Traditions of the Birth of Noah*

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The birth of Noah is recounted in a brief and straightforward manner in Gen 5:28–29, as part of his antediluvian genealogy and providing an explanation for his name (i.e., as a *midrash shem*).1 The story of Noah's birth was expanded, however, into a much more extensive narrative in ancient times, as is evident from the similar accounts found in 1 En. 106:1–107:32 and the Genesis Apocryphon (also known as 1QapGen and 1Q20) 2–5,3 in addition to several other early Jewish texts.4 In this narrative, Noah is born with a striking appearance and praises God upon his birth. This leads his father, Lamech, to fear that the child is of angelic descent, and Methuselah, Lamech's father, journeys to Enoch, his own father (and Noah's great-grandfather) to receive an answer on this matter. Enoch assures him that Lamech is the father and provides a

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1. There are, however, idiosyncrasies in comparison with the other names listed in the genealogy. See Skinner 1910, 124–34; Sarna 1989, 44; and Cassuto 1961, 287–90.

2. Quotations from 1 Enoch, are taken from Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2004. For other translations, see Black 1985; Charles 1913; Isaac 1983; Knibb 1978; Nickelsburg 2001. A synoptic translation to English of all versions can be found in Stuckenbruck 2007.


4. E.g., 1Q19, and perhaps 4Q534–535 (see below). For more on the comparative material, see Machiela 2007, 43–50. This dissertation has been published as Machiela 2009 but may be accessed in pdf format at: http://etd.nd.edu/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-07022007-205251/.
preserved in the Genesis Apocryphon. What would seem to be the title of a book is found only after the birth account, thus excluding the birth narrative from the “book.” On the one hand, this seems logical, since we might expect that “The Book of the Words of Noah” would include only things that were written after his birth (even if only shortly after it, considering he knew how to speak immediately).

On the other hand, there is the issue of what we might call the lost source that recounted the birth of Noah and that was known to numerous authors. Jubilees 10:14 implies the existence of several books of Noah, and this suggests one possible solution to the problem: assigning the birth narrative to another book, distinct from that to which the Apocryphon refers. We are unable, in fact, to say whether the fount of these many tellings of Noah’s birth was in a book of Noah, a work associated with Enoch, or even some other composition. Moreover, the title of the work is of no real importance. It is important, however, that we have considerable grounds for believing that the birth of Noah, as reflected in 1 En. 106–107 and the Genesis Apocryphon, was part of a broader antecedent and reflects the tendency to intensify Noah’s role and significance in Second Temple Judaism.