CHAPTER SIX

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN 1 ENOCH 17–19

In an important monograph entitled *Asking for a Meaning*, Lars Hartman demonstrated that *1 Enoch* 1–5 had “grow[n] out of a soil consisting of an interpreted Old Testament,”¹ and he went on to show how the meaning of the text was bound up with recognition of it as interpretation of the biblical material on which it drew. What Lars Hartman showed in the case of *1 Enoch* 1–5 is of course more generally true of the *Book of Enoch*, namely that in many respects it represents a form of interpretation, and my purpose in what follows is to see what light is cast on the meaning of another passage in the book, chapters 17–19, by its use of scripture. In chapters 17–19, as elsewhere throughout *1 Enoch*, there are no explicit quotations from the Hebrew Bible, but it is not hard to recognise numerous allusions to passages in the Hebrew Bible and numerous parallel passages, and the commentaries are full of such references; the difficulty is to know whether we have to do with a conscious allusion, unconscious use of parallel phraseology, or merely an interesting parallel.² This problem is linked to the fact that it is hard to determine the extent to which we have exact quotation from the biblical text because for the most part we have to do only with a translation into Greek of the Aramaic original³ or (for some three of the five sections of which the book was ultimately composed) with a daughter translation of the Greek, the Ethiopic version.⁴ Notwithstanding these

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¹ Lars Hartman, *Asking for a Meaning: A Study of 1 Enoch 1–5* (ConBNT 12; Lund: Gleerup, 1979), 37–38; see also his earlier study, *Prophecy Interpreted* (ConBNT 1; Lund: Gleerup, 1966).

² On the reasons for the lack of explicit quotation in *1 Enoch* and the difficulty of determining the level of dependence, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 57.

³ I assume that the *Parables* were composed in Aramaic like the other parts of *1 Enoch*, although it is possible that the *Parables* were composed in Hebrew.

uncertainties, there seems to be a sufficient volume of evidence in
1 Enoch 17–19 to justify an enquiry into its use of scripture.

1 Enoch 17–19 gives an account of Enoch’s first journey through the
cosmos and reaches its climax in the description of the mountain that
reached to heaven, like the throne of God (18:8), and of the prison
for the stars that transgressed the Lord’s command and for the angels
who were promiscuous with the women (18:12–19:2). The account of
the journey has no introduction and is attached quite abruptly to the
report of Enoch’s ascent to the throne room of God and of the mes-
gage of judgement on the watchers that he received there (chapters
14–16). This is one of several places within the Book of Watchers where
there is an obvious literary seam, but the lack of any introduction or
transitional passage means that the purpose of chapters 17–19 within
the context of the Book of Watchers has to be inferred from their contents.
I have argued elsewhere that the account of the journey is intended as
a revelation of the true mysteries in contrast to the “worthless mystery”
that the watchers had revealed to mankind, through which evil (τὰ κακά)
had been introduced into the world (16:3).5

The abruptness of the transition between chapters (6)14–16 and
chapters 17–19 is heightened by the fact that in the opening sentence
(17:1) the subject is unspecified: “And they took and brought6 me to a
place where those who were there were like burning fire, and whenever
they wished, they appeared as men.” VanderKam has argued that the
reference is to the winds and other natural phenomena that according
to 14:8 carried Enoch up to heaven. He bases this view on the supposi-
tion that the same verb is used in 14:8 and 17:1, and on the fact that
the angels lead Enoch, not lift him up, and he concludes that, if this
view is right, “chapters 17–36 are meant to be the continuation of the
action that begins in chapter 14.”7 This last point seems true, whether
VanderKam’s interpretation of 17:1 is right or not. But while the same
verb (naś’a) is used in the Ethiopic of both 14:8 and 17:1, VanderKam

5 See Michael A. Knibb, “The Book of Enoch in the Light of the Qumran Wisdom
Literature,” in Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition
6 Eth does not have “and brought.” The text could also be translated “I was taken
and brought,” but that still leaves open the question of the identity of those who
escorted Enoch.
7 James C. VanderKam, Enoch: A Man for All Generations (Studies on Personalities of
the Old Testament; Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press,
1995), 50.