CHAPTER SIX

THE TESTAMENT OF NOAH (7:20–39)

ANALYSIS OF THE TESTAMENT

The Testament of Noah appears in Jub. 7:20–39 following the story of Noah's planting of the vineyard.¹ Two characteristics demonstrate that this passage does indeed belong to the testamentary genre: the terminology, such as the verb “prescribe, command” (ya‘azzzz) at the beginning of the section, and the content, as Noah beseeches his sons to behave appropriately after his death.² An additional internal sign that this passage can be classified as a testament is found in v. 27: “and now I fear regarding you that after I have died you will shed human blood on the earth…”—Noah gives the orders to his sons with an eye toward the future, when he will no longer be around, and this perspective is appropriate for a testament.

In order to describe the structure of the passage, one can divide it into five sections according to their content:

(1) 20–26a: Noah commands his offspring to observe the commandments that he has learned in the past, and emphasizes the lesson learned from the Watchers and flood stories.
(2) 26b–33: Noah notes that his offspring are not acting righteously. He fears that their behavior will eventually deteriorate to the point of murder, and warns them both not to kill others and not to consume blood.

² For a description of the literary genre of testaments, see Collins 1984: 325–326. In his opinion, the most important characteristic of this genre is that it is a speech from a father to his children (or from a leader to his nation or successor), which is presented close to his impending death. The testament is generally introduced with a third-person description of the occasion on which it was imparted, but the testament itself is formulated in the first person. The testament is followed by the death of the speaker. This final element is absent in Jub. 7, and Noah’s death is not mentioned until Jub. 10:15; for a discussion of the anomalous placement of the testament in Jub. 7, see the discussion below, pp. 158–163.
(3) 34: First conclusion of the testament: “Now listen, my children. Do what is just and right…”
(4) 35–37: The laws of the vineyard and firstfruits
(5) 38–39: Second conclusion of the testament

As noted already by scholars, the approach of the testament itself vis-à-vis the identity of the cause of evil in the world is similar to that reflected in the various traditions in 1 Enoch—it attributes it to demons, offspring of the giants (children of the Watchers). However, literary-critical considerations will lead to the conclusion that the testament was not composed by the redactor of Jubilees, and therefore does not reflect his worldview.

Section (1): Similar to other compositions of the Second Temple period, Noah’s testament emphasizes the Watchers story and the resulting flood punishment, since they function as paradigms of sin and punishment. The content of this section is limited to those stories which Noah himself could have known, and those sins which he saw with his very own eyes. This limitation matches the summary of the content found in the introduction to the testament: “the ordinances and the commandments—every statute which he knew” (v. 20). The description of the Watchers’ sins in Jub. 7 is similar to that presented in the rewritten story in Jub. 5, but not identical with it, both in terms of some details of the content, and with respect to its literary genre (testament versus story). However, both passages share the same goal in their reading of the Watchers story. The purpose of the rewritten story in Jub. 5 (with the additional legal passage) is to advocate for the observance of the commandments, and to call attention to the calamitous repercussions resulting from noncompliance. The myth of the sons of god and the women plays a similar role in Noah’s testament in Jub. 7, as the Watchers episode is adduced following a list of laws that Noah implored his sons to observe.

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3 See pp. 139–140.
4 It is possible that the emphasis on “every statute which he knew” is significant for understanding the view of the author regarding the status of the law: Noah’s sons were only obligated in those laws which were already known (cf. Anderson 1994, and the systematic theological approach which he describes). However, it is also possible that according to the literary assumptions of the narrative, Noah was limited in his testament to those commandments that he could have known.
5 So too Jub. 20:5; CD II, 14–III.