FOUR WORLDS THAT ARE “OTHER” IN THE Enochic BOOK OF PARABLES

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For the purposes of this paper, I take “otherworld” to refer to those places that are different from the familiar, inhabited worlds that are occupied by the author of this text and his audience—different from that world to the point of being “other than” it. There are four such worlds that are “other.”

1. Heaven, where God dwells together with His entourage, including the Son of Man/ Chosen One/ Righteous One/ Anointed One, and where the righteous and holy dead dwell.
2. Heaven, or the sky, the location of the astronomical and meteorological elements.
3. Those parts of the terrestrial disk that are also removed from human access and in which the places of judgment and punishment exist now and will exist in the future.
4. Earth as it will be transformed into the place of blessing for the righteous.

All of these worlds are “other” in that they are qualitatively different from, and in a certain sense the very opposite of, the phenomenal world of the author and his audience, and in that they are inaccessible to this audience. Paradoxically, however, they are accessible to the seer, allegedly Enoch of old, but in reality the author of the text. From one point of view, the Enochic Book of Parables is, from start to finish, an account of Enoch’s journeys through these other worlds.

My discussion will touch on the following issues:

1. How does the seer describe these other worlds?
2. How are these other worlds related, positively or negatively, to the world of the author and his audience? That is, how do they reflect the circumstances and problems of the author’s world?
3. How do these worlds transform and ameliorate these circumstances and problems?

My thesis is as follows: For the author and his audience, the present time and world are marked by violence, oppression, and chaos. The coming judgment will change this. Meanwhile, the author had revealed to him, and he reveals to his audience, other worlds, where order rules rather than chaos, where God’s authority is honoured and God’s will is done, and where the mechanisms of judgment are in place or are being prepared to reverse the ills of this world and the present time.

1. The Problem with “this World”: The Kings and the Mighty Who Possess the Earth, the Demons that Lead Humanity Astray, and Wrongful Death

The Book of Parables provides relatively little information about the world in which its author and audience live. The allusions that do occur centre primarily around the activity of “the kings and the mighty (and the exalted / the strong) (and those) who possess the earth.” Variations on the formula occur fourteen times in the book (38:4; 46:4–6; 48:8; 53:5; 54:2; 55:4; 62:1, 3, 6, 9; 63:1, 12; and 67:8, 12 in a Noachic interpolation). The evil character of these individuals is evident from the fact that in all but one instance (55:4) their judgment and ultimate destruction is the subject of the discussion. The exact nature of their sin is, for the most part, vague. The one specific reference is the following:

These are they who †judge† the stars of heaven, and raise their hands against the Most High, and tread upon the earth and dwell on it. All their deeds manifest unrighteousness, and their power (rests) on their wealth. Their faith is in the gods they have made with their hands, and they deny the name of the Lord of Spirits. And they persecute the houses of his congregation, and the faithful who depend on the name of the Lord of Spirits (46:7–8).

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1 Translations of 1 Enoch are the author’s, drawn from G.W.E. Nickelsburg and J.C. VanderKam, 1 Enoch: A New Translation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

2 In 55:4 the “mighty kings who dwell on the earth” are told that they will witness how “my Chosen One” will judge the demon Azazel and his associates.