyses, helpful observations, and a richness of tradition- and religion-historical parallel material that makes the study of Second Temple Judaism so rewarding. It deserves its place on the bookshelves of all academic institutions in the study of religions in antiquity, as it goes far beyond the field of biblical studies. A great work.