

REDISCOVERING ENOCH

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The message in the *Book of Enoch* reads a lot like the Hebrew prophets in the Bible. Enoch's message is a mixture of rebuke for sin and exhortation to repentance. His message includes descriptions of God's coming judgment upon the wicked and the future blessings upon his people. Also like some, but not all of the Hebrew prophets, we are told Enoch wrote his message down.

There is an interesting parallel between the life of Enoch, related in his book, and the subsequent history of the book itself. We are told Enoch was secluded from mankind for a period of time. Then, after being called to become a preacher, Enoch reappeared as a powerful figure on the world scene. As we will see, the *Book of Enoch* has been through a similar process of reappearance in recent times.

Written for the Last Generation

For many centuries, the *Book of Enoch* was in a period of virtual seclusion. The book is now reemerging on the world stage with an important message undiminished by time. Amazingly, the course of the history of this book has nicely lined up with a prediction in the first few verses of its very first chapter. In the first chapter of the *Book of Enoch*, it is stated Enoch's book was not being written for the people living in his day, or even those who would immediately follow. No, from its beginning the *Book of Enoch* was purposed to have a much bigger impact. Enoch's book was written for the sake of the generation that would be living at the end of time. Like a kind of time-capsule set aside for the last generation, the *Book of Enoch* has again come to light in our day and is available for any who wish to discover its treasures.

To understand how all this happened we need to take a closer look at the amazing history of the *Book of Enoch*, as it has passed through distinct phases of popularity, seclusion, and finally reemergence.

Accepted in the Time of Christ

For many Jews in Israel at the time of Christ the *Book of Enoch* was held in high regard. This fact has been confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the late 1940's. At that time approximately 800 books and/or parts of books were discovered in caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. The top five most represented books in the Dead Sea Scrolls rank in this order, the books of *Psalms*, *Isaiah*, *Deuteronomy*, the *Book of Jubilees*, and the *Book of Enoch*. More copies of the *Book of Enoch* were stored in those caves than the first four books of Moses and most of the other books of the Old Testament! Scrolls of the *Book of Enoch* were stored with the books of the Hebrew Bible and treated with equal care and concern for their preservation. The recovery of these ancient copies

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of the *Book of Enoch* in the land of promise coincided with the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1947.¹

Before the destruction of the Jewish temple by the Romans in AD 70, the *Book of Enoch* is referred to in a positive way in the Jewish literature from that time. The *Book of Enoch* is even quoted in the New Testament in the *Letter of Jude*, the half-brother of Jesus, where we read,

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 1:14-15).

Though quoting Enoch 1:9, Jude does not say he was quoting the *Book of Enoch*. Jude says rather he is quoting Enoch the man, who descended the seventh from Adam. Though other books not considered Scripture are quoted in the New Testament, this quote from Enoch is different. Jude says in effect, ‘*when I quote from the Book of Enoch, I know I am in fact quoting Enoch himself*’.²

Both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament point to the high opinion of the book that was commonly known at that time. By the end of the first century this situation would begin to shift.

Rejected by Jewish Religious Leaders

Despite the popularity of the *Book of Enoch* before and during the first century, by the end of that period this situation would begin to reverse. The first phase in the book’s decreasing popularity crystallized about a generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. External pressures caused by the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 and the growing Christian movement, motivated the spiritual leadership of Judaism to reform the religion. A strict canon of Scripture was standardized for all Jews. This canon eliminated Enoch and other well-used books and especially the books of the developing Christian movement which we now have in our New Testament.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 1940’s has shown that many Jews of the first century had a special interest in the *Book of Enoch*. Fragments from at least 10 manuscript copies of the *Book of Enoch* have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls recovered from caves in the desert of Judea.

Increasing communication by Westerners with the Falasha Jews and Christians of Ethiopia, who had historically been in considerable

¹ This subject is discussed in greater detail in chapter 10.

² In Chapter 8, we will show how the Epistle of Jude actually references the *Book of Enoch*, no less than seven times.

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isolation from the rest of world, has also pointed out the importance given to the *Book of Enoch* in ancient times. The Old Testament of the Falasha Jews retained Enoch's book. When the Falasha Jews embraced Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia, the book was brought into the Bible of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, where it remains to this day.

Banned by Church Council

After the first century AD, the *Book of Enoch* continued for quite some time to be popular among early Christian writers and in the churches. Quotes, references, and allusions to Enoch's book can be found in the writings of Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Athenagoras, Tatian, Lactantius, Methodius, Minucius Felix, Commodianus and Ambrose. At times the book was referred to as Scripture. Gradually, however, the book's popularity dimmed within Greek and Latin Christianity. Enoch's book started to fall into disfavor at the same time neo-platonic philosophy and Greek speculation about the purely spiritual nature of angels began to permeate Christian thought.

Ultimately, the *Book of Enoch* was forbidden by the Council of Laodicea near the beginning of the 5th century AD. Apparently, church leaders Augustine and Jerome were influential in further pushing the book into obscurity. Eventually, the *Book of Enoch* was removed from the libraries of the churches of the Mediterranean and gradually all existing copies were lost in that part of the Christian world. The *Book of Enoch* would become effectively lost in the Greek and Latin worlds for more than 1,000 years.

Preserved in Ethiopia

During this time, the world outside of Ethiopia was oblivious to the fact the *Book of Enoch* was being preserved by the Jews and Orthodox Christians there. It is undoubtedly fortunate for us today, that Ethiopian Christians and Jews were themselves in relative isolation from the people of the Mediterranean world throughout this period, for it resulted in the preservation of the book!

For most of the world the exclusion of the *Book of Enoch* was fully underway by the fifth century AD. Like the life of Enoch it was as if the book was being hidden for a time from the attention of the world at large. However, just as was anticipated within the book's pages, the book is currently on a trajectory from obscurity to prominence.

Reintroduced to the World

Since it was 'rediscovered' in the eighteenth century, the *Book of Enoch* has passed through several phases in its gradual reemergence. The following is a broad outline of the initial stages of the *Book of Enoch's* reemergence on the world scene.

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- 1773 Rediscovery by James Bruce
- 1821 First English translation by Richard Laurence
- 1883 Revision by Richard Laurence
- 1893 Second major English translation by Robert H. Charles
- 1912 Revision by Robert H. Charles

The first step in this process occurred in the late 1700's. While searching for the source of the Nile River, explorer James Bruce acquired three complete copies of the *Book of Enoch* in the Ethiopic language Ge'ez (pronounced 'gi-is'). These were brought with him to Europe. It would be nearly 50 years before the first translation of the book into the English language would appear in 1821. It was translated by Archbishop Richard Laurence, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford. The translation was not well-received. Criticism of Laurence's translation work began. More than 60 years later, Laurence put forward a full revision in a failed attempt to address serious deficiencies in his work. Ten years later, Robert Henry Charles, Professor of Biblical Greek in Trinity College, Dublin, issued what would become the definitive English translation for the next 100 years. Charles corrected the problems with chapter and verse numbers introduced by Laurence. The version of Charles' translation included in this volume is his 1912 revision of his work.

Authenticated by the Dead Sea Scrolls

175 years after the *Book of Enoch* had been first rediscovered by the world at large, its authenticity was still doubted by many who believed it to be a forgery. After all, it would not be the first time someone had tried to recreate a 'lost book' and put it forth as original. The truth is without some sort of external corroboration, a legitimate cloud of doubt *could* have remained hanging over the book.

In the late 1940's, a discovery was made which removes all doubt that the version of Enoch preserved in Ethiopia is the same book which is quoted in the New Testament. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves in the desert of Judea included the discovery of a number of truly ancient copies of the *Book of Enoch*. Fragments from seven copies of Enoch in Aramaic had survived. These fragments have been positively dated to the three centuries before Christ, making them more than 2,000 years old. An additional three fragments of Enoch in Greek were also found in those caves.

These Dead Sea Scroll fragments of Enoch have been used to verify the reliability of our Ethiopian copies of Enoch. Since the Dead Sea Scroll copies of Enoch have been dated to two to three centuries before Christ. Modern readers can now be certain the complete copies of Enoch found in Ethiopia preserve the book that was quoted by Jude and is referred to by others in the New Testament.

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Available on the World-Wide Web

For the first time in this phenomenal history of the book, the full text of the *Book of Enoch* can be freely read by anyone in the world with access to the Internet. This development has come about since the 1990's. As we have seen in this chapter, this has been just one more development in an on-going process by which the *Book of Enoch* has been gradually, but steadily, emerging as a known entity to the people of the world.

The Book of Enoch Today

Though there are those who say the *Book of Enoch* is 'pseudepigraphal' (a writing attributed to the wrong author), and though there are others who say it is 'apocryphal' (a writing of dubious origins), there are yet others who call it 'Scripture'. The Christians of Ethiopia believe it is the authentic writings of the Biblical Enoch, and a canonical part of their Bible.

They believe this in part because there is the ancient testimony of St. Jude in the New Testament. The reasonable question arises, would a New Testament writer under inspiration of the Holy Spirit quote the *Book of Enoch* if he discerned it was a false writing? One might also ask, would a New Testament writer who discerned the book to be a false writing, then say it contained legitimate sayings from the Biblical Enoch? Jude would have to have known it would not be hard for members of his flock to get ahold of or be exposed to rest of Enoch's book. No. Jude's manner of usage of the *Book of Enoch* indicates he believed its authorship was authentic indeed.

The *Book of Enoch* comes down to us today after two millennia of faithful copying and preserving by Jews and Christians. For the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the *Book of Enoch* has been and is Scripture and therefore was treated with special care throughout the centuries. Modern scholarship has used the Dead Sea Scroll fragments of the *Book of Enoch* to spot-check the reliability of the Ethiopian text. The judgment has been that the *Book of Enoch* in the Ethiopic language is an essentially faithful literal translation of the original.

The question is often asked, '*why was the Book of Enoch left out of the Bible?*' The question really should be, to whose Bible are we referring? If we say it was left out of our own Bible, well and good, but we should realize it was not left out of everyone's Bible. The *Book of Enoch* has apparently always been on some groups' list of sacred books since before the time of Christ.

The preservation of the *Book of Enoch* over the millennia is testimony to the value which has been perceived in its pages. For generations the book has been a blessing to many. And no wonder as we look at its message it bears vivid, pre-Christian testimony to Jesus, the coming Messiah of Israel, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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At the outset of this chapter, it was noted how Enoch had gone through a period of isolation away from mankind until his call to the office of prophet. Like Enoch, Enoch's book was hidden away for a time, and has been reentering the spotlight, and seems poised to soon fulfill the stated reason for its having been written and preserved. Enoch's book is "*not for [Enoch's] generation, but for a remote one which is for to come*" and for the "*righteous, who will be living in the day of tribulation*" (Enoch 1:1-2).

[\(Excerpt from the Book of Enoch Messianic Prophecy Edition\)](#)