

It is difficult to find ‘good’ intellectual arguments for or against the canonistic nature of the Book of Enoch. Most “Christian” arguments that I find are extremely circular in nature. Many are so high level as to be worthless.

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I found the following answer within a question-and-answer web site. It is one of the best concise descriptions that I have found. It was written by a pastor named Frank Luke. It can be sourced at <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/8888/what-were-the-historical-reasons-why-the-book-of-enoah-was-excluded-from-most-ch>

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First Enoch (or the *Ethiopic Enoch*) stands alone among the Jewish apocalypses for length, diversity, and richness.¹ No other ancient non-canonical work influenced the Jewish world of the first century as much as *Enoch*.² With its interest in suffering, evil, demons, and the Last Judgment, *Enoch* helps bridge the gap in life and thought between Malachi and Matthew. In addition, *Enoch* provides the modern world with insights into a tumultuous period in Jewish history.

Historical Background

Though many books can be classified quite easily to their exact date and origin, *Enoch* comes as a composite work in five sections from the hand of at least five authors. The sections are:

- *The Book of Watchers* (1–36),
- **The Similitudes of Enoch* (33–71),
- *The Book of Heavenly Luminaries* (72–82),
- *The Book of Dream Visions* (83–90),
- and *The Epistle of Enoch* (91–105)
- with chapters 106–108 forming an epilogue.

Each of these section shows a purposeful break from the previous chapters.

Multiple authors alone make the task of identification much more difficult. However, even with numerous authors, the book of *Enoch* still shows massive internal unity with its themes of coming judgement, dualism (either temporal, cosmic, or ontological), and salvation (both ultimate and present).³ This section will attempt to determine as much as possible the dates, location, authorship, and life setting of these five books collected together as *1 Enoch*.

Authorship

More visionaries and poets than systematic theologians,⁴ the authors of *1 Enoch* wrote under an assumed name like their fellow apocalyptic author. Each author chose the name of an ancient because of an affinity with the character.⁵ For example, those who wrote in Ezra’s name displayed a fierce Jewish nationalism similar to the ancient scribe. The group who wrote *Enoch* seem more concerned with the gentile world than their contemporaries do and accordingly chose their hero from the ante-diluvian patriarchs. Obviously orthodox Jews,

one can easily see how all the authors of *Enoch* share a concern that all mankind come to salvation.⁶ Furthermore, the authors present themselves as well-educated intellectuals.⁷

Location

Related to “who” comes the question of “where.” Though the authors drop only a few clues, they do leave a few tell-tale signs of their homeland. While obviously all five parts come from the Holy Land, if nothing else, one can be more precise with the Book of Watchers (1-36). Through geographical references in chapters 12-16, it appears that *1 Enoch* 1-36 originated in Northern Israel near the headwaters of the Jordan River in Galilee.⁸ *First Enoch* 13:7-9 marks one of the few areas outside Jerusalem described, and the authors even name a few cities in the region. The originating location of the other books must remain unknown.

Date

The dates of *Enoch* cause much debate in the academic world. Though most scholars have reached consensus on four of the five books, *The Similitudes of Enoch* still spark debate.

Briefly, this paper will touch on the more agreed upon sections first.⁹

The oldest section of *Enoch*, *The Book of Heavenly Luminaries*, illustrates the antiquity of the calendar debate in Israel and shows one reason that the Essenes of Qumran kept the book. While *Heavenly Luminaries* dates from between the fifth and third centuries B.C., the *Book of Watchers* dates from the third century. *The Book of Dream Visions* comes from the early Maccabean period followed by the *Epistle of Enoch* in the first century B.C.

Easily the youngest or second youngest section of the book, scholars still debate what period the *Similitudes* come from. Though many date the section pre-Christian, others see it as a Christian work and date it accordingly. On one hand, Frey (second century B.C.), Charles (94–64 B.C.), Hooker (70–63 B.C.), Sjöberg (40–38 B.C.), and Einfeldt (39–36 B.C.) say the book comes from the pre-Christian, Jewish era. On the other hand, Dalman, Bousset, Schmidt (all late first century), Hindly (A.D. 115–117), and Milik (A.D. 270) see the book as Christian, based mainly on the lack of the *Similitudes* at Qumran.¹⁰ However, internal and external evidence points to a pre-Christian date for the *Similitudes of Enoch*.

While providing all the evidence for an early date of *The Similitudes* would require a research paper of its own, a summary of the evidence follows.

1. The book describes only one advent of the Messiah where a Christian apocalypse would speak of two.
2. The book makes no references to the cross, scars, or resurrection of the Messiah, all prominent allusions in early Christian works.
3. *The Similitudes* contain too few Christological references.
4. Another apocalyptic work, *The Testament of Abraham* 11 (ca. turn of the era), quotes and refutes part of it.
5. No Christian author would identify Enoch as the “Son of Man” (*1 Enoch* 71:14).

Occasion

Though some may argue,¹¹ all sections of *1 Enoch* seem to come from times of trouble and persecution.¹² First *Enoch* 9:10 and 12:7 indicate the authors knew trouble and persecution. Some of the likely times of trouble for the parts of the work include Alexander's Diadochi Wars (Watchers) and the Maccabean revolt (Dream Visions).¹³ That the authors see the priesthood as defiled marks another problem for Enoch's time (*1 Enoch* 12–13). Additionally, The Epistle of *Enoch* with its warnings to “the children of *Enoch*” seems to be a polemic against apostate Jews. However, others suggest that “Enoch” wrote in response to suffering in general.¹⁴

The authors' troubles work together for unifying the entire book. *Enoch* now stands as a collection of attempts to solve the riddles of nature and scripture seen in suffering and chaos. The authors all seem to come from one group that brooded over theological problems, trying to relate Scripture to life's existential dilemmas.¹⁵ *Enoch*, like other apocalyptic works, encourages its readers to persevere in the present life by promising them God will judge the wicked and bless the righteous in the Eschaton—reminding them how their suffering will not last forever. Like 2 Peter 3:2-10, *Enoch* warns his readers that the coming judgement of the wicked is as sure as the earlier judgement of the Flood. As God saved Noah and his family then, so will He preserve the faithful in the final judgement.

Consideration of Canonicity

History of Inclusion and Exclusion

First Enoch never made a viable bid for canonicity in the Jewish community. While it obviously shaped Jewish thought, only the Qumranites seemed interested in preserving it. They viewed it as an appendix to and interpretation of Scripture instead of Scripture itself.¹⁶ As the apocalyptic works tended to stir national fervor, the rabbis suppressed them in normative Judaism after the failed Zealot revolt of A.D. 70.

On the other hand, *Enoch* enjoys a long history of various Christians arguing for its inclusion or exclusion. That early Christians shared the Jewish fascination with this man who never died cannot be disputed. No less than 24 ancient works identify *Enoch* and Elijah as the two witnesses of Revelation 11.¹⁷ However, *1 Enoch's* place in the canon was not assured.

While Tertullian argued that *Enoch* belonged in the canon based on Jude's quotations, others argued that Jude should be removed from the canon because of its quotations from non-canonical works like *Enoch*.¹⁸ Agreeing with Tertullian, the Ethiopic Church canonized *1 Enoch*.¹⁹ Likewise, the Manichaeans kept another related but separate work of *Enoch*, *The Book of Giants*. *The Epistle of Barnabas* and Athenagoras' *Embassy for Christians* both allude to *Enoch* in favorable ways. Clement and Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.16.2) both quote *Enoch* favorably (but not as Scripture).²⁰ However, all of these arguments together did not prevail, and the early Church ultimately rejected *Enoch* from the canon.

Factors in Consideration of *1 Enoch's* Canonicity

The early Church did not place books in the canon haphazardly. They examined each book and placed it the canon based on function, adaptability and stability, and continuous usage. In other words, a canonical work contains adaptable wisdom on how to live at any time.²¹ However, other factors come into play.

1. New Testament books had to come from the first century apostolic circle—either an apostle, companion of an apostle, or otherwise qualified individual (like a brother of Jesus).
2. They could not contain teachings that contradict orthodox doctrine.
3. The person named as author must be the author.²²
4. The book must demonstrate inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Easily the most difficult to determine, inspiration remains the ultimate factor.

Fortunately, the community of faith realized *Enoch* failings at several points along these tests. Obviously, no Apostle or companion wrote *Enoch*, so it could not be placed in the New Testament. While the ancient book's genre almost required writing pseudonymously, *1 Enoch*'s pseudonymous nature served as another problem for the early Church. However, even if all these could be overcome, *Enoch* still contradicted accepted doctrine.

Enoch contains numerous doctrinal differences with the canon. Almost in the beginning of the book, *Enoch* lays the blame for the Genesis Flood and introduction of evil into the world at the feet of the fallen angels whom he calls "Watchers" instead of humans as Genesis 1 and 6 do (*1 Enoch* 7–8).²³ Sadly, *Enoch*'s doctrinal aberrations do not end there.

Most importantly, *Enoch*'s views on salvation kept it out of the canon. Salvation comes to those who read the book and pay attention to heavenly secrets and no others.²⁴ *Enoch* presents a God so distant and aloof that He requires the unfallen angels to inform Him of events on earth. As might be expected with such a God, the book says very little about the central theme of Scripture—how the holy God can change sinful humans into righteous beings.²⁵ In fact, *Enoch* presents salvation in a way similar to the gnostics of later centuries. On the other hand, canonical New Testament works teach about the transforming power of God and His desire to save repentant sinners.

Assessment of Determining Factors

Lack of inspiration determined *Enoch*'s exclusion from the canon of the church. While no one factor can ever be said to demonstrate inspiration, any of several factors may demonstrate the lack of inspiration. *Enoch*'s pseudonymous nature represented a small problem. Since several books of both testaments have apocalyptic sections, *Enoch*'s concentration on eschatological theology would not have been a major factor. However, as *Enoch* contradicts orthodox doctrine at several points, they had to reject it. Even if the early church had overlooked the origin of evil and the identification of the Son of Man with *Enoch* (71:14), the almost gnostic soteriology rightfully kept the book out of the canon. Indeed, even had he identified the Son of Man as the Messiah, *Enoch*'s teaching of salvation by special knowledge more than amply demonstrated his lack of inspiration.

Works Cited

¹ J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone, "The Books and The Traditions of Enoch," *Numen* 26 (Fasc. 1), 89–103.

² Margaret Barker, *Lost Prophet* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1988), 105. However, Barker presents Enoch as having such an influence that almost every New Testament passage shows traces of Enoch's theology. Compare to the view of D. S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), xiv.

- ³G. Nickelsburg, "The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in 1 Enoch," in *Mysteries and Revelations*, ed. J. J. Collins and J. H. Charlesworth, (Worcester, Great Britain: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 52.
- ⁴D. S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, xiii.
- ⁵D. S. Russell, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 11.
- ⁶F. Crawford Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), 20. Leonhard Rost, *Judaism Outside the Hebrew Canon: An Introduction to the Documents*, trans. by David E. Green. (Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press, 1971), 139, eliminates the Essenes as authors.
- ⁷Michael Edward Stone, "The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E.," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (October 1978), 489.
- ⁸George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 54; Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 28-30.
- ⁹Dates for the four "uncontested" books come from: George Nickelsburg *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 47, 48, 93, 145, and 223; Christopher L. Mearns, "Dating the Similitudes of Enoch," *New Testament Studies* 25 (April 1979), 360, and James C. VanderKam and William Adler, eds. *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 33.
- ¹⁰The given dates are all quoted in Christopher L. Mearns, "Dating the Similitudes of Enoch," *New Testament Studies* 25 (April 1979), 360. A detailed refutation of their arguments can be found in the appendix to this paper. See also, Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 264.
- ¹¹Burkitt, (*Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*), 33 says that the authors had much time to contemplate life and not worry about persecution.
- ¹²H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (New York: Association Press, 1964), 96.
- ¹³George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 52.
- ¹⁴J. C. Thom, "Aspects of the Form Meaning and Function of the Book of Watchers" in *Neotestamentica* 17 (1983), 47.
- ¹⁵Leonhard Rost, *Judaism Outside the Hebrew Canon: An Introduction to the Documents* (Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press, 1971), 140; Julio Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 195.
- ¹⁶R. T. Beckwith, "The Canon of Scripture" in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et. al. (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 29.
- ¹⁷James C. VanderKam and William Adler, eds. *Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, 92.
- ¹⁸*Ibid*, 52; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 85.
- ¹⁹Siegfried Meurer, ed. *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 160.
- ²⁰James C. VanderKam and William Adler, eds. *Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, 42.
- ²¹James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1984), 28.
- ²²Criteria taken from R. T. Beckwith, "The Canon of Scripture" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 30 and Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 261.
- ²³However, contrast 1 Enoch 32:3-6 where Enoch sees the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, and though he sees it as desirable, his angel guide tells him that the same tree

resulted in Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden. Perhaps the author is more orthodox than some believe.

²⁵P. G. R. de Villiers, "Revealing the Secrets" in *Neotestamentica* 17 (1983), 55 and 59.

²⁶For one of the few exceptions, see 1 Enoch 90:35-38 (from the *Book of Dream Visions*) where those Jews (blind sheep) and gentiles (wild animals) who look upon the Messiah (a white bull) transform into His image. The imagery in this "Animal Apocalypse" marks one of the most beautiful descriptions of the Messiah's transforming work in non-canonical, Jewish literature.

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An Addendum to this answer was provided by user "user25930"

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Allow me to congratulate Frank Luke on an excellent answer. Allow me to offer some further points to build on his good start.

The Argument for Canonicity

Before considering this, it should be noted that very few people actually argue that the book of 1 Enoch should be included in the Bible with the notable exception of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. But among those who do, the main reason invariably centres on the almost verbatim parallel between Jude 14, 15 and 1 En 1:9. (They are NOT identical because we now only have them in different languages, Ge'ez and Greek; despite this, the similarity is impressive.) This amazing "quote" could be due to any of the following phenomena:

1. Jude actually quoted from 1 Enoch. However, this does not make 1 Enoch a Biblical book any more than Cyrus (cf Ezra 1) or Epimenides (Act 17:28, 29) (The Book of Revelation also quotes from 1 Enoch.)
2. Jude quotes from the real book of Enoch, now lost, that the (false) book of 1 Enoch attempts to imitate and change by also quoting.
3. Jude quoted the antediluvian patriarch Enoch via an oral tradition as did the book of 1 Enoch. Thus, Jude says nothing about the book of 1 Enoch which, under this scenario, could have been written much later than the patriarch to include such oral traditions to lend it greater credibility. A similar phenomenon has occurred with the "modern" book of Jasher.

Which of these Jude had in mind cannot now be determined. Therefore, nothing can be deduced about the canonicity of 1 Enoch from the presumed quote in Jude. Only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church reckons 1 Enoch as canonical.

Arguments Against Canonicity

1. The Jews did not include 1 Enoch in their cannon (ie, the Old Testament). The Septuagint does not include it either, despite including some other dubious material (eg, Bel and the Dragon, etc). Thus the Jews did not regard 1 Enoch as inspired.
2. The earliest church lists do not include 1 Enoch and the Latin Vulgate prepared by Jerome does not include 1 Enoch. None of the early church councils considered it inspired. (The only Christian Church to include it has been Ethiopian Orthodox

Church.) Some early church fathers were impressed by 1 Enoch such as: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertulian. But in the 4th century the book fell into disfavour and was discouraged by Augustine, Hilary and Jerome.

3. 1 Enoch is now only available in complete form in the ancient Ethiopian liturgical language of Ge'ez. All complete manuscripts date from the 15th century or later. It is not known what the original language was, but it may have been Hebrew, Aramaic or a mixture of both. The book is clearly composite and contains a number of interpolations from various sources such as (apparently) the lost book of Noah – see 1 En 10, 1 En 54:7 – 55:2, 1 En 60 – 68. Further, book 5 (chs 91-108) is clearly scrambled from their original order. Thus, the current state of preservation of the text is lamentable. Now the decision as to whether a book should be included in the canon of scripture is not a human but a divine decision. And, if the Lord had wished to have 1 Enoch in the canon of scripture, He would have preserved it for all to use, but clearly the document has been poorly preserved!
4. 1 Enoch contains a number of themes and statements that are difficult to reconcile with a supposedly inspired work, including:
 - a. 1 En 6ff. The book of Watchers describes (at some length) angels marrying and procreating with humans – a feat described by Jesus as impossible – see Matt 22:30, Mark 12:25.
 - b. The whole premise of the first book of 1 Enoch (chs 1 – 36) hinges on the original sin of angels being their defilement and procreation with women during the antediluvian period after Eden – a claim at odds with the Bible which states that Satan's sin occurred before Eden (Isa 14:12-15, Eze 28:12-17, Gen 3, etc) without the involvement of mortal women.
 - c. 1 En 7:3 describes giants 3000 (or 300 depending on the manuscript) cubits (about 2000 or 200 m) tall!
 - d. 1 En 10:10-12 states that the earth would last another 70 generations of 500 years, or 35,000 years
 - e. 1 En 13:5 states that evil angels cannot speak or even be seen by God (contrast Job 1 & 2)
 - f. 1 En 14:5 says that evil angels cannot ascend to heaven (contrast Job 1 & 2)
 - g. 1 En 22:4 claims that the spirits of the dead beg heaven for mercy and await punishment (contrast this with Eccl 9:5, 6, 10, etc.)
 - h. 1 En 32:2, 77:8, 9 discusses the Red Sea (or Erythraean Sea, depending on the translation) which did not exist before the flood. The same is true of Mt. Sinai (1 En 1:4)
 - i. 1 En 44 says that the origin of lightning is stars!
 - j. 1 En 56:5 describes the country of the Parthians and the Medes which did not exist before 300 BC suggesting that 1 Enoch was written after this time. Therefore, the document could not have been composed by an antediluvian patriarch as it repeatedly asserts.

k. 1 En 60:1 talks about the 500th year of Noah; 1 En 65:4 records a conversation between Enoch and Noah; 1 En 106 describes the birth of Noah during the lifetime of Enoch. All this is at odds with the chronology of Gen 5:18-31 which claims that Enoch was taken from the earth 69 years before Noah's birth.

l. The Book of Heavenly Luminaries (= Astronomical Book) contains a mixture of Greek mythology and Greek Celestial mechanics. This is another compelling evidence that the book was composed about 300 BC or soon after. Thus, the book, by claiming Enoch as its author shows itself a pseudepigraphon.

m. The solar year is stated to be 364 days (1 En 74:10).

5. A frequent criticism of the book of Mormon states that it cannot be genuine because the original text (in "reformed Egyptian") cannot be examined. The same is true of 1 Enoch – the original Hebrew or Aramaic has been almost entirely lost. If the book is divinely inspired, then why was it not preserved in its original form and language as the rest of the Bible has been?
6. A related criticism asserts that because the book was lost for over 1000 years (only rediscovered in 1773), it has not enjoyed divine protection as per the rest of the Bible. Thus during its lost years, Christians had no access to the document.
7. Book 4, the Dream Visions, (chs 83 – 90) contains what purports to be a prophecy of the world (in animal parables) from creation to the coming of Messiah. It is not a very good prophecy because it is only accurate up to the time of the Maccabean revolt. It becomes useless for the time thereafter, thus demonstrating that this section of the book was probably written about the 2nd century BC.
8. The entire character of the book is quite mystical, Greek, and un-Jewish in nature. There is no mention of Old Testament ceremony of the lunar-solar calendar. That is, while 1 Enoch is not genuine Gnostic literature, it is definitely Platonic in character due to its cosmology, calendar, and anthropology.

Thus, the Book of 1 Enoch is frequently at odds with the teachings of the Bible and everyday experience, and is unreliable generally. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as canonical.