

ABDUCTED BY GOD?
THE PROCESS OF HEAVENLY ASCENT
IN JEWISH TRADITION,
FROM ENOCH TO PAUL, FROM PAUL TO AKIVA

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In the Book of Genesis, Enoch was mysteriously “taken” by God. This short passage (Gen 5:21-24) contains virtually all that the Hebrew Bible presents about the person, life, and career of Enoch, and concludes with the nine tantalizing words of Gen 5:24. This brief, perplexing story has been interpreted, translated, and elaborated upon by many individuals over many generations. Their diverse perspectives offered suitable explanations and applications for their communities. This paper serves to survey and examine a few of these, beginning with the base text itself from Genesis 5:

וַיְחִי חֲנוּךְ חֲמֵשׁ וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד אֶת־מֶתוּשֶׁלַח
וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־מֶתוּשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
וַיֹּלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת
וַיְהִי כָל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ חֲמֵשׁ וְשָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
(Gen 5:21-24) וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲיָנָנִי כִי־לָקַח אֱתוֹ אֱלֹהִים פ

When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (RSV)

Aside from the fact that he lived 365 years and begat Methuselah and other children, not much is offered to the reader concerning the life¹ and career of Enoch. Of his career we learn three things, quite simply:

1. Enoch is twice mentioned as having walked with God.
2. Enoch ceased to exist.
3. Because God “took” Enoch.

¹ Of his life, perhaps suggestively he lived as many years as there are days in a year-365 (although, to Enoch, at least according to the Astronomical Book, the original perfect year at creation was actually 364 days). It is also a considerably shorter lifespan than those of the other antediluvian figures, implying he was “taken” at rather a young age relative to his contemporaries.

The Enochic Literature (fifth cent. B.C.E. to second cent. C.E.)

The most elaborate interpretation of Enoch's biography comes with the Enochic literature. Beginning with the Aramaic composition of 1 Enoch, this corpus had its origins in the late Persian period and continued to evolve and multiply throughout the second temple period until the medieval period. This corpus provides a greatly expanded portrait of Enoch, inspired by the few words from the Book of Genesis. This is done, quite remarkably, without directly quoting the verses in question, nor directly quoting any other verse of scripture, for that matter.

The Septuagint of Hellenistic Judaism (c. 300 B.C.E.)

Καὶ ἔζησεν Ἐνωχ ἑκατὸν καὶ ἑξήκοντα πέντε ἔτη καὶ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Μαθουσαλα. εὐηρέστησεν δὲ Ἐνωχ τῷ θεῷ μετὰ τὸ γεννηῆσαι αὐτὸν τὸν Μαθουσαλα διακόσια ἔτη καὶ ἐγένμησεν υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας. καὶ ἐγένοντο πᾶσαι αἱ ἡμέραι Ἐνωχ τριακόσια ἑξήκοντα πέντε ἔτη. καὶ εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνωχ τῷ θεῷ καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο, ὅτι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός. (Gen 5:21-24)

And Enoch lived an hundred and sixty and five years, and begat Mathusala. And Enoch **was well-pleasing** to God after his begetting Mathusala, two hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty and five years. And Enoch **was well-pleasing** to God, and was not found, because God **translated** him.

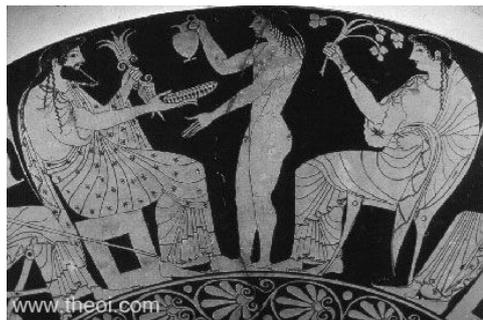
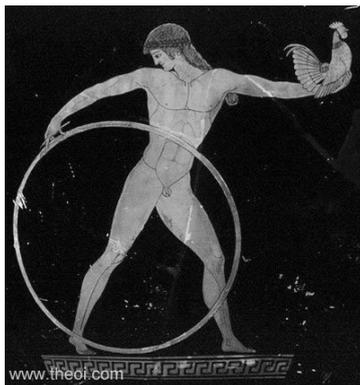
The Greek translator of the Septuagint could have simply provided a simple, rather “wooden” translation of the text, befitting his normal translation style. However, in this case, he chose to paraphrase or rewrite the text to convey what was to him, a clearer or more acceptable sense of the Hebrew. In fact, in the process of paraphrasing the Hebrew text, an apparent *Tendenz* in his translation technique is revealed, as he avoided possibly uncomfortable anthropomorphisms, particularly in the Hebrew idiomatic expression וַיִּהְיֶה לַיהוָה לְמַדְבַּר אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים “And Enoch walked about with God.” He could easily have translated the verb with the perfectly suitable Greek term *περιπατέω*, “to walk, walk about,” as he did in Gen 3:8-9.² Instead he rewrote the text to read *καὶ εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνωχ τῷ*

² In the Hebrew of Genesis 3, the anthropomorphism might seem less blatant, in that it could be interpreted that it was God's “voice,” and not his person, that was walking about the garden. However, in the LXX the verb *περιπατοῦντος* agrees with the person *κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ* and not with the voice *τὴν φωνήν*. It is curious that the translator did not defuse the matter. In the eyes of the Greek world, in this passage, God appears alone, even a bit lonely and helpless, and certainly rejected, as He seeks in vain a willing partner among humankind to walk with Him.

θεῶν “and Enoch well-pleased God.” It may be that the translator was trying to avoid here an anthropomorphism that placed physical human and divine interaction too close for comfort. The image of the mixing of “the sons of God” with “the daughters of men” (Gen 6:1-5), seen as the source of all manner of worldly evil, had to be expressly avoided. Also, similarities to popular pagan stories of divine abductions of humans by members of the Greek pantheon (e.g., the abduction of Ganymede, the myth of Leda and the swan) were far too familiar to the audience and needed to be avoided. The abduction of Ganymede and its three variations (Ganymede is spied playing and is abducted by the gods to serve as Zeus’s cup bearer during the Archaic period [eighth to sixth century B.C.E.], is abducted by Zeus himself to become his lover during the Late Archaic/Early Classical period, and is abducted by Zeus in the form of Eagle, as time continued) follows.

The Abduction of Ganymede

Archaic Period



Red figure ware vases from the Archaic Period depicting Ganymede playing (l.) and pouring wine for Zeus at a feast attended by many gods (r.)

τε καὶ ἀντίθεος Γανυμήδης,
ὃς δὴ κάλλιστος γένετο θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων·
τὸν καὶ ἀνηρείψαντο³ θεοὶ
Διὶ οἰνοχοεῦειν
κάλλεος εἵνεκα οἷο ἴν' ἀθανάτοισι μετεῖη.

³ LSJ: *ἀν-ερείπτομαι (dep., only used in aor. 1) to snatch up and carry off, ἀνηρείψαντο Hom.; ἀνεπειψαμένη Hes. This term was not in common use during the late second temple period. However, the general meaning of this term, “to snatch up and carry off,” better approximates that of ἀρπάζω and not μετατίθημι.

From the hymn to aphrodite

(<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0137%3ahymn%3d5>)

ἦ τοι μὲν ξανθὸν Γανυμήδεα μητιέτα Ζεὺς 203
ἦρπασε ὄν διὰ κάλλος, ἴν' ἀθανάτοισι μετεῖη 204
καὶ τε Διὸς κατὰ δῶμα θεοῖς ἐπιοινοχοεῦσι, 205

205

Verily wise Zeus **carried off** golden-haired Ganymedes because of his beauty, to be amongst the Deathless Ones and pour drink for the gods in the house of Zeus —

ὥς δ' αὖ Τιθωνὸν χρυσόθρονος ἦρπασεν Ἥως, 218

ἕμετέρης γενεῆς, ἐπείκελον ἀθανάτοισι. 219

220

So also golden-throned Eos **rapt away** Tithonus who was of your race and like the deathless gods.

*And godlike Ganymedes
who was the loveliest born of the race of mortals,
and therefore the gods caught him away to themselves,
to be Zeus' wine-pourer,
for the sake of his beauty, so he might be among the immortals.*

(Homer, *Iliad*, Book XX, 232-235; trans. Lattimore) c. eighth cent. B.C.E.

Late Archaic to Imperial Roman Period



5th cent. BCE and 3rd cent. CE depictions of Zeus' Abduction of Ganymede

*There is some pleasure in loving a youth,
since once in fact even the son of Kronos [Zeus], king of the immortals,
fell in love with Ganymedes, seized him, carried him off to Olympus,
and made him divine, keeping the lovely bloom of boyhood."*

(Theognis, Fragment 1. 1345; trans. Gerber, *Vol. Greek Elegiac*) c. sixth cent. B.C.E.

The translator of the Septuagint translated וְאֵינְנִי “and he did not exist (any longer)” as καὶ οὐχ ἠύροίσκετο “and he was not found (any longer),” which presented less of a philosophic challenge.

He could have translated קָבַץ with the Greek λαμβάνω “to take, receive.” But he chose instead to utilize the more ambiguous μετατίθημι “transpose, transfer; change, alter, transform; pervert,” a term which again could imply a less direct form of personal divine interaction with a mortal being. Although the ambiguity may remain as to exactly which nuance the translator wanted to convey, the ideas “transfer” or “change” (i.e., transform) seem most likely here.

The first place where God “walked about” in the Bible was in a garden, Gen 3:8-9:

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּגֶן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגֶּן
וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל-הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה

And they heard the sound [lit. “the voice”] of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

From the reader’s perspective, Adam failed as God walked alone in the garden looking for him. Several generations later, God finally found a suitable walking companion in the person of Enoch. Could it perhaps be humankind’s precarious nature and tainted record that caused God to worry for Enoch and prompted Him to take the precaution of rescuing Enoch from the earthly realm?

The Greek translation of Genesis 3:8-9:

Καὶ ἤκουσαν τὴν φωνὴν κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ περιπατοῦντος ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τὸ δειλινόν, καὶ ἐκρύβησαν ὁ τε Ἀδὰμ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ παραδείσου. καὶ ἐκάλεσεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν Ἀδὰμ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ἀδὰμ, ποῦ εἶ;

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon; and both Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called Adam and said to him, Adam, where art thou?

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible was it expressly stated that Enoch pleased God. However Enoch obviously provoked divine pleasure in that, until his time, no one, not even Adam, succeeded to walk with God. Furthermore, we see later that the only other man who was reputed to walk with God, Noah, also pleased God. Genesis 6:8-9:

וַיֵּחַד נֹחַ מִצָּדָק חָן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה פ
אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים
הַתְּהַלְלֵךְ-נֹחַ

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah **walked** with God.

Νωε δὲ εὗρεν χάριν ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ. Αὗται δὲ αἱ γενέσεις Νωε· Νωε ἄθροωπος δίκαιος, τέλειος ὢν ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ αὐτοῦ· τῷ θεῷ εὐηρόεστησεν Νωε.

But Noah found grace before the Lord God. And these *are* the generations of Noah. Noah was a just man; being perfect in his generation, Noah was well-pleasing to God.

In Genesis it is generally understood that God “took him” because Enoch walked with God. Apparently, Enoch was taken from a corrupt world by being elevating to heaven. In Noah’s case, when he walked with God, it appears that, conversely, all traces of the corrupt world were taken away from him as he was left walk on the earth.

Later Greek writers provided their own take on the matter. Each worked with the nuance of μετατίθημι, provided by the Septuagint, which best suited their message.

Ben Sira

In the Book of Ben Sira, the author “sings praises to the men of piety, our Fathers in their generations...” Enoch heads up this list of renowned individuals in a single Hebrew manuscript of Ben Sira from the Cairo Geniza, CSirB, which preserves the chapter in question.

אות דעת לדור ודור: ⁴Sir 44:16 = C SirB 13v 18
 חנוך נִמְצָא תמים והתהלך עם יי ונִלְקַח

Enoch was found blameless and walked with the LORD and he was taken, (as) a sign/symbol of knowledge to all generations. (trans. by author)

Ben Sira rewrote the biblical text, although he utilized a number of words from the original text such as *התהלך* and *לקח* unchanged. He contributed a number of elements which transform the nuance of the original wording and which reveal the writer’s unique understanding of the story. His rewrite may be taken to infer that Enoch was not “taken” anywhere physically. He modified the second clause *ולקח אותו* to read *ונלקח אות דעת*, where the biblical text’s *אותו* (mark of the accusative + 3ms suffix) has become *אות דעת*, that is, “a sign, symbol of knowledge.” (In fact, one might explore the possibility that the damaged text might have read instead *ולקח* allowing the text to convey the sapiential concept of *לִקְחָ* “practical wisdom,” which would then yield a translation along the lines of: “And (as to) practical wisdom, he was a paradigm of knowledge from generation to generation.”)

At the end of Ben Sira’s exposition of the men of piety, he provides summary statements about the fathers in brief, pithy sentences. Here he presents Enoch as having been taken, but apparently on an interior, philosophical, or, perhaps, mystical dimension:

⁴ The Masada manuscript of Ben Sira curiously has a *vacat* in place of this verse, see below.

מַעַט נּוֹצֵר עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּהֵנִיךְ (!) וְגַם הוּא נִלְקָח
פְּנִים: Sir 49:14 = CSirB 19r 4

Few have been formed on earth like Enoch; and he was also taken up within. (trans. by author)

The Greek Version Translated by Ben Sira's Grandson

Ben Sira, as translated and interpreted in Greek by his grandson, once again does not even hint that Enoch was transferred bodily anywhere. Rather, he infers by his translation that Enoch was actually transformed in his mind. He chooses to follow one of the metaphorical nuances of the LXX's μετατίθημι: Enoch pleased God by his repentance – a change or transformation of his mind. Enoch then becomes a paradigm of repentance to all generations. This revised view of the story conforms to Ben Sira's rejection of visions in favor of practical wisdom.

Ἐνωχ εὐηρέστησεν κυρίῳ καὶ μετετέθη ὑπόδειγμα μετανοίας ταῖς γενεαῖς. (Sir 44:16)

Enoch highly pleased the Lord, and was taken up; he became a paradigm of repentance to all generations. (trans. by author)

In the Greek translation, Ben Sira's grandson, following the LXX, utilized the terms εὐαρεστέω and μετατίθημι. However, he followed the variant reading utilized by his grandfather אֹת דַעַת לְדוֹר וְדוֹר, ὑπόδειγμα μετανοίας ταῖς γενεαῖς, rather than the LXX's αὐτὸν (= MT אֹתוֹ). Finally, however, in the summary statement on the fathers in Ben Sira 49, he followed a perhaps current trend of understanding by departing from his grandfather's picture of a philosophical or mystical ascent to state instead that Enoch ascended physically from the earth.

Οὐδεὶς ἐκτίσθη ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τοιοῦτος οἶος Ἐνωχ· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀνελήμφθη ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς. (Sir 49:14)

No one like Enoch has been created on earth, for he was *also* taken up from the earth. (RSVA; italics author)

The Wisdom of Solomon and Jubilees

At some point during the third to second cent. B.C.E., as reflected in the Wisdom of Solomon and the book of Jubilees, the focus switched to emphasizing the personal and forceful intervention of God in present time and space wherein God snatches Enoch from the present world up to the heavenly realm.

Referring to Enoch, the Wisdom of Solomon perceived the divine action as being a rescue of the innocent from corruption, but not so much from bodily corruption as from corruption of mind and soul. The author preserved the LXX terms εὐαρεστέω and μετατίθημι from Genesis 5 in Wisd 4:10, thus supporting the notion of Enoch's bodily transfer. However, in the following verse he intensified the imagery by utilizing the term ἀρπάζω "to snatch away, carry off; seize hastily; seize, overpower." He thereby tapped into a new notion, found also in Jubilees, turning to a similar means of snatching already familiar in the Greek world (e.g., in the myth of Ganymede), and introduced a more personal, urgent and forceful characterization of the rescue.

εὐάρεστος θεῶν γενόμενος ἠγαπήθη καὶ ζῶν μεταξὺ ἀμαρτωλῶν μετετέθη· ἠρπάγη, μὴ κακία ἀλλάξη σύνεσιν αὐτοῦ ἢ δόλος ἀπατήσῃ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ· (Wisd 4:10-11)

There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was snatched up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul.

The book of Jubilees uses ἀρπάζω here exclusively and, tapping into the imagery of Gen 3:8, the Garden (παράδεισος) has become the heavenly Paradise. Enoch is snatched away to walk about in Paradise. Here God has finally found a beloved and willing candidate to walk about with him in a place where Adam failed to rise to the call.

[Ἐνώχ] εἰς τὸν παράδεισον ἠρπάσθαι. (Jub 4:23)

Enoch was snatched away into paradise.

New Testament: The Apostle Paul

Paul follows the Wisdom of Solomon and Jubilees in their use of ἀρπάζω to describe his own mystical experience of being taken up. This underscores a more aggressive action on God's part while avoiding the ambiguities inherent in the term μετατίθημι. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul reveals the details of a personal experience where, speaking of himself in the third person, he describes an ascent to heaven: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven." His use of the phrase "third heaven," without explanation, makes it apparent that both he and his audience familiar with the idea of the third heaven, and by implication, of the various levels of heaven. If 2 Enoch was not available to him and his audience, something like it apparently was. Paul identifies with a contemporary understanding of Enoch's experience, reflected in 2 Enoch, wherein Paul is snatched upward to the third heaven and also to Paradise,

and where, as we shall see below, he was not immune to angelic tormentors also resident there.

Καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, οὐ συμφέρον μὲν, ἐλεύσομαι δὲ εἰς ὄπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου. οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων, εἴτε ἐν σώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, **ἀρπαγέντα** τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ. καὶ οἶδα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον, εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, ὅτι **ἤρπαγη** εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἔξόν ἄνθρωπῳ λαλῆσαι. (2 Cor 12:1-4)

I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

Paul does not use μεταίθημι to describe his own mystical experience despite its use in the LXX to describe Enoch’s “transfer.”⁵ He instead uses the term ἀρπάζω to present his mystical ascent to the third heaven, a term previously used by the Wisdom of Solomon and Jubilees to describe Enoch’s experience. Paul also uses ἀρπάζω in at least one other context unrelated to the description of his own mystical experience. In his early writings, ἀρπάζω was employed to describe the rapture of those who were dead but rose up alive to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess 4:16-18). Other New Testament authors expanded the use of the term as well, including Luke when writing of Philip’s method of translation by the Holy Spirit from one locality to another (Acts 8:39). The Apocalypse uses the term to depict the rescue of the male child as he is “taken up to God and His throne” (Rev 12:5).

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Not all New Testament authors followed the trend of using ἀρπάζω to describe Enoch’s experience of heavenly travel. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews posits that it is by Enoch’s πίστις (belief/faith/faithfulness) that he gained Divine pleasure, as an example for others to follow. The author remains faithful to the terminology of the LXX, in particular in his use of εὐαρεστέω, μεταίθημι, and εὐρίσκω, but accepts the nuance of a bodily transfer and rescue of Enoch from the clutches of death. This

⁵ And despite the fact that he does know the term and uses it in other contexts where it carries the more negative nuances found in the contemporary use of the word (e.g., Gal 1:6).

experience is, in this way, considered a reward for having pleased God through his faith.

Πίστει Ἐνώχ μετετέθη τοῦ μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον, καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο διότι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός. πρὸ γὰρ τῆς μεταθέσεως μεμαρτύρηται εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ· χωρὶς δὲ πίστεως ἀδύνατον εὐαρεστηῆσαι· πιστεῦσαι γὰρ δεῖ τὸν προσερχόμενον τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἔστιν καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν μισθαποδότης γίνεται. (Heb 11:5-6)

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Josephus

At least one author refuses to picture Enoch's experience as being purely passive but instead emphasizes the willful initiative of the traveler. Josephus completely avoids translating the term $\Pi\rho\lambda$ by introducing a term which conveys a more active role in the journey on Enoch's part: ἀναχωρέω "to retire, withdraw from battle or from this world," as it is used in Aristotle and Plato for a retreat from the busy world to pursue a higher philosophical or contemplative plain (cf. ἀναχώρησις *anachoresis*).⁶ Josephus gives no reason for this choice, either on Enoch's part or on the part of God, being apparently more interested in the fact that there was no record of his death. At the same time he also presents Enoch's experience as being a praiseworthy philosophical pursuit to his Roman audience.

τοῦτον εἰς ἑννέα καὶ ἑξήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἑνακοσίοις βιώσαντα Ἄνωχος υἱὸς διαδέχεται γεννηθεὶς περὶ ἔτη δύο καὶ ἑξήκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῷ τυγχάνοντος οὗτος ζήσας πέντε καὶ ἑξήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς τριακοσίοις ἀνεχώρησε πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὅθεν οὐδὲ τελευτὴν αὐτοῦ ἀναγεγράφασι (Ant. 1:85)

He lived nine hundred and sixty-two years; and then his son Enoch succeeded him, who was born when his father was one hundred and sixty-two years old. Now he, when he had lived three hundred and sixty-five years, departed, and went to God; whence it is that they have not written down his death. (trans. Whiston)

⁶ *LSJ*: ἀνα-χωρέω, f. ἦσω, 1. *to go back*, Hom.: esp. *to retire* or *withdraw* from battle, Hom., Hdt., Att. 2. *to retire from* a place, c. gen., Od. II. *to come back* or *revert to the rightful owner*, ἐς τὸν παῖδα Hdt. III, *to withdraw* from the world, Ar., Plat. Hence ἀναχώρησις.

The Masada Manuscript of Ben Sira (dated 100-75 B.C.E.): Was Enoch conveniently forgotten or stricken from the list?

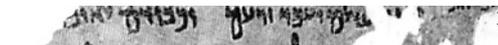
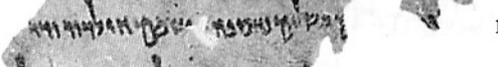
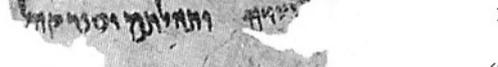
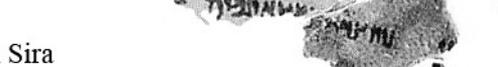
The collection of manuscripts of the biblical and apocryphal texts from Masada provides us with the core of what one might typify as a Pharisaic library.⁷ These include seven “Proto-Masoretic” biblical manuscripts and a copy of Ben Sira which reflects the same scribal practice as found in these biblical manuscripts.⁸ The Sicarii, who controlled Masada for most of the last decade leading up to its destruction, were known to have lived according to the practices of the Pharisees. Speaking of the Sicarii Josephus states, “But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions” (*Ant.* 18.1.6 §23). These practices would certainly include the definition of acceptable holy books.

For some groups, it may have been more convenient to avoid the ticklish subject of Enoch altogether by maintaining a silence concerning the characterization of his activities and his mortality. In the Masada manuscript of Ben Sira, in Chapter 44, a long list of praiseworthy individuals is anticipated as Ben Sira “sings praises to the men of piety, our Fathers in their generations...” Enoch heads the list in the Greek and Cairo Geniza copies of Ben Sira (see above). However, in the Masada manuscript, verse 16, which speaks of Enoch, is curiously missing. One might think that it would have been easier (and more discreet) to have simply skipped the verse and continued with verse 17 which goes on to praise Noah. However, a blank line was clearly left to mark the place where verse 16 should have been written (see below). This would seem to imply that, at least one scribe consciously decided to eliminate Enoch from the list of pious men.⁹

⁷ That is, authoritative works but lacking any written texts of their own authorship since their own traditions were handed down only orally. For this practice see Josephus, *Ant.* 13:297.

⁸ Concerning the distinctive nature of the scrolls found at Masada, Talmon states, “The scribes of the Masada biblical scrolls, and to a lesser degree also of the non-biblical manuscripts, followed rabbinic instructions for the writing of ‘holy books’, laid down in several early and later sources, *int. al.* j. Meg. 1.71d-72a; b. Shab. 103a-105a; b. Men 28b-32b; Tractate Soferim, Tractate Sefer Torah, *et al.*” Cf. S. Talmon, ed., with contributions by C. Newsom – Y. Yadin, *Hebrew Fragments from Masada. Masada VI: Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963-1965 Final Reports* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), p. 21. The Masada manuscript of Ben Sira is the oldest extant copy of the book (ca. 100-75 B.C.E.) having been penned only a century after the autograph. Ben Sira was highly respected as authoritative in rabbinic tradition, even being cited with the introductory formula **כִּאֲשֶׁר כָּתוּב** “as it is written” cf., e.g., Hag. 12a, Nidah 16b, Y. Berachot 11c. The book is quoted in rabbinic literature 82 times. Cf. A. Di Lella with P. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: III. “Canonicity of the Book and Place in the Canon”* (*AB* 39; New York: Doubleday), p. 20.

⁹ It is unlikely, however, this would be the only manuscript that deleted this line since the Syriac Peshitta, which is a translation based on Proto-Masoretic manuscripts, also deletes this verse, while the Greek version of Ben Sira’s grandson does not.

Ben Sira		13
44:13–18		14
		15
missing verse --->		(16)
		17
Masada Ben Sira		18
Col. VII		

Rabbinic reactions to the exaltation and immortality of Enoch

This removal of Enoch from the ranks of the righteous may be subsequently explained in the early rabbinic period following the fall of Jerusalem and Masada. Early rabbinic sources including *Bereshith Rabba* and *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* present a radically divergent perspective on Enoch's life. This view appears to reflect a period of inner sectarian polemics between the rabbinic academies and other religious groups, especially the Enochites, whose religious practice was guided by revelation that was not received "from Moses at Sinai." For the rabbis, the Enoch of Gen 5:24 is not understood to provide a paradigm of righteousness and wisdom for fellow members to emulate. Rather, he is presented as a model of failure and betrayal, which leaves no room for his redemption. *Bereshith Rabba* 25:1 presents the judgments of two sages who deny that Enoch's righteousness even earned him a place in the Book of Life. For them, in fact, the opposite was true. He vacillates between righteous and wicked deeds and so is removed from the roster of the righteous and is added instead to the roster of the wicked. The following quotes are from *Bereshith Rabba* 25:1:

אמר ר. חמא בר הושעיא אינו נכתב בתוך טומוסן של צדיקים אלא בטומוסן של רשעים.

R. Hama b. R. Hoshaya said: "and he was not" means that he was not inscribed in the roll of the righteous but in the roll of the wicked.

ר. איבו חנוך חתף היה פעמים צדיק פעמים רשע. אמר הקב"ה עד שהוא צדיק אסלקנו. אמר ר. איבו ראש השנה דנו בשעה שדן כל העולם:

R. Aibu said: Enoch was a hypocrite, acting sometimes as a righteous, sometimes as a wicked man. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He,

said: “While he is righteous I will remove him.” R. Aibu also said: He judged him on New Year, when he judges the whole world.¹⁰

The same passage, opposing current opinions of heretics, also denies that the scriptures intended to convey that Enoch was translated to heaven or that the Enoch was immortalized.

המינים שאלו את ר. אבהו אמרו לו אין אנו מוצאים מיה לחנוך אמר להם למה אמרו לו נאמ. כאן לקיחו ונאמ. באלהו לקיחה. אמר להם אם לקיחה אתם דורשים נאמ. כאן לקיחה ונאמ. ביחזקאל הנני לוקח את מחמד ונו. (יחזקאל כד טז). אמר ר. תנחומא יפה השיבם:

Some sectarians asked R. Abbahu: “We do not find that Enoch died?” “How so?” inquired he. “‘Taking’ is employed here, and also in connection with Elijah,” said they. “If you stress the word ‘taking’,” he answered, “then ‘taking’ is employed here, while in Ezekiel it is said, ‘Behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes,’ etc.” (Ezek. xxiv, 16). R. Tanhuma observed: He answered them well.

מטרונא שאלה את ר. יוסי אין אנו מוצאים בחנוך. אמר לה אילו נאמ. וייתהלך חנוך את האלהים ושתק הייתי אומר בדבריך. כשהוא אומר ואיננו כי לקח אתו ונו. איננו בעולם כי לקח אתו אלהים:

A matrona asked R. Jose: “We do not find death stated of Enoch?” Said he to her: “If it said, ‘*And Enoch walked with God,*’ and no more, I would agree with you. Since, however, it says, ‘*And he was not, for God took him,*’ it means that he was no more in the world, [having died.] ‘*for God took him*’.”

The rabbinic literature of the following periods is widely silent on Enoch. The Tannaitic literature, the Jerusalem Talmud, and Babylonian Talmud neither mention him by name nor his deeds.

Later medieval Jewish sources, however, reintroduce Enoch as a model of perfect piety and behavior at a time when Jewish mysticism comes into its own between the fifth and tenth centuries C.E. This can be seen already in such works as the Third “Hebrew” Book of Enoch and in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. As noted above, the Cairo Geniza copy of Ben Sira (CSirB; 12th cent. C.E.) presents the full text of Ben Sira at 44:16, as would be expected, as well as the text of 49:14 (which unfortunately has not been preserved in the Masada copy).

¹⁰ I.e., “While Enoch walked with God he was not” means “he was removed from the list of the righteous from the book.”

Entering Paradise while still alive in rabbinic literature: The four who “entered” Paradise

Rabbinic sources do not always portray a mortal’s visit to Paradise negatively.¹¹ However, neither do things always turn out well for those who go there. For example, the sources provide an interesting story of four sages who “entered” Paradise, a story that again avoids the term *לָקַח* altogether. By choice, the four went to Paradise by uttering the Divine Name.

Four entered Paradise. They are Ben Azai, Ben Zoma, Acher (Elisha ben Abuyah), and R. Akiva. R. Akiva said to them: When you reach the stones of pure marble be careful not to say “water, water,” since Scripture says “A speaker of lies cannot stand before my face” (Psalm 101). Ben Azai gazed and died. Ben Zoma gazed and was mentally disturbed. Acher cut the plants (i.e., became a heretic), and R. Akiva came out in peace. (bHag. 14b)

Torment in Paradise?

In 2 Enoch, the third heaven was the heavenly abode of the dead. It was divided into the Eden-like abode of the righteous, “Paradise,” which was separated by a wide desert from a region of torment for the wicked to its far north. Traveling to heaven was not always typified as a positive experience. Some benefited, but not all were well protected in Paradise. A visit to heaven/paradise carried with it the potential for blessing or danger and could have positive or negative results, depending on the individual. In the Enochic literature, Enoch was subject to envy and threat from heavenly angels, due to his special divine provision (and transformation). Paul’s profound experience was supplemented by an unwanted visitor, an “angel of Satan” that acted as a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble, but with positive results, at least according to his own optimistic perspective. In the case of the four sages that went to Paradise, three were worse for the experience, at least from the perspective of the commentators of the Babylonian Talmud, as only Rabbi Akiva emerged unscathed.

The Targums

The Aramaic Targums Neofiti, Onkelos, and Pseudo-Jonathan all understand *הִלָּךְ* and *לָקַח* metaphorically to express simply how Enoch had conducted his life and died.

¹¹ Numerous lists are provided in Jewish sources of individuals who “entered Paradise without tasting death.” These lists are normally headed by Elijah and amount to 11 or more individuals; cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1968), vol. 5, p. 68f., n. 67.

The Palestinian Targum (Targum Neofiti)

ופלח חנוך בקושטא קדם יי ולית ידיע אן הוא <...> אתנגר במימר
 מן־קדם יי:
 Gen 5:24 Targ. Neofiti

And Enoch served/worshipped in truth before the LORD, and it is not known where he *was*<...>, for he expired (lit. was stretched out) by a Word from before the Lord. (trans. by author)

Apparently for Neofiti, by “ministering in truth in the presence of the Lord,” Enoch served like a true priest and died while ministering in God’s presence. Apparently he simply died with no hint of being transferred alive or dead, or resurrected into heaven.

Targum Onkelos

וְהָלַךְ חֲנוּךְ בְּרַחֲלָתָא דִּיּוּי וְלִיתוּהִי אֲרִי אֲמִיתִיהּ יי:
 Gen 5:24 Targ. Onkelos

And Enoch walked in the fear of the LORD and he was not, because the LORD put him to death. (trans. by author)

For Onkelos, Enoch, like a pious man, conducted his life in the fear of the Lord. This is clearly a positive evaluation of Enoch’s life, unlike that of some contemporary rabbinic sources (e.g., *Bereshith Rabba* and *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*). As in these sources, Enoch died like any other human being. However for Onkelos, Enoch’s death appropriately occurred in God’s time and according to his will; it was not a punishment. Onkelos does not take the sage’s death in a negative way, but sees it as part of the life journey of a pious man whose birth, childhood, adulthood and death are orchestrated and protected and blessed according to Divine planning. It transpired, as one would hope, according to His will. At the same time there is nothing extraordinary in his passing, in that no miraculous ascension to heaven is indicated.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

ופלח חנוך בקושטא קדם יי והא ליתוהי עם דיירי ארעא ארום איתניגיד
 וסליק לרקיעא במימר קדם יי וקרא שמייה מיטטרון ספרא רב
 Gen 5:24 Targ. Pseudo-Jonathan

And Enoch served/worshipped in truth before the LORD, and behold he was not with the inhabitants of the earth, for he expired (lit. was stretched out). Then he ascended to the firmament by a Word in the LORD’s presence. And he called his name Metatron the Great Scribe.

Pseudo-Jonathan apparently conflates the biblical text by utilizing the Palestinian Targum, Onkelos, and other traditions. For him Enoch served as a true priest, who died and was miraculously assumed bodily to heaven (where he was honorably renamed “Metatron, the Great Scribe”).

Conclusion: Enoch, an unwitting archetype for any group at any time

As this survey illustrates, the great scribes and interpreters of past generations have had a field day translating and interpreting this minuscule section of the book of Genesis for their own immediate social context and for their own generation. For the most part in the targums, whether the writer presents Enoch as being immortalized with an ascent to heaven or as a simple human who died according to God’s timing, there is clearly a positive evaluation of Enoch’s exemplary life for the audience to follow. This is apparently not the case for the Pharisaic and early rabbinic sources which, likely under stress from sectarian polemics, present Enoch as an exemplary failure, uncompromisingly expunging his name from the list of the righteous and committing him to the estate of the wicked. In later Jewish sources, especially mystical writings, Enoch is elevated by God above all others to favored status as Metatron. In most cases the writers desired to preserve Enoch as a perfect model of what a member of their community should aspire to be. In this way, whether as an exemplary hasid, an exemplary priest, an exemplary rabbi, an exemplary sectary, an exemplary Hellenistic Jew, an exemplary Enochite, or an exemplary Christian, Enoch, based upon his small cameo appearance in Genesis, became a potential source of inspiration to one and all.