CHAPTER FIVE

THE BOOK OF ENOCH IN THE LIGHT OF THE QUMRAN WISDOM LITERATURE

I

The *Book of Watchers* is now regarded as the earliest apocalypse that we possess, and the *Book of Enoch* as a whole as a prime example of the apocalyptic genre, a major source for our understanding of apocalypticism. The apocalyptic genre is, of course, traditionally regarded as representing a continuation of prophecy, and the *Book of Enoch* does make use of prophetic genres in a variety of ways. It is also of interest to note that the quotation of 1:9 in Jude 14–15 is introduced by the statement that Enoch “prophesied” about the heretics condemned by Jude, and that in Ethiopian tradition of a much later age Enoch is called the first of the prophets. But in the *Book of Enoch* itself, Enoch is described as a scribe and a wise man, and his writings as the source of wisdom, and although the book cannot in any sense be regarded as a conventional wisdom book, this inevitably raises the question of the relationship of the book to ‘wisdom’ and the wisdom literature. Within the last decade Randall Argall and Ben Wright have attempted to answer this question by comparing *1 Enoch* with Sirach. Thus in a recent monograph, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment*, Argall argued that there are similarities in the way *1 Enoch* and Sirach treat the themes of revelation, creation, and judgment, and “that their respective views were formulated, at least in part, over against one another.”¹ Ben Wright has taken views like this further and has argued that Ben Sira actively took the side of the temple priests in polemical opposition against those, such as the authors of the *Book of Watchers*, who criticized them.²


² Benjamin G. Wright, “‘Fear the Lord and Honour the Priest.’ Ben Sira as Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood,” in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (ed. Pancratius C. Beentjes; BZAW 255; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 189–222.
Argall, has drawn attention to a number of passages in Sirach that he believes were directly aimed at the views represented in 1 Enoch, such as Sirach 34:1–8 or 3:21–24,

Neither seek what is too difficult for you, 
nor investigate what is beyond your power. 
Reflect upon what you have been commanded, 
for what is hidden is not your concern. 
Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you, 
for more than you can understand has been shown you. 
For their conceit has led many astray, 
and wrong opinion has impaired their judgement (Sir 3:21–24, NRSV).

Boccacini has similarly spoken of a “bitter debate” being reflected in Sirach against the Apocalyptic movement.3 It may be thought, however, that this is only part of the answer.

Since the work of von Rad4 and, subsequently, of Müller,5 the apocalyptic genre has frequently been regarded as having its roots in mantic wisdom. In relation to the Book of Enoch, VanderKam in particular has drawn attention to parallels between the Enochic traditions and the mantic traditions of Mesopotamia. In the light of the widely accepted view that the figure of Enoch incorporates features associated with Enmeduranki of Sippar, who was initiated into the secret of the gods and was the founder of the guild of diviners (the baru), VanderKam argued that this hardly represented an independent development.6 However Andreas Bedenbender has argued that although the figure of Enoch has been influenced by the traditions associated with Enmeduranki, in the case of Enoch—just as in Daniel—there is no clear resemblance to mantic wisdom. He claimed that VanderKam’s analysis of the technique of the mantic sages in Babylon showed more

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