CHAPTER ONE

SETH IN JEWISH LITERATURE

a. The Masoretic Text

The first chapters of the Book of Genesis in which Seth is mentioned (Gen. 3, 25-26; 5, 3-4; 5, 6-8) come from two sources. Of these two sources P is clearly recognizable. To this source belong 1, 1-2, 4a, dealing with the creation of heaven and earth in six days, chapter 5 with its genealogy starting with Adam who after 130 years begot a son “in his own likeness, after his image” (vs. 3) and ending with the birth of Shem, Ham and Japheth (vs. 32), the sons of Noah, and finally chapter 6 from vs. 9 with the history of the righteous Noah. Gen. 5, 29 is not usually regarded as belonging to P.¹

Cain and Abel are not found in P, which mentions Seth as Adam's only son whose generation leads to Noah and his sons (5, 6-32). The same genealogy is found in 1 Chron. 1, 1-4 where we read about Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah. The same tradition was used by Luke, who traced Jesus’ genealogy back to Seth and Adam (cf. Luke 3, 38).

According to this tradition Adam’s likeness and image passed to his generation and Seth was the first to receive it (cf. Gen. 5, 3). It appears that it remained part of humanity even after the flood. In this tradition nothing is said about Adam’s fall. We may even draw the conclusion that the successive generations after Adam until the time of Noah were living righteous.

Gen. 2, 4b-4, 26 is generally regarded as belonging to J. This passage deals with Adam’s life in paradise, the origin of Eve, the fall, the expulsion from paradise, the birth of Cain and Abel and Abel’s death. It also contains a genealogy from Cain to the children of Lamech and the remark that God gave to Adam “a new seed”

with the birth of Seth (4, 25). Of Seth’s generation, only his son
Enosh is mentioned (4, 26). To the same source also belongs
5, 5-8, in which it is said that God regretted his creation of the earth
and decided to blot out all mankind apart from Noah. This passage
is preceded by 6, 1-4, an “erratic block” with mythological ele-
ments and a doubtful origin, dealing with the descent of the “sons
of God” to the children of men.\(^2\) As we have already said, 5, 29 is
usually regarded as belonging to J.\(^3\)

In J, though not in P, there is a gradual deterioration after the
creation of Adam. We read about the expulsion from paradise,
Abel’s death and the birth of the giants, the offsprings of the sons
of God and the children of men. The only sign of light in a decaying
world is the birth of Seth who is considered to be Abel’s substitute:

\[\text{גא\_ילים פ\_חונ ק\_ני} \]

If we accept 5, 29, according to which Noah was to bring relief
“from the toil of our hands on the earth”, as part of J, then we may
assume that this verse refers to a new era coming after the flood.

This means that in both P and J Seth is important.\(^4\) In P he is
placed at the beginning of mankind as the first to bear Adam’s
image and in J he is seen as a new beginning in a world which was
spoilt by Cain’s killing of Abel. The fusion of the two sources,
resulting in the first chapters of Genesis in their present form
would appear to give an even more important position to Seth. As
opposed to the description in J of a world going down in sin and
murder, P gives special emphasis to the birth of Seth not only as the
beginning of a new era but also as his being after Adam’s image.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\) Eissfeldt and Sellin-Fohrer accept a source with primitive stories, like
that in Gen. 6, 1-4, apart from J. For studies before 1937, see G. E. Closen,
*Die Sünde der “Sühne Gottes”*. Gen. 6, 1-4, in: *Scripta Pontificii Institutii
Biblici*, Rom 1937, p. 227-238. See also F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne
oder Engel vor der Sintflut?*, in: *Wiener Beitr. zur Theologie XIII*, Wien 1966,
p. 54-58; J. Scharbert, *Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6, 1-4*,
in: *Bibl. Zeitschr.* n. F. 11 1967, p. 66-78, and H. Haag, s.v. \[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\]

\(\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\) Sellin-Fohrer and Westermann do not mention the idea that 5, 29
belongs to J, but see C. Westermann, *Genesis*, in: *Bibl. Komm.* z. *A.T.* I/1,
Neukirchen 1974, p. 487.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\) Although many Roman Catholic scholars believed that Gen. 6, 1-4
referred to Sethites and Cainites, see f.e. H. Junker, *Zur Erklärung von
Gen. 6, 1-4*, in: *Biblica* 16 1935, 205-214, this view has generally been aban-
doned since the study made by Closen, *op. cit.*, but Scharbert, *op. cit.*, tried to defend it again. It is, however rejected by Haag, *op. cit.*