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Noah's Lost Son in the Qur'ān

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Abstract

In Kor 11 (Hūd), 42-47 the Qur'ān has Noah address one of his sons and plead with him to enter the ark. Noah's son refuses to do so, explaining that he plans to seek refuge from the flood on a mountain. When the son is lost in the flood, Noah turns to God in order to ask that his son be forgiven. In the present article, I discuss the relationship of this Qur'ānic episode with larger themes in the Qur'ān—seen also in the material on Abraham and his father—regarding the believer's proper disposition towards unbelievers, and unbelieving family members in particular. After a study of earlier theories about this passage, I propose that the account of Noah's lost son (not found in the Bible) has a particular relationship to Ezekiel 14, a passage which speaks hypothetically of an unrighteous son of Noah. In conclusion, I argue that this passage is an important example of how the Qur'ān applies, and transforms, earlier traditions in order to advance its particular religious arguments.

Keywords

Koran, Noah, Bible, Muḥammad, intertextual, flood

Résumé

Dans le verset coranique 11 (Hūd), 42-47, Noah s'adresse à l'un de ses fils et le prie d'entrer dans l'Arche. Le fils de Noé refuse de s'exécuter, arguant qu'il a l'intention de trouver refuge dans une montagne contre le Déluge. Quand son fils est perdu dans le Déluge, Noé se tourne vers Dieu afin de Lui demander de pardonner à son fils. Dans le présent article, nous examinerons la relation de cet épisode coranique avec des

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thèmes plus importants du Coran—que l'on peut également voir dans les récits sur Abraham et son père—concernant la disposition du croyant envers les incroyants et, plus particulièrement, les membres de la famille. Après une étude des théories antérieures à propos de ce passage, nous avancerons que le récit du fils perdu de Noé (qui ne se trouve pas dans la Bible) est particulièrement lié à Ezéchiel 14, un passage qui traite, en toute hypothèse, d'un fils indigne de Noé. En conclusion, nous soutenons que ce passage est un exemple important de la façon dont le Coran emploie et transforme des traditions antérieures afin d'avancer ses propres arguments religieux.

Mots clefs

Coran, Noé, Bible, Muḥammad, intertextualité, Déluge

In sura 11 (Hūd) of the Qur'ān one of Noah's sons refuses to get on the ark, thinking he can save himself in the mountains, and is swept away in the flood. A conversation between Noah and God about his son ensues:¹

- (40) When Our edict came and the oven gushed [a stream of water], We said, "Carry in it a pair of every kind [of animal], along with your family—except those [of them] against whom the edict has already been given—and those who have faith." And none believed with him except a few.
- (41) He said, "Board it: In the Name of Allāh it shall set sail and cast anchor. Indeed, my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful."

1 Carlos Segovia wonders whether this conversation (Kor 11, 45-47) is "misplaced"—suggesting that it is better situated before the Flood, when the fate of Noah's son was yet to be determined. See Carlos Andrés Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter ("Judaism, Christianity, and Islam", 4), 2015, p. 57. Régis Blachère considers these verses to be a later insertion. See Régis Blachère, *Le Coran*, Paris, Maisonneuve, 1957, p. 250-251. He comments: "Ce développement [vv. 45-47] vient interrompre celui amorcé par le vt. 46 [44 in the Cairo edition] sur l'atterrissage de l'Arche. Il est tentant de raccrocher ce passage au vt. 42 [40] où l'expression : *excepté celui contre qui la Parole a été proférée* fait allusion à ce fils maudit" (250, n. on '47 à 49'). Richard Bell agrees that v. 45 seems logically to follow v. 40 (and wonders if vv. 45-47 were meant to replace vv. 41-44). See Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'ān*, eds Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Mervyn Edwin John Richardson, Manchester, University of Manchester Press ("Journal of Semitic Studies. Monograph", 14), 1991, I, p. 359.

- (42) And it sailed along with them amid waves [rising] like mountains.² Noah called out to his son, who stood aloof, "O my son! Board with us, and do not be with the faithless!"
- (43) He said, "I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the flood." He said, "There is none today who can protect from Allāh's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy." Then the waves came between them, and he was among those who were drowned.
- (44) Then it was said, "O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!" The waters receded; the edict was carried out, and it settled on [Mount] Judi. Then it was said, "Away with the wrongdoing lot!"
- (45) Noah called out to his Lord, and said, "My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges."
- (46) Said He, "O Noah! Indeed, He is not of your family. Indeed, he is [personification of] unrighteous conduct.³ So do not ask Me [something] of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant."

2 On the description of waves "like mountains" cf. Kor 26, 63.

3 *Innahu 'amalun ġayru ṣāliḥin*. The more obvious interpretation of this phrase is as a reference to an action (*'amal*) of Noah (presumably his intercession for his unbelieving son). Hence Rudi Paret, "Das ist nicht recht gehandelt" and Arthur Droge, "Surely it is an unrighteous deed". Most translators, however, render this phrase in a manner that impugns not Noah but his son. The pronoun *-hu* (in *innahu*) is thus taken to refer to Noah's son himself (as with Quli Qara'i, quoted above) or the actions of Noah's son (and not to an action of Noah). Thus, Yusuf Ali: "His conduct is unrighteous;" Muhammad Pickthall, "He is of evil conduct;" Régis Blachère, "Il a fait un acte impur;" and Muhammad Asad, "He was unrighteous in his conduct". In fact, the connection between this verse and a verse later in the same sura (Kor 11, 76) which has Abraham rebuked for arguing with God over the fate of Sodom suggests that indeed it is Noah who is rebuked here, and for the similar sin of challenging God. See Rudi Paret, *Der Koran*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1979; Arthur Droge, *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation*, Sheffield-Bristol, Equinox ("Comparative Islamic studies"), 2013; Muhammad Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, London, Knopf, 1930; Blachère, *Le Coran*; Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar, Al-Andalus, 1993. This contrast among the translators follows the debate over the interpretation of this phrase (sometimes emended to *innahu 'amila ġayra ṣāliḥin*, with the explanation that Noah's son "committed [*'amila*] *shirk*") among the classical exegetes. See, for example, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Qurtūbī (d. 671/1273), *al-Ġāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1433/2012, IX, p. 42. On this debate see further Gabriel Said Reynolds, "A Flawed Prophet? Noah in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary", in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, eds Majid Daneshgar and Walid A. Saleh, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016, p. 260-273.

- (47) He said, “My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You something of which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers.”⁴

This passage contrasts with the material in the Bible on Noah. Genesis relates that Noah “fathered three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth” (Gen 6, 10) and that these sons entered the ark with him (Gen 7, 7). The Qur’ān, for its part, mentions only this one son who does not enter the ark. The present article is principally dedicated to a discussion of this contrast. I will ask why the Qur’ān (while ignoring Shem, Ham, and Japheth) presents to its audience an account of a son of Noah who is lost in the waves of the Flood. In answering this question, I will first consider the relation of this account to the larger theme of rejecting unbelieving family members in the Qur’ān. Thereafter, I will argue that the unfaithful son of Noah in the Qur’ān in fact does not appear *ex nihilo* but instead reflects the Qur’ān’s dynamic conversation with a Biblical tradition. With the “lost son” of Noah we have an example of how the Qur’ān develops an earlier tradition into an account meant to advance one of its distinctive religious arguments.

The Place of Noah’s Lost Son in the Qur’ān

In his book *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, David Marshall offers an insightful analysis of the purpose to which the Qur’ān puts the story of Noah’s lost son. Marshall discusses the account of Noah’s lost son in the context of his larger argument that the mercy of God in the Qur’ān does not extend to unbelievers.⁵ Marshall believes that sura 11 (traditionally dated to the late Meccan period)⁶ reflects a moment in Muḥammad’s life when he was

4 All Qur’ān translations are from Quli Qara’i unless otherwise noted: Ali Quli Qara’i, *The Qur’an with Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*, New York, Tahrike Taarsile Qur’ān, 2007.

5 It might be noted that the Qur’ān does not explicitly make Noah’s lost son an unbeliever. It simply has him refuse to join the believers on the ark (v. 43). This much, however, implies his unbelief, as does the decree of God in v. 46 which denies that he should be considered part of Noah’s family. Fazlur Rahman, perhaps thinking of certain classical exegetical traditions (cf. note 4 above), calls Noah’s lost son, Noah’s “idolatrous son”. See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 42.

6 The standard Cairo edition makes it the 52nd Sura revealed. Nöldeke places it somewhat later, towards the beginning of the third Meccan period (the 75th Sura revealed). Blachère makes it 77. See Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur’ān*, ed. and transl. Wolfgang H. Behn, Leiden-Boston, Brill (“Texts and

struggling with what he understood to be God's call to separate himself from Meccan unbelievers and with his own lingering feelings of attachment to those unbelievers, who (as the story is told in the *sīra*) were his own people (and some of them his own family). Marshall writes, "It was hardly easy for Muhammad to break his natural ties with the community in which he had been so well esteemed."⁷ In other words, Marshall argues that Noah's own hesitation to disavow his unbelieving son (one might compare also Kor 23, 27 which implies that Noah was concerned for all those condemned by the Flood) is a projection of Muḥammad's struggle to disavow his unbelieving people.⁸ The way in which Noah, begrudgingly, hesitantly, submits himself to God's will that he forswear his attachment to his unfaithful son reflects the process by which Muḥammad came to accept God's refusal to show mercy to infidel relatives and compatriots in Mecca.⁹ He writes to this effect, "We have been given a most revealing glimpse of Muhammad's turmoil, his struggle to bring his inner world into harmony with the demands of God."¹⁰

studies on the Qur'ān", 8), 2013, p. 118-126 (corresponding to the second edition of the German, originally published in 1909: I, p. 144-154). For a comparative list of chronological classifications see the Introduction to *Le Coran*, transl. Sami Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Vevey, L'Aire, 2008, p. 14-17.

7 David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, Surrey, Curzon, 1999, p. 98.

8 None of this struggle, however, is found in the (also "Meccan") verse Kor 71, 26, where Noah prays that God will wipe out all of the unbelievers.

9 In this respect Marshall concludes that Kor 11 represents a middle point of Muḥammad's transformation in this regard, between Kor 26, where the struggle between family and faith is less evident, and Kor 7, where the idea of a kinship by faith is salient.

In his discussion of Noah's lost son Marshall quotes Richard Bell's quip: "Islam breaks all ties". Marshall (*God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 101), quoting Bell, *Commentary*, I, p. 359; Marshall also refers here to Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, Montreal, McGill University Press ("McGill Islamic studies", 1), 1966, p. 58. According to Marshall, however, it was only in Medina that Muhammad fully accepted this principle. Only then did he accept that unbelievers are rejected by God and are to be shown no mercy (until they convert to Islam).

10 Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 101. To this end Marshall also (p. 98-99) quotes Gordon Newby (whose study of the account of Noah's lost son I will address further below): "Insofar as we can understand the account of Noah as an account parallel to that of Muhammad, and I would argue that we can, the compassion of Noah tells us of Muhammad's concern for those who would not heed his message". Gordon Newby, "The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Qur'an and *Tafsīr*", in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic Judaic Studies*, eds William Brinner and Stephen Rick, Atlanta, Scholars Press ("Brown Judaic studies", 111, 178), 1986, p. 29.

Angelika Neuwirth's interpretation of the account is not far from that of Marshall. Neuwirth, who, like Marshall, follows Theodor Nöldeke's chronological classification of this passage, understands this story to reflect the situation of the believers in the late Meccan period, namely that many of them were obliged to cut off ties with their unbelieving family members: "Sie spiegelt aber eher die realen Konflikte zwischen Gläubigen und Ungläubigen, die zur Zeit der Verkündigung der Sure auch innerfamiliäre Strukturen erschüttern."¹¹

In fact, the Qur'ān is generally interested in using stories of the prophets to teach the believers that they should forsake unbelieving family members (something I will address in greater detail below). Presumably this reflects a real concern of the Qur'ānic author in his historical context.¹² Still I am disinclined to locate this sura within a chronology connected to the traditional *sīra*. First, the importance of cutting ties with unbelieving family members could conceivably be a message apropos of any Meccan or Medinan period, and not only the "third Meccan" period.¹³ To this end it is worth noting that Richard Bell imagines the pericope on Noah's lost son to be a Medinan insertion, since he believes that it addresses the concerns of believers in Medina who have left behind unbelieving family members in Mecca.¹⁴ Second, and more importantly, I hesitate to align the Qur'ān with traditional accounts of the *sīra* (which after

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- 11 Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010, p. 630. Neuwirth refers to Kor 29, 8: "We have enjoined man to be good to his parents. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. To Me will be your return, where-at I will inform you concerning that which you used to do" (one might compare Kor 31, 14-15).
- 12 In a recent article Viviane Comerro de Prémare argues that the figure of Noah in the Qur'ān is generally presented in a way which reflects Muḥammad's own concerns: "Muḥammad s'adresse aux siens par la bouche de Noé en reprenant quelques éléments des récits d'origine biblique dans une configuration originale propre à sa predication". Viviane Comerro de Prémare, "Un Noé coranisé", *Revue d'Histoire des Religions*, 232 (2015), p. 624. On Noah in Islamic tradition generally see also Giovanni Canova, "The Prophet Noah in Islamic Tradition", in *Essays in Honour of Alexander Fodor in His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds Kinga Dévényi and Tamás Iványi, Budapest, Eötvös Loránd University Chair for Arabic Studies ("The Arabist. Budapest Studies in Arabic", 23), 2001, p. 1-20.
- 13 One might also note that the accounts of Noah in Kor 11 and 23 (where Noah's concern for unbelievers is explicit, Kor 11, 45, or implied, Kor 23, 27) contrast with the account of Kor 71 (where he prays, v. 26, that God will kill all unbelievers) although all three of these Suras are supposed to be "Meccan".
- 14 "There were, no doubt, regrets for their relatives in the minds of the Muhājirīn and perhaps even in the Prophet's own mind, but such feelings could not be encouraged". Bell, *Commentary*, I, p. 359.

all appeared well after the Qur'ān) with such confidence. In my opinion much (although not all) of the *sīra* is made up of accounts produced as expansions or explanations of Qur'ānic material (it is for precisely this reason that those accounts often seem to match that material well). This means that to read the Qur'ān through the *sīra* would be, as Régis Blachère put it, "a vicious circle."¹⁵ I have presented my arguments to this effect in detail elsewhere.¹⁶

Yet, while I disagree with Marshall (and Neuwirth) regarding the relationship of the account of Noah's lost son to the *sīra*, I agree with him that this account is best understood in light of the Qur'ān's teaching on the proper attitude of believers towards unbelievers, and the Qur'ān's particular concern with the attitude of believers towards unbelieving members of one's own family. The Qur'ān teaches in this regard that believers should not pray or intercede for unbelievers, and indeed should feel no sympathy for them at all. As God Himself has rejected the unbelievers, any sort of sympathy for them would be tantamount to an impertinent, if not blasphemous, questioning of His judgment.

The God of the Qur'ān forgives unbelievers who repent and believe, but He does not love the unbelievers as such (Kor 2, 276). He fights them (Kor 9, 30), mocks them, and allows them to wander blindly (Kor 2, 15). He tells them to die in their rage (Kor 3, 119) and has forgotten them (Kor 9, 67). He sets ambushes for them (Kor 11, 121-123; 89, 14), and plots against them (3, 45; 7, 99; 8, 30; 11, 21). He pours out his punishment upon them (Kor 89, 23) and is severe or harsh towards them (Kor 11, 58; 14, 17; 31, 24; 41, 50). He will not forgive them even if the Prophet asks forgiveness for them (Kor 63, 6), even if he were to ask God to forgive them 70 times (9, 80).¹⁷

In the light of the Qur'ānic passages which express God's condemnation of unbelievers one can better understand the account of Noah's lost son. Just before this account God warns Noah not to intercede for the unbelievers: "Do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers: they shall indeed be drowned" (Kor 11, 37; cf. 11, 76 where Abraham is similarly rebuked when he pleads for the wrongdoers of Lot's people).¹⁸ Noah nevertheless intercedes for his son,

15 "On est dans un cercle vicieux. On part du Coran pour établir une 'vie' du Prophète et on utilise à son tour celle-ci pour définir la chronologie du Coran". Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran*, Paris, Maisonneuve, 1959, p. 246.

16 Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Le problème de la chronologie du Coran", *Arabica*, 58 (2011), p. 477-502.

17 As Marshall summarizes: "Although God is prepared to forgive the unbelievers if they repent, considered as unbelievers they are worthless in his sight". Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 184.

18 Cf. also Kor 29, 32, where Abraham argues only for Lot's sake, but is nonetheless rebuked for his impertinence. One might also compare here Kor 23, 27-28, which similarly has God

and God accordingly rebukes him (Kor 11, 46).¹⁹ The language with which God rebukes Noah is interesting. God declares to Noah that this son “is not of your family,” a remark which caused no little debate among the commentators,²⁰ but which presumably means simply that unbelievers are not to be thought of as family.

In any case the divine rebuke of Noah in verse 46 is meant to warn the Qurʾān’s audience against the danger of the natural ties of family relationships. Indeed, the Qurʾān is generally worried by the possibility that family allegiances keep people from believing in its teaching. To the Qurʾān the passing down of unbelief or idolatry from one’s fathers is a general problem. The Qurʾān has the opponents of Abraham, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Šuʿayb, Luqmān, and the opponents of the Qurʾān’s own prophet attribute their unbelief to the practice of their fathers.²¹ Indeed one might make the case that for the Qurʾān the essential explanation for unbelief is stubborn attachment to unbelieving family members.

The case of Abraham is particularly illuminating for our purposes. In sura 21 (al-Anbiyāʾ), when Abraham asks his father and his people why they worship idols, they insist that they do so only because their forefathers did so first: “When he said to his father and his people, ‘What are these images to which you keep on clinging?’ * They said, ‘We found our fathers worshipping them’” (Kor 21, 52-53). Elsewhere (Kor 6, 74) the Qurʾān has Abraham preach directly to his idolatrous father (whom the Qurʾān names Āzar, and not Terah as in Genesis): “When Abraham said to Āzar, his father, ‘Do you take idols for gods?

warn Noah not to plead for those whom God has condemned. The account of Noah pleading for his son, however, appears only in Kor 11.

- 19 One might compare here Jer 15, 1: “Then the LORD said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!” Marshall comments: “What is certain is that the rebuke from God which follows makes it clear that Noah’s paternal instincts have not yet been sufficiently controlled” (Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 100).
- 20 This remark provoked certain Muslim exegetes (influenced also by Kor 66, 10, which refers to the betrayal of Noah’s wife, along with Lot’s wife) to conclude that the lost son was not really his son, that he was the offspring of his wife’s relations with another man. Some traditions emend the Arabic phrase in v. 42 *nādā Nūḥ ibnahu* (“Noah called his son”) to *nādā Nūḥ ibnahā* (“Noah called her son”) in order to make the point that Noah’s wife conceived this son with another man. See the discussion, for example, in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ġayb*, ed. Muḥammad Bayḍūn, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1421/2000, xvii, p. 185, *ad* Kor 11, 42-43. See also al-Ṭaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad b. Āšūr, Beirut, Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāṯ al-ʿarabī, 1422/2002, v, p. 172-173, *ad* Kor 11, 41-48.
- 21 See Kor 2, 170; 5, 104; 7, 28; 7, 70 (Hūd); 10, 78 (Moses); 11, 53 (Hud), 62 (Šāliḥ), 87 (Šuʿayb); 14, 10 (all prophets); 21, 53 (Abraham); 26, 74 (Abraham); 31, 21 (Luqmān); 34, 43; 43, 22-24; 46, 22 (Hūd).

Indeed, I see you and your people in manifest error'" (Kor 6, 74; cf. 19, 42-45; 21, 52; 26, 70-71; 37, 85; 43, 26).

In other passages the Qur'ān has Abraham promise to pray for his unbelieving father (something which seems to be parallel to Noah's appeal for his lost son in Kor 11, 45): "He said, 'Peace be to you! I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you. Indeed, He is gracious to me. * I dissociate myself from you and whatever you invoke besides Allāh. I will supplicate my Lord. Hopefully, I will not be disappointed in supplicating my Lord'" (Kor 19, 47-48; cf. Kor 14, 41; 60, 4). In sura 26 (al-Šu'arā') the Qur'ān quotes his prayer: "Forgive my father, for he is one of those who are astray" (Kor 26, 86). In sura 9 (al-Tawba), however, the Qur'ān insists that the case of Abraham was exceptional, and that neither the Prophet nor the believers should pray for unbelieving family members:²²

The Prophet and the faithful may not plead for the forgiveness of the polytheists, even if they should be [their] relatives, after it has become clear to them that they will be the inmates of hell. * Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfill a promise he had made him. So, when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. Indeed, Abraham was most plaintive and forbearing. (Kor 9, 113-114)²³

Abraham's confrontation with his father in the Qur'ān might be compared with Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh (who appears in the Qur'ān as Moses' adopted father). In sura 26, the Qur'ān has Pharaoh recall the favor he has shown Moses: "Did we not rear you as a child among us?" (Kor 26, 18). Yet, Moses is not moved by this appeal. He refuses to accept Pharaoh's demand to acknowledge him as a god ("If you take up any god other than me, I will surely make you a prisoner!"; Kor 26, 29) and demands that Pharaoh believe in Allāh: "The Lord of the heavens and earth" (Kor 26, 24).

The cases of Abraham and Moses are evidently different from that of Noah inasmuch as they involve an unbelieving father confronted by a believing son, whereas the case of Noah involves a believing father and an unbelieving son. In

22 Marshall argues that a chronological development can be seen with this material. Whereas in "Meccan" passages (Kor 14, 41; 19, 46-47; 26, 86) and one "Medinan" passage (Kor 50, 4) Abraham promises to pray (or simply prays—Kor 26, 86) for his father, in a late "Medinan" passage (Kor 9, 114) the Qur'ān declares that this was an exception and that the believers are not allowed to pray for their enemies.

23 This theme of dissociation from family members finds interesting parallels in the New Testament, notably Mat 10, 34-39 and Luk 12, 49-53.

sura 46 (al-Aḥqāf), however, the Qurʾān discusses the case of believing parents who raise an unbelieving son.²⁴ After first commending a son who is obedient to his parents and to God, the Qurʾān continues:

As for him who says to his parents, ‘Fie on you! Do you promise me that I shall be raised [from the dead] when generations have passed away before me?’ And they invoke Allāh’s help [and say]: ‘Woe to you! Believe! Allāh’s promise is indeed true.’ But he says, ‘These are nothing but myths of the ancients.’ * Such are the ones against whom the word has become due, along with the nations of jinn and humans that have passed away before them. They were the losers. (Kor 46, 17-18)²⁵

The figure of Noah’s lost son thus appears to be an example of such a disobedient child. Indeed, it is possible that he is meant to be an illustration of the hypothetical case discussed in sura 46.²⁶ What is certain is that the Qurʾān is particularly concerned with the problem of unbelieving family members. One might note to this effect the Qurʾān’s insistence elsewhere that those who believe in God must not love those who oppose God and His messenger, *even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brethren or their clan*” (Kor 58, 22a; cf. 31, 14-15; 64, 14). The account of Noah’s son, and in particular the manner in which God rebukes Noah for his sentimentality towards him, seems to teach this lesson meant for the Qurʾān’s audience. All unbelievers, even one’s own children, must be disowned.²⁷

The passage with Noah’s lost son might be compared to those passages which have Noah’s opponents accuse him of insanity, or possession (Kor 23, 25; 54, 9). Both cases have a certain connection with the Qurʾān’s own prophet. The Qurʾān seems to transpose a concern from Muḥammad’s day about unbelieving family members into the life of Noah. So too it transposes accusations

24 I am grateful to Nicolai Sinai for the reference to this passage.

25 One might compare this passage to Kor 29, 8, cited above (n. 12), which insists that believers are not to obey unbelieving parents.

26 This would not be possible, however, according to a strict understanding of Nöldeke’s chronological scheme, by which both Kor 11 was proclaimed before Kor 46 (although both date from the third Meccan period). One might also note that Kor 58 and 64, which I mention just below, are by tradition Medinan suras.

27 On one occasion (Kor 2, 177) the Qurʾān speaks of (financial) duty towards one’s relatives (*dū l-qurbā*; an expression also found in Kor 59, 7, where it seems to refer to the Prophet’s relatives). This duty, however, would seem under the weight of so many other Qurʾānic passages to refer only to believing family members.

made against Muḥammad of insanity (Kor 7, 184; 37, 36; 44, 13; 52, 29; 68, 51) into accusations made against Noah. The Qur'ān shapes the figure of Noah in a way that renders him useful for its own prophet.²⁸ This presumably explains, for example, why the Qur'ān focuses so much on the confrontation between Noah and his unbelieving people and so little on the details of the flood.²⁹

Having witnessed the place of the account of Noah's lost son within the larger themes of the Qur'ān we are left with the question of whether there is any relation between the account of Noah's son and pre-Qur'ānic traditions on Noah. It is possible, of course, that this account is a pure invention of the Qur'ān. Marshall expresses this view, with reference to an article of Gordon Newby (which I will discuss below). Marshall makes the case that the absence of any account of Noah's lost son in earlier Jewish and Christian literature means that the question of unbelieving family members in the Qur'ān's milieu must have been important enough to provoke such an account.³⁰

In fact, it is true that the story of a son who refuses to get in the ark is found neither in Genesis,³¹ nor in any later Jewish or Christian work. The Syriac *Cave*

28 On this point see Segovia, *The Quranic Noah*, p. 11 ff.

29 As Comerro de Prémare notes, the term for Flood (*tūfān*) appears only once in the Noah narratives of the Qur'ān (Kor 29, 14). Comerro de Prémare, "Un Noé coranisé", p. 627.

30 Marshall argues that both the account of Abraham's prayer for his father and the account of Noah's lost son are original to the Qur'ān. He comments, "Speyer makes the interesting point that there is no trace in Jewish literature of this theme of Abraham's intercession for his father (Speyer, 145), just as Newby argues about the Qur'ān's presentation of the compassion of Noah for his lost son. Thus since the motif of Abraham praying for his father is not present in the Qur'ān simply because it belonged to the pre-existing traditions about Abraham, it is likely that this is in fact an example of a Qur'ānic remoulding of older narrative material to suit Muhammad's own context. This suggests that we have here particularly direct access to an issue within Muhammad's own life and/or the life of the *umma* as a whole". Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 171-172. For the reference to Heinrich Speyer, see Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*, Hildesheim, G. Olms, 1961 (reprint of Grono, Verlag Dr. Theodor Marcus, 1931).

31 For their part the Muslim exegetes do not as a rule attempt to explain why Noah's lost son is unknown to Jews and Christians. This is interesting because other cases where the Qur'ān departs from the Bible—such as the report of the Jews' considering 'Uzayr to be the son of God (Kor 9, 30), or the suggestion that the Christians consider Mary to be divine (Kor 5, 116)—do lead the exegetes to defend the validity of the Qur'ān's report. Those cases, however, became issues of contention between Muslims and non-Muslims. The case of Noah's lost son did not become such an issue, and accordingly the exegetes do not spring into apologetical action.

One modern *exegete* who is aware of the contrast with Genesis is the Tunisian Ibn 'Āšūr [Mohamed Tahar Ben Achour] (d. 1973) who describes Noah's lost son as the "fourth

of *Treasures* (4th-6th c.) gives to Noah an additional son named Yōnātōn, but this is a son who is born to Noah *after* the Flood.³²

A number of earlier scholars, however, argue that the Qurʾānic account of Noah's lost son is nonetheless connected to Genesis. Abraham Geiger, in his *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, notes in this regard the account of Genesis 9 according to which Ham (Noah's son) commits an indiscretion and Noah subsequently curses Canaan (Ham's son).

- (20) Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard;
- (21) and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent.
- (22) And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.
- (23) Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.
- (24) When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him,
- (25) he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."
- (26) He also said, "Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave."

of his sons from Noah's second wife whose name was Wā'ila, and who drowned". This description reflects Ibn ʿĀšūr's awareness of the Biblical account of Noah, as the Bible—and not the Qurʾān—relates that Noah had three sons with him on the ark. Ibn ʿĀšūr also refers to the Bible directly in a second passage on Noah's lost son: "It is said that his name was Yām and it is said that his name was Kanʿān but he was not Kanʿān the son of Ḥām the ancestor of the Canaanites. The Torah which exists currently omits the mention of this son, and the question of his drowning, and does not mention if he had a wife or if he was unmarried". Ibn ʿĀšūr, *Tafsīr al-tahrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-taʾrīḥ, 1420/2000, XI, p. 262, ad Kor 11, 43.

32 The *Cave of Treasures* mentions this son of Noah only in the time of Nimrod (who appears on Genesis 10). *La caverne des trésors : les deux recensions syriaques*, ed. and transl. Su-Min Ri, Leuven, E. Peeters ("Corpus scriptorum christianorum Orientalium", 486-487; "Scriptores syri", 207-208), 1987, 27, 7 (R.or.). The 13th century Syriac *Book of the Bee* makes his birth after the flood explicit. See *The Book of the Bee*, ed. and transl. Ernest Wallis Budge, Oxford, Clarendon, 1886, chap. 20.

- (27) God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." (Gen 9, 20-27)³³

Geiger does not explain exactly how the indiscretion of Ham might have provoked the Qur'ānic account of Noah's lost son.³⁴

For his part Heinrich Speyer, in *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, agrees that this account is ultimately based on the account of Ham in Genesis 9,³⁵ although he refers also to a number of other accounts with some common themes, including one from the *Testament of Naphtali*, a second century BCE text, likely written originally in Greek,³⁶ which tells the story of a dream of Naphtali in which Joseph escapes from a sinking ship on a small boat.³⁷ Speyer also points out how Josephus (*Antiquities*, 1, 4, 2) makes Nimrod the grandson of Ham, and has him build the Tower of Babel in order to have a defense

33 Bible translations are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

As Laura Lieber points out, the episode of Noah's drunkenness (including his cursing of Canaan) is a tragic ending to the story of Noah, who otherwise seems to be a heroic character. Noah is the only figure of righteousness in an unrighteous generation, and he successfully saves humanity, and indeed the animals, from the cosmic flood. See Laura Lieber, "Portraits of Righteousness: Noah in Early Christian and Jewish Hymnography," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 61 (2009), p. 332.

34 Instead he argues simply that this account "wahrscheinlich aus einer Auffassung des üblen Verfahrens seines Sohnes Ham nach der Sündfluth entstand." Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, Leipzig, M.W. Kaufmann, 1902 (reprint of Bonn, Baaden, 1833), p. 109. Geiger also notes how the Qur'ān, in another passage (Kor 66, 10) accuses Noah's wife of betraying her husband (the Qur'ān mentions her along with Lot's wife). Observing that the rabbis make no allusion to any infidelity of Noah's wife, Geiger wonders if these things are simply "errors and mix-ups" (*Irrthümer und Vermischungen*). *Ibid.*, p. 109.

John Bergsma and Scott Hahn make the argument that Genesis 9 implies that Ham had relations with his mother (Noah's wife). This explains the cursing of Ham's son Canaan (understood to be the fruit of the incestuous relations) in Gen 9, 25-27. John Bergsma and Scott Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan" (Genesis 9, 20-27), *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124 (2005), p. 25-40. Yet even if one were to accept their argument, it would be hard to imagine that the Qur'ān's accusing Noah's wife of infidelity in Kor 66, 10 could be related to Genesis 9, as the idea of maternal incest is not found among early interpretations of this passage.

35 Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 105.

36 See Howard Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs", in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth, Garden City, Doubleday, 1983, 1, p. 765-778.

37 Testament of Naphtali, 6, 1-10 in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 11, p. 813.

against a new flood.³⁸ Presumably the point is that both of these characters are seen resisting a flood. Speyer also notes certain rabbinic traditions which have Cain swept away in the waters of the Flood.³⁹ Finally he concludes: “These and other similar legendary materials could have indeed been intertwined in Muḥammad’s imagination with the Biblical narrative.” He adds, however: “In any case a precise parallel narrative to the Qur’ānic report is nowhere to be found.”⁴⁰

More recently the quest to explain the appearance of Noah’s other son in the Qur’ān has been taken up by Gordon Newby. In a 1986 article, Newby agrees that behind Noah’s unbelieving son in sura 11 is the anecdote in Genesis 9.⁴¹ Ham’s crime there is usually described by scholars as seeing Noah naked (as a literal reading of the Bible suggests) or sexually abusing or castrating him.⁴² Yet, in order to explain why Noah curses Canaan here, and not Ham, some Jewish sources (Newby names *Pirqē de-Rabbī Elīezer*, although this is largely a post-Qur’ānic text), and some Church fathers (Newby names Origen),⁴³ suggest that Canaan—not Ham—committed a crime against Noah.

Newby notes that the account of Noah’s nakedness in the Book of Jubilees (2nd c. BCE) could be read to imply that Canaan is actually a son of Noah: “And Noah woke up from his wine, and knew everything which his youngest son had done to him. *And he cursed his son* and said, “Cursed is Canaan, let him be an

38 Speyer also points to traditions which develop the idea of Ham’s sinfulness. In the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 108B) he is punished for having sexual relations while in the ark; Augustine (*City of God*, 16, 2) makes Ham into a prototype of a heretic.

39 *Genesis Rabbah*, 22, 12; transl. Benjamin Freedman, London, Soncino, 1983, p. 191; cf. 32, 5; transl. Freedman, p. 252. See also Testament of Naphtali, 6, 1-10. The reference to the Flood is missing in the text translated in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, p. 813; it is preserved by the source used by Speyer: Emil Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, Tübingen-Freiburg, Mohr, 1900, II, p. 504.

40 Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 106.

41 Newby, “The Drowned Son”. On Noah in the Qur’ān see also Erica Martin, “The Literary Presentation of Noah in the Qur’ān”, in *Noah and His Book(s)*, ed. Michael Edward Stone, Aryeh Amilhay and Vered Hillel, Leiden-Atlanta, Brill-Society of Biblical Literature (“Early Judaism and its literature”, 28), 2010, p. 253-275. Martin, however, does not seek to explain the presence of Noah’s lost son in the Qur’ān.

42 As Bergsma and Hahn (“Noah’s Nakedness”) point out, the expression “to uncover nakedness” (cf. Gen 9, 21-22) is an expression used repeatedly for sexual intercourse in Leviticus 18.

43 See Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 16, Engl. translation (*Fathers of the Church*), p. 215.

enslaved servant of his brothers.” (Jubilees 7, 10-11).⁴⁴ Newby thus suggests—although he does not say so explicitly—that the sura 11 passage on Noah's unbelieving son might reflect the influence of *Jubilees*.⁴⁵

Angelika Neuwirth, following Speyer, sees a possible connection between the account of Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān and the incident of Noah and Ham in Gen 9,⁴⁶ although her principal concern (as mentioned above) is to point out the connection between this account and the situation of the nascent Muslim community in Arabia when it was proclaimed.⁴⁷

Finally, Carlos Segovia has proposed that in seeking out Biblical antecedents to the Qur'ānic account of Noah's lost son we need not look only at Noah in the Bible. Instead we might imagine that this account is a new manifestation of the *topos* seen with Abraham's arguing over Sodom in Gen 18 and David's lamenting over his dead son Absalom in 2 Sam 18.⁴⁸

44 Transl. Wintermute, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2, 69. For the Ethiopic see *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, ed. James C. Vanderkam, Leuven, E. Peeters (“Corpus scriptorum christianorum Orientalium”, 510; “Scriptores aethiopici”, 87), 1989, p. 44.

45 Elsewhere Newby connects this account to Muḥammad's own experience: “Noah is represented as the concerned, compassionate paterfamilias, and he is severely distressed that his ‘son’ might not heed his message and be lost . . . We see here a Noah of both passion and compassion, a Noah who is willing to argue with God for the salvation of one individual. In a very few words, the Qur'ān shows us a Noah unlike that Noah of the rabbinic exegetes. Insofar as we can understand the story of Noah as an account parallel to that of Muhammad, and I would argue that we can, the compassion of Noah tells us of Muhammad's concern for those who would not heed his message”. Newby, “The Drowned Son”, p. 29.

It might be added here that most *exegetes* give Noah's lost son the name Canaan. See, e.g. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Šihāta, Beirut, Dār al-turāṭ al-‘arabī, 2002 (reprint of Cairo, Mu’assasat al-ḥalabī, n.d.), 11, p. 283, *ad* Kor 11, 42; al-Zamaḥsharī, *al-Kaššāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ḡawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥusayn Aḥmad, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1987, 1, p. 396 *ad* Kor 11, 42-43; Ibrāhīm al-Biqā’ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsūb al-āyāt wa-l-suwar*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq Ġālib al-Mahdī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1432/2011, 111, p. 532. According to a secondary opinion the lost son was named Yām. Newby wonders if this name is connected to the Northwest Semitic *yam(m)* (“sea”), a name used in some traditions for a water god who “represents the forces of evil against the good sky deity Baal” (Newby, “The Drowned Son”, p. 24). In fact, Yām is certainly a corruption of the Biblical name Ham, something which seems to confirm that the exegetes came up with names for Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān in light of the two characters who are presented as unfaithful, or cursed, in the Noah story in the Bible.

46 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, p. 629-631.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 630.

48 Segovia, *The Quranic Noah*, p. 87. Another, less convincing, attempt to explain Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān is offered by Brian Brown, *Noah's Other Son: Bridging the Gap between*

Before presenting my own theory, it is perhaps worth mentioning that this case of the Qurʾān's departure from the Bible is hardly unique. The Qurʾānic appropriation of Biblical characters not infrequently involves dramatic changes: in the Qurʾān Haman (Kor 28, 6, 8, 38; 29, 39; 40, 24, 36) appears not in Persia but in Egypt as an assistant to Pharaoh; Mary appears as the sister of Aaron (Kor 19, 28) and the daughter of ʿImrān (Kor 3, 33 ff.) like the Miryam of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (see Exo 6, 20; 15, 20; 1 Chr 5, 29); in the Qurʾān Potiphar's wife gathers her friends together to witness Joseph's beauty (Kor 12, 30-32), an anecdote nowhere to be found in the Bible. Now some of these departures can be explained by an appreciation of the way Jews and Christians developed Biblical accounts in later literature and traditions.⁴⁹ Yet, the Qurʾān, in my opinion, is never a passive recipient of earlier traditions, whether those traditions originate in the Bible, midrash or elsewhere. The Qurʾān chooses material, and shapes that material, based on its own theological and polemical concerns. In analyzing the Qurʾān's relationship to the Bible it is important to appreciate those concerns.

To this end, it is important to note that the figure of Noah in the Qurʾān has a special relationship with the figure of Lot. As alluded to above, the Qurʾān in sura 66 (*al-Taḥrīm*) makes an explicit connection between the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot:

Allāh draws an example for 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 Allāh, and it was said [to them], "Enter the Fire, along with those who enter [it]." (Kor 66, 10)⁵⁰

the Bible and the Qurʾān, New York, Continuum, 2007. Brown argues that the Qurʾān preserves an ancient tradition—a tradition not recorded in the Bible—according to which Noah had four sons: Ham, Japheth, Shem, and Canaan. The youngest of these, Canaan, died in the Flood, and Ham decided to name his son after his dead brother (hence the appearance of a grandson of Noah named Canaan in Genesis). He writes: "In the Bible, Ham, another son of Noah, named his son Canaan, no doubt after his lost brother, so the name is not entirely unfamiliar to Jews and Christians" (p. 51).

49 Adam Silverstein has shown this to be the case for Haman: Adam Silverstein, "Haman's Transition from the Jahiliyya to Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 34 (2008), p. 285-308. On Mary, see Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués: aux sources de quelques péripécies coraniques (Q 19:16-33)", in *Partage du sacré: Transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, eds Isabelle Dépret and Guillaume Dye, Brussels, E.M.E. & Intercommunications, 2012, p. 55-122. On Joseph, see James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1990, p. 28-65.

50 One might also note the joining of references first to Lot and then to Noah in Kor 21, 74-77.

The connection between Noah and Lot is perhaps suggested already by Genesis.⁵¹ Indeed the story of the salvation of Lot and his daughters in Gen 19 might be seen—and has been seen by Biblical scholars—as a sort of exegesis of the Noah account.⁵² This connection is also found in Christian tradition.⁵³ Luke 17 has Jesus refer to the accounts of Noah and Lot as a way of explaining that the Kingdom of God will come suddenly:

- (26) 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of man.
- (27) People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all.
- (28) It will be the same as it was in Lot's day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,
- (29) but the day Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all. (Luk 17, 26-29)

The parallel between Noah and Lot is also found in 2 Peter, which singles out Noah and Lot as two righteous men in the midst of peoples who were ultimately destroyed:

- (5) He did not spare the world in ancient times: he saved only Noah, the preacher of uprightness, along with seven others, when he sent the Flood over a world of sinners.

51 It is also taken up in *midrash*. For example, a tradition in *Genesis Rabbah* explains Abraham's request that God save Sodom if ten righteous people could be found therein (Gen 18, 32) by comparing the family of Noah with the family of Lot: "Perchance there shall be found among them (the Sodomites) ten (righteous people)! Why ten? . . . Because from the Flood generation there remained eight (righteous people, *i.e.* Noah, his wife, and his three sons and their wives), yet the world wasn't saved in their merit. Another explanation: why ten? Because he thought that there would be ten, namely, Lot, his wife, his four daughters, and his four sons-in-law". *Genesis Rabbah* 49, 13; 1, p. 432. I am grateful to Michael Novick for this reference.

52 The Qur'ānic account of Noah's lost son might in turn be a development of the story of Lot's lost wife (Gen 19, 26). In the Qur'ān Lot's wife is not a character who unfortunately happens to look back out of curiosity but is simply one of those who remained behind (see Kor 7, 83; 15, 60; 26, 171; 27, 57; 29, 32-33; 37, 134-135; cf. 11, 81). In one case (Kor 27, 57) the Qur'ān has God explain that He has ordained her to do so.

53 On this, see Dieter Luhrmann, "Noah und Lot (Lk 17:26-29): ein Nachtrag", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 63 (1972), p. 130-132.

- (6) He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by reducing them to ashes as a warning to future sinners;
- (7) but rescued Lot, an upright man who had been sickened by the debauched way in which these vile people behaved-
- (8) for that upright man, living among them, was outraged in his upright soul by the crimes that he saw and heard every day. (2 Pe 2, 5-8)

One could imagine, then, that just as the Qur'ān has Lot lose a member of his family, his wife (Kor 7, 83; 11, 81; 15, 59-60; 26, 170-171; 27, 54-58; 29, 32-33; 37, 134-135), it completes this parallel by having Noah lose a member of his family, his son.

Yet, in my opinion the story of Noah's lost son in the Qur'ān is best explained in light of a passage in Ezekiel where the point is made that the merits of a father will do nothing for a sinful son.⁵⁴ Ezekiel uses the example of Noah along with Daniel and Job to make this point:⁵⁵

- (13) "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast,
- (14) even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord GOD.
- (15) If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the beasts;
- (16) even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate.
- (17) Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, let a sword go through the land; and I cut off from it man and beast;

54 In her article "Un Noé coranisé", Comerro notes the relationship between Ezechiel and the Qur'ānic passage on Noah's lost son. She writes: "Le récit de la sourate 11 (25-48) est particulièrement intéressant puisqu'il comporte un élément dont on n'a trouvé aucun parallèle narratif en dehors du Coran, bien qu'il ait été rapproché d'un passage du livre biblique d'*Ézéchiël* (14, 14-16)" (p. 628).

55 Noah might also have been seen as a particularly apt example for Ezekiel because one of his sons, Ham, appears to be sinful in the account of Noah's drunkenness in Gen 9.

- (18) though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered.
- (19) Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast;
- (20) even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness. (Eze 14, 13-20)

The choice of Noah as an example in Ezekiel 14 presumably reflects above all a conviction of his righteousness based on Gen 6, 9 (*pace* the incident of his drunkenness in Gen 9).⁵⁶ He is accordingly mentioned along with Daniel and Job, two other figures known for righteousness in the midst of tribulation.

Several chapters later the divine voice in Ezekiel returns to this point and has God declare: "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die" (Eze 18, 4). The importance of these passages for our purposes is the way Ezekiel speaks theoretically of a son of Noah (along with Daniel and Job) who would die for his unrighteousness.⁵⁷ In the Qur'ān this son is no longer a theory. He has become a real character.

A parallel to this transformation from theory into reality can be found in the passage on David's conversation with two litigants in Kor 38, 21-26. 2 Samuel

56 A similar conviction is found in Wisdom/Ben Sira 14, 17, Jubilees 5, 19, and 1 Enoch 67, 1, which (alluding to Gen 6, 9) relates: "In those days, the word of God came unto me, and said unto me, "Noah, your lot has come up before me—a lot without blame, a lot of true love" (transl. Isaac). It also seen in the passage of 2 Pet (2, 5) quoted above, and in Heb 11, 7: "It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, took care to build an ark to save his family. His faith was a judgement on the world, and he was able to claim the uprightness which comes from faith".

57 Comerro puts this otherwise: "Le motif du 'fils perdu' peut être considéré d'un point de vue intertextuel comme une mise en récit d'Ézéchiel 14, 16 sans que cela indique pour autant une transmission directe" (p. 628).

The idea that this son tried to escape the Flood by climbing up a mountain is logical enough and perhaps no explanation for it is needed. However, it is worth noting at least that the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* has the Children of Seth unsuccessfully seek to climb the mountain of Paradise in order to escape the waters of the Flood, after they are locked out of the ark: "The children of Seth ran to the ark and begged Noah to open the door of the ark for them. When they saw the waves which surrounded them from every side they were overcome with great anxiety and sought to climb the mountain of paradise but they could not". *La caverne des trésors*, 18, 12-13 (R.Or.). This element of the *Cave of Treasures* might be inspired in part by the prophecy against the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, 6-9.

12, 1-13 has the prophet Nathan tell David a parable about two men, one of whom has stolen a lamb from another, in order to that he might appreciate the sin he has committed by taking Bathseba from Uriah. In the Qur'ān, these two men are no longer a theory; they enter "into the presence of David" (38, 22) and David judges between them.⁵⁸ Something similar has taken place with the son of Noah mentioned in Ezekiel 14. The Qur'ān's author transforms this theoretical son, who in theory would die for his sin, into a real character who really dies for his sin. The subsequent dialogue between Noah and God reveals the reason for this transformation: the account of Noah's lost son is meant to illustrate one of the Qur'ān's central arguments: that all unbelievers, even those in one's own family, are to be left behind.

58 Nevertheless, this account still contains an allusion to David's sin. 38, 24 has David, after judging between the two litigants, ask forgiveness from God and fall down penitently in prostration. On this passage see Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 378 and *The Qur'ān Seminar Commentary*, ed. Mehdi Azaiez, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Tommaso Tesei and Hamza M. Zafer, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 326-332.