



**Nickelsburg, George W. E.**

***I 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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The appearance of Nickelsburg's learned commentary on *I Enoch*, here as the first of two volumes, is welcome. Whereas the second volume, which still awaits publication, will be devoted to the Similitudes or Parables (chs. 37–71) and to the main part of Astronomical Book (chs. 72–82), this first volume covers the rest: (1) the *Book of Watchers* (chs. 1–36: comprised of separate traditions in chs. 1–5; 6–11; 12–16; 17–19; and 20–36), (2) the testamentary end of the Astronomical Book or Book of the Luminaries (81:1–82:4ab), (3) the Book of Dreams (chs. 83–84 and 85–90, the Animal Apocalypse), (4) a summons by Enoch of his children in testamentary form (91:1–10, 18–19), (5) the Apocalypse of Weeks (93:1–10; 91:11–17), (6) the Epistle of Enoch (92:1–5; 93:11–105:2), (7) the Birth of Noah (chs. 106–107), and (8) a final eschatological “book” attributed to Enoch (ch. 108). The commentary proper is lengthy: it extends to over four hundred pages (129–560) that, except for the English translation of the texts, are organized in two columns. Interspersed within the commentary are no less than twenty-two excursuses on various topics that offer discussions of topics and motifs that locate *I Enoch* within wider streams of tradition history.

The detailed discussion of the commentary is preceded by a lengthy introduction (1–125). This prolegomenon to the rest of the volume consists of several areas. First, it provides Nickelsburg's linguistic, textual, literary, and historical—with respect to composition and reception of the materials—framework for the commentary (1–70). Second, and significantly, the introduction includes a section that documents the reception of *I Enoch* traditions in later Jewish and Christian literature (71–108) and an overview of scholarly

study since the book's reintroduction to the West in the late eighteenth century (109–24). Third, Nickelsburg offers some general comments regarding directions the future study of *I Enoch* might take (125).

In this introduction readers will be able to gain insight into the multidimensional nature of *I Enoch* in every way. Anyone writing a commentary concerned with such a complex “document” is faced with an enormously complex task, especially given the number of originally independent literary pieces that have been combined at various stages to form the *I Enoch* collection. How does one comment on a collection of so many apparently diverse compositions brought together because they share some cosmological and eschatological themes and, above all, “Enoch” as the primary visionary? Nickelsburg is well aware of the problem, and the commentary illustrates the degree to which he has been concerned with it. To begin with, Nickelsburg's choice of what to include in each of the two volumes reveals something of his own perspective. The present volume does away with—and rightly so—the more conventional notion that *I Enoch* consists of five main compositions (chs. 1–36, 37–71, 72–82, 83–90, and 91–105), among which other written traditions have been interspersed and to which two appendices are attached (chs. 106–107 and 108). And so, *I Enoch I* addresses what Nickelsburg regards as those core documents and traditions that gave shape to *I Enoch* in its early stages. Though one might be tempted to think that attempts to weld *I Enoch* into a literary unit are doomed to failure, Nickelsburg here offers an approach that may enable one to consider how “*I Enoch*” might be understood in a way that allows for a degree of coherence. Beginning with the Book of Watchers, Nickelsburg has taken a skeletal, testamentary framework that, he argues, explains how several of the originally distinct larger compositions in *I Enoch* were threaded with one another.

Nickelsburg proposes the following sequential stages in the development of *I Enoch* (25–26): (1) independent composition of the Book of the Luminaries—a lengthier Aramaic version behind the Ethiopic version in chapters 72–82—and the paraphrase of Gen 6 in *I En.* 6–11 about the heavenly rebellion and fall of the “watchers”; (2) the composition of a Shemihazah myth in chapters 12–16, which integrates into the story about the fallen angels the figure of Enoch (cf. Gen 5:21–24), who, having ascended, functions as a prophet commissioned to announce their doom; (3) the addition of chapters 17–19, which places the punishment of the fallen angels within the framework of cosmological revelations given to the ascended Enoch as he journeys to the northwest; (4) the addition of chapters 20–36, in which the ascended Enoch travels to the east, where he sees the locales of punishment not only of the fallen angels but also of the wicked angels; (5) the addition of chapters 1–5, which presupposes an interest in chapters 20–36 in the eschatological fate of humans and, given its allusions to Deut 33 in chapter 1, may be said to have given the growing collection thus far (with or without chs. 6–11) a

testamentary shape (Nickelsburg holds it possible that the addition of chapters 1–5 would have coincided with a testamentary *inclusio* [absent at ch. 36] in 81:1–3, or perhaps even the other testamentary materials in 81:5–82:3 and in chapters 91, 94, and 104–105; arguing against the assumption that the Book of Watchers existed as a separate literary unit, Nickelsburg makes his case on the basis of the Dead Sea materials: it is not impossible that the earliest manuscripts of *1 Enoch*, 4QEn<sup>a,b</sup>, contained more materials than simply the Book of Watchers [chs. 1–36], while it is likewise not impossible that 4QEn<sup>g</sup>, which contains material from chapters 91–94, would have begun with 91:1); (6) the addition of the Animal Apocalypse (chs. 85–90), which seems familiar with the Book of Watchers and seems to presuppose a tradition about Enoch’s ascent and descent and viewing of humanity’s deeds; (7) the addition of remaining parts of chapters 92–105 (the so-called Epistle of Enoch), in order to provide instructional content to Enoch’s visions; (8) the addition of chapters 106–107, concerned with the Birth of Noah, in order to provide a portrait of a prototype of the righteous one who would survive the great judgment (based on a flood typology at work in chs. 6–11)—after this, further additions of materials no longer have the testamentary framework in view; (9) the addition of the Book of the Luminaries, in compressed form, after chapter 36, in order to give content to the instructions touched on in 33:3–4 and chapters 34–36; (10) the insertion of the Book of Parables, after chapter 36 and before the Book of the Luminaries, perhaps because of its numerous overlaps with themes in chapters 1–36; and (11) the addition of chapter 108 at the end of the collection as a book written by Enoch for Methuselah and his offspring.

In addition to the Aramaic Enochic manuscripts 4QEn<sup>a,b,g</sup> (see [5] above), the Herodian manuscript 4QEn<sup>c</sup> plays an important role in Nickelsburg’s reconstruction, as it contains fragments from the Book of Watchers, Animal Apocalypse, Epistle of Enoch, and Birth of Noah (corresponding to stages 1–7 above). With the exception of chapter 108 and chapters 83–84 (see below), the volume is primarily concerned with *1 Enoch* materials that, as he has argued, shaped or grew around the Enochic testament.

This reconstruction alone demonstrates that the commentary could only have been produced by a mature scholar who has worked on the materials, taking into account a multiplicity of issues—text-, source-, and literary-critical—for a long time. Convinced that the volume will become something of a “classic” in *1 Enoch*—perhaps even more generally, early Jewish—studies, the present reviewer nonetheless finds reason to question some aspects of Nickelsburg’s reconstruction. In particular, Nickelsburg’s analysis takes *1 En.* 1–108, built around a testamentary framework, as a point of departure. At times, therefore, it seems that he strains to make the silence of the earliest manuscript evidence to fit into his scheme. One example of this is his view of the first vision of the Book of Dreams (chs. 83–84) which, he argues, was probably added to the Enochic corpus after the Birth of Noah and the Book of Parables had already become part

of the collection, since he thinks this section was influenced by chapters 1–11, 106–107, and 65. He thus seems to oblige himself to argue for that 4QEn<sup>c</sup> (= 4Q204) did not originally contain any part of chapters 83–84 (24). In addition to being an argument from silence, Nickelsburg’s categorical view that “No Aramaic MS. Preserves any part of the first vision” (24) is misleading. In fact, the manuscript 4QEnGiants<sup>a</sup> (= 4Q203), which Nickelsburg with Milik regards as part of the same manuscript as 4QEn<sup>c</sup>, preserves two fragments (9 and 10) that overlap in content with Enoch’s prayer in *1 En.* 84:2–4, so much so that Knibb (*The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1978], 1:10 and 193–95) has raised the possibility that there may be a literary relationship between the texts. Though the latter view is questionable, it remains curious why Nickelsburg has not referred to the 4Q204 fragments at all when commenting on the first vision (23–24, 334, 349).

Another example is apparent in Nickelsburg’s discussion of the Greek Chester Beatty papyrus, which, copied apart from other sections of *1 Enoch*, preserves a large part of the Epistle of Enoch plus the Birth of Noah (*1 En.* 97:6–107:3). Appealing to affinities in the Epistle with chapters 1–36 and 81, Nickelsburg maintains that the manuscript evidence here should not lead to the view that chapters 92–105 were composed as an isolated document (26).

A final example may be seen in Nickelsburg’s handling of the oldest of the manuscripts preserving portions of the Book of Watchers, 4QEn<sup>a</sup>, which preserves parts of chapters 1–10, possibly 12. The evidence of the manuscripts serves Nickelsburg’s reconstruction of the early growth of *1 Enoch* in that chapters 1–5 are here already inserted at the beginning of the Book of Watchers in order to create a testamentary frame. Here Nickelsburg’s treatment of the manuscript is uneven. Though he gives the impression of agreeing with Milik’s view that the manuscript was a copy of a manuscript dating back at least to the third century B.C.E. (9), his discussion of the addition of chapters 1–5 in the commentary (170) flatly suggests that all stages of growth in the Book of Watchers “would have taken place before the writing of 4QEn<sup>a</sup> in the first part of the second century B.C.E.” (293). Although Nickelsburg is dealing with the question of a *terminus ad quem*, the observations by Milik about the manuscript have not been integrated into the temporal context in which he discusses the Book of Watchers. This is to say nothing of the fact that the most recently published fragments of 4QEn<sup>a</sup>, which would have come from portions of Book of Watchers subsequent to chapter 10, do not contain any words whatsoever that place them within any previously known texts and versions of the book. In other words, after chapter 10 4QEn<sup>a</sup> may very well have contained a recension that differs somewhat, or even markedly, from what is otherwise preserved (see Stuckenbruck in DJD 36:3–9). If this is true, then Nickelsburg’s inferences from the existence of

chapters 1–5 about the content and nature of the rest of the Book of Watchers (esp. 25, 132) should be greeted with caution.

The examples just mentioned raise a further methodological problem that does not seem to have been sufficiently reflected upon in the commentary: What constitutes “influence,” and how, if it exists, is it to be construed? Contra Nickelsburg, one could argue, first, that similarities could in principle work in the other direction (e.g., chs. 83–84 may have been presupposed in chapters 106–107 or chapter 65) and, second, that influence does not necessarily have to be of an inner-literary nature (e.g., so that if 92–105 reflect ideas from the Book of Watchers, this does not have to be because these documents have been included within the same Enochic corpus). More broadly, I am not convinced that Nickelsburg’s correct observation that Deut 33 is alluded to in the opening chapter of the Book of Watchers (*I En.* 1:1–2; see p. 135) bears enough weight for him to infer that the latter was therefore written to provide the document with a testamentary opening.

A further problem in the commentary is posed by the degree to which the Book of Giants materials have been integrated into the discussion. Nickelsburg is very aware of the recent publications of the manuscripts by Puech and Stuckenbruck (DJD 31 and 36) and is to be credited with having opened the way for their inclusion, at least as evidence for early Enochic tradition, in the commentary (see 10–11 and 172–73). This is especially appropriate given Nickelsburg’s agreement with Milik that the Book of Giants was copied alongside the other *I Enoch* compositions in 4QEn<sup>c</sup>. However, in a number of places in the commentary, the Book of Giants curiously goes ignored where the discussion could have benefited considerably. In addition to the point raised about chapters 83–84 above, several examples may be pointed out. (1) The throne vision in the Book of Giants (4Q530; see Puech DJD, 31:28–38), despite some shared details, is not included among the parallels to the theophanic vision in *I En.* 14 (68, 254–56) and is not, alongside Dan 7:9–13 in relation to the vision of judgment, covered in the Animal Apocalypse (see *I En.* 90:14–22; so Nickelsburg, 396–403). (2) Despite references to other early Jewish literature regarding the functions of “scribes,” “sages,” and “seers,” Nickelsburg’s observations about Enoch as “scribe” are limited to the *I Enoch* Enochic literature (65–67); thus no mention is made of the Book of Giants’ designation of Enoch as “scribe of distinction/interpretation” (see 4Q530 frg. 2 col. ii + 6–12, lines 14, 22; 4Q203 frg. 8, line 4). (3) In the commentary on 9:10 (see 205, 213), Nickelsburg says nothing about the fact that part of the verse, as preserved in Greek and Ethiopic, overlaps almost exactly with the Aramaic text in the Book of Giants (see Puech in DJD 31:xx), even though Milik drew attention to this in his publication of Enoch Aramaic fragments in 1976 (*The Book of Enoch* [Oxford: Clarendon], 230). (4) In commenting on the association of Raphael with the binding motif (221; on 10:4–6), Nickelsburg, while rightly drawing attention to Tob 8:3, makes no reference to the Book of Giants at 4Q203

fragment 8, in which just such a link arguably occurs. (5) Since the Book of Giants has (understandably) not been included within the commentary on *I Enoch* proper, absence of any reference to this work in the section “1 Enoch in the Ongoing Tradition” is conspicuous. These oversights may well be explained by the ambiguous status of the Book of Giants in relation to the *I Enoch* compositions: on the one hand, it was copied (so Nickelsburg and Milik) within a manuscript containing portions of *I Enoch*, while, on the other hand, it is not part of *I Enoch* as it has come to us (certainly not as a composition framed as a testament!). Since further study of the Book of Giants promises to shed significant light on the early Enoch tradition, on both its growth and reception, it may well be added to Nickelsburg’s “Agenda for Future Study” (125).

On a number of other matters, a few examples of further problems and omissions in Nickelsburg’s argument may be briefly noted: (1) The claim (esp. 38; see also 150–58) that Book of Watchers chapter 2 emphasizes the orderly obedience of the creation, just as is the case throughout the Book of the Luminaries, is misleading. At 80:2–6, the delays of seasons and the wandering astray of stars are also featured; the contrast between this and *I En. 2* is not mentioned. (2) It is not clear that the blinding of Israel in the Animal Apocalypse is due to the ongoing influence of the fallen angels (38, 381), since according to 88:1–3 these were bound and hurled into the regions below the earth and kept there until their judgment narrated in 90:23–24. (3) The possibility of *neph(a/i)lim*, as a designation for the giants, meaning “abortions” is not considered (cf. *Gen. Rab.* 26:7). (4) The possibility that *-y-* in the fallen angels’ names refers to a genitive rather than to a first-person singular pronominal suffix (181) is not carried over (223) into a possible interpretation of “Gabriel” as “man of God.” (5) The early reception history of the word *mamzer* (behind  $\mu\alpha\zeta\eta\rho\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  in Codex Panopolitanus to 10:9) in the Dead Sea Scrolls as a designation for the giants is not mentioned (223). (6) In the comment on 32:6 Nickelsburg does not address the problem of why it is that allusion to the Adam and Eve figures has them driven away from Paradise, instead focusing on the beneficial wisdom with which they were endowed. In view of the derivation of evil from the rebellious angels prominent elsewhere in the Book of Watchers, it would have been appropriate to raise the question of whether or not the author of chapter 32 would have known (and mitigated) another explanation.

The above comments should not be understood as an attempt to detract from the immense value of the first volume of Nickelsburg’s commentary on *I Enoch*. This is undoubtedly a landmark study in early Enochic tradition and, indeed, it could be said, in the study of Judaism of the Second Temple period. Nickelsburg has succeeded in commenting with linguistic and historical acumen on one of the most complex collections of documents preserved to us from Jewish antiquity. The breadth of his linguistic skills and his wide knowledge of Jewish, Greek, and Christian tradition lend an exemplary balance to his

discussions of passage after passage on almost every page. This is a work the value of which will continue to be discovered in the years ahead. Based on this achievement, scholars and students can only look forward to the appearance of the second volume.