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A Reassessment of the Role of 1 Enoch 56:5-8 for the Dating of the Similitudes of Enoch:
A Critique of the Historical-Allusional Method and a New Suggestion for Understanding the
Text from a Tradition-Historical Perspective

ABSTRACT

From the inception of research on 1 Enoch 185 years ago, the Similitudes (chs. 37-71) have been dated almost exclusively according to proposals regarding the probable historical setting of an alleged allusion to a Parthian invasion in 56:5-8. First, the present thesis reexamines the *opinio communis* and shows that the various hypotheses that scholars have advanced for a historical setting of the text fail to convince. In particular, the Parthian incursion into Palestine of 40 BCE, the incident usually considered to be in view, does not correlate especially well with the contents of the text, whereas other events from the sketchy history of the Parthian Empire provide a much closer correspondence. Moreover, many of the elements within the passage are typical of the Greco-Roman characterization of the Parthians, raising the possibility that the pericope may be primarily constructed according to this depiction rather than actual historical occurrences. These difficulties are further exacerbated by the two major presuppositions underlying the various theories, namely that the term *Parthians* is original to the document and can only refer to a single, specific group, but the soundness of these assumptions is challenged by the potential for textual alteration in the former situation and the widespread overlapping use of *Parthians*, *Persians*, and *Medes* in the latter. Second, the thesis goes on to argue that a more fruitful approach to the interpretation of 1 Enoch 56:5-8 would be to understand the text as drawing upon a (proto-) apocalyptic tradition that expects foreign invaders to attempt to wage war against Jerusalem in an eschatological battle. Since other passages containing this tradition (Ezekiel 38-39; *Sib. Or.* 3.657-732; Rev. 20:7-10; 4 Ezra 13:5-11) are not considered to be rooted in *vaticinium ex eventu*, the validity of using this text within the historical-allusional method of dating is consequently called into question.