1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 1-36, 81-108 (Hermeneia: a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible) by George W. E. Nickelsburg

Sets The Standard For Study Of This Crucial, But Neglected Book

The first commentary on this work since 1773 1 Enoch is one of the most intriguing books in the Pseudepigrapha (Israelite works outside the Hebrew canon). It was originally written in Aramaic and is comprised of several smaller works, incorporating traditions from the three centuries before the Common Era. Employing the name of the ancient patriarch Enoch, the Aramaic text was translated into Greek and then into Ethiopic. But as a whole, it is a classic example of revelatory (apocalyptic) literature and an important collection of Jewish literature from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This volume represents the culmination of three decades’ work on the Book of 1 Enoch for Nickelsburg. He provides detailed commentary on each passage in chaps. 1–36 and 81–108, and an introduction to the full work. The introduction includes sections on overviews of each of the smaller collections, texts and manuscripts, literary aspects, worldview and religious thought, the history of ideas and social contexts, usage in later Jewish and Christian literatures, and a survey of the modern study of the book. (Volume 2 will cover chaps. 37–80 and will be written by Nickelsburg and James VanderKam.)

My Personal Review:
George Nickelsburg has spent more than thirty years working with 1 Enoch and related texts from the Second Temple era. If anyone knows more about 1 Enoch than Nickelsburg, I have no idea who it is.

This book represents the culmination to date of his lifetime’s scholarship. For all its painstaking detail, the introductory material is extremely readable
and very informative. It engages all the major issues of provenance, theme, and so forth, allowing for areas of disagreement without polemic.

The bulk of the book covers the text of 1 Enoch (note that this volume only deals with portions of 1 Enoch; another volume is forthcoming on the rest) in its various linguistic remnants. Since few people are fluent in Coptic, Greek and Aramaic as Nickelsburg is, most will gladly rely on his expertise in these areas.

This should be read in connection with his very readable English translation, 1 Enoch: A New Translation; Based on the Hermeneia Commentary. For those interested in more, the work of scholars such as Gabriele Boccaccini Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism continues where Nickelsburg leaves off. Another good connecting point is Richard Horsley's recent volume, Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea.

We should all be grateful to Nickelsburg for the enormous work that this volume represents.

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