CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE PARABLES OF ENOCH

The Book of Parables (mashaf zamesale), the title used in 1 En. 68:1 for chaps. 37–71 (or for an earlier version of this section), appears at first sight to have a simple structure and literary form. The overarching genre of the text is that of a report of an otherworldly journey, and the material, after an introduction (chap. 37), is clearly divided by headings and colophons1 into three “parables” (38:1–44:1; 45:1–57:3; 58:1–69:29). Chaps. 70–71, which bring the section to a conclusion, then describe Enoch’s ascent to heaven and identification as Son of Man. So much is obvious, but closer inspection suggests that the structure and literary form of the Book of Parables are not quite so straightforward.

The Book of Parables forms some of the latest material to be included in the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, and it is apparent that the authors drew their inspiration from the sections of 1 Enoch that were already in existence, particularly the Book of the Watchers, on which the Book of Parables to some extent seems consciously modeled. The text is headed “The second vision which he saw,”2 and this suggests that the Book of Parables was intended as a continuation of the previous “vision” that Enoch had seen (cf. 1:2).3 More particularly, the use of the term ‘parable’ (mesale) to describe the contents of this section (see 37:5; 38:1; 45:1; 57:3; 58:1; 69:29) seems to have its obvious point of reference in 1:2,4 although a wider background for its use is provided by the occurrence of the Hebrew term mashal in the Balaam narratives (cf., e.g., Num 23:7, 18) and in prophetic texts (cf., e.g., Ezek 17:2; 20:49; Mic 2:4). In relation to content, there are frequent references in the Parables to the story of

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1 There is no colophon at the end of the first parable (chap. 44).
2 Cf. 1 En. 39:4, “and there I saw another vision.”
3 Milik speaks of a contrast with the “first vision,” but identifies the “first vision” with “the whole collection of revelations contained in the Aramaic and Greek Enochic Pentateuch in two volumes: the Book of the Watchers, the Book of Giants, the Book of Dreams, the Epistle of Enoch in the first volume, and the Astronomical Book in the second volume.” See Józef T. Milik, The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 89.
4 In the Aramaic and the Greek, but not in the Ethiopic.
the *Watchers*, whose punishment at the final judgment is associated with that of “the kings and the mighty,” the opponents of the group that lies behind the *Book of Parables*. Above all, although the first parable reports, as if it were a new event, that clouds and a storm wind carried Enoch off to heaven (39:3; cf. 52:1), Enoch’s journey around the heavenly regions and the cosmos is effectively presented as a continuation of the journey described in the second half of the *Book of the Watchers* (chaps. 17–36). Thus the literary form of the *Book of Parables* continues that of the *Book of the Watchers*.

The account of Enoch’s otherworldly journey in chaps. 17–36, which follows, without an introduction, immediately on the account of Enoch’s ascent to heaven in 14:8–16:4, is characterized by repeated references to the movement of Enoch around heaven and by descriptions of the sights he sees. The narrative refers frequently to Enoch going or being taken to a different place and contains frequent descriptions of what he saw that are introduced by the phrases “and I saw (there)” or “and he showed me.” But in addition to the widespread use of verbs referring to movement and to visionary experience, some of the individual units of which the narrative is composed have a common form, which is illustrated by chap. 23: Enoch reports that he went to another place (23:1); he describes what he sees (23:2); he asks the angel who accompanies him to explain the significance of what he has seen (23:3); the angel gives him an explanation (23:4). In practice, most of the examples are more complex than this, but the fourfold pattern, notwithstanding all the variation, is used repeatedly in chaps. 17–36, and particularly in 21–36.

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5 The return of Enoch to earth is not reported until the end of the *Astronomical Book* (81:5–10).
6 1 En. 17:5; 18:6; 21:1, 7; 22:1; 23:1; 24:1; 26:1; 28:1; 29:1; 30:3; 32:2–3; 33:1; 34:1; 35; 36:1, 2. See also 14:9, 10, 13, 25.
7 1 En. 17:1, 2, 4.
8 1 En. 17:3, 6, 7, 8; 18:1 (bis), 2 (bis), 3, 4, 5 (ter), 9, 10, 11 (bis), 12, 13; 19:3; 21:2, 3, 7 (ter); 22:5; 23:2; 24:2; 26:1, 2, 3; 28:1; 29:2; 30:1, 2, 3; 31:1, 2; 32:1, 3; 33:1, 2, 3; 34:1, 2; 35; 36:1, 2, 4; cf. 23:4; 25:3. See also 14:14, 18.
9 1 En. 22:1; 24:1; 33:3, 4.