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# Once again on Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān: the Enochic connection

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**Abstract:** In the Qur'ān, a son of Noah dies in the flood because, the Qur'ān states, he is not actually of Noah's family. The passage in question (Q 11:46) was puzzling to classical Muslim exegetes and modern scholars alike, and the search for parallel narratives in previous biblical and parabiblical texts has been largely unsuccessful. Another Qur'ānic passage that portrays Noah's wife in negative terms (Q 66:10) led some early Muslim scholars to consider the possibility that she cheated on his husband but this interpretation was later dismissed on the principle of prophetic infallibility. In this paper, the story of Noah's perished son is examined in the light of Second Temple Jewish texts, in particular the First Book of Enoch and the Genesis Apocryphon, where the sexual corruption of the fallen angels leads to cases of doubtful paternity. In these sources Noah's own birth is recounted as a wondrous event that makes Noah's father Lamech suspect that his wife had the child from an angel. Lamech's grandfather Enoch eventually confirms Noah's righteous conception and birth but the narrative motifs around antediluvian sexual decadence, conjugal disloyalty and miraculous birth stories survive into other Second Temple Jewish and early Christian texts. I argue that the Qur'ān, too, was aware of these narrative motifs and the story of Noah's son constitutes a unique Qur'ānic spin on certain of these Enochic themes.

**Keywords:** Book of Enoch; early Christianity; Qur'ān; Second Temple literature

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# 1 Introduction

The Qur'ānic story of Noah, retold in different recensions throughout the Qur'ān,<sup>1</sup> principally follows the biblical synopsis but diverges significantly from it on one key point: Noah loses one of his sons to the flood. In a dramatic scene enacted in Chapter 11, Noah calls his son, who is not given a name in the Qur'ān, to board the ark amid rising waves but his son refuses saying that he will seek protection on a mountain. Noah warns him that nothing could save him from God's command in that catastrophe but he cannot persuade his son to join him in the ark. The son perishes in the flood. Once the flood is over, Noah calls onto God to find out why his son, a member of his family who was promised by God to survive the flood, was not saved. God responds with the following:

11:46: 'O Noah! He is not of your family (*innahu laysa min ahlika*). He is [the personification of] unrighteous conduct (*innahu 'amalun ghayru ṣālihin*). So do not ask Me [something] of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant'.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this short passage on Noah's drowned son has elicited much commentary from classical Muslim exegetes and from more recent academic scholarship on the questions of why the Qur'ānic story differs from the biblical account, whether there is any Jewish or Christian interpretive precedence to a lost son of Noah, and what the Qur'ān means by the phrase "he is not of your family". The last question, in particular, preoccupied Muslim scholars when it was considered in the context of another passage in the Qur'ān that speaks of Noah's wife as having betrayed his righteous husband. The possibility that Noah's wife could have been unfaithful, and hence that the son could have been from someone else, was entertained by a few early scholars but the majority of Muslim exegetes abhorred the idea of a prophet being cuckolded by his wife and sought other explanations.

In this article, I will argue that the Qur'ān might be, in fact, speaking about an unfaithful wife and that it reflects in this interpretation the traditions about the anxieties of conjugal disloyalty and questions of paternity in the corrupt generation of the flood as found in Jewish texts from the Second Temple literature. I will underline, as part of a wider argument, the Qur'ān's conscious intertextual juxtaposition of Noah's story with traditions from Enochic texts, which could have

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<sup>1</sup> There are more than thirty references to Noah in the Qur'an but his story involving the flood is told primarily in three separate places. Q 11:25–48 recounts Noah's preaching, the refusal of Noah's people, the flood and Noah's plea to God about his son. Q 26: 105–122 is a shorter narrative modeled onto other prophetic stories in the chapter but with references to Noah's preaching and the flood once again. Chapter 71 is named after Noah and the entire chapter is on his preaching against his people's idolatry but the flood is not given much space in the narrative of this chapter.

reached Arabia from Christian Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> Before introducing the Second Temple texts that I believe to be at the background of the Qur'ān's Noah pericope in Q 11 I will provide a brief overview of the Muslim exegetical tradition and the recent western scholarship on the question of Noah's drowned son.

Q 66, a chapter dealing with a domestic dispute between Muḥammad and his wives, ends with allusions to four women as positive and negative role models for Muslim women:

66:10: Allah cites an example of the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against Allah, and it was said [to them], 'Enter the Fire, along with those who enter [it].' 66:11: Allah cites an example of the faithful: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, 'My Lord! Build me a home near you in paradise, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his conduct, and deliver me from the wrongdoing lot.' 66:12: And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so we breathed into it of our spirit. She confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was one of the obedient. (Tr. Ali Quli Qarai with my occasional emendations).

It is not hard to understand how Mary, Pharaoh's wife and Lot's wife gained their reputation based on their Qur'ānic portrayals but why is Noah's wife condemned? The connection with Q 11:46's statement that Noah's drowned son was not of his family could suggest that her betrayal is of a sexual nature. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), collector of early exegetical traditions, lists several reports to that effect many of which go back to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728).<sup>3</sup> According to the latter, the son was definitely not Noah's biological son. In another report, Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 722), a contemporary of Ḥasan and another important scholar from the second generation, suggests that it became clear to Noah that the son was not his once God told him not to ask about something he does not know.<sup>4</sup> 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr al-Laythī, another second generation scholar from Mecca, describes Noah's son as a child

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, there is no positive evidence for the presence of biblical or parabiblical texts circulating in western Arabia before Islam but there are at least two reasons why an Ethiopian route for Enochic traditions into the Qur'ān remains plausible. 1 Enoch and Jubilees had been translated into Ge'ez from Greek before the rise of Islam, and these two books enjoyed greater authority (perhaps even canonical status) in Ethiopia than the rest of the Christian world. In addition, quotations from biblical texts, the Gospel of Matthew and the Psalms to be exact, are attested in a Ge'ez inscription (RIE 195) from Marib in Yemen, which provides a rare, if not solitary, documentary evidence for the knowledge of biblical texts in Arabia.

<sup>3</sup> al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 426–427. In one of these reports, Qatāda b. Di'āma (d. 735), a junior contemporary of Ḥasan, approaches the latter and challenges his interpretation saying that the People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians, do not doubt Noah's paternity of his son. Hasan simply responds that they are wrong, *inna ahl al-kitābi yakdhibūna*.

<sup>4</sup> al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 427–428. There is another report here related by Thuwayr b. Abī Fākhita (d. 127 AH) on the authority of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114 AH) that puts it matter-of-factly: "If he were of his family, he would have been saved", *law kāna min ahlihi la-najā*. Perhaps it

born in one's bed but not belonging to him biologically.<sup>5</sup> In another report mentioned in al-Qurṭubī's commentary, Ibn Jurayj (d. 767) says that Noah was under the wrong impression that the son was his (hence his calling him "my son") but his wife betrayed him on this matter, *wa kānat imra'atuhu khānathu fīhi*.<sup>6</sup> Al-Qurṭubī also cites a report with a variant reading of the phrase *wa-nādā nūhun ibnahu*, "Noah called upon his son" as *wa-nādā nūhun ibnahā*, "Noah called upon her [i.e. his wife's] son" hinting that the son was from another man.<sup>7</sup> It seems based on these reports that some scholars among the *ṭābi'ūn* and the next generation did not find it completely unlikely that a prophet's wife could cheat on him.

The idea, nevertheless, was disturbing, and al-Ṭabarī recorded several traditions that speak against the possibility of a prophet being cuckolded. Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687), Muḥammad's cousin and an early Qur'ān scholar, vehemently denied it by saying that "no wife of a prophet ever fornicated", *mā baghat imra'atu nabīyyin qaṭṭ*.<sup>8</sup> Ibn 'Abbās's opinion eventually became the majority position among later exegetes even though some of them continued to mention Ḥasan's interpretation in their works. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, says after citing numerous reports for both opinions that the correct interpretation is that of Ibn 'Abbās and that the son was in fact Noah's but he rejected his father's religion and became excluded from Noah's family that God promised to save, *innahu laysa min ahlika l-ladhīna wa'adtuka an unajjiyahum*.<sup>9</sup> Al-Ṭabarī's objection to the first interpretation was not necessarily because a cheating wife for a prophet was unthinkable but because the Qur'ān would not put the words "my son" in Noah's mouth if it were not true.<sup>10</sup> Others, like al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) and al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153), objected on the principle of a prophet's infallibility.<sup>11</sup> By the time of al-Rāzī (d. 1209) a consensus had already

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is worth mentioning, however, that Thuwayr had a very bad reputation as a hadith transmitter, see Ibn al-Jawzī 1986: vol. 1, 161.

5 al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 428. 'Ubayd likens the case of Noah's son to a paternity dispute that took place in Medina and was adjudicated by Muḥammad, who noticed that the child in question was a fruit of adultery and uttered the phrase *al-waladu li-l-firāsh wa li-l-'āhiri l-ḥajar*, "the child belongs to the bed [of his non-biological father because he was born there] and stoned to the adulterer". For the *ḥadīth* in question, see al-Bukhārī 2002: 395.

6 al-Qurṭubī 2006: vol. 11, 135. Al-Qurṭubī himself disagrees with this opinion and says that the betrayal of Noah's wife has to do with religious matters and not conjugal ones: *fī-d-dīn, lā fī-l-firāsh*.

7 al-Qurṭubī 2006: vol. 11, 137. The variant reading is attributed to 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Al-Qurṭubī objects to this reading on the grounds that it is not canonical.

8 al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 429.

9 al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 433.

10 al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 433.

11 al-Zamakhsharī 2009: 484. Al-Zamakhsharī argued that being cheated on is a defect from which the prophets are protected, *wa-hādhihi ghaḍāḍa 'uṣimat minhā l-anbiyā'*. Al-Zamakhsharī's opinion is already cited in Reynolds 2016: 266. Al-Ṭabarsī does mention that the Qur'ān would not call him

been reached: interpreting Q 11:46 as an indication that Noah's son was a child of adultery was "absolutely baseless", *bāṭil qaṭ'an*.<sup>12</sup> The idea was outlandish to Ibn Kathīr (d. 1353) as well, who recalled the slander against Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha and implied that God would be angry against those who talk about the integrity of Noah's wife just as He was in the case 'Ā'isha.<sup>13</sup> Al-Tha'ālibī, a fifteenth-century exegete, could refer to the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās as the majority and preferred opinion to dismiss the idea of conjugal infidelity<sup>14</sup> and more recent exegetes like al-Shawkānī did not even mention it as a possible interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

If Noah's son was in fact his biological son as Muslim exegetes unanimously thought, the second phrase in God's response to Noah, the one referring to an "unrighteous act", would have to be something other than his wife's sexual betrayal. Two opinions prevailed here: *innahu 'amalun ḡhayru ṣāliḡin* meant either that Noah's asking about his perished son was an act of unrighteousness or that Noah's son did something unrighteous such as rejecting his father's religion that earned him his exclusion from the ark. Both explanations, however, required some grammatical acrobatics to work. The first interpretation, preferred by al-Ṭabarī,<sup>16</sup> would mean that the enclitic third person masculine pronoun *-hu* had no nominal precedent or antecedent to which it could refer other than the supposed "your questioning me about your son". The second interpretation fares slightly better thanks to a minority variant reading that turns the nominal phrase into a verbal one, *innahu 'amila ḡhayra ṣāliḡin*, meaning "he [i.e. Noah's son] committed an unrighteous act".<sup>17</sup> Otherwise the nominal phrase would have to be amended, as some scholars argued, to *innahu dhū 'amalin ḡhayri ṣāliḡin* to arrive at the same meaning.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that both interpretations functioned to exclude the more straightforward reading of the phrase as

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Noah's son if it were not true and then adds that the prophets' elevated status would have been blemished by such a disgrace, something that God would not allow, see al-Ṭabarsī 2006: vol. 5, 220–221.

<sup>12</sup> al-Rāzī 1981: vol. 18, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Kathīr 1999: vol. 4, 326.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Tha'ālibī 1997: vol. 3, 286. "As for the opinion of those who say 'the son was illegitimate', it is completely wrong (*khaṭa' maḡḡ*) according to the opinion of Ibn Abbas and the majority (*al-jumhūr*)."

<sup>15</sup> Al-Shawkānī 2007: 660.

<sup>16</sup> al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 436.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Reynolds 2016: 271. Among the seven canonical readers, only al-Kisā'ī opted for this reading whereas the remaining six read it as a nominal phrase. Al-Ṭabarī rejects the reading of al-Kisā'ī on the grounds that all major readers from the *amṣār* prefer the nominal phrase except some "latecomers", *ba'd al-muta'akḡḡirīn*, by which he must have meant al-Kisā'ī, the youngest of the canonical readers, see al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 435.

<sup>18</sup> al-Qurṭubī 2006: vol. 11, 134.

“he [your son] is [the fruit of] an unrighteous deed”, meaning that he was a child out of rightful marriage, *ghayr rishda*.<sup>19</sup>

It is perfectly understandable that the *tafsīr* literature gradually censured the idea of a prophet’s wife being an adulteress and looked for other explanations for Q 11:46 as the corollary of a rising orthodoxy around the status of prophets. Yet, the idea was not seriously studied in the western scholarship either. The main concern for most scholars has been to discover the biblical and parabiblical texts to which the Qur’ān could be indebted for the story of Noah’s lost son. In a recent article, Gabriel Reynolds neatly summarized previous attempts to account for the Qur’ān’s clear deviation from the biblical flood story and offered his own suggestion. Reynolds rightly notes that finding a biblical parallel to the Qur’ānic story proved to be difficult and the exclusion of Noah’s son from the ark has often been explained in light of the curse of Ham in Gen. 9:20–27 in the absence of more direct parallels.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Reynolds argues, we should turn to a passage in Ezekiel 14, where Noah is mentioned alongside Job and Daniel as righteous figures who could not save their sons and daughters despite their righteousness from a hypothetical pestilence God would send upon them. In other words, what was imagined as a theoretical possibility in Ezekiel 14:20 became a reality in the Qur’ān.<sup>21</sup>

Reynolds’s argument is certainly plausible but it does not address all parts of the puzzle. We still do not know why the Qur’ān tells Noah that the drowned son is not of his family and how the betrayal of Noah’s wife in Q 66:10 connects with the narrative in Q 11. Besides, Reynolds assumes, as did other scholars working on the question, that the son belonged to Noah biologically, partly on the authority of Muslim exegetes and partly because the biblical story does not offer any clues for a son of Noah whose paternity is questionable. If we consider for a moment, however, that God is in fact telling Noah in Q 11:46 that he is not the biological father of the son who perished in the flood, can we locate parallel traditions in the pre-Qur’ānic literature, preferably about the generation of Noah, that reflect disputes over paternity or anxieties of fathers around what they thought to be their biological children? I will argue here that the Qur’ānic story of Noah’s lost son could be best understood in the context of Second Temple traditions about Noah’s own birth. Now I turn to two texts, Enoch 1 and the Genesis Apocryphon, that describe the circumstances of Noah’s birth and the concerns of his father Lamech over his paternity of Noah.

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<sup>19</sup> al-Ṭabarī 2001: vol. 12, 434.

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds 2017: 139–43. As Reynolds mentions, Heinrich Speyer, the thorough scholar as he was on the subject of biblical and parabiblical background of Qur’ānic prophetic stories, admitted, “eine genaue Parallelerzählung zu dem qoranischen Bericht ist jedenfalls nirgends aufzufinden”, see Speyer 1961: 106.

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds 2017: 147.

## 1.1 Lustful angels and insecure fathers: 1 Enoch and the Genesis Apocryphon

The short and enigmatic reference to sons of God taking wives from the daughters of men in Gen. 6:1–4 is expanded with much detail in the First Book of Enoch, a Second Temple Jewish text which survived in its entirety in Ge'ez and in fragments in a few other languages.<sup>22</sup> According to the 1 Enoch, in addition to teaching mankind the secrets of heavens, magic and other crafts, the angels that descended upon the earth copulated with women and sired giant, bloodthirsty children.<sup>23</sup> After other angels complained to God about the havoc wrought on earth in the hands of the corrupted angels and their offspring, these “children of adultery”, as 1 Enoch 10:9 calls them, got destroyed either by fighting against each other or by perishing in the flood that God planned.<sup>24</sup> The danger of Watchers having relations with married women on earth and having children whose fathers would be uncertain was there but not fully developed in the narrative of the fallen angels at the beginning of 1 Enoch. That theme, however, became part of the narrative of Noah’s birth as it is recounted at the very end of 1 Enoch in chapters 106 and 107.<sup>25</sup>

According to 1 Enoch 106, Noah is born as a wonder child with a snow-white and rose-red complexion, white hair and glowing eyes, and as soon as he is conceived, he is able to speak and bless God. His father Lamech gets alarmed by the strangeness of the baby and rushes to his own father Methuselah to share his worries about the paternity of the baby as follows:

I have begotten a strange son: He is not like an (ordinary) human being, but he looks like the children of the angels of heaven to me; his form is different, and he is not like us. His eyes are like the rays of the sun, and his face glorious. It does not seem to me that he is of me, but of angels, and I fear that a wondrous phenomenon may take place upon the earth in his days. (1 Enoch 106:5-7, tr. E. Isaac in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth).

Methuselah, then, goes to his father Enoch, who then was residing in the heavens, to find out the truth about the wunderkind. Enoch responds with a summary of the corruption caused by the Watchers having intercourse with earthly women and the destruction that God will incur on the unrighteous. Then, he adds:

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<sup>22</sup> For an introduction to 1 Enoch and a list of extant versions see Charlesworth 1983: v. 1, 5–12; Nickelsburg 2001: 9–20.

<sup>23</sup> See 1 Enoch 7:1-6; 9:7-9.

<sup>24</sup> Both possibilities for their death are mentioned in 1 Enoch 10.

<sup>25</sup> For a brief introduction on the section of Noah’s birth in 1 Enoch and how it relates to the rest of the book see Nickelsburg 2001: 539–40.

And this son who has been born unto you shall be left upon the earth; and his three sons shall be saved when they who are upon the earth are dead ... Now, make known to your son Lamech that the son who has been born is indeed righteous... (1 Enoch 106:16-18, tr. E. Isaac).

Enoch thereby puts the minds of Methuselah and Lamech at ease, and the latter calls his son Noah, “comforter” or “remnant”,<sup>26</sup> as per Enoch’s instructions and in line with the mission he will carry out after the flood.

There are a few points in the narrative of 1 Enoch 106 to be highlighted for their rapport with the Qur’ānic story of Noah’s lost son as I will discuss them in the next part. Most importantly, unlike the section on the fallen angels in chapters 6 to 10 of 1 Enoch, chapter 106 identifies the sexual transgressions of the Watchers as the primary, or even solitary, act of unrighteousness triggering God’s anger.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in the atmosphere of doubtful paternity created by the actions of the Watchers, Lamech and his father need to turn to a higher, divine source or a close proxy (in this case, Enoch) to reveal the truth about Noah’s father. Lamech’s insecurity is certainly indicative of his suspicions about his wife’s actions but his wife is hardly a significant part of the narrative in 1 Enoch, which focuses mostly on baby Noah’s abnormality and his father’s bewilderment. In other words, adultery is implied but not elaborated in 1 Enoch 106 but the other Second Temple text that contains the story of Noah’s birth, the Genesis Apocryphon, provides further details on this point.

One of the major scrolls coming out of Qumran Cave 1, 1 QapGen, or more commonly known as the Genesis Apocryphon (referred to hereafter as GA), begins with the story of the Watchers immediately followed by the narrative of Noah’s birth.<sup>28</sup> The first two columns of the scroll (Columns 0 and 1), which contain an account of the fallen angels, are very fragmentary but Column 2 is in better shape and begins with Lamech’s doubts over the son born to his wife. Narrated by Lamech in the first person, the text of the GA roughly follows the same storyline as 1 Enoch 106 but it inserts a fairly lengthy dialogue between Lamech and his wife, here given the name of Bitenosh, before Lamech goes to his father Methuselah.

Unlike in 1 Enoch 106, Lamech’s suspicion of his wife’s infidelity gets the center stage in the GA, where Lamech confronts Bitenosh directly and asks her to swear to

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**26** For a discussion of the naming of Noah in 1 Enoch 106–107 see Nickelsburg 2001: 546–48. An important part of miraculous birth narratives seems to be the naming of the newborn according to their soteriological promise.

**27** As William Loader noticed, this is a major divergence from the early sections of 1 Enoch where illicit sexual relations are but one of the transgressions of the Watchers and their giant children, see Loader 2007: 71–72.

**28** Joseph Fitzmyer’s edition and translation of 1QapGen provides a useful introduction to the text, its context and its history, see Fitzmyer 2004: 13–46.

tell the truth about the paternity of the newborn.<sup>29</sup> Bitenosh, feeling unsure how to defend her integrity against such an accusation, reminds Lamech twice the pleasure of their encounters leading to the conception of the child and adds:

I swear to you by the Great Holy One, by the King of H[eaven] that this seed is from you; from you is this conception, and from you the planting of [this] fruit, and not from any stranger, or from any of the Watchers, or from any of the sons of hea[ven...] (GA, col. 2:14-17, tr. Fitzmyer).

The rest of the narrative where Lamech goes to Methuselah, who in turn goes to Enoch, is in line with 1 Enoch 106 but the portion of the scroll that has the resolution of Lamech's concerns by Enoch is too fragmentary to compare with 1 Enoch 106. Nevertheless, it is possible to make out the part where Enoch announces the good news of Lamech's paternity by saying that the son is from Lamech "in truth", *b-qwšt*.

It is worth noting that both narratives in 1 Enoch 106 and the GA establish a connection between the conception of Noah through righteous ways and his righteousness as an adult. Born in a generation of corruption, primarily of sexual kind, Noah's gaining favor in God's eyes and his mission to populate the earth after the flood are heralded by his impeccable birth despite his father's suspicions. This connection displays itself in both texts in the semantic interplay between the word "truth", as in the truth of Noah's paternity, and the word "righteousness", denoting Noah's quality that earned him the survival in the flood. In the GA, Noah is Lamech's son "in truth", *b-qšwt*, Bitenosh speaks truthfully, *b-qšwt*, about her integrity and when he is born Noah announces,

In the womb of her who bore me I came out for righteousness (*qwšt*),<sup>30</sup> and when I came forth from my mother's womb, I was planted for righteousness (*qwšt*). [During] all my days I have practiced righteousness (*qwšt*) ... on my tracks righteousness (*qwšt*) was settled ... And I girded my loins in an appearance of righteousness and wisdom ... Then, I, Noah, became a man, and I clung to righteousness (*qwšt*)... (Col. 6: 1–6, tr. Fitzmyer).

In short, according to the GA, that Noah was truly the son of Lamech and not the fruit of adultery, when the latter was rampant, was an important prequel to his righteousness in his adult life.

The same connection between Noah's faultless birth and his upright character pervades the language of 1 Enoch 106. Already in the account of the Watchers in chapter 10, right after mentioning the "souls of pleasure (*nafsāta tamnet*)"<sup>31</sup> and the

<sup>29</sup> For a study of the exchange between Lamech and his wife see Nickelsburg 1999: 137–58.

<sup>30</sup> As Fitzmyer notes, certain instances of the Aramaic word *qwšt* in the GA are standing for the word *tsaddik*, which is used in the Hebrew Bible for the righteousness of Noah (Gen. 6:9), see Fitzmyer 2004: 145.

<sup>31</sup> The Ethiopic text I use for this paper is from Knibb 1978. On this occasion, the edition seems to be mistaken as it has *tawnet* instead of *tamnet* for adultery.

children of the Watchers”, God commands the angels to put an end to every “un-righteous act” (*kʷellu megbār ’ekuy* in Ge’ez and *πὰν ἔργον πονερίας*<sup>32</sup> in Greek) so that “the plant of righteousness and truth” (*takla šedq wa-rat’*) could appear on the earth after the flood. The Greek text of 1 Enoch 106 adds the parenthetical statement that “righteousness was brought low”, *ἐταπεινώθη ἡ δικαιοσύνη*, in the days of Lamech when Noah was born, referring to the reason why Lamech doubted his wife in the first place.<sup>33</sup> Enoch’s announcement that the son was actually Lamech’s, once in 106:18 and again in 107:2, uses the same language of righteousness and truth in both Aramaic and Greek. In an age lacking righteousness, *δικαιοσύνη*, Noah was Lamech’s son “in truth and in holiness”, *δικαίως και ὀσίως*, or as 107:2 puts it, “in truth and without falsehood”, *δικαίως και οὐ ψευδῶς*. The Aramaic portion of 1 Enoch 106 discovered in Qumran follows the GA in using the phrase *b-qšwt*, “in truth/righteousness” for the righteous birth of Noah.<sup>34</sup> The announcement in 107:2 in Aramaic has the phrase *b-qšwt w-l’ b-[k]dbyn* corresponding to the Greek *δικαίως και οὐ ψευδῶς*.<sup>35</sup>

It is in the Ge’ez texts of 1 Enoch 106, however, that the link between Noah’s righteousness and his blameless birth displays itself in the most interesting way. While rendering 106:18, Enoch’s announcement of Noah’s paternity, some manuscripts contain the phrase “the son who has been born is in truth, *ba-šedq*, his [Lamech’s] son”, which would perfectly parallel the Aramaic phrase of *b-qwšt*.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, a variant reading attested in some manuscripts puts the announcement as “the son who has been born is righteous, *šādeq*”.<sup>37</sup> Once again, Noah’s birth in licit ways and not through adultery, and his righteous standing are brought together in the juxtaposition of the words truth, *šedq*, and righteous, *šādeq*.

## 1.2 From Second Temple texts to 2 Enoch and the Qur’ān

Some details of the narrative of Noah’s wondrous birth had an afterlife in the later literature, especially in 2 Enoch and the narratives of Jesus’s birth in the Gospels. As Andrei Orlov and others already noted, Noah’s wondrous traits at his birth, such as talking as a newborn or having a glorious appearance, as well as his father’s doubts

<sup>32</sup> Mentioned in the critical apparatus in Knibb 1978: vol. 1, 37.

<sup>33</sup> The quotations from the Greek text of 1 Enoch 106–107 are from Bonner 1937. This addition to the Greek version must have to do with providing an etymology for Lamech’s name meaning “to bring low”, see Nickelsburg 2001: 542–43.

<sup>34</sup> Milik 1976: 209.

<sup>35</sup> Milik 1976: 210.

<sup>36</sup> Knibb 1978: vol.1, 415.

<sup>37</sup> Michael A Knibb 1978: vol.1, 415. This is the version that E. Isaac used in his translation of the passage in Charlesworth 1983.

about him, are transferred in 2 *Enoch* to Melchizedek, another character from the generation of the flood.<sup>38</sup> In line with the narrative in the GA, Melchizedek's mother Sopanim, in this case an old and barren woman,<sup>39</sup> has to defend her chastity before her husband Nir, who was shocked by her pregnancy at an old age without any sexual contact with him. Nir's incredulity in her wife's testimony and the commotion that follows lead to her sudden death while the baby was still in her womb. Once again, the divine intervention confirms the innocence of the mother as an archangel reassures Nir in a dream that the child is, in fact, a "righteous fruit" and that he will survive the flood under God's protection.<sup>40</sup> It is only after this reassurance that Nir buries his wife together with Noah, who, in 2 *Enoch*'s rendering, was Nir's older brother.

All in all, 2 *Enoch* portrays Melchizedek as a wonder child speaking at birth, like Noah of 1 *Enoch* 106 and the GA, and as a righteous son without a human father, like Jesus. The parallels between the birth narrative of Noah and Melchizedek on the one hand, and the narratives of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke have already been recognized.<sup>41</sup> The Matthean narrative in particular, consisting of Joseph's uneasiness about Mary's pregnancy, the reassurance he receives in a dream and the naming of the kid for the role he will play in the future, displays elements from both the birth of Noah and that of Melchizedek in 2 *Enoch*.<sup>42</sup> Still more tellingly, the apocryphal Gospel of James contains an exchange between Mary and Joseph similar to the one we find between Bitenosh and Lamech in the GA, and between Nir and Sopanim in 2 *Enoch*.<sup>43</sup> However, there is no clear consensus on the date and provenance of 2 *Enoch*,<sup>44</sup> while the relationship

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**38** For a summary of Melchizedek's birth account in 2 *Enoch* see Bow 2000: 33–41. For a discussion of the similarities between the birth story of Noah in 1 *Enoch* 106–107 to Melchizedek's birth see Orlov 2000: 207–21.

**39** It is hard to miss that Sopanim's pregnancy in 2 *Enoch* is modeled on other figures in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament such as Mary, Sarah and Elizabeth but as Beverly Bow notes, the greatest similarities are with Elizabeth in Luke, see Bow 2000: 35–36.

**40** This detail of an archangel reassuring Nir is from the shorter recension of 2 *Enoch*, see the translation of the passage by F. I. Anderson in Charlesworth 1983: vol. 1, 207. In the longer recension Nir understands the righteousness of his wife as he and Noah observe the newborn Melchizedek as an already developed wonder child.

**41** Nickelsburg 2001: 540–41; Fitzmyer 2004: 123; Bow 2000: 36; Segovia 2011: 130–45.

**42** Matthew 1:18–24.

**43** The Protoevangelium of James, ch. 13.

**44** As F. I. Anderson notes in the introduction to his translation of 2 *Enoch*, "dates ranging all the way from pre-Christian times to the late Middle Ages have been proposed for the production of 2 *Enoch*", see Charlesworth 1983: 95. That the text only survives in Old Slavonic in medieval manuscripts without any substantial references or quotations in earlier works makes it hard to pinpoint its date and provenance. It certainly has parallels with 1 *Enoch* and the Qumran texts while the story of Melchizedek brings it closer to a Christian environment but nothing certain can be derived from these parallels. More recently, Christfried Böttrich argued, convincingly in my

between the 1 Enoch 106–107, the GA and the Gospels is complicated.<sup>45</sup> It is challenging, therefore, to create a full picture of how these birth motifs developed from the Second Temple period to early Christianity. For the purposes of this study, it can be safely said at least that certain themes about unusual births that some or all of the texts I discussed above share had already been commonplace before the emergence of the Qur’ān. These themes include, but are not limited to, the link between a legitimate birth and future righteousness of a child, awareness of the sexual corruption in the generation of the flood and the anxieties of paternity caused by it, doubtful pregnancies leading to suspicious fathers, vulnerable mothers being confronted and defending themselves, divine intervention to reveal the true paternity of the child, and the wondrous aspects of the newborn.

One obvious locus in which these motifs are carried to the Qur’ān is the birth story of Jesus, told as a parallel narrative to the birth of John the Baptist in Chapter 19. According to the Qur’ān, both children are conceived in unexpected circumstances: John because his parents were old and his mother was barren like in the case of Melchizedek, Jesus because his mother was a virgin. At this point, the Qur’ān is mostly following the Lukan narrative but its depiction of Jesus as a marvel child that talks at birth shows that the Qur’ān was aware of other motifs of miraculous birth narratives outside of the canonical Gospel stories. Scholars have previously noticed the Qur’ān’s parallels with apocryphal Christian sources in its retelling of stories related to Mary and Jesus.<sup>46</sup> It is also likely that Enochic material provided part of the background for the Qur’ān’s depiction of miraculous births. The equation that 1 Enoch 106 and the GA draws between a righteous birth and righteousness is found in the Qur’ān’s portrayal of miraculous births in the contexts of John the Baptist and Jesus. In the annunciation of both births, to Zechariah and Mary respectively, the angels bringing the news describe the children-to-be-born as *min al-ṣāliḥīn*, “from among the righteous”,<sup>47</sup> anticipating the objection of the parents. In fact, a closer look at the Qur’ān’s employment of words in the narratives of Noah’s lost son, his unfaithful wife and the children of miraculous

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opinion, that the text must have been composed before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, see Böttrich 2001.

<sup>45</sup> To be sure, the GA contains materials from 1 Enoch but it also seems to have the Book of Jubilees on the background, which does not have the story of Noah’s birth. The narrative of Noah’s birth could have entered 1 Enoch and the GA from another common source. On the other hand, the link between the Qumran community and early Christianity is much debated but there is no reason to ignore the possibility that tropes about miraculous births, which certainly had biblical precedents, were commonly adopted by many groups in the final centuries of the Second Temple period.

<sup>46</sup> Horn (2006): 113–150; Horn 2007: 509–538.

<sup>47</sup> See Q 3:39 (for John) and Q 3:46 (for Jesus).

births would suggest that the word *ṣāliḥ*, “righteous” carries in the Qur’ān the import of the words like *ṣādeq/ba-ṣedq* in the Ge’ez of 1 Enoch 106 and *qwšt’/b-qwšt* in the Aramaic of 1 Enoch 106 and the GA.

In addition to characterizing John and Jesus as righteous figures born in extraordinary, but altogether righteous, circumstances, the Qur’ān opens the section that alludes to positive and negative models for women in Q 66:10 by drawing a contrast between Noah and Lot, “two righteous servants” of God (*‘abdayni min ‘ibādīnā ṣāliḥayni*), on the one hand, and their wives who betrayed them (*khānatāhumā*) on the other. These two women, who partook in the corruption of their age despite having righteous husbands, are further contrasted in the next two verses to the wife of Pharaoh and Mary, who guarded their faith and purity against overwhelming odds. Moreover, I believe it is more than a mere coincidence that the two women the Qur’ān portrays as positive role models, the wife of Pharaoh and Mary, are righteous mother figures who raised Moses and Jesus, respectively, in an environment of adversity. Mary, in particular, is referred to as a *siddīqa*, “righteous woman” (Q 5:75),<sup>48</sup> a title that the Qur’ān uses exclusively for male prophetic figures like Enoch, Abraham and Joseph.

It is under this light, cast by the narrative motifs beginning with Noah’s birth in Second Temple texts and extending to the Qur’ān via the miraculous birth stories of early Christian texts, that the Qur’ān’s story of Noah’s drowned son must be interpreted. My contention is that the Qur’ān was clearly aware of the interpretive traditions concerning the sexual corruption in the generation of Noah as well as those concerning the birth of Jesus as modeled upon the miraculous birth of Noah and, possibly, of Melchizedek. The narrative motif developed in Second Temple texts about potential cases of doubtful paternity in the age of Noah was taken up by the Qur’ān and given a unique interpretive spin in the context of Noah’s own son. The same motif, as it was transformed in Christian texts for the miraculous births of Melchizedek and Jesus, also showed up in the Qur’ān in the narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Considered under this light, the verse *innahu laysa min ahlika innahu ‘amalun ḡhayru ṣāliḥin*, “he is not of your family, he is [the fruit] of a deed not righteous” in the Qur’ān would mean that the son born of Noah’s wife was the product of “the” unrighteous act that characterized the time of Noah and the generation of the flood, and that led to stories of doubtful paternity: adultery with the Watchers. When the Qur’ānic passage is read together with the narrative of 1 Enoch 106 and the GA, it is understood that God’s promise to save Noah’s family and wipe out the children born out of adultery would naturally lead to the drowning of the child that Noah mistakenly thought to be his biological son. As in the narratives of 1 Enoch 106, the

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48 I am grateful to Gabriel Reynolds for bringing this connection to my attention.

GA and 2 Enoch, the questionable case of paternity is resolved by divine judgment in the Qur'ān: Noah is not the father and he is not supposed to ask God about something of which he has no knowledge. In other words, the betrayal of Noah's wife, as alluded to in Q 66:10, is encapsulated in the "unrighteous act" of Q 11:46 that led to an ungrateful child. The Qur'ān, therefore, adopts the connection between a figure's birth through decent ways and his/her future righteousness, as invented in earlier Jewish and Christian literature, but inverts that connection in the case of Noah's drowned son while honoring it in the cases of John and Jesus.

To reiterate, I argue here that Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān was, in fact, one of the giants born in the age of sexual corruption that led to the flood according to the accounts of Gen. 6 and, even more poignantly, of 1 Enoch and the GA. This interpretation explains the enigmatic reference to Noah's wife in Q 66:10 as well as the statement in Q 11:46 about the son not being of Noah's family. Admittedly, though, this argument comes with a few problems of its own. It needs to be explained, for instance, how the Second Temple narrative motif of doubtful paternity in the generation of the Watchers ended up in the Qur'ān. It has been argued recently that the Qur'ān accords some space to the age of corruption before the flood and to the episode of the fallen angels, in the same vein as these are narrated in 1 Enoch and the Jubilees. The early sections of 1 Enoch, in particular the Book of Watchers, seem to have echoes in the Qur'ān's depiction of Adam's creation and the story of two angels that descended on earth and became corrupted. It is not impossible, therefore, to imagine that Enochic narratives outside of the Book of Watchers, such as the birth of Noah in 1 Enoch 106, could have been known to the audience of the Qur'ān.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the Qur'ān's reworking of earlier narrative motifs in the case of Noah's presumed son led to a unique interpretation that does not have a direct parallel in previous biblical and parabiblical texts.

Another question to be answered is why the Qur'ān turns the narrative of Noah's birth upside down, as it were, and imagines a son that is born to Noah with questionable paternity. After all, it is possible to say that the Qur'ān picks up on the motif of sexual corruption in the time of Noah but why does the Qur'ān make Noah, of all people, to be the victim of his age's iniquity? It should be remembered here that the Qur'ān does not mention the number of Noah's sons or their names so that we could have an idea about whether the lost son is one of his three sons or a fourth son that the Bible does not mention. In light of this ambiguity, is it possible to find a clue in the earlier Jewish and Christian literature about any sons of Noah being associated with a figure of doubtful paternity?

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<sup>49</sup> See, among others, Crone 2013: 16–51; Reed 2015; Reeves 2015: 817–42; Tesei 2016: 66–81. For other connections between 1 Enoch and the Qur'ān, see Reeves 2003: 43–60.

To answer this question, we need to consider the entire cast of characters that I discussed above in the context of miraculous birth narratives. Interestingly, some early rabbinic and late antique Jewish sources equate the figure of Melchizedek in Gen. 14 with Shem, the oldest son of Noah.<sup>50</sup> Given that Melchizedek was already transformed into a fatherless, Jesus-like figure in early Christian sources,<sup>51</sup> the Qur'ānic understanding of Noah's lost son can be seen the result of a unique mixture of Jewish and Christian narratives where one of Noah's sons was known to be associated with another figure, i.e. Melchizedek, whose birth and paternity had been a matter of debate. In other words, the identification of Melchizedek with Shem, on the one hand, and the doubtful paternity of Melchizedek, on the other, could have made it possible for the Qur'ān to invent a narrative of a son born to Noah that perished in the flood because of his problematic lineage.

Assuming as I do that Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān is in fact one of the giants born of the fallen angels, other details in the Qur'ānic narrative can be read in light of this interpretation. The Qur'ān's depiction of the son as rebellious and supercilious, in particular, has resonances in earlier sources that describe the character of the giants. Josephus, for instance, has the following remark: "For many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength."<sup>52</sup> This short passage not only underlines the main concern of the time, namely the adulterous acts of angels with worldly women, but it also neatly summarizes the character defects of the giants as injustice and hubris. It should be remembered at this point that Noah's son in the Qur'ān, when asked by his father to join the rest of the family in the ark, refuses by saying that he could save himself by climbing a mountain.

Another possible hint that the Qur'an was aware of the sexual corruption of Noah's age comes in chapter 71, a chapter wholly devoted to the story of Noah.

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**50** See, for instance, Babylonian Talmud Tractate Nedarim 32b and Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 7: "Noah handed on the tradition to Shem, and he was initiated in the principle of intercalation; he intercalated the years and he was called a priest, as it is said, "And Melchizedek king of Salem ... was a priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18). Andrei Orlov adduces other Jewish sources including the Targumim for the identification of Melchizedek with Shem, see Orlov 2000.

**51** A key early text for this interpretation is the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author expands on Psalm 110:4 ("You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek") and presents Jesus as a timeless priest like Melchizedek: "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever" (Heb 7:3). I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this journal for reminding me of this reference.

**52** Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.73 (translation above is by William Whiston): πολλοὶ γὰρ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ γυναιξὶ συνιόντες ὑβριστὰς ἐγέννησαν παῖδας καὶ παντὸς ὑπερόπτας καλοῦ διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τῆ ἰσχυρίᾳ πεποιθῆσθαι.

Realizing that his exhortations to his people came to naught Noah turns to God and says: “My Lord, do not leave upon the earth any unbeliever (*min al-kāfirīna*) walking around. For if you leave them, they will misguide your servants and will beget none but (*wa-lā yalidū*) unbelieving libertines (*fājiran kaffāran*) (Q 71:26-27)”. The word *fājir* here could refer to people committing any act of moral wrongdoing but one common meaning of the word has to do with sexual immorality.<sup>53</sup> Still more significant is Noah’s warning that this generation of deviant unbelievers could only produce children like themselves, as though their sinful inclinations are a matter of their makeup and not of their choice. In this occasion, too, the Qur’an seems to operate under the assumption that Noah’s interlocutors were not just ordinary deniers of one God, and their complete obliteration from the face of the earth is justified by their grave sexual offences.

## 2 Conclusion

Reading the accounts of Q 11:46 and 66:10 together and deducing that the son Noah lost to the flood was not his biological son but rather a child of adultery was not acceptable to Muslim exegetes after a consensus around the infallibility of prophetic figures was established. That consensus, however, does not directly stem from the Qur’an itself. Considering that the Qur’an contains references to the age of corruption before the Flood and to the story of fallen angels it is quite likely that related narrative motifs such as children born of angelic adultery and worries of fathers in this age over the paternity of their children were carried to the Qur’an as well. The story of Noah’s birth as told in 1 Enoch 106 and the GA captures the anxieties of the time perfectly and opens up new narrative avenues around the issue of righteous figures in the age of corruption. Some of these avenues, leading to the birth narratives of Melchizedek and Jesus in later sources, converge in the Qur’an’s depiction of miraculous births whereas the story of Noah’s lost son seems to be a conscious overturn of the same narrative motif.

The argument I put forward here differs from the opinions of Muslim exegetes and western academics on the lost son of Noah but the reasons scholars suggested as to why the Qur’an makes a significant amendment to the biblical Flood story still hold. As Reynolds and others argued, Noah’s relationship with the person he thought to be his son might have typological underpinnings for Muḥammad and his community.<sup>54</sup> In fact, by fronting the significance of Noah’s wife in the story instead of the son who perished in the flood it could be argued that the Qur’an was

<sup>53</sup> Lane 1863: 2,341.

<sup>54</sup> Reynolds 2017: 132–39.

pushing the idea of a prophet's helplessness in contrast to God's omniscience when faced with the betrayal or disbelief of a close family member. Framed in this way, the story of Noah's son (and the unfaithfulness of his wife) might have been perceived among the immediate addressees of the Qur'ān as a model for the well-known episode of the allegations of unfaithfulness directed at Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha. Regardless of its *Sitz im Leben* in Muḥammad's life, however, the story of Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān appears to have echoes of Second Temple narratives about Noah's birth as well as narratives of miraculous births extending from the Hebrew Bible to the Christian apocrypha.

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