

“Nephilim” & “Sons of God” in Genesis 6:1–4 ~ *Six Articles*

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Michael G. Maness: I agree with Sproul and Keil, the more classic view that the **Sons of God are of the Sethite lineage** and the **nephilim are simply people of renown**, like the men of the exact same word in the only other use of the “*nephilim*” in Num. 13:33, “renown” or “giants” to the 12 Israelite spies who felt like they were grasshoppers. The 3rd–6th below have compelling arguments for their views, though for me are not not enough. Furthermore, none deal with the angelic view where “angels as the Sons of God” infers that *all* the fallen angels were males. As they point out, a few times angels appear in the form of men, yet Matt 22:30 indicates angels do not do sex, and there is no indication anywhere in the Bible to the contrary.

See Psalm 73:15, 80:17, Deu. 32: 5, and Hosea 1:10 for the godly or Israel as “God’s sons.” The Sethite view of “sons of God” was also held by Saints John Chrysostom (d. 407), Augustine (d. 430), Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), and the top Protestant Reformers Martin Luther (d. 1546) and John Calvin (d. 1564)

Sons of God = Sethite Lineage

1st - R. C. Sproul (1939-2017), “Who Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6?” Ligonier Ministries (online 5-27-2020): www.Ligonier.org/learn/articles/who-are-sons-god-genesis-6. Sproul was the first minister of preaching and teaching at Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, FL, Presbyterian, first president of Reformation Bible College, executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine, the author of 100 books, including *The Holiness of God*, *Chosen by God*, and *Everyone’s a Theologian*.

Maness Note: Sproul outlines *my preferred position well*, the most common Reformed and most common Evangelically conservative view that the **“Sons of God” are of the Sethite lineage**, those obedient to God and the disobedient who intermarried between the Cainite and Sethite lines. Though a popularly written and the least technical, know that there are several technical pieces defending the Sethite line over the centuries, especially since the Protestant Reformation of 1571.

2nd - C.F. Keil, “*Keil & Delitzsch O.T. Commentary, Genesis 6:1–4*,” Vol 1, Genesis (T&T Clark, 1866, 127–139, www.google.com/books/edition/Biblical_Commentary_on_the_Old_Testament/F6NkmPGJKvIC).

Maness Note: Keil argues for the Sethite lineage of “Sons of God” being men of former “godly” line and the *Nephilim* being offspring that became renown, not necessarily giants, and Keil goes to great technical lengths against his comrade Delitzsch who Keil said held to the angels view.

Sons of God = Angels, Evil Spirits, Demons

3rd - Willem A. Van Gemeren, “Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43, No. 2 (Spring 1981): 320–348.

Maness Note: Van Gemeren leans to the angelic view of “Sons of God,” outlines the pros and cons well. He notes how both John Calvin and Martin Luther held to the “Sons of God” being the lineage of Seth, the godly line, and the sin being that of intermarriage with unbelievers or of the line of cursed Cain with sin of violence. Van Gemeren outlines a few views of the *Nephelim*, translates it as *Nephelim* himself. His excellent survey of the ancient literature showed how a lot of Jewish tradition and many early Church Fathers leaned to the supernatural and “angel” view of the “Sons of God” and more led him to lean to the supernatural.

4th - Robert C. Newman, “Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5, No. 1 (Spring 1984): 13–36.

Maness Note: Newman’s excellent survey of the ancient literature showed how a lot of the Jewish tradition and many early Church Fathers leaned to the supernatural and “angel” view of the “sons of God” and more led him to lean to the supernatural, even to angels being Sons of God.

Angels
an “Erratic
Stone”
Oldest View

Sons of God = King/Rulers

5th - Leroy Binney, “Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1-4,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 13, No. 1 (Winter 1970): 43–52. Outline below by Maness.

Maness Note: Binney jettisons the angelic view of “Sons of God,” ably outlines the classical ecclesiastical position of the “Sons of God” being of the Sethite line, while in the end favoring the “Sons of God” being Nephilim and therefore mighty rulers or kings.

6th - Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, No. 2 (May 1962): 187–204.

Maness Note: Kline admirably notes the Sethite line of the “Sons of God” as the “absence of a satisfactory alternative” and proceeds with an admirable critique of weakness of that view and—then—proceeds to admirably defend his “kingship” motif from Adam to Abraham and from David to Christ, to whom “every knee should bow” (Phil 2:9–11).

Daniel Darling, “They Might Be Giants. (Or Angels. Or Superhuman Devils): Who, or What, Are the Nephilim? We Don’t Know—and Maybe We Don’t Need To,” *Christianity Today* (May-June 2022): www.ChristianityToday.com/ct/2022/may-june/daniel-darling-characters-creation-nephilim-genesis-angels.html. He leans to the Sethite lineage and is director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the article is adapted from his book, *The Characters of Creation: The Men, Women, Creatures, and Serpent Present at the Beginning of the World* (Moody, 2022).

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1st – “Who Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6?” by R. C. Sproul

Sons of God
Sethite Lineage

R. C. Sproul (1939-2017), “Who Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6?” Ligonier Ministries (online 5-27-2020): www.Ligonier.org/learn/articles/who-are-sons-god-genesis-6. Sproul was the first minister of preaching and teaching at Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, FL (Presbyterian), first president of Reformation Bible College, executive editor of Tabletalk magazine, the author of 100 books, including *The Holiness of God*, *Chosen by God*, and *Everyone’s a Theologian*.

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In the twentieth century, the German biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann gave a massive critique of the Scriptures, arguing that the Bible is filled with mythological references that must be removed if it is to have any significant application to our day. Bultmann’s major concern was with the New Testament narratives, particularly those that included records of miracles, which he deemed impossible. Other scholars, however, have claimed that there are mythological elements in the Old Testament as well. Exhibit A for this argument is usually a narrative that some believe parallels the ancient Greek and Roman myths about gods and goddesses occasionally mating with human beings.

In [Genesis 6](#), we read this account: “When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.... The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown” ([Gen. 6:1–4](#)).

This narrative is basically a preface to the account of the flood God sent to eradicate all people from the earth, except for the family of Noah. Of course, the flood narrative itself is often regarded as mythological, but this preparatory section, where we read of the intermarriage of “the sons of God” and “the daughters of man,” is seen as blatant myth.

The assumption in this interpretation of [Genesis 6](#) is that “the sons of God” refers to angelic beings. Why do some biblical interpreters make this assumption? The simple answer is that the Scriptures sometimes refer to angels as sons of God, and it is assumed that the reference in [Genesis 6](#) means the same. This is certainly a possible inference that could be drawn, but is it a necessary inference? I would answer no; I do not believe this text necessarily teaches the idea of sexual relations between angels and human beings.

We see two lines, one obeying God and the other willfully disobeying Him.

To understand this difficult passage, we have to look at the broader application of the phrase “sons of God.” Pre-eminently, it is used for Jesus Himself; He is the Son of God. As noted, it is sometimes used to refer to angels ([Job 1:6](#); [21:1](#); [Ps. 29:1](#)). Also, it is sometimes used to speak of followers of Christ ([Matt. 5:9](#); [Rom. 8:14](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)). So, the concept of divine sonship in the Scriptures is not always linked to a biological or ontological relationship (relationship of being). Rather, it is chiefly used to set forth a relationship of obedience. This means [Genesis 6](#) could simply be speaking about the intermarriage of those who manifested a pattern of obedience to God in their lives and those who were pagans in their orientation. In other words, this text likely describes marriages between believers and unbelievers.

The immediate context of [Genesis 6](#) supports this conclusion. Following the narrative of the fall in [Genesis 3](#), the Bible traces the lines of two families, the descendants of Cain and of Seth. Cain’s line is recounted in [Genesis 4](#), and this line displays proliferating wickedness, capped by Lamech, who was the first polygamist ([Gen. 4:19](#)) and who rejoiced in murderous, vengeful use of the sword ([Gen. 4:23–24](#)). By contrast, the line of Seth, which is traced in [Genesis 5](#), displays righteousness. This line includes Enoch, who “walked with God, and... was not, for God took him” ([Gen. 4:24](#)). In the line of Seth was born Noah, who was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” ([Gen. 6:9](#)). Thus, we see two lines, one obeying God and the other willfully disobeying Him.

Therefore, many Hebrew scholars believe that [Genesis 6](#) is describing not the intermarriage of angels and human women but the intermarriage of the descendants of Cain and Seth. The two lines, one godly and one wicked, come together, and suddenly everyone is caught up in the pursuit of evil, such that “every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” ([Gen. 6:5](#)). We do not need to surmise an invasion of the earth by angels in order to make sense of this chapter.

Resolving the interpretive difficulties of [Genesis 6](#) reminds us to be very careful about drawing inferences from Scripture that are not necessarily warranted. The descriptive terms “sons of God” and “daughters of man” do not give us license to make the assumption of interaction between heavenly beings and earthly beings. We have to be very careful when we look at a difficult text like this to see how the language is used in the broader context of Scripture. It is a very important principle that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture.



2nd – Keil & Delitzsch O.T. Commentary, Genesis 6:1–4
by Carl F. Keil

Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, Genesis (T&T Clark, 1866, 127–139, www.google.com/books/edition/Biblical_Commentary_on_the_Old_Testament/F6NkmPGJKvIC).

Sons of God
Sethite Lineage

Maness Note: Keil argues for the Sethite lineage of “Sons of God” being men of former “godly” line and the *Nephilim* being offspring that became renown, not necessarily giants, and Keil goes to great technical lengths against his comrade Delitzsch who Keil said held to the angels view.

**MARRIAGE OF THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF
MEN. — CH. 6: 1-8**

Gen. 6: 1-8. The genealogies in Gen. 4 and 5, which trace the development of the human race through two fundamentally different lines, headed by Cain and Seth, are accompanied by a description of their moral development, and the statement that through marriages between the “*sons of God*” (*Elohim*) and the “*daughters of men*,” the wickedness became so great, that God determined to destroy the men whom He had created. This description applies to the whole human race, and presupposes the intercourse or marriage of the Cainites with the Sethites.

Gen. 6: 1. relates to the increase of men generally (בְּנֵי אָדָם, without any restriction), i.e., of the whole human race; and whilst the moral corruption is represented as universal, the whole human race, with the exception of Noah, who found grace before God (v. 8), is described as ripe for destruction (vv. 3 and 5-8). To understand this section, and appreciate the causes of this complete degeneracy of the race, we must first obtain a correct interpretation of the expressions “sons of God” (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) and “daughters of men” (בָּנוֹת אָדָם). Three different views have been entertained from the very earliest times: the “sons of God” being regarded as (a) the sons of princes, (b) angels, (c) the Sethites or godly men; and the “daughters of men,” as the daughters (a) of people of the lower orders, (b) of mankind generally, (c) of the Cainites, or of the rest of mankind as contrasted with the godly or the children of God. Of these three views, the first, although it has become the traditional one in orthodox rabbinical Judaism, may be dismissed at once as not warranted by the usages of the language, and as altogether unscriptural. The second, on the contrary, may be defended on two plausible grounds: first, the fact that the “sons of God,” in Job. 1: 6; 2: 1, and 38: 7, and in Dan. 3:25, are unquestionably angels (also בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים in Psa. 29: 1 and 89: 7); and secondly, the antithesis, “sons of God” and “daughters of men.” Apart from the context and tenor of the passage, these two points would lead us most naturally to regard the “sons of God” as angels, in distinction from men and the daughters of men. But this explanation, though the first to suggest itself, can only lay

claim to be received as the correct one, provided the language itself admits of no other. Now that is not the case. For it is not to angels only that the term “sons of Elohim,” or “sons of Elim,” is applied; but in Psa. 73:15, in an address to Elohim, the godly are called “the generation of Thy sons,” i.e., sons of Elohim; in Deu. 32: 5 the Israelites are called His (God’s) sons, and in Hos. 1:10, “sons of the living God;” and in Psa. 80:17, Israel is spoken of as the son, whom Elohim has made strong. These passages show that the expression “sons of God” cannot be elucidated by philological means, but must be interpreted by theology alone. Moreover, even when it is applied to the angels, it is questionable whether it is to be understood in a physical or ethical sense. The notion that “it is employed in a physical sense as *nomen naturae*, instead of angels as *nomen officii*, and presupposes generation of a physical kind,” we must reject as an unscriptural and gnostic error. According to the scriptural view, the heavenly spirits are creatures of God, and not begotten from the divine essence. Moreover, all the other terms applied to the angels are ethical in their character. But if the title “sons of God” cannot involve the notion of physical generation, it cannot be restricted to celestial spirits, but is applicable to all beings which bear the image of God, or by virtue of their likeness to God participate in the glory, power, and blessedness of the divine life, — to men therefore as well as angels, since God has caused man to “want but little of Elohim,” or to stand but a little behind Elohim (Psa. 8: 5), so that even magistrates are designated “Elohim, and sons of the Most High” (Psa. 82: 6). When *Delitzsch* objects to the application of the expression “sons of Elohim” to pious men, because, “although the idea of a child of God may indeed have pointed, even in the O.T., beyond its theocratic limitation to Israel (Exo. 4:22; Deu. 14: 1) towards a wider ethical signification (Psa. 73:15; Pro. 14:26), yet this extension and expansion were not so completed, that in historical prose the terms ‘sons of God’ (for which ‘sons of Jehovah’ should have been used to prevent mistake), and ‘sons (or daughters) of men,’ could be used to distinguish the children of God and the children of the world,” — this argument rests upon the erroneous supposition, that the expression “sons of God” was introduced by Jehovah for the first time when He selected Israel to be the covenant nation. So much is true, indeed, that before the adoption of Israel as the first-born son of Jehovah (Exo. 4:22), it would have been out of place to speak of sons of Jehovah; but the notion is false, or at least incapable of proof, that there were not children of God in the olden time, long before Abraham’s call, and that, if there were, they could not have been called “sons of Elohim.” The idea was not first introduced in connection with the theocracy, and extended thence to a more universal signification. It had its roots in the divine image, and therefore was general in its application from the very first; and it was not till God in the character of Jehovah chose Abraham and his seed to be the vehicles of salvation, and left the heathen nations to go their own way, that the expression

received the specifically theocratic signification of “son of Jehovah,” to be again liberated and expanded into the more comprehensive idea of υἱοθεσία τοῦ Θεοῦ (i.e., *Elohim*, not τοῦ κυρίου = *Jehovah*), at the coming of Christ, the Saviour of all nations. If in the olden time there were pious men who, like Enoch and Noah, walked with Elohim, or who, even if they did not stand in this close priestly relation to God, made the divine image a reality through their piety and fear of God, then there were sons (children) of God, for whom the only correct appellation was “sons of Elohim,” since sonship to Jehovah was introduced with the call of Israel, so that it could only have been proleptically that the children of God in the old world could be called “sons of Jehovah.” But if it be still argued, that in mere prose the term “sons of God” could not have been applied to children of God, or pious men, this would be equally applicable to “sons of Jehovah.” On the other hand, there is this objection to our applying it to angels, that the pious, who walked with God and called upon the name of the Lord, had been mentioned just before, whereas no allusion had been made to angels, not even to their creation.

Again, the antithesis “sons of God” and “daughters of men” does not prove that the former were angels. It by no means follows, that because in v. 1 אֱלֹהִים denotes man as a genus, i.e., the whole human race, it must do the same in v. 2, where the expression “daughters of men” is determined by the antithesis “sons of God.” And with reasons existing for understanding by the sons of God and the daughters of men two species of the genus אֱלֹהִים, mentioned in v. 1, no valid objection can be offered to the restriction of אֱלֹהִים, through the antithesis Elohim, to all men with the exception of the sons of God; since this mode of expression is by no means unusual in Hebrew. “From the expression ‘daughters of men,’ “ as *Dettinger* observes, “it by no means follows that the sons of God were not men; any more than it follows from Jer. 32:20, where it is said that God had done miracles ‘in Israel, and among *men*,’ or from Isa. 43: 4, where God says He will give *men* for the Israelites, or from Jud. 16: 7, where Samson says, that if he is bound with seven green withs he shall be as weak as a *man*, for from Psa. 73: 5, where it is said of the ungodly they are not in trouble as *men*, that the Israelites, or Samson, or the ungodly, were not men at all. In all these passages אֱלֹהִים (men) denotes the remainder of mankind in distinction from those who are especially named.” Cases occur, too, even in simple prose, in which the same term is used, first in a general, and then directly afterwards in a more restricted sense. We need cite only one, which occurs in Jud. 19-21. In Gen. 19:30 reference is made to the coming of the children of Israel (i.e., of the twelve tribes) out of Egypt; and directly afterwards (Gen. 20: 1, 2) it is related that “*all* the children of Israel,” “all the tribes of Israel,” assembled together (to make war, as we learn from vv. 3ff., upon Benjamin); and in the whole account

of the war, Gen. 20 and 21, the tribes of Israel are distinguished from the tribe of Benjamin: so that the expression “tribes of Israel” really means the rest of the tribes with the exception of Benjamin. And yet the Benjamites were Israelites. Why then should the fact that the sons of God are distinguished from the daughters of men prove that the former could not be men? There is not force enough in these two objections to compel us to adopt the conclusion that the sons of God were angels.

The question whether the “sons of Elohim” were celestial or terrestrial sons of God (angels or pious men of the family of Seth) can only be determined from the context, and from the substance of the passage itself, that is to say, from what is related respecting the conduct of the sons of God and its results. That the *connection* does not favour the idea of their being angels, is acknowledged even by those who adopt this view. “It cannot be denied,” says *Delitzsch*, “that the connection of Gen. 6: 1-8 with Gen. 4 necessitates the assumption, that such intermarriages (of the Sethite and Cainite families) did take place about the time of the flood (cf. Mat. 24:38; Luke 17:27); and the prohibition of mixed marriages under the law (Exo. 34:16; cf. Gen. 27:46; 28: 1ff.) also favours the same idea.” But this “assumption” is placed beyond all doubt, by what is here related of the sons of God. In v. 2 it is stated that “the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose,” i.e., of any with whose beauty they were charmed; and these wives bare children to them (v. 4). Now **לָקַח אִשָּׁה** (to take a wife) is a standing expression throughout the whole of the Old Testament for the marriage relation established by God at the creation, and is never applied to **πορνεία**, or the simple act of physical connection. This is quite sufficient of itself to exclude any reference to angels. For Christ Himself distinctly states that the angels cannot marry (Mat. 22:30; Mark 12:25; cf. Luke 20:34ff.). And when *Kurtz* endeavours to weaken the force of these words of Christ, by arguing that they do not prove that it is impossible for angels so to fall from their original holiness as to sink into an unnatural state; this phrase has no meaning, unless by conclusive analogies, or the clear testimony of Scripture,^f

^f[FOOTNOTE=We cannot admit that there is any force in *Hofmann’s* argument in his *Schriftbeweis* 1, p. 426, that “the begetting of children on the part of angels is not more irreconcilable with a nature that is not organized, like that of man, on the basis of sexual distinctions, than partaking of food is with a nature that is altogether spiritual; and yet food was eaten by the angels who visited Abraham.” For, in the first place, the eating in this case was a miracle wrought through the condescending grace of the omnipotent God, and furnishes no standard for judging what angels can do by their own power in rebellion against

God. And in the second place, there is a considerable difference between the act of eating on the part of the angels of God who appeared in human shape, and the taking of wives and begetting of children on the part of sinning angels. We are quite unable also to accept as historical testimony, the myths of the heathen respecting demigods, sons of gods, and the begetting of children on the part of their gods, or the fables of the book of Enoch (Gen. 6ff.) about the 200 angels, with their leaders, who lusted after the beautiful and delicate daughters of men, and who came down from heaven and took to themselves wives, with whom they begat giants of 3000 (or according to one MS 300) cubits in height.

Nor do 2 Pet. 2: 4 and Jude 6 furnish any evidence of angel marriages. Peter is merely speaking of sinning angels in general (ἀγγέλων ἀμαρτησάντων) whom God did not spare, and not of any particular sin on the part of a small number of angels; and Jude describes these angels as τοὺς μὴ τηρήσαντας τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχὴν ἀλλὰ ἀπολιπόντας τὸ ἴδιον οἰκητήριον, those who kept not their principedom, their position as rulers, but left their own habitation. There is nothing here about marriages with the daughters of men or the begetting of children, even if we refer the word τούτοις in the clause τὸν ὅμοιον τούτοις τρόπον ἐκπορνεύσασαι in v. 7 to the angels mentioned in v. 6; for ἐκπορνεύειν, the commission of fornication, would be altogether different from marriage, that is to say, from a conjugal bond that was permanent even though unnatural. But it is neither certain nor probable that this is the connection of τούτοις. *Huther*, the latest commentator upon this Epistle, who gives the preference to this explanation of τούτοις, and therefore cannot be accused of being biassed by doctrinal prejudices, says distinctly in the 2nd Ed. of his commentary, “τούτοις may be grammatically construed as referring to Sodom and Gomorrah, or *per synesin* to the inhabitants of these cities; but in that case the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah would only be mentioned indirectly.” There is nothing in the rules of syntax, therefore, to prevent our connecting the word with Sodom and Gomorrah; and it is not a fact, that “*grammaticae et logicae praecepta* compel us to refer this word to the angels,” as *G. v. Zeschwitz* says. But the very same reason which *Huther* assigns for not connecting it with Sodom and Gomorrah, may be also assigned for not connecting it with the angels, namely, that in that case the sin of the angels would only be mentioned indirectly. We regard *Philippi’s* explanation (in his *Glaubenslehre* iii. p. 303) as a possible one, viz., that the word τούτοις refers back to the ἄνθρωποι ἀσελγείς mentioned in v. 4, and as by no means set aside by *De Wette’s* objection, that the thought of v. 8 would be anticipated in that case; for this objection is fully met by the circumstance, that not only does the word οἱ, which is repeated five times from v. 8 onwards, refer back to these men, but even the word τούτοις in v. 14 also. On the other hand, the reference of τούτοις to the angels is altogether

precluded by the clause *καὶ ἀπελθοῦσαι ὀπίσω σαρκὸς ἑτέρας*, which follows the word *ἐκπορνεύσασαι*. For fornication on the part of the angels could only consist in their going after flesh, or, as *Hofmann* expresses it, “having to do with flesh, for which they were not created,” but not in their going after *other*, or foreign flesh. There would be no sense in the word *ἑτέρας* unless those who were *ἐκ πορνεύσαντες* were themselves possessed of *σάρξ*; so that this is the only alternative, either we must attribute to the angels a *σάρξ* or fleshly body, or the idea of referring *τούτοις* to the angels must be given up. When *Kurtz* replies to this by saying that “to angels human bodies are quite as much a *ἑτέρα σάρξ*, i.e., a means of sensual gratification opposed to their nature and calling, as man can be to human man,” he hides the difficulty, but does not remove it, by the ambiguous expression “opposed to their nature and calling.” The *ἑτέρα σάρξ* must necessarily presuppose an *ἰδίᾳ σάρξ*.

But it is thought by some, that even if *τούτοις* in v. 7 do not refer to the angels in v. 6, the words of Jude agree so thoroughly with the tradition of the book of Enoch respecting the fall of the angels, that we must admit the allusion to the Enoch legend, and so indirectly to Gen. 6, since Jude could not have expressed himself more clearly to persons who possessed the book of Enoch, or were acquainted with the tradition it contained. Now this conclusion would certainly be irresistible, if the only sin of the angels mentioned in the book of Enoch, as that for which they were kept in chains of darkness still the judgment-day, had been their intercourse with human wives. For the fact that Jude was acquainted with the legend of Enoch, and took for granted that the readers of his Epistle were so too, is evident from his introducing a prediction of Enoch in vv. 14, 15, which is to be found in ch. i. 9 of Dillmann’s edition of the book of Enoch. But it is admitted by all critical writers upon this book, that in the book of Enoch which has been edited by *Dillmann*, and is only to be found in an Ethiopic version, there are contradictory legends concerning the fall and judgment of the angels; that the book itself is composed of earlier and later materials; and that those very sections (Ch. 6-16:106, etc.) in which the legend of the angel marriages is given without ambiguity, belong to the so-called book of *Noah*, i.e., to a later portion of the Enoch legend, which is opposed in many passages to the earlier legend. The *fall* of the angels is certainly often referred to in the earlier portions of the work; but among all the passages adduced by Dillmann in proof of this, there is only one (ch. 19: 1) which mentions the angels who had taken wives. In the others, the only thing mentioned as the sin of the angels or of the hosts of Azazel, is the fact that they were subject to Satan, and seduced those who dwelt on the earth (ch. 54: 3-6), or that they came down from heaven to earth, and revealed to the children of men what was hidden from them, and then led them astray to the commission of sin (ch. 64: 2). There is nothing at all here about their taking wives. Moreover, in the earlier portions of

the book, besides the fall of the angels, there is frequent reference made to a fall, i.e., an act of sin, on the part of the stars of heaven and the army of heaven, which transgressed the commandment of God before they rose, by not appearing at their appointed time (vid., ch. 18:14, 15; 21: 3; 90:21, 24, etc.); and their punishment and place of punishment are described, in just the same manner as in the case of the wicked angels, as a prison, a lofty and horrible place in which the seven stars of heaven lie bound like great mountains and flaming with fire (ch. 21: 2, 3), as an abyss, narrow and deep, dreadful and dark, in which the star which fell first from heaven is lying, bound hand and foot (ch. 88: 1, cf. 90:24). From these passages it is quite evident, that the legend concerning the fall of the angels and stars sprang out of Isa. 24:21, 22 (“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall visit the host of the height [צְבָא הַמָּרוֹם], the host of heaven, by which stars and angels are to be understood] on high [i.e., the spiritual powers of the heavens] and the kings of the earth upon the earth, and they shall be gathered together, bound in the dungeon, and shut up in prison, and after many days they shall be punished”), along with Isa. 14:12 (“How art thou fallen from heaven, thou beautiful morning star!”), and that the account of the sons of God in Gen. 6, as interpreted by those who refer it to the angels, was afterwards combined and amalgamated with it.

Now if these different legends, describing the judgment upon the stars that fell from heaven, and the angels that followed Satan in seducing man, in just the same manner as the judgment upon the angels who begot giants from women, were in circulation at the time when the Epistle of Jude was written; we must not interpret the sin of the angels, referred to by Peter and Jude, in a one-sided manner, and arbitrarily connect it with only such passages of the book of Enoch as speak of angel marriages, to the entire disregard of all the other passages, which mention totally different sins as committed by the angels, that are punished with bands of darkness; but we must interpret it from what Jude himself has said concerning this sin, as Peter gives no further explanation of what he means by ἀμαρτῆσαι. Now the only sins that Jude mentions are μὴ τηρεῖσαι τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχήν and ἀπολιπεῖν τὸ ἴδιον οἰκητήριον. The two are closely connected. Through not keeping the ἀρχή (i.e., the position as rulers in heaven) which belonged to them, and was assigned them at their creation, the angels left “their own habitation” (ἴδιον οἰκητήριον); just as man, when he broke the commandment of God and failed to keep his position as ruler on earth, also lost “his own habitation” (ἴδιον οἰκητήριον), that is to say, not paradise alone, but the holy body of innocence also, so that he needed a covering for his nakedness, and will continue to need it, until we are “clothed upon with our hose which is from heaven” (οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). In this description of the angels’ sin, there is not the slightest allusion to their

leaving heaven to woo the beautiful daughters of men. The words may be very well interpreted, as they were by the earlier Christian theologians, as relating to the fall of Satan and his angels, to whom all that is said concerning their punishment fully applies. If Jude had had the *πορνεῖα* of the angels, mentioned in the Enoch legends, in his mind, he would have stated this distinctly, just as he does in v. 9 in the case of the legend concerning Michael and the devil, and in v. 11 in that of Enoch’s prophecy. There was all the more reason for his doing this, because not only to contradictory accounts of the sin of the angels occur in the Enoch legends, but a comparison of the parallels cited from the book of Enoch proves that he deviated from the Enoch legend in points of no little importance. Thus, for example, according to Enoch 54: 3, “*iron chains of immense weight*” are prepared for the hosts of Azazel, to put them into the lowest hell, and cast them on that great day into the furnace with flaming fire. Now Jude and Peter say nothing about *iron chains*, and merely mention “everlasting chains under darkness” and “chains of darkness.” Again, according to Enoch 10:12, the angel sinners are “bound fast under the earth *for seventy generations*, till the day of judgment and their completion, till the last judgment shall be held for all eternity.” Peter and Jude make no allusion to this point of time, and the supporters of the angel marriages, therefore, have thought well to leave it out when quoting this parallel to Jude 6. Under these circumstances, the silence of the apostles as to either marriages or fornication on the part of the sinful angels, is a sure sign that they gave no credence to these fables of a Jewish gnosticizing tradition.]

it can be proved that the angels either possess by nature a material corporeality adequate to the contraction of a human marriage, or that by rebellion against their Creator they can acquire it, or that there are some creatures in heaven and on earth which, through sinful degeneracy, or by sinking into an unnatural state, can become possessed of the power, which they have not by nature, of generating and propagating their species. As man could indeed destroy by sin the nature which he had received from his Creator, but could not by his own power restore it when destroyed, to say nothing of implanting an organ or a power that was wanting before; so we cannot believe that angels, through apostasy from God, could acquire sexual power of which they had previously been destitute.

Gen. 6: 3. The sentence of God upon the “sons of God” is also appropriate to men only. “*Jehovah said: My spirit shall not rule in men for ever; in their wandering they are flesh.*” “The verb *רָאָה* = *רָאָה* signifies to rule (hence *רָאָה* the ruler), and to judge, as the consequence of ruling. *רוּחַ* is the divine spirit of life bestowed upon man, the principle of physical and ethical, natural and spiritual life. This His spirit God will withdraw from man, and thereby put an

end to their life and conduct. **בְּשָׂרָם** is regarded by many as a participle, compounded of **בְּ**, **שָׂר**, a contraction of **אֲשֶׁר**, and **גַּם** (also), used in the sense of *quoniam*, because, (**בְּשָׂרָם** = **בְּאֲשֶׁר**, as **שָׂר** or **שָׂרָה** = **אֲשֶׁר** Jud. 5: 7; 6:17; Son. 1: 7). But the objection to this explanation is, that the **גַּם**, “because he *also* is flesh,” introduces an incongruous emphasis into the clause. We therefore prefer to regard **בְּשָׂרָם** as the *inf.* of **שָׂגָה** = **שָׂגָה** with the suffix: “*in their erring* (that of men) *he* (man as a genus) *is flesh*,” an explanation to which, to our mind, the extremely harsh change of number (*they, he*), is no objection, since many examples might be adduced of a similar change (vid., *Hupfeld* on Psa. 5:10). Men, says God, have proved themselves by their erring and straying to be flesh, i.e., given up to the flesh, and incapable of being ruled by the Spirit of God and led back to the divine goal of their life. **בְּשָׂרָם** is used already in its ethical signification, like **σάρξ** in the New Testament, denoting not merely the natural corporeality of man, but his materiality as rendered ungodly by sin. “*Therefore his days shall be 120 years*,” this means, not that human life should in future never attain a greater age than 120 years, but that a respite of 120 years should still be granted to the human race. This sentence, as we may gather from the context, was made known to Noah in his 480th year, to be published by him as “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2: 5) to the degenerate race. The reason why men had gone so far astray, that God determined to withdraw His spirit and give them up to destruction, was that the sons of God had taken wives of such of the daughters of men as they chose. Can this mean, because angels had formed marriages with the daughters of men? Even granting that such marriages, as being unnatural connections, would have led to the complete corruption of human nature; the men would in that case have been the tempted, and the real authors of the corruption would have been the angels. Why then should judgment fall upon the tempted alone? The judgments of God in the world are not executed with such partiality as this. And the supposition that nothing is said about the punishment of the angels, because the narrative has to do with the history of man, and the spiritual world is intentionally veiled as much as possible, does not meet the difficulty. If the sons of God were angels, the narrative is concerned not only with men, but with angels also; and it is not the custom of the Scriptures merely to relate the judgments which fall upon the tempted, and say nothing at all about the tempters. For the contrary, see Gen. 3:14ff. If the “sons of God” were not men, so as to be included in the term **בְּנֵי אָדָם**, the punishment would need to be specially pointed out in their case, and no deep revelations of the spiritual world would be required, since these celestial tempters would be living with men upon the earth, when they had taken wives from among their daughters. The judgments of God are not only free from all unrighteousness, but avoid every kind of partiality.

*Gen. 6: 4. “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them: these are the heroes (הַגִּבֹּרִים) who from the olden time (מֵעוֹלָם, as in Psa. 25: 6; 1Sa. 27: 8) are the men of name” (i.e., noted, renowned or notorious men). נָפְלִים, from נָפַל to fall upon (Job. 1:15; Jos. 11: 7), signifies the invaders (ἐπιπτοντες Aq., βιαῖοι Sym.). Luther gives the correct meaning, “tyrants:” they were called *Nephilim* because they fell upon the people and oppressed them.^f*

^f[FOOTNOTE=The notion that the *Nephilim* were giants, to which the Sept. rendering γίγαντες has given rise, was rejected even by Luther as fabulous. He bases his view upon Jos. 11: 7: “*Nephilim non dictos a magnitudine corporum, sicut Rabbini putant, sed a tyrannide et oppressione quod vi grassati sint, nulla habita ratione legum aut honestatis, sed simpliciter indulgentes suis voluptatibus et cupiditatibus.*” The opinion that giants are intended derives no support from Num. 13:32, 33. When the spies describe the land of Canaan as “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof,” and then add (v. 33), “and there we saw the *Nephilim*, the sons of Anak among (מִן lit., from, out of, in a partitive sense) the *Nephilim*,” by the side of whom they were as grasshoppers; the term *Nephilim* cannot signify giants, since the spies not only mention them especially along with the inhabitants of the land, who are described as people of great stature, but single out only a portion of the *Nephilim* as “sons of Anak” (בְּנֵי עֲנָק), i.e., long-necked people or giants. The explanation “fallen from heaven” needs no refutation; inasmuch as the main element, “from heaven,” is a purely arbitrary addition.]

The meaning of the verse is a subject of dispute. To an unprejudiced mind, the words, as they stand, represent the *Nephilim*, who were on the earth in those days, as existing before the sons of God began to marry the daughters of men, and clearly distinguish them from the fruits of these marriages. הָיוּ can no more be rendered “they became, or arose,” in this connection, than הָיוּ in Gen. 1: 2. הָיוּ would have been the proper word. The expression “in those days” refers most naturally to the time when God pronounced the sentence upon the degenerate race; but it is so general and comprehensive a term, that it must not be confined exclusively to that time, not merely because the divine sentence was first pronounced after these marriages were contracted, and the marriages, if they did not produce the corruption, raised it to that fulness of iniquity which was ripe for the judgment, but still more because the words “after that” represent the marriages which drew down the judgment as an event that

followed the appearance of the *Nephilim*. “*The same were mighty men.*” this might point back to the *Nephilim*; but it is a more natural supposition, that it refers to the children born to the sons of God. “*These,*” i.e., the sons sprung from those marriages, “*are the heroes, those renowned heroes of old.*”

Now if, according to the simple meaning of the passage, the *Nephilim* were in existence at the very time when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, the appearance of the *Nephilim* cannot afford the slightest evidence that the “sons of God” were angels, by whom a family of monsters were begotten, whether demigods, daemons, or angel-men.^f

^f[FOOTNOTE=How thoroughly irreconcilable the contents of this verse are with the angel-hypothesis is evident from the strenuous efforts of its supporters to bring them into harmony with it. Thus, in *Reuter's Repert.*, p. 7, *Del.* observes that the verse cannot be rendered in any but the following manner: “The giants *were* on the earth in those days, and also afterwards, when the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, these they bare to them, or rather, and these bare to them;” but, for all that, he gives this as the meaning of the words, “At the time of the divine determination to inflict punishment the giants *arose*, and also afterwards, when this unnatural connection between super-terrestrial and human beings continued, there arose such giants;” not only substituting “arose” for “were,” but changing “when they connected themselves with them” into “when this connection continued.” Nevertheless he is obliged to confess that “it is strange that this unnatural connection, which I also suppose to be the intermediate cause of the origin of the giants, should not be mentioned in the first clause of v. 4.” This is an admission that the text says nothing about the origin of the giants being traceable to the marriages of the sons of God, but that the commentators have been obliged to insert it in the text to save their angel marriages. *Kurtz* has tried three different explanations of this verse but they are all opposed to the rules of the language. (1) In the *History of the Old Covenant* he gives this rendering: “Nephilim were on earth in these days, and that even after the sons of God had formed connections with the daughters of men;” in which he not only gives to אֱנַנִּים the unsupportable meaning, “even, just,” but takes the imperfect אִשְׁתָּ in the sense of the perfect אִשָּׁה. (2) In his *Ehen der Söhne Gottes* (p. 80) he gives the choice of this and the following rendering: “The Nephilim were on earth in those days, and also after this had happened, that the sons of God came to the daughters of men and begat children,” were the ungrammatical rendering of the imperfect as the perfect is artfully concealed by the interpolation of “after this had happened.” (3) In “*die*

Söhne Gottes,” p. 85: “In these days and also afterwards, when the sons of God came (continued to come) to the daughters of men, they bare to them (sc., Nephilim),” where **בָּאוּ**, they came, is arbitrarily altered into **יָוֹסִיפוּ לָבוֹא**, they continued to come. But when he observes in defence of this *quid pro quo*, that “the imperfect denotes here, as *Hengstenberg* has correctly affirmed, and as so often is the case, an action frequently repeated in past times,” this remark only shows that he has neither understood the nature of the usage to which H. refers, nor what *Ewald* has said (§ 136) concerning the force and use of the imperfect.]

Gen. 6: 5-8. Now when the wickedness of man became great, and “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil the whole day,” i.e., continually and altogether evil, it repented God that He had made man, and He determined to destroy them. This determination and the motive assigned are also irreconcilable with the angel-theory. “Had the godless race, which God destroyed by the flood, sprung either entirely or in part from the marriage of angels to the daughters of men, it would no longer have been the race first created by God in Adam, but a grotesque product of the Adamitic factor created by God, and an entirely foreign and angelic factor” (*Phil.*).^f

^f[FOOTNOTE=When, on the other hand, the supporters of the angel marriages maintain that it is only on this interpretation that the necessity for the flood, i.e., for the complete destruction of the whole human race with the exception of righteous Noah, can be understood, not only is there no scriptural foundation for this argument, but it is decidedly at variance with those statements of the Scriptures, which speak of the corruption of the men whom God had created, and not of a race that had arisen through an unnatural connection of angels and men and forced their way into God’s creation. If it were really the case, that it would otherwise be impossible to understand where the necessity could lie, for all the rest of the human race to be destroyed and a new beginning to be made, whereas afterwards, when Abraham was chosen, the rest of the human race was not only spared, but preserved for subsequent participation in the blessings of salvation: we should only need to call Job to mind, who also could not comprehend the necessity for the fearful sufferings which overwhelmed him, and was unable to discover the justice of God, but who was afterwards taught a better lesson by God Himself, and reproved for his rash conclusions, as a sufficient proof of the deceptive and futile character of all such human reasoning. But this is not the true state of the case. The Scriptures expressly affirm, that after the flood the moral corruption of man was the same as before the flood; for they describe it in Gen. 8:21 in the very

same words as in Gen. 6: 5: and the reason they assign for the same judgment not being repeated, is simply the promise that God would no more smite and destroy all living, as He had done before — an evident proof that God expected no change in human nature, and out of pure mercy and long-suffering would never send a second flood. “Now, if the race destroyed had been one that sprang from angel-fathers, it is difficult to understand why no improvement was to be looked for after the flood; for the repetition of any such unnatural angel-tragedy was certainly not probable, and still less inevitable” (*Philippi*).]

The force of נָחַם, “it *repented* the Lord,” may be gathered from the explanatory יָתַעֲצַב, “it *grieved* Him at His heart.” This shows that the repentance of God does not presuppose any variableness in His nature of His purposes. In this sense God never repents of anything (1Sa. 15:29), “*quia nihil illi inopinatum vel non praevisum accidit*” (*Calvin*). The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man, and signifies that “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish” (*Calvin*). The destruction of all, “from man unto beast,” etc., is to be explained on the ground of the sovereignty of man upon the earth, the irrational creatures being created for him, and therefore involved in his fall. This destruction, however, was not to bring the human race to an end. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” In these words mercy is seen in the midst of wrath, pledging the preservation and restoration of humanity.



**3rd - “Sons Of God In Genesis 6:1-4:
(An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)”***
by Willem A. Van Gemeren

Willem A. Van Gemeren, “Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43, No. 2 (Spring 1981): 320–348.

Maness Note: Van Gemeren leans to the angelic view of “Sons of God,” outlines the pros and cons well. He notes how both John Calvin and Martin Luther held to the “Sons of God” being the lineage of Seth, the godly line, and the sin being that of intermarriage with unbelievers or of the line of cursed Cain with sin of violence. Van Gemeren outlines a few views of the *Nephelim*, translates it as *Nephelim* himself. His excellent survey of the ancient literature showed how a lot of Jewish tradition and many early Church Fathers leaned to the supernatural and “angel” view of the “Sons of God” and more led him to lean to the supernatural.

Sons of God
Angels
Spirits
Demons

Angels
an “Erratic
Stone”
Oldest View

Introduction

Why does the theology in which creation, miracles, the miraculous birth and resurrection of Jesus have a place, prefer a rational explanation of Genesis 6:1–4? Evangelical writers proffer, instead of the angelic/demonic intermarriage view, the view that the Sons of God are the Sethites and the daughters of man are descendants of the line of Cain or variations of the intermarriage of two classes of human beings. Why do evangelicals prefer the view of the intermarriage of humans, in whatever variety it may be found? This question is more difficult to answer. What concerns me is a seeming inconsistency. Normally, the goal of interpretation has been the elucidation of the Word of God so the community of faith may know what to believe and what to do. When, however, the object of interpretation becomes the removal of apparent obstacles to which the passage may give rise, reinterpretation is introduced, and one may wonder how this differs from demythologization. It is granted that it is hard to imagine how preternatural (angelic, supernatural, demonic) beings have sexual relations with women of the human race and father offspring. But is the difficulty so great that it *must* be removed as something offensive? Is it possible that theology has taken the place of exegesis? ¹ Or has

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a philosophical theology explained away the difficulties of Genesis 6:1–4?

The problem is intensified by the seeming simplicity of the explanation. A careful consideration of the linguistic and conceptual data present the exegete of Genesis 6:1–4 with significant problems. The question arises how one of the admittedly most difficult passages in the Hebrew Old Testament is given such a simple, natural explanation as if there were more significant issues elsewhere.

The passage is one of the most difficult pieces of Old Testament literature, in that it has many problems. ² First, is the passage a prologue, and if it is, how is it related to the

¹ D. Poulet’s arguments are theological rather than exegetical. He disposes of the preternatural interpretation on the argument that it is contrary to how we conceive of spiritual beings and what sound theology teaches (“The Moral Causes of the Flood,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* IV (1942), 297.

² Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), p. 269.

Flood narrative? Second, several words contain difficulties which have been treated in articles and monographs:

“Sons of God”
“Daughters of men”
“my spirit” or “my Spirit”
“dwell” or “strive”
“nephilim” and
“gibborim” (giants).

Third, the flow of the passage is interrupted by the absence of the nexus between verses 3 and 4. The sin of the Sons of God is not specified, and yet it is highly offensive in God’s sight, for which reason he judged men. Is the judgment of God (verse 3) related to God’s judgment in the Flood? Is the rise of the nephilim-gibborim (verse 4) one of the causes of the Flood? To these problems the issue of the identity of the Sons of God must be added as the *crux interpretum*. Finally, what genre of literature is represented in this section; poetry, narration, saga, myth?

In spite of these difficulties, evangelical writings at times assume that understanding the passage requires a naturalistic, rational frame of mind. Jesus’ words that angels are not given in marriage (Matt 22:30) provides the theological justification for looking in the context for a natural explanation. Others give extensive arguments to provide a “reasonable” explanation.³

WTJ 43:2 (Spr 1981) p. 322

Why is it that evangelicals prefer a natural(istic), reasonable explanation of a passage whose style, vocabulary, syntax, and idioms leave the exegete weary? Several explanations may be given.

1. Genesis 6:1-4 and Mythology

For one, in critical writings the account has been explained as a remnant of an ancient mythological account in which gods eat, drink, get intoxicated, sleep and can procreate. A Hittite myth has some similarities to Genesis 6:1–4.⁴ The myth details the battles between the weather god and Illuyankas, the dragon. The dragon robbed the eyes and heart of the weather god after his defeat. The weather god, unable to engage the dragon again in battle, makes plans for having his organs restored. For this he needs a human being to foil the dragon. He marries “the daughter of a poor man,” who bears him a son. When the son was old enough to be married, he was prepared to marry the daughter of the dragon, Illuyankas, with the intent of requesting the return of the eyes and heart of his father. Illuyankas, unfamiliar with the parentage of the young man, fulfills the unusual request. The prospective son-in-law returns the organs to his own father. The weather god, having regained his eyesight and heart, is ready to engage the dragon in battle. He slays the dragon and also kills his son upon his own request.

The myth of the weather god contains the motif of a male god marrying a daughter of man with the intent of using the semi-divine and semi-human offspring for his own purpose. The text breaks off after the death of the son, so it is not clear what happened to his human wife. It is little surprise that the four verses of our pericope have generated

³ G. H. Livingston, “Sons of God” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 493f; James Oliver Buswell, Jr., in “Sons of God,” *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Merrill C. Tenney, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 806.

⁴ W. Beyerlin, ed. *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), D III, 5, p. 158.

controversy and many different interpretations. Does Genesis 6:1–4 include in abridged form a remnant of a Canaanite legend or myth? Is the author setting this interpretation of the legend over against the legends or

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sagas of the nations to explain the origin of the nephilim-gibborim? The consensus of modern scholarship responds positively to these suggestions. This opinion is reflected in commentaries on scholarly and popular levels, and it may be found in notes to the English text, as does the New American Bible:

This is apparently a fragment of an old legend that had borrowed much from ancient mythology. The sacred author incorporates it here, not only in order to account for the prehistoric giants of Palestine, whom the Israelites called *the Nephilim*, but also to introduce the story of the flood with a moral orientation—the constantly increasing wickedness of mankind.

It is easy to see how evangelicals today as well as Christians in the Early Church developed an alternate explanation, which was not reminiscent of pagan mythology. The question of demythologization remains a significant issue.

2. Genesis 6:1–4 and Criticism

Second, the account of the sons of God and the daughters of men is generally considered as related to the narrative of the Flood. Though the offence is not stated, it is assumed that intermarriage of the godly and ungodly descendants of Adam, polygamy, and violence was the wrong for which reason God regretted having made man and decided to destroy the human race except for Noah’s family. But the passage does not clearly state the nature of the offence of the sons of God and the nephilim. It seems to be isolated from the narrative of the flood where the violence and the wicked imagination of mankind are judged by God to be the reason for the radical judgment in the flood. Critical scholars show a much greater sensitivity to the text, even when they express in a radical manner that the text (6:1–4) is adrift. Conservative scholars have already assumed the nature of the wrong and have difficulty listening to the arguments by which the text is separated from the immediate context. First, it was suggested that the text contains a fragment of mythology. God forbid! Next, critics do not always see a reason for connecting it as a prologue to the Flood narrative and therefore, the passage is considered to be an intrusion in the Flood story. The

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effect of negative criticism is seen in the separation of literary strands and sources and in the judgment that the passage contains a mythological motif. What justification is there in the argument that Genesis 6:1–4 is not in its proper literary context?

First, due to the unusual brevity and due to the unrelated motif of the Sons of God and the flood story, the passage is thought to have been isolated from the surrounding chapters and hence, must be treated separately. According to this view, the section is a part of a larger story which cannot be reconstructed. There are no parallels in the literature of the Ancient Near East. One concludes that the myth is not left intact. Second, the absence of any verbal, linguistic, or thematic connections with the Flood story corroborate the fact that Genesis 6:1–4 is not in its proper place. Possibly it was incorporated by accident as a scribal mistake. Speiser’s terse characterization is quite representative: “The undisguised mythology of this isolated fragment makes it not only

atypical of the Bible as a whole but puzzling and controversial in the extreme.”⁵ It is assumed that the section is an independent narrative which seems to be like “a cracked erratic boulder.”⁶ In Gunkel’s words, it is a *torso*—a remnant of something once told more fully but abbreviated.⁷ The complexity of the linguistic and contextual problems have made an argument for the unity of the larger context more difficult. The discussion of the many problems of the passage kept the focus of scholarship on the text itself and made it impossible to see any connections with Adam’s genealogy (chapter 5) and the Flood (chapter 5ff).⁸

Others agree with the conclusion that the story is an “erratic boulder,” but nevertheless attempt to explain how the story was ultimately adopted as a proper introduction to the Flood story. They posit that the final composition belongs to a Yahwist, who in various recensions added it at this place to portray “the

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culminating act of human wickedness.”⁹ The question of why the nature of the wickedness is not explained is still unresolved. If it is intermarriage, why should God’s wrath come upon mankind, since there is no apparent condemnation of intermarriage given in Genesis 6:1–4. If it is the rise of the nephilim, it is not clear from our pericope what the nephilim have done wrong to be singled out as the object of judgment.

I. Context of Genesis 6:1-4

In response to the evangelical concern for these widely held positions, it is first our object to show that the text as it stands is not necessarily misplaced. The problem of the apparent lack of contextual ties is real. If we can establish that the passage is a unit connected to the larger context, the conclusion will lend support to viewing the mixture of the two classes of beings as related to the Flood story. In our method we focus first on the context. The broader connections must be viewed before the details can be put into a perspective.

A. Linguistic Data

The introductory clause וַיְהִי כִּי חָחַל הָאָדָם לָרֶב (“Now it came about, when men began to multiply”) has been construed to have closely followed the account of creation. On first sight there is a semblance of truth to the suggestion that the section followed the expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:22–24)¹⁰ or the genealogy of Cain (Gen 4:17–24 or 4:25f).¹¹ Older critics opposed the connection with Genesis 5 on the assumption that it derives from the Priestly source, whereas chapter 4 and 6:1–4 derive from the Yahwist source. Nevertheless, critical scholars admit that any connection with chapters 2–4 is difficult on account of the supposed drastic abridgment of the “sons of God” episode. For want of a better solution it is the prevailing opinion that “any clear literary relations are difficult to establish.”¹²

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5 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p. 45.

6 Otto Procksch, *Die Genesis* (3rd ed.; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1924); p. 59, was followed in this usage by G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; Rev ed., 1961), p. 113.

7 Quoted by Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Genesis 6:1–4,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, VI (1947), 196.

8 Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), I, 497f.

9 Cuthbert A. Simpson, “Genesis,” *Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. I, p. 533.

10 N. C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 28.

11 John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963²), p. 141.

12 Habel, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

The phrases *על פני האדמה* (“on the face of the earth”) and *בנות האדם* (“daughter”/“the daughters of men”) lead us to find literary connections with the preceding chapter. Contrary to critical opinion there is a link between 5:29 and 6:1. The observation that the word (“ground”) occurs mainly in chapters 2–4 has supported the supposition that 6:1–4 is a part of the literary unit of chapters 2–4. The difficulty of such a supposition is caused by the failure to observe that the word is also used in chapter 5. Its usage at the conclusion of the chapter, therefore, makes for a verbal transition to the “sons of God” episode. Upon Lamech’s naming of his son Noah, he expressed a clear hope of a future deliverance: “This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands *arising* from the ground (*מן האדמה*) which the Lord has cursed.”¹³ Hence, no need exists to look for a literary relation to Genesis 2–4 as suggested by Habel, on account of the presence of the word *אדמה* (“ground”).¹⁴

In addition to this nexus, the word *בנות* (“daughters”)¹⁵ recurs nine times in chapter 5 in the phrase, “so and so begat sons and daughters.”¹⁶ Here as elsewhere the phrase “sons and

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daughters” signifies the many children that were born.¹⁷ Nevertheless, chapter 5 with its emphasis on man’s ability to reproduce himself in God’s image suggests that there is a verbal connection with chapter 6:1, 2.

Returning to the clause “when man began to multiply on the face of the land,” we consider that 6:1 contains a restatement of chapter 5 similar to the summary of the creation account written to introduce the Sabbath (Gen 2:1–3) and the restatement of the creation of Adam and Eve (5:1, 2) before the genealogy of the Sethite line. Curiously, chapter 6 begins with the words “when man began to multiply.” In Hebrew the introductory words (“now it came about that, when...”) ¹⁸ has a clear connection with the preceding unit, and introduces a new development. It is a transition from one theme to a different motif, and the chronological aspect is secondary.¹⁹

B. Conceptual Framework

Another approach to the passage is conceptual. In the book of Genesis we are given four divine judgments: the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel, and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. In each of these episodes God comes down to see firsthand what has happened and to judge the guilty parties. In the Garden of Eden He walked in the garden and after He called to Adam and Eve (“Where are you?,” 3:9) man admitted that he was naked. God made the charge that man had eaten from the forbidden fruit, had

13 The usage of Yahweh and *‘adamah* (“ground”) viewed as indicative of the J source must not be seen as an explanatory insertion into a P source. Ch. 5 leads up to the story of Noah, whose name explained in 5:29 as “comforter” raises new hopes immediately preceding the dark page in the history of man (6:1–7).

14 Habel, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

15 The exegesis of 6:1 favors a connection with chs. 4 and 5. The distinction between the ungodly and the godly lines of the family of man should not be pressed. The incomplete genealogy of Cain’s family is purposefully climactic. It ends on the self-exalting taunt song of Lamech. In this manner the family of Cain is reduced to insignificance in God’s eyes and the reader is assured of the presence of a righteous remnant at the time of Enosh (4:26). On the basis of the connection of ch. 6 with ch. 5 and the usage of the word “daughters,” one could argue that the “daughters of men” are identical with those mentioned repeatedly in ch. 5, the line of Seth. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 112, expressed his difficulty in determining the exact relationship between the two lineages. He considers that possibly the narrator used the genealogy of Cain “to show the increase of sin” and the genealogy of Seth to bring him “down in the history of tradition directly to Noah and the Flood.”

16 Cf. 5:4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26, 30.

17 Cf. ch. 11.

18 Gen 26:8; 27:1; 43:31; 44:24; cf. Exod 1:21; 13:15, etc.

19 Similar to *יהי כאשר* and *יהי כן*.

disobeyed Him, and therefore was culpable. Based upon the fact of the case the verdict was given (Gen 3:14–19). The story of the Tower of Babel sets forth the plotting of men in building a tower by which man could make a name for himself so as to defy the divine command of populating the earth (11:3, 4). During the outright act of rebellion, God is said to have come down to see what man had schemed (11:5, 6). Again, based upon the facts, the verdict was to scatter the people by confounding their means of communication (11:7, 8). Similarly, the wickedness of the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Adamah, and

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Seboim had been “heard” by Yahweh (18:20). Yahweh told Abraham that he had come down to “see” if he had heard properly (18:21). His coming down to see is an anthropomorphic expression to convey in literary style the impending judgment, described in Genesis 19. The incident of the angels in Sodom (Gen 19:4–11) further illustrates the wickedness of the Sodomites and gives warrant for the destruction of the city.

The conceptual model of judgment includes a statement on the evil perpetrated, God’s coming down to see the facts, and the verdict. How do the facts in Genesis 6 fit this model? If the episode of the Sons of God is *not* to be related to the Flood story, why does the narrative of the flood begin with God’s “seeing”? “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (6:5). The verdict is given thereafter as in the other episodes, “So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them’” (6:7). The evil perpetrated is not clearly given as in the narratives of man’s fall and the building of the tower of Babel. In the story of the overthrow of the four cities of the plain, the account of the homosexual desires of the Sodomites is at least illustrative of their wickedness. What are *the* offences which account for so radical a judgment as the flood? Certainly the context gives reason for believing that the wickedness was so great that it had to be dealt with, “So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth’” (6:13). If the episode of the Sons of God is not related to the Flood narrative, the judgment is unique, in that the reason is not explicitly stated. On the other hand, the model seems to be complete when the episode of the Sons of God is taken as a prologue, giving some indication of the iniquity in which mankind involved itself so as to fill the earth with “violence.”

Conclusions

In summary, the passage is hedged in between the genealogy of Adam and the story of Noah, the central figure of the Flood

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narrative. Its connections with the preceding chapter (5) are mainly linguistic: אדם (*‘adam*, “man” or “Adam”; 5:1; 6:1, 2, 3, 4), (אדמה, *‘adamah*, “land,” “earth”; 5:29; 6:1), בנות (*banot*, “daughters”; 5:4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26, 30; 6:1, 2, 3), ילדו (*yulda*, “were born”; 6:1, from the root *yalad*, “to bear”; cf., the repeated use of ויולד (*wayyoled*, “and he begat,” from the root *yalad*, “to bear”; 5:26, 28, 30, 32). The connections with the next section also show verbal links: האדם (*ha-adam*, “man”; 6:5, 6, 7).

The passage also has a nexus with 6:5–8. The phrase וירא יהוה (“Yahweh saw”; 6:5) is God’s assessment of the situation. In the narrative of the Tower of Babel we have a parallel. After the expression of the human motivation, God’s judgment is introduced

with these words וירד יהוה לראות (“Yahweh came down *to see*”; 11:5).²⁰ The passage connects the existence of the *nephilim-gibborim* (verse 4) and God’s assessment of the situation: “the evil of man (הָאָדָם) is great” (4:5) by a linguistic device. God is said, in anthropomorphic terms, to have regretted creating man (הָאָדָם, verse 6). Consequently, he will destroy man from the earth (מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה), from which he was taken. The repetition of the Hebrew words הָאָדָם, “man,” and הָאֲדָמָה, “earth,” has the literary function of tying together the birth of Noah (chapter 5), the intermarriage of the Sons of God with the daughters of man (6:1–4), and God’s judgment of man in the form of the Flood (6:5ff).²¹ The passage (verses 1–4) sets the context for the Flood. It is a literary bridge between the genealogy of Seth leading to Lamech, who expressed his hope of deliverance from man’s toil in Noah’s generation (5:29), and God’s tribute paid to Noah, the man who with his family would be exempted from the Flood (6:7, 8).

The linguistic relationships and the conceptual model permit us to see the unity of the material. I agree that the unity is not so apparent as to make the critical arguments invalid. The flow from the genealogies, to the episode of the Sons of God, and finally to the narrative of the Flood seems to go forward and then backward. Even within chapter six the story of the Flood has several starting points:

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- a. the episode of the Sons of God (1–4)
- b. the corruption of mankind (5–8)
- c. the generations of Noah (6–12)
- d. God’s command to build the Ark (13–21).

The argument leading up to the necessity of the Flood is therefore composite: the Sons of God and the rise of the *nephilim-gibborim* (1–4), the wickedness of man’s imaginations (5–8), and the violence of mankind (9–13). From a critical perspective, Brevard S. Childs came to the same conclusion:

The story serves as an example in 6.5 of the ungodly conditions before the flood. Disregarding the difficulty that mankind in general is punished for the sins of the “sons of gods,” the Yahwist has worked this material into his “history.” It serves as a plastic illustration of the increasing sinfulness of man before God. The magnitude of sin is seen in the appalling fact that even the divine beings transgress the established order of the creator.²²

II. Identity of the Sons of God

The second issue concerns the identity of the Sons of God. The issue is not only what the exegesis of the text may demand, but also how its conclusions fit our understanding. Camps are easily drawn up, so that the proponents of differing view may have problems in hearing one another. The hermeneutics of the passage demand careful attention to several problems: What is the significance of the phrase “daughters were born to man” (הָאָדָם)? Is it not to be expected that daughters are born? Why are the daughters of man singled out as being beautiful? How are we to understand the contrast: Sons of “God” and the daughters of “man?”

²⁰ Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

²¹ Cf. Ps 14:2 (… יהוה משמים השקיף על בני אדם) (לראות היש משכיל).

²² Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), p. 57.

A. Daughters of “Man”

The first question pertains to “the daughters of man.” The introductory phrase “when man began to multiply” recaptures past events. It relates to both chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4, “the

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man” (verse 1, הָאָדָם) became the father of Cain, Abel, and Seth. The genealogy of Cain includes mainly prominent male leaders of the clan and one lady, Naamah, sister of Tubal-Cain. Chapter 5 returns to the genealogy of Adam (אָדָם) and gives the genealogy from Adam through the line of Seth to Noah and his three sons. The reference to “the man” (הָאָדָם; cf., Gen 1:27; 2:7; 8:15, 16, 18–23, 25; 3:8, 9, 20, 22, 24; 4:1) may suggest that Adam (“the man” of 4:1) was first in fathering daughters. This suggestion is not quite out of line, as we are informed that Adam begat sons *and daughters* (5:4). It is most appropriate to read 6:1 as a summary statement of chapters 4 and 5, and especially of chapter 5 with the repeated emphasis that the men in the genealogy of Adam via Seth begat daughters (5:4, 7, 10, 13, 19, 22, 26, 30). The word *ha-adam* (“man”) is generic, and this usage is supported by the context, since the prepositional phrase (“daughters were born to them”) must be read as referring back to a plural subject. Hence, daughters were born to many men. The context relates directly to the daughters of chapter five, but one goes too far in limiting it to the Sethites. The verse simply tells us that more daughters were born than one might expect based upon a superficial reading of chapters 4 and 5.²³

What is the relevance of the observation that daughters were born? Abraham Kuyper explained it as an unusual phenomenon, whereby the number of girl babies increased.²⁴ The sudden increase of the percentage of women to men might favor the view that polygamy was the wrong committed and that the text hereby explains the circumstances in which the evil arose. Attractive as this view may be, the birth of the daughters to men (הָאָדָם) is to be related to the next verse, according to which the sons of God see the daughters of man (הָאָדָם) are beautiful (literally “good”). I agree with the traditional translation of “beautiful” instead of “good.” The quality of moral goodness is not in view. The word “good” is a shortened form of the idiom “good in appearance.”

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The beauty of the women has an important bearing on the exegesis. I do not think that it gives warrant for the view that the mere physical beauty led the “sons of God” to lust carnally. Calvin comments that the daughters of men were beautiful to the sons of God through the eyes of lust which led to their marriage “without discrimination, rushing onward according to their lust.”²⁵ The element of lust introduces an idea foreign to the text and prejudges the case. All that can be said here is that the attractive appearance of human daughters made them appealing to the sons of God.²⁶

The suggestions of polygamy and lust have been associated with certain interpretations of “the Sons of God.” It is better not to read too much into the observation that “daughters were born to men” and the observation that they were “beautiful,” lest

²³ W. H. Gispen, *Genesis I: Kommentaar op het Oude Testameint* (Kampen: J. H. Kok), p. 251.

²⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *De Engelen Gods*, p. 65; cited by Gispen, *ibid.*, p. 215.

²⁵ Calvin, *Genesis*, p. 294.

²⁶ Cassuto, *Genesis*, p. 294.

conclusions are adduced to the passage which are not transparent.²⁷ It is sobering to recognize how difficult it is to read the passage without preconceived ideas and even more how the exegete can analyze every word and phrase and yet have difficulty in coming to a synthesis. Thus, the absence of any reference to “sons of man” should not suggest that only girl babies were born. The Old Testament genealogies rarely include references to girls or women, and from this one should not conclude that the ratio of men to women was unfavorable. The intent of the authors is rarely to provide the twentieth-century historian with the information he desires. All we have here is an observation that “girls” were born and that the girls were attractive in looks. We are not even told to what genealogy “the daughters of man” belong, whether to the genealogy of Seth or Cain. A possible reading from Genesis 5 to Genesis 6 may suggest that the daughters descended from Seth. How else can one explain the repeated refrain: “and he begat sons and daughters?” However, this suggestion contradicts the view according to which the sons of God are the Sethites and the daughters of man are identified with the female descendants of the line of Cain (chapter 4). The reference to “the daughters of man” cannot be limited to the

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genealogy of Seth or Cain. They are the daughters of *man*. They belong to the category of human beings of the feminine gender.

B. The Sons of God as Sethites

The second question pertains to the identity of the “Sons of God.” As we focus on the *central* question of the passage, exegesis again seems to be tied to traditional understanding and attachment. In the past couple of hundred years the debate of the theological, exegetical, and critical issues has led interpreters into different camps. The conclusions are associated with other than exegetical considerations. Those who hold that the sons of God are preternatural (divine) beings also hold to the view that Genesis 6:1–4 is a piece of raw mythology or that the ancient Israelites used the pagan myth and demythologized it to fit in the confessional framework of Israel’s faith.²⁸ Fewer Old Testament scholars favor the point of view of an intermarriage of human beings.²⁹ Conservative scholars have strongly argued against the intermarriage of angelic (divine) beings with human females. Among those opposing the intermarriage of the angelic beings with humans are Keil and Delitzsch.³⁰ Their carefully set forth arguments, together with William Henry Green’s

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27 Poulet rejects sensuality and lust as the moral cause of the flood, “Nothing in the sacred text justifies this explanation, and it is now generally discarded that its refutation would be superfluous” (*op. cit.*, p. 294).

28 Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 55f; Cassuto explains the verses as a polemic against pagan myths. The Canaanites held to the tradition of viewing the giants as demigods, born from the union of gods and the daughters of men. This section sets forth that they are after all flesh, even though they may have a supernatural origin. “Following her usual procedure, the Torah explains how the giants came into being, and from what is stated we can infer that which is rejected. The giants are not at all related—Heaven forbid!—to the Deity, but only to ‘the sons of God,’ that is to say, to the Divine household, to the attendants of God, and actually to the lowest order of them. Every word is carefully weighed. The Torah was deliberately brief, confining the subject to a few verses, as though she wished to say that the episode was entirely uncongenial to her, and was not mentioned for its own sake, but only so as to disabuse the reader’s mind of certain concepts.” Cassuto, “The Episode of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Man,” in *Biblical & Oriental Studies*, I (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1973), 24.

29 Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 502 (“Die Stimmen, die für die Menschendeutung eintraten, sind zurückgegangen”)?

30 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n.d.), 131–38.

exposition³¹ on these verses, provide the most stimulating apology for the intermarriage of the Sethite and the Cainite families. John Murray summarized the arguments in an appendix in his significant work on ethics, *Principles of Conduct*.³² In a manner characteristic of Murray the lengthy arguments of Keil, Delitzsch, and Green are reduced to several pages of extremely worthwhile reading. These arguments against the “angel” theory are here further reduced to the bare bones in seven theses:

1. The divisions of “the daughters of man” and “the Sons of God” are drawn from the human family.
2. The genealogies given in chapter 4 (the family of Cain) and in chapter 5 (the family of Seth) provide the background for the distinctions of “daughters of men” and “Sons of God.”
3. The phrase “the Sons of God” also applies to human beings and applies properly to the godly family of Seth.
4. Scripture is silent on the sexual functions of angels or demons.
5. The phrase “and they took wives for themselves” is the Hebrew idiom for a legal marriage relationship and can hardly refer to an unnatural relationship.
6. The judgment is inflicted on men (6:3), not on angels.
7. The *nephilim* are not necessarily the offspring of the intermarriage between the sons of God and the daughters of men.

According to this reconstruction of the events, the Sons of God are men of the genealogy of Seth. Their sin lies in marrying with women from the line of Cain. Moreover, the phrase “and they took for themselves wives, whomever they chose” is considered to be an allusion to the multiplication of wives. Therefore, the Sethites sinned by marrying outside of the godly family and by multiplying wives, just because of the physical attractiveness of “the daughters of man.” Their indiscriminate marriage

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is interpreted by the beauty of the line of Cain. This intermarriage, on the one hand, endangered the purity of the godly line, and with that the promise of God and, on the other hand, it explains the widespread corruption at the time of the flood in that the offspring did not fear God.

The human intermarriage view has enjoyed a place in the history of the interpretation. From the third century on (Julius Africanus) and especially in the Syriac church, the Sethites have been identified with “the Sons of God.” Luther and Calvin both chose in favor of this view. According to Luther the Sons of God are those male descendants who had the promise of the *protevangelium* (Gen 3:15),³³ and Calvin posits that the Sons of God enjoy the status of being related to God by the decree of eternal election.³⁴

Criticism has been leveled, however, against the exegetical consideration given in support of the seven theses. Among the critics are those who hold to a human marriage view, but find that theses two and three are questionable, and for this reason they posit several different interpretations. The strongest argument is the lack of exegetical warrant in making arbitrary separations between the descendants of Adam. As we have stated

31 William Henry Green, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men,” *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, V (1894), 654–60; and *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), pp. 53–61.

32 John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 243–249.

33 *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 129.

34 Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 238.

above, the close link to chapter 6:1–4 is chapter 5, and according to this chapter man in his various generations “begat sons and daughters.” Since the genealogy of Seth is traced in chapter 5, it is not farfetched to assume that the “daughters of man” are at least the daughters born to the family of Seth. In the intermarriage theory one must also differentiate between the usage of “man” in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 the usage of the word man is generic. It states in the most general way that man began to multiply. However, the usage of “man” in the phrase “the daughters of man” (verse 2) denotes the line of the Canaanites exclusively. The contrast is *not* between a man as a large group and man in a more limited sense, rather it is between “the Sons of God” and “the daughters of men.” Therefore “the daughters of men” must signify any female whether of the family of Cain or Seth or of Adam’s other sons and daughters (5:4).

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M. G. Kline also argues against thesis 7.³⁵ He is convinced that the *nephilim-gibborim* (verse 4) are the offspring of the marriage mentioned. If this is not the case, verse four stands by itself. Then, we have *another* fragment with no apparent relation to the context.

In view of his expressed reservations with theses 2, 3, and 7, Kline considers the spiritual interpretation of “the Sons of God” as godly men to be anachronistic.³⁶ The interpretation that “the sons of God” are the “children of God” is so unique in Genesis that it demands “a more plausible explanation for its appearance there than can be readily discovered.”³⁷ Constrained by the force of these objections, Kline expressed the following judgment: “Unless the difficulty which follows from this conclusion can be overcome, the religiously mixed marriage interpretation of the passage ought to be definitely abandoned.”³⁸

Gispen, likewise, considered the serious objections against the human intermarriage view. Among the objections and problems he mentions the absence of contextual connections of 6:1–4 with chapter 5; the lack of clear identification of the Sethites with “the sons of God”; the problem of how the *nephilim* were born into families of mixed marriage; the strange supposition that only the daughters of the line of Cain were beautiful; and to the difficulty of positing two separate meanings for “man” in verses 1 (“mankind”) and 2 (“the Cainites”). He observes rightly that the clue to the interpretation lies in the *contrast* between “the Sons of God” and “the daughters of man.”³⁹

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C. The Sons of God as Rulers

There are two major variants of the human marriage view. They avoid several objections as raised by Kline, Gispen, and others. An ancient Jewish interpretation gives an alternative to the theologically sticky problem of angelic marriage by the novel suggestion that the word אֱלֹהִים in the Old Testament may denote “judges”⁴⁰ or

³⁵ Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 189; cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1960). The conservative exegete Leupold observed independently that “the bringing forth of daughters is being considered as taking place throughout all mankind” (*Exposition of Genesis* [Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1942], p. 252). The absence of distinctions based on those supposedly drawn in chs. 4 and 5, is an argument in favor of the angel view, as Murray also observed that the absence of the distinctions drawn within the human family “gives plausibility to the argument that ‘the sons of God’ must refer to preternatural beings” (p. 245).

³⁶ Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³⁹ Gispen, pp. 218, 219.

⁴⁰ Cf. Exod 21:6; 22:8, 9, 20; Ps 82:6.

“magnitude, strength.”⁴¹ The consistent avoidance of anthropomorphisms led to the widespread view that “the Sons of God” of our passage are to be identified with nobles, princes, or heroes who married girls outside their rank and status.⁴²

The sin of the nobles was that they looked at the “daughters of man” with sensual desire and took great numbers into their harems. The sensuality and lust was the expression of their sinful hearts. Writing from a Jewish perspective, Hertz expresses the point of view well: “These marriages were the result of mere unbridled passion, and are an indication of the license and oppression of that time.”⁴³ However, how does this explain the presence of the *nephilim-gibborim* (thesis 7)? It is again assumed that there is no relationship.

The *nephilim-gibborim* are considered to be loosely connected to the narrative. Their existence brings out the perverse condition of mankind, which was oppressed by men who gained for themselves a reputation as heroes with no or little regard for the rights of others. Rashi reiterated a popular etymology of *nephilim*. They were called nephilim in that “they fell (*naphlu*) and led the world to its fall (*hippilu*).”⁴⁴

D. Sons of God as Dynastic Rulers

Some interpreters are in basic agreement with the human kingship view, but object to the easy manner in which the

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nephilim-gibborim are dismissed as a separate issue altogether. Kline moves beyond the traditional point of view by understanding the passage from the ancient Near Eastern conception of kingship. The expression “Sons of God” is taken as an ancient designation of kings who were honored as divine or theocratic rulers. The idiom “Sons of God” is a title which functions as a “genuinely theistic expression honoring these potentates in their office.”⁴⁵

Consistent with the usage of “daughters of men,” Kline points out that the “divine” kings took to themselves any wife, whether from the line of Cain or of Seth. The nature of the transgression is thought to lie in *polygamy*.⁴⁶ The children, born out of the relationship of the aristocrats and the wives of the harem, characterize themselves by a flagrant disobedience against God’s laws and established institutions. They are to be identified with the *nephilim-gibborim*, who were intent on making a name for themselves.⁴⁷

Support for the sacral kingship may be found in the phrase “sons of the Most High” (Ps 82:6). The parallel expression of “sons of the Most High” is “gods,” as we read, “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the most High’” (Ps 82:6). The theocratic ruler receives the title of “god” and “son of the Most High.” Other passages may be considered in favor of the thesis that theocratic kings were in a sense considered like God.⁴⁸ The Hebrew word God (אלהים) does not distinguish between Yahweh God and judges and kings who are at times entitled as “gods.” The argument receives further support if

41 Jonah 3:3, 4 : Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon des Alten Testaments*, p. 52.

42 Cassuto, “The Episode of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Man,” *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, I (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 18.

43 Hertz, *Pentateuch* (London: Soncino Press. 1965), p. 19.

44 Rashi, *ad loc.*

45 Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

48 Cf. Exod 21:6; 22:7, 8, 27, in English versions vv. 8, 9, 28 translated “judges.”

Melamed’s reconstruction of the text is right. In his penetrating analysis of Hebrew stereotyped phrases, he poses two problems of Psalm 82:6 : (1) no human being addresses another human being with the words “you are gods”; the phrase בני עליין occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament.⁴⁹ It is his contention that compound

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linguistic stereotypes may be broken up into two components for poetic effects. The original of the expression in Psalm 82:6 may have been אתם כלכם בני אלהים עליין.⁵⁰ On the basis of such a reconstruction, the sacral kingship view would receive scriptural support, since kings are entitled to the honorary position of being “Sons of God Most High.”

In this interpretation the rule of the sacral kings (Gen 6:1–4) was marred by tyranny. Kline finds an exegetical connection between Cain’s line in which urbanization, industrialization, and arts are combined with oppression and threats of tyranny (chapter 4). Lamech’s polygamy and readiness cruelly and mercilessly to avenge himself is an expression of how the dynasty of Cain developed. Kline connects this description with 6:1–4, in which the progress of tyranny and polygamy have reached their apex. The sin of the generation of the Flood is found in the uncontrolled development of human leadership without regard for God. They viewed themselves as divine potentates and as such they may well have called themselves “sons of God.” The children born out of the relationships more evidently manifest the character of their parents. Autonomy, tyranny, and an utter disregard for God and man gave way to an avalanche of sin which could only be stopped by God’s special intervention.⁵¹

E. Objections to the Kingship Hypothesis

Apart from the seeming lack of continuity between the genealogy of Cain (chapter 4) and the description of “the Sons of God” and the rise of the *nephilim-gibborim* (6:1–4), there are several other issues to be considered. First, the expression “sons of God” is used in contrast to “the daughters of man.”⁵² Cassuto presses

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this point hard and, in my opinion, it seems to be a proper exegetical consideration. Since the phrase *ha-’adam* (הָאָדָם, “man”; 6:1, 2) denotes mankind generically, Hebrew grammar dictates that “the daughters of man” refer to the female offspring, regardless of the family relationship. Any interpretation of בני האלהים short of divine beings does not satisfactorily appreciate the “balanced contrast”⁵³ of these verses. Hence, I agree with Cassuto who wrote: “...it is clear that the former (בני האלהים) pertains to beings outside the human sphere.”⁵⁴ Moreover, the usage of *bene ha’elohim* (בני האלהים, “Sons of God”

49 Ezra Zion Melamed, “Break-up of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), VIII, 118f.

50 Cf. Ps 57:3; 78:35, 56. The first objection remains unresolved, unless the current identity of the sons of God with the gods is accepted (cf. Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 502).

51 Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

52 Cassuto, “The Episode,” p. 19. Keil observed “the antithesis” but rejected it on the basis of non-linguistic considerations (p. 128). The cases cited (p. 130) to minimize the antithesis generally do not relate to the matter. Murray was likewise struck by the contrast: “Genesis 6:1–3 does appear to lend support to the view that ‘the sons of God’ are nonhuman. We should naturally suppose that ‘the daughters of men’ represent mankind and that those designated ‘sons of God’ must not only be contrasted with the women of mankind but also with mankind. We might expect that if the contrast were simply between ‘daughters’ and ‘sons,’ that is between the women and the men, the distinction would be drawn in terms of ‘the daughters of men’ and ‘the sons of men’ (*op. cit.*, p. 244).

53 Speiser, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

54 Cassuto, “The Episode,” p. 19.

in Genesis 6:2) as “divine kings” is so significantly unique in Scripture and particularly in the Book of Genesis that we should expect an additional explanatory phrase.

Though the above interpretation of Psalm 82:6 seems to favor the sacral kingship view, we observe that we do not have a complete parallel expression. I am willing to accept Melamed’s thesis that there are many examples of broken linguistic stereotypes. It is known that the idiom *אל [הים] עליין* occurs in the Old Testament (Gen 14:8; Ps 57:3) and that the idiom may be broken up, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells” (Ps 46:4). However, the breaking up of the idiom is rare and it is not a good exegetical step to argue from this text or any other verses where the king could be considered as “God” to the conclusion that the phrase “sons of God Most High” is functionally equivalent to “Sons of God” in Genesis, in that the real question still is whether the sons of God are kings. One expects that additional explanation be given in the context, justifying why the usage of “Sons of God” to denote “angelic beings” (Job 1:6; 2:1) is not relevant in Genesis 6:2.

An objection to all variants of the “human marriage” view is the usage of *בני האלהים* or *בני אלים* in the Book of Psalms 29:1;

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139:6, Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7, and the Septuagint text of Deuteronomy 32:8—supported by a Hebrew fragment at Qumran⁵⁵—the phrase denotes angelic beings.⁵⁶ As the expression *בני האלהים* is elsewhere a technical term referring to angelic beings, we cannot assume that it is in some way semantically equivalent to “son” with reference to Israel⁵⁷ or to divine kings.⁵⁸ Were we to find the phrase *בני האלהים* employed with respect to the Israelites,⁵⁹ judges, or kings, a case might be made to broaden its meaning to include all human beings—a point in favor of the spiritual interpretation of *בני האלהים*. Were it to be clearly shown that kings and “sons of God” are synonyms, three problems beg an answer. First, the expression in Genesis 6:2, *בני האלהים*, is not clearly explained as a reference to kings. Second, there is no place for the contrast between “the Sons of God” and “the daughters of man,” since both classes belong to the category of “people.” Third, what is the reason for the reference to the *nephilim-gibborim*? Are they merely “giants” by their acts of violence, or do the words also denote men of special stature?

Partly in appreciation of the contrast and partly because the idiom “the Sons of God” nowhere refers to the members of the covenant community, Kline concluded that the Sethite

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55 P. W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘song of Moses’ (Deut 32) from Qumran,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 136 (1954), 12.

56 Cf. Cassuto, “The Episode,” p. 19 (“...we may conclude that an examination of the structure of the verses before us and of the usages of the Hebrew tongue make it evident that *בני האלים* can only mean *angels*”).

57 In recognizing plausible grounds for the angelic explanation Keil claims to be led by the context and the tenor of the passage. We wonder whether the “first” explanation that suggested itself to Keil was rejected in favor of the established interpretation of the Sethite intermarriage. “...these two points would lead us *most naturally* to regard the ‘sons of God’ as angels, in distinction from men and the daughters of men. But this explanation, though the first to suggest itself, can only lay claim to be received as the correct one, *provided the language itself admits of no other*” (p. 128, emphasis ours). He answered our question in admitting that “these passages show that the expression ‘sons of God’ cannot be elucidated by philological means, but must be interpreted by theology *alone*” (p. 128, emphasis ours).

58 Kline, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-94.

59 Cf. Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 128; Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 54f; Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 246, thesis 6.

intermarriage view had to be abandoned.⁶⁰ In turn, Cassuto used the same argument against any interpretation other than divine beings: “When, therefore, we find in our section the expression בני האלהים without any *explanatory* addition, we have no right to attribute to it a connotation other than that which it *normally* has in the Bible.”⁶¹

In addition to these questions, what is the wrong involved in the marriage of “the Sons of God” to the daughters of man? The supposition that the wrong lay in the multiplication of wives, must be inferred from the text, since it is not clearly stated.⁶² Moreover, though the validity of an interpretation of Scripture may be tested by external literary data, we cannot agree with the supposition that a theme prominently treated in the Sumero-Babylonian epic tradition must have a counterpart in the biblical narrative.⁶³ There is presently no clear evidence in support of the argument that the Sumero-Babylonian tradition knew of a kingship which brought about the Flood. Alexander Heidel specifically contends that though the Flood was sent because of man’s sin, the epic “does not give us any clue as to the nature of man’s offence.”⁶⁴ The fragmentary tablet of Nippur⁶⁵ deals with the themes of creation, kingship,⁶⁶ and the flood. The record of each of these themes is broken off so that no clear connection is drawn

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nor to be inferred from the lacunae. Nothing can be assumed about a relation between these topics until a better copy of this text is discovered. In view of these reservations, we cannot agree with Kline’s conclusion: “It appears then that the theme of antediluvian kingship centering in cities under the hegemony of various gods *constituted the main introductory motif* in the Sumero-Babylonian flood traditions.”⁶⁷

The variants of the “human marriage” view have thus far not proved to be satisfactory. The linguistic, semantic, and literary considerations adduced to establish each one of these variants fail in one aspect or another to be compellingly attractive.

I agree with Gispén that Kline’s alternative is an excellent example of good scholarship and sensitivity to the text, even where he goes against “hallowed” traditional views. Gispén is hesitant in deciding in favor of Kline or a variant of the angelic marriage view. However, certain questions have been raised and with a great deal of hesitation I present the following proposals for further reflection. I have not yet been persuaded by any of the above proposals of the human intermarriage view. Kline’s alternative has answered many questions, and yet it is not wholly satisfactory. Therefore, my proposal follows his observation,

...what has contributed most to the
continuing dominance of the mythical

60 Kline, *op. cit.*, pp. 191ff. “Nevertheless, the use of the designation ‘sons of God’ for members of the covenant community would be isolated in the context of the Book of Genesis and would moreover be so remarkable as to demand a more plausible explanation for its appearance there than can be readily discovered.”

61 Cassuto, “The Episode,” p. 19 (emphasis ours); cf. Skinner *op. cit.*, p. 141 (“The *sons of God* ...are everywhere in Old Testament members [but probably inferior members] of the divine order, or [using the word with some freedom] *angels*.”)

62 Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 196. Cassuto opposes the idea of a harem and straightforwardly suggests the translation that each Son of God chose for himself a desirable wife (p. 295).

63 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

64 Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 225; cf. p. 268.

65 Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

66 Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 44, sees a correspondence between the *Sumerian Kings List* and the ten generations between Adam and Noah and the ten generations between Noah and Abraham.

67 Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 199 (emphasis ours); cf. Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 141, “The Babylonian Flood—legend also is free from any allusions to giants, or mingling of gods and men.”

(or at least angelic) interpretation of the passage has been the absence of a satisfactory alternative.⁶⁸

III. Proposals

- A. We propose that any reinvestigation of the “angelic” interpretation must be clearly set off from the dominant critical view according to which 6:1–4 is a mythological fragment incorporated into the biblical text.

1. The current critical view, according to which these verses

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were arbitrarily put into the present order of the text as an “erratic boulder” has no support.⁶⁹

2. No connection exists between the passage and pagan mythology.⁷⁰ The shift in identification of “sons of God” from Sethites to beings belonging to the class of god has been viewed as a support for the mythological interpretation.⁷¹ Yet, the assumption that the Israelites demythologized a Canaanite myth in which the sexually motivated love of the gods for the human beauties gave rise to a super-race is completely unacceptable to the teaching of the Torah.⁷² It is not sufficient to suppose that the “editor” of Genesis drastically abridged the work so as to remove those elements inconsistent with Yahwism.⁷³

3. The passage does not belong to a class of aetiological myths.⁷⁴ Those who primarily view the story aetiologically propose that the passage in the first place gives an explanation of the origin of the nephilim-gibborim,⁷⁵ and secondarily gives reason for the shortened span of human life.⁷⁶

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Von Rad correctly observed that “the special aetiological concern of the ancient myth cannot move forward after the ‘demythologization’ practised by the editor.”

⁷⁷ If it is assumed that the passage is an “erratic boulder” cut out of a rock of unknown origin, how can we reconstruct the original purpose and significance? The passage is not arbitrarily placed here. Any aetiological purpose of the story is only a twentieth-century guess.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 188f.

⁶⁹ See Introduction, Section 2 above; Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁷⁰ Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 498ff, 514ff; Childs, in *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, subsumed Genesis 6:1–4 under the heading “Myth in Conflict with Old Testament Reality” (emphasis ours).

⁷¹ Cf. Westermann (*op. cit.*, pp. 499ff) for an account of the shift as well as excellent bibliographical references. In German works the change in idiom is noticeable: *Göttersöhne* instead of *Gottessöhne*.

⁷² Von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 115. Cassuto finds no point of contact with pagan mythology. He finds in the passage a contradiction of pagan myths “without a direct polemic” (“The Episode,” p. 24). As such the purpose of the narrative is to teach: “Do not believe the gentile myths concerning men of divine origin who became immortal. This is untrue, for in the end all men must die, *בשגם הוא בשר*, because they, too, are flesh” (p. 26). However, Yahezkel Kaufman *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), viewing the section as a mythical fragment, did not think that it was foreign to the faith of Israel. “It was not felt to be foreign, however, because its protagonists on both sides are creatures of God, not God himself. That any conscious censorship had been at work to purge these stories of pagan features is improbable in view of the folk naïveté that permeates the legends of Genesis 2–11 ” (p. 68).

⁷³ Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

⁷⁴ Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁷⁵ Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

⁷⁶ Habel, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁷⁷ Von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

4. The passage is not a fragment of ancient material which after a gradual process of demythologization came to serve as an introduction to the Flood narrative.⁷⁸ Westermann expressed his reservations with Child’s view that J employed the story of the intermarriage as an illustration of the sinfulness of man which brought the Flood upon mankind. He posits that the whole of the J narrative grounds the necessity for the Flood in the multitude of man’s transgressions (chapter 3; 4:2–16; 6:1–4; 11:1–9).⁷⁹
- B. We propose that the ancient “angelic” interpretation must be reinvestigated. The tradition is extremely ancient.⁸⁰ After a popularity in the apocalyptic literature⁸¹ and in Rabbinic Judaism, it declined in favor along with the apocalyptic elements which had gained an official status in Judaism of the first century AD.⁸² In the early centuries of Christianity an angelic interpretation was widely held by the Church Fathers.⁸³ Though Murray accepted the Sethite intermarriage view, he was impressed with the case for the angelic explanation based on interpretations of 1 Peter 3:19. He cautiously stated:

Most recently Bo Reicke...and E. G. Selwyn have ably

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presented the case for this interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 and, by implication of Genesis 6:1–3. Without question, if 1 Peter 3:19 refers to angelic beings, whether exclusively or partially so as to include also the disembodied souls of men, this interpretation would necessarily turn the scales in favour of the view that the sons of God in Genesis 6:1–3 were angelic beings.⁸⁴

The difficult passages in 1 Peter 3:19, 20 and Jude 6, 7 will have an important bearing on the discussion of Genesis 6:1–4 and we welcome further insights from New Testament scholars.

- (1) The problems with all variants of the “human marriage” view leave no satisfactory alternative to the ancient “angel” interpretation. Theological objections against the angelic marriage with the daughters of men must be restudied in the light of what Scripture teaches about the nature of angels. No inferences should be drawn from the silence of Scripture. Elsewhere angels may appear in human form, dressed as men, eat, drink, walk and are subject to being molested (Gen 18:1, 2, 8; 19:1, 5). Here we are dealing with fallen angels who apparently have no regard for God.
- (2) Any contextual interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 must recognize its limitations. Defenders of the “human marriage” view have admitted that the exegesis of Genesis 6:1–4 favors the “angel” view.⁸⁵ We believe that, despite the brevity of the passage, the complexity of the issues and the linguistic problems, the “angel”

78 Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

79 Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

80 Cassuto, “The Episode,” p. 19.

81 D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 249ff.

82 Poulet, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

83 J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) provides references to the works of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria (p. 256). Poulet, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

84 Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 246; Poulet, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

85 Cf. Kline’s positive remark: “It has been a merit of some who have thought that they found in this passage a preternatural intrusion into earthly history, a sort of pseudo-messianic embodiment of demonic spirits in human flesh, that they have sensed more fully than the advocates of the traditional exegesis, the titanic, one might almost say the eschatological, character of the ancient crisis” (pp. 192f).

view solves more exegetical problems than the “human marriage” view can account for.

- (3) The exact offence of the marriage is not stated. In the reconstruction of the human marriage, the wrong is assumed to lie in the intermarriage of the godly Sethites with the

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daughters of Cain. The mere statement of the relationship of angels with the daughters of men needs no further explanation as to the wrong involved. It clearly contradicts the marriage ordinance (Gen 2:24).

- (4) The perverted nature of man’s thoughts (6:5) may be inferred from 6:3. Being under God’s judgment since the Fall, man made an attempt to circumvent God’s plan (*Grenzüberschreitung*) by being enticed to the Satanic scheme of intermarriage with demonic beings with the hope of ultimate prolongation of life. The resultant super-race, produced by the intermarriage of “the sons of God” and the daughters of men,⁸⁶ is in God’s judgment still בשר (“characterized by flesh”, verse 3). Hence it is also observed that the super-race of the *nephilim-gibborim* was characterized as belonging to the earth (באריץ, verse 4). To crush the attempt of introducing man into the realms of the divine, God sovereignly and justly judged man⁸⁷ to death in the Flood. As a perpetual judgment on man’s wickedness, the human race is under the divine limitation on longevity, characteristic of those generations before the Flood. The life span of man is reduced to 120 years. The judgment stands in stark contrast to the aim of man to obtain everlasting life (לא ידון רוחי לעולם)—“my [life giving] spirit will not abide in man forever”).⁸⁸
- (5) The argument that the “sons of God” as angels are not judged assumes that all that happened is revealed or at least that all that is revealed is completely revealed. We hold to the sufficiency of Scripture pertaining to faith and life, but it does not mean that all is revealed. The lot of the angelic beings was not in the direct interest of the author of Genesis 6:1–4. However, an intimation may be gained

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from Jude, “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day” (verse 6).

- (6) A modification of the angelic view is not impossible and deserves all consideration. In Hebrew the phrase “the Sons of God” may refer to any being which is not man and not God. The language is not precise.⁸⁹ They may be angels, demons, or one could even conceive of demon-possessed men who took to themselves wives, who were not possessed. Gispén feels a strong attraction to this possibility, “It is difficult to make a definite choice. To assume the demonic

⁸⁶ The consecutive verbs used in Gen 6:2–5 support the assumption of a transgression-sin-judgment narrative. In 3:6 and 9 the verbs ראה, לקח, and אמר indicate the actions involved in the transgression (“saw” and “took”) and in God’s judgment (“said”). Again in 6:2–5 we find the verbs “saw” and “took” and “said.”

⁸⁷ Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

⁸⁸ Speiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 126f; Cassuto, Commentary, *ad loc.*; Baumbartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum AT*, I, 208.

⁸⁹ Cassuto, “The Episode,” pp. 22, 23.

background has many advantages. However, one must accept that the text presents us with men who are controlled by fallen angels.”⁹⁰

On the basis of our exegesis and the exegetical results of students of the text, we provide the following translation:

When men began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born, the Sons of God noticed that the daughters of mankind were attractive and they married those whichever they chose. Yahweh said: My [life giving] spirit will not abide permanently in man, since he is flesh. His days will reach 120 years! In those days and also later, after the Sons of God had cohabited with the daughters of men, the *nephilim* appeared on earth. These were the heroes of old, men of renown.

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⁹⁰ Gispén, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

4th - “Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4”

by Robert C. Newman

Robert C. Newman, “Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5, No. 1 (Spring 1984): 13–36.

Maness Note: Newman’s excellent survey of the ancient literature showed how a lot of the Jewish tradition and many early Church Fathers leaned to the supernatural and “angel” view of the “sons of God” and more led him to lean to the supernatural, even to angels being Sons of God.

Sons of God
Angels
Spirits
Demons

Angels
an “Erratic
Stone”
Oldest View

Abstract

The exegesis of Gen 6:2, 4 in ancient times is surveyed among extant sources, both Jewish and Christian. These interpretations are categorized as either “supernatural” or “nonsupernatural” depending upon the identification of the “sons of God” It is observed that the interpretation of “sons of God” as angels and “Nephilim” as giants dominates. This interpretation also seems to be that of the NT, almost certainly in Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4, and probably in 1 Cor 11:10 and Matt 22:30. Some suggestions regarding the source of this interpretation and its validity are made.

* * *

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with men forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim were on earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown (Gen 6:1–4 NASB).

This passage has been a center of controversy for at least two millennia. The present form of the dispute is rather paradoxical. On the one hand, liberal theologians, who deny the miraculous, claim the account pictures a supernatural liason between divine beings and humans.¹ Conservative theologians, though believing implicitly in angels and demons, tend to deny the passage any such import.² The

liberal position is more understandable with the realization that they deny the historicity of the incident and see it as a borrowing from pagan mythology. The rationale behind the conservative view is more complex: though partially a reaction to liberalism, the view is older than liberal theology. Moreover, the conservative camp is not unanimous in this interpretation; several expositors see supernatural liasons here, but ones which really occurred.³

1 E.g., A. Richardson, *Genesis 1–11* (London: SCM, 1953); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964); B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977); G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

2 E.g., G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); H. G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); J. Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 243–49.

3 U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I: From Adam to Noah, Gen 1–6⁸* (Jerusalem: Magnes and Hebrew University, 1961); H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); W. A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 43 (1981) 320–48.

The concern in this article, however, is not to trace the history of interpretation of this passage, nor (basically) to discuss modern arguments for and against various views. Rather, the concern is to see how it was understood in antiquity and (if possible) why it was so understood.

Gen 6:1–4 seems to be something of an “erratic boulder” for all interpreters, standing apart to some extent from its context. The preceding chapter consists of a 32-verse genealogy extending from Adam through his son Seth to Noah and his sons. God is mentioned in three connections only: he creates man (5:1), walks with Enoch (5:22, 24) and curses the ground (5:29). If we include the last two verses of chapter 4, we pick up two more references: Seth is God’s replacement for Abel (4:25); and men begin to call upon the LORD at the time of Enosh (4:26). Following our passage, the context leads quickly into the flood, beginning with God’s observation that both man and beast must be wiped out because man’s wickedness has become very great.

From the passage and its context a number of questions arise. Who are the “sons of God” mention in 6:2, 4? The phrase occurs nowhere else in the context or even in Genesis. Who are the “daughters of men”? This phrase at least seems to be related to v 1, where “men” have “daughters” born to them. Why does the text say “sons of God” and “daughters of men” rather than “sons of men” and “daughters of God”? How is God’s reaction in vv 3 and 5 related to all this? Are these marriages the last straw in a series of sins leading to the flood or not? Who are the “Nephilim” in v 4? Are they the offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men or not? Are they the “mighty men” mentioned in the same verse? Is it *their* sin which brings on the flood?

The scope of this article does not permit an investigation of all these matters. We shall concentrate on two: the phrase בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, usually translated “sons of God” (vv 2, 4) and the word נְפִלִים, here transliterated “Nephilim” (v 4). Though other matters are of interest

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and will influence one’s interpretation, these two seem to constitute an interpretive watershed.

For ease of discussion we shall divide the various interpretive schemes into two broad categories which we label “supernatural” and “nonsupernatural” (this rather clumsy term being used to avoid the connotation of “proper” which “natural” would give). The supernatural category will include any views in which the sons of God are not human, and the nonsupernatural those in which they are human. Within each category we shall proceed more or less chronologically from the earliest extant examples to late antiquity, giving greater attention to earlier materials. The NT will be omitted from this preliminary survey, but we shall return to it later to see if it favors one of these interpretations. Thereafter we shall examine possible exegetical bases for the various views and seek to draw some conclusions regarding not only what was done in antiquity but how we should interpret the passage. We hope also to provide some general methodological suggestions.

Supernatural Interpretation

Among extant materials interpreting Gen 6:2, 4, the supernatural view is older, though we cannot be sure in which work it appears first, the LXX or 1 Enoch.

LXX

The Old Greek version of the Pentateuch, traditionally known as the LXX, was probably produced in the middle of the 3rd century B.C.⁴ Extant MSS of Genesis render בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים variously as υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ and ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ.⁵ The latter alternative clearly moves the

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text in a supernatural direction, even though ἄγγελος sometimes means a human messenger (e.g., Gen 32:3, 6). This variant is already cited and discussed by Philo,⁶ so apparently predates the 1st century A.D. In Gen 6:4 גִּבֹּרִים is translated γίγαντες without textual variation. The Greek word, usually rendered “giant,” indicates a warrior of large stature⁷ and translates גִּבּוֹר in Gen 10:8, 9.

1 Enoch

Possibly older than the LXX is the book of *Enoch*, an apocalyptic work of great diversity organized around revelations allegedly given to the patriarch of this name. The particular material we are concerned with is thought to be pre-Maccabean by Charles and from the early 2nd century B.C. by Eissfeldt. In any case, fragments from this part of *Enoch* have been found at Qumran in a style of handwriting that dates to the pre-Christian era.⁸

The first five chaps. of *Enoch* present a mostly poetic picture of the coming of God to earth in judgment and what this will mean for the wicked and the righteous. Chap. 6 begins:

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied, in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: ‘Come, let us choose wives from among the children of men and beget us children.’ (1 Enoch 6:1–2)

The account goes on (chaps. 6–8) to tell how two hundred angels came down on Mt. Hermon, led by their chief Semjaza, took wives, taught them science, magic and technology, and begot by them giants over a mile high! Along with Semjaza, principal attention is given to the angel Azazel, who taught mankind metallurgy for weapons and jewelry.

4 J. W. Wevers, “Septuagint,” *IDB* 4 (1962) 273; E. M. Blaiklock, “Septuagint,” *ZPEB* 5 (1976) 343–44.

5 See the relevant textual footnotes in A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (7th ed.; Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962) 8, and especially in J. W. Wevers, *Genesis* (Göttingen LXX: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1974) 108. The variant ἄγγελοι is the minority reading among extant MSS and versions, but it is supported by many witnesses, including Codex Alexandrinus (4th century A.D.), as well as Philo and Josephus, both writing in the 1st century A.D. though extant only in much later MSS. These latter comment on the passage in such a way that their reading cannot be dismissed as a scribal error from later Christian copyists. υἱοί is the majority reading, for which the most important witnesses are papyrus 911 (3rd century A.D.) and Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (7th century). The Göttingen LXX favors the latter reading since it is supported by all the MS groups, though none are as early as Philo and Josephus. Yet the influence of the MT on the transmission of the LXX might well explain υἱοί, even if ἄγγελοι were the original translation. It is therefore impossible to be certain whether ἄγγελοι was the original translation or an early midrashic corruption.

6 Philo, *On the Giants* 6.

7 H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. Drisler, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Based on the German Work of Francis Passow* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1879) 292. [Not in recent edition.]

8 R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2.163; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 618–19. M. Rist (“Enoch, Book of,” *IDB* 2 [1962] 104) would date this section later, ca. 100 B.C. In any case, fragments of this part of Enoch have been found at Qumran: see O. Betz, “Dead Sea Scrolls,” *IDB* 1 (1962) 796; J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 6,139–40,164.

The good angels report these things to God (chap. 9), who sends Uriel to warn Noah of the coming flood, Gabriel to destroy the giants, Raphael to take charge of Azazel, and Michael to deal with

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Semjaza and his fellows. The instructions given to Raphael and Michael are of particular interest:

Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the great day of judgment he shall be cast into the fire. (*1 Enoch* 10:4–6)

Go, bind Semjaza and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness. And when their sons [the giants] have slain one another, and they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, bind them fast for seventy generations in the valleys of the earth, till the day of their judgment and of the consummation, till the judgment that is for ever and ever is consummated. (*1 Enoch* 10:11–12)

Thus *Enoch* presents an interpretation of Gen 6 in terms of angelic cohabitation with women, resulting in gigantic offspring. The angels who sinned are bound to await the final judgment.

Jubilees

The Book of Jubilees [*Jub.*] is an expanded retelling of Genesis and part of Exodus. It provides an elaborate chronology based on sabbatical cycles and jubilees, plus a theory that the patriarchs observed various Mosaic regulations even before they were given at Sinai. Charles and Tedesche date the book in the last half of the 2nd century B.C., while Eissfeldt puts it about 100 B.C. More recently VanderKam has presented detailed arguments for a somewhat earlier date, around 150 B.C.⁹

Though apparently dependent on *1 Enoch* or one of its sources, *Jub.* differs from *Enoch* on the reason for the angels' descent to earth:

...and he called his name Jared; for in his days the angels of the Lord descended on the earth, those who are named the Watchers, that they should instruct the children of men, and that they should do judgment and uprightness on the earth. (*Jub.* 4:15)

Chap. 5 follows with an expansion of Gen 6, in which these Watchers cohabit with women and the offspring produced are giants. The sinning angels are not named, but God's response to their sin is described:

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And against the angels whom He had sent upon the earth, He was exceedingly wroth, and He gave command to root them out of all their dominion, and He made us [one of the good angels is speaking] to bind

⁹ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 6; S. Tedesche, “Jubilees, Book of,” *IDB* 2 (1962) 1002; Eissfeldt, *OT Introduction* 608; J. C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (HSM 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977) 283–84.

them in the depths of the earth, and behold they are bound in the midst of them and are (kept) separate. (*Jub.* 5:6)

Other Pseudepigrapha

The other works included in Jewish pseudepigrapha which refer to this view are late. Both 2 *Enoch* 18 and 2 Baruch [*Bar*] 56 mention the angels of Gen 6 as being punished by torment, the former indicating that they are under earth, the latter as being in chains.

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs [*T. 12 Patr.*] make reference to this view more than once, but the date and nature of these works are problematical since they are Christian in their present form. Whether the Testaments are basically pre-Christian with some later editing, or basically Christian using some older Jewish materials, is still hotly debated.¹⁰ In any case *T. Reub.* 5:5–7 presents an unusual variant of the supernatural view: the actual cohabitation is between humans, but the spiritual influence of the angels produces giants:

Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind: because every woman who uses these wiles hath been reserved for eternal punishment. For thus they allured the Watchers who were before the flood; for as these continually beheld them, they lusted after them, and they conceived the act in their mind; for they changed themselves into the shape of men, and appeared to them when they were with their husbands. And the women lusting in their minds after their forms, gave birth to giants, for the Watchers appeared to them as reaching even unto heaven.

T. Naph. 3:3–5 gives a supernatural interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 in a grouping of examples which parallels those in Jude and 2 Pet:

The Gentiles went astray, and forsook the Lord, and changed their order, and obeyed stocks and stones, spirits of deceit. But ye shall not be so, my children, recognizing in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord who made all things, that ye become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature. In like manner the Watchers also changed the order of their nature, whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account he made the earth without inhabitants and fruitless.

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Qumran

Among the materials found in caves near the Dead Sea, both the Genesis Apocryphon [1QapGen] and the Damascus Document [CD] refer to the supernatural interpretation. The former is a retelling of Genesis in popular style, extant only in one fragmented MS, which has been dated paleographically to the late 1st century B.C. or early 1st century A.D.¹¹ On the basis of a detailed comparison of contents with 1 *Enoch* and *Jub.*, Vermes believes that apGen is older and a source for both, “the most ancient midrash of all.” Fitzmyer disagrees, dating apGen in the same era as the extant MS.¹² Certainly it is no later than the Roman destruction of Qumran about A.D. 68. In what little remains of the

¹⁰ Eissfeldt, *OT Introduction* 631–36; M. Smith, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *IDB* 4 (1962) 575–79; M. E. Stone, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *IDB Supp* (1976) 877.

¹¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary* (BibOr 18A; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971) 15.

¹² G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (SPB 4; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 124–25; Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon* 16–19.

scroll’s col. 2, Lamech is fearful that his wife’s pregnancy (her child will be Noah) is due to “the Watchers and the Holy Ones,” but she stoutly denies it.

The CD is a sort of covenant-renewal document: the history of the community (presumably Qumran) is sketched, and its members are exhorted to covenant faithfulness. Cross and Vermes date the work to about 100 B.C.¹³ Speaking of the “guilty inclination” and “eyes of lust,” the author says:

For through them, great men have gone astray and mighty heroes have stumbled from former times until now. Because they walked in the stubbornness of their heart the Heavenly Watchers fell; they were caught because they did not keep the commandments of God. And their sons also fell who were tall as cedar trees and whose bodies were like mountains. (CD 2:16–19)

Philo

In his treatise *On the Giants*, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo (20 B.C.-A.D. 50)¹⁴ quotes the Old Greek version of this passage with the readings ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ and γίγαντες. Unfortunately Philo is not always a clear writer. Apparently he takes the literal meaning of the verses to refer to angels and women since, immediately after quoting Gen 6:2, he says:

It is Moses’ custom to give the name of angels to those whom other

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philosophers call demons [or spirits], souls that is which fly and hover in the air. And let no one suppose that what is here said is a myth.¹⁵

After a lengthy discussion arguing for the existence of non-corporeal spirits, however, Philo proceeds to allegorize the passage:

So, then, it is no myth at all of giants that he [Moses] sets before us; rather he wishes to show you that some men are earth-born, some heaven-born, and some God-born.¹⁶

Roughly speaking, these three categories Philo enumerates correspond to people primarily concerned about the physical, the intellectual and the mystical, respectively. Philo’s sympathies definitely lie with the second and third. He has no interest in stories about physical mating, and is probably best understood as rejecting the literal meaning of this passage.¹⁷ If so, we have in Philo a literal exegesis which gives the supernatural interpretation and an allegorical exegesis which provides a very unusual sort of nonsupernatural view.

Josephus

From late in the 1st century A.D. comes the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-100). The first eleven books of the *Antiquities* retell the biblical history with various elaborations based on Jewish traditions. In book one, just before recounting the flood, Josephus says:

13 F. M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (rev. ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) 81-82n; G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968) 95.

14 All dates are approximate throughout.

15 Philo, *Giants* 6–7.

16 *Ibid.*, 60.

17 See S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria* (New York: Oxford, 1979) 150, 162, who notes that Philo denies the historicity of Sarah and Hagar in *On Mating* 180.

For many angels of God now consorted with women and begat sons who were overbearing and disdainful of every virtue, such confidence had they in their strength; in fact, the deeds that tradition ascribes to them resemble the audacious exploits told by the Greeks of the giants.¹⁸

In addition to this clearly supernatural interpretation, Franxman sees evidence for a nonsupernatural interpretation involving Sethite-Cainite intermarriage: in the immediately preceding sentences of Josephus, we are told that the Sethites continue virtuous for seven generations and then turn away from God and become zealous for wickedness, a feature of later Sethite-Cainite views.¹⁹ Yet nothing about intermarriage of Sethites and Cainites appears in the extant

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copies of Josephus, so Franxman must postulate this in a non-extant source he used.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

It is difficult to know where to place the targumim. These Aramaic translations of Scripture (often paraphrases or even commentaries) have an oral background in the synagogue services of pre-Christian times, but their extant written forms seem to be much later.²⁰ Among these, the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* [*Tg. Ps.-J.*] presents at least a partially supernatural interpretation. Although in its extant form this targum is later than the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D., early materials also appear in it.²¹ In view of the rabbinic reactions to the supernatural view by the 2nd century A.D. (see below), our passage is probably one of its early parts:

And it came to pass when the sons of men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and beautiful daughters were born to them, that the sons of the great ones saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, with eyes painted and hair curled, walking in nakedness of flesh, and they conceived lustful thoughts; and they took them wives of all they chose.... Shamhazai and Azael fell from heaven and were on earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of the great ones came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them: the same are called men of the world, the men of renown. (*Tg. Ps.-J.* 6:1–2, 4)

Here the phrase “sons of the great ones” may reflect a nonsupernatural interpretation, but the reference to Shamhazai and Azael falling from heaven certainly does not. The names given are close to those in *I Enoch*, considering that the latter has gone through two translations to reach its extant Ethiopic version. Notice also that the Nephilim are here identified with the angels rather than their offspring as in *Enoch*, *Jub.*, and Josephus.

As we shall see below, the supernatural interpretation was eventually superceded in Jewish circles by a nonsupernatural one, probably in the century following the fall of Jerusalem. Yet remnants of the former can still be seen in later rabbinic literature.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.73.

¹⁹ T. W. Franxman, *Genesis and the ‘ Jewish Antiquities ’ of Flavius Josephus* (BibOr 35; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979) 80–81.

²⁰ J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: University, 1969) 14; M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 86–89.

²¹ Bowker, *Targums* 26; McNamara, *Targum and Testament* 178.

Early Christian References

Passing over the NT for the time being, we find abundant early evidence for the supernatural interpretation in Christian circles. Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-160) says, in his *Second Apology* :

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God, when He had made the whole world, and subjected things earthly to man, ...committed the care of men and of all things under heaven to angels whom He appointed over them. But the angels transgressed this appointment, and were captivated by love of women, and begat children who are those that are called demons.²²

Justin goes on to tell how the human race was subdued to the angels by being introduced to magic, fear, false worship and lust, and how they were trained in all sorts of wickedness. Justin accepts the pagan mythologies as having some historical veracity, describing the acts of these angels and demons rather than the gods.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) alludes to the supernatural interpretation in his *Miscellanies* : “...the angels who had obtained the superior rank, having sunk into pleasures, told to the women the secrets which had come to their knowledge...”²³

Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) speaks of the incident several times. In *On Idolatry* 9, he says that “those angels, the deserters from God, the lovers of women,” revealed astrology to mankind. In his work *Against Marcion* 5.18 he argues that Paul’s reference to “spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies” (Eph 6:12) does not refer to Marcion’s wicked creator-god, but to the time “when angels were entrapped into sin by the daughters of men.” And in his treatise *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7, he argues that Paul’s reference to veiling “because of the angels” (1 Cor 11:10) refers to this incident.

Lactantius (A.D. 240-320), in his *Divine Institutes* 2.15, teaches that God sent the angels to earth to teach mankind and protect them from Satan, but that Satan “enticed them to vices, and polluted them by intercourse with women.” This is closer to *Jub.* than *Enoch*. The sinning angels, Lactantius continues, could not return to heaven, so they became demons of the air. Their half-breed offspring could not enter hell (hades?), so they became demons of the earth. All of this Lactantius connects with pagan mythology and the occult.

Similar materials are found in the *Clementine Homilies* 8.11-15 and the *Instructions* of Commodianus (chap. 3), neither of which is likely to predate the 3rd century.²⁴ The *Homilies* add the unusual idea that the angels had first transformed themselves into jewels and animals to convict mankind of covetousness. Perhaps this was derived from some of the stories about Zeus, as the writer says: “These things also the poets among yourselves, by reason of fearlessness, sing, as they befell, attributing to one the many and diverse doings of all” (8:12).

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Nonsupernatural Interpretation

The earliest extant examples of the nonsupernatural interpretations of Gen 6:2, 4 come from the 1st century A.D. and thus are later than the earliest specimens of the

²² Justin, *Apology* 2.5.

²³ Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.1.10.

²⁴ See the relevant articles in F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford, 1958).

supernatural interpretation. Since all come centuries after Genesis was written, it is not possible to be sure which is the oldest.

First Century Sources

As mentioned previously, Philo prefers an allegorical interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 in which God-oriented persons (sons of God) may fall and become earth-centered (beget giants, the “earth-born”) by consorting with vice and passion (daughters of men).

The *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo is another work which retells biblical history, in this case from Adam to Saul. By an unknown writer, it was attributed to Philo because it circulated with his genuine works. It is usually dated shortly before or after the fall of Jerusalem.²⁵ Chap. 3 begins:

And it came to pass when men had begun to multiply on the earth, that beautiful daughters were born unto them. And the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were exceeding fair, and took them wives of all that they had chosen. And God said: My spirit shall not judge among all these men forever, because they are of flesh; but their years shall be 120.
(*Bib. Ant.* 3:1–2)

On the surface this does not appear to be an interpretation at all, and perhaps it is not. The writer does not mention the Nephilim, but this may be merely a case of epitomizing. Yet the rendering of the biblical יָדִין (Gen 6:3) by “judge” at least foreshadows *Targum Neofiti*, to be discussed below. Likewise the rabbinical exegesis of Gen 6:2 — “they took wives of all they chose” — is anticipated in an earlier remark of Pseudo-Philo: “And at that time, when they had begun to do evil, every one with his neighbor’s wife, defiling them, God was angry” (2:8).

Second Century Sources

Three translations of the OT into Greek were made in the 2nd century A.D.: one by Aquila, a student of R. Akiba, about A.D. 130;²⁶ another by Symmachus, said to be an Ebionite, late in the century;²⁷

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and a third by Theodotion, of whom little is known. Theodotion reads υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ and γίγαντες like many MSS of the LXX, adding nothing new and not clearly either supernatural or nonsupernatural.²⁸ Aquila has υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν, which looks more like an attempt to avoid the problem of the one true God having sons than it does a preference for either of the interpretations we are considering. Symmachus has υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστεύοντων, meaning either “sons of the powerful” or “sons of the rulers,” rather like the targumic views to be discussed below and that of Meredith Kline.²⁹ For the Nephilim, Aquila has ἐπιπίπτοντες, meaning “those who fall upon,” which might be either supernatural “those who fall upon (earth)” or nonsupernatural “those who attack.” Symmachus has βίαιοι, “violent ones.” Both the second translation of Aquila’s rendering and that of Symmachus fit Gen 6:11 — “the earth was filled with violence.”

25 G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 265–68.

26 J. W. Wevers, “Aquila’s Version,” *IDB* 1 (1962) 176.

27 J. W. Wevers, “Symmachus,” *IDB* 4 (1962) 476.

28 See the lower set of footnotes in the Göttingen LXX for the readings of these other Greek versions.

29 M. G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 24 (1962) 187–204.

The Targumim

Targum Neofiti [*Targ. Neof.*] is the only complete extant MS of the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch. The MS is from the 16th century, but its text has been variously dated from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D.³⁰ In place of the Hebrew בני האלהים is the Aramaic בני דייניא, “sons of the judges,” using a cognate noun to the verb ירון appearing in the MT of Gen 6:3.³¹ Nephilim is rendered by גיבריה, “warriors.” The text of the targum seems to reflect a nonsupernatural interpretation, unless we press the last sentence of 6:4 — “these are the warriors that (were there) from the beginning of the world, warriors of wondrous renown”—so as to exclude human beings. However, the MS has many marginal notes, which presumably represent one or more other MSS of the Palestinian Targum.³² One such note occurs at 6:4 and reads: “There were warriors dwelling on earth in those days, and also afterwards, after the sons of the angels had joined (in wedlock) the daughters of the sons.”³³ Thus the text of *Targ. Neof.* seems to be nonsupernatural while a marginal note is clearly supernatural.

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The *Targum of Onkelos* [*Tg. Onq.*] became the official targum to the Pentateuch for Judaism. According to the Babylonian Talmud [*Bab. Talm.*] (Meg. 3a) it was composed early in the 2nd century A.D., but this seems to be a confusion with the Greek translation of Aquila. Although the relations between the various targumim are complicated by mutual influence in transmission, *Onq.* was probably completed before A.D. 400 in Babylonia using Palestinian materials as a basis.³⁴ In our passage *Onq.* reads בני רברביא, “sons of the great ones,” probably referring to rulers.³⁵ For Nephilim it has גיבריה. Etheridge’s translation “giants” for this is possible, but not necessary, as Aberbach and Grossfeld prefer “mighty ones.”³⁶

Christian Interpretations

Meanwhile, the nonsupernatural interpretation begins to show up in Christian circles. Julius Africanus (A.D. 160-240) wrote a *History of the World* which has survived only in fragments quoted by later authors. In one of these Julius says:

When men multiplied on earth, the angels of heaven came together with the daughters of men. In some copies I found “sons of God.” What is meant by the Spirit in my opinion, is that the descendants of Seth are called the sons of God on account of the righteous men and patriarchs who have sprung from him, even down to the Saviour Himself; but that the descendants of Cain are named the seed of man, as having nothing divine in them....³⁷

30 See Bowker, *Targums* 16–20; McNamara, *Targum and Testament* 186; M. McNamara, “Targum,” *IDB Supp* (1976) 858–59; R. LeDeaut, “The Current State of Targumic Studies,” *BTB* 4 (1974) 5,22–24.

31 A. Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1: Genesis* (Madrid and Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1968) 33,511.

32 S. Lund and J. Foster, *Variant Versions of Targumic Traditions Within Codex Neofiti I* (SBLASP 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977) 12,14; our passage and marginal note are not discussed.

33 Diez Macho, *Neophyti* 511.

34 Bowker, *Targums* 22–26; McNamara, *Targum and Testament* 173–76.

35 A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic; I: Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) 9.

36 J. W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and of Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum* (London: 1862–65; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1968), 1.46; M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1982) 52.

37 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. C. Coxe and A. Menzies, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886), 6.131.

There is no context to work with here, but it sounds as though Julius has derived this view on his own.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) discusses Gen 6:1–4 in his *City of God*. His basic approach is seen in 15.22:

It was the order of this love, then, this charity or attachment, which the sons of God disturbed when they forsook God and were enamored of the daughters of men. And by these two names (sons of God and daughters of men) the two cities [city of God and city of man] are sufficiently distinguished. For though the former were by nature children of men, they had come into possession of another name by grace.

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Augustine goes on (15.23) to admit that angels do appear in bodies, and that stories were at his time being told of women being assaulted by sylvans and fauns, but he says “I could by no means believe that God’s holy angels could at that time have so fallen.” He interprets 2 Pet 2:4 as referring to the primeval fall of Satan. The word “angel,” he points out, can with scriptural warrant be applied to men. Besides, the giants were already on earth when these things happened, and so not the offspring of the sons of God and daughters of men. Also the giants need not be of enormous stature but only so large as sometimes seen today. God’s response in Gen 6:3 is directed against men, so that is what the “angels” were. He dismisses with contempt “the fables of those scriptures which are called apocryphal.”

Rabbinic Literature

The Mishnah is a concise topical summary of the oral rabbinic legal traditions written about A.D. 200. It contains no reference to Gen 6:1–4 to the best of my knowledge, but this is not surprising in view of the preponderance of *halakah* rather than *haggadah*.

The Midrash Rabbah [*Midr. Rab.*] is a collection of interpretive comments on the Pentateuch and the five Megillot (Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Lamentations). The earliest of these is Genesis Rabbah [*Gen Rab.*], which Strack puts “not much later than the Palestinian Talmud” (ca. A.D. 400) and Epstein sees as mainly from the 3rd century A.D.³⁸ We have an extended discussion of our passage in *Gen Rab.* 26.5-7. R. Simeon b. Yohai (A.D. 130-160) is quoted as identifying the “sons of God” as “sons of nobles” and as cursing all who call them “sons of God.” The reason for their title “sons of God” is their long lifespans. To explain why marrying women would be such a sin as the context indicates, R. Judan (A.D. 325) explains that טבת, “beautiful” (Gen 6:2), should be taken as a singular adjective: the noblemen enjoyed the bride before the bridegroom could. The phrase “they were beautiful” meant they took virgins; “they took wives for themselves” meant they took married women; “whomever they chose” meant they indulged in homosexuality and bestiality. Regarding the interpretation of “Nephilim,” the rabbis apparently used Num 13:33, where the term is associated with the Anakim at the time of the Exodus. With this hint and the aid of Deut 2:10–11, 20–21, they obtained five other names for the Nephilim by which to describe them using etymological word-play. Two of these are rather supernatural sounding: “Gibborim:...the marrow of each one’s thigh bone was eighteen cubits long”; “Anakim:...their necks

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38 H. L. Strack, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1931) 218,65; I. Epstein, “Midrash,” *IDB* 3 (1962) 376.

reached the globe of the sun.” The term “Nephilim” is understood as teaching that “they hurled (הפילו) the world down, themselves fell (נפלו) from the world, and filled the world with abortions (נפילים) through their immorality.”

A few scattered references occur in the Babylonian Talmud, a compilation of the Mishnah and its commentary finished in the 6th century A.D. A relatively clear allusion to the nonsupernatural view occurs in *Sanh.* 108a, in a context of the corruption of the generation at the time of the flood. R. Jose (A.D. 130-160) is quoted:

They waxed haughty only on account of covetousness of the eyeball, which is like water, as it is written, And they took wives from all they chose. Therefore he punished them by water, which is like the eyeball, as it is written, All the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

There is a word-play here on עין, which can mean either “fountain” or “eye.” The main point, however, is that the punishment was designed to fit the crime. Thus those who died in the flood are understood to be those who took the wives. If the attribution to R. Jose here is trustworthy, then this view was in circulation by the middle of the 2nd century A.D., in agreement with the testimony of Symmachus and *Gen Rab.*

Elsewhere in the Talmud there are scattered remnants of the supernatural view. *Yoma* 67b refers to the scapegoat being called Azazel because it atones for the “affair of Uza and Aza.el,” probably a reference to the Shamhazai and Azael of *1 Enoch* and *Tg. Ps.-J.*³⁹ *Nid.* 61a speaks of an Ahijah, son of Shamhazai.

NT Interpretation

The supernatural interpretation clearly existed before NT times, as did Philo’s peculiar nonsupernatural view. Whether or not the later rabbinic view (that the sons of God were judges or noblemen) or the later Christian view (that the sons of God were Sethites) existed at this time, we cannot say, but there is no positive evidence for them.

What does the NT have to say? Does it refer to Gen 6:2, 4 at all? If so, how does it interpret the passage? First, unlike hundreds of other OT passages, the NT nowhere explicitly quotes this passage. Any NT reference will therefore have to be merely an allusion. What will count as an allusion? Proponents of a nonsupernatural view will be at something of a disadvantage: references to the wickedness of men at the flood are not decisive in favor of the nonsupernatural

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view, but references to wicked angels will have to be assigned to some other event if this view is to stand.

2 Pet 2:4

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...

Is this a reference to Gen 6 or to the primeval fall of Satan before Eden as proposed by Augustine? This example precedes a reference to the flood and to Sodom and Gomorrah, so the order would be chronological in either case. It is given as an example of judgment to the readers of the epistle, and examples, when not explained, can be presumed well-known to the original readers. The other two examples are both well-

³⁹ L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1937), 5.152, explains how “Shamhazai” may be derived from “Uza.”

known because they occur in Scripture. The primeval fall, however, would be almost totally inference, whereas the supernatural view would see this as a popular understanding of Scripture at the time. Certainly some measure of popularity is to be inferred from its occurrence in the pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo and Josephus.

The word “pits” (σιποῖς) is a variant; some MSS read σείραις, “chains.” Either word would fit the description of the angels’ punishment in *1 Enoch* and *Jub.*, but this must be a new revelation (which happens to match an old view of Gen 6 !) on the nonsupernatural view. Similarly for the details about “darkness” and the angels’ being “reserved for judgment.” The verb translated “cast into hell” is ταπόω, derived from Tartarus, “a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out.”⁴⁰

This passage seems strongly to support the supernatural interpretation of Gen 6, even though it raises problems regarding the extra detail it shares with *Enoch* and *Jub.* not found in Genesis. We will address this question later.

Jude 6

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

Jude 14-15 contains a quotation that appears almost word-for-word in *1 Enoch* 1:9⁴¹, so it is difficult to argue that Jude knew nothing of *1 Enoch* 6. All the features of Jude 6 fit *1 Enoch* better

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than they do *Jub.*, where the angels were on earth before sinning, and were even sent there by God. To explain Jude 6 of the primeval fall, one must see further new revelation here also, namely that this fall involved leaving their οἰκητήριον, “dwelling” or “abode.” On the other hand, this is not necessary for the supernatural view, as the angels would at least have to come to earth to get their wives (Gen 6:2) and their offspring the Nephilim are explicitly said to be “on earth” (Gen 6:4).

In addition, Jude’s next example (v 7) of Sodom and Gomorrah seems to refer back to this example when it says “they [Sodom and Gomorrah] in the same way as these [angels] indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh.” One might seek to avoid this by reading “they [the cities around Sodom and Gomorrah] in the same way as these [Sodom and Gomorrah] indulged....” But “these” is τούτοις, which more naturally refers to the angels (masculine) than to Sodom and Gomorrah, as the latter have just been referred to in the same verse by the feminine pronoun αὐτάς. Likewise “gross immorality” and “strange flesh” are two points of real parallelism between the violent homosexuality of Sodom and the angel-human liaisons of the supernatural interpretation. It seems that Jude 6 strongly indicates a supernatural interpretation of Gen 6:1–4.

1 Cor 11:10

Therefore the woman ought to have (a symbol of) authority on her head, because of the angels.

This verse has puzzling elements for any interpreter because of its briefness and lack of explanation. So little is known about the activity of angels that one cannot rule out some obscure allusion to the presence of good angels at Christian worship who would be

⁴⁰ BAGD, 805.

⁴¹ With attestation in the Qumran fragments; see Milik, *Books of Enoch*, on 4QEn^c.

offended by unsubmitive women.⁴² Yet one can easily find more serious offenses for the angels to be upset about in the Corinthian worship services, e.g., misuse of tongues (chaps. 12–14) and disorderly conduct at the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34). Yet the supernatural interpretation of Gen 6 would supply an excellent reason why this phrase would occur in this context and the statement would become far less cryptic. Tertullian so understood the passage by A.D. 200. This context might also fit the context tangentially, with woman being made for man (v 9) perhaps suggesting she was not made for angels, and the veiling indicating she is under the authority of father or husband.

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1 Pet 3:19-20

For Christ also died for sins...that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits (now) in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah....

This, too, is a puzzling passage which bristles with uncertainties no matter how one interprets Gen 6:1–4. Yet it seems clearly to point to spirits disobedient at the time of Noah. The word “spirit” may have been chosen by Peter to picture disembodied men (cf. Luke 8:55; Acts 7:59), but it could also refer to or include non-humans. If the passage concerns a “descent into hell,” the supernatural interpretation might at least suggest a rationale for singling out those particular spirits associated with the time of Noah: the events of Gen 6:1–4 may have been an attempt to thwart or pre-empt the incarnation. By itself the passage hardly proves the NT favors the supernatural interpretation.

Matt 22:30

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.

This is probably the most common passage on which the supernatural interpretation is refuted.⁴³ It is quite naturally understood to teach that angels cannot marry and therefore they never have. Likewise, the terminology recalls Gen 6:2, since “to take a wife to oneself” is a standard OT idiom for marriage. But perhaps the term “angels” is intentionally qualified by the phrase “in heaven.” In the supernatural interpretation it was not the angels in heaven that took wives, but those who left heaven (cf. Jude 6 : “abandoned their abode”) and came to earth to do so. This would not be so obscure an allusion in NT times as it seems to us today if the supernatural interpretation were then common knowledge as the evidence indicates. The same phrase “in heaven” occurs in the parallel passage in Mark (12:25). It does not occur in Luke (20:36), but the context strongly implies good angels are in view.

Other NT Passages

No other passages strongly favor either interpretation. References to the abyss—as an unpleasant abode for demons (Luke 8:31), as a

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prison for some sort of supernatural locusts (Rev 9:1-11), and as the source for the beast (Rev 11:7)—are consistent with either view, though somewhat parallel to the binding beneath the earth described in *1 Enoch* and *Jub*. So is the reference to the binding of

⁴² E.g., R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961) 445.

⁴³ E.g., Murray, *Principles of Conduct* 246; Stigers, *Genesis* 97; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (1875; reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 1.131.

Satan in Rev 20. A Sethite-Cainite view of Gen 6:1–4 might serve as a basis for Paul’s remarks about mixed marriages in 1 Cor 7:9, 15, but these could easily be generalized from OT regulations against intermarriage with Gentiles. In spite of the interpretation commonly given to Matt 22:30 and parallels, the evidence seems strong that the NT adopts a supernatural interpretation of Gen 6:1–4.

Sources of the Interpretations

Here we move from the solid ground of extant sources to the thin ice of speculation. Since the authors rarely write anything directly about their sources or methods, we are left to inferences from what they do write. Patte summarizes the situation nicely for the Qumran commentators:

At first one wonders what is the actual relationship between the biblical text quoted and its interpretation. The author is giving us the results of his use of Scripture without emphasizing the process itself.⁴⁴

Studies in the NT and the intertestamental literature indicate that this situation is not confined to Qumran.

Several sources for these interpretations can be imagined: (1) pure invention; (2) borrowing from another source, whether an earlier writing, an oral tradition, or even pagan mythology; (3) extra-biblical revelation, whether divine or occult; and (4) influence from other OT passages thought to be relevant. This list is probably not exhaustive.

The first category is doubtless important: new ideas for the interpretation of a given passage will continue to arise until at least the simpler alternatives are exhausted. Borrowing from an earlier written or oral source may also be important. As long as these sources are interpretations of the passage at hand, this will merely serve to push the origin of the interpretation back into non-extant sources. Charles believes this is what happened for our passage in *1 Enoch*, which he attributes to a non-extant *Book of Noah*.⁴⁵ The idea that the Jews borrowed from pagan myth is popular among liberals. Where Jews believed that the event reported in a pagan myth really happened, they might have done so, though this is hard to imagine for the Pharisees or Essenes. Indeed, in some of these cases, the events reported may actually have happened!

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Regarding extra-biblical revelation, Patte and Russell believe that some of the apocalyptic literature may be based on actual visions experienced by the author.⁴⁶ Whether Patte accepts the miraculous or not is not altogether clear: he speaks of these visions as “Psychical”⁴⁷ yet also as being put together by “creative imagination” from materials in the author’s memory.⁴⁸ Frederic Gardiner favors earlier unrecorded divine revelation as a source for some of the materials in 2 Pet and Jude:

Particulars of their [fallen angels] history may have been from time to time incidentally revealed which have not been mentioned in the volume of inspiration, but may nevertheless form a true basis for various traditions concerning them. This seems probable from the way in which both St.

44 D. Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine* (SBLDS 22; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975) 303.

45 Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 163.

46 Patte, *Hermeneutic* 182; D. S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 172.

47 Patte, *Hermeneutic* 183, 201.

48 *Ibid.*, 183.

Peter and St. Jude speak of them, citing certain facts of the history, not elsewhere revealed, as well-known truths.⁴⁹

Neither should occult activity be ruled out in some Jewish sectarian circles at this period.

Yet some of the interpretations which we see here may be based on other OT passages thought to be relevant to Gen 6:1–4. Both the NT and the Jewish literature throughout this period often weave together OT passages from various locations.⁵⁰ This may even be the case when it is not so obvious:

... in many cases where we cannot understand the reason for a targumic interpretation, one should resist the temptation to conclude that it is the product of the mere fancy of either the targumist or of the community.... On the contrary, we should assume that in most instances the targumic interpretations are the result of an explanation of Scripture by means of Scripture.⁵¹

This fourth category is the most easily investigated since the OT is extant.

Consider first the interpretation of בני האלהים, “sons of God.” The various interpretations are most easily seen as a combination of categories (1) and (4) above, working out the simple alternatives on the basis of Scriptural parallels. The phrase occurs in Job 1:6 and 2:2 in a heavenly context, and Satan is associated with them. Thus the

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supernatural view “angels” arises easily. On the other hand, אלהים is occasionally used of rulers and judges in the OT (e.g., Exod 22:8, 9), from which the Jewish nonsupernatural interpretation may be derived. It is possible that the targumic rendering “sons of the great ones” in *Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Tg. Onq.* may have another origin—an etymological translation to protect the transcendence of God by denying that he has any sons. Philo’s mystical and moralizing exegesis of Gen 6:1–4 is a general characteristic of his technique. It is borrowed from the ethical and anti-historical, anti-physical side of hellenistic Greek philosophy. Perhaps it might be said to be influenced by pagan mythology by way of negative reaction. The Christian nonsupernatural view—“sons of Seth” or believers—is most likely based on the NT use of “sons of God” for believers (e.g., in John 1:12), coupled with Gen 4:26 and 5:24.

The interpretation of נפלים by “giants” is easily understandable for both the supernatural and nonsupernatural views. The word Nephilim only occurs elsewhere in the OT in Num 13:33, where it is associated with the large size of the Anakim. Perhaps the reference here to the Israelites being like grasshoppers in their sight explains the rabbinic remark (*Gen Rab.* 26.7) that the “marrow of each one’s thigh was eighteen cubits long.” If we take the grasshopper’s “thigh” as one inch long and the human thigh as one cubit long (ca. 18 inches), the proportion is exact!

Regarding the binding of the angels mentioned in *1 Enoch*, *Jub.*, 2 Pet and Jude, this feature may depend on an earlier source going back to explicit revelation, or it may be derived from Isa 24:21–22 :

So it will happen on that day,
That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high
And the kings of the earth, on earth.

49 F. Gardiner, *The Last of the Epistles: A Commentary Upon the Epistle of St. Jude* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856) 72.

50 See Patte, *Hermeneutic* 184, and throughout, on anthological style.

51 *Ibid.*, 67.

And they will be gathered together
Like prisoners in the dungeon [lit. “pit”]
And will be confined in prison
And after many days they will be punished.

We would normally interpret this passage eschatologically because of the context. Yet it might be understood as the eschatological punishment for an earlier sin, especially if we follow the Qumran Isaiah MS 1QIsa^a, which reads אִסְפוּ (perfect) instead of the usual וְאִסְפוּ (perfect with *waw*), giving a past tense instead of future:⁵²

They were gathered together...
And will be confined...
And after many days they will be punished.

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In any case the passage refers to the confinement in a pit of what appear to be angelic beings, like prisoners (chained?), with an eschatological punishment after many days. The reference in the context (Isa 24:18–19) to “windows above” being opened and the earth being split is certainly reminiscent of events at the beginning of the flood (Gen 7:11), though the terminology is not identical. Even if this passage is seen as strictly eschatological, its parallels with the flood may have suggested a parallel mode of punishment to interpreters favoring a supernatural view of Gen 6:1–4.

Most of the angelic names in Enoch are modeled on the biblical angelic names “Michael” and “Gabriel,” using the theophoric element “El” for God and either angelic spheres of authority or divine attributes.⁵³ One exception is “Shamhazai,” but Ginzberg sees the first syllable as שֵׁם, “name,” a common targumic substitute for the divine name. “Azazel,” too, is of special interest, and it may suggest that other angelic names are derived from OT texts. The name (or something close to it) occurs in the scapegoat passage in Lev 16:8. One goat is for the LORD, the other for Azazel, taking עֲזָאזֵל as a proper noun instead of a term meaning “entire removal.”⁵⁴ The word may well have been puzzling, and the reference in Lev 17:7 to goats as objects of worship might have led early interpreters to speculate that there was something supernatural about “Azazel.” Charles notes that “Dudael,” the place of Azazel’s binding in *I Enoch* 10:4, is in the wilderness and on “rough and jagged rocks” just like the place to which the scapegoat is taken in *Tg. Ps.-J.*⁵⁵

Thus it appears that a number of details appearing in the various interpretations of Gen 6:2, 4 can be derived—rightly or wrongly—from other OT passages. This does not prove that they actually arose in this way.

Conclusions

We have now examined the ancient interpretation of Gen 6:2, 4 in Jewish literature, in Christian literature and in the NT in particular. The earliest extant view is the supernatural one, that the “sons of God” were angels and that the “Nephilim” were their gigantic offspring. The sin in this case was the unnatural union between angels and humans. Going beyond the text of Genesis, this view pictures the offending angels as being bound and cast into dark pits until the day of judgment. This interpretation seems to

⁵² BHK, 641n.

⁵³ See Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 191; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5.152–53; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, on 4QEn^a.

⁵⁴ BDB, 736.

⁵⁵ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 193.

have been popular at the time of Christ. The nonsupernatural interpretations are not extant

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until later and take two basic forms which we may for convenience label “Jewish” and “Christian.” The Jewish view sees the “sons of God” as judges or noblemen and the “Nephilim” as violent warriors. The sin involved is unrestrained lust, rape, and bestiality. The Christian view sees the “sons of God” as Sethites or believers in general, the “daughters of men” as Cainites or unbelievers, and the sin as mixed marriage.

After investigating possible NT references to this passage, it appears highly likely that the NT does refer to this incident, almost certainly in Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4. Other passages are less certain, but 1 Cor 11:10 and Matt 22:30 are probable. Though serious questions can be raised whether Matt 22:30 and parallels endorse or oppose the supernatural interpretation, Jude and 2 Pet clearly favor the supernatural position.

Do Jude and 2 Pet *endorse* this interpretation or only mention it? One might be inclined to dismiss Jude’s reference as an *ad hominem* argument against opponents who accepted the OT pseudepigrapha since he apparently quotes *1 Enoch* 1:9 in v 14 and cites a no longer extant portion of the *Assumption of Moses* in v 9.⁵⁶ Yet there is no hint in the context that Jude in any way distances himself from these citations. In 2 Pet 2, the whole structure of the argument (vv 4–9) indicates that Peter endorses the historicity of this angelic sin: if God judged those notorious sinners of antiquity, then he will judge these current false prophets who engage in similar activities.

Not only do Jude and 2 Peter seem to endorse the supernatural interpretation of Gen 6, they also mention some of the details found in *1 Enoch* and *Jub.* which do not occur in the Genesis account. Liberal theologians have no difficulty here, since they treat all of this as superstitious nonsense, but how are those who believe in the Bible to respond?

Although part of the evangelical resistance to the supernatural interpretation is exegetical and part is theological, some resistance seems to be due to rationalistic assumptions. Especially in the fields of science, history and Biblical studies, a “minimal-miracle” stance may be adopted, if for no other reason than that miracles pose a roadblock to investigation. However, whenever a minimal-miracle approach begins to produce a crop of problem passages, we should consider the possibility that we are wresting Scripture or other data.

It is also possible that evangelicals along with liberals have adopted too readily the enlightenment-evolutionary view that the

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ancients were ignorant and superstitious. Perhaps an over-reaction to the excesses of the medieval Catholic Church is also to blame. Of course the ancients (except in the case of inspiration) were fallible and influenced by the dominant worldviews of their times, but so are we. They did not have the leisure, technology, communications, and libraries that we have, so we should not expect their scholarship to be as impressive as ours. But they weren’t fools! When all of human history testifies against our times to the reality of the supernatural and the occult, we evangelicals (of all people) would be foolish to dismiss this testimony out of hand, especially when it corroborates biblical testimony.

⁵⁶ For ancient patristic evidence that this incident appeared in the *Assumption of Moses* in their times, see C. Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; New York: Scribners, 1909) 331; a complete list of texts is given in R. H. Charles, *The Assumption of Moses* (London: Black, 1897) 107-10.

May it not be possible that we enlightened, 20th-century Christians can learn something positive from the ancient exegetes? Perhaps they were right in seeing an angelic incursion in Gen 6:1–4 and we are wrong in denying it. Perhaps with a great interest in the supernatural and angels some ancient interpreters scoured the Scriptures to locate any hints it might contain on this subject. In such a case, they might well have reached some valid insights which God preserved by inscripturation in the NT.



5th - “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4” by Meredith G. Kline

Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, No. 2 (May 1962): 187–204.

Maness Note: Kline admirably notes the Sethite line of the “Sons of God” as the “absence of a satisfactory alternative” and proceeds with an admirable critique of weakness of that view and, then, proceeds to admirably defend his “kingship” motif from Adam to Abraham and from David to Christ, to whom “every knee should bow” (Phil 2:9–11).

Sons of God
King/Rulers

I. Critique of Prevalent Interpretations

Genesis 6:1–4 is, according to the prevailing opinion of the day, a piece of raw mythology. In fact, the claim is repeatedly made that it is the most blatant instance of that sort of thing anywhere in the sacred canon. It is supposed to relate how certain divine beings, enticed by the beauty of earthly women, entered into unholy wedlock with them and so gave rise to a race of gigantic heroes of antiquity.¹ The current fashion is to credit the editor responsible for incorporating the mythical fragment into the biblical narrative with the intention of using it simply as a symbolic vehicle to convey the sense of man’s demonic potentialities for good or evil on an heroic scale.² But even this demythologizing old Israelite existentialist will have transmitted the primitive pagan tale startlingly undisguised.

The decisive difficulties, both exegetical and theological, which beset the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 in terms of non-terrestrial beings have been presented long since and need not all be repeated here.³ Advocates of this divine, or demonic,

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invasion view have themselves been most disturbed by the exclusive attention paid to “man” and to him as a creature of “flesh” in the verdict of God pronounced against the sin of “the sons of God” (vs. 3). The obvious awkwardness of this for the view that the chief offenders under judgment were non-human, incorporeal beings has encouraged doubts as to the propriety of the present location of verse 3. It has been conjectured, for example, that verse 4 ought to follow immediately upon verse 2; then the condemnation of “man” (vs. 3) might be related to the Nephilim-Gibborim (vs. 4), who were the at least half-human and quite corporeal offspring of “the sons of God”.⁴ But for all who are concerned with interpreting the meaning of the author of the narrative in its canonical form (and there is no objective evidence that the Masoretic text differs significantly from the original) it is

1 For a recent discussion of the passage from this very ancient viewpoint see Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen 6:1–4,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, VI, 4 (October 1947), pp. 193–208; cf. G. von Rad, *Genesis*, Philadelphia 1961 (translation of *Das erste Buch Mose, Genesis*, Göttingen, ed. of 1956).

2 Cf. A. Richardson, *Genesis I–XI*, London, 1953, pp. 93f; R. H. Elliott, *The Message of Genesis*, Nashville, 1961, pp. 62f.

3 Cf. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, London, 1957, pp. 243–249; W. H. Green, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men,” *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, V (1894), pp. 654–660 and *The Unity of the Book of Genesis*, New York, 1910 pp. 51–61. It must be conceded that the force of some (but only some) of the criticisms is escaped by a view such as that of Franz Delitzsch, who interpreted “the sons of God” as angels who acted through the instrumentality of demoniacs; cf. his *New Commentary on Genesis*, I, Edinburgh, 1888.

4 Cf. Kraeling, *op. cit.*; von Rad, *op. cit.* Other textual rearrangements have been suggested. For example, only verses 1 and 2 are original (J¹) and these were first located in Gen 11 before vs. 4, but then moved by J² to a position after vs. 8. Later they were re-located by the priestly redactor in their present position and supplemented with the groundwork of verses 3 and 4. Cf. C. Simpson, *The Book of Genesis, The Interpreter’s Bible*, I, Nashville, 1952, p. 533.

apparent that the verdict of verse 3 refers primarily to the activity of “the sons of God” (vs. 2), and that precludes all likelihood that the author regarded the latter as preternatural spirits.⁵

Except perhaps for the fact that “sons of God” often denotes angels in the Old Testament⁶ and practically equivalent terminology is used for minor deities in extra-biblical literature,⁷ what has contributed most to the continuing dominance

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of the mythical (or at least angelic) interpretation of the passage has been the absence of a satisfactory alternative.⁸ On the orthodox side, the view apparently generally held today is that which has long been popular in the church and among some Jewish interpreters, namely, that “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men” represent respectively the Sethite and Cainite lines which are set in contrast to one another as the godly and the ungodly in Genesis 4 and 5. The sin of “the sons of God” was then their failure to marry within the covenant.⁹ Therein is said to lie the explanation of the otherwise unexplained development that degeneracy prevailed universally outside the family of Noah, the Sethite line being scarcely able to preserve its specific covenantal identity in the face of the advancing tide of Cainite ungodliness.

This view has the advantage of doing justice to the terms of the verdict of verse 3 by understanding all parties to the sinful marriages as human beings. Against it, however, the serious objection has been directed that it takes אֱלֹהִים in two different senses in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 it understands אֱלֹהִים as mankind generically; in verse 2, as the Cainite line specifically. That such a shift in meaning is certainly not intended becomes apparent as soon as one observes that the “men” of both verses are identified as the fathers of the “daughters” of the two verses and surely the “daughters” of the two verses are identical.

This difficulty can, however, be overcome in such a way that an interpretation of at least the same general tenor remains as a plausible possibility. It is necessary simply to regard אֱלֹהִים as generic in verse 2 as well as in verse 1 where it is certainly so. There would then be no specific reference to Cainite women. But the sin of the Sethite men, “the sons of God”, would on this modified approach still be their failure to show covenantal discrimination in their selection of marriage partners inasmuch as they made their choice out of the generality of women according to their own unrestricted pleasure. The emphasis would now fall on מִכָּל אִשָּׁר בָּחָרוּ

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the מן being partitive, *i.e.*, they selected mates out of the category “any that they chose”, or possibly explicative, *i.e.*, “even all that they chose”. Their choice would of course often be a Cainite woman, but even when they chanced to select a Sethite woman they only chanced to select a covenant woman and so did not act in conscious fidelity to the covenant but in careless independence of its holy requirements.

5 Even in the interpretation that possessed men were the instruments of demons (*cf.* note 3), it would not be the possessed humans but the demons who were the agents with primary responsibility and the chief objects of the divine displeasure, as one may judge from the encounters of our Lord with demoniacs as related in the Gospels. K. Rabast, recognizing the difficulty, would salvage the angel interpretation by the implausible suggestion that verses 1 and 2a describe a sin of angels, but verse 2b (assuming an abrupt change of subject) describes a corresponding sin of men. It would then be the punishment of the latter only which it is mentioned in verse 3. *Cf.* his *Die Genesis*, Berlin, 1951, pp. 130ff.

6 See Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; *cf.* Ps 29:1; 89:7.

7 *Cf.* the *bn ilm* of the Ugaritic texts, the *bn ilm* of the Azitawadd inscription, and the *bn אלם* of the Incantation of Arslan Tash.

8 Although Rabast (*idem*) suggests what he deems a possible solution, he declares after his survey of the standard interpretations that the passage remains an unsolved enigma.

9 *Cf.* Gen 24:3, 4; 26:34, 35; 27:46; 28:1, 2, 6–8; 34.

But a yet more serious problem is posed for any variety of the prevalent orthodox view by verse 4 if the Nephilim-Gibborim there referred to are the offspring of the marriages of “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men”. For it is not at all clear why the offspring of religiously mixed marriages should be Nephilim-Gibborim, however these be understood within the range of feasible interpretation. Now it is unwarranted to suppose as some have that our passage was designed to serve primarily as an aetiological story accounting for the origin of the Nephilim. But on the other hand, difficult though the verse is, we must agree with the judgment expressed by Dillmann: “That the Nephilim were the fruits of those marriages is certainly the meaning, and is also clearly evident from אֲשֶׁר יָבְאוּ וְגִי.”¹⁰ For if the author’s intention had been to say nothing more than that the Nephilim-Gibborim were contemporary with the marriages mentioned, he would have simply referred to those marriages in language similar to or even identical with that in verse 2. But his reference to the conjugal act and to childbearing finds justification only if he is describing the origin of the Nephilim-Gibborim.¹¹ Unless the difficulty which follows from this conclusion can be overcome, the religiously mixed marriage interpretation of the passage ought to be definitely abandoned.¹²

The traditional ecclesiastical view has also been criticized for interpreting “the sons of God” in a spiritual sense, *i.e.*,

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godly men. For one thing, a specific part of the genus is thus set in contrast to the genus itself, *i.e.*, godly men over against men. Other examples of that sort of thing can, however, be cited.¹³ There is also the question of whether a reference to spiritual sonship would not be anachronistic in Genesis 6. But it cannot be demonstrated that the concept of man as a spiritual son of God was unknown in the antediluvian period. Moreover, the terminology in Gen 6:2 need not reflect the thought or language of any earlier stage in revelation than the time when this inspired interpretation of the antediluvian history was produced in its Pentateuchal form, and the idea of spiritual sonship is found elsewhere in the Pentateuch.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the use of the designation “sons of God” for members of the covenant community would be isolated in the context of the Book of Genesis and would moreover be so remarkable as to demand a more plausible explanation for its appearance there than can be readily discovered. One is constrained to seek for some other interpretation of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים.

II. Divine Kingship

Is not the key to the identity of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים provided by the sacral kings who are so much in the center of interest in current studies of ancient Near Eastern life and culture? From the several great kingdoms which formed the setting of Old Testament history the evidence has been amassed, showing that kings were often regarded as in one sense or another divine and that they were indeed called sons of the various

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¹⁰ *Genesis*, I (1897), p. 241.

¹¹ It is not necessary to the above interpretation but אֲשֶׁר יָבְאוּ וְגִי בְּאֶרֶץ וְגִי may be translated: “The Nephilim arose [rather than “were”] in the earth in those days...when, etc.” For such a rendering in sentences of similar construction, *cf.*, e.g., Gen 7:6, 10; 15:17.

¹² *Cf.* Rabast, *idem*.

¹³ *Cf.*, e.g., Gen 14:16; Ps 73:5; Isa 43:4; Jer 32:20. “The explanation lies in the circumstance that in such cases the whole is thought of as having only the generic characteristics and nothing more, whereas to the part a certain distinction is attributed which raises it above the genus, to which nevertheless logically it belongs” (G. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids, 1954, p. 60).

¹⁴ *Cf.* Deut 14:1; 32:5, 6. On Exod 4:22 see below.

gods.¹⁵ An especially interesting example comes from the Ugaritic epics where king *Krt* is called *krt bn il*.¹⁶

From the titulary of this pagan ideology of divine kingship the term בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים was appropriated in Gen 6:1–4 as a designation for the antediluvian kings. It is accordingly to be translated, “the sons of the gods”.¹⁷ By this simple literary stroke the author at once caught the spirit of ancient paganism and suggested darkly the satanic shapes that formed the background of the human revolt against the King of kings. For these “sons of the gods” were of all the seed of the serpent most like unto their father. One brief title thus serves to epitomize the climactic developments in the history of man’s covenant breaking during those generations when the judgment of God was impending by which the world that then was perished. It has been a merit of some who have thought that they found in this passage a preternatural intrusion into earthly history, a sort of pseudo-messianic embodiment of demonic spirits in human flesh, that they have sensed more

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fully than the advocates of the traditional exegesis, the titanic, one might almost say the eschatological, character of this ancient crisis.

Still interpreting the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים as kings, it is also possible to regard that designation not as a direct appropriation from the pagan titulary but as a genuinely theistic expression honoring these potentates in their office as “the sons of God”.¹⁸ The kings’ own self-designation as the son of this or that god will still have supplied the inspiration for our author’s use of בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, but as it stands in Genesis 6 the expression will be an adaptation, reinterpreting the kingly dignity for what it is in truth. “For they are God’s ministers”, Paul could say even in the days of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים who ruled from Rome (Rom 13:6).

Support for the interpretation of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים as kings is found in the use of similar titles for theocratic rulers in Israel. In the Book of the Covenant those who administer justice as the representatives of God are called אֱלֹהִים.¹⁹ Particularly important is the evidence of Psalm 82. There the Israelite magistrates, because of their God-like dignity and authority, and in spite even of their malfeasance (vss. 2ff) which brings upon them a divine warning of their mortality (vs. 7), are called אֱלֹהִים (vss. 1, 6) and in synonymous parallelism

15 For the evidence see such standard treatments as I. Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, Uppsala, 1943; H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1948; J. de Fraine, *L’Aspect religieux de la royauté Israélite*, Rome, 1954; A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, Cardiff, 1955; *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, ed. S. H. Hooke, Oxford, 1958; and *La Regalità Sacra—The Sacral Kingship* (Studies in the History of Religions IV), Leiden, 1959.

16 Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook*, 125:20. In this passage, which describes the mourning over the sick king, there is voiced the question raised by the prospect of the death of a divine being. “How can it be said, ‘Krt is a son of El, the offspring of Ltpn and Qds?’ Or do gods die, the offspring of Ltpn not live?” (lines 20–23).

17 There is no more theological difficulty in this than there is in the *ad hominem* objectification of the gods of the nations which is common in the Old Testament. Another biblical instance of such usage is probably found in Ps 138:1. “Before the gods [אֱלֹהִים] will I sing praise unto thee.” The context indicates that these [אֱלֹהִים] are the Gentile rulers; see verse 4 and compare Ps 119:46. The addition of בְּנֵי in Genesis 6 does not alter the sense radically, if at all. It could be a case of בן used to denote an individual of a particular class. Cf. the parallelism of אֱלֹהִים and בְּנֵי עֲלִירִין in Ps 82:6. Or the use of בן in Genesis 6 might be to reflect the claim of the heathen kings to divine paternity rather than their claim to divinity as such. In either case, the addition of בְּנֵי in Genesis 6 would also achieve a better verbal balance and a more complete conceptual contrast with the בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם “the daughters of men”.

18 Cf. Rom 13:7.

19 See Exod 21:6; 22:8, 9, 28 (Heb 7, 8, 27). Particularly significant is the parallelism in 22:28 between אֱלֹהִים and נִשְׂאֵה בָעָם, “the ruler of thy people”. (Cf. Acts 23:5.) This contradicts the suggestion that אֱלֹהִים in these passages denotes sacred images such as were used in court ordeals elsewhere; cf. C. H. Gordon, “אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LIV (1935), pp. 139–144. The same perspective is found in the Deuteronomic stipulations (19:17) where to stand for judgment “before the Lord” is explained by the appositional “before the priests and the judges”.

with that in verse 6, בְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן “sons of the Most High”.²⁰ Similarly, the scion of David is heir to the divine promise: “I will be his father and he shall be my son”.²¹

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And that covenant is fulfilled uniquely in him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, the messianic Son of God.²²

On the basis of such biblical usage the view anciently arose among the Jews that the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים of Genesis 6 were men of the aristocracy, princes and nobles, in contrast to the socially inferior “daughters of men”. This interpretation came to expression, for example, in the Aramaic Targums²³ and in the Greek translation of Symmachus²⁴ and it has been followed by many Jewish authorities down to the present.²⁵ Always lightly dismissed in critical surveys of the long debate over the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4, this Jewish view was indeed deficient as a total assessment of the Genesis 6 crisis. In particular, it failed to recognize the precise nature of the transgression of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים. Nevertheless, it alone of all the views was on the right track, only wanting the necessary substantiation and a correct orientation. That the clue to a similar but more precise and comprehensive solution of the ancient mystery of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים has now been made available by the studies in divine kingship would have been more readily recognized had not the mythical view of Gen 6:1–4 become in the meantime so unquestioned a tenet of critical Old Testament scholarship.

III. Dynasty of Tyrants

It is the genealogical nature of the treatment of the antediluvian history that accounts for the focusing of attention on the marriages of the royal בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים. The precise character of these marriages and especially of the sin involved in them can best be seen if Gen 6:1–4 is viewed in relation to the preceding context. The beginnings of the genealogical history of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים are found in the genealogy of Cain (4:16–24).

Significantly, at the very outset of Cain’s genealogy the

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origin of city organization is noted (Gen 4:17). It was precisely in the urban political unit that the stage was set for the emergence of kingship.²⁶ What, therefore, begins as the genealogy of Cain becomes in the course of its development the dynasty of Cain.

In Cain’s dedication of his city to the name of his heir there was foreshadowed the lust for a name that was increasingly to mark these city rulers until, when the city-states began to be theocratically conceived, they esteemed themselves veritable sons of the gods, and so “men of name” (Gen 6:4) indeed. Outstanding representative of the Cainite dynasty was Lamech. Concerning his court life it is recorded that he practiced bigamy (Gen 4:19) and of his royal enforcement of law it is witnessed out of his own mouth that his policy was one of tyranny, a tyranny that reckoned itself through the power of the sword of Tubal-Cain more competent for vengeance than God himself (Gen 4:23, 24).

With this portrait of the kingship of Cainite Lamech the dynastic genealogy of Cain breaks off so that the genealogy of Seth may be given (Gen 4:25–5:32). But then Gen 6:1–

²⁰ Cf. John 10:34, 35.

²¹ 2 Sam 7:14. Cf. Exod 4:22f, where God’s identification of Israel as “my son” seems to signify Israel’s royal status as heir of the kingdom of God. That is suggested by the contrast drawn between Israel, God’s firstborn son, and Pharaoh’s firstborn, who was of divine birth according to Egyptian king ideology and so one of “the sons of the gods”.

²² Cf. Ps 2:6, 7; 45:6; 110:1.

²³ The Targum of Onkelos renders בני רבביא.

²⁴ οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δυναστεύοντες.

²⁵ Cf., e.g., *The Soncino Chumash*, ed. A. Cohen, *in loc.*

²⁶ For the conjunction of the origins of kingship and cities in the Sumero-Babylonian sources see below.

4 resumes the thread of the history where it was dropped at Gen 4:24. Structurally, the accounts of Lamech (Gen 4:19–24) and of the בני־הַעֲלֵהִים (Gen 6:1ff) are much alike. In each case there are the taking of wives, the bearing of children, and the dynastic exploits. The one passage closes with the boast of Lamech concerning his judgment of those who offend him; the other issues in the Lord’s announcement of the judgment he purposes to visit on the earth which has become offensive to him. Gen 6:1ff simply summarizes and concludes the course of dynastic development which had already been presented in the individual histories of the several rulers, indicating how the evil potential of Cainite kingship, betrayed even in its earliest beginnings, was given such full vent in its final stages as to produce a state of tyranny and corruption intolerable to the God of heaven.

Accordingly, the sinfulness of the marriages described in Gen 6:1, 2 was not that they were mixed—whether the

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mixture be regarded as a mixture of two worlds (as on the angel view) or of two religious communities (as on the Sethite view) or of two social classes (as on the old Jewish view).

²⁷ The sin was that of Cainite Lamech, the sin of polygamy, particularly as it came to expression in the harem, characteristic institution of the ancient oriental despot’s court. ²⁸ In this transgression the בני־הַעֲלֵהִים flagrantly violated the sacred trust of their office as guardians of the general ordinances of God for human conduct. ²⁹

The princes born into these royal houses of the בני־הַעֲלֵהִים were the Nephilim-Gibborim (vs. 4), the mighty tyrants who Lamech-like esteemed their might to be their right. So as man abounded on the face of the earth (vs. 1) God saw that the wickedness of man abounded in the earth (vs. 5). By reason of the polygamy and tyranny practiced by the dynasty of the בני־הַעֲלֵהִים in the name of divine-royal prerogative and justice, the earth became corrupt before God and filled with violence (vss. 5–7, 11–13) and so hastened to destruction.

The validity of this interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 as the culmination of the antediluvian kings’ outrage against God may be tested by a comparison of the biblical narrative with the Sumero-Babylonian flood tradition. Such a comparison will also be found to have relevance for the question of whether this passage is an integral part of the history leading to the flood or whether, as popular critical opinion has it, it was originally a postdiluvian tradition. ³⁰

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The flood story as narrated by Utnapishtim to Gilgamesh (in Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic) begins with a reference to the flood hero’s city of Shurippak, of which it is affirmed

²⁷ There was, of course, nothing inherently improper in a mixed marriage of the type involved on the old Jewish view.

²⁸ Cf. Kraeling’s comment on verse 2b: “A polygamous situation is implied in these words” (*op. cit.*, p. 197). Cf. Rabast, *op. cit.*, p. 132. Translate מְכָל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ, “even all that they chose”, the מֵן being explicative; cf. Gen 7:22; 9:10; Lev 11:32. Verse 1a, “when man began to abound on the earth”, is a more apt introduction to verse 2 if the sin there described is polygamy than if it is some sort of mixed marriage.

²⁹ The description of their self-indulgence in defiance of the divine appointment (*cf.* Gen 2:21–24) recalls that of beguiled Eve (*cf.* Gen 3:6 and 6:2).

³⁰ Kraeling, who grants that from its original inclusion in what he analyzes as the source J¹ Gen 6:1–4 was an episode preparatory to the flood, states that in this judgment he finds himself “running counter to the almost unanimous opinion of Old Testament scholarship” (*op. cit.*, p. 195). The majority, following Wellhausen and Budde, has regarded Gen 6:1–4 as an aetiological legend purporting to account for the Nephilim of Num 13:33; and they have, therefore, concluded that originally it was a story dealing with postdiluvian times, since if antediluvian the Nephilim would have been wiped out in the deluge. (The ingenuity of some Jewish exegetes would overcome such a problem by the assumption that the Nephilim strain was preserved through the deluge in the persons of Noah’s daughters-in-law. Cf. *The Soncino Chumash*, *in loc.*)

that it was old “and the gods were in its midst”.³¹ But no explanation is given of what led the great gods to send the flood. Something on this subject is, however, found in the Old Babylonian flood epic commonly called after the hero, The Atrahasis Epic. The first fragment, containing part of the introduction to the flood, begins: “The land became wide, the peop[le became nu]merous, the land *bellowed* like wild oxen. The god was disturbed by their uproar. [Enlil] heard their clamor (and) said to the great gods: ‘Oppressive has become the clamor of mankind. By their uproar they prevent sleep’.”³² Alexander Heidel’s observation is correct that the manner in which this epic begins with a reference to the population increase is “a point in favor of treating Gen 6:1–4 not as a separate fragment but as the introduction to the story of the deluge, regardless of whether the biblical account is dependent on the Babylonian or whether both have a common origin”.³³ A further point of similarity to Gen 6:1–4 in the Atrahasis Epic is that a period of grace is given to man, during which men are visited with a series of monitory plagues.³⁴

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A valuable contribution to our knowledge of the principal themes, particularly the introductory themes, of the ancient flood traditions is made by the Sumerian Deluge account, found on a fragmentary tablet at Nippur. The preserved portion of the first column deals with the creation. Then after a break the second column relates that kingship was lowered from heaven and that five cities were founded and apportioned to particular gods.³⁵ When the text continues on the third column after another lacuna, the subject is the flood itself.

Further light is shed on the contents of the important second column by the closely related antediluvian preamble of the Sumerian King List.³⁶ That list begins, “When kingship was lowered from heaven”, and it goes on to state that kingship was successively at five cities, the same as those mentioned in the Sumerian Deluge text. The kings who ruled at each of these royal centers are named and the phenomenal lengths of their reigns given. Thus, for example: “(In) Bad-tibira, En-men-lu-Anna ruled 43, 200 years; En-men-gal-Anna ruled 28, 800 years; the god Dumu-zi, a shepherd, ruled 36, 000 years. Three kings (thus) ruled it for 108, 000 years.”³⁷ This section of the king list concludes: “These are five cities, eight kings ruled them for 241,000 years. (Then) the Flood swept over (the earth).”³⁸

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31 Line 13. On Shurippak as the last center of kingship and cult before the flood see below.

32 Column 1, lines 2–8. Translation of E. A. Speiser in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ed. J. B. Pritchard), Princeton, 1950, p. 104.

33 *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, Chicago, 1949, p. 226, n. 2.

34 Cf. Gen 6:3; 1 Pet 3:19, 20. The reference to the one hundred and twenty years in Gen 6:3 is, of course, one of the clearest marks of the passage as a prelude to the flood judgment, if the verse is recognized as original and it is interpreted as setting a temporal limit to the divine forbearance with men.

35 The cities are Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, and Shurippak.

36 See Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, Chicago, 1939, pp. 58–61.

37 Translation that of A. Leo Oppenheim in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 265.

38 *Idem*. In this connection, the conclusion of Kraeling may be noted that the Gibborim of Gen 6:4 “are a Western adaptation of the Babylonian tradition of the antediluvian kings” (*op. cit.*, p. 200). We do not agree with the way he reconstructs the literary relationship and do not accept the exegesis of his supporting argument, *i.e.*, that Gen 6:3 is the Yahwistic contradiction of the immensely long lives attributed to the kings by the polytheistic source. But Kraeling is correct in detecting an historical parallel in the two passages. Incidentally, the longevity theme is in the Bible explicitly associated with the Sethite line and we suspect that this genealogy too is, or at least becomes in its later stages, dynastic. The Sumerian Noah, Ziusudra, appears as a king in the Sumerian Deluge account. As kings the Sethites would also be בני־האלהים in the sense of “sons of God”. They could not, however, be identified with the dynasty of corruption and oppression described in Gen 6:1ff.

It appears then that the theme of antediluvian kingship centering in cities under the hegemony of various gods constituted the main introductory motif in the Sumero-Babylonian flood traditions. This kingship was of heavenly origin and significantly it numbered a god among its representatives.³⁹ Now it is evident that our interpretation of the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* of Gen 6:1–4 as sacral kings in a dynasty reaching back into the Cainite genealogy of Genesis 4 provides a theme which parallels this major motif in the Sumero-Babylonian antediluvian traditions. For all who are familiar with the way in which Genesis repeatedly is found to share the formal thematic interests of other ancient literature the parallelism just noted should be persuasive evidence that our interpretation is in its basic orientation sound. Or, to state the corollary, the fact that an historical theme so prominently treated in the Sumero-Babylonian epic tradition finds no counterpart in Genesis 3–6 according to the standard interpretations is itself good reason to suspect that these interpretations have been missing the point.⁴⁰ And in addition to corroborating the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 in terms of divine kingship, the thematic parallelism which is thus discovered between the biblical and extra-biblical antediluvian accounts offers, in contradiction to the subjective surmisings of the documentary theorists, convincing confirmation of the integrity of the passage within the antediluvian context.

IV. Kingship from Adam to Abraham

It may be useful to observe the kingship theme of Gen 6:1–4 in the perspective of its broader development in the early chapters of Genesis.

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To the God-like one among his creatures the Creator assigned the dignity of kingly dominion over all other creatures and commissioned him with the royal mandate to subjugate and cultivate the earth (Genesis 1 and 2). This kingdom program was to be executed through the basic institutions of marriage and labor. Through these the earth was to be filled with a race of gifted rulers who would exercise their stewardship of talent and dominion in the perfecting of the consecration of all sub-human creation to the interests of man, as the royal representative and priest of God: This program was reinstituted after the Fall with the intimation given that it would be realized as a soteric accomplishment of the Lord (Genesis 3).

At the flood, which terminated the first great historical epoch, the royal mandate may be seen fulfilled after a figure. For within the ark there was found the paradisaical kingdom of God renewed in miniature, with regal Noah, scion of Seth's faithful dynasty, together with his princely heirs established in dominion over the representatives of all the sub-human creation and triumphant over the natural elements. And from the ark the loyal covenant servant emerged as the redeemed king into the new world, cult-centered and rainbow-crowned (Genesis 5, 7, and 8).

Over against this realization of the royal ideal by means of the soteric intervention of God, there is set the failure of the royal enterprise as conducted by the dynasty of Cain. Within this succession of the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* the marriage ordinance was desecrated and the extension of dominion was sought by violence rather than through godly labor. But though they exalted themselves against the heavenly King, their breath was in their nostrils and

39 The god Dumu-zi (*i.e.*, Tammuz) is listed; *cf.* column I, line 15. Dumu-zi reappears as one of the postdiluvian kings, along with other divine or partly divine beings like “the god Lugal-banda” and “the divine Gilgamesh” (*cf.* column III, lines 12–20).

40 Attempts have been made to equate many of the names in the antediluvian genealogies of the Bible with those in the extra-biblical king lists. But even if this effort is in a measure successful, it comes short of finding an explicit reference to kingship in these biblical passages, much less of finding in kingship the dominant theme preparatory to the flood. In particular, the climactic introductory episode of the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* is still left standing unrelated to the kingship motif.

their regal aspirations to divinity perished in the same waters of divine vengeance which bore the righteous king into his new world (Genesis 4, 6, and 7).

The history of kingship from the flood to Abraham as described in Genesis 9–12 repeats the antediluvian pattern found in Genesis 3–8. Man was again commissioned to the kingdom program and enthroned as lord over all the lower orders (Gen 9:1ff). Even the special office of king was specifically provided for in that the human community was invested with the power of the sword for the punishment of

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all who shed man’s blood, whether the man-slayer be “any kind of beast” or a fellow man, and so a “brother” of the slain (Gen 9:5, 6; cf. 4:15, 24).⁴¹

Once more too the mystery of iniquity developed in this new aeon towards a climactic episode of defiance against the God of heaven. The author begins to trace this theme in Gen 9:20ff, as he had in Gen 4:3ff, with the record of a transgression by a son of the covenant patriarch which issued in an echo of the primeval curse (Gen 9:25; cf. 4:11; 3:14). He continues, as he had in Gen 4:16ff, with a survey, within a genealogical framework, of the cultural-political advance of mankind outside the covenant community (Gen 10:1ff). It presently appears that kingship was again “lowered from heaven” in the postdiluvian period. In the midst of the Genesis 10 survey there looms the figure of Nimrod in whom the climactic Babel episode is anticipated and possibly even individualized (vs. 8), so providing a parallel to the relationship which obtains between the figure of Lamech (Gen 4:19ff) and the irreligious dynasty of Gen 6:1–4.

The account of Nimrod is of particular interest for the interpretation of Gen 6:4 because he is described as one belonging to the category of the Gibborim (Gen 10:8). That Nimrod was a king is clear from Gen 10:10 (which locates his dominion in the land of Shinar, cf. Gen 11:2), and this supports the interpretation of the Gibborim of Gen 6:4 and their fathers, the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, as a royal dynasty. If one bears in mind the divine ordinance of Gen 9:5, 6, by which the civil

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power was authorized to destroy manslaying beasts as well as human murderers, it will be seen that Gen 10:9 need not be judged an interpolation which breaks the thematic unity of verses 8 and 10, simply because it specifies that Nimrod was גִּבּוֹר־צִיד. Nimrod’s hunting exploits were not mere sport but a function properly pertaining to his royal office and quite necessary in his historical situation.

The ungodly dynasty of human kingship challenged the ordinances of the Creator until at Babel it was ripe for judgment. Gen 11:1ff parallels Gen 6:1ff. The spirit of the two is the same; the kingdom builders of Shinar, like the ancient Gibborim, were bent on a name (11:4; cf. 6:4). And of course each episode leads directly to the divine reckoning and intervention.

But while there was this rebellious development of human kingship that led on to the judgment of God, the era of Genesis 9–12 like that of Genesis 3–8 moved towards an

41 “His brother” (אָהוּי) in Gen 9:5 does not denote the kinsman avenger as though responsibility were here being laid upon him to overtake the murderer. Each instance of אָדָם מֵן in this verse must have the same force and, as the case of “every kind of beast” clearly indicates, its force is to hold the slayer liable to punishment. The אָהוּי declares that every murder is like the first murder a case of fratricide. The הָאָדָם שֶׁכָּרַח of verse 6 then summarizes all the manslayers of verse 5, both men and beasts as this verse goes on to assign to man in his kingly capacity the responsibility for putting all manslayers to death. In view of our thesis that the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים are kings it is tempting to interpret verse 6b (כִּי בָצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתֵיהֶם) as an appeal to the God-like nature of man as the justification for his executing the divine judgment. But it seems at least as plausible to refer this description to the victim and so find in it a measure of the enormity of the crime of murder.

outstanding realization of a kingship of man which was after God’s own heart and towards a significant portrayal of the kingdom of God among men. The earlier age led to Noah and the kingdom in the ark; the following age led to Abraham and the kingdom in the promises.⁴² The fall of the dynasty of the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* was the foil to Noah’s triumph. So in contrast to the debacle at Babel there is set the establishment of God’s covenant with Abraham as the crowning fruit of the Noahic era, the fruit in which there was in turn the seed of the future of God’s kingdom and of a righteous kingship on earth.

In opposition to the world center which rose from the accursed ground of Shinar, destined to desolation, there appears in the covenant promises given to Abraham the city of God, which descends from heaven and endures forever. In

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those promises Abraham possessed a kingdom which was the fulfillment, first in a pre-messianic symbol and afterwards in messianic reality, of the kingdom mandate given to Adam in the Garden of God. Fill the earth and subdue it, was the divine commission given to Adam; thy descendants shall be as the stars of the heaven and they shall conquer and inherit a new paradise land of milk and honey, was the corresponding divine promise given to Abraham.

It was in that kingdom of God that true human kingship was to prosper and be perfected. It would produce a kingship not bent on its own name but consecrated to the glory of God. For the covenant by which it was administered was a vassal covenant—a declaration of the lordship of the God who gave it and an establishment of the dynasty of the faithful who received it as servant-kings, vicegerents of the Almighty.

In the unfolding of that covenant the ideal of true kingship was ever more clearly delineated. The true theocratic king must not like the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* “multiply wives to himself” (Deut 17:17). He must not like the Gibborim fill the earth with violence by committing injustice against the weak but rather judge the people with righteousness, break in pieces the oppressor, and redeem the soul of the needy from deceit and violence (cf. Ps 72).

None, however, among the *אֱלֹהִים* of ancient Israel actually reigned in perfect righteousness. Some so far fell short that the conditions of Genesis 6 returned in Israel (cf. Ps 82:1–5) and these “sons of the Most High” had to be warned in words which seem to allude to the verdict and judgment against the prediluvian dynasty of the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים*: “Ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (Ps 82:7; cf. Gen 6:3ff).

But it is the confession of the church that the king-ideal has found embodiment in the seed of David whom David called “my Lord” (Ps 110:1; cf. Matt 22:43ff; Mark 12:36f; Luke 20:42ff; Acts 2:33ff); to whom God declared, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Ps 2:7); who was a priest-king after the order of Melchizedek, “without father, without mother”;⁴³ the righteous Servant who was the King of kings

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⁴² Noah was introduced in a genealogy of the covenant generations which was recorded between the accounts of Lamech and the *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים* (Gen 4:25–5:32) and was resumed after the latter (Gen 6:9, 10). Similarly, the genealogy that introduces Abraham intervenes between the genealogy in which Nimrod appears and the Babel episode (Gen 10:21–31) and is resumed after the latter (Gen 11:10ff), although there is minor structural variation at this point.

⁴³ Cf. Heb 7:3a. This disclaimer of human parentage was made by ancient kings like Gudea and Assurbanipal. For a discussion see, e.g., Frankfort, *op. cit.*, p. 300; Engnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 78. The formula was apparently a negative way of claiming divine appointment for the dynasty. It was associated with a positive claim to divine “parentage”. Melchizedek is thus portrayed by the author of Hebrews as one appointed to his kingship by his God, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, and so as one of the *בְּנֵי עֶלְיֹן* (cf. Ps 82:6; Gen 14:18ff), a godly counterpart to the Lamech-Nimrod type of *בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים*. Thus, too, was he “made like unto the Son of God” (Heb 7:3).

and the Gibbor of Gibborim, for he was עֶלְגַּבְּרִיר, the mighty One who is God (Isa 9:6); who lusted not after a name but humbled himself in obedience unto the death of the cross, and therefore has been given a name which is above every name, that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9–11).

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6th – “Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4”

by Leroy Binney

Leroy Binney, “Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1-4,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 13, No. 1 (Winter 1970): 43–52. Outline below by Maness.

Maness Note: Binney jettisons the angelic view of “Sons of God,” ably outlines the classical ecclesiastical position of the “Sons of God” being of the Sethite line, while in the end favoring the “Sons of God” being Nephilim and therefore mighty rulers or kings.

Sons of God
Rulers

Introduction to Three Views

Genesis 6:1–4 connects with the preceding context by the reference to multiplication of the human race, which sums up the nine occurrences in chapter 5 of the phrase “and begat sons and daughters.” It connects with the following context by providing an explanation or an illustration of the wickedness on the earth which was the reason for judgment by an exterminating flood. The exact meaning of the details, however, is widely disputed, and the passage has suffered many interpretations. It is always worthwhile to seek to judge between various interpretations by means of an exegetical study.

Verse 1: “And it came to pass when mankind began to become too numerous upon the face of the land and daughters were born to them” (*wayehi kēhēl hā-ādām lārōb .al penē hā- ādāmā ūbānôt yulledū lāhem*). Since population increases geometrically rather than arithmetically, the rate of multiplication accelerates. Men were no longer a small community, but had experienced the first minor population explosion. We will now see a picture of the corruption of them all, apart from Noah and his family.

Verse 2a: “that sons of god saw daughters of mankind that they were fair (*wayyir-ū benē hā-ēlōhīm .et benôt hā-ādām kī tōbôt hēnnāh*) *ha’adam* in verse 1 obviously refers to mankind as a whole, not to any particular division of man.¹ Is there a good reason for assuming a more particular use of this word in the term *bānôt hā-ādām*, “daughters of men”? It is possible for a universal term to be restricted by the context. For example, note the restricted use of the word “people” in Genesis 14:16, “and also brought back his brother lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”² Those who take the term *benē hā-ēlōhīm*, “sons of god,” to mean the chosen portion of mankind, [1] the Sethites, usually consider “daughters of men” by contrast to be the unbelieving Cainite women. Those who take the “sons of God” to be [2] nobles or princes may take the “daughters of men” by contrast to be commoners. Those who take the “sons of god” to be [3] angels take the “daughters of men” to be women in general. However, Kline has pointed out that even though the “sons of god” be a division of mankind, whether Sethites or princes, the term “daughters of men” could still refer to women in general; for the sin is not marriage between two classes of mankind, but marriage of “any

that they choose.”³ Since a possible contrast with the “sons of god” as a separate division of mankind would not *require* the limitation of the term “daughters of men” and since the universal usage of *hā-ādām* in verse 1 forms a presumption in favor of the same usage in verse 2, it is best to take the term “daughters of men” to mean women in general, not Cainite women or women

1 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, tran. James Martin (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), I, 127.

2 William Henry Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), p. 58, cites this passage and Genesis 3:5; Leviticus 8:15; Judges 16:17; 19:30; 20:1–3; I Samuel 13:6–7; Psalm 73:5 and Jeremiah 32:20.

3 Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, XXIV (May, 1962), 2:189–190. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) p. 247, gives a contrary view.

commoners. We would be justified in restricting the term only if the context required it, but it does not.

The greatest debate is over the meaning of the term *benê hā.ēlōhîm*, “sons of god.” We will examine the merits of each possible interpretation of this term in turn.

A. “Sons of God” as Angels

The view that the “sons of god” means angels has been held by many. The pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch, compiled during the last two centuries B.C. says that 200 angels in heaven saw the beautiful daughters of men, lusted after them, and took them for wives with the result that they became pregnant and bore great giants.⁴ Two lines of support are adduced. One is the assertion that the books of II Peter and Jude accept the story in the Book of Enoch, and the other is that the usage of the term “sons of god” in the Bible favors this meaning.

1. For Angels

II Peter 2:4 says, “But if God spared not the angels when they sinned.” “Jude 6–7 says, “The angels that kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner *with these* given themselves over to fornication....” Delitzsch says that this supports Enoch’s sinning angel interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4, “for *toutois*, [“with these”] ver. 7, refers back to angels.”⁵ Keil however notes concerning the passage in Jude, “There is nothing here about marriages with the daughters of men or the begetting of children, even if we refer the word *toutois* [“with these”] ... in verse 7 to the angels mentioned in verse 6, “because Jude speaks of fornication while Genesis 6 speaks of actual marriage,⁶ as we shall see below. Actually, *toutois*, “with these,” can better be referred back to Sodom and Gomorrah, or to the inhabitants in them.⁷ Concerning the passage in Peter, Keil says, “Peter is merely speaking of sinning angels in general whom God did not spare, and not of any particular sin on the part of a small number of angels.⁸ Besides, the Bible does not speak of more than one defection by angels, and that took place before the fall of man, since Satan tempted man in Eden.

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The second line of support for the interpretation that “sons of god” means angels is the usage of that term in the Old Testament. Most agree that it occurs three times in that sense in Job (1:6; 2:1; & 38:7). A similar phrase, *benê ʿēlîm*, sons of god or sons of the mighty, in Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 is usually interpreted to refer to angels also. Daniel 3:25, bar *ʿēlālîn*, is also sometimes cited. “Angels” is a possible meaning for the term “sons of god.” Other possible meanings will be noted later.

2. Against Angels

What are the chief objections to interpreting “sons of god” as angels? One is that “the whole conception of sexual life, as connected with God or angels, is absolutely foreign to Hebrew thought.”⁹ Green notes that there is no Hebrew word for goddess, that the idea of deities having sexual function is considered an unacceptable heathen notion in the Bible, and

4 Murray, p. 243, quotes *The Book of Enoch*, tran. R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1912), VI, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7; VII, 1, 2, 3; of. X, 1–15; XV, 1–12; LXIV, 1, 2.

5 Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, tran. Sophia Taylor (2 vols.; 5th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), I, 225.

6 Keil and Delitzsch, I, 132.

7 *Ibid.*, I, 132–133.

8 *Ibid.*, I, 132.

9 Green, p. 54.

that there is no analogy in the Bible for the idea of intermarriage of angels and men.¹⁰ Keil notes that there is no other reference to angels in the context and that Christ specifically stated that angels cannot marry (Matt. 22:30, Mark 12:25, *cf.* Luke 20:34–35).¹¹ Delitzsch’s suggestion that it was angels working through demoniacs¹² does not alleviate the difficulty, for then “sons of god” is used of demoniacs, which has no parallel in Scripture. The lack of any analogy in Scripture for the idea of angels having sexual functions or being able to cross-breed with the human race makes that interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 untenable.

Perhaps an even greater objection to the view that “sons of god” means angels is that the judgment fell upon men alone, and it is the “sons of god” who were the initiators of the wrong.¹³ Since this passage gives the background for the near extermination of the human race by the Flood, and since the “sons of god” were the chief initiators of the wrong, they must have been a part of the human race. In summary, the interpretation that the “sons of god” were angels must be considered untenable because it is not supported by II Peter or Jude, it is contrary to the Biblical view of the nature of angels, and the punishment for their crime fell upon men rather than upon angels.

B. “Sons of God” as the Sethite Lineage

The most common view of orthodox interpreters has been that the “sons of god” were the men of the godly Sethite lineage. Usually this view considers the “daughters of men” to be women of the ungodly Cainite lineage, but in accord with our exegesis above, the “daughters of men” could mean women in general. Then the sin would be that the Sethite men were marrying without distinction to whether the women were believers or not, or that they were marrying polygamously (see the discussion on the exact nature of the sin below).

1. For the Sethite Lineage

a. All Participants Are Human Beings

There are several factors strongly favoring the interpretation that the “sons of god” means men of the godly line. One is that it understands

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all participants in the sinful marriages to be human beings, which is more consistent with the immediate context and the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

b. Sethite Line a Distinct Entity

Another factor is that the Sethite line appears as a distinct entity in the context of this portion of Genesis (as angels do not). It is in the context of the Sethite line that it says, “began men to call upon the name of Jehovah” (Gen. 4:25–26), and Enoch who “walked with God” (Gen. 5:24) was in the line of Seth. Then, “Quite naturally the title ‘sons of God’ can be taken as another specification of the discrimination already established.”¹⁴

c. Consistent with Biblical Concept of Sons of God a “Chosen People”

The interpretation that the “sons of god” are the godly line is also consistent with the Biblical concept that Israel is the son of God and the chosen people are His children. This concept occurs in Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5, 6, 18, 19; Hosea 1:10; Isaiah 1:2; 11:1; 43:6; 45:11; Jeremiah 31:20; and Psalm 73:15.¹⁵ This argument is weakened however by the fact that the exact term “sons of god” does not appear in the above passages. Thus, they

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Keil and Delitzsch, I, 130–131.

¹² Delitzsch, I, 226.

¹³ Murray, p. 245.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Green, p. 55.

cannot be considered to definitively establish the usage of that term. Delitzsch considers this usage of the concept in the Old Testament to apply only to the theocratic nation of Israel,¹⁶ and it would be very difficult to prove him wrong.

d. Warning Against Marrying Unbelievers

Perhaps the strongest factor favoring this interpretation is that the warning against marrying unbelievers is one theme of the Pentateuch, including the book of Genesis. In Genesis we see the concern that Isaac not marry one of the Canaanites (24:3–4), the concern that Jacob not marry one of the daughters of Heth in Canaan (27:46 and 28:1–3), the distress caused by Esau’s marriage to Canaanitesses (26:34–35 and 28:6–8), and the problem of Dinah and the Shechemites (chap. 34)?¹⁷ In this context, Genesis 6:1–4 furthers the practical aim of preventing indiscriminate marriage without regard to spiritual status.

e. Moral Decline of Seth Lineage

Also, if the “sons of god” are the Sethite men, we see a progression of corruption leading to the Flood: the source of corruption in chap. 3, the degeneracy of the line of Cain in chap. 4, and finally the moral decay of the line of Seth in Gen. 6:1–4.¹⁸ This solves a question not answered by other views, namely, how it was that only Noah’s family, of all the line of Seth, was saved.

In summary, the view that the “sons of god” were men of the godly Sethite line is tenable because that group is already discriminated in the context, the term is consistent with the Pentateuchal concept of spiritual sonship, it furthers the theme of Genesis which warns against religiously indiscriminate marriages, and it fits the purpose of the context

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by demonstrating the progressive corruption of the human race. Let us now examine a third and perhaps equally tenable view.

C. “Sons of God” as Kings or Nobles

A third view is that the term “sons of god” refers to kings or nobles.

1. Some Jewish Tradition “Sons of God” as Rulers

This was the [lot of] ancient Jewish interpretation, e.g., the Aramaic Targums and the Greek translation of Symmachus.¹⁹ Biblical usage may be adduced for this view also. The magistrates or administrators of justice are called *‘ēlōhīm* in Exodus 21:6; 22:8, 9, 28. The same term is used of them in Psalm 82:1, and the expression *benê ‘elyōn*, “sons of the most high,” is used of the magistrates in verse 6 of the psalm, despite the fact that they are accused of wrongdoing in verses 2–5 and 7.²⁰ Thus, it was not uncommon to use divine epithets to refer to magistrates, and so “sons of god” in Genesis 6:1–4 could refer to magistrates or rulers.

2. Some Extra-Biblical Sumero-Babylonian Parallels “Sons of God” as Rulers

Another factor in favor of the interpretation of “sons of god” as rulers is that this would show a thematic parallelism with the same motif in the Sumero-Babylonian antediluvian traditions. “For all who are familiar with the way in which Genesis is repeatedly found to share the formal thematic interests of other ancient literature, the parallelism noted should be persuasive evidence that our interpretation is in its basic orientation sound,”²¹ says Kline of his view that the “sons of god” are dynastic rulers in the Cainite line. On this view, Genesis 6:1–4 is seen to pick up the

¹⁶ Delitzsch, I, 224.

¹⁷ Green, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁹ Kline, p. 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

themes of city-building, tyranny, and polygamy found in the description of Cain’s line in chapter 4. The purpose of the Sethite genealogy then would be to show how there came to be the righteous family of Noah in the midst of such corruption. In this case, the term “sons of god” would still refer to a group already discriminated in the context of Genesis, the Cainite tyrants as represented by Lamech in Genesis 4:19–24, the nearest previous passage with the same emotional tone as this one.

3. Widespread Pagan & Middle East Use of “Sons of God” as Rulers

A third factor in favor of taking the “sons of god” as rulers is the widespread pagan custom of referring to kings as sons of various gods. This pagan usage could have been applied to the antediluvian kings to suggest their Satanic background.²² Or the term could have been applied simply because it was so widespread that everyone would immediately understand it to refer to rulers. In Egypt the king was called the son of *Re* (the sun god).²³ The Sumero-Akkadian king was considered the offspring of the goddess and one of the gods, and this identification with the deity goes back to the earliest times according to Engell.²⁴ In one inscription he is referred to as “the king, the son of his god.”²⁵ The Hittite

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king was called “son of the weather-god,”²⁶ and the title of his mother was *Tawannaanas* (=mother-of-the-god).²⁷ In the northwest Semitic area the king was directly called the son of the god and the god was called the father of the king.²⁸ The Ras Shamra (Ugaritic) *Krt* text refers to the god as the king’s father and to king *Krt* as *Krt bn il*, the son of *il* or the son of god.²⁹ Thus, on the basis of Semitic usage, the term *benê hā-ēlōhîm*, the “sons of god” or the “sons of the gods,” very likely refers to dynastic rulers in Genesis 6.

In summary, the view that the “sons of god” are rulers, probably Cainite tyrants, is tenable because that group is already indicated in chapter 4, the term is consistent with Biblical usage and the usage of the entire ancient Middle East, and it fits the context by carrying forward and culminating the theme of human corruption as the basis for the Flood.

D. Jettisoning Angels, “Sons of God” Are “Sethites” or “Rulers”

Considering the view that the “sons of god” means angels to be untenable in Genesis 6, how do we choose between the view that the term means the line of Seth and the view that it means rulers? Considering how each view fits the themes of Genesis, dovetails with previous material in the context, adds to the progression of thought, and lays the basis for the Flood, there seems to be no appreciable difference in their merit. In terms of Biblical usage, the view that the “sons of god” are rulers seems to be slightly more likely. In terms of broader evidence of linguistic usage, and thematic parallels, the evidence also favors the view that the offenders in Genesis 6 were rulers.

E. Violating Marriage Prescriptions in Polygamy Sin of Sethites or Rulers

Verse 2b: “and they took to them wives of all which they chose” (*wayyiqeḥû lāh em nāsāim mikkōl .āšer bāḥārû lāqah .iššāh*). The phrase *laqah ssah* (to take a wife) “is a standing expression throughout the whole of the Old Testament for the marriage relation established by God at the

²² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²³ Ivan Engell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 4, 6, 12, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 18, 23–24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42, n. 3, citing H. G. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, PI. 5.1.38. Col. III.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58, citing Forrer, *Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves*, 4:2, p. 709.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136, 153–154, and 192, n. 16.

creation, and is never applied to *pornea*, or the simple act of physical connection.”³⁰ Thus the sin was not a matter of profligate fornication, but of some kind of marriages that were a violation of God’s law.

The nature of the violation is expressed in the next phrase—*mikkōl āšer bāḥārû*. Delitzsch considers the *min in mikkōl* to be generalizing and partitive, so that it means “whichever they chose.”³¹ This interpretation would favor the view that the sin was choosing wives without regard to their spiritual status (on the view that “sons of god” means Sethites) or without regard to their royal status (on the view that “sons of god” means rulers), but it would not rule out the idea that the sin

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included polygamy. Kline considers the *min* to be explicative, so that it means “even all that they chose.”³² In this case the sin was polygamy. The “sons of god,” whether Sethites or rulers, were taking in marriage as many women as they wished. As Kraeling says, “A polygamous situation is implied in these words.”³³ The reference to the fact of mankind becoming numerous in verse 1 fits well with the idea that the sin is polygamy.³⁴ The sin being polygamy also fits well with the view that the “sons of god” were dynastic rulers, for we are prepared for this by the polygamy of Lamech in chapter 4, and it was usually kings who led the way in this type of sin in the ancient world. Viewing the sin as polygamy also removes the tension of trying to see the “daughters of men” as one division of mankind as over against the “sons of god,” a tension which is probably imported into the text since the text itself offers no clear clue to the resolution of such a tension. This view also fits a theme of Genesis intended to discourage polygamy. The idea of monogamy was presented in Genesis 2:24, then there is this passage, then there are later accounts which dramatically portray the disadvantages of polygamy. Therefore in view of the above observations, grammatically and exegetically the best interpretation is that the sin was not intermarriage between two groups—whether two worlds (angels and men), two religious communities (Sethite and Cainite), or two social classes (royal and common)—but that the sin was polygamy.

Verse 3: “and Yahweh said, My spirit will not rule in mankind forever because he is flesh but let his days be one-hundred and twenty years (*wayyōmer YHWH lô·-yādōn rūḥî bešaggam hū· bās-āār wehāyû yāmāyw mē āh we· es-ārim sanāh*). Delitzsch takes *yā-dōn* to be jussive of *dōn* (= *dîn*), to rule, to act,³⁵ and he takes *rūḥî*, my spirit, to be the breath of life by which man is animated as in Genesis 2:7. It is called “my spirit” because of its divine origin and kinship with divine nature or because it was a divine gift. When it is removed, man dies.”³⁶

bešaggam is the preposition *be* plus *sē* (= *āšer*) plus *garn* (also). It means “because,” as *ba-āšer* means “because” in Genesis 39:9, 23.³⁷

bās-āār, flesh, may already have an ethical connotation here, thinking of the increased tendency to decay which the presence of sin has brought to the corporeal nature of man.³⁸

³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, p. 131.

³¹ Delitzsch, I, 222. He cites Genesis 7:22; 9:10; 17:12; Deuteronomy 15:17; Leviticus 4:2; and Song of Solomon 3:0.

³² Kline, p. 196, n. 28. He cites Genesis 7:22; 9:10; Leviticus 11:32. Of the citations by both Kline and Delitzsch, in my opinion all but Leviticus 4:2 and possibly Song of Solomon 3:6 favor the polygamy interpretation presented by Kline.

³³ *Ibid.*, citing Kraeling, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, VI (October, 1947), 4:197. He also cites K. Robast, *Die Genesis* (Berlin, 1951) p. 32, in favor of this view.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Delitzsch, I, 227. He cites Zechariah 3:7 and the Qere of Job 19:29. He rejects the explanation *habitet*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 227, 229. See also Keil and Delitzsch, I, 135.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 228–229.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 229. See also Keil and Delitzsch, I, 136.

“Let his days be 120 years” could refer to a more limited life-span or to the time until the Flood. It probably refers to the latter since the sons of Noah and all the patriarchs lived longer.³⁹

F. Nephilim “Result” or “Before” Sons of Gods Went Into Daughters

Verse 4: “The nephilim were in the earth in those days and also after that the sons of god went in to daughters of mankind and they bore to them those the mighty ones which were of old, men of renown” (*hannepplîm hāyû bā.āreṣ bayyârnîm hāhēm wegarn .ahēr-kēn āšer yābō.û benê hā.ēlōhîm .el-benôt hā.ādām wayyāledû lāhem hēm māh haggibbōrîm .āšer mē.ōlām .anešê haššem*). There is a difference of opinion over whether the nephilim were contemporary with the marriages or were the product of the marriages. Should we: translate *hāyû* “were” or “arose, came to be”? Both Kline and Delitzsch favor “arose.”⁴⁰ There are numerous occurrences of this verb which might be cited for either reading. Kline favors “arose” because of the reference to going into the daughters of men and to their bearing children, with the idea that that the offspring were the nephilim. “This reference to the conjugal act and to child-bearing finds justification only if he is describing the origin of the Nephilim-Gibborim.”⁴¹ The meaning would then be that the mighty, renowned nephilim arose out of the polygamous marriages of the dynastic rulers. The sentence reads fairly well on this interpretation, its position following verses 1–3 favors the idea that it is a result, and if the nephilim were popularly considered wicked it contributes to the thought expressed in verse 5. A disadvantage is that it leaves only 120 years for the nephilim to have gained such renown. It also fails to explain the presence of the phrase “and also after that” in verse 4.

Keil favors the translation “were.” He says, “The words, as they stand, represent the nephilim, who were on the earth in those days, as existing before the sons of God began to, marry the daughters of men, and clearly distinguishes them from the fruits of those marriages. *hāyû* can no more be rendered ‘they became, or arose,’ in this connection, than *hāyâh* in chapter 1:2. *wayyihyû* would have been the proper word.”⁴² Green maintains the same view,⁴³ as does Murray who says, “The natural connection is that they were already in the earth when these marriages took place.... There is no suggestion of genetic connection between the nephilim and the marriages concerned.”⁴⁴ This view takes the more natural connection of the words, and it accounts for the phrase, “and also after that.” Also verses 1–3 form a kind of a unit describing a sin and pronouncing coming judgment upon it. The statement above the nephilim in verse 4 adds information, filling out the picture of the general conditions of that time. On this view, the purpose of mentioning the nephilim

is to give a better picture of the conditions of wickedness at the time these polygamous marriages took place.

Either the meaning “arose” or “were” could be consistent with our exegesis of verses 1–3. It is very difficult to choose between the two possibilities, but because of the phrase “and also after that,” it is probably better to accept the interpretation that the nephilim were in the earth throughout this period of corruption, not just during the last 120 years.

The word “nephilim” occurs only here and in Numbers 13:33. In Numbers it is used of the Anakim, who were of great stature. The LXX translates “giants,” and other old Greek versions

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 230.

⁴⁰ Kline, p. 190, n. 11; Delitzsch, I, 232. They cite Genesis 7:6, 10 and 15:17.

⁴¹ Kline, p. 190.

⁴² Keil and Delitzsch, I, 137.

⁴³ Green, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Murray, p. 247.

translate “assailants” or “violent men.”⁴⁵ Various ideas have been tied to the root *NPL*, *to fall*, e.g. to fall from heaven (fallen angels), to fall upon others (tyrants or invaders),⁴⁶ to be aborted (unnaturally begotten by angels).⁴⁷ The etymology offers little help. This context and the reference in Numbers would suggest merely that the Nephilim were men known for their prowess.

However, it is possible that the nephilim are identified with the “sons of god” by the word *āšer*. Verse 4 would then read, “The nephilim were in the earth in those days and after that as well, which sons of god went into the daughters of men so that they bore to them; those were, the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.” On this view, the mention of the nephilim is an explanation of the situation which led to the polygamous marriages and an identification of the “sons of god.” This fits the passage best.

The word *hērnāh*, “those, or the same,” could refer back to nephilim, or it could refer to the children of the marriages, or it could refer to the immediately preceding pronoun *hem*, which refers to the “sons of god.” Whichever refers back to are described as *haggibbōrīm*, mighty ones. The same word is used of Nimrod in Genesis 10:8, who became a king according to Genesis 10:10–12. Hence it would seem most likely that the *hērnāh* (“those”) who are described as *haggibbōrīm* are the “sons of god,” the dynastic rulers, referred to in the immediately preceding pronoun. In this case, the “sons of god” are identified as nephilim, as gibbōrīm (mighty kings), as men of the primitive age, and as the men of renown. Verse 4 is best seen as an identification of those who, were especially prominent in the wickedness leading to the corruption and hence the judgment of the earth.

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⁴⁵ Green, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, I, 137.

⁴⁷ Delitzsch, I, 232.