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Painting 1 Enoch: Biblical interpretation, theology, and artistic practice

Philip F. Esler and Angus Pryor

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Abstract

This article inaugurates a new approach to biblical interpretation that involves close collaboration on a particular text between a biblical interpreter (Philip Esler) and a practicing artist (Angus Pryor) culminating in the production of works of art that generate a new understanding of the text in question. This approach reflects the recent scholarly interest in how artists who paint biblical scenes are active interpreters of biblical texts. Here the text selected is 1 Enoch, while the artworks in question are four 2 x 2 meter paintings, in oil on canvas, that depict pivotal scenes from that text. The collaboration draws on Ethiopian tradition reflecting the scriptural status and widespread influence of 1 Enoch in Ethiopia and the fact that the complete text of the work was only preserved there until its rediscovery in modern times. The interpretative process includes a focus on the original meaning of 1 Enoch, which then influences the creation of artworks laden with theological meaning. This approach is equally available to interpreters more interested in the contemporary (rather than the historical) meaning of other biblical and extra-biblical texts where the connection with national traditions, if present, may be quite different.

Key words: 1 Enoch, biblical interpretation, artistic practice, Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodoxy

Contextualizing a new approach to the creation and interpretation of paintings on biblical subjects

The aim of this article is to outline a new approach to the creation and interpretation of paintings on biblical subjects, one that involves close collaboration between a biblical interpreter on the one hand and a practicing artist on the other, the authors of this article, both academics at the University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham, UK. While the focus of this article is 1 Enoch, it is submitted that other biblical or extra-biblical texts would respond to the type of interpretation set out below conducted by biblical researchers and artists working collaboratively. In order to situate this enterprise within the wider arena of biblical interpretation (here embracing historical and theological interpretation) and to delineate its distinctiveness from current research, it will help to set the scene with some contextual details.

The hundreds of thousands of paintings in the Western tradition on biblical subjects, many by the greatest artists, [1] have made them an intense focus of interest for researchers in art history since the founding of that discipline in the early 20th century (with antecedents in the 19th century and even earlier). Art history is the study of how human beings have expressed themselves artistically across the centuries. Art historians look at the way that artists have made meaning visually and materially in their particular historical and stylistic contexts and have contributed to society,

[1] For a sample of some of them, see the Web Gallery of Art (https://www.wga.hu).

politics and religion in doing so. It can be a powerfully analytic discipline. In the UK in 1972 the art critic, painter, novelist, and poet John Berger explained in a four-part BBC television series, and then in a book, how artists view the world and how we can learn to see things more clearly by the analysis of art and other imagery. Berger especially advocated the investigation of ideologies that lie hidden beneath the aesthetics of artistic images.

One aspect of art history that has a particular connection with the Bible (and early Christian tradition) is iconography, the practitioners of which seek to identify, describe and interpret images, especially recurrent images, including of figures and scenes from the Old and New Testaments and the early history of Christianity. Iconography, which precedes the rise of art history as such, represents a long and honorable tradition of research into Western biblical and other Christian art (Ripa 1986 [originally published in 1603], Schiller 1971 and 1972, and van Straten 1994). Much of this imagery is remarkably stable, with paintings of the conversion of St Paul, for example, always showing the horse from which he has fallen on the road to Damascus, even though no horse is mentioned in Acts 9:1-9. A basic knowledge of biblical iconography makes visiting any gallery with paintings on biblical subjects a much more rewarding experience.

In the last few decades, however, biblical critics have turned to biblical paintings with a different and exciting interest: to analyze the extent to which the artists have interpreted a biblical passage or scene in the very process of painting it. In so doing they have developed unique insights into the meaning and contemporary application of biblical texts and scenes. Early exponents of treating artists as biblical interpreters included Mieke Bal (1991) and Cheryl Exum (1996). This research addresses particular paintings considering biblical narratives, while sometimes also seeking to theorize the processes at work in such artistic expression (as in Boyd and Esler 2004; O'Kane 2007: 1-33, 2008b, 2010b, 2012; Davey 2011 and Harvey 2013). This interest is closely related to the upsurge of attention being paid to the reception history of Old and New Testament texts (for example, Lieb *et al.* 2011 and the Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentaries), to the extent such reception is embodied in paintings and sculptures. The number of paintings available for analysis is so great that so far only a fairly limited number of examples have been analyzed. Thus, to cite but a sample of this work, Rembrandt has attracted attention (Bal 1991), Jane Boyd and Philip Esler have written on Velázquez (2004), Martin O'Kane and colleagues have worked on biblical works in Welsh churches (2010b) and in smaller British galleries (O'Kane 2011), while Esler (2014) has written on the *Lignum Vitae* painting by Pacino di Bonaguida and so on.

The present article continues the project of investigating artists as biblical interpreters but pushes it in a new direction of research. Whereas on at least one previous occasion, in 2004, a biblical critic (Philip Esler) collaborated with a practicing artist (Jane Boyd) in the analysis of an existing work of art by another artist (in that case, Velázquez' *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* from 1618 in the National Gallery in London), this article appears to be the first example of published research on the collaboration between a biblical critic and an artist during the latter's actual composition of an artistic work.

The work in question consists of Pryor's twelve 2 x 2 meter paintings based on 1 Enoch and his large-scale model of an Ethiopian church illuminated inside and outside with Enochic imagery (a veritable church of St Enoch). The work thus builds on the uniquely close links between Ethiopia and 1 Enoch. 1 Enoch is a composite work, written largely in the apocalyptic genre (Collins 1979), with five main parts that was composed in Israel, in Aramaic, roughly from the third century BCE to the first century CE. Around the turn of the first millennium it was translated into Greek. It was influential in ancient Jewish tradition and among Christian theologians until roughly the time of Augustine (Stuckenbruck 2013). Thereafter, however, most of the text disappeared in both Western and Eastern Christianity, except in Ethiopia. During the fourth to sixth centuries CE Christian missionaries arriving in Ethiopia (Esler 2019: 43-50) translated 1 Enoch into Geʻez (also known as Ethiopic) and there it survived in full. The work was only restored to the rest of world when the Scottish explorer James Bruce (Bredin 2000) brought copies back to Europe in 1773, one of which went to the Bodleian Library in Oxford. In 1821 Richard Laurence, the Oxford professor of Hebrew, published a translation into English (the first in a European language) from the Bodleian manuscript. This exposed the text to widespread and enthusiastic scholarly and popular interest.

Yet it was no mere accident that 1 Enoch survived in Ethiopia, since from an early period it was regarded as an important theological work. For Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, indeed, 1 Enoch is a biblical text, and one that provides an important theological bridge between the Old and New Testaments. Western interpreters (and visitors to Ethiopia) need to give due recognition to the scriptural status of 1 Enoch in Ethiopia, a matter upon which Gordon McConville (2017) has written with insight and generosity of spirit. It is in full recognition of this status of 1 Enoch as Old Testament scripture in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition that Pryor has created both the paintings and the model.

Initial stimulation for the artworks came from Pryor's exposure to Esler's research on 1 Enoch. Their creation followed subsequent visits they made together to Ethiopia as part of a project funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust on the significance of 1 Enoch for contemporary theology. This project, which involved researchers from Ethiopia, the UK, Germany and the USA, culminated in the publication of *The Blessing of Enoch: 1 Enoch and Contemporary Theology*, edited by Esler, in 2017. Esler and Pryor also explored the ancient Christian north of Ethiopia in terms of its vibrant contemporary religious life (which includes its debt to 1 Enoch), its archaeology and its utterly distinctive and magnificent architectural and artistic traditions (Fogg and Hosking 2001; Horowitz 2001; Munro-Hay 2002; Philippson 2009; Esler 2019; 133-165). As the authors travelled around northern Ethiopia they found they were experiencing similar responses of admiration and, at times, amazement at the character and quality of the religious art and architecture and the extent to which both were deeply intermeshed with the

religious beliefs and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodoxy, a form of Christianity with an unbroken tradition in the country since the conversion of Ezana, King of Aksum (in northern Ethiopia) by St Frumentius in about 335 CE (Esler 2019: 27-41).

In this article, to keep its length within manageable limits, we will focus on a sample of four paintings in the series. Prior to that examination we will make some general observations about the impact of Ethiopian art on the composition of the works.

The influence of Ethiopian ecclesiastical painting

Of major appeal to the authors is that Ethiopian art is rooted in a particular place - the unique country that is Ethiopia - geographically, historically and culturally. At the most literal level, before the advent of modern acrylic pigments, the colours used in Ethiopian paintings were largely sourced in the vegetation, earth and minerals of the land itself. Small works of art produced in monasteries today often still use these materials. Like much art in the eastern Orthodox tradition, Ethiopian art eschews depth, volume and perspective in its mode of representation, appearing “flat” or two-dimensional. More distinctively, however, Ethiopian art favours the rather naïve representation of human figures. The head and eyes tend to be enlarged, often with front-on views of virtuous figures (although sometimes with a sideways glance) and side-on views of evil ones (Esler 2019: 133-135).

Ethiopian art, moreover, is not made for an elite. Nearly all of it is religious in content and consists of frescoes and panel paintings in churches and illuminations in manuscripts, both biblical and hagiographical (Esler 2019: 135-158). The practice of hanging religious paintings in private houses never really caught on in Ethiopia, nor did sculpture as a major art form. In consequence of its overwhelmingly ecclesial settings, Ethiopian art is, and always has been, readily accessible to the Christian faithful. This tradition continues today in the lively practice of commissioning new paintings for Orthodox churches (Johnson 2011).

Much of this art depicts characters in an extended narrative - from creation until the End - that speaks of the dynamic relationship between God, heaven and earth. First Enoch is central to this narrative. Most modern scholarship mistakenly interprets the picture in 1 Enoch 1-36 of God in heaven with his angels as replicating the Temple in Jerusalem, with the angels as priests. In fact, the text portrays heaven as a royal court (Esler 2017c), with the divine king in his palace in heaven surrounded by courtiers in the form of archangels and angels, most of whom stayed loyal and continue to act, when needed, as his agents on earth, often with a quasi-military role. On the other hand, a number of angels, called “the Watchers,” seceded from heaven and descended to earth to take on human wives, with havoc and desolation the consequence until God’s intervention, at the time of the Flood, with his climactic intervention to end evil on earth reserved until the End-Time.

Figure 1 *The Archangel Raphael*

As a sample of this art, consider Figure 1, [1] a sixteenth century painting in early Gondarine style of the archangel Raphael in the church of a monastery on the eastern shores of Lake Tana, which Esler has discussed elsewhere (2017c: 1-5). It is on a door leading into the interior of the church to which access is forbidden to non-clerics. Raphael appears on several occasions in 1 Enoch (for example, 20:3; 22; 70:8, 9, 13). Yet when you stand before this masterpiece of Ethiopian Orthodox art something happens that takes you beyond the experience of encountering

[1]Copyright image, Angus Pryor

Raphael textually. The painting is exposed to the viewer by a priest of the monastery drawing back a red curtain. It is difficult to shed the sensation that the archangel has erupted into this pose with his sword brandished just as the curtain was being drawn back. A visual embodiment of the power of God is looking straight at you and his message is clear: “You shall not pass.” The impact is a reflection of the extent to which, as human beings, we can feel the transcendent more immediately and powerfully through image-making than through text. Looking at the painting of Raphael leads us to believe that this is Raphael, and we do not get that from the text. The effect is amplified by the architectural context: an ancient church built of wood and roofed in rush, floored in hessian on which you stand with shoes removed, with low levels of light. Except when services are in progress the church is normally deserted. The effect is a combination of solidity, humility and peace. One has a contemplative space that is all one’s own. Then there is the sense that it is not an illusion of God because of the largely two-dimensional style of painting. It is innocent. It is not trying hard to be itself, which is unusual in art. It has a sense of the naïve, as does medieval painting and modernism. With modernism one is meant to be looking into an abyss or a sublime. This Raphael is sublime: it is more beautiful than beauty. It has been created by a human being but it is not of a human being. When one looks at it one says, “What am I looking at?” and “What have I got myself into here?” For the painting prompts the fundamental question, “Is this a reflection of a human being?” The shock of the sudden exposure to the image shakes the viewer from the everyday context of observation and experience, and of human interaction. Even on the Sistine Chapel ceiling there are people who look like us. This Raphael image is very different, not only in the character of the figure looking intently at you, but in the immediacy of his presence and potency. Here we sense a transcendent power, eminently capable of – apotropaically - repelling entry to the sanctuary of the church, or of permitting it. Yet all this is the work of an artist, both interpreting the divine realm but also manifesting it, not surpassing God’s greatness but revealing something of its essence through the miracle of human creativity expressed through pigments on wood. As Pryor has written elsewhere, “Painting signifying belief is a powerful medium” (2017: 195). This painting of Raphael, and many others in the Ethiopian tradition, have influenced the authors’ understanding of the distinctiveness of Ethiopian religious art and profoundly shaped the way that Pryor has created the artworks. Let us now proceed to considering them.

The first painting: *God on his Throne in 1 Enoch 14*

In 1 Enoch 14, Enoch has a vision in which he is carried to heaven. Having passed through the outer wall of heaven, built of hailstones with circling tongues of fire, Enoch crosses a space and approaches a building that turns out to be God’s palace. It has a smaller antechamber, and adjacent to it, and visible through a door, lies a much larger room in which God is seated on a throne. Here is how Enoch describes it:

> I was looking and I saw a high throne,
> and its appearance was like ice,
> and its roundness was like the shining sun,
> and the border was cherubim.
> And from underneath the throne flowed forth rivers flaming with fire,
> And I was unable to see.
> Upon it sat the Great Glory;
> His garments were like the appearance of the sun
> and whiter than abundant snow.
> No angel could enter into this house and gaze on his face
> Because of the splendor and glory,
> And no human being was able to look at him (1 Enoch 14:18-21: ET Esler).

For some reason, commentators regularly (and grievously) mistranslate the third statement as “and its wheels were like the shining sun,” even though the Greek word for “roundness” (τροχός; *trochos*) is in the singular (as is the word *kebab*, also meaning “roundness,” in the Ethiopic translation) and later in the text, at 1 Enoch 18:4, the same words in Greek and Ethiopic are used of “the roundness of the sun” (Esler 2017c: 131-135). It is not surprising that the scribe or scribes responsible for 1 Enoch 14, originating in a tradition with a strong interest in astronomical phenomena (VanderKam 1984), should hit upon the sun, with the perfect roundness of its form, as providing a model for the divine throne. The sun-like roundness of God’s throne co-exists with imagery that paradoxically combines ice and rivers of fire. Later we learn that certain angels did approach God (1 Enoch 14:23), although we do not know how close they came.

Underlying this image is the notion, quite common in the Hebrew Bible, of God on his throne in heaven. In 1 Kings 22:19, for example, the prophet Micaiah is quoted as saying: “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left.” Even earlier than this and possibly influencing the picture was the council of the gods depicted in the Ugaritic documents from Ras Shamra (Mullen 1980) and other Ancient Near Eastern representations of divine dwellings (Hundley 2013). In Psalm 45:6 the psalmist proclaims that “Your divine throne endures for ever and ever,” while Psalm 103:19 states that “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” In Isa 6:1-6 the prophet

recounts a vision he has of the Lord sitting on the throne, but it is situated in the Temple. Above God stood the seraphim, each with six wings, with one calling to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Yet the picture in 1 Enoch 14:18-21 is very different from these. Above all, it features the elaborate imagery of sun, ice and fire mentioned above, the product of a powerful visual imagination at work in the writing. Secondly, the Enochic God is located in splendid isolation from both angels and human beings in a manner not evident in the other texts. In 1 Enoch God is alone in the room. Only his most senior courtiers approach him. This seems to reflect the total isolation that the Persian kings (beginning with Deioces) introduced into their dealings with their subjects (Esler 2017c: 46-47, 68). God's house in 1 Enoch 14 is like the palace of an Ancient Near Eastern or Hellenistic king; it bears no relation to the architecture of the Temple in Jerusalem (Esler 2017c: 136-152). The angels in heaven are portrayed like courtiers, not priests in a Temple. When we try to imagine God on a throne we are making an assumption of a monarchical political organisation. We are attempting to understand the unknown in terms of the known.

Much closer to 1 Enoch 14 is the description in Daniel 7:9-10:

> As I looked,
> thrones were placed
> and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
> his raiment was white as snow,
> and the hair of his head like pure wool;
> his throne was fiery flames,
> its wheels were burning fire.
> A stream of fire issued
> and came forth from before him;
> a thousand thousands served him,
> and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
> the court sat in judgment,
> and the books were opened (RSV).

Although God is not isolated as in the Enochic version, we do have imagery of flames and a stream of fire. And this throne does have wheels. Yet we must remember that the Enochic passage in question (like the whole of 1 Enoch 1-36) was likely to have been written in the third century BCE or even earlier, while the account in Daniel probably dates from the second century BCE. Accordingly, while Daniel 7 has probably drawn upon 1 Enoch 14 for some of its imagery, the wheels under the throne do not have an Enochic origin. Instead, they were probably inspired by the wheels in Ezekiel, where they are attached, it should be noted, not to God's throne (which always remains above the firmament in heaven) but to the mobile conveyance that conveys an hypostasis of Yahweh, not Yahweh himself, to various places (Strong 2015: 33-40).

With these textual details in place, we turn to the painting, *God on His Throne in 1 Enoch 14* (Figure 2). The artist has approached the text within the overall painterly tradition or approach of post-conceptualism (Gaiger 2004; Albero *et al.* 2006) that characterizes the rest of his oeuvre. In addition to painting in oil on canvas, the artist applies

Figure 2, *God on His Throne*

ready-made objects to the painting. In these paintings he has also applied prints from objects such as the human face, dolls, fruit and birds to create images in paint on canvas (thus re-appropriating the ready made into the made). Once pressed into the canvas they describe and signify the language and history of painting. With marks placed together both of the imprinted and the gestured, the process of their realisation disappears and all that is left is the language of painting. The artist introduces objects to create a surface tension so that the real, the imagined and the made create a new dynamic and new dimensions. The finished paintings are discursive narratives that explore text, theology and painting as their nascent foundation.

In taking on the challenge of painting *God on His Throne in 1 Enoch 14,* of creating an image of God*,* based on that text, the artist faced three primary difficulties: firstly, there was the need to be respectful of the text; secondly, the work had to be developed in a painterly manner in line with historic tradition; and, thirdly, it had to be painted with one eye on the Ethiopian tradition of ecclesiastic imagery. Within the text, God on his throne is a visual joy but creating a realized image from a well-read and identified text can have its issues. Faced with translating text into a visual representation, the artist decided to employ a conceptual framework using the ready-made to deliver the image. In this way, instead of drawing or (painting) an image he translated the image via a human body print, using the biblical notion of God creating humanity in his own image (Gen 1:26-27). This painting is therefore an image of man (literally a full-face print) made by the "creator" in his own image. Like the other three paintings, it is characterised by a two-dimensional presentation - that is, painted as a flat image - in a deliberate evocation of the Ethiopian painting style. In addition, the composition and color derive from traditional Ethiopian paintings, and have then been developed with an eye to Ethiopian tradition to create a contemporary metaphor. It also deliberately captures the naïveté of Ethiopian painting in details such as the large black eyes of God, with a sideways gaze. These eyes also evoke the eyes of Ethiopian prayer scrolls (Mercier 1997), which have a precise apotropaic function.

Scale was essential for this painting since the composition is located in the celestial; the figure of God therefore needed to appear both life-size and infinite at the same time, with proportions and perspective simultaneously intrinsic and extrinsic, thereby creating a micro and a macro effect. This leads the viewer to reflect on more than one level. Firstly, there is an image of God on the human scale and a reflection on humanity. Secondly, we have an unworldly image situated in infinite space, to be imagined rather than directly observed.

The spherical character of the painting is important. This pictorial quality ultimately depends upon the point made above, namely, that the Enochic text is speaking not of a wheeled throne but of a throne characterised by roundness, that very word later being used of the sun (1 Enoch 18:4; 72:4) and the moon (1 Enoch 73:2). This roundness entails that there is no top or bottom, so ultimately no hierarchy as with the sun itself, meaning we see God in perpetual motion and that he does not move but all move around him.

The composition thus deals with the spherical, with God sitting or floating on his throne surrounded by the paradoxical and implausible notion of fire and ice. The throne in the painting is an impossible structure. It is painted as a ball of energy, almost like a spiro graph, or something that is in perpetual motion, but also as a dichotomy giving energy as it rotates through the celestial atmosphere, even though the painting is static. The celestial space that the God of the throne inhabits sits within a non-descript space. This links back to the journey of Enoch, firstly when he is taken around the heavens and then when he is translated to be with God (1 Enoch 14:8; 70). The space it evokes is the attempt of a mortal who looks up into the night sky with wonder and tries to locate the place where God sits. The painting describes this space as being everywhere; it is a universal space. The little gold spheres are wheels within wheels. The artist is trying to show God's energy, with its greatness created through the image where one element is added to another. It is similar to the combination of fire and water as an antithesis to each other, but also as a requirement for sustainability. The artist creates a painting depicting God's machine for creation, much like a living cell!

The other significant compositional factor is that the roundness attributed to the throne in 1 Enoch 14:18 now corresponds to the fact that so many Ethiopian churches are constructed as circles within circles (Esler 2019: 162-165). The circle of the painting is like the floor or the ceiling of the church; so that the painting is like a plan or a schematic of the space. Architecture infuses aesthetics. Because of the three circular zones of many Ethiopian churches, to encounter church art you have to make a circular journey through rather dark space. This is like encountering a disk or entering an orb. Just like a saint or angel features a halo or nimb, this painting has the essence of the spherical. In part, the painting halos God, replicating Ethiopian pictorial methods of representing sanctity. In some ways the painting is like a visualisation of belief; it is like seeing God.

The nature of God's gestures is also one of ambiguity. The visualization here is a form of visual exegesis where the artist interprets and expands the Enochic text. Gesture is important; there is a frontal, full-face God, with his eyes looking to the viewer's right (thus representing a good person in Ethiopian iconography) as he surveys his infinite kingdom. His open hands suggest that he is a welcoming God who is transcending the visual space as if moving towards us so that we can embrace him and what he stands for.

The birds above his shoulders act as cherubim who are the guardians - the Watchers. They are hybrids from the pure birds from the Bible (Deut 14:11) and the fact that they are golden suggests that they are other-worldly or Watchers (Angels) who act as guardians looking at God. The colors are taken from the cherubs found in Ethiopian churches and so become not only the guardians of the Holy of Holies but also the guardians of Ethiopian culture. The blue and brown shapes evoke Ethiopian cherub wings visible in the ceilings of some Ethiopian churches, such as those

in the Dabra Berhan Selassie Church in Gondar. The Ethiopian cross on the left and the orb on the right symbolize the Holy Trinity.

The colors in the painting are charged with metaphor and meaning. The God figure is dressed in traditional Ethiopian ecclesiastical clothing, which is white and therefore understated and pure. Hanging around the neck of God is a traditional Ethiopian cross in the Lalibela style, of unpainted wood but colored gold to show the significance of the wearer. The coloration of the rays round God link directly to the colours of Ethiopia visible in paintings in the Cathedral in Addis Ababa and around the Tomb of Haile Selassie. They feature constantly in paintings of the Holy Trinity.

The two modified deer-heads are a reference to 1 Enoch 90:38, where an animal of uncertain identification but great importance is mentioned. It is called a *nagar*. What kind of a creature is a *nagar*? Francis Watson has noted that this Ge'ez term means "word" or "speech", though it is not the equivalent of *logos* and has no clear Christological connotations. He has noted that according to an old and attractive theory, this Enochic animal came to be known as a "Speech", *nagar*, because of a double translation failure. On this view, the Greek text underlying the Ge'ez, transliterated the Hebrew word *r'ēm*, a wild ox, as *rēm*, which the Ethiopic translator misread as *rēma*, word. Whether this explanation is correct or not, the Enochic bestiary now includes the great-horned *nagar*, which is said to enjoy first place among the white bulls. This is the impressive white creature on the right of an image from the Garima III Gospel Book (Watson 2015), the Garima Gospels being very early translations into Ge'ez, with illuminations, that survived in a monastery in northern Ethiopia (Esler 2019: 103-106). The artist's inclusion of a reference to the *nagar* of 1 Enoch 90:38 serves to integrate the picture of God on his throne in 1 Enoch 14 with the wider narrative of the text, and its happy ending for the just.

Finally, the image is insouciant as to whether one is a believer or an unbeliever. In either case, one is drawn to this image of 1 Enoch 14:18-20 like a moth to a shining light, as one sees God in a burning celestial place surrounded by ice. Intellectually, the artist knows that it is sublime and one always wants to transgress into the sublime, which is faith. The painting creates a narrative using the image of God as human being and human being as God. But once it is finished, it is no longer an illustration. It becomes an entity. One looks at it and asks, 'What is God?' It points beyond imagery of God to the essence of God at work throughout the cosmos. It is, paradoxically, like the Raphael image discussed above, both apotropaic and welcoming. In this painting the artist has responded directly to the theology in the text and attempted to replicate it.

The second painting: *The Site of Jerusalem in 1 Enoch 26-27*

The first part of 1 Enoch 1-36 consists of the action set in heaven and on earth involving the Watchers and Enoch's role in relation to them at God's command (1 Enoch 1-16). The second half of 1 Enoch 1-36 describes journeys undertaken by Enoch across the cosmos in the company of angelic guides. The first of the two journeys, to the north-west, occupies 1 Enoch 17-19 (Bautch 2003). His second journey, comprising 1 Enoch 20-36, is to the east. During the course of this journey he reaches a destination that is recognisable from the way that its topography is described (1 Enoch 26-27). It is the site of Jerusalem, although before the construction of the city, and it is a place described as being the centre of the earth:

1. And from there I proceeded to the center of the earth, and I saw a blessed place where there were trees that had branches that abide and sprout.
2. And there I saw a holy mountain. From beneath the mountain water (came) from the east, and it flowed toward the south.
3. And I saw to the east another mountain higher than it, and between them a deep valley that had no breadth, and through it water was flowing beneath the mountain.
4. And to the west of this, another mountain lower than it and not rising very high, and a deep and dry valley beneath it, between them, and another deep and dry valley, at the apex of the three mountains.
5. And all the valleys were deep, of hard rock, and no tree was planted on them.
6. And I marveled at the mountain, and I marveled at the valley, I marveled exceedingly (26:1-5; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2004: 45-46).

Commentators have noted how the passage represents a close and detailed description of the topography of Jerusalem and its immediate environs (Milik 1976: 36-37; VanderKam 1984: 137; Nickelsburg 2001: 318.). Thus the "holy mountain" (v. 2) is Mount Zion (Moriah, the hill on which the Temple would be erected, although the Temple is not mentioned here). The water coming from the east (v. 2) is Gihon, flowing at first towards the south, and thence out into the Kedron Valley. To the east of Zion is a higher mountain (v. 3), the Mount of Olives. The deep valley between them is the Kedron Valley (v. 3). Finally, the last mentioned "deep and dry valley," at the apex of the three mountains (v. 4), is the valley of Hinnom (= Gehenna), which is probably to be identified with the valley mentioned in 1 Enoch 27 as the ultimate gathering place for those who are cursed forever. The certain identification of other features is rendered difficult because of textual variations.

It was common in the ancient world for ethnic groups to regard their land, especially its principal cultic site, as the center of the earth, a view often associated with the notion that "our world" is "the world" (Eliade 1959: 44-45).

Delphi, for example, featured a large stone *omphalos*, a "belly-button," as a means of manifesting this claim by the Greeks in a physical way. A version survives and is kept in the museum there. Here we see an example of this among Israelites. In Ezek 5:5 God declares, "This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations; with countries round about her." The author could be borrowing from Ezekiel (here and in 38:12), as VanderKam suggests (1995: 57; also Jub 8:12, 19 and Charles 1913: 54), or he could just be giving expression to a belief that Jerusalem was the centre of the earth, which Richard Bauckham (1995) has shown was commonly held among Israelites.

In 1 Enoch 26-27 none of these features of the topography is named, nor in this section of the text is there any mention of the city that would be built there or the Temple it would have at its heart. The author leaps over these developments that lay in the future beyond Enoch, and moves to certain features of the ultimate future (Nickelsburg 2001: 315), when the cursed will dwell in the valley of Hinnom forever, somehow in the presence of the righteous (1 Enoch 27). Since 1 Enoch 25:5 probably entails that the Tree of Life will be transported to a site next to the Temple in Jerusalem in the End-Time, the likely result is that the righteous will be entering the sanctuary and enjoying its fragrance while, not far away, the cursed are gathered forever in Gehenna. As a result, while 1 Enoch 25:5 requires us to assume the existence of the Temple in the time up to the end, the author of 1 Enoch 1-36 evinces no interest in its role during that period. That is why he can describe the topography of Jerusalem in 1 Enoch 26-27 without mentioning it. In Israelite history and tradition, Jerusalem would eventually become the mother-city (*mêtropolis* in Greek) of the Israelites, the capital of the homeland, so often a feature of ethnic identity. This applied *a fortiori* for Israelites who had only one God whose cult was observed in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet here the author is in no way concerned with the function of the land, its capital with its cultic centre as contributing to the ethnic identity of the Israelites. True, the eschatological Temple will see service during the ultimate future beyond the great judgment; yet what

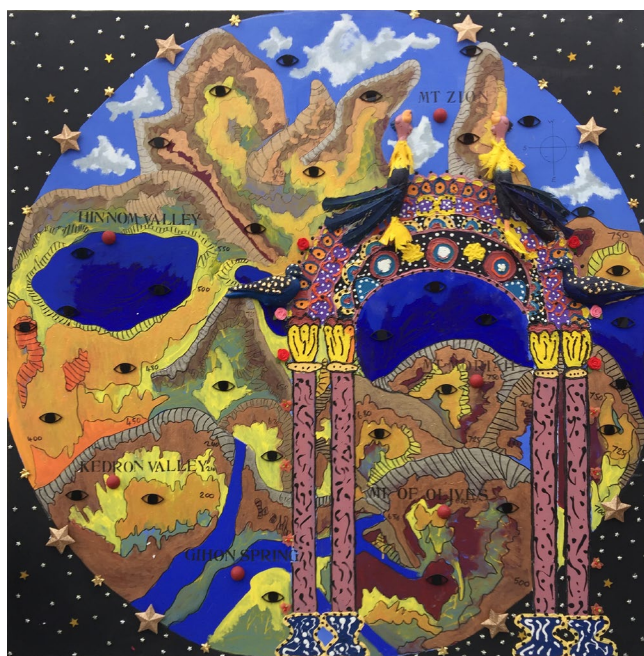

Figure 3, *The Site of Jerusalem in 1 Enoch 26-27*

happens until then (including the role of the historical Temple) is largely immaterial. For these reasons it is submitted that this section of the text is appropriately called "proto-ethnic."

In the painting *The Site of Jerusalem in 1 Enoch 26-27* (Figure 3) the artist has created the painting as a vision. He has sought to express features of the text but also to introduce some recognition of what would happen in this place in the future beyond Enoch's description of it. For the artist, the potency of the place proves impossible to constrain within a mythological past; its tumultuous future seeps out from the bare earth, from those precious valleys and the hills, and expresses itself in various ways on the canvas. The use of words to identify topographic features with the names that they would only acquire long after Enoch's visit is one sign of this. So too is the arch (see below).

Since this place, the site of Jerusalem, is described as the centre of the earth in the text, the artist has created the composition in such a way that it can be seen or drawn in three ways. Firstly, it is isolated and floating as if in a bubble in the celestial atmosphere; it is tentative and inchoate, a "creating" that has been made but not finalized and awaits its time of use. It is partly structured topographical material for a great world-building enterprise. Many of the elements in the painting are mythical. Secondly, however, the essence of the painting is the symbiotic relationship between the artist's conception, Enoch's aerial view of the topography and these mythical dimensions. In other words, while the text creates a space that is appropriately designated "proto-ethnic," the painting accepts that space but also imagines it as a space that will happen. So space is re-imagined as plan. The painting is a laid-out space being prepared for a future moment which has a sense of what will happen to its own self.

Thirdly, it is like having a spot-light on one element (the ethnic Israel that is to come) so that it can be highlighted. The painting floats between mythical and instructional. The artist plays with the discourse through the

painting's 2-D and 3-D relationship as well as the confusing points of perspective that lead the viewer from one picture plane to another. The arch acts as an entrance to the painting. In all its magnificence and beauty the arch is a mythical element, in a state of unfinished perfection. Here the artist's investment in, and homage, to Ethiopian tradition becomes clear. For the arch is a visual representation of an image in one of the three Garima Gospel books, in particular, Garima III (reproduced in McKenzie and Watson 2016: 33). These works, from the monastery of Garima, not far from Adwa in northern Ethiopia, are the oldest manuscripts in Ethiopia. Recent carbon dating shows that two of them appear to date from the sixth or seventh centuries CE (McKenzie and Watson 2016). Indeed Garima III, radiocarbon dated to 330-650 CE, is the oldest surviving illuminated Gospel book in the world (McKenzie and Watson 2016: 1). The source image for the arch here was painted to form a frame for the canon tables invented by St Eusebius (*ca.* 260 – *ca.* 340 CE) to highlight similar passages in the four Gospels. As Francis Watson has noted, "The primary function of these tables is to make parallel passages available for consultation, but they also serve to *display* the harmonious order underlying the apparent chaos of gospel interrelations" (McKenzie and Watson 2016: 147). So just as the Garima arch functioned to assist believers to gain access the Gospels, the artist's arch serves here to provide an entrée to the topography of Jerusalem and its future destiny. In particular, the arch evokes an ecclesiastical tradition that runs from events in Galilee and Judea, especially in Jerusalem, with its Temple, where Christ was crucified and, for his believers, rose again in the first century CE, to Ethiopia, in the fourth to sixth centuries CE, when Christianity arrived and became embedded. So, with this premise, the painting as a plan has the sense of vision and archaeology all at the same time. The archway is a feature of the Temple of Israel, with all its beauty, but it also resembles a ruin or a relic of what has past. The arch enables the juxtaposition of the new and the old within the same metaphor.

The mythical creatures in the painting are the Watchers of 1 Enoch 1-36. They are not properly of this world and are positioned across the canvas to describe the sense of someone, like Enoch himself, now entering into paradise and heaven. A characteristic feature of the Garima canon tables is their decoration with colorful birds, some of them unique to Ethiopia, and these have prompted the inclusion of birds within the compositional scheme. But the artist has anonymised the birds, so that they are unrecognisable compared with any bird on earth and look like hybrids, not to denigrate them (as if they were like the detestable birds of Lev 11:13-19!) but to proclaim that these are, in fact, glorious avian creatures of heaven.

Also directly connecting with Ethiopia are the eyes on the surface of the painting. They are good Ethiopian eyes looking directly at the audiences almost as vetting agents, very much like the apotropaic eyes on Ethiopian prayer scrolls. They are observing the viewer's every move and watching the proceedings going forward, from the mythical realized past and beyond. Ethiopian tradition is acting here as the gateway to Heaven. Here exists the Temple of Israel in Ethiopian ecclesiastical guise and this exists as the portal linking the painting straight back to the original text of 1 Enoch. Theologically speaking, a path to salvation is through 1 Enoch.

The third painting: *The Tree for the Righteous* (1 Enoch 24-25)

During the course of his angel-guided tour of the cosmos, when he has journeyed to the west (23:1), Enoch sees seven glorious mountains, three to the east (one set on the other), three to the south (one set on the other) and the seventh in the midst of them 24:1-12). It was higher than the others and was like the seat of a throne, with fragrant trees encircling it. Among those trees, Enoch comments, "was a tree such as I had never smelled … It had a fragrance sweeter smelling than all spices, and its leaves and its blossom and the tree never wither. Its fruit is beautiful, like dates of the palm trees" (24:4; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 44). Enoch asks Michael, the angel then accompanying him, to explain this tree (24:5-25:2). He learns that the high mountain is like the throne of God, "the seat where the Great Holy One, the Lord of glory, will sit, when he descends to visit the earth in goodness" (25:3). No human being is able to touch this tree "until the great judgment, in which there will be vengeance on all and a consummation forever" (25:4). In the description of God's end-time descent onto the earth for judgment in 1 Enoch 1:4-9, Mount Sinai is the mountain that serves as the staging-post for God and his angelic army after leaving heaven to judge humanity; perhaps the reader is meant to identify this high mountain with the tree in 1 Enoch 24-25 as Sinai.

Yet Enoch now learns something truly remarkable. After the judgment the tree will be transplanted to the holy place, meaning Jerusalem, next to the house of God (meaning the Temple). It will be given to the righteous and the pious and the chosen will use its fruit as food. They will rejoice and gladly enter the Temple with the fragrances of the tree in their bones and

> they will live a long life on the earth,
> such as your fathers lived also in their days,
> and torments and plagues and suffering will not touch them (25:6; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 45).

Some commentators regard this tree as the "tree of life" mentioned in Genesis 2-3 (Charles 1913: 205; Nickelsburg 2001: 314). These chapters of Genesis actually mention two trees growing in the garden of Eden in the east that God planted: the tree of life in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:8-9). God told Adam that he could freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden, except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and if he did that, he would die on that day (2:16-17). After this God formed Eve from Adam (2:18-25) and Adam must have told her of this divine prohibition, since she repeated it to the serpent, saying that God forbade them

eating from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden (3:1-3). The serpent understood her to mean the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (not the tree of life), even though it was the tree of life that was explicitly located in the midst of the garden (in both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint), since he told her that when they did eat its fruit they would know good and evil (3:4-5). So both Eve and then Adam ate of its fruit (3:6-7). God soon confronted them with the charge, 'Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?' (Gen 3:11) and outlined the consequences of their doing so (3:17-19). Later, God was concerned that, having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam might also eat from the tree of life and thereby gain immortality (3:22). So he drove him (and presumably Eve with him) out of the garden of Eden, while east of Eden he placed cherubim and a flaming sword "to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:23-24).

Did the author (or authors) of 1 Enoch 24-25, therefore, intend their audience to identify the tree mentioned there with the tree of life in Genesis 2-3? Certainly, and critically, like the tree of life in Genesis, no human being is able to touch it, at least until the final judgment, and after that event the righteous will eat its fruit and gain life. Admittedly, the tree in 1 Enoch 24-25 is not called the "tree of life" and the life it grants is not everlasting (as in Gen 3:24) but "long." Nor is it described as being in Eden but in a mountain in the west that could be Sinai. Charles answered the latter problem by suggesting that "the tree of life was moved from the earthly Eden to the Garden of Righteousness, and will thence be moved to Jerusalem" (1913: 205). While the idea of two translations is a useful one, this solution raises a further complication. The "paradise of righteousness" features in a later section of the text, in 1 Enoch 31-32, when Enoch is journeying through another section of the cosmos, in the east (31:1), indeed, far in the east (32:2). Here he passes by the paradise of righteousness and sees more mountains and more trees, including one he called "the tree of wisdom." Enoch comments that the holy ones eat of it and learn great wisdom (32:3). He describes it as follows:

> That tree is in height like the fir, and its leaves, like (those of) the carob, and its fruit like clusters of the vine - very cheerful, and its fragrance penetrates far beyond the tree (ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 48).

When Enoch expresses admiration for the beauty of the tree, the angel with him (Gabriel probably) replies:

> This is the tree of wisdom from which your father of old and your mother of old, who were before you, ate and learned wisdom. And their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they were driven from the garden (32:6; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 48).

In the Enochic picture, therefore, we have, on a mountain in the west, a tree that is recognisably like the tree of life, and another, in the east, which is expressly identified by Enoch with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2-3. Veronika Bachmann (2009), however, has recently mounted an innovative argument that the tree in 1 Enoch 24-25 is to be identified with Wisdom. Yet this view is difficult to reconcile with the two features of this tree that do align with the Genesis tree of life (that it is forbidden to human beings and will ultimately give life) and with the fact that it is the tree in 1 Enoch 32 that the text expressly links with wisdom. On the other hand, Charles erred in suggesting the tree in 1 Enoch 24-25 was located in "the paradise of righteousness," for which we must wait until 1 Enoch 32. The tree like the tree of life is not growing there but on a mountain in the west.

Turning now to the painting, *The Tree for the Righteous* (Figure 4), the artist has fixed upon the tree in 1 Enoch

Figure 4, *The Tree for the Righteous*

24-25 for his subject, but at the particularly dramatic moment when God has descended from heaven to initiate the last judgment. In 1 Enoch this event is described at the start of the work (1:4-9), presumably to assure its audience that in spite of the horrors that will later be described as afflicting humanity in general, Israel and the cosmos, God will eventually prevail over evil, punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. The artist has imagined a scene where God's descent upon the mountain brings him directly above the Tree for the Righteous. He has predicated the painting on the premise that the Tree for the Righteous was like no other tree known to humanity. The artist has grasped the idea of creating a painterly, metaphysical tree by using a post-conceptual process. The elements in the text, once translated into paint, create a new and dynamic image. William Blake's *Ancient of Days* (1794) has served as a compositional device, while one senses the influence of Samuel Palmer's painting *Early Morning* (1825) for its use of an isolated tree within landscape. A major stroke of painterly originality is that within the painting, rather than God creating the Tree, God is the Tree, with knowledge his knowledge, righteousness his righteousness. His head is at the crown of the tree. He is depicted as God, but painted with facial characteristics that are used for positively regarded figures in Ethiopian painting. He is surrounded by a halo in the Ethiopian colours of orange, yellow and red. Above him, a quarter sun suggests the pathway to heaven for the righteous, post-judgment. In the sky, there are two symmetrical clouds underneath the head of the deity that represent the sustenance for the tree and its means of proliferation. Also in the sky, creatures framed by gold spheres congregate around the tree to denote its heavenly status. The two birds with spotted wings, which evoke some of the Ethiopian birds depicted in the Garima Gospels, act as the Watchers, guarding the deity. Immediately underneath his beard is an Ethiopian cross, partly to reflect his status and partly reflecting the wood of the tree.

As a compositional device, the viewer's eye is led down directly into the mass of the main tree. Beneath the Godhead, the boughs of the tree are in symmetry. On these boughs grow a myriad of fruit like no other, "beautiful, like dates of the palm trees" (24:4). Some fruits are created in two dimensions, by taking exotic fruits and printing them with paint on to the canvas. The colours chosen distinguish them as unearthly, imagined fruits. There are also three-dimensional fruits that sit on the surface like dates. The whole concept of these fruit is that anyone worthy enough to eat them will be deemed one of the righteous. There are birds nesting within the tree, including three-dimensional guinea fowl that are recognisably Ethiopian birds. These guinea fowl nest, partly for their own protection, but also as guardians of the tree. Insects, ladybirds and bees also gravitate to the tree, helping to pollinate it. The artist has chosen a composition that allows the viewer to see a myriad of images at once, with the essence of the tree as the main focal point. This was in part a device to suggest a sense of smell, with the artist leading the viewer to look at the strange fruits and to think that they could smell them within a visual narrative: "It had a fragrance sweeter smelling than all spices" (24:4).

The painting compositionally is grounded by the earth. This is a flat earth, with nothing else growing in this scene other than the Tree for the Righteous that springs up like an eternal fountain. Mushrooms and insects gather around the bottom of the tree to represent a pilgrimage of mankind to the Tree after the last judgment. The two deer heads and the antler represent the mysterious *nagar* of 1 Enoch 90:38, discussed above, and thus link this painting to the larger structures of 1 Enoch and the Enochic tradition.

The muted colours are Ethiopian in character, with the gold depicting the celestial. The relationship between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional creates a sense of space in the painting, bringing the Ethiopian flatness of style into a contemporary context. Overall this painting is an assault on the senses, with the viewer becoming a participant in the End-time congregation around the Tree following its transplantation to Jerusalem after the Judgment. The painting allows such participation to be realised in a way that transcends exposure to the text alone. The painting also escapes the narrative sequencing of the text by foregrounding central textual features in one experience and moment of visual and ideational comprehension. The painting thus honours the text by creating theological linkages simultaneously and sensorially. In sum, this painting is a celebration of the Tree for the Righteous that vouchsafes for God's ultimate vindication of those who act in accordance with his will.

The fourth painting: *Abel's Cry* (1 Enoch 22:5-7)

The biblical narrative underlying this painting is the narrative concerning Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Adam and Eve had two sons, first Cain and then Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the earth to the Lord, while Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. For an unstated reason, the Lord approved of Abel and his offering, but disapproved of Cain and his offering. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord asked Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?," and then said, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain's reaction to this message, which implied he had not done well, was emphatically negative:

> Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him (Gen 4:8)

So the Lord asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” and Cain replied with a lie, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” This response elicited the following response from God:

> “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (Gen 4:10-12; RSV).

Cain replied to God that, as a fugitive and wanderer upon the earth, anyone who found him could slay him. But God rejected this: “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him” (4:15). Cain did indeed survive, married and fathered a son and this was the beginning of Cain’s numerous descendants (4:16-24). At some point he must have died, but Genesis does not say when or how. Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, and enjoyed a numerous lineage through him, of which one was Enoch, in the sixth generation after Adam.

1 Enoch contains a succinct reference to this narrative of Cain and Abel (22:5-7). At this point in Enoch’s wandering through the cosmos his guides are the archangel Raphael and other holy angels. They travel to a place where the angels show Enoch a high mountain in the west. It contains four hollow places, three of which are dark and one illuminated. Raphael explains to Enoch that these hollows were created for the souls of the dead to be kept in until the day of the great judgment (22:1-4). This picture of the souls in pits on a mountain is sharply differentiated from the usual Israelite understanding of the dead being in Sheol below the earth (see 1 Samuel 28). At this point Enoch observes as follows:

> There I saw the spirit of a dead man making suit, and his lamentation went up to heaven and cried and made suit. Then I asked Raphael, the Watcher and the holy one who was with me, and said to him, “This spirit that makes suit—whose is it—that thus his lamentation goes up and makes suit unto heaven?” And he answered me and said, “This is the spirit that went forth from Abel, whom Cain his brother murdered. And Abel makes accusation against him until his posterity perishes from the face of the earth, and his posterity is obliterated from the posterity of human beings” (22:5-7; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 42-43, slightly modified).

While the connection with Gen 4:10 is apparent, in Genesis it is Abel’s blood (animate and personified) that calls to God from the ground, whereas in 1 Enoch 22:5 Abel’s spirit does so. The difference probably represents changing Israelite views on the nature of the human person from the earlier time when Genesis was written to the Hellenistic period of origin of 1 Enoch 1-36. That the spirit of Abel is making suit to heaven connects this incident with other examples of petitions that are directed to heaven: such as that by the earth in response to the violence of the Giants (7:6; 9:2), by human beings in consequence of the knowledge taught by the Watchers (8:4) and by the rebellious Watchers seeking mercy from God (13:6-7). The language of petition comes from the administrative practices of ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic monarchies where subjects of the king wrote to the king or his courtiers requesting that they help them with their problems. The very language of the numerous petitions in Greek that have survived in the sands of Egypt is found in the extant Greek text of 1 Enoch 1-36 (Esler 2017c: 72-78). This language is part of the evidence that heaven in the text is modelled on the ancient royal court and its courtiers, not on the Jerusalem Temple and its priests.

The implications of the accusation by Abel’s spirit are intriguing. Certainly the fact that Abel’s spirit makes the accusation imputes to him knowledge that Cain did, indeed, have descendants (as noted above). Yet is Abel asking (God in) heaven to hurry along the death of Cain’s posterity, or is he simply complaining about Cain until such time, presumably the End-time, when his descendants will have been obliterated from the earth? Most probably the former is intended. Abel’s spirit is directing a petition to heaven and that means asking God to do something, which here can only be to wipe out Cain’s descendants. Given that Genesis shows God to be surprisingly solicitous in preserving Cain’s life, it is rather surprising to find Abel asking for the opposite fate to be inflicted on his descendants. But that is what the text implies. Whether this constitutes a request for vengeance or justice is, however, a more difficult question. Neither word, “justice,” nor “vengeance” appears in the passage. One’s initial reaction might be that it is grossly disproportionate to call for the death of all Cain’s descendants when only Abel himself was killed. But Abel’s implied concern is that Cain’s murdering him deprived him of the posterity that Cain had himself enjoyed and that it would therefore be just for Cain’s posterity to be removed from the earth as well. For this would put them both in a roughly equal position. So perhaps Abel’s spirit is calling for justice rather than vengeance (even though there may be times when they are hard to distinguish). Therefore, we have here a highly imaginative literary and theological interpretation of the circumstance that Cain had descendants, refracted through the sense of grievance felt by Abel’s spirit.

Finally, and most importantly, this comparatively brief reworking of the story of Cain and Abel in 1 Enoch 22 serves to alert us to something of fundamental importance for how the Enochic scribes understood evil (Esler 2017b). This is that the root of evil in the world is violence. To appreciate this we need to recognise how 1 Enoch 1-36 distinguishes between “narrative time,” meaning the broad sweep of time implied in the text (beginning with the

creation in Genesis and proceeding to the End), and "dramatic time," which is the more specific period within narrative time within which the major events of the plot take place (Esler 2017b: 168-170). Whereas within dramatic time evil begins with the defection of the Watchers to earth and the mischief they wreak there (1 Enoch 6-7), the text makes clear that, within the more encompassing framework of narrative time, evil, epitomised by violence, began on earth much earlier with Cain's violent murder of his brother and was entirely human in origin (even though this homicide is not mentioned till 1 Enoch 22:5-7).

The importance of the story of Cain and Abel to the Enochic scribes in relation to the question of evil emerges when we consider how they dealt with the Genesis account of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Later in his wanderings Enoch arrives at a place in the east where the paradise of righteousness is located, which contains many beautiful trees (1 Enoch 28:1-33:4). One of them, "the tree of wisdom, whose fruit the holy ones eat and learn great wisdom," is particularly beautiful and Enoch asks his angel guide about it. Then Raphael, the holy angel who was with him, replies as follows:

> "This is the tree of wisdom from which your father of old and your mother of old, who were before you, ate and learned wisdom. And their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they were driven from the garden" (32:6; ET Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012: 48).

There is nothing here about the disobedience of Adam and Eve, nor about their being punished for it by dying or becoming mortal. The text imputes a measure of incongruity in what they had done - eating food that was not meant for them and thus meriting their expulsion from the garden - but they are not described as having sinned. Accordingly, as far as the author or authors were concerned, the first human sin was Cain's murder of Abel, an act of violence. This is the major point here, the first instance of evil on the earth, a theme that will be taken up repeatedly and developed across the entirety of 1 Enoch. Other explanations, such as that Abel is the prototype of the righteous martyr (Nickelsburg 2001: 306), miss the role of this incident within the larger narrative presupposed in the text. Throughout 1 Enoch violence figures as the primary sin and this is where it begins (Esler 2017b: 168-175). Yet this is also the first instance of anyone dying in the larger narrative presupposed in the text, and this raises the admittedly daring question of whether the Enochic scribes regarded this incident as the cause of humans losing their initial immortality.

In the next painting, *Abel's Cry* (Figure 5), violence is central in that it contains a multi-layered dialogue that explores the circumstances surrounding the first fratricide. The artist invites the viewer to imagine the scream coming from an entrapped man as he responds to an unjust and violent death: it can send shivers down our spine. What if everyone who has ever been wronged screams for justice for eternity? Maybe this is the noise we hear when no worldly sounds are blocking the airwaves. When all else is silent, in a world pervasively infected by evil, is this what we hear?

In this painting the artist has created an almost cinematic effect where the viewer is confronted by the "before-and-after" scenario of the crime story. He calls on the audience to think about the questions posed by the painting - of original sin, of vengeance, of justice and injustice. What was going through Cain's mind? He invites the audience to absorb the issues here, after reading the text of 1 Enoch 22:5-7, and to draw their own conclusions. As viewers, they are being given a role and a voice, as with the confessional altarpieces of the fifteenth century.

Figure 5, *Abel's Cry*

In dialogue with Philip Esler and his views on the Enochic understanding of the origins of sin (summarized above), the artist has created this work based on the duality of man and the divided self. In its upper hemisphere the painting contains two imprints of the same person, of their left and right sides, which create the effect of a Rorschach test. The aim is to show how the two sides of a human being can love and hate at the same time. The artist has also sought to capture the moment just before the fatal attack in order to examine the intent to kill. If Cain planned to kill Abel in the field, then this act was indeed murder. Yet through the painting the artist seeks to explore and understand the mind-set of Cain before he acts out this scenario. A sharp, jagged flint lies in wait on Cain's side of the painting. Was it placed there, ready to use or was it grabbed in the heat of the moment? On Abel's side there are two sheep skulls predicting his fate, as in the *vanitas* paintings of the Dutch period by artists such as Antonio de Salgado and Pieter Claus. Death awaits him. However, these sheep have a dual significance as they also represent the ancient *nagar*, the mysterious End-time creature of 1 Enoch 90:38 mentioned above. All of this visual information serves to interpret Enoch watching and scribing this ominous event and Abel's cry.

The gifts offered by Cain and Abel mentioned in Genesis feature prominently in the painting. Stretching through its upper and lower hemispheres is a large sheep carcass: this is the offering Abel that gives to God as a token of showing his prosperity and the potential to develop and maintain a large civilisation. In the painting's lower left quadrant, Cain's corn offerings are in place, as are his - in this depiction - Ethiopian baskets but the maggots in the pile of overripe apples predict that this will be a failed offering.

There are flowers growing in the garden. Abel's flowers show the green shoots of life, while Cain's are black and red to represent the blood about to be spilt and to flow into the earth forever. The two yellow suns at the top and bottom of the painting represent life and death. The orange, and no longer yellow, sun signifies God's disappointment and the transition of Cain to sinfulness and mortality. Ultimately (and here the artist takes a bold leap away from blaming Adam and Eve for human mortality) death will be the fate of us all, now that immortality has been taken from humanity as a result of this sin.

As well as being replete with symbols and metaphors based on this event as described in 1 Enoch 22, the entire painting owes its debt to Ethiopia. This is evident in the facial features painted in Ethiopian style and in the palette and colours applied to the canvas. This latter dimension is very evident in the horizontal bands in the painting in colours very common in Ethiopian painting: from the top down we have: the gold of heaven; the blue of the sky; the white band of the firmament, separating the heavenly realms and earth; the khaki-green of the flora; the brown of the earth and the red of hell. The replication of the gold spheres at the very top and very bottom of the painting speak to God's control of the cosmos, from heaven to hell. The painting also pays homage to fundamental characteristics of Ethiopian art in other ways: the use of silhouette, the heavy employment of outlines and the practice of storytelling through colour and form. The stars in the circle are wooden (signifying how they first looked to human viewers), but those in the celestial space, in consequence of Cain's act, are blackened because of what they are witnessing.

The whole scene is acted out as if in a celestial play. The spotlight falls on the momentous act as it is witnessed by the whole universe and, of course, by God. This is the moment when everything changes for humanity. Abel's anguished cry for justice rises up to the heavens like an anti-annunciation. This infamous moment is sacred but tragic too. It is the road map of our humanity. We all have a choice; how will we use it? Ultimately, the painting is asking what, in the aftermath of the first sin - which in this view was violence - will be the consequences for humankind?

Conclusion

In this article the authors have outlined a new approach to the interpretation of biblical and extra-biblical works that involves a biblical specialist and an artist working in close collaboration as the latter creates works of art that are inspired by selected features of the text. While referring to the text and the world at large, the paintings establish an autonomous imaginative zone with its own shape and structure that appeals to the aesthetic sensibility of the viewers. The created artworks necessarily speak to the viewers in their present experience and encourage in them a creative interpretation of the meaning of the text. Such meaning has powerful contemporary application in a manner that, given the subject matter of the paintings, is deeply theological. The text is brought to life via an artistic expression that draws in the viewers and impacts on them in the here and now in the manner of all successful art.

At the same time, however, the four paintings discussed above are deeply respectful both of the original meanings communicated by the ancient text that is 1 Enoch and of the authors that created and communicated those meanings. In the present collaboration, this interest in the original meanings of 1 Enoch has been aided by the strong interest on the part of the biblical interpreter in the historical interpretation of this and other biblical texts. This means that the progressive journey of understanding undertaken by the authors has involved a continual shuttling backwards and forwards between the ancient and the contemporary, but enriched by reference to Ethiopian tradition. One way to understand this is to view the process of interpreting a biblical text—where its cultural alterity is acknowledged - for its contemporary significance through artistic expression as involving a dialogue. It is a dialogue that takes place across time and across cultures between the ancient Israelite authors and modern interpreters, in a manner theorized by one of the authors elsewhere (Esler 2005). Yet this approach by no means precludes others, especially, for example, where the biblical interpreters favor interpretation of Fifgur significance.

Finally, this approach is equally applicable to other biblical texts and also extra-biblical texts, in the latter case perhaps to the extent that there is at least one Christian tradition that regards the work in question as scriptural, as is

the case with 1 Enoch in Ethiopia. Nor does the debt in this article to Ethiopian tradition - the vehicle for the preservation and communication of 1 Enoch to the wider world - in any way limit the generality of the approach proposed. The Ethiopian dimension simply forms part of the perspective here chosen to interpret 1 Enoch given the unique circumstances of the text's preservation. All that is needed is that biblical interpreters of whatever interest work with practising artists in a joint interpretative enterprise that results in the production of artistic outputs.

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