

The Sons of God
in
Genesis 6:1–4

THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN
IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

THE SONS OF GOD
IN
GENESIS 6:1–4

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Jaap Doedens

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To Timea, Miriam, Eszter, Aletta, and Bence

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SHORT TITLES — PERIODICALS — SERIALS

AB	Anchor Bible
AHW	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981
AJBI	<i>Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute</i>
AMTh	Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
APOT	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. H. Charles. 2 vols. Oxford, 1913
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AthR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCAT	Biblischer Commentar über das Alte Testament (Keil & Delitzsch)
BCNH	Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi
BCOT	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibB	Biblische Beiträge
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibLeb	<i>Bibel und Leben</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series

BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago, 1956–
CAT	= <i>KTU</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series latina. Turnhout, 1953–
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CNT-3	Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament: Derde serie
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr. 3 vols. Leiden, 2003
COT	Commentaar op het Oude Testament
COTB	Commentarenreeks op het Oude Testament: De Brug
CR	Corpus Reformatorum
CSCD	Cambridge Studies to Christian Doctrine
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CTH	<i>Catalogue des Textes Hittites</i> . Emmanuel Laroche. Paris, 1971
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTU	<i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995 (= <i>KTU</i> / <i>CAT</i>)
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993–
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. 2d edition. Leiden, 1999
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert

DMBI	<i>Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters</i> . Edited by Donald K. McKim. Downers Grove, Ill., 2007
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta orientis antiqui
DNTB	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter. Downers Grove, Ill., 2000
DNWSI	<i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> . Edited by J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. 2 vols. Leiden, 1995
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
DSSSE	<i>The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition</i> . 2 vols. Vol. 1 (1Q1–4Q273), Vol. 2 (4Q274–11Q31). Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. Leiden, 2000
DULAT	<i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> . Edited by Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín. 2 vols. Leiden, 2004
EncJud	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . 2d ed. 22 vols. Edited by Fred Skolnik. Jerusalem, 2007
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain
EvT	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GAG	<i>Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik</i> . W. von Soden. 2d ed. Rome, 1969
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GHAT	Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
GK	<i>Gesenius’ hebräische Grammatik</i> , edited by E. Kautzsch, Leipzig, 1902
GKC	<i>Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford, 1910
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
GTT	<i>Gereformeerde theologisch tijdschrift</i>
HAL	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> . Fascicles 1–5, 1967–1995 (KBL3). ET: <i>HALOT</i>

<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stam, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden, 2001
HCHC	Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
<i>HeBAI</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HSAT	Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979–1988
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
Jastrow	Jastrow, Marcus. <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i> . London, 1903
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JESOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series

JSRC	Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTI	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2 vols. Vol. 1: texts, Vol. 2: commentary. Wiesbaden, 1962–1964
KBANT	Kommentare und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
KBL	Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i> . 2d ed. Leiden, 1958
K&D	Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch. <i>Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . Translated by J. Martin et al. 25 vols. Edinburgh, 1857–1878. Reprint, 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1988
KEH	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer Kommentar)
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
KNT	Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament (Bottenburg commentaar)
KTU	= <i>KTU² The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU: second, enlarged edition)</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995. 2d, enlarged ed. of KTU, <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976 (= CTU / CAT)
KV	Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift.
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
LQ	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
LXX	Septuaginta. Edited by Alfred Ralphs. Stuttgart, 1983
MGWJ	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
MT	Masoretic Text according to the <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
NA27	Nestle-Aland. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 27th ed. Stuttgart, 1994
NAC	New American Commentary
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel

NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 5 vols. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Nashville, 2006–2009
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . 5 vols. Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. Carlisle, 1996
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
<i>NPNF</i> ¹	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1
<i>NPNF</i> ²	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 2
<i>NTT</i>	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
<i>Numen</i>	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983, 1985
OTS	Oudtestamentische studiën
PA	Palestina Antiqua
PaThSt	Paderborner theologische Studien
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886
PL	Patrologia latina [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
POT	De prediking van het Oude Testament
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
PS	Patrologia syriaca. Edited by René Graffin e.a. Paris, 1894–1907
RA	Revealing Antiquity
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>Ref</i>	<i>De Reformatie</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>

<i>RGG</i> ¹	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by F. M. Schiele and L. Zscharnat. 5 vols. 1st ed. Tübingen, 1909–1913
<i>RGG</i> ⁴	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by H. D. Betz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, and E. Jüngel. 8 vols. 4th ed. Tübingen, 1998–2007
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLABib	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLTCS	Society of Biblical Literature Text-Critical Studies
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBOT	Studiebijbel Oude Testament
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris, 1943–
<i>SCJ</i>	<i>Stone-Campbell Journal</i>
SECA	Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha
<i>SEL</i>	<i>Studi epigrafici e linguistici</i>
<i>SF</i>	<i>Sárospataki Füzetek</i>
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Thought
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPSM	Studia Pohl: series major
SRT	Studies in Reformed Theology
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SubBi	Subsidia biblica
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TEG	Traditio Exegetica Graeca

<i>THAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. 2 vols. 2d ed. München, 1975
<i>TheolRef</i>	<i>Theologia Reformata</i>
<i>ThWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Stuttgart, 1970–
<i>ThWQ</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zu den Qumrantexten</i> . Edited by Heinz-Josef Fabry and Ulrich Dahmen. 2 vols. Stuttgart, 2011–2013
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TSHLRS</i>	Texts and Studies in the Hebrew Language and Related Subjects
<i>TT</i>	Tekst en toelichting
<i>TWNT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Stuttgart, 1932–1979
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>UCOP</i>	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>UNP</i>	<i>Ugaritic Narrative Poetry</i> . Edited by Simon B. Parker. SBLWAW 9. Atlanta, 1995
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>VWGTh</i>	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
<i>WA</i>	<i>Martin Luthers Werke</i> . Weimarer Ausgabe
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WBT</i>	Wiener Beiträge zur Theologie
<i>WSB</i>	Wuppertaler Studienbibel
<i>WThJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZBK</i>	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
<i>ZRGG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i>

BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Amos	Amos	Josh	Joshua
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles	Judg	Judges
Dan	Daniel	1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings
Deut	Deuteronomy	Lam	Lamentations
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Lev	Leviticus
Exod	Exodus	Mal	Malachi
Ezek	Ezekiel	Mic	Micah
Gen	Genesis	Neh	Nehemiah
Hab	Habakkuk	Num	Numbers
Hag	Haggai	Prov	Proverbs
Hos	Hosea	Ps	Psalms
Isa	Isaiah	1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
Jer	Jeremiah	Song	Song of Songs
Job	Job	Zech	Zechariah
Joel	Joel	Zeph	Zephaniah
Jonah	Jonah		

BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Acts	Acts	Jude	Jude
Col	Colossians	Luke	Luke
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians	Mark	Mark
Eph	Ephesians	Matt	Matthew
Gal	Galatians	1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
Heb	Hebrews	Phil	Philippians
Jas	James	Rev	Revelation
John	John	1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
1 John	1 John		

APOCRYPHA AND SEPTUAGINT

Bar	Baruch
3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees
Sir	Sirach / Ecclesiasticus
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

PSEUDEPIGRAPHIA

<i>Acts Thom.</i>	<i>Acts of Thomas</i>
<i>Apoc. Adam</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Adam</i>
<i>Apos. Con.</i>	<i>Apostolic Constitutions and Canons</i>
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
<i>Cav. Tr.</i>	<i>Cave of Treasures (Spelunca Thesaurorum)</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>2 En.</i>	<i>2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>Jan. Jam.</i>	<i>Jannes and Jambres</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>L.A.B.</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)</i>
<i>Liv. Pro.</i>	<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>
<i>SpTh.</i>	<i>Spelunca Thesaurorum (Cave of Treasures)</i>
<i>T.12 Patr.</i>	<i>Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs</i>
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
<i>T. Reu.</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>
<i>T. Adam</i>	<i>Testament of Adam</i>
<i>T. Sol.</i>	<i>Testament of Solomon</i>

TARGUMIC TEXTS

<i>Sam. Tg.</i>	<i>Samaritan Targum</i>
<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Targum Neofiti</i>
<i>Tg. Onq.</i>	<i>Targum Onqelos</i>
<i>Tg.Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>

DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND RELATED TEXTS

CD-A	The Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i> (<i>Damascus Document^a</i>) (= 4Q266–273)
Mas1k	<i>Masada Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice</i>
1QapGen ^{ar}	<i>Genesis Apocryphon</i> (1Q <i>Genesis Apocryphon</i>)
1QH ^a	1QH <i>odayot^a</i>
1QM	1Q <i>War Scroll</i>
1QS	1Q <i>Rule of the Community</i>
1Q23	1Q <i>EnGiants^a ar</i>
1Q33	1Q <i>War Scroll</i> (1QM)
1Q35	1QH <i>odayot^b</i>
1Q36	1QH <i>Hymnic Composition</i>
4Q127	4Q <i>Paraphrase of Exodus</i>
4Q158	4Q <i>Reworked Pentateuch</i>
4Q165	4Q <i>Isaiah Pesher^e</i>
4Q175	4Q <i>Testimonia</i>
4Q180	4Q <i>Ages of Creation A</i>
4Q181	4Q <i>Ages of Creation B</i>
4Q185	4Q <i>Sapiential Work</i>
4Q201	4Q <i>Enoch^a ar</i>
4Q202	4Q <i>Enoch^b ar</i>
4Q203	4Q <i>Book of Giants^a ar</i>
4Q204	4Q <i>Enoch^c ar</i>
4Q206	4Q <i>Enoch^e ar</i>
4Q216	4Q <i>Jubilees^a</i>
4Q252	4Q <i>Commentary on Genesis A</i>
4Q266	4Q <i>Damascus Document^a</i>
4Q286	4Q <i>Blessings^a</i> (4QBer ^a)
4Q287	4Q <i>Blessings^b</i> (4QBer ^b)
4Q368	4Q <i>Apocryphon Pentateuch A</i>
4Q370	4Q <i>Exhortation Based on the Flood</i>
4Q381	4Q <i>Non-Canonical Psalms B</i>
4Q387a	4QP <i>Pseudo-Moses^b</i>
4Q400	4Q <i>Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^a</i>
4Q401	4Q <i>Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^b</i>

4Q402	<i>4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^c</i>
4Q403	<i>4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^d</i>
4Q404	<i>4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^e</i>
4Q405	<i>4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^f</i>
4Q417	<i>4QInstruction^c</i>
4Q417b	<i>4QSelf-Glorification Hymn^a</i>
4Q418	<i>4QInstruction^d</i>
4Q427	<i>4QHodayot^a</i>
4Q431	<i>4QHodayot^e</i>
4Q542	<i>4QTestament of Qahat ar</i>
4Q443	<i>4QPersonal Prayer</i>
4Q491	<i>4QWar Scroll^a</i>
4Q491c	<i>4QSelf-Glorification Hymn^b</i>
4Q496	<i>4QWar Scroll^f</i>
4Q502	<i>4QRitual of Marriage (4QpapRitMar)</i>
4Q503	<i>4QDaily Prayers^a</i>
4Q511	<i>4QSongs of the Sage^b</i>
4Q530	<i>4QBook of Giants^b ar</i>
4Q531	<i>4QBook of Giants^c ar</i>
4Q532	<i>4QBook of Giants^d ar</i>
5Q13	<i>5QRule</i>
11Q17	<i>11QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice</i>

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis (That God Is Unchangeable)</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De Gigantibus (On Giants)</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De Plantatione (On Planting)</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De Posteritate Caini (On the Posterity of Cain)</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum (Questions and Answers on Exodus)</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin (Questions and Answers on Genesis)</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De Somniis (On Dreams)</i>

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

A.J. *Antiquitates judaicae (Jewish Antiquities)*

MISHNAH, TALMUD, AND OTHER RABBINICAL LITERATURE

<i>‘Abod. Zar.</i>	<i>‘Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Ḥul.</i>	<i>Ḥullin</i>
<i>Mo‘ed</i>	<i>Mo‘ed</i>
<i>Nez.</i>	<i>Neziqin</i>
<i>Nid.</i>	<i>Niddah</i>
<i>Pirqe R. El.</i>	<i>Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Yoma</i>	<i>Yoma</i>

APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Barn. *Epistle of Barnabas*

PATRISTIC LITERATURE

Alexander of Lycopolis, <i>De plac. Manich.</i>	<i>De placitis Manichaeorum (On the Teachings of the Manicheans)</i>
Ambrosius, <i>Apol. David</i>	<i>Apologia prophetae David (Apology of the Prophet David)</i>
Ambrosius, <i>De Noe et arca</i>	<i>De Noe et arca (On Noah and the Ark)</i>
Ambrosius, <i>De virg.</i>	<i>De virginibus (On Virgins)</i>
Ambrosius, <i>Expos. in ps. CXVIII</i>	<i>Expositio in psalmum CXVIII (Exposition on Psalm 118)</i>
Anastasius Sinaita, <i>Quaest.</i>	<i>Quaestiones (Questions)</i>
Aphrahat, <i>De Sabb.</i>	<i>De Sabbato (On Sabbath)</i>

Aphrahat, <i>De virg. et sanct.</i>	<i>De virginitate et sanctitate (On Virginity and Sanctity)</i>
Athanasius, <i>Interpret. ex V.T.</i>	<i>Interpretationes ex V.T. (Interpretations from the O.T.)</i>
Athenagoras, <i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legatio pro christianis (Embassy for the Christians)</i>
Augustine, <i>De civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei (The City of God)</i>
Augustine, <i>Qaest. in hept.</i>	<i>Quaestiones in heptateuchum (Questions on the Heptateuch)</i>
Bardaisan of Edessa, <i>Lib. Leg. Reg.</i>	<i>Liber Legum Regionum (Book of the Laws of the Countries)</i>
Basil of Seleucia, <i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes (Sermons)</i>
Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus (The Instructor)</i>
Clement of Alexandria, <i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata (Miscellanies)</i>
Commodian, <i>Instr. adv. gent. deos</i>	<i>Instructiones adversus gentium deos (Instructions against the Gods of the Heathen)</i>
Cyprian, <i>De hab. virg.</i>	<i>De habitu virginum (On the Dress of Virgins)</i>
Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Adv. Jul.</i>	<i>Adversus Julianum (Against Julian)</i>
Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Glaph.</i>	<i>Glaphyra (Elegant Comments)</i>
Cyril of Jerusalem, <i>Cat. sec.</i>	<i>Catechesis secunda (Second Catechetical Lecture)</i>
Didymus the Blind, <i>Comm. in Gen.</i>	<i>Commentarium in Genesim (Commentary on Genesis)</i>
Diodore of Tarsus, <i>Fragm. in Gen.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Genesin (Fragments on Genesis)</i>
Ephrem the Syrian, <i>Comm. in Gen.</i>	<i>Commentarium in Genesim (Commentary on Genesis)</i>
Epiphanius, <i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion, also known as Adversus haereses</i>
Eusebius, <i>Praep. evang.</i>	<i>Praeparatio evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)</i>
Eusebius of Emesa, <i>Fragm.</i>	<i>Fragmenta exegetica in Pentateuchum</i>
Eutychius of Alexandria, <i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales (Annals)</i>

Gennadius, <i>Fragm. in Gen.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Genesim (Fragments on Genesis)</i>
Hilary of Poitiers, <i>Tract. super Ps.</i>	<i>Tractatus super Psalmos (Tractate on the Psalms)</i>
Ireanaeus, <i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)</i>
Jerome, <i>Hebr. quaest. in Gen.</i>	<i>Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim (Hebrew Questions on Genesis)</i>
Jerome, <i>Tract. in Ps.</i>	<i>Tractatus in librum Psalmorum (Tractate on the Book of Psalms)</i>
John Cassian, <i>Coll.</i>	<i>Collationes (Conferences)</i>
John Chrysostom, <i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae (Homilies)</i>
John Chrysostom, <i>Syn.</i>	<i>Synopsis</i>
John Malalas, <i>Chron.</i>	<i>Chronographia (Chronology)</i>
John of Zonara, <i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales (Annals)</i>
Julius Africanus, <i>Chron.</i>	<i>Chronologia (Chronology)</i>
Justin, <i>Apol.sec.</i>	<i>Apologia secunda pro christianis (Second Apology)</i>
Justin, <i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogus cum Tryphone judaeo (Dialogue with Trypho)</i>
Lactantius, <i>Div. inst.</i>	<i>Divinae institutiones (Divine Institutions)</i>
Methodius, <i>De resurr.</i>	<i>De resurrectione (On the Resurrection)</i>
Origen, <i>Comm. in Ioan.</i>	<i>Commentariorum in evangelium secundum Ioannem (Commentary on the Gospel of John)</i>
Origen, <i>Contra Celsum</i>	<i>Contra Celsum (Against Celsus)</i>
Philastrius, <i>De haer.</i>	<i>De haeresibus (About Heresies)</i>
Photius, <i>Amphil.</i>	<i>Amphilochia (Disputes)</i>
Procopius of Gaza, <i>Comm. in Gen.</i>	<i>Commentarii in Genesim (Commentaries on Genesis)</i>
Pseudo-Clement, <i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homilia (Homilies)</i>
Pseudo-Clement, <i>Rec.</i>	<i>Recognitiones (Recognitions)</i>
Sulpicius Severus, <i>Hist. sacra</i>	<i>Historia sacra (Sacred History)</i>
Tertullian, <i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticum (Apology)</i>
Tertullian, <i>Adv. Marcion</i>	<i>Adversus Marcion (Against Marcion)</i>

Tertullian, <i>De cultu fem.</i>	<i>De cultu feminarum (On the Apparel of Women)</i>
Tertullian, <i>De idol.</i>	<i>De idolatria (On Idolatry)</i>
Tertullian, <i>De orat.</i>	<i>De oratione (On Prayer)</i>
Tertullian, <i>De virg. vel.</i>	<i>De virginibus velandis (On the Veiling of Virgins)</i>
Theodoret of Cyrus, <i>Quaest. in Gen.</i>	<i>Quaestiones in Genesin (Questions on Genesis)</i>

Ἰθάκη

Σὰ βγεῖς στὸν πηγαμὸ γιὰ τὴν Ἰθάκη,
νὰ εὔχῃσαι νὰ ἴναι μακρὺς ὁ δρόμος,
γεμάτος περιπέτειες, γεμάτος γνώσεις.
Τοὺς Λαιστρυγόνες καὶ τοὺς Κύκλωπας,
τὸν θυμόμενο Ποσειδῶνα μὴ φοβᾶσαι,
τέτοια στὸν δρόμο σου ποτέ σου δὲν θὰ βρεῖς,
ἂν μὲν ἡ σκέψις σου ὑψηλὴ, ἂν ἐκλεκτὴ
συγκίνησις τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ σῶμα σου ἀγγίζει.
Τοὺς Λαιστρυγόνες καὶ τοὺς Κύκλωπας,
τὸν ἄγριο Ποσειδῶνα δὲν θὰ συναντήσεις,
ἂν δὲν τοὺς κουβανεῖς μὲς στὴν ψυχὴ σου,
ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ σου δὲν τοὺς στήνει ἐμπρὸς σου.

Νὰ εὔχῃσαι νὰ ἴναι μακρὺς ὁ δρόμος.
Πολλὰ τὰ καλοκαιρινὰ πρωινὰ νὰ εἶναι
ποῦ μὲ τί εὐχαρίστηση, μὲ τί χαρὰ
θὰ μπαίνεις σὲ λιμένας πρωτοειδομένους.
Νὰ σταματήσεις σ' ἐμπορεῖα Φοινικικὰ,
καὶ τὲς καλὲς πραγμάτειες ν' ἀποκτήσεις,
σεντέφια καὶ κοράλλια, κεχριμπάρια κ' ἔβενους,
καὶ ἡδονικὰ μυρωδικὰ κάθε λογῆς,
ὅσο μπορεῖς πιὸ ἄφθονα ἡδονικὰ μυρωδικὰ.
Σὲ πόλεις Αἰγυπτιακὲς πολλὲς νὰ πᾶς,
νὰ μάθεις καὶ νὰ μάθεις ἀπ' τοὺς σπουδασμένους.

Πάντα στὸ νοῦ σου νὰ ἴχῃς τὴν Ἰθάκη.
Τὸ φθάσιμον ἐκεῖ εἶν' ὁ προορισμός σου.
Ἀλλὰ μὴ βιάζεις τὸ ταξίδι διόλου.
Καλλίτερα χρόνια πολλὰ νὰ διαρκέσει.
Καὶ γέρος πιά ν' ἀράξεις στὸ νησί,
πλούσιος μὲ ὅσα κέρδισες στὸν δρόμο,
μὴ προσδοκῶντας πλούτη νὰ σὲ δώσει ἡ Ἰθάκη.

Ἡ Ἰθάκη σ' ἔδωσε τ' ὠραῖο ταξίδι.
Χωρὶς αὐτὴν δὲν θὰ βγαίνες στὸν δρόμο.
Ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχει νὰ σὲ δώσει πιά.

Κι ἂν πτωχικὴ τὴν βρεῖς, ἡ Ἰθάκη δὲν σὲ
γέλασε.

Ἔτσι σοφὸς ποὺ ἔγινες, μὲ τόση πείρα,
ἥδη θὰ τὸ κατάλαβες οἱ Ἰθάκες τὶ σημαίνουν.

Κωνσταντῖνος Καβάφης

Ithaca

When you set sail for Ithaca,
wish for the road to be long,
full of adventures, full of knowledge.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
an angry Poseidon – do not fear.
You will never find such on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, and your spirit
and body are touched by fine emotion.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
a savage Poseidon you will not encounter,
if you do not carry them within your spirit,
if your spirit does not place them before you.

Wish for the road to be long.
Many the summer mornings to be when
with what pleasure, what joy
you will enter ports seen for the first time.
Stop at Phoenician markets,
and purchase the fine goods,
nacre and coral, amber and ebony,
and exquisite perfumes of all sorts,
the most delicate fragrances you can find.
To many Egyptian cities you must go,
to learn and learn from the cultivated.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your final destination.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better for it to last many years,
and when old to rest in the island,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to offer you wealth.

Ithaca has given you the beautiful journey.
Without her you would not have set out on the
road.
Nothing more does she have to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not
deceived you.
Wise as you have become, with so much
experience,
you must already have understood what
Ithacas mean.

Konstantinos Kavafis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Old Testament exegesis is like a journey which has a goal in itself, while at the same time the final destination has to be kept in sight. During this journey, one encounters many interesting persons, opinions and ideas. A journal of such a journey cannot replace the travel itself but is still able to convey images which were collected along the way. The present study consists of a journal of such a journey within the wide field of exegesis, that of Genesis 6:1–4. In Old Testament exegesis, this strange narrative about ‘sons of God’ and giants is probably one of the most difficult passages to explain. Even though a fresh look at this story perhaps does not lead to shockingly new insights, it may provide a model for how to handle texts which do not fit immediately into the idea one might have formed about the Old Testament. During such a journey ‘Cyclopes’ and ‘Lestrygonians’ may never be far away, but, more importantly, there are always friends and companions on the way who provide guidance for a longer or shorter time, or from whom one can ask the direction to take.

Exegesis is impossible without having competent teachers. With gratitude I remember the schooling in Old Testament subjects I received from the late Prof. H. M. Ohmann and from his successor, Prof. Gert Kwakkel, who already earlier taught me Hebrew and Aramaic. I owe gratitude to Prof. J. P. Lettinga for his teaching me Akkadian; it is with appreciation that I recall his lessons and his willingness to share his knowledge.

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Exegesis sometimes requires impulses which can activate the imagination. In the case of this study, it was the insightful remarks of Ad de Bruijne on the possible function of Genesis 6:1–4 as referring to the origin of idolatry in his article “Er

wordt verteld; er is geschied,” in ‘our’ 2002 published study *Woord op schrift*, which kindled afresh my interest in this Genesis narrative. In acknowledging his initial influence, I would like to express my gratitude to him for this.

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back on his and his wife Anthoinette's help and hospitality. I am grateful to my Canadian-Hungarian friend, Dávid Pándy-Szekeres, who corrected the English of my manuscript with a clear-cut feeling for style, and to his wife Anna for her hospitality during the long days while we were working on the text. Prof. István Győri, head of the New Testament Department at the Theological Academy of the Reformed Church College in Sárospatak, revived my interest for the Greek language of the apostles and of the church fathers. Travelling with him to Greece in 2008 on an itinerary based on the travels of the apostle Paul and studying Greek at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 2010 and in 2012 turned out to be an unforgettable experience. I thank him for his willingness to check my translations of Greek and Latin patristic quotations. I thank my colleagues and students in Sárospatak for their interest in the results of my study.

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The journey goes on and, hopefully, new adventures are in store. May sons and daughters of God have new paths to travel, high seas to sail, far havens where to rest and exquisite perfumes to appreciate in the Coming Age of a new creation.

Jaap Doedens

Sárospatak, August 2013

NOTE

Commentaries will be referred to by author's name followed by "comm.", the abbreviated title of the Bible book and the date of publication; full details are given in the bibliography. Other references and abbreviations are formatted according to Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).

1

Setting the Course:
Introduction

I propose ... that we set out like pilgrims on the way indicated by our book; that we employ whatever hermeneutical tools available that help us to follow its sense; that we pray for the illumination of the Spirit and for the humility to acknowledge our missteps; and that we consult other pilgrims that have gone before us as well as Christians in other parts of today's world. What we must not do is postpone setting out until we have resolved all interpretative questions.¹

1. SETTING THE COURSE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 Introduction

Among enigmatic texts in the Old Testament, Genesis 6:1–4 should probably be accorded the leading position. At first glance, the reader might expect the passage to be an essential junction in the progress of the Genesis narrative. Genesis 5 offers a description ending in Gen 5:32 about how mankind is gradually multiplying on earth. Thus, the chapter witnesses how human existence continues despite mortality, all expressed by the refrain-like phrase, “he begot sons and daughters, all his days were ... years, and he died.” Enoch’s case, however, differed in that he “walked with God, and was not any more, for God had taken him,” Gen 5:24. Noah, who is introduced at the end of Gen 5, will become the protagonist in Gen 6:8–9:29. He is presented from a perspective of hope, articulated in his very name as it was given in Gen 5:29: “Out of the ground which YHWH has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” In this was expressed the expectation that the curse on mankind announced in Gen 3:17–20 (where the same keywords occur as in Gen 5:29), could be soothed. The text, however, does not

¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation?” *JETS* 48 no. 1 (2005): 92.

elucidate in what way the expected consolation might be realised. As an immediate continuation, the story of the flood, beginning in Gen 6:5, would cause a rather brusque transition, unexpectedly etching the multiplication of man's overall wickedness. One would expect the passage in between to provide an explanation for this; it would seem that Gen 6:1–4 should offer a description of how mankind ended up setting itself in the wrong direction. However, the passage at issue is so strange² that it defies confident interpretation.³ The history of exegesis provides ample evidence that this has been the case for quite some time and not just exclusively for the modern reader. The passage even has some 'mythological' air about it,⁴ something which confused both ancient and modern interpreters.

Repeated reading of the passage only multiplies questions which arise. Who are meant to be בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, the 'sons of God'?⁵ And who are the 'daughters of men'? To whom does the text refer with the word גִּבּוֹרִים, generally translated as 'giants'? Are they the offspring issuing from the relationships between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men', or are they only the contemporaries of the children born from those unions? If they are only presented as contemporaries, for what reason are they mentioned at all? Who are the גִּבּוֹרִים, the 'mighty men' or 'heroes'? Are they identical with the גִּבּוֹרִים, or do they constitute a separate category? Why is YHWH introduced via his reacting to what is happening? Does this reaction consist of a sanction, and is the time-limit of hundred and twenty years a limitation of lifespan or a period of time for possible repentance until the coming of the flood?

It is to be further noted that the shortness of the passage and its consequent lack of redundancy – as well as the presence of the *hapax legomena* יָדוֹן and בְּשָׁנִים – makes Gen 6:1–4 difficult to explain. In short, "[i]n Genesis 6:1–4 difficulties emerge at every level, as it bristles with textual, philological, syntactical, and theological problems."⁶

The problem posing the most difficulty is the interpretation of the expression 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4. The exegesis of the other problems, already signalled, depends in part on this interpretation. Beginning from early explanations right up to modern exegetical research, interpreters have not settled on any unanimous

² Cf. Davidson, *comm. Gen* (CBC) 1973, 69; Gowan, *comm. Gen* (ITC) 1988, 83.

³ Cf. E. A. Speiser, *comm. Gen* (AB) 1964, 45.

⁴ Cf. A. van Selms, *comm. Gen I* (POT) 1967, 101.

⁵ For the convenience of the reader the Hebrew expression *bēnē-hā'ēlōhīm* and its cognates is rendered as 'sons of God'. This translation does not imply an interpretative choice, but is based on the convention in exegetical literature.

⁶ Rick Marrs, "The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4)," *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 218.

solution for the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in this passage. In fact, all mainstream variants of exegetical solutions that have arisen in the course of history continue to be found in recent exegetical literature. It is for this reason that the present study will focus on the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. Other elements of the passage may also fall into place during the process of this investigation.

1.1.2 Aim

Until recently, conservative exegesis has perhaps too uncritically accepted the exegetical consensus from the time of church fathers of the fourth century onwards, that being that the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4 are godfearing persons from the line of Seth, an exegesis also known as the Sethites-interpretation. This position has been challenged in several ways by Jewish and Christian exegesis of an earlier period as well as by newer exegetical research.

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, it will attempt to clarify the expression ‘sons of God’ by evaluating the arguments provided for a given interpretation. Second, it intends to interpret the whole passage of Gen 6:1–4 within its literary context, if possible. It furthermore is expected that this research will provide, as a major spin-off, an overview of the history of exegesis. Even if new data on the given passage is not expected⁷ to be uncovered in view of the intensive exegetical efforts of more than two millennia, the reconsideration of older and existing data may still lead to new results. It is hoped that by this approach it will be possible to chart a viable roadmap which will help clarify the meaning of Gen 6:1–4 within its literary context.

1.1.3 State of the Question

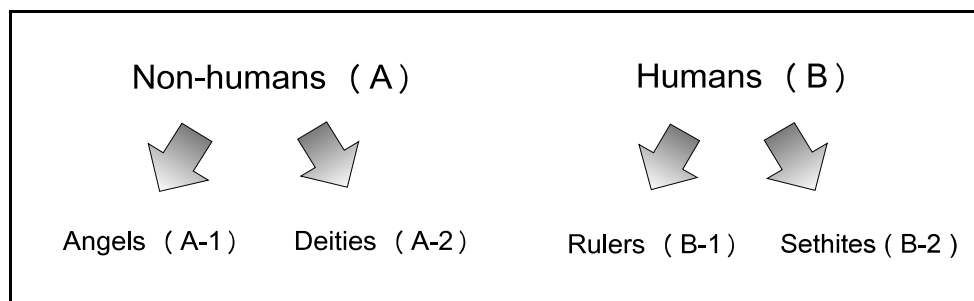
Throughout the history of exegesis, the main focus for interpretation has been the appropriate identification of בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, the ‘sons of God’. Two main solutions can be discerned in the literature.

The first mainstream solution of such exegesis identifies the ‘sons of God’ as non-human, that is to say, super-human beings. In the present study, this line of exegesis is referred to as ‘interpretation A’. This category then has two further

⁷ Cf. Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1979), 10.

branches. One branch holds that the ‘sons of God’ are angels (referred to as A–1). The other branch identifies the beings in question as gods, deities, or divine beings (referred to as A–2).

The second mainstream of interpretation regards the ‘sons of God’ to be human beings. This interpretation will be referred to as ‘interpretation B’. This second line of thought can be divided into two branches. One of these branches identifies the ‘sons of God’ as rulers, judges or generally mighty ones (referred to as B–1). The other branch considers the ‘sons of God’ to be offspring from Seth (Gen 5:6–32), also known as Sethites, implying that ‘sons of God’ means something like godfearing people, generally interpreted as a group in opposition to the offspring of Cain, that is to say, people rebelling against God (referred to as B–2). These four exegetical options can be illustrated schematically:



A–1: Angels-Interpretation

The earliest known exegetical solution identifies the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 as angels. This interpretation is apparently inferred from places in the Old Testament where the same expression, בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, or without the article בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, appears to refer to angels, as in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7. The identification of the ‘sons of God’ as angels is an interpretation found most often in early Jewish literature and in that of the Early Church.

B–1: Mighty Ones-Interpretation

The earliest example of a shift in exegesis, where now the ‘sons of God’ are identified as human beings, is found in the *Targumim* as well as in some of the pseudepigraphical writings. Philo also gives an interpretation in which ‘sons of God’ signifies ‘virtuous men’, whereas the ‘daughters of men’ is rendered as ‘wicked and

corrupted women'. Similar to this explanation is Symmachus' translation of the Old Testament where the 'sons of God' is rendered as the 'sons of the rulers'. In reviewing the writings of the synagogue, it appears that it is this interpretation which has been sanctioned as the authoritative exegesis therein. *Genesis Rabbah* 26:8 notes that a curse was pronounced on anyone who persisted in referring to them as 'sons of God', that is to say, on those who still promulgated the heretofore generally accepted 'angels-interpretation'.

B-2: Sethites-Interpretation

Within the interpretative category of the 'sons of God' as human beings there is found a variant, this being the so called Sethites-interpretation. According to this line of thought, the 'sons of God' are the offspring of Seth. Within the literature from the time of the church fathers, Julius Africanus is the first author known to have represented the view that the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1-4 might be regarded Sethites. At the same time, it is not likely that he is the author of this idea. The expression 'sons of God' becomes thus interpreted as an indication of a religious category, that is to say, that of godfearing people. The 'daughters of men' are, by consequence, considered to be the offspring of Cain.⁸ This exegesis and its associated explanation became the dominant one in the writings of the church fathers from the fourth century onwards. Despite this, traces of the older angels-interpretation can still be found to occur.

A-2: Divine Beings-Interpretation

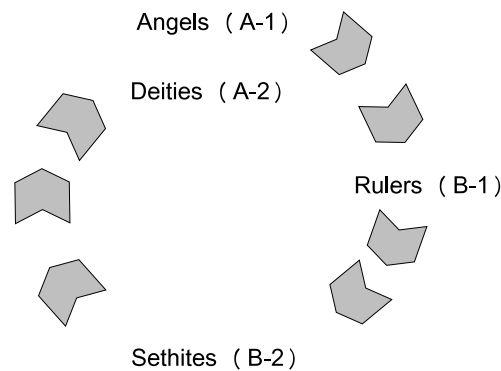
Newer research almost unanimously takes the expression 'sons of God' to refer to divine beings. This exegesis is based on lexical evidence from biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages. It is infrequent that the expression 'sons of X' expresses a genealogical relationship and more often indicates that individuals or objects belong to the class referred to by 'X'. Reading the expression 'sons of God' in this way results in interpreting the expression as referring to divine or heavenly beings. Because the gods of the ancient Near Eastern pantheon are also referred to as 'sons of the gods' and, being members of the so called 'divine council', some interpreters are convinced that Gen 6:1-4 draws on mythological material. According to this view, Gen 6:1-4 serves as principal evidence for the presence of mythological material from the ancient Near East in the Old Testament.

⁸ A variant on this exegesis is that the 'sons of God' are the descendants of Cain.

Four Lines of Exegesis

Interestingly, all of these four main streams of the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4 are still present in today’s exegetical literature. Newer exegesis returns in a certain manner to the starting point of interpretation A: the ‘sons of God’ are to be identified as non-human beings, although no longer in the form of angels, but in the form of divine beings.

Although it would appear that the end is circling back to the beginning, the result exegetically does not come to rest at the same level. Interpreters who favour the angels-interpretation (A-1), apparently share the world view of the relevant exegesis, in other words, they believe that angels exist. Interpreters who favour the divine beings-interpretation (A-2), generally do not share the world view reflected by this exegesis. The development of the multiple lines of interpretation mentioned can be visualised as follows:



1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The present majority view of Genesis 6:1–4 considers this passage to be a fragment of ancient Near Eastern mythology, although an exact equivalent has yet to be found. At the same time, conservative exegesis as of yet has hardly interacted with the results of newer research.

The veritable situation being (a.) that all four mainstream interpretations of exegesis are still present, (b.) that modern interpretation has found no exact parallel in mythology and (c.) that conservative exegesis has done very little to evaluate newer interpretative results, calls for a re-evaluation of exegetical arguments and a renewed search for the meaning of Gen 6:1–4 in its literary context.

Therefore, the question to be researched by the present study is:

What is the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4, and how does the interpretation of this expression contribute to the interpretation of the whole passage in its literary context?

Because (a.) the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4 is interconnected with other textual elements in the passage, and (b.) the aim of the research is also to interpret the whole passage, the following aspects and questions are to be considered in seeking an answer to the question to be researched.

A. Questions relating to Genesis 6:1–4 in a general way

- *To whom does ‘daughters of men’ in Genesis 6:1–4 refer?*
- *To whom does the word גִּבּוֹרִים, traditionally translated as ‘giants’ refer? Are these ‘giants’ to be identified with the ‘sons of God’? Are they perhaps the offspring of the unions between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’, or are they only mentioned as contemporaries to them?*
- *Who are the גִּבּוֹרִים, the ‘mighty men’ or ‘heroes’? Are they to be identified with the גִּבּוֹרִים? Are they the offspring from the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’, or do they form a separate category?*
- *What does the reaction of YHWH in Gen 6:3 mean? Is it a sanction or only a statement?*
- *What does the time-limit of 120 years mean? Is it a limitation on human lifespan or does it denote a time of respite until the coming of the flood?*

B. Questions relating to the expression ‘sons of God’

- *History of exegesis—what directions did the explanation of the expression ‘sons of God’ take?*

- *Comparison and evaluation of diverse exegetical solutions—what could be the relative value of diverse solutions and in what respect do they offer a solution?*
- *How much evidence exists to connect the expression ‘sons of God’ to the biblical and extra-biblical concept of the so-called ‘divine council’?*

C. Questions relating to the function of Genesis 6:1–4

- *What is the function of Genesis 6:1–4 in its literary context?*
- *What can possibly be the truth-claim of Genesis 6:1–4?*

1.3 METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Unit Delimitation

A decision has to be made as to which text is to be interpreted. In other words, can Gen 6:1–4 be considered as a textual unit to be analysed separately?

Taking first the larger unit, it has been observed that the entire book of Genesis consists of sections beginning with a *tôlĕdôt*-formula. The word תולדות can mean ‘births, generations’ and is also translated as ‘history’. In Genesis, the *tôlĕdôt*-formula functions as a kind of hinge or joint between subsequent lengthier sections.⁹ This transitionary formula divides the book of Genesis into twelve¹⁰ sections, as is shown in the following scheme:

⁹ Cf. B. Holwerda, *Dictaten deel 1: Historia Revelationis Veteris Testamenti* (Kampen, 1954), 9–17, who sees the *tôlĕdôt*-formulae as literary devices in the composition of Genesis; cf. also C. Houtman, *Inleiding in de Pentateuch* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 244–245; K. van Bekkum and G. Kwakkel, “Een veilige leefwereld voor de mens in dienst van God,” *TheolRef* 53 no. 4 (2010): 330. Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 96–106, considers the formula to be an indication displaying the presence of different sources.

¹⁰ Cf. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 44. Walton argues that the *tôlĕdôt*-formula, as a transitionary formula, only can continue a sequence, it cannot begin a sequence; the word בראשית, then, would be an adequate term at the very beginning of such a sequence.

(Table 1)

LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS		
0	Prologue	1:1–2:3
1	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of heaven and earth	2:4–4:26
2	The book ¹¹ of the <i>tôlēdōt</i> of Adam/mankind ¹²	5:1–6:8
3	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Noah	6:9–9:29
4	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Noah's sons	10:1–11:9
5	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Sem	11:10–26
6	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Terah	11:27–25:11
7	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Ishmael	25:12–18
8	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Isaac	25:19–35:29
9	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Esau	36:1–8
10	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Esau (Edomites)	36:9–43
11	<i>tôlēdōt</i> of Jacob	37:1–50:26

According to this well-known inner literary structure of the book of Genesis, the passage of Gen 6:1–4 is part of the section bearing the heading “this is the book of the *tôlēdōt* of Adam / mankind” (Gen 5:1) and ending with Gen 6:8, after which a new section begins, introduced by the formula “this is the *tôlēdōt* of Noah”. The section characterised as the *tôlēdōt* of Adam, describes the history of the world preceding the flood, this history being separated into two parts. In recalling the creation of man and woman in Gen 5:1–2, it can be noted that the first part of the section describes world history in its densest form, namely in the form of the

¹¹ Only in Gen 5:1 the word ‘book’, סֵפֶר, is used. This designation similarly appears in the LXX in Gen 2:4 (αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς), possibly inferred from Gen 5:1 because a literal translation of the plural *tôlēdōt* would prove too difficult here. In the other texts, where the meaning ‘generations’ or ‘families’ was possible, this caused no problem: αὐται αἱ γενέσεις κτλ.

¹² The LXX reads collectively (βίβλος γενέσεως) ἀνθρώπων.

genealogy, at times using slightly different phraseology¹³ or by supplying extra information, as in Gen 5:24: “Enoch walked with God; and he was not any more, for God had taken him”. Another example is the passage in Gen 5:29 of Noah receiving his name: “he called him Noah, with the words: Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands”. Following the description of how the world became populated, the latter part of the section introduced as the *tôlēdōt* of Adam ends in Gen 6:5–8 with the announcement of the total depopulation of the earth, leaving no one other than Noah and his family. Genesis 6:1–4 appears to function as the nexus between the two literary parts within the section, including the closing words about the increasing world population and the lead-in to the announcement of the annihilation of every living creature on earth. Interpreting Gen 6:1–4 in its present literary context might therefore do justice to structural indications in the book of Genesis.

Several observations can immediately be made when analysing the smaller unit, Gen 6:1–4. The masoretic tradition displayed in the Leningrad Codex suggests, interestingly enough, that Gen 5:32 is the beginning of the textual segment, as indicated by the *setumah* (ס). It is to be noted that between Gen 6:4 and 5 the Leningradensis has a *petuḥah* (פ), this implying that the Leningrad Codex, at least,¹⁴ considers Gen 5:32–6:4 to be a textual unit. Viewed philologically, however, Gen 6:1–4 contains a number of textual markers which enable the reader to understand the meaning of the passage on the basis of its context and to perceive it as a coherent literary unit. Siqueira mentions several of these markers,¹⁵ among which the most important is that Gen 6:1–4’s interest centres on subjects who appear neither in the preceding verses nor in the subsequent verses (‘sons of God’, ‘daughters of men’, נְפִלִיִּים, נְבִרִים). This observation, which focuses on the passage’s

¹³ In the case of Enoch, it is not ‘lived’ which is used in Gen 5:22, as could be expected, but ‘walked with God’.

¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this study to refer to other manuscripts, but it should be noted here, that according to Marjo C. A. Korpel, “one of the most common errors in Masoretic manuscripts is the omission of Petuḥot and Setumot. Moreover, in every tradition there were scribes who marked more paragraphs than others ... or were extremely parsimonious in this respect Therefore it is mistaken to trust only one manuscript, usually the Codex Leningradensis, if it comes to sectioning.” Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Who Is Speaking in Jeremiah 4:19–22? The Contribution of Unit Delimitation to an Old Problem,” *VT* 59 no.1 (2009): 95–96. For further study see Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, eds., *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature* (Pericope 4; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003); Raymond de Hoop, Marjo C. A. Korpel, and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis* (Pericope 7; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

¹⁵ Cf. Reinaldo W. Siqueira, “The ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4,” *Kerygm@* 1 no. 2 (2005): 50 [cited 15 Sept. 2007] online: <http://www.unasp.edu.br/kerygma/artigo2.04.1.asp>.

content, appears to be the strongest argument in favour of treating Gen 6:1–4 as a separate exegetical unit.¹⁶ In this sense, Gen 5:32 can be considered to be the end of the preceding segment.

Mainstream research also tends to treat Gen 6:1–4 as a separate unit, yet recognises only minimally the connections that the passage may have with its literary context. This could cast it in a rather negative light,¹⁷ especially in view of the earlier literature, but also in a positive light when comparing it to a mediaeval miniature,¹⁸ to an inclusion¹⁹ in a piece of amber, such as a prehistoric insect which has been conserved in fossilised tree resin, thus allowing a glimpse into a world long past. Others have voiced the observation – without offering further qualification – that the passage appears to be disconnected from its literary context.²⁰ As has been pointed out, an attempt to explain Gen 6:1–4 in its present literary context may deserve preference. Should this prove possible, there would appear to be no need of dissociating the passage from its context.

1.3.2 Diachronic and Synchronic Approaches

This study has chosen to start with the *data* of the text as found in the masoretic tradition of the Codex Leningradensis, and not with a presumed oral or written tradition which has accumulated as an entourage of the text in question. This indicates the decision to have accorded a higher priority to the synchronic approach than to the diachronic one.²¹

The diachronic approach has long considered the first four verses of Gen 6 to be a separate fragment, believed to bear, for the most part, the marks of the Yahwist

¹⁶ Vs. Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 435–456, who argues that Gen 6:1–8 is a structural unit.

¹⁷ E.g. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883), 334: “Ein ganz wundersamer erratischer Block ist ferner die Vermischung der Gottessöhne mit den Menschentöchtern (Gen 6,1–4).”; Dillmann, *comm. Gen* 1892, 117: “dunkel, abgerissen, lückenhaft”; Gunkel, *comm. Gen* (GHAT) 1917, 59: “Das Stück ist ein Torso. Es ist kaum eine Geschichte zu nennen”; Procksch, *comm. Gen* (KAT) 1924, 59: “Dieser rissige erratische Block”.

¹⁸ Cf. Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (BIS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 63.

¹⁹ For this metaphor I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Tibor Marjovszky, head of the department Biblical Theology and History of Religion at the Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Debrecen, Hungary.

²⁰ E.g. Ida Fröhlich, “Újraírt szövegek,” in *Az utókor hatalma; Újraírt szövegek* (ed. Ida Fröhlich; Kréné 4; Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005), 25.

²¹ Cf. Eep Talstra, *Oude en nieuwe lezers: Een inleiding in de methoden van uitleg van het Oude Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 112–113.

tradition.²² This opinion, however, is no longer unanimously accepted. Some scholars consider Gen 6:1–4 to be part of J, but with glosses of P.²³ As exegetical literature aptly demonstrates, views on the historical origin of the text vary enormously: from J,²⁴ or even pre-Israelite, to the other extreme of the post-exilic non-canonical tradition.²⁵ It has therefore become common to ascribe the passage to the redactor of Genesis.²⁶

In cases where the estimated date of origin of Gen 6:1–4 is deemed important, a diachronic approach may prove to be a useful tool. Such is the case, for example, when one has to decide whether the tradition in the pseudepigraphic work of *1 Enoch* is to be considered a kind of commentary on Gen 6:1–4, or the other way around, implying that Gen 6:1–4 functions as polemic²⁷ against – or summary²⁸ of – the tradition as rendered in its final form in *1 Enoch*.²⁹

To read Gen 6:1–4 synchronically in its present context, irrespective of underlying traditions, appears to be an option which is workable and increasingly favoured in modern exegetical research.³⁰ Unless the text explicitly refers to its

²² Cf. Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte,” *BZ* 11 (1967): 69; idem, *comm. Gen* (NEchtB) 1985, 79. Jean Astruc, *Conjectures sur les memoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s’est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genese* (Brussels: Fricx, 1753), 45–46, already placed Gen 6:1–8 in his ‘column B’, it consisting of the passages that use the name YHWH, and defends this (341–345) despite the fact that ‘Elohim’ is also used in the expression ‘sons of God’, explaining this expression as being ‘les fils des chefs, des puissants, des juges’, 345. Interestingly, Astruc is well aware that already Tertullian and Augustin had already signalised the different names for God, 333–334. He therefore does not present his observation as something new, concluding instead that the existence of different sources based on this observation was unprecedented.

²³ Cf. Wenham, *comm. Gen* (WBC) 1987, 138.

²⁴ Cf. Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6, 1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (ATANT 65; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979), 26–30.

²⁵ For an overview, cf. Marc Vervenne, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6.1–4,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed* (ed. Jon Davies et al.; JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 22–23.

²⁶ Cf. Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte,” 71; Hugh Rowland Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (VTSup 65; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 111.

²⁷ Cf. Fröhlich, “Újraírt szövegek,” 27–29.

²⁸ Cf. J. T. Milik, “Problèmes de la littérature Hénochique à la lumière des fragments Araméens de Qumrân,” *HTR* 64 (1971): 349–350; idem, ed., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 30–31.

²⁹ This subject will be discussed in more detail in 3.4.2.

³⁰ Cf. C. Houtman, “Het verboden huwelijk; Genesis 6:1–4 in haar context,” *GTT* 76 no. 2 (1976): 73; F. H. Breukelman, “Het verhaal over de zonen Gods die zich de dochters des mensen tot vrouw namen,” in *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor exegese en bijbelse theologie, Cahier 1* (ed. K. A. Deurloo, et al.; Kampen:

sources, distinguishing between historical layers in the text remains mostly hypothetical.³¹ The book of Genesis exists, but its alleged sources will probably remain a construct.³² The starting approach of the present study is therefore one of a synchronic nature, by which Gen 6:1–4 is considered to be part of the larger textual entity of Gen 5:1–6:8. There will be an attempt made to interpret Gen 6:1–4 as having unity within its literary context. As long as the passage as a whole can be demonstrated to have functional place in its context, there appears to be no need to refer to historical stratification within this context, nor within the passage itself. If no coherent sense can be assigned to it without presuming different sources, the choice for a diachronic approach can still be made.³³

1.3.3 Systematic Concentration

After assessing, as far as possible, exegetical questions relating to Gen 6:1–4 in general, this study will systematically concentrate on the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. This will be achieved, firstly, by undertaking a study of the history of exegesis pertaining to this particular subject. Subsequently, the arguments gleaned from the philological analysis and the history of exegesis are to be classified and evaluated. In order to interpret the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4, other biblical passages in which a similar expression occurs are also to be taken into account. The biblical use of the expression ‘sons of God’ is furthermore to be compared to corresponding expressions which are known to have appeared in ancient Near Eastern literature.

Kok, 1980), 21; Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 437. See also Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 16–17.

³¹ Interestingly, although even the reputedly conservative scholar W. H. Gispen keeps the possibility of a separate source for the passage at issue open: “6:1–4 [kan] ontleend ... zijn aan een verhaal dat uitvoeriger was”, he also opts for an exegesis in context: “In de huidige context staat 6:1–4 niet los van het voorafgaande (5:1–32) en het volgende, het verhaal van de zondvloed (6:5–9:17).” Gispen, *comm. Gen* (COT) 1974, 214.

³² Cf. Turner, *Announcements of Plot*, 17. Kikawada and Quinn argue that this methodological position not necessarily lead to adopting a polemical stance towards source criticism, but to the conclusion that observations and results from source-critical scholarship can be implemented in a synchronic approach, cf. Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 83.

³³ Cf. E. Talstra, *Solomon’s Prayer: Synchrony and Diachrony in the Composition of 1 Kings 8,14–61* (CBET 3; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), 20: “Of these two forms of textual analysis the synchronic analysis has an ‘operational priority’ over the diachronic.”

1.4 STRUCTURE

Following the *Introduction*, *Chapter 2* (a.) provides a philological analysis of Gen 6:1–4, and (b.) intends to answer in a general way the questions relating to Gen 6:1–4, these being in part A of the sub-questions to the research question, and doing this – to the extent possible – without drawing any conclusion as to the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’.

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the history of exegesis, and thereby also a part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 6:1–4, thus attesting to the fact that no one today can claim to be the first to have read the biblical text. The description of the history of exegesis will concentrate on the early exegesis because most of the positions taken here are only to be regularly repeated in later interpretation. The third chapter, then, answers the first sub-question relating to the expression ‘sons of God’ as formulated in section B of the research question.

Chapter 4 provides an evaluation of arguments in defence of a given exegetical solution. This research leads to the observation that no proper evaluation of arguments has ever been formulated. Arguments are mentioned and discussed in exegetical literature, but nowhere is a classification of their *nature* to be found. The new aspect of the present study is that it attempts to weigh the value of arguments based on an analysis of their nature. In this way, the fourth chapter answers the remaining questions found in part B of the research question.

Chapter 5 intends to throw some light on the possible functions of the expression ‘sons of God’ and of Gen 6:1–4 within its context in order to answer the questions articulated in part C of the research question. The study closes with an *Epilogue*. A detailed *Bibliography* is provided after the *Appendix*, and at the very end of the study there is a *Summary* of the conclusions in English, Dutch, and Hungarian.

2

A Quest for Meaning:
Understanding Genesis 6:1–4,
Round One

2. A QUEST FOR MEANING: UNDERSTANDING GENESIS 6:1–4, ROUND ONE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter has a twofold aim. It offers a philological analysis of Gen 6:1–4 and intends to answer circumstantial questions relating to Gen 6:1–4, while deferring the detailed discussion on the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ to the subsequent chapters. The first sections (2.1–2.4) provide a philological analysis of the passage and discuss exegetical questions relating to each of its verses. The section following this textual analysis (2.5), deals more specifically with the place of Gen 6:1–4 in its literary context. The chapter ends with general observations on Gen 6:1–4 and its *dramatis personae* and proffers in that way provisional conclusions to the sub-questions under part ‘A’ of the research question (2.6).

2.1 LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 6:1

1a ויהי כִּי־החל האדם לרב על־פני האדמה

1b ובנות ילדו להם:

*When man began to multiply on the surface of the earth,
and daughters were born to them,*

¹ Martin Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519–1521, on Psalm I,1. WA 5,27.

Genesis 6:1 is not really difficult to translate; it tells how mankind began to fill the earth, as was already preordained in the blessing of Gen 1:28 and mentioned in the narrative of Gen 5. The verse opens with a textual marker introducing a new syntactical unit, וַיְהִי כֵּן, ‘and it happened when’. The narrative *wayhi*, followed by a temporal expression, has no independent meaning,² the real action is related in the succeeding main clause, often beginning with a *wayyiqtol*, indicating what happened at the time described in the clause opening with *wayhi*.³ Generally, it functions as an indicator of a new section in the narrative, or as a time indicator (cf. Gen 4:3; 7:10.12.17; 8:6.13).⁴ Based on these observations, the translation renders Gen 6:2 as a main clause and Gen 6:1 as subordinate clause.

The Hiphil of the verb חָלַל, ‘to begin’ is frequently used in the first eleven chapters of Genesis to indicate a new development: Gen 4:26 “At that time man began to call upon the name of YHWH”, 9:20 “Noah began to till the soil (וַיִּזְרַע נֹחַ)”, 10:8 “Nimrod began to be a mighty man (וַיִּבְרַח) on earth”, 11:6 “this is only the beginning of what they do”. Here, in Gen 6:1, it is not so much the outset of something new but a dependent temporal clause recalling in short what had already been recounted in Gen 5: the multiplying of mankind on earth. Genesis 6:1 takes up this narrative thread from Gen 5, thus relating something which happened during the time of man’s multiplying on earth.

The word בְּנֵי־אָדָם has to be taken as a collective noun, referring to humanity.⁵ At first sight it seems peculiar that Gen 6:1 mentions daughters to be born, because this does not provide any new information: Gen 5 already repeatedly recounted that not only sons but daughters also were born (Gen 5:4.7.10.13.16.19.22.26.30).⁶ The birth of daughters appears to be specifically mentioned to serve as a preamble to the next verse, according to which the sons of God see that these daughters of men

² Therefore it is better to omit this from the translation, cf. J. P. Lettinga, T. Muraoka, and W. Th. van Peursen, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (10th ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 169, §77h. For the use of narrative *wayhi* cf. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 361, § 118b.

³ Cf. Jan Joosten, “Diachronic Aspects of Narrative *Wayhi* in Biblical Hebrew,” *JNSL* 35 no. 2 (2009): 45. Joosten observes how narrative *wayhi* as literary rendering of an oral style is more or less obligatory in Classical Biblical Hebrew but optional in Late Biblical Hebrew.

⁴ Cf. Helge S. Kvanvig, “Gen 6,1–4 as an Antediluvian Event,” *SJOT* 16 no. 1 (2002): 81.

⁵ Cf. Gunkel, *comm. Gen* 1910, 55: “בְּנֵי־אָדָם” kollektiv, Menschheit; der einzelne Mensch בֶּן־אָדָם.”

⁶ Abraham Kuyper suggested that, according to Gen 6:1, the expansion of mankind increased suddenly because significantly more women were born. Cf. A. Kuyper, *De engelen Gods* (Kampen: Kok, 1923), 64–66.

are fair.⁷ Once the daughters of men have been introduced, the narrative can proceed to tell how the ‘sons of God’ began to behave towards the ‘daughters of men’.

2.2 LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 6:2

2a ויראו בני־האלהים את־בנות האדם כי טובת הנה

2b ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר בחרו:

the ‘sons of God’ saw how beautiful the daughters of men were, so they took for themselves wives from them, whomever they chose.

The interpretation of Gen 6:2 poses one of the most difficult problems in Old Testament exegesis. To whom does the term ‘sons of God’ refer? The difficulty of the expression lies most specifically in the field of semantics.⁸ It is possible to translate the expression ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the gods’ or it can be interpreted as an idiomatic expression for ‘divine beings’ or ‘gods’. In the latter interpretation, a Hebrew genitive construction with בֶּן or בְּנֵי, ‘son(s) of x’ is taken as an indication of a subject or an object belonging to the class of ‘x’.⁹ In the first two interpretations the word ‘sons’ can still be understood to be metaphorical or literal. Yet in all three translations it remains unclear to whom this expression refers. Therefore בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים will be provisionally rendered as ‘sons of God’ pending a more definitive solution.

There will be further detailed study of the expression ‘sons of God’ in the subsequent chapters. The next section *per se* limits itself to preliminary exegetical remarks in this matter.

⁷ Cf. Willem A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 331.

⁸ Cf. Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 265.

⁹ For an overview of the possibilities, see Chrys C. Caragounis, “בֶּן” in *NIDOTTE* 1:671–677.

2.2.1 The Sons of God

Vervenne draws attention to the fact that the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 is a new textual element in the course of the Genesis account.¹⁰ New textual elements should be defined either in the narrative itself or must be previously known the reader to be understood. In Genesis other undefined concepts are used by the author which presuppose the audience’s existing knowledge of these, for example the **בְּרִיִּים** of Gen 3:24 or the **נְפִלִים** of Gen 6:4, this being part of their conceptual world. As soon as this knowledge faded from their conceptual world the need arose for later readers to reconstruct the meaning of these same concepts with the help of other passages.

Fortunately, supporting textual evidence exists, which may help in the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 for this expression occurs in other Old Testament passages as well. Similar expressions are equally found in other texts with slight variations in phrasing as shown in Table 2 below.¹¹

(Table 2)

Similar expressions for ‘sons of God’		
בְּרִיִּי הָאֱלֹהִים	Gen 6:2 “the sons of God saw the daughters of men ...”	LXX: οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ codex A (rescr.) ἄγγελοι
	Gen 6:4 “when the sons of God came to the daughters of men ...”	LXX: οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ
	Job 1:6 “on a certain day, the sons of God came to present themselves before YHWH”	LXX: οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ
	Job 2:1 “on a certain day, the sons of God came to present themselves before YHWH”	LXX: οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ

¹⁰ Cf. Marc Vervenne, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6.1–4,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed* (ed. Jon Davies et al.; JSOTSup195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 36.

¹¹ All occurrences are compared to those in the Septuagint, not primarily because of its influence on the history of exegesis but because LXX Deut 32:8.43 gives references to the ‘sons of God’ which are absent in MT and only partially present in the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls.

Similar expressions for ‘sons of God’		
בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים	<p>Deut 32:8¹² בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים in 4QDeut^j (vs. MT בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) “When he separated the sons of men, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God”</p> <p>Deut 32:43 [colon absent in MT]: “Let all the sons of God bow down before him”</p> <p>Job 38:7 “and all the sons of God cried out”</p>	<p>LXX: κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ</p> <p>LXX: προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ</p> <p>LXX: ἄγγελοί μου</p>
בְּנֵי אֱלִים	<p>Ps 29:1 “Sons of gods,¹³ give YHWH, give YHWH glory and strength”</p> <p>Ps 89:7b “who is like YHWH among the sons of gods”</p>	<p>LXX: υἱοὶ θεοῦ¹⁴</p> <p>LXX: ἐν υἱοῖς θεοῦ</p>
בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן	Ps 82:6 “I thought you were gods, all of you sons of the Most High”	LXX: υἱοὶ ὑψίστου
בְּרֵאֲלֵהֵי	Dan 3:25 “the appearance of the fourth is similar to that of a son of the gods”	LXX: (= Dan 3:92) ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ

¹² 4QDeut^j, col. XII:14, cf. Eugene Ulrich (ed.), *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants* (VTSup 134; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 240.

¹³ The word אֱלִים is to be translated as a plural in all the other occurrences in the Old Testament. The term refers to ‘gods’ in Exod 15:11 and Dan 11:36. In Ezek 32:21 and in Job 41:17 it may also be a defective spelling for אֱלִילִים, ‘rams’, ‘chiefs’, as in Exod 36:19, where אֱלִים עֶרֶת unequivocally refers to ‘skins of rams’.

¹⁴ The LXX has a parallel phrase which has no equivalent in MT, ἐνέγκατε τῷ κυρίῳ υἱοὺς κριῶν, “bring to YHWH sons (acc. plur.) of the rams”, referring to sacrifices, perhaps from the *plene* spelling of אֱלִילִים in some manuscripts, meaning ‘rams’. The reasoning of Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 25, is difficult to understand when he argues that the LXX “suggests that we have to do here with human ‘judges’.” The translation “You sons of the judges, give glory and power to the Lord” is impossible. The expression ‘sons of the judges’ would have been υἱοὶ κριτῶν. Moreover, the expression in the text of the LXX is, grammatically, the object of the imperative ‘give’. Greek κριός means ‘ram’.

(1) The Significance of Variant Wording

If the expression ‘sons of God’ has to be understood as a syntagm, the question arises to the importance of the variation in wording. Is there a significant distinction between the five expressions listed above, translated as ‘sons of the Most High’, ‘sons of the gods’, ‘the sons of God’ or ‘sons of God’? Does the absence or presence of the definite article or the use of a variant term (עֲלֵיִן instead of אֱלֹהִים) result in a substantial difference in meaning?

To resolve this question, the significance of the presence or absence of the definite article will be discussed firstly. Subsequently the question of whether the use of a variant term results in a different meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ will be addressed.

(1) In Gen 6:1.4, the balanced presence of the definite article is possibly meant to create a more obvious unity with בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם ‘the daughters of men’. Gilboa points to the expression ‘sons of men’ in Ps 33:13b which has the definite article but shows this expression in Ps 89:48b to be without this article, having no difference in meaning whatsoever.¹⁵ The presence or absence can perhaps best be attributed to the author’s preference in the use of style.¹⁶

(2) The use of the word עֲלֵיִן instead of אֱלֹהִים in Ps 82:6 appears to be only a variation in wording, especially because אֱלֹהִים already appeared in the first half of the verse. The evident parallelism implies that those being addressed in either half of the verse are the same: “I thought you were gods, all of you sons of the Most High.”

Based on these observations, the present study perceives the aforementioned five expressions as listed in Table 2 to be expressions referring to the same semantical concept but in slightly varied form.

(2) ‘Sons of God’ as Angels?

It is perhaps best to leave the definitive meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:2.4 open until further clarification.¹⁷ In all other occurrences, however, the

¹⁵ Cf. R. Gilboa, “Who ‘Fell Down’ to our Earth? A Different Light on Genesis 6:1–4,” *BN* 11 (2002): 70.

¹⁶ The Septuagint cannot be of much help in determining whether the translators explicitly intended to use a definite article because, as Wevers points out, the article before υἱοί is omitted in a number of textual variants, possibly as a result of a common auditory error: despite the pronounced (h)i (h)ii the article was easily omitted, or vice versa, despite (h)ii being pronounced, the article was inserted. Cf. John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBLSCS 35; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1983), 76.

¹⁷ The subject will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

expression appears to be a syntagm in the semantic field of ‘heavenly beings’. This is corroborated by the Septuagint, which in some cases translates more specifically as ἄγγελοι, ‘angels’; in other cases it translates more literally as υἱοὶ θεοῦ, ‘sons of God’, thus leaving it to the reader to interpret the expression in its most preferable form.¹⁸ In general, there appears to be a transition in the interpretation of the expression from the general ‘divine beings’, now offering different possibilities, to that of a more specific understanding of ‘angel’ as a messenger of YHWH. This can serve as an explanation as to why some exegetes understood the expression to refer to angels.¹⁹ The text of Dan 3:25–28 illustrates well this shift. Nebuchadnezzar sees (Dan 3:25) a ‘son of the gods’, בֶּרֶאֱלֹהִין, amidst the men in the furnace, yet he explains the phenomenon by saying that “God sent his messenger (מַלְאָכָה) and delivered his servants” (Dan 3:28).²⁰ A similar transition in interpretation can be observed in the Qumran documents.²¹

If one is to examine the second term of the expression ‘sons of God’, it seems that the word אֱלֹהִים is ambivalent in allowing for two translations, that being either a singular ‘God’ or a plural ‘gods’. This ambivalence is perhaps reflected in the variant phrasing as shown in Table 2, in which אֱלֹהִים can be substituted either by the singular עֲלִיּוֹן or the plural אֱלִים.

It is thus possible to interpret the expression as an idiomatic phrase standing for divine beings or deities. In the Qumran fragment of Deut 32:8 the expression אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי is used most probably to create a contrast with אָדָם בְּנֵי mentioned in the first half of the verse²² which signify human beings. Moreover, προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ as found in Deut 32:43 LXX has its equivalent in the parallel

¹⁸ Cf. Wevers, *Notes*, 76.

¹⁹ Advocates of the ‘angels-interpretation’: Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Die Ehen der Söhne Gottes mit den Töchtern der Menschen*. (Berlin: J.A. Wohlgemuth, 1857), 48–64; Karl Budde, *Die biblische Urgeschichte (Gen. 1–12,5)* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1883), 3; Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Genesis* 1887, 146; Dillmann, *comm. Gen* 1892, 119; Holzinger, *comm. Gen* (KHC) 1898, 64–66; Dodds, *comm. Gen* 1909, 31; Driver, *comm. Gen* 1948, 82; Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 293; Joseph Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” *BZ* 11 no. 1 (1967): 72–73; Gispén, *comm. Gen* (COT) 1974, 216–218; Kidner, *comm. Gen* 1974, 84; Willem A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WTJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 343–348; Atkinson, *comm. Gen* 1990, 130; F. B. Huey, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? Yes,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 184–209; M. J. Paul et al., eds., *comm. Gen / Exod* (SBOT) 2004, 75.

²⁰ Cf. S. B. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” in *DDD*, 799.

²¹ See Appendix.

²² Only known from the MT, the Qumran text is fragmentary, cf. Ulrich, *Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 240.

verse of 4QDeut^q, namely *והשתחוּ לו כל אלהים*,²³ which allows for only a plural translation: ‘and all the *gods* bow before him’. The parallelism of *בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים* and *בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם* in Gen 6:2.4 may also indicate that the expression is to be read as an idiomatic reference to divine beings which are otherwise not specified. In this case, the question as to whether *אֱלֹהִים* has to be understood as a singular or a plural becomes irrelevant given that listeners would generally not have bothered with the question to whom exactly the second term of the expression was referring.²⁴

All the same, the exegetical problem would not be so significant if Gen 6:1–4 would state, for example, that the ‘sons of God’ were appearing before God to give him glory, as in Ps 29:1. Yet, for many interpreters, the real exegetical problems arose from objections to what the text states about the behaviour of the ‘sons of God’, most specifically if the expression refers to divine beings. These ‘sons of God’ perceive the visible beauty of human women, whereupon they take some of them as wives for themselves and procreate. Apart from the question as to the physical possibility of this act, the ontological question arose as to whether ‘sons of God’, interpreted as heavenly beings, really did exist within Israel’s conceptual world. As a direct consequence of these objections, the history of the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4 demonstrates various efforts to avoid arriving at the conclusion that it is heavenly beings which is meant by the term ‘sons of God’.

The mundane alternative is to allow for the expression ‘sons of God’ to refer to a group of human beings. Two mainstream explanations have been proposed for this exegetical option, namely that the ‘sons of God’ are to be perceived as mighty men or as god-fearing men. These alternative solutions will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

(3) ‘Sons of God’ as Mighty Ones?

One approach to the ‘sons of God’ as human beings focuses on the second term of the expression. By this method the word *אֱלֹהִים* can be viewed as an indication of a superlative, referring to people who are ‘higher’, either in power or in function. Understood in such a way, the expression ‘sons of God’ can mean ‘powerful, mighty men’ or ‘rulers, judges’.²⁵ The option ‘judges’ becomes specific in later²⁶ Jewish

²³ 4QDeut^q, col. II: frg. 5 ii:7, see Ulrich, *Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 242.

²⁴ Cf. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” in *DDD*, 795.

²⁵ Advocates of the ‘mighty ones-interpretation’ are: B. Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 170; Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 187–204; Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der*

exegesis. Key passages for this exegesis are Exod 21:6, 22:7, and 22:27. These texts use the word אֱלֹהִים in a context in which juridical confirmation through a symbolic act is needed (Exod 21:6; 22:7) or where the word אֱלֹהִים is used in parallel with the word נָשִׂיא, 'ruler' (Exod 22:27).

In this vein, in the case of a slave who declined his right to freedom upon concluding his obligation of serving his master, according to Exod 21:6 the owner had to take his slave אֶל־הָאֵלֹהִים and physically fixed, temporarily, the ear of the slave with an awl to the doorpost. This symbolic act signified that the slave chose to stay on with his master. Having appeared before הָאֱלֹהִים guaranteed that the slave would stay voluntarily without being forced to do so.

The other situation as described in Exod 22:7–8 is about goods which were stolen after having been placed in deposit. If no thief was identified, the person responsible for the deposit could acquit himself of suspicion by approaching אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים.

Exodus 22:27 uses the word אֱלֹהִים in parallel with נָשִׂיא: "You shall not curse אֱלֹהִים nor call down a curse upon a ruler (נָשִׂיא) of your people."

The traditionally accepted meaning of אֱלֹהִים is 'judges' in the three above-mentioned texts from Exodus. Based on this interpretation, the *Targumim* translate the expression 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4 as בְּנֵי רַבְרַבִּיא, 'sons of the great ones'²⁷ or בְּנֵי דִינִיָּא, 'sons of the judges'.²⁸

Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode (WBT 13; Wien: Verlag Herder, 1966), 29–54; Leroy Birney, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4," *JETS* 13 no. 1 (1970): 48; Akio Tsukimoto, "Der Mensch ist geworden wie unsereiner: Untersuchungen zum zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Gen. 3,22–24 und 6,1–4," *AJBI* 5 (1979): 20; László M. Pákozdy, "Hogyan prédikáljunk az Ószövetség igéi alapján?" in *Hirdesd az igét: Az igehirdetők kézikönyve* (ed. József Adorján; Budapest: Magyarországi Református Egyház zsinati irodájának sajtóosztálya, 1980), 63; Jagersma, *comm. Gen* 1995, 83; Stephen Hre Kio, "Revisiting 'the Sons of God' in Genesis 6.1–4," *BT* 52 no. 2 (2001): 237–239; Walton, *comm. Gen* (NIVAC) 2001, 293.

²⁶ According to *Genesis Rabbah*, 26:5 rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai referred to the expression 'sons of God' as 'sons of the nobility' and cursed anyone who called them 'sons of God' by taking the expression literally. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation: Volume I: Parashiyot One through Thirty-Three* (BJS 104-106; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 282. The curse suggests that another interpretation of the expression did exist formerly and was still known, probably known in the form of the angels-exegesis as is suggested by the translation of the LXX. See further 3.1.2–3.1.4, 3.1.6–3.1.9, and 3.6.

²⁷ *Targum Onqelos*, and *Pseudo-Jonathan*: 'great ones'. Translation: Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 52; Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis: Translated, with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 37. Cf. Philip S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early

Other interpreters see the expression in Gen 6:1–4 as referring to a form of divine kingship, meaning that rulers were granted a form of divinity.²⁹ Dexinger has suggested that the use of the expression *bn il(m)* in the Ugaritic texts may refer to two different categories: to a group of undefined gods or to a group of deified heroes.³⁰ According to Dexinger it is to this latter group that the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 refers.

In evaluating the above-mentioned solutions as an interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ as referring to mighty persons, the following provisional remarks can be made:

(1) Should ‘sons of God’ be taken to mean something like ‘mighty ones’ or ‘judges’, the sense of Gen 6:1–4 stands its ground. Yet, at the same time, it would make Gen 6:1–4 an exception because such an interpretation hardly accommodates the other uses of בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים or similar expressions.

(2) Another problem which has to be addressed is the question as to whether the texts in Exod 21 and 22 veritably allow for translating אֱלֹהִים as ‘judges’.³¹

(3) As far as divine kingship is considered, it is understood that a king is indeed sometimes called ‘god’ or ‘son of a (specified) god’ in ancient Near Eastern literature but nowhere are kings as a group referred to as ‘the sons of God’. Dexinger’s proposal to distinguish two different categories of *bn il(m)* in the Ugaritic texts, namely, the gods in general and deified heroic persons, was criticised³² and later also rejected by Dexinger himself.

Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *JJS* 23 no. 1 (1972): 60. See further 3.1.6 and 3.1.8.

²⁸ *Targum Neofiti 1*: ‘sons of the judges’. Translation: Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 71. *Tg Neof.* reads in margin גְּלִיכִיָּא, ‘angels’. Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” 60. See further 3.1.7.

²⁹ Cf. Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 187–204; John H. Walton, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? No,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 184–209.

³⁰ Cf. Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode*, (WBT 13; Wien: Verlag Herder, 1966), 38.

³¹ This question will be reconsidered in 4.2.1.

³² Jan Holman, review of Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut*, *Bib* 49 no. 2 (1968): 293: “Es genügt nicht zu zeigen dass *Krt* kein Gott ist und deshalb Mensch. *Datur tertium*: ein König, der, obwohl, Mensch, in einer besonderen Beziehung zur Gottheit steht – was durchaus von *Krt* gesagt werden kann.” The question will be discussed in more detail in 4.2.2.

(4) 'Sons of God' as Godfearing Men?

Another line of exegesis considers the 'sons of God' to be an expression referring to human beings who are God's chosen people. Textual evidence for this can be advanced from Exod 4:22 where YHWH refers to Israel as "my firstborn son", בְּנִי בְכֹרִי; Deut 14:1 "you are sons of YHWH, your God", בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם; Deut 32:5 where it is said that the Israelites "are no longer his (YHWH's) sons", לֹא בְנָיו; Hos 2:1 "they shall be called sons of the living God", בְּנֵי אֵל חַי;³³ and Hos 11:1 where YHWH asserts: "from Egypt I called my son", קָרָאתִי לְבְנִי.³⁴

Usually passages from the New Testament are also inferred to support the interpretation of 'sons of God' as 'god-fearing people',³⁵ for example, Matt 5:9 where peacemakers are called 'sons of God', υἱοὶ θεοῦ; believers are called 'Gods children', τέκνα θεοῦ, in 1 John 3:1; those who love their enemies will be 'sons of the Most High', υἱοὶ ὑψίστου, according to Luke 6:35. When Jesus speaks about those who will take part in the final resurrection, he says (Luke 20:36) that death can no longer claim them because they are "equal to angels, (ισάγγελοι),³⁶ and sons of God because they are sons of the resurrection". Interestingly, there is a close relationship here between 'sons of God' and angels, as though an angels-interpretation of the Old Testament expression 'sons of God' is hidden in the connotation.

The provenance of the interpretation of the 'sons of God' as 'god-fearing men' can be traced back to patristic exegesis. The key text for this interpretation was an understanding of Gen 4:26 in which a special function was assigned to Seth and his offspring.³⁷ This is why this exegesis is also called the Sethites-interpretation.³⁸ The

³³ Quoted in *Jub.* 1:25, "They will all be called 'sons of the living God.'" With the thought-provoking addition: "And every angel and spirit will know and acknowledge that they are my sons." Cf. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP* 2:54.

³⁴ See also Isa 1:2, where YHWH says "Sons (בְּנִים) have I reared and brought up, but they rebelled against me"; Isa 30:1 "rebellious sons" and Isa 30:9 "lying sons, sons who will not listen to the instruction of YHWH"; Isa 43:6 tells how YHWH's sons and daughters are called back from exile. Psalm 73:15 mentions god-fearing people as "the generation of your (God's) sons".

³⁵ The expression in the New Testament definitely refers to both men and women; however, the expression 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4, when understood as referring to humans, it does so to men only.

³⁶ In the parallel texts Matt 22:30 and Mark 12:25 there is a slight variation which is ὡς ἄγγελοι.

³⁷ This patristic exegesis is discussed in more detail in 3.8.35.

³⁸ Advocates of the Sethites-interpretation are: Keil, *comm. Gen / Exod* (BCAT) 1861, 80–89; James E.

problem described in Gen 6:1–4, then, is the intermarriage of god-fearing men and pagan women.

As a provisional conclusion, it can be observed that, similar to the mighty ones-interpretation, the Sethites-interpretation makes sense in Gen 6:1–4. Yet, it is hardly an adequate solution for any of the other passages in which the expression ‘sons of God’ occurs.

(5) Alternative Interpretations

A few alternative interpretations can be listed which either combine the human and the super-human approach or else suggest another interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as humans.

(5a) The Combination of Human and Superhuman Approaches

Rabast proposed the use of an alternative subject in Gen 6:2. His approach implies that the subject of וַיִּקְחוּ, ‘they took’, is ‘people’. This results in the interpretation: ‘When the sons of God had seen that the daughters of men were beautiful, *the people also took wives for themselves*, whomever they wanted’.³⁹ Rabast asserts that Gen 6:1–4 is about a fall of angels which was the source of the provenance of giants. Rabast further says that Gen 6:2 describes, without undue detail, how mankind emulated the behaviour of the angels to a certain extent by giving up monogamous marriage for polygamy.⁴⁰ This approach, however, presents several difficulties:

(1) The comparison thus proposed between the behaviour of the ‘sons of God’ and that of men is rendered by the word ‘also’. It is, however, rather difficult to see from which element of the Hebrew text this comparison can be derived.

Coleran, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2,” *TS* 2 no. 4 (1941): 507–509; Paul Heinisch, *Probleme der biblischen Urgeschichte* (Luzern: Verlag Räder & Cie., 1947), 119; Vonk, *comm. Gen / Exod* 1960, 150; W. Vijfvinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” *TheolRef* 17 no. 3 (1974): 192; Hamilton, *comm. Gen* (NICOT) 1990, 264; Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NAB) 1996, 329; Currid, *comm. Gen* 2003, 174; Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo, Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 21; Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 450.

³⁹ Karlheinz Rabast, *Die Genesis* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, [1951]), 130: “und als die Gottessöhne gesehen hatten, daß die Töchter der Menschheit schön waren, *da nahmen nun auch die Menschen sich zu Weibern*, welche sie immer wolten.” [emphasis added]

⁴⁰ Cf. Rabast, *Genesis*, 132.

(2) It is indeed possible to translate *בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים* in Gen 6:2 as referring to a general undefined subject:⁴¹ “When the ‘sons of God’ saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, people took for them women whomever they chose.” This implies, however, that here there are three groups: the ‘sons of God’, a general ‘they’, and the ‘daughters of men’. One can recognise such a construction in the case that this ‘undefined third group’ is introduced somewhat suddenly, or in the case that the mentioned third person plural cannot be connected logically to previously mentioned third person plurals within the immediate context. Neither is the case in Gen 6:2.

(3) In Gen 6:4 the ‘sons of God’ are mentioned as having sexual intercourse with the daughters of men. It appears to be the most natural to understand Gen 6:2 in the same way. To assume a ‘third group’ which is philologically possible in Gen 6:2 is impossible in Gen 6:4.

Based on these arguments, there is hardly reason to presume the proposed subject-change connected to the verbal form *בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים* in Gen 6:2, all the more so because this notion is in contradiction to Gen 6:4.

Westermann combines the exegesis of ‘gods’ and ‘mighty ones’. In his view, exegesis is not to focus on the identification of the term ‘sons of God’ but more on the description of what happens. He compares Gen 6:1–4 with Gen 12:10–20 where a king implicates the sexual integrity of the tribal mother.⁴² In a similar way, kings or powerful men are depicted as violating boundaries in Gen 6:1–4. Given that in Westermann’s view social classes did not exist during the *Urgeschichte*, the status or person of ‘kings’ could only be described with the help of the term which referred to beings of a superior status: ‘sons of God’, a word-pair which originally referred to heavenly beings.⁴³

(5b) An Alternative to the Mighty Ones-Interpretation

Within this category Jacob proposes an alternative solution. He seeks to know what the singular of *בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים* might be. He rules out *בֶּן הָאֱלֹהִים*, ‘son of God’, but favours *אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים*, ‘man of God’. To him this is an indication that ‘men of God’ is

⁴¹ Cf. J. P. Lettinga, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (8th ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 153–154, §65i.

⁴² The similarities in wording between Gen 6:1–4 and Gen 12:11–14 were already observed earlier by Karl Budde, *Die biblische Urgeschichte (Gen. 1–12,5)* (Gießen, J. Ricker, 1883), 7.

⁴³ Westermann, *comm. Gen* (BKAT) 1974, 494–500.

meant by the term ‘sons of God’, which in the singular form refers to a prophet (e.g. 1 Kgs 13:1.18) or to heroes on whom the spirit of God descended in order to extend to them extra vitality (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 15:14).⁴⁴

It can be argued, however, that a translation ‘prophets’ or ‘inspired persons’ would not make much sense in the other texts in which the expression ‘sons of God’ occurs. At the same time the singular ‘son’ in Dan 3:25, although in Aramaic, is an indication that if a singular version of the expression ‘sons of God’ were to occur in Hebrew, it most likely would not take the form שׂוֹן, ‘man’, but בֶּן, ‘son’, instead.

(6) ‘Sons of God’ as Deities?

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the divine beings-interpretation has become the view of the majority regarding the expression ‘sons of God’.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁴ Cf. B. Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 175–176.

⁴⁵ Advocates of the divine beings-interpretation are: Gunkel, *comm. Gen* (GHAT) 1917, 55; Procksch, *comm. Gen* (KAT) 1924, 60; Böhl, *comm. Gen* 1930, 81; Skinner, *comm. Gen* (ICC) 1930, 141; Wolfram Herrmann, “Die Göttersöhne,” *ZRGG* 12 no. 3 (1960): 242; Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 51; Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 22–47; Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 124; Oswald Loretz, *Schöpfung und Mythos: Mensch und Welt nach den Anfangskapiteln der Genesis* (SBS 32; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 36; Von Rad, *comm. Gen* (OTL) 1972, 113–114; Herbert Haag, “בֶּן,” *ThWAT*, 1973, 1:680–682; Hartmut Gese, “Der bewachte Lebensbaum und die Heroen: zwei mythologische Ergänzungen zur Urgeschichte der Quelle J,” in *Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. Hartmut Gese and Hans Peter Rüger, AOAT 18; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 84; Werner Schlisske, *Gottessöhne und Gottessohn im Alten Testament: Phasen der Entmythisierung im Alten Testament* (BWANT 17; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 15–20; Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1979), 15; Rick Marrs, “The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4),” *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 219–220; Josef Schreiner, “Gen 6,1–4 und die Problematik von Leben und Tod,” in *De la Tōrah au Messie: Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes à Henri Cazelles* (ed. Maurice Carrez et al., Paris: Desclée, 1981), 69; Brueggemann, *comm. Gen* 1982, 71; Ronald S. Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 no. 1 (1987): 16; Joseph Hong, “Problems in an Obscure Passage: Notes on Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 40 no. 4 (1989): 422–423; Sarna, *comm. Gen* 1989, 356 nt. 2; Lowell K. Handy, “Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible,” *BR* 35 (1990): 26–30; Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 276; John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1992), 149; Leander E. Keck et al., eds., *NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 382–383; Marc Vervenne, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6:1–4,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (eds. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey and Wilfred G. E. Watson, JSOTS 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 25; Seebass, *comm. Gen* 1996, 192; Wolfram Herrmann, *Von Gott und den Göttern: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 259; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 41–42; Mirjam and Ruben Zimmermann, “‘Heilige Hochzeit’ der Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter? Spuren des Mythos in

discovery of the Ugaritic literature in 1929 has since strengthened this viewpoint. In this way the interpretation of the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ has settled on that of superhuman beings.⁴⁶

The study as presented in this chapter will confine itself to the above-mentioned philological possibilities and the evaluation of remarks pertaining to the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. A more detailed discussion will follow in the subsequent chapters.

2.2.2 The Daughters of Men

The most likely explanation for the expression ‘daughters of men’ בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם is that it refers to ‘women’ in general because Gen 6:1 uses אָדָם as a collective noun for mankind. The collective meaning of אָדָם in 6:1 is corroborated by the plural suffix לָהֶם: “daughters were born to *them*.” The expression ‘daughters of men’ in Gen 6:2 reiterates this use much as in Gen 6:1.

A collective meaning of אָדָם, however, becomes problematic when the expression ‘sons of God’ is understood as a *class* of men, either socially (‘judges, mighty ones’) or religiously distinguished (‘Sethites, godly ones’). In this case, the expression ‘daughters of men’ also has to be a social or a religious class in order to provide a mirror-image pair to the ‘sons of God’ which are to be seen either as ‘daughters of the poor/powerless’ (social distinction) or as ‘daughters of Cain/the wicked’ (religious distinction).⁴⁷ The ‘daughters of men’, then, are not ‘women’ in general but more a subset within the group of women. This implies that the meaning of the word אָדָם in Gen 6:1 has to change from a collective noun to a non-collective one in Gen 6:2.

Keil and Delitzsch list passages for comparison which use terms of all-inclusiveness while, from the context, it is clear that there are exceptions.

Gen 6,1–4,” ZAW 111 no. 3 (1999): 329; Gerrit Singgih, “Why Did God Send the Flood upon the Earth? An Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–22,” in *Christian Faith and Violence: Volume 1*, (SRT 10; ed. Dirk van Keulen and Martien E. Brinkman; Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 35; Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (ATANT 86; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 219; Horst Seebass, “Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß: Gen 6,1–4,” BN 134 (2007): 8; Walter Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung,” ZAW 123 no. 4 (2011): 495–515.

⁴⁶ This exegesis will be discussed in detail in 4.4.

⁴⁷ Eslinger alters the categories: the ‘daughters of men’ are the Sethites, literally ‘daughters of Adam’, whereas the ‘sons of God’ are the Cainites, namely ‘sons of Eve’, because Eve places herself in Gen 4:1 ahead of YHWH, thus considering herself a ‘goddess’. Cf. Lyle Eslinger, “A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha’elohim* and *benoth ha’adam* in Genesis 6:1–4,” JSOT 13 (1979): 65–73.

Jeremiah 32:20 recounts that God showed ‘signs and wonders in Israel and among men’, which of course does not mean that Israelites do not belong to the class of men. Judges 20:1–2 relates how ‘all the tribes’ assembled in Mizpah to make war on Benjamin – one of the tribes, which obviously did not appear among ‘all the tribes’ for warfare against itself.⁴⁸ Yet, in these cases, the distinction between a collective noun and its exception is evident from the context, an evidence which is lacking in Gen 6:2.

Alternative explanations for ‘daughters of men’ as a subset among all women fail to explain the presence of the doubly contrasted parallelism present in the expressions ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’: ‘sons’ versus ‘daughters’, and ‘of God’ versus ‘of men’.

Genesis 6:2 states that the ‘sons of God’ took wives from among the ‘daughters of men’ because they saw “how beautiful they were”.⁴⁹

Jacob argues that nowhere does the adjective טוֹב as such mean ‘beautiful’, for if it is meant as such it is concretely specified by נִרְאָה (e.g. Gen 24:16; 26:7), רָאָי (e.g. 1 Sam 16:12), or חָאָר (1 Kgs 1:6). Therefore his translation “gut bei Leibe” or “von starkem Körperbau”, refers to how טוֹב is used without further specification in Gen 18:7; 27:9 in the case of animals and in 1 Sam 9:2 to express height of Saul which was well above average.⁵⁰ Relying on a translation as ‘good’, however, might suggest moral goodness, something which is not the expressed purpose in Gen 6:2.⁵¹ The meaning of the adjective טוֹב can be specified by a substantive noun but also by its context. In Gen 6:2 it may therefore refer to physical beauty.⁵²

2.2.3 The Action Described in Genesis 6:2

The ‘sons of God’ take whomever⁵³ they chose as wives for themselves from the ‘daughters of men’. The expression לָקַח אִשָּׁה, to take a wife, is regularly used to denote the beginning of a marriage relationship.⁵⁴ This may include polygamy or

⁴⁸ K&D, 1:130–131.

⁴⁹ Translating הֵן as ‘how’: ‘how good they were’, cf. J. P. Lettinga, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (8th ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 151, §63c: “hoe mooi ze waren”.

⁵⁰ Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 172. For similar lexical arguments, see Carol M. Kaminski, “Beautiful Women or ‘False Judgment’? Interpreting Genesis 6.2 in the Context of the Primaeval History,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 457–465.

⁵¹ Cf. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God,” 331.

⁵² Cf. “טוֹב,” *HAL* 2:355.

⁵³ For this translation, cf. e.g. Delitzsch, *comm. Gen*, 146 “welche immer, quascunque”; Van Selms, *comm. Gen* (POT) 1967, 102: “wie ook maar”.

⁵⁴ Cf. “לָקַח,” *THAT* 1:878; *HAL* 2:507.

adultery but not rape (see for example 2 Sam 13:14, where other terms are used for rape: *וַיַּחֲזֶק מִמֶּנָּה וַיַּעֲנֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ* “and he was stronger than her, he forced her, and lay with her”). Wenham suggests that if Gen 6:2 does not mention rape or seduction, then it would follow that the fathers of these daughters must have played a part in giving their consent to these relationships: “[t]he obvious avoidance of any terms suggesting lack of consent makes the girls and their parents culpable”.⁵⁵ This suggestion may be overextending the meaning of the text but it can provide a partial answer to the ever-resurfacing question arising in the exegesis of Gen 6:3 as to why only mankind is punished whereas nothing is said about the fate of the ‘sons of God’, at least not in the case where the interpretation of Gen 6:3 would imply punishment.

Interestingly, Gen 6:2 states that the ‘sons of God’ took from the ‘daughters of men’ for themselves wives, they took whomever they *chose*. Seebass observes that *בָּחַר*, ‘to choose, to elect’ is used nowhere else for the choice of a spouse. In most occurrences it is used for the election of a king or the recruiting of young soldiers⁵⁶ but also other objects can be combined with the verb *בָּחַר*, for example, land (Gen 13:11), a town for residence (Deut 23:16), stones for a sling (1 Sam 17:40), a bull for sacrifice (1 Kgs 18:23, 25), wood for making an idol (Isa 40:20) or words (Job 9:14).⁵⁷ The verb indicates a careful selection from a larger group of objects or persons. According to Kvanvig, Gen 6:2 is the only place in the Old Testament where the verb *בָּחַר* is used in the meaning ‘to choose a wife’, similar to the use of the verb *hâru*⁵⁸ in Akkadian.⁵⁹

In Gen 6:2, however, the expression *לָקַח אִשָּׁה* appears to be used as the standard terminology for taking a wife, whereas the verb *בָּחַר* ‘to choose’ indicates how the ‘sons of God’ could select women freely from among the ‘daughters of men’.

⁵⁵ Wenham, *comm. Gen* (WBC) 1987, 141.

⁵⁶ Seebass, “Die Gottessöhne,” 10. Cf. H. Wildberger, “*בָּחַר*,” in *THAT* 1:276–280.

⁵⁷ Cf. Emile Nicole, “*בָּחַר*,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:638.

⁵⁸ *CAD* 6:119, “*hâru A (hîāru)*”, “to pick and take as mate (for oneself or someone other), ... to espouse,” with as subject not only men, but also said of gods.

⁵⁹ Cf. Helge S. Kvanvig, “Gen 6,1–4 as an Antediluvian Event,” *SJOT* 16 no. 1 (2002): 103.

2.3 Lexical and Grammatical Analysis of Genesis 6:3

3aa ויאמר יהוה

3ab לא ידון רוחי באדם לעלם

3ba בשנם הוא בשר

3bb והיו ימיו מאה ועשרים שנה:

Then YHWH said: 'My spirit shall not remain in man forever; in his erring he is flesh; his days shall be a hundred and twenty years'.

Genesis 6:3 presents a varied scale of exegetical problems. The main difficulties are of a lexical nature, namely, the translation of the *hapax legomena* ידון and בשנם but also at the level of content when it comes to the meaning of the time-limit of 120 years. Moreover, the question arises whether YHWH's verdict is a sanction, and if so, why it only pertains to mankind and not to the 'sons of God'. Further discussion of the literary place of Gen 6:3 will be broached upon later as some interpreters consider this verse to be a secondary insertion.

2.3.1 “My Spirit Shall Not Remain in Man Forever”: ידון

The first verb in YHWH's reaction is difficult to translate because ידון is a *hapax legomenon*, provisionally to be rendered as “My spirit shall not ... (?) in man forever”. The traditional translation is ‘to remain’, which is supported by the Septuagint's rendition καταμείνη. However, it is not clear whether this translation was a conjecture interpolated from the context or based on lexicological evidence. A large number of proposals for a possible derivation of the word ידון exists; the following excursus provides an overview.

(1) Possible Cognates in Akkadian

The following solutions are suggested as a derivation of Akkadian:

- *danānu*, *da'ānu*,⁶⁰ 'to become strong', *dunnunu*, 'to strengthen'.⁶¹ It can be compared with the name of the place *Dannāh* in Josh 15:49 which has the possible meaning of 'stronghold'.⁶²
- *dinānu*, 'substitute', for example, in a polite salutation in correspondence: "aradka PN ana di-na-an bēlija lullik, your servant PN, I would lay down my life (lit. may I be a substitute) for my lord".⁶³ In magic rituals it refers to a substitute figurine for the person on whom the ritual is carried out.⁶⁴ It can also refer to 'wraith', 'ghost', the 'double' of a dead person.⁶⁵ Skinner suggests a derivation from this noun for דין in Gen 6:3: "it would be still better if the verb could be taken as a denominative from Assyrian *dinānu*, 'bodily appearance', with the sense 'shall not be embodied in man for ever'."⁶⁶ In his article on דין, Speiser favours a similar derivation.⁶⁷ He observes that *dinānu*, 'substitute' is employed only as a noun whereas in Gen 6:3 דין is a verb. To overcome this difficulty, he argues that *dinānu* has a close morphological parallel in *durāru*, both words – and only these two – have an alloform with *an-*, namely *andunānu*⁶⁸ and *andurāru*. The noun (*an*)*durāru* means 'remission of (commercial) debts', 'manumission (of private slaves)', 'cancelling of services (illegally placed on free persons)', in the general

⁶⁰ Neo-Assyrian form of the verb, cf. Wolfram von Soden, *GAG*, *Ergänzungsheft zu GAG*, 21**, §98i.

⁶¹ *CAD* 3:83–86. Wilhelm Gesenius and Rudolf Meyer (ed. Herbert Donner), *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, 18th ed., vol. 2:245, opt for this derivation. Cf. also Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der Hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtlichen Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 219; Horst Seebass, "Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß: Gen 6,1–4," *BN* 134 (2007): 5.

⁶² Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 266–267; Ronald S. Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4," *JBL* 106 no. 1 (1987): 15 nt. 10. Hendel refers to the Israelite placename *Dannāh* in Josh 15:49: "The likelihood is ... that *Dannāh* was originally an Israelite settlement and that the name *Dannāh* was a good Hebrew name. The meaning of the word is 'stronghold' or 'fortress,' cognate with the Akkadian *dannatu*. The root \sqrt{dnn} occurs in Hebrew in a placename and, I propose, in the verb *yādōn* in Gen 6:3. I might add that there is no difficulty in reading the form *yādōn* as stative, since other similar geminate forms are attested in Hebrew with stative meanings, e.g. *tā'ōz* (Ps 89:14), also meaning 'to be strong'."

⁶³ *CAD* 3:149, 1b.

⁶⁴ *CAD* 3:148–150.

⁶⁵ *CAD* 3:150.

⁶⁶ Skinner, *comm. Gen* 1930, 143.

⁶⁷ E. A. Speiser, "YDWN, Gen 6:3," *JBL* 75 no. 2 (1956): 126–129.

⁶⁸ With the same meaning as *dinānu*, cf. *CAD* 1/II:115.

meaning of freeing someone from responsibility or service.⁶⁹ However, Speiser observes that the noun *andurāru* occurs also as a denominative verbal form: *ina andarārim ul inandar* ‘she shall not be granted remittance of her financial obligations’.⁷⁰ The author therefore suggests that also *(an)dinānu* could be used in a denominative way. He argues that “[t]he meaning of the biblical term would be, accordingly, something like ‘expiate, answer for,’ in other words, ‘shield, protect’.”⁷¹ His translation of Gen 6:3 is: “My spirit shall not answer for man forever, in that he too is but flesh. His days shall be therefore a hundred and twenty years”.⁷²

- *dunnû*, ‘inferior’, plural *dunnāti*, ‘of inferior quality’,⁷³ *dunnamû*, ‘person of low status’.⁷⁴ These derivations are proposed by Scharbert. His translation of Gen 6:3 results in the following: “My spirit will not for ever become inferior in man because he is also flesh”.⁷⁵ However, the word *dunnû* (*dunnāti*) refers to something of inferior quality in a specific context only, namely in the case of dry asphalt consisting of either fine particles or bigger lumps, which is difficult to use and therefore ‘inferior’.⁷⁶ The word itself rather refers to ‘strength’ or ‘stiffness’.⁷⁷ This means that the meaning ‘inferior’ is connected to specific situations and not a general meaning of the word. This may be true similarly for the word *dunnamû* ‘fool, feeble minded’⁷⁸ which etymologically might be connected to a ‘hardness’ in understanding. The overall sense of *dunnû*, *dunnāti*, and *dunnamû* therefore appears to be connected more to the semantic field of ‘strength, hardness’ than to something inferior. If,

⁶⁹ Cf. “*andurāru*,” CAD 1/II:115–117; “*durāru*,” CAD 3:190.

⁷⁰ Speiser’s translation, cf. Speiser, “YDWN,” 128. CAD translates differently, however, without consequences for the translation of the verbal form; cf. “*darāru* A,” CAD 3:109: “she (the woman bought as a menial servant, *kinattūtu*) will not be released upon a (royal decree proclaiming) freedom (for persons sold for debts).”

⁷¹ Speiser, “YDWN,” 128.

⁷² Speiser, “YDWN,” 128.

⁷³ Cf. “*dunnû*,” AHW I:177. Cf. also “*dunnu* A,” CAD 3:184: “1. (physical) strenght, power, 2. force, violence, 3. severity (of cold weather), 4. fort, fortified house and area, 5. foundation, depth, firm ground, bedrock, 6. lump; pl. *dunnāti* in mngs. 4. and 6.”

⁷⁴ CAD 3:183–184; AHW I:176.

⁷⁵ Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” BZ 11 no. 1 (1967): 68, “Mein Geist soll nicht für immer durch den (oder: im) Menschen an Wert einbüßen deshalb, wil dieser auch Fleisch ist”.

⁷⁶ AHW I:177, cf. CAD 3:185 (*dunnu* A:6).

⁷⁷ Cf. AHW I:177.

⁷⁸ CAD 3:183–184.

nevertheless, inferiority is the intention, then this meaning is determined by the specific object to which it refers.

(2) Possible Cognates in Ugaritic

- *dn*, ‘strength, potency’.⁷⁹ Herrmann chooses this option with reference to Akkadian *danānu*, resulting in a translation “My spirit will not be for ever strong in mankind”.⁸⁰

(3) Possible Cognates in Arabic

Some scholars refer also to Arabic to find cognates for the verb יָדִין, resulting in the following derivations:

- *dnn*, stem IV, pf. *adanna*, ipf. *yudinnu*, with preposition *bi*, ‘to stay in (a place)’.⁸¹ This derivation would support the traditional translation of the Septuagint.
- *dwn*, stem I, pf. *dāna*, ipf. *yadūnu*, ‘to be mean, weak, despised’.⁸² Adjective: *dūn*, ‘inferior, low, bad’.⁸³ Mentioned by Scharbert to support his reference to Akkadian *dunnāti*.⁸⁴
- *dnw* / *dny*, stem I, pf. *danā*, ipf. *yadnū*, ‘to be near, close; to come near, go near, approach’.⁸⁵
- Schüle proposes a derivation from *dāna* / *yadānu*, ‘continuously doing something’, adding that in Arabic this is never used absolutely but always as introduction to an infinitive construction.⁸⁶ However, this pattern and

⁷⁹ DULAT I:276 (*dn* III). Cf. also Stanislav Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 183: “*dnn* (?) KTU *da(?)n* 1.16:I:30 . . . , probably perf. 3. sing. m. /d-n-n/ ‘to be strong’ (cf. Akkad. *danānu*) (or adj. ‘strong’(?), cf. Akkad. *dannu*).” Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge,” 15 nt. 10, refers to KTU 1.12:II:59.

⁸⁰ Wolfram Herrmann, *Von Gott und den Göttern: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 259. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1999), 43.

⁸¹ Cf. J. G. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary for the Use of Students* (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1921), 217. Cf. also Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 295–296. I am grateful to Dr. Adriana Drint, associate professor of Old Testament Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic at the Apeldoorn Theological University who was so kind as to help me with her knowledge of Arabic.

⁸² Cf. Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon in Eight Parts* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), vol. 3:938; Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 223.

⁸³ Cf. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 223; Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Arabic-English* (ed. J. Milton Cowan; 3d ed.; London: MacDonald and Evans, 1980), 304.

⁸⁴ Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte,” 68.

⁸⁵ Cf. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 218; Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 294.

⁸⁶ Schüle, *Der Prolog*, 219.

meaning is not to be found in Arabic with the root *dwn* but only with the root *dwm*, stem I, pf. *dāma* ipf. *yadāmu* / *yadūmu*.⁸⁷

(4) Possible Cognates in Aramaic

Jewish exegesis in Gemara and Tosefta connects ידון to *נִדָּן, ‘sheath (of a sword)’⁸⁸ (cf. 1 Chron 21:27) referring to Dan 7:15 which reads: “As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed in its sheath (נִדָּןָה)” which might mean ‘in its body’. Genesis 6:3, then, is accordingly paraphrased: “God says: I do not bring their spirit back in its sheath = their body”.⁸⁹ However, the reading of Dan 7:15 is uncertain. Masoretic vocalisation is נִדָּןָה, traditionally read with the suffix as נִדָּןָה.⁹⁰ Based upon the translation of the Septuagint (ἐν τούτοις), a conjecture is proposed, namely בְּגִן דִּנָּה, ‘in the midst of this, about this’.⁹¹ Even if the meaning ‘in its body’ is followed in the interpretation of Dan 7:15, the metathesis of consonants (*dwn* / *dyn* / *dnn* > *ndn*) makes this explanation less probable for Gen 6:3.⁹²

(5) Possible Derivations in Hebrew

The possible derivation of the verbal form ידון in Hebrew is disputed. Most common is a derivation of the verb דון but different proposals exist, much as the following survey shows.

- ידון, usually translated as ‘to remain’.⁹³ Gunkel uses this in referring to the Elephantine-papyri in which the name *Jedonja* occurs. The name *Jadon* (יָדוֹן)

⁸⁷ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* 3:935: “It [a thing] continued, lasted, endured, or remained”. Cf. Hava, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 222; Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 303.

⁸⁸ “*נִדָּןָה,” *HAL* 3:636–637.

⁸⁹ Cf. B. Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 173. See *Gen. Rab.* 26:6.3.B, where the interpretation is mentioned referring to a sheath of a sword and a quiver for arrows: “When I put the spirit back in its sheath, I shall not put their spirit back in their sheath.” (Translation Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (BJS 104; Vol. 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1985), 283. Cf. also 1QapGen ar II:10: וְנִשְׁמַתִּי לִנְיָ נִדְנָהָא “the gasping of my breath in my breast” (*DSSSE*, 28–29).

⁹⁰ Cf. “*נִדָּןָה / נִדָּןָה,” *HAL* 5:1744. Cf. also KBL, 1098, where the vocalisation נִדָּןָה is given.

⁹¹ Cf. *HAL* 5:1744, where more conjectures are listed.

⁹² John Calvin rejects this solution not only because it gives a strained explanation but also because it “tastes of the delirium of the Manichaeans”: “Sed quia violenter detorta est expositio, et Manichaeorum delirium resipit, quasi hominis anima pars esset divini spiritus, repudianda nobis est.” *Commentarius in Genesin* (CR 50), 114.

⁹³ *HAL* 1:208 “Gn 6:3, inexpl., sec. ctxt bleiben”; cf. *HALOT* 1:217.

in Neh 3:7, then, could be the abbreviated form.⁹⁴ The meaning of this name could be 'YHWH remains' but this translation depends upon the supposed meaning of the verb *דן* and therefore has no conclusive force. Gunkel mentions⁹⁵ also the Septuagint translation of the verb *יָנִין*⁹⁶ in Ps 72:17 as a possible translation of a variant reading *יָדִין*: "Be his name be blessed forever, before the sun may his name remain (*διαμεινέι*).” Yet this translation may have three different sources: (1) The translators' exemplar contained the reading *יָנִין*,⁹⁷ (2) The translators did not know how to render *יָנִין* and therefore made a conjecture, (3) The *Vorlage* used the verb *יָדִין*. Clines assumes four homonyms of the verb *דן*, 'to remain,' 'to be lowly,' 'to enrich, feed' and 'to be close,' leaving the possibility that Gen 6:3 mean either "My spirit will not remain in humanity" or "will not be close to humanity".⁹⁸

- *דן*, 'to judge, to dispute'.⁹⁹ Some translate this as 'to rule', referring to Zech 3:7 where it is said to Joshua, *וְגַם-אַתָּה תִּדְרִין אֶת-בֵּיתִי* 'and you also shall rule my house'.¹⁰⁰ However, in this case one would rather expect to see *יָדִין* and not *יָדִין* in Gen 6:3,¹⁰¹ despite that the *ו* and the *י* are sometimes interchanged in the scribal tradition.¹⁰² Talmudic exegesis understands *יָדִין* as a form of *דן* and refers usually to the day of the last judgment in which the generation of the flood will not survive and it will not partake of the age to come.¹⁰³ Also Symmachus, who usually provides a literal translation, renders the verbal form as 'to judge'.¹⁰⁴ In the same semantic field, but with the emphasis on the

⁹⁴ Cf. Gunkel, *comm. Gen* 1917, 57.

⁹⁵ Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 57.

⁹⁶ Qere *יָנִין*, Niphal of *יָנַן*, *HAL* 3:657, *HALOT* 1:696 'to produce shoots, get descendants'.

⁹⁷ See the apparatus of *BHS* ad loc. Niphal of *יָנַן*, *HAL* 2:442, *HALOT* 1:464, '(1.) to be established (2.) to be steadfast, be sure (3.) to be completed, be arranged (4.) to be permanent, endure (5.) to be ready'.

⁹⁸ *DCH* 2:426.

⁹⁹ "*יָדִין*," *HAL* 1:211; *HALOT* 1:220, "(1.) to plead one's cause (2.) to contend with (3.) to execute judgement, with *ב*".

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Gen* 1887, 149.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 266.

¹⁰² Obviously caused by graphic similarity in Hebrew square script. Cf. e.g. the Qere in Gen 36:5, Ps 72:17; see further Ernst Würthwein, *Der Text des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 119.

¹⁰³ *Genesis Rabbah* 26:6.1–3. Translation Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, 283. See also *Mishnah*, *Nez. Sanh.* 10:3. Translation Matis Roberts, *Seder Nezikin Vol. II(a): Tractate Sanhedrin* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2001), 177: "The generation of the Flood has no share in the World to Come, nor will they stand for judgment, as it is stated (*Gen. 6:3*): *My spirit shall not contend evermore concerning man*".

¹⁰⁴ Cf. F. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersint* (Vol. 1, Prolegomena, Gen–Esth.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 22: "οὐ κρινεῖ το πνεῦμά μου τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αἰωνίως".

meaning ‘to dispute, to be at strife with’, some interpreters refer to 2 Sam 19:10, וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל־הָעָם נִדּוֹן, where a Niphal participle of דָּן is used.¹⁰⁵ Translations rendering נִדּוֹן as a form of דָּן show considerable variations for Gen 6:3: My spirit will not judge men; my spirit will not be at strife with men; I will not judge them too strictly, I am at strife with myself, whether I will destroy them or spare them.¹⁰⁶

- דָּן / דִּין is apparently used in Talmudic Hebrew as ‘to remain’¹⁰⁷ and may play a role in the explanation of Dan’s name (Gen 30:6), not with the meaning “God has done justice to me” but as “God is with me”. According to Cassuto, the word נִדּוֹן can only be derived from the root *dnn*. Usually this root is explained as having been derived from the Akkadian verb *danānu*, meaning ‘to be strong’. Cassuto provides several arguments to establish *dnn* as signifying ‘to remain, to exist’: (1) Akkadian also has a second root *danānu* which can be found in the nouns *dinnû*, (fem. *dinnūtu*)¹⁰⁸ and *madnanu* B.¹⁰⁹ (2) In Arabic, Akkadian, Syriac, Talmudic Aramaic, and possibly also in Hebrew, the word *dan* signifies a jar with a sharp bottom rim that can be thrust into the ground to make it stand permanently.¹¹⁰ (3) The verb דָּן is found in the *Qal* conjugation in Talmudic Aramaic in the sense of ‘to remain, to exist perpetually in a given place’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ HAL 1:211, HALOT 1:220, ‘to quarrel, argue’.

¹⁰⁶ For various translations in Jewish tradition within this semantic field, see Jacob, *Genesis*, 173–174.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 267.

¹⁰⁸ An adjective describing a kind of couch or bed, cf. CAD 3:150.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. CAD 10/I:19, *madnanu* A = kind of chariot or wagon, B = strength.

¹¹⁰ See CAD 3:98–99 *dannu*, “vat, mostly used for storage of wine, beer etc.” 99: “The word *dannu* is late ... and seems to appear in Arabic and Aram. as a loan word Derived from the adj. *dannu* describing containers ..., it refers ... exclusively to large storage jars”. According to CAD 3:99 it should not be connected to Ugaritic *dn*, a container for bread, but cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Grammar, Texts in Translation, Cuneiform Selections, Glossary, Indices* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 386:680 “*dn* = ‘jar’ in which bread can be stored”. Cf. also “*dn* II”, *DULAT* 1:276, ‘vessel, vat’.

¹¹¹ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 295–296. Semantically, the connection between ‘to be strong’ and ‘to remain’ is not too far-fetched: something that is strong (e.g. a stronghold) is also something that remains on a certain place. Cf. Hungarian *vár*, meaning as noun *stronghold, fortress*, a place where one waits for the enemy, but used as verb it has the meaning ‘to wait’.

(6) Proposed Emendations

- דוּר, 'to dwell, to stay, to remain'.¹¹² The Septuagint translation of יָדוּן as καταμείλην is possibly based on a finite form of the verb דוּר at its source.¹¹³ Interestingly enough, this variant reading יָדוּר, 'to reside', instead of יָדוּן is attested in 4Q252, an early Jewish commentary of Genesis.¹¹⁴ The variant reading could also be an early emendation or a result of the confusion of the ך and the ר, which could happen easily in Hebrew square script.
- לִין, לִין, 'to dwell, to spend the night'.¹¹⁵ Hamilton suggests that either דוּר or לִין could be an explanation for the translation found in the Septuagint.¹¹⁶
- Next to classical emendations assuming instead of יָדוּן verbal forms of דוּר, לִין, or לִין, Tur-Sinai proposes a more thoroughgoing emendation. Based on an alleged scribal error in an earlier unvocalised stage of the text, he suggests a metathesis of the *res* and the *nun* for the unvocalised יִדְנַרַח, resulting in יִדְרַנַח, to be vocalised as יָדַר נַח. The text, then, reads: "And YHWH said: Noah shall not dwell among men forever, because he (Noah) also is flesh, his time among man – not his total lifetime – will be one hundred and twenty years".¹¹⁷ This would mean that already here in Gen 6:3 God has announced his decision to save Noah alone among mankind. However, in assuming a scribal error in a very early stage of the transcription of the text, Tur-Sinai renders his position almost unassailable. For, if true, this error will have determined the whole of the subsequent textual tradition and also the ancient versions. Yet, one could still ask how such an error could have gone unnoticed by an audience or scribes who were familiar with the original, especially because it allegedly changed an easily understandable statement about Noah into a difficult reading about YHWH's spirit together with an apparently rare verb. Although Tur-Sinai's emendation may be unassailable, it is equally unverifiable. Therefore it can be rejected in Bartelmus' words as an unwarranted exegetical fantasy.¹¹⁸

¹¹² "דוּר II," HAL 1:208–209, HALOT 1:217, 'to live, dwell'.

¹¹³ Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 266.

¹¹⁴ 4Q252 Col. I:2. Cf. DSSSE, 500: באדם לעולם ידור רוחי.

¹¹⁵ "לִין II," HAL 2:502–503, HALOT 1:529: 'to leave overnight, to spend the night, stay overnight, to stay, dwell'.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 266.

¹¹⁷ N. H. Tur-Sinai, "The Riddle of Genesis vi. 1–4," *ExpTim* 71 (1959): 349.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen*

(7) Conclusions Concerning יָדִין

Because יָדִין is a *hapax legomenon* in Biblical Hebrew, the exegete is forced to draw upon data from comparative etymology in cognate languages. The results of etymological research are represented in the following Table 3:

(Table 3)

semantic field	language	word	degree of isomorphy
‘strong’	Akkadian	<i>danānu</i> , <i>da’ānu</i> - to become strong <i>dunnunu</i> - to strengthen <i>dunnu</i> (<i>dunnāti</i>) - strength, force, fort, foundation, lump	high high high
	Ugaritic	<i>dn</i> - strength	medium/high
‘remain’	Akkadian	<i>dinānu</i> - substitute (considered as something remaining, a ‘replacement’)	high
	Arabic	<i>dnn</i> - to stay <i>dnw</i> / <i>dny</i> - to be near	high medium
	Talmudic Hebrew	דָּיַן / דָּיַן - to remain	high
‘inferior’	Akkadian	<i>dunnu</i> (<i>dunnāti</i>) - (harder and therefore) inferior, unusable	high
	Akkadian	<i>dunnamû</i> - person of low status (probably derived from ‘hard-headed’ > ‘foolish’)	medium/high
	Arabic	<i>dwn</i> - to be weak	high
‘sheath, casing’	Aramaic	*דָּיַן - sheath	low
‘judge’	Hebrew	דָּיַן - to judge, to dispute	medium

Literatur (ATANT 65; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1979), 19: “Völlig aus der Luft gegriffen ... ein besonders skurriles Beispiel exegetischer Phantasie”.

When surveying the above-mentioned data, the most significant evidence is found in the semantic field of ‘being strong’ and ‘remaining’. Both semantic fields may partly overlap, in the sense that something which is strong endures and therefore remains.¹¹⁹ The connotations of some of the cognate words with ‘inferiority’ may at least partly be due to their development in a specific context within the semantic field of ‘being strong, hard’. The derivation from Aramaic *נָדָן, ‘sheath, casing’ is unduly uncertain. Talmudic Hebrew is a later development but, of course, can have preserved an earlier meaning.

A derivation from Hebrew דִּין, ‘to judge’ is possible, but gives a more strained meaning in the context of Gen 6:3. After all, the combination דִּין with בָּ is only attested in Ps 110:6, בְּנֵי־יְהוָה דִּין, ‘he will do justice among the people’. It can therefore be asked how sensible a translation of Gen 6:3 as ‘my spirit will not forever do justice among mankind’ can be. It could mean that God decides to abandon mankind but, then, why is ‘my spirit’ mentioned explicitly? When the verb is vocalised as a Niphal, יִדּוֹן, it may result in the translation: ‘My spirit will not forever quarrel with mankind’, but the Niphal appears to have a more reciprocal meaning, ‘to argue with each other’, as in the only attested case of 2 Sam 19:10.

Among the emendations only דוּר deserves serious consideration. Yet, with respect to content, it expresses the same meaning as ‘to remain’. The presence of ידוּר in 4Q252 supports this emendation. It is, however, impossible to track its origin: was this rendition meant as an emendation or clarification of the difficult ידוֹן? Or was it already present in the manuscript 4Q252 serving as its source?

Unless other data is uncovered, a translation of ידוֹן as ‘to remain’ appears justified based on the analysis above.

2.3.2 “My Spirit Shall Not Remain in Man Forever”: רוּחַ Versus בָּשָׂר

What does it mean when YHWH asserts that his spirit¹²⁰ will not remain in man forever?

¹¹⁹ Cf. Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” *BZ* 11 no. 1 (1967): 67: “In übrigen hallt man das Suchen nach einer Etymologie für mehr oder weniger überflüssig, weil dem Zusammenhang nach die Bedeutungen ‘walten’, ‘herrschen’ und ‘bleiben’ auf dasselbe hinauskommen; denn in jedem Fall wolle der Text von V. 3 sagen, der Geist Jahwes solle nicht für immer im Menschen wirksam bleiben”. See also Cassuto, *comm. Gen.*, 296; Westerman, *comm. Gen.*, 507.

¹²⁰ The word רוּחַ varies in gender. In Gen 6:3 it is treated as grammatically masculine, predominantly it is feminine but it can be treated as masculine as well, e.g. Num 5:14 (m.) and 5:30 (f.).

The history of exegesis gives evidence of several approaches to interpret the word רִיחַ in Gen 6:3.¹²¹ According to some interpreters, YHWH's spirit is his ethical principle judging the corrupt nature of mankind.¹²² This exegesis pertains to the translation of יָדוֹן as 'to judge'. Another explanation is that 'my spirit' refers to God's emotions which are stirred up by human sin.¹²³ Others consider רִיחַ to refer to the divine substance that YHWH and the angels share.¹²⁴ This exegesis espouses the view that divine and human substances have become mingled by the illicit sexual unions mentioned in Gen 6:2 which is something God does not tolerate.¹²⁵ According to Tsukimoto, the intention of Gen 6:3 may be to criticise the institution of kingship in Israel, thereby intimating that God will withdraw his spirit from the leader of his people whenever that leader abuses his being anointed with God's spirit for the satisfaction of personal desires.¹²⁶

Most common is the view that רִיחַ means the divine breath of life bequeathed to mankind at creation, as is described in Gen 2:7.¹²⁷ Support for this view can be found in several passages: Genesis 2:7 describes how God breathed life into man. Although Hebrew here uses נְשָׁמָה (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים) and not רִיחַ, the concept is the same, as is shown by passages in which both words are used in parallel.¹²⁸ This notion of

¹²¹ For an overview, see Skinner, *comm. Gen* 1930, 144–145.

¹²² E.g. John Calvin, *Commentarius in Genesin* (CR 50), 114: "Quantisper enim poenam suspendit Dominus, quodammodo disceptat cum hominibus ... [n]unc quasi taedio affectus, declarat sibi non esse animum litigandi diutius, ac si gallice quis diceret, *C'est trop plaider*." John Calvin, *comm. Gen* 1948, 241: "For as long as the Lord suspends punishment, he ... strives with men ... [a]nd now ..., he declares that he has no mind to contend any longer, as if any should say in French, 'This is to plead too much'."

¹²³ Skinner, *comm. Gen*, 144, mentions that A. Klostermann, *Der Pentateuch*, 1907, advocates this explanation.

¹²⁴ E.g. Holzinger, *comm. Gen* 1898, 65–66: "רִיחַ bezeichne den spirituellen Stoff, aus dem Jahwe und die Engel bestehen, während der Mensch Fleisch ist. ... Jahwe verwirft die Vermischung von Engeln und Menschen dabei nicht aus Abscheu vor derlei Unnatürlichem, sondern der Neid der Gottheit erträgt es nicht, dass die Menschen die ihnen gesetzten Schranken überspringen." See also H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 50.

¹²⁵ The difficulty of this interpretation is that just shortening human lifespan would not prevent the propagation of the divine substance among humanity. Only the annihilation of the affected persons would function as effective remedy for the alleged problem. Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 52.

¹²⁶ Akio Tsukimoto, "Der Mensch ist geworden wie unsereiner: Untersuchungen zum zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Gen. 3,22–24 und 6,1–4," *AJBI* 5 (1979): 22–23.

¹²⁷ See e.g. Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Gen* 1887, 149; Dodds, *comm. Gen* 1909, 32; Procksch, *comm. Gen* 1924, 60; Von Rad, *comm. Gen* 1972, 114; Gispén, *comm. Gen* 1974, 223; Westermann, *comm. Gen* (BKAT) 1974, 506; Brueggemann, *comm. Gen* 1982, 72; Atkinson, *comm. Gen* 1990, 131; Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 277; Soggin, *comm. Gen* 1997, 121; Waltke, *comm. Gen* 2001, 117.

¹²⁸ Cf. Gen 7:22 (both words combined), Job 27:3; 32:8; 33:4 (parallelism); 34:14 (hendiadys); Isa 42:5; 57:16 (parallelism).

God's life-giving spirit as sustaining human and animal life returns throughout the Old Testament.¹²⁹ It can also be found in the literature of Qumran.¹³⁰

A further support for better understanding this is provided in Isa 31:3. Similar to Gen 6:3, Isa 31:3 stresses the contrast between what is the distinctive element for humans, namely בָּשָׂר, and for God, namely רוּחַ. In unmistakable parallelism, the message of the fundamental distinction between the divine and the human is expressed by Isa 31:3 in a situation in which Israel blindly believes in nothing but the physical strength of horses: "The Egyptians are men (אָדָם) and not God (אֱלֹהִים), their horses are flesh (בָּשָׂר) and not spirit (רוּחַ)".¹³¹ The word בָּשָׂר, here, refers to the transitoriness of life, just as the word רוּחַ indicates endless divine life-power. The word רוּחַ in the Old Testament is therefore different from the word 'spirit' in Western philosophical tradition which considers spirit to be the opposite of matter. In the Old Testament, רוּחַ can refer to powerful phenomena which transcend the distinction of mind versus matter.¹³² The vulnerability of mankind in contrast with God is also stressed in Ps 56:5, 12: "In God I trust ... what can 'flesh' (vs. 5) / 'man' (vs. 12) do to me?" A similar statement is found in Ps 78:39: "He remembered that they are 'flesh', a 'wind'¹³³ that passes and does not return" and in Job 10:4: "Do you (God) have eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees?"¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Cf. Gen 7:15; Job 34:14–15; Ps 104:29–30; Eccl 3:19–20; Isa 57:16; Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14.

¹³⁰ 1QH^a: (17) "[I give] you [thanks] for the spirits (sic! JJTD) which you placed in me (רוּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה בִּי)." (DSSSE, 149); Col. V "(24) And I, your servant, have known (25) thanks to the spirit you have placed in me [...]" (DSSSE 151); 4Q427: Frags. 2 + 3 col. II (= 1QH^a XX; 4Q428. 8 II) "(12) And I, the Inst[uctor, have known you, my God, through the spirit which you gave in me בִּי רוּחַ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה בִּי, and I have listened loyally to your wonderful secret] (13) through [your holy] spirit." (DSSSE, 895).

¹³¹ Cf. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration*, 50–51; J. R. Wiskerke, "De geestelijkheid van God," in *De strijd om de sleutel der kennis: Een bundel opstellen over theologie en filosofie* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1978), 93–99; N. H. Gootjes, *De geestelijkheid van God* (Franeker: Wever, 1985), 129–132; Marc Vervenne, "All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6.1–4," in *Words Remembered, Text Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (eds. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 36.

¹³² Cf. Wiskerke, "De geestelijkheid van God," 97; see also J. H. Scheepers, *Die Gees van God en die gees van die mens in die Ou Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1960), 263; Emil G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," *JNES* 6 no. 4 (1947): 199.

¹³³ Here רוּחַ traditionally is translated as 'wind', referring to elusiveness, almost as a synonym of flesh but perhaps it has to be seen as stressing the contrast between 'flesh' and 'spirit': when the spirit goes, it does not come back, thus demonstrating the frailty of flesh.

¹³⁴ The contrast between flesh (in the sense of 'meat') and spirit can be seen in a very literal form in Num 11.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, one can conclude that in Gen 6:3 the word בָּשָׂר might be just another word to denote mankind,¹³⁵ especially mankind in its frailty and transiency. Eslinger suggests that the word בָּשָׂר in Gen 6:3 may refer to moral depravity.¹³⁶ Yet, the texts analysed above, in which רוּחַ and בָּשָׂר are contrasted, point more towards a connotation of transiency and weakness, especially in Isa 31:3 where the Egyptian horses (ancient war machines!) are rendered as vincible in their being only mortal beings.

2.3.3 “My Spirit Shall Not Remain in Man Forever”: לֹא לְעֹלָם

The construction לֹא לְעֹלָם ... can be translated in two ways: ‘never’ or ‘not forever’. Jacob chooses the former solution, arguing that when an eternal period of time is negated, Hebrew uses the construction לֹא לְעֹלָם, as in Job 7:16, Ps 103:9, Prov 27:24 and Isa 57:16, but when the negation denies the predicate, preceded or followed by לְעֹלָם, the translation should be ‘never’ or ‘not at all’, as in Exod 14:13, Judg 2:1, Deut 23:4 (עַד עֹלָם), 2 Sam 12:10 (עַד עֹלָם), Neh 13:1 (עַד-עֹלָם), Ps 15:5, 55:23, 112:6, 119:93, Isa 14:20, 25:2, Jer 20:11, 31:40, 35:6 (עַד עֹלָם), Ezek 26:21, and Joel 2:26–27. This would mean that Gen 6:3 hopes to express that the spirit of YHWH never again appear in mankind in the way it had previously been.¹³⁷

However, in some cases, a construction similar to Gen 6:3 with negation of the predicate followed by לְעֹלָם can only mean ‘not ... forever’, for example, in Jer 3:12: “I will not be angry forever” (not: “I will never be angry”) or Lam 3:31: “The Lord will not cast off forever” (not: “The Lord will never cast off”).¹³⁸ Such a translation as ‘not ... forever’ makes perfect sense in the context of Gen 6:3, all the more so because the verse mentions a limit of 120 years: God’s spirit will not remain endlessly in man.

¹³⁵ N. H. Tur-Sinai, “The Riddle of Genesis vi. 1–4,” *ExpTim* 71 (1959), 348: “like the corresponding word *bashar* in Arabic.”

¹³⁶ Cf. Lyle Eslinger, “A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha’elohim* and *benoth ha’adam* in Genesis 6:1–4,” *JSOT* 13 (1979): 72. Eslinger argues that בָּשָׂר is used as euphemism for ‘male member’ in Ezek 16:26, 23:20 and therefore suggests as translation of Gen 6:3: “My spirit shall not always remain with man forever because he is a male member”. However, from the text of Ezekiel this euphemistic use of the word is clear from its context, as is the reference to moral and religious depravity. Part of the concept of a euphemism is the idea that the normal use of the word governs the euphemistic use and not vice versa.

¹³⁷ Cf. B. Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 173.

¹³⁸ See also Delitzsch, *comm. Gen*, 149; Westermann, *comm. Gen*, 506.

2.3.4 “My Spirit Shall Not Remain in Man Forever”: בָּאָדָם

Who are the ones addressed when YHWH asserts that his spirit will not remain in them? Considering that the word בָּאָדָם is used also in vs. 1 and 2, it most plausibly refers to the same group in Gen 6:3, namely to mankind in general. Some exegetes, however, believe that Gen 6:3 concerns a subgroup within mankind, the ones born from the illicit relationships between the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’.¹³⁹ The Septuagint may suggest this as well,¹⁴⁰ with the rendition: “my spirit shall not remain in these men” (ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις).

Yet, the Hebrew text has no specific indications by which the meaning of בָּאָדָם is narrowed to only a particular group of mankind. Moreover, a view of בָּאָדָם as referring to mankind in general makes good sense, therefore there is no need to infer from the content of Gen 6:1–4 that with בָּאָדָם in Gen 6:3 only a subset of mankind is targeted.

2.3.5 “In His Erring He is Flesh”: בִּשְׁגָגָה

Translating the word בִּשְׁגָגָה presents serious challenges. The Leningrad Codex vocalises בִּשְׁגָגָה but many manuscripts and printed editions have the variant בִּשְׁגָגָה,¹⁴¹ suggesting the last syllable to be a third-person plural masculine pronominal suffix.

To address this problem, four¹⁴² solutions will be discussed:

¹³⁹ Cf. Procksch, *comm. Gen.* 61; Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” *JNES* 6 no. 4 (1947): 198–199: “the *gibbōrīm* must be meant here”.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBLSCS 35; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), 77: “[T]he divine judgment is not on mankind as a whole but on ‘these men.’ ... the limitation must be on those men who were to be the product of the illicit union referred to in vv. 2 and 4.”

¹⁴¹ See the critical apparatus in *BHS* ad locum.

¹⁴² The solution from *gematria* can be mentioned only in passing. Roy A. Rosenberg, “*Beshaggam* and *Shiloh*,” *ZAW* 105 no. 2 (1993): 258–259, calculates that the letter-value of מֹשֶׁה (Moses) is 40+300+5=345 which has the same value as בִּשְׁגָגָה (2+300+3+40). As this was the age of Moses, the second half of Gen 6:3 would have a meaning similar to “Moses is flesh and his days will be 120 years”. Howard Jacobson, “*Beshaggam* and *Shiloh* Revisited,” *ZAW* 106 no. 3 (1994): 490, remarks that this solution – unpersuasive in his opinion – was already mentioned by the rabbis of old and refers to *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 32 and *Zohar* 1.25b. But there are also other references which connect Moses to Gen 6:3, see *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 9:8 (translation D. J. Harrington, *OTP* 2:316), Talmud, *b. Hul.* 139b, cf. Dirk U. Rottzoll, *Rabbinischer Kommentar zum Buch Genesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 137 nt. 23 and *Gen. Rab.* 26:6.9 (translation: Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary on the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 285. See also Josephus, *A.J.* 1.6.4:152, who mentions that it was only after the death of Moses that God restricted human lifespan to 120 years. Interestingly enough, newer research argues that the redactor of the primeval history used the age of Moses (Deut 31:2; 34:7) as source to determine the maximum lifespan of man, cf.

- (1) the word is to be interpreted as a verb which can be traced to the Akkadian word *šagāmu*,
 - (2) a composite preposition consisting of —בִּי , —שׁ , and בְּנֵי ,
 - (3) the preposition —בִּי + infinitive construct of שָׁנַג with a third-person masculine plural suffix, and
 - (4) the preposition —בִּי + infinitive construct of שָׁנַג with an enclitical *mem*.
- The following excursus provides an overview.

(1) *The Akkadian Connections*

The Akkadian verb *šagāmu*, ‘to roar, to thunder, to buzz, to make resound’¹⁴³ might provide the etymological background for the translation of בְּנֵי שָׁנַג . Clines tentatively suggests that בְּנֵי שָׁנַג might conserve a reference to human noise as the immediate cause of the flood in Mesopotamian literature. The resulting translation would be: “My spirit will not abide in man forever because of the noise of flesh”.¹⁴⁴ Additional arguments for a connection with Akkadian *šagāmu* are provided by Kvanvig who translates it thus: “My spirit shall not be powerful in man forever in the noise. He is flesh, and his days shall be 120 years.” Although Kvanvig admits that suggesting a Hebrew lexeme *šgm* would create a new *hapax legomenon*, he identifies another word of Akkadian provenance in the immediate context which is also a *hapax*, namely כִּפָּר ‘bitumen, pitch’ (Gen 6:14). The Akkadian cognate is *kupru*,¹⁴⁵ a word also used in the Mesopotamian flood stories.¹⁴⁶ The author could have also used a good Hebrew equivalent, namely חֵמָר , as in Gen 11:3 (pitch for mortar), 14:10 (bitumen pits) and Exod 2:3 (one of the sealing materials of Moses’ basket). Kvanvig argues that this occurrence of the word כִּפָּר in the Genesis flood story demonstrates that the scribe had access to a Mesopotamian version of the story of the flood. Even if

Walter Bührer, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung,” ZAW 123 no. 4 (2011): 511.

¹⁴³ CAD 17/I:63–65.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. David J. A. Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the ‘Primeval History’ (Genesis 1–11),” JSOT 13 (1979): 40. Clines admits, however, that with this translation the occurrence of בְּנֵי שָׁנַג is unintelligible, see his nt. 40; he therefore argues that, although the present text does not refer to human noise as inciting cause of the flood, an earlier version of the text might have done so.

¹⁴⁵ CAD 8:553–555, ‘bitumen’.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. Gilgamesh Epic, Standard Babylonian Version XI:66, cf. A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (vol. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 706–707.

there is no Mesopotamian counterpart of Gen 6:1–4, the text has, according to Kvanvig, numerous details which have a possible Mesopotamian provenance.¹⁴⁷ Vervenne considers this derivation as “extremely hypothetical”,¹⁴⁸ all the more so because the Mesopotamian motif of human noise disturbing the sleep of the gods – as the cause of the flood – cannot be found in Gen 6.¹⁴⁹

A further solution based on an Akkadian cognate is to be ascribed to Walton. He makes a direct connection of *בשנם* to the Akkadian adjective *šaggu* ‘stiff, rigid’¹⁵⁰ which is a derivate of the verb *šagāgu* ‘to stiffen’.¹⁵¹ Complemented with an adverbial *mem*,¹⁵² it has a possible translation of ‘irrepressibly, undeniably, assuredly’.¹⁵³ The difficulty with this proposal is that *šaggu* in Akkadian is used primarily in contexts of medical diagnosis. An etymology evolving from ‘stiffness’ to ‘assured’ seems therefore less likely.

(2) *בשנם* as Compound Preposition

The word *בשנם* is commonly explained as being a compound preposition composed of *ב*-, *ש*- and *נ* (*ש*- in this case being the alternative form of the relative pronoun *אשר*). Its meaning, then, approximates ‘because’.¹⁵⁴ Even if the same composite preposition does not occur in biblical Hebrew, there are cases of similar combinations. Song of Songs 1:7 uses *שֶׁלֹמָה* ‘for why’, a compound of *ש*-, *ל*- and *מָה*.¹⁵⁵ The composite *שֶׁנֶם־זֶה* ‘also this’ occurs in Eccl 1:17, 2:15 and 8:14. Moreover, similar *hapax legomena* can be found in Eccl 2:16, using *בְּשֶׁכֶּבֶר*, a compound of *ב*-, *ש*- and *כֶּבֶר* ‘already’ and in Jonah 1:7, using *בְּשֶׁלֹמִי* ‘because of what’, a compound of *ב*-, *ש*-, *ל*- and the interrogative pronoun *מִי*.

¹⁴⁷ See Helge S. Kvanvig, “Gen 6,1–4 as an Antediluvian Event,” *SJOT* 16 no. 1 (2002): 108–109.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Vervenne, “All They Need is Love,” 28.

¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the *Leitwort* in the Atrahasis Epic is *rigmu* ‘sound, noise,’ cf. *CAD* 14:328–334), as is observed by Walter Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung,” *ZAW* 123 no. 4 (2011): 502–503 nt. 52. Examples from the Atrahasis are I:242.365.358, II:5, III:23, cf. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, eds., *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 60–94.

¹⁵⁰ *CAD* 17/I:71–72.

¹⁵¹ *CAD* 17/I:62.

¹⁵² Cf. *GK* §100g.

¹⁵³ Walton, *comm Gen* 2001, 295–296.

¹⁵⁴ The ancient versions and old rabbinic commentaries render it as ‘because’. Cf. Jacob, *comm. Gen*, 175; Gunkel, *comm. Gen*, 58. However, the LXX may retain a trace of the third-person plural pronominal suffix, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς σάρκας.

¹⁵⁵ *HAL* 2:523, *HALOT* 1:552.

The use of שֶׁ as relative pronoun has definitely been in use in Semitic languages since ancient times¹⁵⁶ and also in Hebrew. Its use was most likely diminished for a while in favour of the use of אֲשֶׁר .¹⁵⁷ The word can be found twice in Judg 5:7¹⁵⁸ (the *Song of Deborah*) which is generally considered to be among the oldest texts in the Old Testament.¹⁵⁹ In the Pentateuch the pronoun שֶׁ in itself is absent but can be found to occur in the names of persons. In Gen 4:18, it is present in the name מֶתוֹשָׁאֵל ¹⁶⁰ in Exod 6:22 and Lev 10:4 in the name מִישָׁאֵל . According to Rosenberg, it is possible to identify שֶׁ in Gen 49:10 if the word שֶׁלֹּה is read as שֶׁלֹּה ‘what is his’.¹⁶¹ Even if שֶׁ is only sparsely used in the Pentateuch, the suggestion that it is an element of בְּשִׁנִּים does not appear totally out of place.

The particle גַּם has a wide range of meanings. It not only indicates ‘also’ but it furthermore functions as an emphatic particle, to be rendered as ‘indeed, really’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Akkadian *ša*, ‘of, that, which, that of’ (introducing a genitive or a subordinate clause), from Old-Akkadian on, *CAD* 17/I:1 or *šû*, ‘that, the aforementioned’, *CAD* 17/III:155.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *HALOT* 2:1365, *HAL* 4:1271: “The pronoun is archaic in Hebrew and in the course of time its function was taken over by אֲשֶׁר ”, what is unfortunately no adequate translation of *HAL* 4:1271: “Das Pr. ist in He. alt, aber *zeitweise* durch אֲשֶׁר im Gebrauch zurückgedrängt worden” [emphasis added]. See also Horst Seebass, “Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß: Gen 6,1–4,” *BN* 134 (2007): 5–6: “Die Rel.-Part. *sch* galt stets als alt und ist nun als solche erwiesen durch T. Muraoka, Grammar 118f durch akkad. *scha* und Ri 5,7”.

¹⁵⁸ שֶׁ also occurs in Judg 6:17, 7:12 and 8:26.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Soggin, *comm. Judg* 1981, 80.

¹⁶⁰ Compared by *HAL* 2:618, *HALOT* 1:654 with the Assyrian name *mūtu ša ilū*, ‘man of god’. (*CAD* 10/II:313–316: *mūtu*, ‘husband, man, warrior’).

¹⁶¹ Roy A. Rosenberg, “*Beshaggam* and *Shiloh*,” *ZAW* 105 no. 2 (1993): 260.

¹⁶² Cf. C. J. Labuschagne, “The Emphasizing Particle *GAM* and its Connotations,” in *Studia Biblica et Semitica* (ed. W. C. van Unnik and A. S. van der Woude; Wageningen: H. Veenman & zonen, 1966), 193–203. Labuschagne qualifies גַּם as one of the most difficult particles in Hebrew to translate. He outlines a possible semantic development, suggesting that the particle’s original sense is one of emphasis, while its use to denote addition is secondary. He compares it to the Ugaritic cognate *gm*, allegedly meaning ‘with voice, aloud’. In Ugaritic, the word appears to not have developed further, in Hebrew its function as an emphasizing particle can be understood as originating from a common Semitic word indicating ‘aloud’. From a particle denoting emphasis, sequences like ‘indeed ... indeed’ evolved to denote addition, ‘not only ... but also’. Muraoka argues that the primary function of the particle is to express addition. He considers the semantic evolution depicted by Labuschagne as highly hypothetical but identifies a few examples in which גַּם appears to possess affirmative-emphatic force. Cf. T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 143–146.

It is clear, then, that combinations of prepositions occur in biblical Hebrew¹⁶³ but the phenomenon of a composite of three or more prepositions appears to be characteristic for middle and late Biblical Hebrew, as is demonstrated by the examples. The occurrence of such a multiple composite would be unique for the Pentateuch and as such motivation to seek further solutions to this problem. Alternatively, it could mean that Gen 6:1–4, or at least Gen 6:3, is from a later period.

(3) Derivation from the Verb שגג

There are many manuscripts and editions which have a different vocalisation of בָּשָׁגָם and read בָּשָׁגָם, a composite of the preposition בָּ with the infinitive construct of שגג ‘to go astray, to err’¹⁶⁴ with a third-person plural masculine pronominal suffix.

Thus, the translation would give: “My spirit shall not remain forever in man, in their erring he is flesh”. Holzinger chooses this solution, explaining the plural suffix as referring to the ‘sons of God’ who – in his interpretation – are angels. As a paraphrase he offers: “My spirit shall not forever ... in man, as a consequence of their [the angels’] aberration because he (man) is, and remains (has to remain) flesh”.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, a reference to the angels’ aberration and subsequently to mankind as ‘flesh’ would explain the incongruence between the plural suffix (‘their’) and the singular personal pronoun (‘he’). If one is not willing to accept Holzinger’s solution of the plural suffix as referring to angels, one can consider the incongruence between plural and singular to be a *constructio ad sensum* induced by בָּאֲדָמָה as a collective term for mankind. But even in this latter case the construction remains awkward,¹⁶⁶ specifically

¹⁶³ Cassuto mentions that בָּאֲשֶׁר occurs in Gen 39:9.23 with the meaning ‘because, in as much as’ and suggests that in Gen 6:3 “for reasons of poetic style, Scripture has chosen the form –שֵׁ”. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 296–297.

¹⁶⁴ HALOT 2:1413, HAL 4:1312–1313: a secondary form of שָׁגָה. According to Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 219, the verb can also mean ‘to seduce’ (‘verführen’), thus referring to the behaviour of the ‘daughters of men’. But then one would rather expect the Hiphil of שָׁגָה, see HAL 4:1313.

¹⁶⁵ Holzinger, *comm. Gen* 1898, 65. [my translation, JJTD]

¹⁶⁶ In the verdict of Joseph Hong, “Problems in an Obscure Passage: Notes on Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 40 no. 4 (1989): 424: “Although some commentators try to overlook this crude inconsistency by citing similar instances such as Ps 5.10 or by referring the suffix to the ‘sons of God’, the use is really ungrammatical and the idea expressed unsuitable.”

because of the singular הוּא 'he' and the singular suffix in יָמָיו 'his days' which follow immediately.

The verb שָׁגַג is frequently said to indicate sins committed out of ignorance or not on purpose¹⁶⁷ but this appears to be based mainly on theological exegesis. It is better not to overly restrict the meaning and maintain the somewhat broader meaning 'to err, to go astray'.¹⁶⁸ The translation "in their erring he is flesh" makes sense but still the third-person plural pronominal suffix appears to be out of place.

(4) Derivation from the Verb שָׁגַג with Enclitic Mem

The enclitic *mem* is found in other Semitic languages¹⁶⁹ and assumed to be present in Biblical Hebrew, especially after the decipherment of Ugaritic, primarily in those cases in which a *mem* as plural ending or designation of a plural pronominal suffix is difficult to explain. The first alleged occurrence of an enclitic *mem* was identified by Ginsberg in Ps 29.¹⁷⁰ The landmark publication of Hummel¹⁷¹ on the subject provides a long list of possible uses¹⁷² of the enclitic *mem* in the Old Testament. The phenomenon is considered to be masked by the Masoretic Text because the Masoretes did not recognise it in its veritable form. For the scope of the present study the most interesting examples are the ones in which a third-person *singular* masculine pronominal suffix might be assumed to be hidden in a seemingly out-of-place plural ending or in a plural pronominal suffix with a singular antecedent.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. HAL 4:1312–1313.

¹⁶⁸ As is also suggested by Van Dam in his study on the derivate שָׁגַג, cf. C. Van Dam, "The Meaning of שָׁגַג," in *Unity in Diversity: Studies Presented to Prof. Dr. Jelle Faber on the Occasion of his Retirement* (ed. Riemer Faber; Hamilton, Ont.: Senate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1989), 13–24.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (AOAT 273; Münster: Ugarit Verlag), 825–832, §89.2; W. von Soden, *GAG*:177–178, §123a.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. H. L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter," in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti, Roma 23–29 settembre 1935* (Rome: G. Bardi, 1938), 474.

¹⁷¹ Horace D. Hummel, "Enclitic Mem in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially in Hebrew," *JBL* 76 no. 2 (1957): 85–107.

¹⁷² Emerton, however, explains most of the examples given by Hummel in other ways, cf. John A. Emerton, "Are There Examples of Enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible?" in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 321–338. According to Emerton an enclitic *mem* is only to be presumed where the MT is grammatically or logically not understandable and where at the same time an enclitic *mem* resolves the difficulty more satisfactorily than any other theory.

(a) Examples of the Masoretic Text's reading of a masculine plural ending tentatively to be understood as third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix with enclitic *mem*:

- Deut 33:3 אֵף חָבֵב עַמִּים “Indeed, he loves peoples” might be explained as representing עַמּוֹם ‘his people’.¹⁷³
- Isa 3:13 עֹמֵד לְדִין עַמִּים “he stands to judge peoples” might be interpreted as עַמּוֹם ‘his people’.¹⁷⁴

(b) Examples of the Masoretic Text's reading of a third-person plural masculine pronominal suffix tentatively to be interpreted as third-person singular pronominal suffix with enclitic *mem*, because of a singular antecedent:

- Ps 102:18 אֶת־תַּפְלֹתָם לֹא־יִבְזֶה “he will not despise their prayer” within this context might be interpreted as תַּפְלֹתָיו ‘his prayer’.¹⁷⁵
- Ps 109:13 שְׁמָם יִמַּח אַחֵר בְּדוֹר אַחֵר “let their name be blotted out in another generation” might be explained as שְׁמוֹ ‘his name’.¹⁷⁶
- Ps 109:15 וַיִּכְרֹת מֵאֶרֶץ זָכָרָם “let their memory be cut of from earth” might be read as זָכוֹרָם ‘his memory’.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Cf. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem*,” 99.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem*,” 100. Emerton, “Are There Examples of Enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible?” 335, thinks it highly probable that in the case of Deut 33:3 and Isa 3:13 עַמּוֹ should be read instead of the MT עַמִּים but he criticises the alleged reading of a *waw* for the pronominal suffix because prior to the Exile the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix was usually written with a *he* and not with a *waw*. He considers it unlikely that a *waw* and a *yod* were confused in Paleo-Hebrew script before the adoption of the square script, cf. Emerton, “Are There Examples of Enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible?” 324. However, in Paleo-Hebrew script the *he* and *yod* actually could be confused, meaning that a possible orthography with *he* (עַמְהִים) might have been interpreted as עַמִּים. For an example of a possible confusion of *he* and *yod* based on graphic similarity in Paleo-Hebrew, cf. Ernst Würthwein, *Der Text des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 119. Würthwein mentions Ps 19:5 where בָּהֶם may have been originally בָּיִם.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem*,” 99.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem*,” 100.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem*,” 100. According to Emerton, “Are There Examples of Enclitic *mem* in the Hebrew Bible?” 333–334, the plural suffix in the examples of Ps 102:18; 109:13,15 can be explained as referring to a collective antecedent; moreover, the alleged reading with a third-person singular masculine pronominal suffix requires the addition of a *waw* before each supposed enclitic *mem*.

(c) Examples of the Masoretic Text’s reading of a second-person plural masculine tentatively to be construed as second-person singular masculine with enclitic *mem* because of a singular antecedent:

- 1 Sam 9:19 וַאֲכַלְתֶּם “and you (plural) will eat”, to be construed as וַאֲכַלְתָּ “and you (Saul) will eat”.¹⁷⁸
- 1 Kgs 20:28 וַיִּדְעֶתְם “and you (plural) will know”, to be read as וַיִּדְעֶתָ “and you (Ahab) will know”.¹⁷⁹

The two examples mentioned in (3) do not require an additional *waw* as *mater lectionis*. These differ from the cases in which the presence of a third-person singular masculine pronominal suffix is proposed. The phenomenon mentioned in the examples in (1) can be easily explained as a confusion of the *waw* and the *yod*.¹⁸⁰ The examples mentioned in (2) necessitate the assumption that in earlier orthography *matres lectionis* were not always written even in the case of end-vowels.

(5) Evaluation: The Interpretation of בָּשָׁנִים

Present etymological solutions for the interpretation of בָּשָׁנִים remain unsatisfactory: an alleged reference to ‘noise’ does not fit the present context of Gen 6:3; a development from ‘stiffness’ through ‘assuredly’ is nowhere attested. To interpret בָּשָׁנִים as a multiple composite preposition would draw on a phenomenon of which there is no evidence in the Pentateuch.

A better solution seems to be the interpretation of בָּשָׁנִים as the infinitive constructive of the verb שָׁגַג ‘to err’ with an added preposition –בִּ and a pronominal suffix. The antecedent of this plural pronominal suffix is in singular form (אָדָם) but this can be explained as a *constructio ad sensum*, which has a basis to it in the sense that the general meaning of the word is ‘mankind’. Yet, a singular suffix would be congruent with the preceding singular אָדָם and also with the following הוּא. The difficulty, then, might be resolved by assuming the presence of an enclitic *mem*, connected to a singular pronominal suffix which ulteriorly

¹⁷⁸ Cf. J. P. Lettinga, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (8th ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 105, §48z.

¹⁷⁹ As in 1 Kgs 20:13. Cf. Lettinga, *Grammatica*, 8th. ed., 105, §48z.

¹⁸⁰ Due to graphic similarity. For examples, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 246–247. In an earlier orthography in Paleo-Hebrew script, if the third-person masculine singular suffix was written with an *he*, the *yod* and the *he* could have been interchanged. Cf. 2.3.5 no. 4, nt. 174.

went unobserved. This solution yields a translation of Gen 6:3 as: “YHWH said: My spirit shall not remain in man forever, in his erring/going astray he is flesh, his days shall be a hundred and twenty years”.

2.3.6 “His Days Shall Be a Hundred and Twenty Years”

The latter part of Gen 6:3 does not clearly state to what period the announcement of 120 years refers. Is YHWH setting a limit to the maximum lifespan of mankind (1) or offering a period of respite¹⁸¹ prior to the inevitable flood (2)? Both interpretations draw on extra-biblical data which will be discussed first of all in an excursus.

(1) In favour of the lifespan-exegesis, some interpreters refer to Herodotus for the alleged belief in the ancient Near East that human lifetime has a maximum of 120 years.¹⁸² On closer examination, however, the passages from Herodotus which serve as sources do not overly support this explanation. Herodotus’ *Histories*, Book I:163, mentions only that Arganthonios, king of Tartessos, lived 120 years. Book III:22-23 recounts the story of the Ethiopian king who is informed by spies of the Persian king Cambyses that the maximum lifespan of Persians is about eighty years. In responding to their question about the lifetime of the Ethiopians, the king answers that the “greater number of them reached the age of a hundred and twenty years, *and some surpassed even this*”.¹⁸³ These advanced ages are ascribed to the type of nutrition consumed and to the water acquired from a special source. In the Herodotus story attaining the age of 120 years or more is considered to be exceptional.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ The interpretation of the 120 years as a period of grace is already found in rabbinical and patristic exegesis. See e.g. Delitzsch, *comm. Gen.*, 151; Jacob, *comm. Gen.*, 175; Andrew Louth and Marco Conti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 125.

¹⁸² Cf. Gunkel, *comm. Gen.*, 58; Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” *JNES* 6 no. 4 (1947): 201; Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 54.

¹⁸³ George Campbell Macaulay, *The History of Herodotus* (London: Macmillan, 1890) [emphasis added]. Cited 1 April 2010. Online: http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/index.htm#section_000 (parallel English/Greek text).

¹⁸⁴ As in the Old Testament, see Ps 90:10, where maximum lifespan is said to be seventy or, in case of exceptional strength, eighty years.

Other authors refer to Hesiod's *Works and Days*.¹⁸⁵ In II:121–139, a description of mankind during the Silver Age is found; here man's childhood extended for one hundred years and then was followed by a short period of adulthood filled with sin and iniquity. In the Silver Age man lived a life completely different from his predecessors of the Golden Race, that is, the people who lived like the gods, never experiencing sorrow, toil nor grief, II:109–120.¹⁸⁶ Although there is an implication that the lifespan of those of the Silver Generation was shorter, this is neither explicitly stated nor can there be any explicit reference found to a lifespan of a maximum of 120 years. As a consequence, comparisons with extra-biblical texts provide hardly any tangible assistance.

(2) It was within the Atrahasis Epic that support for the interpretation of the 120 years as a period of respite was sought, for it is in the recounting of this that a period of 12,000 years elapsed between the announcement and the unleashing of the flood. The figures of 120 years in Genesis and 12,000 in the Atrahasis Epic are both thought to originate in the Babylonian sexagesimal system.¹⁸⁷

However, the Atrahasis exudes a completely different atmosphere: the period immediately before the flood is not a period for repentance but rather a time during which the gods experiment with different methods to reduce the human population. These actions culminate in the flood but do not conclude with it, for, after the flood, the Babylonian gods set limits to human fecundity and lifespan, also.¹⁸⁸ What is more, the figure of 12,000 years in the Atrahasis Epic is a repeated formulaic expression, referring to the time between the creation of man – to whom was shifted the heavy toil of the lower gods – and the

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Kraeling, "Significance," 202; Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 54. The work is best dated as around 700 B.C.E., cf. Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSRC 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 20.

¹⁸⁶ Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod's Works and Days*, II:109–139. Cited 1 April 2010.

Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/works.htm>.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1–11)," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 42; Helge S. Kvanvig, "Gen 6,1–4 as an Antediluvian Event," *SJOT* 16 no. 1 (2002): 99.

¹⁸⁸ "Atra-ḫasis," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (COS 1.130:450–452); Cf. W. G. Lambert, "The Theology of Death," in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXVI^e Rencontre assyriologique internationale* (ed. Bendt Alster; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 58: "[I]n Babylonian thought death was introduced after other means of decimating the human race, culminating in the flood, had proved ineffective."

beginning of over-population which caused excessive noise, depriving the gods of sleep.¹⁸⁹ The gods therefore attempt to reduce the human population by unleashing plagues and famine. These, however, do not achieve their purpose as the people bring sacrifices to the god meting out the scourge in question which thus leads to its suspension. In the end, as a final solution to their discomfort, the gods decide to allow the flood to descend upon man. However, 12,000 years represent a rationally consistent length of time for an exponential growth of the population during this period. The relationship, if any, of the number of 120 [years] in Gen 6:3 to the 12,000 mentioned in the Mesopotamian flood story can thus be assumed to be superficial.

It can be concluded that extra-biblical data is of little help in either approach. Nonetheless, biblical texts may offer leeway for the interpretation of 120 years in Gen 6:3 as pertaining to putting limits on human lifespan.

(1) Gen 3:22 describes how God prevents man from living forever: *בְּןָ ... וְחַי לְעֵלָם*. Genesis 6:3, then, takes up this ‘not forever’ and describes human lifespan as being restricted to 120 years.¹⁹⁰

(2) The theme of repentance is not touched upon in the text, neither in Gen 6:3, nor subsequently, yet somehow this is to be expected if the 120 years is to be understood as a period of grace.¹⁹¹

(3) The wording ‘his days’ combined with a reference to mortality (‘he is flesh’) supports an interpretation which views the 120 years as indicative of a lifespan, comparable with Gen 5, where the repeated phrase “all the days of *X* were *n* years, and he died” refers to lifespan.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), I:352, 416; II:1: “Twelve hundred years had not yet passed, when the land extended and the peoples multiplied”.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Walter Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung,” *ZAW* 123 no. 4 (2011): 509.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 279.

¹⁹² See Walton, *comm. Gen* 2001, 296, who observes that “[o]f nearly one hundred occurrences of the plural ‘days’ with pronominal suffix, almost all refer to life span. The exceptions that offer the greatest deviation from that pattern are references like Deut. 12:19, which pertain to Israel’s tenure in the land.” (296, nt. 11). Cf. also Ronald Hendel, “The Nephilim Were on Earth: Genesis 6:1–4 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 14 nt. 6.

(4) The term of 120 years for a time of respite cannot be reconstructed from the narrative in Genesis; Gen 5:32 states Noah to be five hundred years old when his sons are born, whereas Gen 7:11 indicates Noah's age to be six hundred years at the onset of the flood. This represents the duration of a century, which would mean that, to arrive at the number of 120 years, the time limit mentioned in Gen 6:3 was fixed twenty years before the birth of Noah's sons.

(5) The number of 120 years may pertain to the contemporaries whom the author of Gen 6:3 is addressing, for, unlike in patriarchal times, no one lives for ages.¹⁹³

One can object that longevity is still present after the flood (Gen 11:10–32) and that it hardly can have escaped the attention of the author of Gen 6:3 that the patriarchs after the flood lived longer than the mentioned 120 years.¹⁹⁴ Yet, already in Gen 5 the maximum age shows an overall downward tendency.¹⁹⁵ Genesis 11:10–32 gives evidence of the same; the span of human life diminishes over the generations until it stabilises in the vicinity of 120 years.¹⁹⁶ After the flood, there is no mention of anyone having a lifespan over five hundred years, exception to this being only Shem (Gen 11:10–11), who was born before the flood. Prior to the flood it is also worth

¹⁹³ Cf. Bühner, "Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter," 509.

¹⁹⁴ Therefore Luther and Calvin both interpreted the 120 years as a period of time in which repentance was still possible. Cf. Luther, *WA* 42, 278: "Loquitur igitur de tempore, quod concessum est mundo ad poenitentiam, antequam Diluvium veniret."; Calvin, *comm. Gen* 1948, 243, states the same but sees also the problem of the missing twenty years by comparing Gen 5:32 with 7:11. Calvin's solution is that Genesis gives round numbers: *Commentarius in Genesin*, (CR 50), 115: "quando scriptura, ubi de quingentesimo aetatis illius anno loquitur, non affirmat, eousque iam tunc pertigisse. Atque hic modus loquendi plusquam tritus est, tam initium temporis quam finem in numeris notari. Quia ergo maior pars quinti centenarii transacta erat, ut quingentis annis propinquus foret, dicitur eius fuisse aetatis." John Calvin, *comm. Gen*, 243: "when the Scripture speaks of the five hundredth year of his age, it does not affirm, that he had actually reached that point. And this mode of speaking, which takes into account the beginning of a period, as well as its end, is very common. Therefore, inasmuch as the greater part of the fifth century of his life was passed, so that he was nearly five hundred years old, he is said to have been of that age." This solution is also mentioned in rabbinical literature, cf. N. H. Tur-Sinai, "The Riddle of Genesis vi. 1–4," *ExpTim* 71 (1959): 349. Tur-Sinai quotes Shelomo Yishaqi: "And if you contend: From the birth of Japhet until the flood there are only one hundred years [the answer is], the Torah does not always follow the exact chronological order. God's decision had already been made twenty years before the birth of Noah's sons".

¹⁹⁵ As explicitly mentioned in *Jub.* 23:8–15, cf. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP* 2:100. Cf. also Lactantius, *Div. inst.* II,14 (*ANF* 7:91–92). Lactantius argues that God gradually diminished lifespan in each generation and thus imposed a limit of 120 years.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen*, 297–298; Gispén, *comm. Gen* 1974, 224. Interestingly, *Jub.* 5:8 mentions 110 years: "My spirit will not dwell upon man forever; for they are flesh, and their days will be one hundred and ten years", cf. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP* 2:64.

noting the relatively exceptionally short three hundred and sixty-five year lifespan of Enoch (Gen 5:23).¹⁹⁷

In light of the first half of Gen 6:3 which recounts YHWH asserting that his (life-giving) spirit will not remain ‘forever’ in man, it would seem preferable to explain the 120 years as God’s limit on the human lifespan.

Alternative interpretations view the 120 years as either referring to a period within the entire human lifespan or as referring to a specific group within mankind in general. According to Schüle, the 120 years refer to the maximum age until which humans were able to procreate.¹⁹⁸ Jacob explains the limit of 120 years, in agreement with his exegesis of the expression ‘sons of God’, as pertaining to a prophet, a ‘man of God’.¹⁹⁹ Other exegetes treat the 120 years as the limit set exclusively for the **בְּרִיִּים**, the heroes and not for all humankind.²⁰⁰ Documentation for this interpretation is generally derived from ancient Greek literature,²⁰¹ although the number of 120 years is not explicitly mentioned there.

2.3.7 The Reaction Described in Genesis 6:3

As a consequence of the ‘sons of God’ taking wives from among the ‘daughters of men’, YHWH intervenes resolutely in the manner described in Gen 6:3. This intervention most probably has the intention of offsetting the effects of the behaviour of the ‘sons of God’, independently of the exact nature of this limitation. YHWH emphasises the constancy of human frailty (‘he is flesh’) and the unending string of

¹⁹⁷ The refrain-like description in Gen 5 is similar to what is found in Gen 11: “when *X* had lived *n* years, he became the father of *Y*; *X* lived beyond the birth of *Y* *n* years.” The only exception is that Gen 11 avoids mentioning the entire lifespan, while Gen 5 does so: “thus all the days of *X* were *n* years, and he died”.

¹⁹⁸ Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1-11)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 238.

¹⁹⁹ B. Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 176–177: “Der erste **בְּרִיִּים** ... nach der Sintflut ist Mose und er wird in der Tat gerade 120 Jahre alt. Er ist es ... auf den die Worte gehen. Auf andere Menschen trifft die Bestimmung nicht zu.”

²⁰⁰ Cf. Procksch, *comm. Gen* 1924, 61.

²⁰¹ Cf. Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” *JNES* 6 no. 4 (1947): 201–202. John Van Seters, “The Primeval Histories of Greece and Israel Compared,” *ZAW* 100 no. 1 (1988): 8, refers to Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women*, fragment 19A: “The reference to the limitation of man’s lifespan to 120 years has also puzzled scholars, but it too may be a piece of ancient lore about the regular age of the heroes. In one fragment of the Catalogue the hero Sarpedon, son of Zeus, is granted a lifespan of ‘three generations of mortal man’ (i.e. 120 years).” Translation: Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod’s Catalogues of Women*. Cited 5 April 2010. Online: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodCatalogues.html>. The pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* is to be dated around 580 B.C.E., cf. Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSRC 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 21.

mankind's wrong choices ('he is erring') as opposed to man's increasing in power and might, as is recounted in the next verse (Gen 6:4).²⁰² It may be implied that the limitation of human lifespan also – or especially – extends to the Nephilim and the Gibborim, who are mentioned in Gen 6:4. Read in this way, the passage of Gen 6:1–4 is comparable to Gen 3:22–24 and 11:6–8, as illustrated in the following scheme. These passages all have as a common trait God's direct discourse denoting a measure which is to prevent the carrying out of unwanted actions.

(Table 4)

text:	possible / incipient action:	(expected) result:	preventive measure:
Gen 3:22–24	eating from tree of life	living for ever	cherubim guard tree
Gen 6:1–4	union of 'sons of God' and 'daughters of men'	might and power of the heroes	limit of 120 years
Gen 11:6–8	city and tower to prevent becoming scattered	no proposed plan will be impossible	confusion of language

An interesting aspect of this occurrence is that, although the relationships between 'sons of God' and 'daughters of men' may violate boundaries, YHWH does not intervene in these relationships. By this the only thing YHWH asserts is that humans are still mortal and that their lifespan will be restricted. This is a pattern Gen 6:1–4 shares with Gen 3:22–24 and Gen 11:6–8.²⁰³ In Gen 3, Adam and Eve do not die immediately but live on, though among far more trying circumstances and having lost the possibility of living forever. Furthermore, in Gen 11, YHWH effects a significant setback to human megalomaniac ambitions but does not impose conditions making it impossible that mankind entertain similar aspirations again.

²⁰² Almost all exegetes observe that the punishment does not seem appropriate to the crime because it is the victims who suffer punishment. However, limiting lifespan is congruent with the themes in Gen 1–11 where the limits of the boundaries of human existence are tested. Cf. Ronald Hendel, "The Nephilim were on Earth: Genesis 6:1–4 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 15. See also 2.6.3.

²⁰³ See also 6.2 and 6.5.

2.3.8 The Literary Place of Gen 6:3

Even before the content of Gen 6:1–4 begins to unfold, the narrative is interrupted by the inclusion of YHWH's pronouncement limiting human lifespan in Gen 6:3. For some exegetes this demonstrates that the verse is a later inclusion.²⁰⁴ If presumed to be of a later period, the content of the verse brings the action of the story to a sudden standstill and, as such, transforms the original intent of the first two verses.²⁰⁵ For Petersen the quick riposte of YHWH in Gen 6:3 is an indication that Gen 6:1–4 depicts YHWH in a situation in which events are getting beyond his control.²⁰⁶ Other exegetes propose shifting Gen 6:3 to a position immediately after the existing verse 4. This, however, does not provide an adequate explanation for the sudden change of direction within the narrative.²⁰⁷

All the same, Gen 6:3 may also be read differently. YHWH's response conveys superiority, all the more in that he entirely ignores making mention of the 'sons of God' which could be an indication of their insignificance in YHWH's eyes.

Over and beyond the above-mentioned tenets of being Gen 6:3 a later inclusion, there exist arguments that Gen 6:3 was originally part of the passage. Admittedly, the whole of Gen 6:1–4 appears to be a summary of a longer version of the same story. However, the fact of a sudden change of events in a narrative is not necessarily an indication that the unexpected new direction stems from a later inclusion. On the contrary, God's reaction to human action often reflects a crucial moment in the progress of biblical narrative²⁰⁸ and is attested several times in Gen

²⁰⁴ E.g. Bartelmus, *Heroentum*, 22; Westerman, *comm. Gen*, 495. Bartelmus argues that the allusion to this verse is missing from Enoch 6–11. However, Van Seters draws attention to 1 Enoch 15–16 which "seems to contain an expanded midrash on Gen. 6:3. In it the 'spirits' (pl.) are identified with the heavenly beings, and 'flesh' with humankind." Cf. John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1992), 153.

²⁰⁵ Cf. F. H. Breukelman, "Het verhaal over de zonen Gods die zich de dochters des mensen tot vrouw namen," in *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor exegese en bijbelse theologie: Cahier 1* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 16–17.

²⁰⁶ David L. Petersen, "Genesis 6:1–4: Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 48.

²⁰⁷ Westermann, *comm. Gen*, 504: "Die Schwierigkeit liegt nicht in der Stellung, sonder im Inhalt von V.3."

²⁰⁸ E.g. Gen 2:18, 6:7, 7:1, 11:6, 12:1, 35:1.10. Calvin already observed this narrative phenomenon: *Commentarius in Genesin* (CR 50), 113: "Moses ... Deum ipsum loquentem inducit. Plus enim gravitatis habet sententia, quum ore suo pronunciat Deus." John Calvin, *comm. Gen* 1948, 240: "Moses ... introduces God himself as the speaker. For there is greater weight in the declaration when pronounced by God's own mouth". For the significance of divine discourse as illocutionary act, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge:

1–11.²⁰⁹ Genesis 6:3 connects seamlessly to the preceding verses with the *wayyiqtol* וַיֵּאמֶר.²¹⁰ Genesis 6:4 equally shows that verse 3 is necessarily an integral part of the passage: by means of the words בְּיָמֵי הָהֵם ‘in those days’ it refers back to Gen 6:1–2 and by the following words וְגַם אַחֲרֵי כֵן ‘and also afterwards’ it most likely refers to Gen 6:3.²¹¹ There is, then, no requirement to consider Gen 6:3 as a later inclusion to the passage of Gen 6:1–4.²¹²

2.4 LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 6:4

4a הנפלים היו בארץ בימים ההם

4b וגם אחרי־כן אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל-בנות האדם וילדו להם

4c המה הגברים אשר מעולם אנשי השם:

The giants were on the earth in those days and also afterwards, when the sons of God came to the daughters of men and they bore (offspring) to them; these are the heroes of old, the famous men.

In the wake of the divine intervention of Gen 6:3, Gen 6:4 continues with what was already mentioned in Gen 6:2, namely, the marital relationships between the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’. Yet, next to the ‘sons of God’, Gen 6:4 introduces two new categories, namely the נְפִלִים, a term traditionally translated as ‘giants’ and the גִּבֹּרִים, commonly rendered as ‘warriors, heroes’. Moreover, the

Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁰⁹ Cf. Gen 3:9–18; 4:9–12; 11:5–7.

²¹⁰ Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 500.

²¹¹ Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 500 nt. 34: “אחרי־כן” hat keinen anderen Referenzpunkt in Gen 6,1–4 als V.3 und bezieht sich auch nicht auf spätere Zeiten (etwa den literarhistorisch wohl späteren Vers Num 13,33), wie der Relativsatz in V.4aα zeigt, der V.4 an V.1.2 zurück bindet”.

²¹² Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 500–501, who explains that older research considered Gen 6:3 to be a later inclusion in which an *interpretatio israelitica* of the myth present in Gen 6:1–2.4 is found. He argues that a change between human action and divine reaction is common in primeval history and that Gen 6:1–4 as a whole is not an ancient myth but a text from the redactor of Genesis. He therefore asserts that “diese auf überholten religionshistorischen Prämissen aufbauende Auffassung *ad acta* gelegt werden [kann].” (501).

verse also introduces the offspring issuing from the unions between the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’.

One of the main problems in Gen 6:4 is determining ‘who is who?’ Not only is it difficult to identify the different groups, it is also unclear how these categories are connected to one another in Gen 6:4. Are the ‘giants’,²¹³ the ‘heroes’²¹⁴ or are they both²¹⁵ the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’? Are the נפֿלים perhaps only mentioned as contemporaries to the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’?²¹⁶ Is the designation נבֿרִים a qualifier for נפֿלים? Or are the נפֿלים identical to the ‘sons of God’? Is the vagueness of the meaning of the verse perhaps intentional?²¹⁷

Genesis 6:4, then, raises numerous interwoven questions and, unfortunately, provides minimal material as underpinning for possible answers. These issues will be addressed in the following way: firstly, the meaning of the word נפֿלים will be discussed (2.4.1); secondly, the mutual relationship between the נפֿלים, the ‘sons of God’ and the נבֿרִים will be reviewed (2.4.2). Finally, the meaning of Gen 6:4 will be summarised by giving particular attention to the background information and the evolution of the narrative (2.4.3).

2.4.1 Nephilim as Giants?

The meaning of the term נפֿלים is unclear, therefore diverse interpretations can be proposed. The following section will first examine the translations of the ancient versions (1). Subsequently, etymological approaches (2) and a religio-historical proposal will be reviewed (3). Finally, the only other biblical occurrence of the word נפֿלים in Num 13:33 will be analysed (4). The section ends with conclusions pertaining to the meaning of the word נפֿלים (5).

²¹³ Cf. Von Rad, *comm. Gen* (OTL) 1972, 115; Breukelman, “Het verhaal over de zonen Gods,” 14; Sarna, *comm. Gen* 1989, 46.

²¹⁴ Cf. Hartley, *comm. Gen* (NIBCOT) 2000, 97.

²¹⁵ Cf. Gispén, *comm. Gen* (COT) 1974, 214; M. J. Paul, e.a., eds., *comm. Gen / Exod* (SBOT) 2004, 77; János Molnár, “A kerten kívül – Az istenfiak házassága,” *Theologiai Szemle* 52 no. 1 (2009): 6.

²¹⁶ Cf. Heinisch, *comm. Gen* 1930, 162; W. Vijfinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” *TheolRef* 17 no. 3 (1974): 193–194; Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NAC) 1996, 337; Currid, *comm. Gen* 2003, 176.

²¹⁷ Cf. Sarna, *comm. Gen*, 46; Zimmerli, *comm. Gen* (ZBK) 1991, 263; Soggin, *comm. Gen* 1997, 122.

(1) נפלים in the Ancient Versions

Of the *versiones antiquae* the Septuagint translates both נפלים and גבריים as οἱ γίγαντες ‘the giants’, while Symmachus translates both words identically as οἱ βίαιοι ‘the violent ones’. Symmachus’ interpretation of the word נפלים is perhaps deduced from how he understood the term גבריים. Only Aquila uses different translations for the two terms, translating נפלים as οἱ ἐπιπύπτοντες ‘the fallen ones’ and גבריים as οἱ δυνάτοί ‘the mighty ones’.²¹⁸ It is likely that Aquila based his translation of נפלים on an etymological approach derivating the word from the verb נפל ‘to fall’. Interestingly, the Targumim use גפיל ‘giant’²¹⁹ as a translation for the constellation Orion כסיל in Job 9:9 and 38:31.²²⁰

(2) Etymological Approaches for נפלים

One of the etymological options is based on a derivation from נפל, ‘miscarriage’.²²¹ The use of נפל is attested in Ps 58:9, Job 3:16 and Eccl 6:3 but in all these cases it is used to express untimely births, that is to say, about ones who are stillborn. The נפלים, then, can only in a metaphorical sense can be said to be ‘miscarriages’, labelling them as ‘monsters’ or ‘deformed people’.²²² Yet, there might be a better

²¹⁸ F. Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersint; Sive Veterum Interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta*. Vol. 1: Prolegomena, Genesis – Esther. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 22–23.

²¹⁹ Jastrow, 924. Also Michael S. Heiser, *The Meaning of the Word Nephilim: Fact vs. Fantasy*, proposes a derivation from Aramaic. Online: www.michaelsheiser.com/nephilim.pdf. Cited 15 October, 2011.

²²⁰ Cf. Jan Holman, Review of Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode*. Bib 49 no. 2 (1968): 294.

²²¹ One of the options listed in HAL. Cf. “נפלים” HAL 3:669: “Riesen, aus Fehlgeburten hervorgehend od. vom Himmel herabgestürzt”, see “נפל” HAL 3:671.

²²² There exist ancient Near Eastern texts which classify monstrous births, namely the Akkadian *Šumma izbu* omens, in which also a giant is mentioned. Cf. Erle Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma izbu* (TCS 4; Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1970), 38, Tablet I, omen 69: “If a woman gives birth to a giant either male or female—a sinful man impregnated that woman in the street.” Duane Smith argues that the word Á.KAM, which is translated as ‘giant’ by Leichty, should be read as *šeḫānu*, ‘ecstatic’ (cf. “*šeḫānu*,” CAD 17/2:263).

Online: http://www.telecomtally.com/blog/2011/08/i_almost_made_a_giant_error.html. Cited 17 October 2011. However, the word *šeḫānu* can, indeed, be interpreted as an *-ānu* noun-form (cf. GAG §56 r39) of the verb *šēḫu*, ‘to be agitated’, CAD 17/2:266, but also as the same form of the adjective *šīḫu*, ‘tall, high, stately’, CAD 17/2:418. This interpretation makes sense; the text is about the offspring of a “sinful man” (being a giant is a deviation from what is considered normal, while being an “ecstatic” is not inherently negative) and is further supported by a reference to a “dwarf” somewhat before in *Šumma izbu* I:54–55, cf. Leichty, *Šumma izbu*, 36.

solution, still related to the word נָפַל. The verb נָפַל 'to fall' can actually mean 'to be born'²²³ or 'to give birth to',²²⁴ a meaning only²²⁵ attested in Isa 26:18: "We were pregnant, we were in labour pains but it was as if we gave birth to wind, we did neither bring deliverance in earth, nor were inhabitants of the world born (יִפְּלוּ)". This etymology can also be brought in connection with Arabic *nāfilat*, 'grand-child'.²²⁶ Based on these observations it is possible to interpret the נָפְלִים as the ones who were born from the relationships between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men'.

Very common is a derivation from the verb נָפַל in its most attested meaning, namely 'to fall'. The word נָפְלִים could in this case be rendered as something like 'the fallen ones'.²²⁷ The key text for this interpretation is Ezek 32:27 which refers to warriors (נִבְרִים) of old,²²⁸ who lie prostrate, dressed in full weaponry in the realm of the dead. The term נִבְרִים is related here to the plural participle of נָפַל, נָפְלִים 'to fall' which could have a strong connection to Gen 6:4. Yet, Ezek 32:27 seems rather to evoke a general picture of fallen mighty warriors²²⁹ in Sheol, than to refer to a specific group of 'fallen ones' who are supposedly the נָפְלִים from the time preceding the flood. The etymological explanation as 'fallen ones' perhaps also inspired the legend in pseudepigraphic literature about angels who fell from heaven and about their offspring, the giants, who fell in battle.²³⁰

The participle *Qal* of the verb נָפַל can also have the meaning of 'deserters, defectors'. If the word נָפְלִים is related to this military connotation of נָפַל, it may well convey the idea of attackers or violent men.²³¹ However, the concept of a

²²³ Cf. "נָפַל," (Qal 5:) HAL 3:670.

²²⁴ Cf. "נָפַל," (Hiphil 8:) HAL 3:671.

²²⁵ HAL 3:671 (Hiphil 8:) lists also Ps 106:27 under 'giving birth to' but here it is better translated as: "make their descendants fall (יִפְּלוּ) among the people", cf. Ps. 106:26.

²²⁶ Cf. "נָפַל," (Qal 5:) HAL 3:670.

²²⁷ Emil G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," *JNES* 6 no. 4 (1947): 203 suggests a *kātil*-form, indicating an enduring state of the verbal root, "hence *Nefilim* are 'those who lie fallen'." Cf. GK §84a.1; Horst Seebass, "נָפַל," *ThWAT* 5:531. Idem, "Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß," *BN* 134 (2007): 7.

²²⁸ MT מְעֻלִּים, 'of the uncircumcised', emendated to מְעֻלָּם, based on the LXX's reading ἀπ' αἰῶνος.

²²⁹ A visit to the museum encompassing the tomb of Philip II, king of Macedonia, in Vergina, could illustrate this description.

²³⁰ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 298.

²³¹ Cf. Allan M. Harman, "נָפַל," *NIDOTTE* 3:130.

deserter is more determined by the fact that somebody ‘falls’²³² from one party and joins the other than to convey the idea of somebody being a violent soldier.

(3) A Religio-Historical Approach for נפלים

The approach of Anne Kilmer is based on a religio-historical comparison. She observes similarities between the נפלים and the Akkadian *apkallu*, semi-divine beings, also called the Seven Sages.²³³ According to Mesopotamian records they are the creations of the god Ea. Yet, the author admits that there is only “circumstantial evidence for a remote connection”²³⁴ between the *apkallu* and the נפלים.

(4) נפלים in Numbers 13:33

The only other occurrence of the term נפלים within the Old Testament is in Num 13:33. From the context it is clear that the term here refers to tall people. The spies sent out by Moses, report upon their return about the fearfully tall people, in comparison to whom they felt like grasshoppers. Numbers 13:33 refers to the נפלים (written in this verse both *plene* and defective) as הַנְּפִלִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מִן־הַנְּפִלִים, “the *nēpīlīm*, sons of Anak from the *nēpīlīm*.”²³⁵ The Anakim are mentioned in Deut 2:10–11.20–21; together with the Rephaim, they are both a tall people.²³⁶

²³² Depending on the side described: deserters (2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 21:9; 37:14; 39:9; 52:15) or defectors (1 Chron 12:20–21; 2 Chron 15:9; 1 Sam 29:3).

²³³ The *apkallu*, or Seven Sages, lived according to the teachings of Mesopotamian religion before the flood. They passed on knowledge of letters, science and craftsmanship to mankind, cf. J. C. Greenfield, “Apkallu”, in *DDD*, 72–74. The motif of mankind receiving divine instruction is also characteristic of the Enochic tradition concerning the ‘sons of God’, see Chapter 3. For a broader religio-historical comparison of this notion, see Brian E. Colless, “Divine Education,” *Numen* 17 no. 2 (1970): 118–142.

²³⁴ Cf. Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical *Nēpīlīm*,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985* (ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 39–43, (quotation: 43).

²³⁵ Other occurrences of עֲנָק / עֲנָקִים are found in Num 13:22.28; Deut 1:28; 2:10–11.21; 9:2; Josh 11:21–22; 14:12.15; 15:13–14; 21:11; Judg 1:20. Cf. E. C. B. MacLaurin, “Anak / Ἀναξ,” *VT* 15 no. 4 (1965): 468–474. MacLaurin suggests the word עֲנָק is not a proper name but an indication of a title of rank derived from Philistine language. He compares the word with Greek ἄναξ, ‘lord, master’. Although ἄναξ looks as if derived from the stem *ἀνακτ- (note its genitive ἀνακτορ), it has the archaic stem *ἑανακ-*, cf. LSJ 114 which brings it still closer to עֲנָק. The word *ἑαναξ*, ‘king’, is also known from Mycenaean: *wana-ka*, cf. John Chadwick, “Linear B and Related Scripts,” in *Reading the Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Alphabet* (ed. J. T. Hooker; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 162; James T. Hooker, “The *wanax* in Linear B Texts,” *Kadmos* 18 no. 2 (2009): 100–111. Interestingly, the LXX’s translation of Jer 47:5 (LXX Jer 29:5), equates the Philistines with οἱ κατάλοιποι Ἑνακίμ, ‘the remaining Anakim’, instead of the MT’s שְׁאֵרֵי עֲנָקִים, ‘the remnant of their strength’.

²³⁶ According to Deut 2:10–11 both the Emim and the Anakim are reckoned to be Rephaim but the

The modern reader is directed to realise that in Num 13:33 the term may be deliberately vague; the spies have no intention of specifying but more of terrifying. They evoke a scene of encountering the נפלים as an excuse to decide not to take possession of the promised land.²³⁷ In Num 13:28 only the Anakim are mentioned but in the final argument of 13:33 they are compared to the נפלים. These Anakim are not identical to the נפלים but the נפלים are presumably referred to as beings known from old tales. Only the mention of this name by the spies was already enough to rouse the imagination of their audience. Therefore, not much more can be said other than that the scarce textual evidence points towards נפלים as epic beings of tall stature,²³⁸ at least in Num 13:33.

Moabites called them Emim. Perhaps the lack of clarity in these verses is due to dittography of כַּנְזִימִים in 2:11? Deuteronomium 2:20 tells that the Ammonites called the Rephaim Zamzummim. In the historical books Rephaim are ancient inhabitants of Palestine. In the poetical and prophetic biblical literature the term is used to designate the spirits of the dead. The interrelation between the two terms, if any, has still not been clarified. Literature on the subject is abundant, especially in its connection to the Ugaritic *rapiuma*-texts (*KTU* 1.20–22). For an overview see H. Rouillard, “Rephaim,” in *DDD*, 692–700. See also Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1994), 267–273. The expressions *g̃zrm* ‘heroes’ and *mhr* ‘warriors’ belong to the epithets of the *rpum*, see Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1989), 137. This can be an indication of some point of connection between the ‘historical’ and ‘poetical’ Rephaim. Interestingly, the LXX translates ‘valley of Rephaim’ in 2 Sam 5:18.22 as ‘valley of the Titans’ but in 2 Sam 23:13 it appears as ‘valley of Rephaim’.

John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 223–224, observes a fascinating connection between *KTU* 1.108.1–3 where *rp'u mlk 'lm*, “Rp'u, king of eternity” is mentioned, who is characterised as *'il ytb b'trt 'il tpz bhd'r'y*, “the god who dwells in Ashtaroth, the god who judges in Edrei”, and Josh 12:4 about one of the ethnic Rephaim, “Og, the king of Bashan, one of the remnant of the Rephaim, who dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei.” (cf. Josh 13:12 “Og, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei”). According to Day, the concept of the ethnic Rephaim may be derived from that of the underworld Rephaim because the latter ones are already attested in Ugaritic literature from the second millennium B.C.E. onwards. However, this is only based on an earlier *literary* occurrence. Historically, it may be possible that the concept of an underworld god was based on the existence of ethnic Rephaim who became legendary for some reason or other. In the Old Testament, the victory over Og appears to have been considered ‘legendary’ because of the reputation of Og. For the phenomenon of ‘mythologising of history’ in Egyptian records, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 262.

²³⁷ Hugh Rowland Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (VTSup 65; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 119: “[A] land ... where mythical creatures dwell (the *npylm*). The effect is that Canaan is perceived as a land where primordial chaos reigns.” This assertion is perhaps too extreme but a similar feeling could indeed be the intent. See also J. A. Beck, “Geography and the Narrative Shape of Numbers 13,” *BSac* 157 (2000): 280.

²³⁸ Cf. J. A. Soggin, “Sons of God(s), Heroes, and *nephilim*: Remarks on Genesis 6:1–4,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 136.

In Gen 6:4, the word נְפִלִים is not explained, hence it seems evident that the contemporary reader knew what the term stood for, specifically because it is introduced by the definite article: *the* Nephilim.²³⁹ In Num 13:33, the words נְפִלִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מִן הַנְּפִלִים may serve as an explanation of the word נְפִלִים. If so, there are four possibilities to explain the phrase “the *nēpîlîm*, sons of Anak from the *nēpîlîm*”. 1) Only the expression ‘sons of Anak’ conveys the idea of ‘giantness’, in this case, not all of the Nephilim are necessarily giant individuals, only some of them. The sentence could be paraphrased as “We saw the Nephilim, *giants* from among the Nephilim”. 2) Only the term “Nephilim” refers to ‘giantness’, which leads to a possible paraphrase of “We saw the giants, *Anakites* from among the giants”. 3) Both terms refer to ‘giantness’, the phrase could, then, be paraphrased as “We saw giants, *gigantic* giants”. 4) None of the terms has the connotation of ‘giantness’, therefore the phrase is to be paraphrased as “We saw the Nephilim, *Anakites* from among the Nephilim”. This last option is unlikely, the mention of the ‘tall men’, אַנְשֵׁי מְדוּחַת, in Num 13:32 and the content of Num 13:33 precluding this.

The analysis above implies that not necessarily all the נְפִלִים are gigantic. Nevertheless, there appears to be a strong connotation of the נְפִלִים with tall stature. It, therefore, can be assumed that some reference to physical stature is implied in Gen 6:4 as well because, in reporting, the spies use, possibly deliberately, the epic נְפִלִים to prompt fearful associations of menacing soldiers whom the Israelites will encounter as soon as they enter Canaan.²⁴⁰

(5) Conclusions Pertaining to the Meaning of the Word נְפִלִים

In summary, it must be noted that evidence for the meaning of the word נְפִלִים remains lacking. The ancient versions already offer a varied palette of solutions. The Septuagint’s rendering of the נְפִלִים as giants may be based on Num 13:33. The other variant translations may be the outcome of exegetical discourse meant to keep the text well-separated from the Hellenistic myths about giants.

²³⁹ Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 270. Cf. also the use of נְפִילִין / נְפִילִים in the literature of Qumran, 1Q36 fragm. 16:3; 4Q530 col. 2:6.20; col. 3:8; 4Q531 fragm. 5:2.8; 4Q532 fragm. 2:3.

²⁴⁰ A mention comparable to this of people of large stature is made in the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi I, dated to the early reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.E.). The addressee, a ‘logistic officer’ in the army, is warned about the Shasu, a nomadic tribe: “The face of the pass is dangerous with Shasu, hidden under the bushes. Some of them are 4 or 5 cubits, nose to foot, with wild faces.” Cf. “The Craft of the Scribe (Papyrus Anastasi I),” translated by James P. Allen (*COS* 3.2:13). (4–5 cubits = ca. 210–260 cm, based on the ‘royal cubit’ of 52.5 cm, or 180–225 cm, based on the ‘small cubit’ of 45 cm, see *NIDB*, Raz Kletter, “Weights and Measures,” 5:839.)

All etymological approaches are based on a derivation of the verb נָפַל, although with different nuances of meaning: are the נִפְּלִים ‘fallen ones’ because they have ‘fallen’ as miscarriages? Or is it because they have ‘fallen’ in their loyalty by becoming deserters? Or is it because they have literally fallen in battle? Usually shades of meaning of a word are clarified by the literary context in which the word functions. In Gen 6:4, it is exactly this kind of ‘guiding context’ which is direly missing. As a result, there appear to be no arguments to side with and subsequently every possible solution produces, as it were, its own ‘context’ to determine who the נִפְּלִים actually represented. Etymology, all the same, opened the door to the belief in the later tradition of Gen 6:1–4 relating the ‘fall of the angels’.

It has been observed, however, that etymology often does not advance one closer to the *actual* meaning of a word.²⁴¹ Should it be possible to trace the actual functioning of a word, a highly plausible meaning for it may be determined. Unfortunately, only through Num 13:33 can the modern reader catch a glimpse of how the נִפְּלִים were viewed. Because Num 13 undoubtedly ties the נִפְּלִים to beings of tall stature, this most probably is what has been understood in Gen 6:4 as well. Based on these observations, a translation rendering ‘giants’ gives at least some impression of what is meant.

The נִפְּלִים do not seem to be directly related to the Mesopotamian *apkallu* as based on a difference in function and attributes.²⁴² In Mesopotamian literature, the *apkallu* are semi-divine beings who bring cultural achievements, while in Gen 6:4 there is no mention of the possible function of the נִפְּלִים. Interestingly though, it would be more appropriate to compare the *apkallu* as purveyors of cultural development with the reception history of Gen 6:1–4 in which the ‘Watchers’, the angels, Enoch or Seth are the ones who teach mankind arts and craftsmanship.²⁴³ If any relationship of Gen 6:1–4 to the tradition about the *apkallu* can be assumed, it

²⁴¹ Cf. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), passim.

²⁴² Cf. Ronald Hendel, “The Nephilim were on Earth: Genesis 6:1–4 in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 28–29; Russel E. Gmirkin, *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (LHB/OTS 433; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 109; Helge S. Kvanvig, “The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 206.

²⁴³ See Chapter 3.

would be more plausible to connect these with the ‘sons of God’ – who in later interpretation fulfil the role of purveyors of culture – rather than with the נַפְלִים.²⁴⁴

2.4.2 Nephilim, Gibborim, and the ‘Sons of God’

The second issue to be addressed is the mutual relationship between the נַפְלִים, the ‘sons of God’ and the גִּבּוֹרִים.

Much like the נַפְלִים, also the גִּבּוֹרִים are a category newly introduced in Gen 6:4. In Gen 6:4 this group is characterised as הַגִּבּוֹרִים אֲשֶׁר מִעוֹלָם ‘the heroes that were of old’ and as אֲנָשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם ‘men of renown’.²⁴⁵ The word גִּבּוֹר occurs often in the Old Testament and generally means ‘strong man, warrior, hero’, as in the list of David’s champions in 2 Sam 23:8–39.²⁴⁶ Angels can also be called גִּבּוֹרִים as, for example, in Ps 103:20. With the qualification ‘heroes of old’, Gen 6:4 depicts them as a class of mighty warriors from the past, who almost have entirely faded from memory.²⁴⁷ According to some interpreters, Ezek 32:27 points to this very group of mighty men, in the dirge about the Pharaoh, where it is said how mighty men²⁴⁸ of old²⁴⁹, after having fallen in battle, gained a special place in the netherworld.²⁵⁰ The most proximate occurrence is found in Gen 10:8–12 where Nimrod is called the first גִּבּוֹר

²⁴⁴ Unless, of course, the נַפְלִים are identical with the ‘sons of God’, see below 2.4.2.

²⁴⁵ For this translation, cf. Stanley Gevirtz, “West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law,” VT 11 no. 2 (1961): 142–143. In this section of his article, Gevirtz discusses the Phoenician inscription of Azitawada (vocalised as Azatiwada in COS 2.31). In line 13 of the inscription, one finds the expression *dm šm*, which Gevirtz translates as ‘man of renown’. This translation fits the context: “And if a king among kings, or a prince among princes, if a man who is a man of renown shall expunge the name of Azitawada ...”. In support of his view, Gevirtz points to *awil šumim* ‘man of name’, as mentioned in the Mari letters (142–143 nt. 4), as opposed to F. Rosenthal in ANET², 500 nt. 6, who translates it thus: “an ordinary human being without titles of any sort”. See also “The Azitiwada Inscription,” translated by K. Lawson Younger (COS 2.31:150): “a man of renown”.

²⁴⁶ Cf. also Akkadian adjective *gabbāru*, ‘strong’, CAD 5:3. For the rabbinic use of גִּבּוֹרִים, see Richard G. Marks, “Dangerous Hero: Rabbinic Attitudes Toward Legendary Warriors,” HUCA 54 (1983): 181–194.

²⁴⁷ Jagersma, *comm. Gen* 1995, 84–85, remarks that, ironically, the Old Testament supplies no names to the ‘men of name’.

²⁴⁸ Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 12 nt. 34, “Heroen sind keine gesunkenen Götter, wie zu Ende des 19. Jhs. immer wieder behauptet wurde”.

²⁴⁹ The translation “of old” is according to the LXX, see 2.4.1, nt. 228.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Emil G. Kraeling, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4,” JNES 6 no. 4 (1947): 196–197. According to Kraeling Ezek 26:19–20 demonstrates that the word עוֹלָם in Gen 6:4 has “the special nuance of ‘previous world age’.” (196). See also P. W. Coxon in DDD, 345: “*mē’ōlām* is important here because it locates the activities of the *gibbōrîm* in the primeval period and not in the recent historical past”; R. Mark Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b–21* (SBLABib 11; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 46.

on earth.²⁵¹ There is an apparent intent of Genesis to describe Nimrod as being violent.²⁵²

The most problematic to explain, however, is the interrelation between the נְפִלִים, the ‘sons of God’ and the גִּבּוֹרִים, as this is rather unclear in the description furnished by Gen 6:4. Connected to this is the question as to who are perceived to be the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’. There are three possible solutions pertaining to the mutual relationship between the נְפִלִים, the ‘sons of God’ and the גִּבּוֹרִים:

- (1) The נְפִלִים are identical with the ‘sons of God’.
- (2) The נְפִלִים are identical with the גִּבּוֹרִים.
- (3) The נְפִלִים are not identical with the ‘sons of God’ nor with the גִּבּוֹרִים, thus meaning that they belong to entirely different groups. In scheme:

(Table 5)

The possible interrelations of <i>nēpīlīm</i> , <i>gibbōrīm</i> and ‘sons of God’			
1	‘sons of God’	↔ <i>Nephilim</i> ✕	<i>Gibborim</i>
2	‘sons of God’	✕ <i>Nephilim</i> ↔	<i>Gibborim</i>
3	‘sons of God’	✕ <i>Nephilim</i> ✕	<i>Gibborim</i>

Pending an evaluation of these three exegetical solutions (4), the identity of the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ will be addressed (5).

(1) *Are the נְפִלִים Identical with the ‘Sons of God’?*

The identification of the ‘sons of God’ as the נְפִלִים is favoured by exegetes who see the word נְפִלִים as antecedent of אֲשֶׁר in Gen 6:4b. Birney advocates this option. His

²⁵¹ Cf. Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen: Teil 1: Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetischer Sicht* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), 173. According to Drewermann, Gen 10:8–12 explains the concept of the גִּבּוֹרִים as primeval kings, “Urzeitkönige”. Further literature on Nimrod: K van der Toorn and P. W. van der Horst, “Nimrod Before and After the Bible,” *HTR* 83 no. 1 (1990): 1–29; C. Uehlinger, “Nimrod” in *DDD*, 627–630; Yigal Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad,” *VT* 52 no. 3 (2002): 350–366.

²⁵² Cf. Mary Katherine Y. H. Hom, “... A Mighty Hunter before YHWH: Genesis 10:9 and the Moral-Theological Evaluation of Nimrod,” *VT* 60 no. 1 (2010): 68.

translation: “The nephilim were in the earth in those days and after that as well, *which* sons of god went in to the daughters of men so that they bore to them; those were the mighty men of old, the men of renown”.²⁵³ Similarly Dexinger in a paraphrase states that the נפלים came *as* the aforementioned ‘sons of God’ to the daughters of men. He adds that a temporal relative clause, “in those days, in which ...” would have been introduced by בְּאַשֵּׁר.²⁵⁴ Hamilton remarks that support for identification of נפלים and ‘sons of God’ can also be gleaned from the Palestinian Targum.²⁵⁵ Indeed, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan translates Gen 6:4 as: “Sham-hazai and Azael fell from heaven and were on earth in those days.”²⁵⁶ In this manner, the Targum exchanges the word נפלים with the names of the two leaders of the dissenting angels known from the Pseudepigrapha²⁵⁷ and, at the same time, interprets the word נפלים etymologically as ‘the fallen ones’. Thus, the etymology of the נפלים as ‘the fallen ones’, combined with an interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as fallen angels, led to the designation of both groups being one and the same.²⁵⁸

(2) Are the נפלים Identical with the גברים?

It is further possible to view נפלים and גברים as terms which refer to the same beings. The Septuagint translates both terms as ‘the giants’,²⁵⁹ the translation of

²⁵³ Leroy Birney, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JETS* 13 no. 1 (1970): 51. [emphasis added]

²⁵⁴ Cf. Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode* (WBT 13; Wien: Herder, 1966), 45. Dexinger refers for his translation “came as the sons of God” to Ps 29:10 יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ לְעוֹלָם, “YHWH sits enthroned as king forever”. However, the verb יָשַׁב is there the technical term for ‘to throne, to govern’, (cf. HAL 2:424) which implies that the translation of מֶלֶךְ is determined by that meaning.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 269 nt. 25.

²⁵⁶ For the Tg. Ps.-J., see 3.1.8.

²⁵⁷ Cf. 3.4.

²⁵⁸ Cf. R. Gilboa, “Who ‘Fell Down’ to Our Earth? A Different Light on Genesis 6:1–4,” *BN* 111 (2002): 71–72. Gilboa sees the word נפלים as a generic name of the offspring of the ‘sons of God’. He therefore argues that the ‘sons of God’ were also נפלים.

²⁵⁹ John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBLSCS 35; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), 77–78, explains this double rendering of ‘giants’. He suggests that the Septuagint ought to be read as having a period instead of a comma after καὶ μετ’ ἐκεῖνο. Interpreted in this way, the text reads: “The giants were on earth in those days and also afterwards. When the sons of God were going in to the human daughters, they raised offspring for themselves, these were the giants ...” First it is said that the giants were on earth, the second clause makes clear how these giants came into being. Based on this interpretation it becomes understandable how the Septuagint can translate both נפלים and גברים as ‘giants’.

Symmachus twice renders them as ‘the violent ones’.²⁶⁰ According to Gunkel, the more frequent and less mythological word גִּבּוֹרִים serves best to explain the rare and obsolete expression נִפְלִיִּים.²⁶¹ Van Wolde suggests that the narrator uses the two different names to characterise two different aspects of the same beings. The text, then, describes them first from the perspective of the gods as ‘the fallen ones’, by using the association with the root נָפַל ‘to fall’. Subsequently they are depicted from the perspective of humans as powerful men, ‘the heroes’.²⁶² Exegetical arguments to consider גִּבּוֹרִים and נִפְלִיִּים as being identical are grounded in the view that otherwise the נִפְלִיִּים form a completely isolated element in the text. Grammatically, the equivalence of both terms can be supported by interpreting אֲשֶׁר as not introducing a temporal but a causal clause: “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterwards, *because* the ‘sons of God’ cohabited with the ‘daughters of men’ and they bore offspring to them; these (the Nephilim) were the heroes (Gibborim) of old, the men of renown”.²⁶³ If both groups are identical, this implies that the personal pronoun הֵמָּה in Gen 6:4c most likely has the word נִפְלִיִּים as antecedent.

(3) Are the נִפְלִיִּים a Separate Group?

It is also possible to see the נִפְלִיִּים as neither identical with the ‘sons of God’ nor with the גִּבּוֹרִים. According to Schüle, the clause about the נִפְלִיִּים only serves to give an outline of the temporal background, recounting that the story of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ is dated at the time when the Nephilim also happened to be on earth.²⁶⁴ As an argument it can be advanced that clauses similar to “the

²⁶⁰ See 2.4.1 no. 1, and 3.1.3.

²⁶¹ Gunkel, *comm. Gen* 1917, 58.

²⁶² Cf. Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden: Brill 1994), 67.

²⁶³ Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 55; Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” *BZ* 11 no. 1 (1967): 69 nt. 12; János Molnár, “A kerten kívül: Az istenfiak házassága,” *Theologiai Szemle* 52 no. 1 (2009): 6. For the causal meaning of אֲשֶׁר cf. “II אֲשֶׁר,” *HAL* 1:95.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 230–231. According to Schüle, this background information is meant to orientate the reader about the place of Gen 6:1–4 in comparison with Greek mythology, namely the time of primeval beings like Cyclops and Titans. Cf. also Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditions- und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1979), 22–23. Bartelmus argues that the heroes were deliberately begotten by the ‘sons of God’ in order to fight the giants; this suggestion, however, lacks textual evidence.

Nephilim were on earth in those days” are found in Gen 12:6 (“At that time, the Canaanites were in the land”) and Gen 13:7 (“At that time, the Canaanites and Perizzites dwelt in the land”).²⁶⁵

(4) The Mutual Relationship Between the נַפְלִים, the גִּבּוֹרִים, and the ‘Sons of God’

In revisiting the solutions mentioned above, the following arguments are to be considered:

Had Gen 6:4 intended to convey that the נַפְלִים are identical with the ‘sons of God’, the explicit mention of the ‘sons of God’ contradicts this. In this case, it would have been sufficient to formulate: “The Nephilim were on earth in those days, and also afterwards, who came to the daughters of men so that children were born²⁶⁶ to them”. Because Gen 6:2 already related that the ‘sons of God’ chose wives from among the ‘daughters of men’, it would then have been obvious that those ‘sons of God’ were called ‘Nephilim’ in Gen 6:4. The presence of the expression בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים in this verse makes it more plausible that אַחֲרָיו introduces a temporal clause,²⁶⁷ and has as antecedent ‘in those days and also afterwards’.

In identifying the גִּבּוֹרִים with the נַפְלִים, the personal pronoun הֵמָּה serves a crucial function. The word הֵמָּה can refer to the offspring implied in the clause וַיֵּלְדוּ לָהֶם: “they bore offspring to them, these (הֵמָּה) are the Gibborim”. However, if this is what is meant, the pronoun הֵמָּה would have better been left out: “they bore to them the Gibborim”.²⁶⁸ The syntax of Gen 6:4 makes it more probable that the word הֵמָּה refers to the first word of Gen 6:4: הַנְּפִלִים.²⁶⁹ This would mean that the author of Gen 6:4 uses the qualification Gibborim as an alias for the Nephilim.

If the reference to the נַפְלִים were a mere temporal indicator (“the story of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ happened in the same time when the Nephilim were also on earth”), the text would become even more cryptical. Such information would hardly convey anything worthwhile at all.

²⁶⁵ Cf. the asides found in Deut 2:10–12; 2:20–23; 3:9; 3:11; 3:13b–14.

²⁶⁶ This would require to vocalise יָלַד as a *Pual*. The *Pual* of יָלַד possibly can function as a passive to the *Qal*, cf. HAL 2:393. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads a *Hiphil*: וַיֵּלְדוּ, ‘they begot’.

²⁶⁷ Cf. GKC §164d.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Josef Schreiner, “Gen 6,1–4 und die Problematik von Leben und Tod,” in Maurice Carrez, Joseph Doré, and Pierre Grelot, eds., *De la Tōrah au Messie* (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 70. Schreiner proposes to strike the pronoun הֵמָּה from the text, assuming that it is the result of dittography of the last two letters of the preceding לָהֶם and of the ה of the following definite article.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Walter Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1–4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung,” *ZAW* 123 no. 4 (2011): 504–505.

All things considered, it seems likely that Gen 6:4 implies that the Gibborim are identical with the Nephilim.

(5) *The Offspring of the ‘Sons of God’ and ‘Daughters of Men’*

Genesis 6:4 relates that the Nephilim – also known as the Gibborim – were on earth but it also furnishes a new detail, namely, that from the relationships between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’ offspring came forth. The direct object of the verbal form יָלְדוּ is only implied: “they bore (children) to them”.²⁷⁰ Yet, one can ask whether Gen 6:4 does not suggest that the Nephilim / Gibborim are these very offspring.

This hypothesis would gain more clout, if the clause הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ is translated as “the Nephilim arose on earth” instead of “were on earth”, similar to the use of the verb הָיָה in Gen 7:6 and 10: “the flood came on earth”.²⁷¹ Much the same as when one translates הָיָה in its sense of ‘to be’ and not as ‘come to be’, it is still possible to interpret Gen 6:4 in the way that the author saw the Nephilim / Gibborim as the offspring of ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’.²⁷² Such an hypothesis has at least the reception history of Gen 6:1–4 on its side.²⁷³ Admittedly, the text, however, does not say this explicitly.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Other occurrences of יָלַד also leave out the direct object, e.g. Gen 16:1, “she did not bear him (children)”, see also Gen 16:2; 17:17; 18:13; 20:17; 30:1; Exod 1:19; Judg 13:2–3; 1 Sam 4:19; 1 Kgs 3:18.

²⁷¹ Cf. Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WThJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 190 nt. 11; Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Gen* 1887, 152, “extiterunt d.i. sie traten ins Dasein”.

²⁷² This may also be an answer to the returning difficulty that the divine intervention is not proportional to the crime, in other words, why are humans punished for the perpetration of the ‘sons of God’? If the Nephilim / Gibborim are the result of the relationships between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’, they belong to humanity and as such are subsumed under this limitation of 120 years, despite their obvious power.

²⁷³ According to 1 En. 7:2; 9:9, giants were the offspring of the unions between the ‘children of heaven, the angels’ and the ‘daughters of man’ (1 En. 6:1–2). Cf. “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” translated by E. Isaac (*OTP* 1:15–17), see 3.4.2. Cf. also 1QapGen ar Col. II:1, where it is told that Lamech thinks that “the conception (of his son Noah) was (the work) of the Watchers, and the pregnancy of the Holy Ones, and it belonged to the Nephilin” (*DSSSE* 28–29), see 3.5.1, and 4Q180 Fragm. 1:8 and 4Q181 Fragm. 2:2, where it is said that ‘Azaz’el and his angels beget גְּבִרִין with the daughters of men (*DSSSE* 370–375).

²⁷⁴ Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 504–505. According to Day, the Nephilim were the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ in the myth behind Gen 6:1–4, but not any more in Gen 6:1–4 itself. See John Day, “The Sons of God and Daughters of Men and the Giants: Disputed Points in the Interpretation of og Genesis 6:1–4,” *HeBAI* 1 no. 4 (2012): 427–447.

2.4.3 Background Information and Development of the Narrative

In Gen 6:4 two things happen. The author turns, as it were, to his audience and explains that the period of time which he is recounting happened to be the time of the Nephilim and the Gibborim. Yet, he mentions also the outcome of what was recounted in Gen 6:2 about the ‘sons of God’ who cohabited with the ‘daughters of men’. Subsequently, the description of the divine intervention in Gen 6:3 interrupted the flow of the narrative and, as a consequence, Gen 6:4 picks up the narrative thread from Gen 6:2 and provides ‘background information’ to the story. These two aims of Gen 6:4 may provide an explanation of the complicated structure of the verse. These two issues, the background information and the further development of the narrative, will be addressed successively.

Semantically, Gen 6:4 provides background information. The verse traces a more general picture of the time in question by mentioning the ‘giants’, portraying them as ‘warriors of old’. In this way the narrative refers to an ancient period during which the world was different relative to the era of the implied audience.²⁷⁵ This background function of the narrative is conveyed by the verbal forms used in the text. Research on the use of verbal forms in Biblical Hebrew has resulted in the view that *wayyiqtol*-forms are the typical means to describe the thrust of a narrative. They serve as the motor of continuing subsequent actions, constituting the foreground of a narrative, whereas the sudden *qatal*-form in Gen 6:4 functions as a pause-button which checks the course of the narrative, enabling the narrator to provide background information to his readers.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Both the word-order subject-*qatal* and the expression בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם ‘in those days’ refer to an event in the past.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Norbert Lohfink, “Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jon 4,5),” *BZ* 5 (1961): 192; Walter Gross, “Syntaktische Erscheinungen am Anfang althebräischer Erzählungen: Hintergrund und Vordergrund,” in *Congress Volume Vienna 1980* (VTSup 32; ed. J. A. Emerton, Leiden: Brill, 1980), 133–139; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, “An Overview of Hebrew Narrative Syntax,” in *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996* (BIS 29; ed. Ellen van Wolde, Leiden: Brill 1997), 1–20; Alviero Niccacci, “Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose,” in *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996* (BIS 29; ed. Ellen van Wolde, Leiden: Brill 1997), 167–202; Tal Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 139–148; Gard Granerød, “Omnipresent in Narratives, Disputed among Grammarians: Some Contributions to the Understanding of *wayyiqtol* and their Underlying Paradigms,” *ZAW* 121 no. 3 (2009): 418–434. For further discussion see John A. Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics: Clarifying the Roles of *Wayyiqtol* and *Weqatal* in Biblical Hebrew Prose,” *JSS* 49 no. 2 (2004): 247–273; Ola Wikander, “The Hebrew Consecutive *Wāw* as North West Semitic ‘Augment’: A Typological Comparison with Indo-European,” *VT* 60 no. 2 (2010): 260–270.

However, the narrative has not come to a standstill in Gen 6:4. This verse recounts what could have been expected, based on Gen 6:2, but, in fact, remained untold: children were born as result of the sexual intercourse of ‘sons of God’ with ‘daughters of men’. When one keeps in mind these two aims of Gen 6:4, namely, providing background information and developing further the course of the narrative, the structure of the verse within the whole passage becomes more clear:

- *the Nephilim were on earth* — new information provided by Gen 6:4
- *in those days* — this temporal indication refers back to Gen 6:2, overarching the divine intervention described in Gen 6:3 where it was said that the ‘sons of God’ took women from among the ‘daughters of men’
- *and also afterwards* — namely after the divine intervention which imposed a limit on the duration of human lifespan; both temporal indications, as it were, ‘embrace’ the content of Gen 6:3: although the narrative came to a temporary halt in Gen 6:3, the story still did not reach its completion²⁷⁷
- *when the ‘sons of God’ had intercourse with the ‘daughters of men’* — takes up the narrative line from Gen 6:2
- *and they bore children to them* — new information that had remained untold because of the divine intervention recounted in Gen 6:3
- *these are* — the personal pronoun is overarching the whole verse and returns to the first word: ‘the Nephilim’, but implicitly tell that the Nephilim were the beings who were born from the mixed relationships
- *the Gibborim, who were of old, the men of renown* — explains the Nephilim as famous warriors of old.

Based on these observations, it can also be concluded that Gen 6:4 forms a unity²⁷⁸ and is well integrated within the whole of Gen 6:1–4.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 503.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Bühner, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” 503.

2.5 CONTENT AND CONTEXT: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS RELATING TO GENESIS 6:1–4

Much of the content of Gen 6:1–4 remains enigmatic due to a lack of information, especially for the modern reader. A contemporary audience, sharing the background of a similar conceptual world, most probably would have understood the passage better. This is obvious because concepts are introduced with the definite article,²⁷⁹ without further explanation: ‘the sons of God’, ‘the daughters of men’, ‘the giants’, ‘the heroes of old’.²⁸⁰ As will be pointed out in the next chapter, this presumably natural capacity of understanding was already waning from the second century B.C.E. onwards. Nevertheless, some general observations about the passage can be made as to its content and its context.

Genesis 6:1 describes the point of departure of the short narrative. Gen 6:1a refers *qua* content back to the situation related in Gen 5, namely, the increase in numbers of humankind on earth. Genesis 6:1b incorporates the transition to the new narrative course by stating that daughters were born. These daughters will play a crucial role in the rest of the story. The verse functions as a hinge joining the preceding chapter and the following verses.

Genesis 6:2 describes the action of the narrative. The ‘sons of God’, who are introduced here for the first time, take for themselves women as wives from among the already mentioned ‘daughters of men’ (Gen 6:1).

Genesis 6:3 ties the reaction of YHWH to the action of the ‘sons of God’. God interferes even before the story can begin to unfold any further. From this divine intervention it appears that somehow in Gen 6:2 a violation of boundaries is reported, otherwise the verse would be rather incomprehensible. The exact meaning of the reaction and its motivation remains the subject of much discussion. Most likely the limit of 120 years is to be understood as regulating human lifespan. Yet,

²⁷⁹ In Hebrew the definite article can be used even when something is introduced for the first time in a text, referring to a person or object well-defined in the mind of the author, cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 243–244, §13.5.1.e; J. P. Lettinga, T. Muraoka, and W. Th. van Peursen, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (10th ed. Leiden: Brill, 1996), 155, §72f-4.

²⁸⁰ Cf. *NIB* 1: 382, “The author introduces the ‘sons of God’ (or ‘sons of the gods’) as a matter of course, as if the reader needs no explanation. But the modern reader does; indeed, much depends on the proper identification.”

independently of how the cited 120 years are to be explained, some kind of temporal restriction is imposed on humanity: either on the generation living before the flood (i.e., the flood will come within 120 years) or on mankind in general (i.e., lifespan is limited to 120 years).

Genesis 6:4 provides background information to the course of the story which had its beginnings in Gen 6:1. The intended audience hears in Gen 6:4 of a time long past. It depicts a situation with an air of lurking violence, mentioning giants (Nephilim) who are also referred to more specifically as heroes or warriors (Gibborim). The verse at least gives the impression that these Nephilim / Gibborim are the offspring of the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men'.

The whole passage in its present form can be interpreted as a coherent unity. Apart from the question whether the passage of Gen 6:1–4 once was part of a separate source, in the present setting it has a clear function and it can be read in connection with that context. Based on these observations, looking for various sources or later additions to the text is not absolutely necessary to the understanding of the passage.²⁸¹ Presently, the narrative functions as a prelude and transition to the biblical flood story. Without it, Gen 6:5–7 would be an unexpectedly abrupt introduction to God's decision to blot out all humanity except Noah and his family by a complete overturning of creation. Up to the time of Gen 4, only sins of individuals were recounted, in most cases accompanied by God's reaction to these deeds. For a time the fate of humanity seems to take a turn for the better. Apart from harping upon the inevitability of death, the end of Gen 5 even strikes a hopeful chord. But dark clouds are rolling in: from Gen 6 onwards, focus shifts to the sins of a collective group, ultimately resulting in God's punishment imposed on all living beings.

Further indications that Gen 6:1–4 functions as an introduction to the story of the deluge are inner-textual allusions connecting the passage to the subsequent chapters²⁸² and to the rest of Gen 1–11.²⁸³ A more literary approach in particular

²⁸¹ As has already been pointed out in 1.3.2. Cf. also Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 271.

²⁸² As has already been pointed out in 1.3.1.

²⁸³ E.g. the 'making of a name' in Gen 4:17 and 11:4 can be brought into connection with the 'men of renown' in 6:4, cf. David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1–11)," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 37–38. Another example is the similar wording in Gen 3:6, "The woman saw (רָאָה) that the tree was good (טוֹב) ... she took (לָקַח) ..." and 6:2, "The 'sons of God' saw (רָאָה) how good (טוֹב) the daughters of men were, and took (לָקַח) for themselves ...", cf. *NIB* 1, 383; Wenham, *comm. Gen* (WBC) 1987, 141; the same observation is made by Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NAC) 1996, 321; Sven Fockner, "Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God," *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 439; Carol M. Kaminski, "Beautiful Women or 'False Judgement'?"

tends to illuminate allusions, repetitions, parallels and chiasmic structures to better demonstrate the coherence of the passage itself and its relationship to the surrounding literary context. There are, indeed, some striking parallels between Gen 6:1–4 and 6:5–8, outlined as follows:²⁸⁴

(Table 6)

Parallels between Gen 6:1–4 and 6:5–8	
vs. 1: increase of mankind on earth (עַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ מְרֹבָה)	vs. 5: increase of mankind and evil on earth (בְּאֶרֶץ)
vs. 2: ‘sons of God’ see ... good	vs. 5: YHWH sees ... evil
vs. 3: YHWH says: ... spirit not forever	vs. 7: YHWH says: ... eliminate man
vs. 4: giants, warriors as men of fame (background information: subject - <i>qatal</i>)	vs. 8: Noah as man of grace (background information: subject - <i>qatal</i>)

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, therefore it is impossible to apply an all-encompassing literary method which avoids all pitfalls.²⁸⁵ Yet, even if not all observed possibilities carry the same weight, several subtle repetitions appear to be present in Gen 6:1–8.

Interpreting Genesis 6.2 in the Context of the Primaeval History,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 467–471. Walter Brueggemann, “David and His Theologian,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 156–181, sees further-reaching allusions. He argues that the structure of Gen 2–11 is derived from the David story. For parallel structures within Gen 6, see Gordon J. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 440–442.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Wenham, *comm. Gen.* 137; Rick Marrs, “The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4),” *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 220. For slightly different analyses, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 180–181; Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion,” 445.

²⁸⁵ Alonso-Schökel, “Hermeneutical Problems of a Literary Study of the Bible,” 1, quotes Staiger: “Strange lot that of literary science: he who pursues it ends up either without science or without literature.”

2.6 DRAMATIS PERSONAE: PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS RELATED TO GENESIS 6:1–4 IN GENERAL

Several provisional conclusions can be drawn after having reached the end of this chapter. The passage of Gen 6:1–4 retains many of its enigmas, thus it is impossible to be dogmatic in answering exegetical questions related to this part of the book of Genesis. However, some proposals solve more difficulties than others or else leave different numbers of difficulties unresolved.

2.6.1 Sons of God

Further investigation is necessary to determine the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’. Both ‘human’ and ‘super-human’ explanations have been proposed in the course of the history of exegesis. Based on indications from passages where the same expression is used, an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as divine beings may be more plausible. Two things can be noted already at the present phase of this research. Firstly, the expression refers to beings who were part of the conceptual world of the implied audience of the text; secondly, in the light of the other textual evidence in which the same or a similar expression is used, the expression ‘sons of God’ can be presumed to function as a syntagm.

2.6.2 Daughters of Men

The explanation of the expression ‘daughters of men’ depends basically on the exegesis of the expression ‘sons of God’. If the ‘sons of God’ are interpreted as a Sethites, the expression ‘daughters of men’ has to refer to a subset among all females, in this case viewed by most as Cainite women. However, considered the collective use of the expression ‘man’ in the sense of ‘mankind’ in Gen 6:1–4, the expression ‘daughters of men’ most likely means ‘women’, who are called ‘daughters of men’ in contrast with ‘sons of God’.

2.6.3 Mankind

In Gen 6:1–4 mankind is depicted as mortal and prone to erring and as having gone astray by engaging in the relationships between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’. The Nephilim / Gibborim are also depicted as part of the human race and not as semi-divine beings. Therefore the limitation imposed on human lifespan may well serve to restrict their range of action. This can offer an explanation for the ever-returning question of exegesis as to why the lifespan of mankind is limited, while, at the same time, nothing is said about a limitation or punishment for the ‘sons of God’.

2.6.4 YHWH’s Reaction

Though much remains unclear in seeking to understand the reaction of YHWH, a few results can be presented. First of all, the reaction underlines the frailty of humans by calling them ‘only flesh’, meaning that they are only mortals, something which is stressed by the fact that YHWH says his spirit will not without end have station in humans. Secondly, the reference to the spirit of YHWH can be interpreted as his life-giving empowerment of man. Thirdly, the limit of 120 years most probably refers to the maximum human lifespan. This fits well within the overall impression rendered by Gen 6:3 and also concurs with the common phrasing ‘his days were *n* years’. The exegesis considering the 120 years a time of respite is of an ancient date but has insufficient basis within the text itself. Fourthly, the reaction of YHWH appears to be more a restriction than a punishment.

2.6.5 Nephilim

The word נִפְלִיִּים most probably refers to beings of a tall physical stature. This is further reinforced by the occurrence of the same expression in Num 13:33. In Num 13, ten of the twelve spies apparently mention the נִפְלִיִּים not in order to specify but much more to terrify their listeners through the use of exaggeration. A hearkening back of primeval times in the word נִפְלִיִּים may have reinforced the frightening effect. To date, etymology has not proved useful in the interpretation of the word נִפְלִיִּים. Unless new and better information is uncovered, using the translation ‘giants’ can be justified. The text of Gen 6:4 specifies these giants as warriors (גִּבּוֹרִים) of old and men of renown. They probably represent the offspring from the sexual intercourse of ‘sons of God’ with ‘daughters of men’, although the text does not explicitly say this.

2.6.6 Gibborim

The גִּבּוֹרִים are heroes or warriors. In Gen 6:4 they are referred to as the great warriors of foregone days. As mentioned above, the description of these גִּבּוֹרִים may intend to offer an explanation of the term נְפִלִים. The text most probably has to be understood in a way that these גִּבּוֹרִים are the offspring of the relationships between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’.

2.6.7 Text and Reader

Genesis 6:1–4 in its present context forms the literary bridge between the genealogy of Gen 5 and the story of the flood. The passage depicts the degeneration of humanity in a few words, almost in an impressionistic way, which leaves some work to be done by the reader.²⁸⁶ The reaction of YHWH stresses the frailty and the error of humanity over against a seemingly all-powerful race which came into being. Perhaps it is the purpose of the text to describe a time long gone, full of haughtiness and acts of outrage, but also a show of restraint by the God who governs.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Peter J. Leithart, “I Don’t Get it: Humor and Hermeneutics,” *SJT* 60 no. 4 (2007): 412–425. Leithart argues that the interpretation of every text needs information from outside that text.

3

Trodden Paths:
Early Exegesis of the Expression
‘Sons of God’

Καὶ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον τούτου τοῦ χωρίου πολλὴν τὴν ἔρευναν ποιήσασθαι,
καὶ ἀνατρέψαι τὰς μυθολογίας τῶν ἀπερισκέπτως πάντα φθεγγομένων.¹

3. TRODDEN PATHS: EARLY EXEGESIS OF THE EXPRESSION ‘SONS OF GOD’

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 is an ever-arising question throughout the history of exegesis. The character of the expression both fascinated and intrigued exegetes. The interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 considerably influenced a portion of pseudepigraphic and apocryphal literature and in this way the passage also contributed to the shaping of angelology and demonology in systematic theology. This influence maintained its presence even in later times when these pseudepigraphic writings had more or less fallen into oblivion.² It is therefore important to include in the research on Gen 6:1–4 its history of exegesis, also.³ The present chapter provides an overview predominantly of the early⁴ exegesis of Genesis 6 and, in doing so, focuses on seeking an explanation for the expression ‘sons of God’.

The first impressions about the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 can be drawn from the ancient translations and paraphrases (3.1). Subsequently, an overview from

¹ John Chrysostom, *Homily* 22 on Gen 5:32–6:1 (PG 53:187). “It is necessary to do the full study of this passage, to refute the fanciful fictions of the people who thoughtlessly blurt out everything.”

² For a summary, see Ferdinand Dexinger, “Jüdisch-Christliche Nachgeschichte von Gen 6,1–4,” in *Zur Aktualität des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Georg Sauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Siegfried Kreuzer and Kurt Lüthi; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 155–175.

³ For a concise summary, see Robert C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4,” *GTJ* 5 no. 1 (1984): 13–36.

⁴ Until the fifth century C.E. the three main interpretations of the expression ‘sons of God’ continuously evolved (‘angels’, ‘judges’, ‘Sethites’), only to be finally complemented by the nineteenth-century’s religio-historical solution (‘deities’).

Jewish exegetical literature from the Second Temple period and patristic exegesis is provided. The Jewish interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 has been laid down in the works of Philo of Alexandria (3.2), Flavius Josephus (3.3), in the pseudepigrapha and apocrypha (3.4), several documents from Qumran (3.5) and rabbinic literature (3.6). For the Christian exegetical tradition, this chapter looks first to New Testament passages which possibly allude to Gen 6:1–4 (3.7) and after that turns to the Greek, Latin and Syriac church fathers (3.8). The overview ends with examples of the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4 from the Middle Ages, Reformation (3.9) and Classical Modernity (3.10). The chapter ends with general conclusions (3.11).

3.1 THE *VERSIONES ANTIQUAE*

In an environment in which the Hebrew language increasingly slipped into disuse, the need arose to have the holy scriptures translated or paraphrased. These translations and paraphrases shaped the course of later exegesis because, apparently, many exegetes had access only to a translation and not to the Hebrew original. The Aramaic-speaking Jewish audience made use of diverse Targumim which initially may have existed in the form of oral *ad hoc* translations. In the early church, the Septuagint, originally meant to serve the Greek-speaking Jewish community, became the canonical form of the Old Testament, something which significantly influenced exegesis.⁵ As the world language, Greek was spoken and understood both in East and West, as examples from patristic literature demonstrate. Around 180 C.E. the tide turns. From hereon local languages begin to dominate in the realm of written communication.⁶ The Syriac-speaking Eastern church was in need of Syriac translations and this eventually led⁷ to the appearance of the Peshitta.⁸ The

⁵ Cf. Ernst Würthwein, *Der Text des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1988), 59.

⁶ Cf. Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 52–53.

⁷ The oldest extant manuscripts, published in the Leiden-edition, are from the fifth and the sixth century C.E., cf. P. B. Dirksen, “The Peshitta and Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” *VT* 42 no. 3 (1992): 376.

⁸ Even then the LXX kept its influence in Syriac Christianity, as will be demonstrated below, see 3.8.22, although congruent readings in Peshitta and LXX do not necessarily point to dependence of the Peshitta on the LXX, cf. Dirksen, “The Peshitta and Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” 376–390; Heidi M. Szpek, “On the Influence of the Septuagint on the Peshitta,” *CBQ* 60 no. 2 (1998): 251–266.

Latin-speaking Western church produced Latin translations which were ultimately revised and edited in form of the Vulgate. The same development can be observed in Egypt in the Coptic-speaking areas.

3.1.1 The Septuagint

The Septuagint⁹ renders the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:2.4 as οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ. This is a verbatim translation of the Hebrew equivalent, thus leaving it to the reader to interpret the expression. Notably, the word בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, ambivalent in terms of whether it is used as a singular or a plural, is translated as a singular: ‘the sons of God’. A lesser number of the manuscripts, however, has the reading ἄγγελοι ‘messengers, angels’ instead of υἱοί.¹⁰ This more interpretative translation is perhaps influenced by the translation of Job 1:6 and 2:1, where the expression ‘the sons of God’ is translated as ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ, and of Job 38:7 where it is rendered as ἄγγελοί μου. This interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ as ‘angels’ was originally widely accepted in Jewish and Christian circles. However, it can be assumed that the manuscripts of the Septuagint which contain the more literal translation are the earliest ones.¹¹

3.1.2 Aquila

The translation of Aquila¹² usually provides a very literal translation. Interestingly, Aquila reads οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν, that is ‘the sons of the gods’, rendering בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים in the plural.¹³ Greek readers could have thought this to refer to gods in general.¹⁴ It is not

⁹ The translation of the Torah dates from the third century B.C.E., cf. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 136.

¹⁰ Witnessed in several manuscripts, but inconsistently, because only in vs. 2 and not in vs. 4, except in two manuscripts which read also in vs. 4 ἄγγελοι instead of υἱοί (one ms. *in margine*). Cf. John William Wevers, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum*. Vol. 1: Genesis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 108–109.

¹¹ Cf. Philip S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *JJS* 23 no. 1 (1972): 63.

¹² Disciple of rabbi Akiva, his translation dates from around 130 C.E., cf. Würthwein, *Text des Alten Testaments*, 64.

¹³ Cf. F. Field, ed. *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersint; Sive Veterum Interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* Vol. 1: Prolegomena, Genesis – Esther (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), 22; see also PG 15:188.

¹⁴ Cf. Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, II:2–13: “[Zeus] was hastening to make an utter end of the race of mortal men, declaring that he would destroy the lives of the demi-gods, that *the children of the gods* should not mate with wretched mortals, seeing their fate with their own eyes; but that the blessed gods henceforth even as aforetime should have their living and their habitations apart from men.” [emphasis added] Translation Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod’s Catalogues of Women*. Cited 26 May 2010. Online:

clear whether this is also what Aquila intended because in other cases when he translates אֱלֹהִים as a plural, it apparently does not refer to YHWH but to ‘other gods’ (e.g. 1 Kgs 14:9; Isa 37:19), something which may justify the interpretation that Aquila interpreted בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים as ‘sons of idols’.¹⁵ According to Dillmann, Aquila possibly intended his translation to have the sense of ‘idolaters’ (*Götzendienner*).¹⁶ In Exod 21:6 both Aquila and Symmachus translate אֱלֹהֵי אֲנָשִׁים as plural: πρὸς τοὺς θεοῦς. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion read אֱלֹהִים as a plural also in Exod 22:8: “and whom the gods, (οἱ) θεοί, condemn ...” Yet, it is possible that they interpreted the word אֱלֹהִים in these Exodus texts as referring to judges.¹⁷ Thus, the plural translation ‘gods’ does not unequivocally refer to idols. In the case of Gen 6:2 the question remains unanswered as to whether Aquila equated in his translation ‘sons of the gods’ with ‘(sons of) idols’ or with ‘(sons of) judges’. But it can be said, all the same, that his interpretation differs from the earlier one which took the ‘sons of God’ to be ‘angels’.¹⁸

3.1.3 Symmachus

Symmachus translates the expression ‘sons of God’ as οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων ‘the sons of the rulers’. His translation, intended to be as literal a rendering of the Hebrew as possible and at the same time be written in good Greek, dates from about 170 C.E.¹⁹ In this translation of Gen 6:1–4 Symmachus most probably was influenced by the shift in interpretation as known from the comments of rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai²⁰ which appears in *Genesis Rabbah*. Simeon bar Yoḥai, a disciple of the school of Akiva, referred to the ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the nobility’ and cursed anyone who called them ‘sons of God’.²¹ The fact that an *anathema* was declared demonstrates the intensity of the exegetical debate and further that it was

<http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodCatalogues.html>. Fragment 69, Berlin Papyri 10560.

¹⁵ Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” 64–65; Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1–4 in Early Jewish Literature* (WUNT 198; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2005), 63.

¹⁶ Dillmann, *comm. Gen* 1892, 120.

¹⁷ Cf. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersint*, 117 nt. 3 (Exod 21:6), and 119 nt. 8 (Exod 22:8).

¹⁸ Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” 64–65.

¹⁹ Cf. Würthwein, *Text des Alten Testaments*, 65.

²⁰ Mid second century C.E., one of the most important pupils of Akiva. Cf. *EncJud* 18:593–594.

²¹ See *Gen. Rab.* 26:5. Translation: Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (BJS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1985), 282.

far from settled at this time.²² The shift in interpretation from the earlier angels-interpretation to the rulers-interpretation was also possibly influenced by the presence of esoteric groups which attributed excessive emphasis on the importance of angels.²³

3.1.4 Theodotion

Theodotion revised an earlier Greek translation at the end of the second century C.E.²⁴ He translates ‘sons of God’, much as the majority of the Septuagint manuscripts do, as υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ.²⁵ There seems no apparent reason why he fell back on this translation other than to provide the most literal one possible.

3.1.5 Conclusions to the Greek Translations

The Greek translations of the Septuagint and οἱ τρεῖς ἑρμηνευταί show fluctuations between a literal translation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 (leaving the interpretation to the reader – Septuagint and Theodotion) and at least two distinct interpretations, these being the angels-interpretation (several Septuagint manuscripts) and the mighty ones-interpretation (Symmachus). Perhaps Aquila shared this last interpretation given that his translation is that of ‘gods’, possibly to be considered as referring to ‘judges’. It is, however, also possible that he equated ‘sons of the gods’ with idols or perhaps with idolaters.

3.1.6 Targum Onqelos

The Aramaic translation of Onqelos [*Tg. Onq.*] became the official Targum on the Pentateuch for Judaism.²⁶ In the Babylonian Talmud the persons of Onqelos and Aquila are apparently interchanged.²⁷ The text of this Targum consists of layers of material which vary in their dates of provenance,²⁸ therefore it is difficult to date it

²² The school of rabbi Yishmael, who was a contemporary of Akiva, accepted the angels-interpretation as an historical fact. Cf. Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos* (Vol. 6 of *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*; Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds.; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988), 52 nt. 1. Cf. also Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 67b.

²³ Cf. Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*. (Volume 1B of *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*; Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 37 nt. 2. A mode of thinking perhaps also present in the so-called ‘Colossian heresy’, cf. Col 2:18.

²⁴ Cf. Würthwein, *Text des Alten Testaments*, 65.

²⁵ See Field, ed. *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersint*, 22.

²⁶ Cf. *EncJud* 15:513.

²⁷ Cf. Robert C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4,” *GTJ* 5 no. 1 (1984): 25.

²⁸ Cf. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos*, 30.

accurately.²⁹ Onqelos provides an interpretive translation of the expression בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, namely בְּנֵי רַבְרַבִּיָּא ‘sons of the great ones’.³⁰ In adhering to this translation, Onqelos rejects the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 as being a story about fallen angels intermarrying with mankind as recorded in pseudepigraphic literature. As a disciple of the school of Akiva, who is known to be an opponent of the angels-interpretation, this rendering concurs with that of Simeon bar Yoḥai,³¹ disciple of the same school.³²

3.1.7 Targum Neofiti 1

The Targum Neofiti 1 [*Tg. Neof.*] preserved the text of Palestinian targumic traditions dating from the first to the fourth century C.E.³³ This Targum translates ‘sons of God’ as בְּנֵי דִינִיָּא ‘sons of the judges’.³⁴ However, in one particular codex from the sixteenth century, marginal glosses, which possibly represent other Palestinian Targumim, still reflect the angels-interpretation. A note appearing in the margin of this codex concerning Gen 6:2 reads מְלָכִיָּא ‘of the kings’, which is subsequently corrected to מְלָאכִ ‘of the angels’. Furthermore, a gloss pertaining to Gen 6:4 gives the reading בְּנֵיהוֹן דְּמְלָאכִיא לְבִנְחָהוֹן דְּבְנֵי ‘the sons of the angels [joined] with the daughters of the sons [of man]’.³⁵

3.1.8 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan [*Tg. Ps.-J.*] translates בְּנֵי רַבְרַבִּיָּא ‘sons of the great ones’, this being similar to Onqelos’ translation.³⁶ This Targum is best dated as

²⁹ It is estimated to be from the period between the first and the fifth century C.E., see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 150.

³⁰ Text: Alexander Sperber, ed., *The Bible in Aramaic: The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* (Vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1959), 9. Translation: Grossfeld, *The Targum Onkelos*, 52.

³¹ See 3.1.3.

³² Cf. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onkelos*, 52 nt. 1.

³³ Cf. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4,” 24.

³⁴ Text: Alejandro Díez-Macho, ed., *Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense Ms de la Bibliotheca Vaticana*. Tomo 1: Génesis (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968), 33. Translation: Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Vol. 1A of *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*; Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds.; Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1992), 71–72.

³⁵ Cf. Díez-Macho, *Neophyti 1*, 33.

³⁶ Text: E. G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 7. Translation: Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (Vol. 1B of *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*; Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 37–38.

originating after the rise of the Islam in the seventh century C.E.³⁷ Surprisingly, it also incorporates earlier views which had already been rejected in rabbinic treatises reacting to the angels-interpretation.³⁸ The rendering of ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the great ones’ obviously does not support a supernatural exegesis of Gen 6:1–4, however, the passage about the **נְפִלִים** is paraphrased as “Shamhazai and Azael fell from heaven and were on earth in those days”,³⁹ this being a translation which definitely reflects the angels-interpretation. Both names are mentioned in *1 Enoch* as leaders of the angels who came down to earth to marry women. Even if the ‘sons of God’ are no longer equated with angels, traces of the angels-interpretation can still be found in *Tg.Ps.-J.* together with the mighty ones-interpretation.

3.1.9 The Samaritan Targum

In Gen 6:1–4, the Samaritan Pentateuch shows only small deviations from the Masoretic Text.⁴⁰ The Samaritan Targum [*Sam. Tg.*] manuscript or. 7562⁴¹ of the British Museum leaves the word-pair **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים** untranslated.⁴² However, the manuscript of the Vatican library, Sam no. 2, interprets **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים** as **בְּרֵי שְׁלֹמֹנִיָּה** ‘sons of the governors’.⁴³

3.1.10 Conclusions to the Targumim

The Targumim represent primarily a non-supernatural interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:2.4, preferring a translation from the semantic field of ‘mighty ones’. Yet, the influence of the supernatural angels-interpretation is still discernable in *Tg. Neof.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* For that matter, the targumic textual witnesses reveal a development in Judaism from mid second century C.E. onwards which tried to suppress the earlier view of the ‘sons of God’ as angels, a view which

³⁷ Second half of the ninth century, see Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 11.

³⁸ In *Tg.Ps.-J.* many halakic elements contradict the accepted halakah, see Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 2.

³⁹ Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 38.

⁴⁰ Text: August von Gall, ed., *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1918), 9.

⁴¹ Ms. or. 7562 is the most important source for *Sam. Tg.* See Abraham Tal, “The Samaritan Targum to the Pentateuch, Its Distinctive Characteristics and Its Metamorphosis,” *JSS* 21 no. 1–2 (1976): 30.

⁴² Cf. Abraham Tal, ed. *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch: A Critical Edition: Part I, Genesis, Exodus* (TSHLRS 4; Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1980), 18.

⁴³ Tal, *Samaritan Targum*, 19. The *London Polyglot* has also this reading, cf. Brian Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1963, reprint, original edition London, 1657), 23.

only later resurfaced in non-official writings.⁴⁴ This break with the earlier angels-interpretation may have its background in rabbinic polemic against a speculative angelology which tentatively arose due to the depressed situation in the wake of the Jewish Wars.⁴⁵ According to Alexander, allusions to the angels-interpretation in *Tg. Ps.-J.* and also in the margin of *Tg. Neof.* are an indication that these Targumim in their original forms are to be dated before the Bar Kochba revolt of 132–135 C.E.⁴⁶

3.1.11 The Peshitta

The Syriac version of the Old Testament reads ‘sons of God’, literally ‘sons of *alohim*’, the latter word being a transliteration of the Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים.⁴⁷ A variant reading, *bny dyn*, ‘sons of the judges’, is given by only one of the ancient manuscripts, 8/5b1.⁴⁸ According to Van der Kooij, ‘sons of *alohim*’ must be the earlier reading because it is attested at an early date, as can be established from the writings of Ephrem the Syrian and Bardaisan of Edessa. Moreover, the same reading is shared by the Peshitta text of Job 1:6 and 2:1.⁴⁹ The rendering ‘sons of the judges’ may be the result of a theological correction which draws on developments in Jewish exegesis as witnessed in the Targumim.⁵⁰

3.1.12 The Vetus Latina and Vulgate

Fragments of the earliest Latin Bible translations, the *Vetus Latina*, still show variants in the translation *fili dei* or *angeli dei*, similarly to the tradition of the Septuagint.⁵¹ However, the manuscripts of the Vulgate translate the term unanimously as *fili dei*.⁵²

⁴⁴ Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” 62–63.

⁴⁵ Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis,” 68–70.

⁴⁶ Cf. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis,” 70–71.

⁴⁷ *alohim* is a word borrowed from the Hebrew, cf. Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann’s Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 48.

⁴⁸ *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version, Part I, 1: Preface, Genesis–Exodus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 10.

⁴⁹ Cf. Arie van der Kooij, “Peshitta Genesis 6: ‘Sons of God’ – Angels or Judges?” *JNSL* 23 no. 1 (1997): 44–47.

⁵⁰ Cf. Van der Kooij, “Peshitta Genesis 6,” 47–50.

⁵¹ Petrus Sabatier, ed., *Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel*, Vol. 2, Genesis (Freiburg: Herder, 1951–1954), 102–104.

⁵² Cf. Robert Weber, R. Gryson et al., eds., *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* (5th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007) ad locum; Henri Quentin, Aidano Gasquet, *Biblia Sacra iuxta latinam vulgatam versionem: Librum Genesis* (Roma: typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1926), 161–162.

3.2 PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

The Jewish exegete and philosopher Philo (ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) commented in several of his writings on the content of Gen 6:1–4. Taking its origins from within a Jewish-Hellenistic climate in first-century Alexandria, the character of his exegetical methodology rests upon allegorical interpretation in which the biblical narratives usually function as models representing the state of the soul.⁵³

Philo's work *On Giants* is, in fact, a treatise on Gen 6:1–4.⁵⁴ According to Philo, the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4 are angels (ἄγγελοι), the very same beings whom – in the vocabulary of Philo – philosophers other than Moses call 'demons' (δαίμονες).⁵⁵ He refrains, however, from relying on a naturalistic explanation by allegorising the passage such that the angels are evil spirits. These spirits inspire wicked men who are not "acquainted with the daughters of right reason, that is, with the sciences and virtues",⁵⁶ to pursue all sorts of bodily pleasure. The 'giants' are a representation of men 'born of the earth' who devote themselves to earthly pleasures, in contrast with men born of heaven (the philosophers and learned) or born of God (priests and prophets).⁵⁷ In this way, the whole treatise becomes a warning not to pursue earthly pleasures but to seek instead genuine beauty and virtue.

Philo develops similar thoughts in the first chapter of his book *That God is Unchangeable*.⁵⁸ There the 'angels' are the 'companions of darkness' who interact with effeminate passions which are otherwise called 'daughters of men' in the text of Genesis. These things happen when the light of knowledge is weakened in man. As a result, these passions do not result in the bearing of children for God, that is to say, in virtues, but in offspring cavorting in unseemly wickedness.

⁵³ Cf. *EncJud* 16:62.

⁵⁴ Philo, *De gigantibus* / Περὶ γιγάντων. Text: Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, eds., *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt* (Vol. 2; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1897), 42–55; translation: C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: New Updated Version* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 152–157.

⁵⁵ *Gig.* 2:6. Similar ideas can be found in *Somn.* 1,22:133–141.

⁵⁶ *Gig.* 4:16–18. Translation: Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 153.

⁵⁷ *Gig.* 13:58–61.

⁵⁸ Philo, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis* / Ὅτι ἀτρέπτου τὸ θεῖον 1:3. Text: Cohn and Wendland, *Philonis Alexandrini opera*, Vol. 2, 56ff. Translation: Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 158–173.

Philo's *Questions and Solutions on Genesis*⁵⁹ explains the meaning of giants born of angels and women.⁶⁰ Here Philo focuses more on the *sensus literalis*; the angels are understood as adopting a human form in order to engage in connections with women. The wickedness of the children born from these relationships is described as one resulting from having imitated their mothers and having never committed themselves to the virtue of their fathers. Perhaps this lesser degree of allegorical exegesis is addressed to a broader Jewish audience as compared to the more limited audience of the allegorical treatises.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Philo provides here an alternative explanation as well, one which he seems to prefer: when Scripture labels angels as 'sons of God', this description may, according to Philo, also refer to excellent men who are called 'sons of God'. In this way Philo suggests that in Gen 6:4 angels are to be viewed – allegorically – as excellent men. Yet the allegorical line of reasoning remains more vague in his *Questions and Solutions on Genesis* in comparison with his other works.

In sum it can be said that, although Philo has to be included among those interpreters who advocate the angels-interpretation, one should be aware that in his case the narrative about angels engaging in relations with women is to be understood allegorically. For Philo, Gen 6:1–4 is not a myth about the birth of giants but is a narrative of how humanity is divided into three levels: the ones who are born of earth, the ones who are born of heaven, and the ones who are born of God.⁶²

3.3 FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The Jewish army commander and historian Flavius Josephus (37 C.E. – ca. 100) describes in *Jewish Antiquities* the story of the Jewish people from the beginning of the world until his own time. His descriptions are mainly intended for non-Jewish readers.⁶³

⁵⁹ Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim* 1. The complete text is only extant in Armenian. For a Latin and French translation: Charles Mercier, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim: I et II, e versione armeniaca* (Paris: Cerf, 1979). English translation: Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 791–813.

⁶⁰ *QG* 1:92.

⁶¹ Cf. Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1–4 in Early Jewish Literature* (WUNT 198; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2005), 196. Wright quotes the work of Birnbaum who suggested that *QG* and *QE* represented a source-book for the Alexandrian Jews.

⁶² See also Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits*, 191–219.

⁶³ Cf. *EncJud* 11:437–438.

In *A.J.* 1:72 Josephus describes how Sethites, who originally lived faithfully to God, gradually changed for the worst. An example of their wickedness can be found in the following section in *A.J.* 1:73: “For many angels of God, consorting with women, fathered children who were insolent (πολλοὶ γὰρ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ γυναιξὶ συνιόντες ὑβριστὰς ἐγέννησαν παῖδας) and despisers of every good thing because of the confidence they had in their power”.⁶⁴ Josephus compares the evil deeds of these offspring for the benefits of his readers with the deeds of the giants in Greek mythology. He clearly held the view of the identity of the ‘sons of God’ as being understood in terms of the angels-interpretation. Although for Josephus this story is connected to the preceding history of the Sethites, as turns out from the wording of his description πολλοὶ γὰρ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ (note the particle γὰρ), the ‘sons of God’ are not explicitly identified as Sethites. The presence of the particle γὰρ appears to not be sufficient evidence to suggest that Josephus was already leaning towards the later Sethites-interpretation.⁶⁵ The contrast drawn by Josephus in *A.J.* 1:72–73 is not that former pious Sethites – perhaps metaphorically called ‘angels of God’ – fathered children full of *hubris* but that by their socially and religiously unjust behaviour they made *God himself* their enemy (ἐνθεν ἑαυτοῖς τὸν θεὸν ἐξεπολέμωσαν). Josephus emphasises this by referring to the culminating fact of angels *of God* who beget wicked children as a result of their relationship with earthly women. In formulating thus, Josephus most probably intended to express that there is hardly a more direct way to evoke God’s ‘polemic’ against mankind than by mixing with God’s angels. The emphasis in the passage from *A.J.* 1:72–73 should thus be placed on the enmity directed against God himself. Josephus therefore can be seen as a solid advocate of the angels-interpretation.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*. Text: Benedictus Niese, ed., *Flavii Iosephi opera*. Vol. 1: *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum Libri 1–V* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), 17; translation: Steve Mason, ed., *Flavius Josephus Translation and Commentary: Vol. 3, Judean Antiquities 1–4* (trans. Louis H. Feldman, Leiden: Brill, 2000), 26–27.

⁶⁵ As is suggested by Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode* (Wien: Herder, 1966), 96; cf. idem, “Jüdisch-Christliche Nachgeschichte von Gen 6,1–4,” in *Zur Aktualität des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Georg Sauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Siegfried Kreuzer and Kurt Lüthi; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 171.

⁶⁶ See also Van der Kooij, “Peshitta Genesis 6: ‘Sons of God’ – Angels or Judges?” 43; Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits*, 70–71.

3.4 APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHIA

Several apocryphal books allude to the story of Gen 6:1–4 in its Enochic reworking but do not mention the ‘sons of God’. Yet, a number of pseudepigraphic writings offer an ample elaboration of the story found in Gen 6. The present section demonstrates the way apocrypha refer to Gen 6:1–4 and, subsequently, how pseudepigrapha interpreted the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6.

3.4.1 Apocryphal Works

The apocryphal book of Jesus ben Sira,⁶⁷ from about 190 B.C.E.,⁶⁸ *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, provides an allusion to Gen 6:1–4 in 16:7 by mentioning that God “was not propitiated for the giants of old who became disobedient in their force”.⁶⁹ The entire section of 16:5–17 is about friendship; the verses 16:7–13 imply that one should be careful in choosing friends.⁷⁰ In line with this statement, personal experience (16:5) and examples from the Old Testament (16:6–10) are here summarised. The reference to Gen 6:1–4 is certainly present, but more clearly in the Greek manuscripts (ἀρχαίων γιγάντων) than in the two extant Hebrew fragments which contain 16:7, which read נְסִיכֵי קְדָם ‘the princes of old’.⁷¹ The Greek version may

⁶⁷ The book is known from the Septuagint canon in Greek but was originally written in Hebrew as the grandson of Jesus ben Sira explicitly mentions this in his foreword to the Greek translation. Since 1896 several fragments in Hebrew were found, cf. Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes, Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 51–54. For a text edition see Pancratius C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of all Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (VTSupp 68; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

⁶⁸ Between 200 and 180 B.C.E. Cf. Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Canon and Scripture in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (ed. Magne Sæbø; Vol. I/2 The Middle Ages; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 593.

⁶⁹ οὐκ ἐξιλίσσατο περί τῶν ἀρχαίων γιγάντων, οἱ ἀπέστησαν τῇ ἰσχύϊ αὐτῶν.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Ein Mensch ohne Freund ist wie eine linke Hand ohne die Rechte”: Prolegomena zur Kommentierung der Freundschaftsperikope Sir 6,5–17,” in *Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14,20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira* (CBET 43; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 68–69.

⁷¹ Cf. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 270.

have used here a *Vorlage* in which the expression נַפְלִי קָדָם was present,⁷² but this is only speculation.⁷³

The book *Wisdom of Solomon*, probably written by a Hellenistic Jewish author in Alexandria after 30 B.C.E.⁷⁴ mentions in 14:6 the perishing of the giants during the time in which ‘the hope of the world’, Noah, escaped on a raft. The ‘sons of God’ are not mentioned here; the context is that of polemic opposed to the making of wooden images.

The book *Baruch* is found in the editions of the Septuagint but dates probably from after 70 C.E.⁷⁵ In a poem about God’s wisdom (Bar 3:9–38), “the famous giants of old” (οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ὀνομαστοὶ οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) are mentioned, who were excellent in warfare but perished because of their lack of wisdom (Bar 3:26–28). Yet nothing is said about their origin, nor are the ‘sons of God’ mentioned.

The *Third Book of the Maccabees*,⁷⁶ in a prayer about the sovereignty of God (3 Macc 2:4), mentions that the “giants, who were convinced of their strength and braveness” (γίγαντες ... ῥώμῃ καὶ θράσει πεποιθότες), were destroyed by the flood. Here also, the giants of Gen 6:1–4 are only mentioned to provide an historical example of how those who turn against God will perish; 3 Macc directs this pointedly against king Ptolemy IV Philopator who insisted upon entering the sanctuary of the Jerusalem temple (3 Macc 1:1–29).

3.4.2 (Ethiopic)1 Enoch

Compared with the rather shallow allusions to Gen 6:1–4 in the apocryphal writings, the pseudepigrapha give witness of a more profound interest in the story related in Gen 6:1–4.

⁷² Cf. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 270. According to Goff, the Hebrew text of *Ben Sira* 16:7 refers to aboriginal Canaanite rulers and only alludes to Gen 6:1–4; Matthew J. Goff, “Ben Sira and the Giants of the Land: A Note on Ben Sira 16:7,” *JBL* 129 no. 4 (2010): 650–654.

⁷³ It is more likely that the Greek translation by the grandson of Ben Sira was influenced by the LXX translation of Gen 6:4. The Greek translation of Sira is not word for word but is addressed to the translator’s audience of the Hellenistic world ca. 132 C.E. (I am indebted to Prof. Dr. P. C. Beentjes, Tilburg University, The Netherlands, for this suggestion, written communication, 5 December 2011).

⁷⁴ Cf. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 3–4. However, no consensus exists regarding the date of Wis, the book being dated variedly between 220 B.C.E. and 50 C.E., cf. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 20–25.

⁷⁵ Cf. O. C. Whitehouse, *APOT* 1:576.

⁷⁶ The manuscript is not found in Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus but appears in the Alexandrinus and can be dated as from between 217 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., probably in the first part of the first century B.C.E. Cf. H. Andersen, “3 Maccabees: A New Translation and Introduction,” *OTP* 2:510–512.

The earliest extant witness of this appears to be that of *1 Enoch*,⁷⁷ one of three pseudepigrapha attributed to Enoch. The entire book of *1 Enoch* is only extant in an Ethiopic version, though Aramaic fragments were found in cave 4 of Qumran.⁷⁸ Parts of the work are also preserved in Greek and Latin translations.⁷⁹ Due to textual criticism, modern translations differ slightly from each other, depending on which manuscripts are given priority.⁸⁰ The different parts of the book clearly show that its content is of a composite nature with sections from various periods.⁸¹ The section specifically related to the story of Gen 6:1–4, *1 En.* 6–36, also called *The Book of Watchers*, is considered to be the earliest extant apocalyptic work,⁸² probably dating from pre-Maccabean times.⁸³ As can be concluded from an examination of the fragments from Qumran, the content of the later compilation as found in the Ethiopic version, must have been present as early as the first century

⁷⁷ The relation between the tradition in Gen 6:1–4 and the Enochic literature is still the subject of scholarly discussion, see below.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. T. Milik, “Problèmes de la littérature Hénochique à la lumière des fragments Araméens de Qumrân,” *HTR* 64 (1971): 333. Fragments related to the passage of Gen 6:1–4 are: 4Q201 I:2–6; III:13–21 (*DSSSE* 1:398–403), 4Q202 II:2–5; IV:5–11 (*DSSSE* 1:404–407), 4Q204 VI:5–13 (*DSSSE* 1:414–417); frag. 5 col. II:16–19 (*DSSSE* 1:420–421).

⁷⁹ Cf. R. H. Charles, *APOT* 2:165–167; E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” *OTP* 1:6.

⁸⁰ English translations: Charles, *APOT* 2:163ff; Isaac, *OTP* 1:5ff; Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual notes* (SVTP vol. 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985); George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (ed. Klaus Baltzer; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

⁸¹ Cf. Isaac, *OTP* 1:6–7.

⁸² Cf. Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History* (JSPSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 61–62. Sacchi divides the *Book of Watchers* into two sections each originating from different authors. He dates *1 En.* 6–11 to the early fourth century B.C.E. and *1 En.* 12–36 to a later time in this same century. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* 1, 168, dates the nucleus of the work to the early Hellenistic period.

⁸³ Cf. Isaac, *OTP* 1:7. See also James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984), 110–140. See further Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and The Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers, and Apocalyptic* (OTS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 153.

B.C.E.,⁸⁴ except for perhaps the content of the *Book of Parables*, 1 *En.* 37–71 as this is not found at Qumran.⁸⁵

The *Book of Watchers* describes that beautiful daughters were born during the period when mankind multiplied on earth. The angels,⁸⁶ the sons of heaven,⁸⁷ desire to take these daughters of men as wives in order to beget children. Shemhaza, the leader of the angels, has a fear of being held solely responsible for this sin. The other angels, however, take an oath binding themselves by a curse by which they agree to participate in the carrying out of the deed. Two hundred angels descend⁸⁸ on mount Hermon⁸⁹ and take wives for themselves.⁹⁰ The women give birth to giants who consume the victuals of the people. Once the people have refused to feed them, the giants turn against them, devouring the people and every living being they can find (1 *En.* 6–7). Subsequently, the focus of the narrative shifts⁹¹ to another

⁸⁴ According to Milik, “Problèmes,” 334, the diverse texts formed already a unified entity at that time. Devorah Dimant, “The Biography of Enoch and the Books of Enoch,” *VT* 33 no. 1 (1983): 17, disputes Milik’s proposal because the latter is based on a literary theory trying to explain the data found in the documents, data which only, at best, show a tendency to regroup the various works pertaining to Enoch, while other manuscripts consist of only one work.

⁸⁵ According to Milik, “Problèmes,” 373, the *Book of Giants*, of which fragments were found at Qumran, originally formed a part of the compilation of the book of Enoch which later was replaced by the *Book of Parables*, not found at Qumran, but present in the Ethiopic version of 1 *En.* However, this hypothesis is criticised for its lack of convincing evidence, see Isaac, *OTP* 1:7.

⁸⁶ Several manuscripts refer to them as ‘the Watchers’, a term (עִירִי) also used in Dan 4:10.14.20, in parallel with ‘holy one(s)’, referring to a heavenly messenger. The Slavonic 2 *En.* 18 refers to them as ‘Grigori’, a transcription of the Greek word in Koine-pronunciation: οἱ ἐγρήγοροι. Interestingly, there also is a reference to watchers (φύλακες) of men in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, II:248–264: “For upon the bounteous earth Zeus has thrice ten thousand spirits, watchers of mortal men (ἀθάνατοι Ζηνὸς φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων), and these keep watch on judgements and deeds of wrong as they roam, clothed in mist, all over the earth.” Translation Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod’s Works and Days*, II:252–255. Cited 20 January 2012. Online: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/works.htm>. Greek text: online: www.gottwein.de/Grie/hes/erggr.php, cited 20 January 2012. The quotation of Hesiod is also cited by Lactantius, *Div. inst.* II,15 (*ANF* 7:93–94).

⁸⁷ שְׁטוֹלִים οὐρανῶν, clearly a circumlocution of הַאֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי הָעֶלְיוֹן in Gen 6:2.4.

⁸⁸ A number of manuscripts add ‘in the days of Jared’, cf. Gen 5:15, clearly meant as a paronomasia of Jared and יָרֵד, ‘to descend’, see Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 117.

⁸⁹ A deliberate paronomasia of Hermon and הָרֵם, ‘curse’.

⁹⁰ Cf. J. A. Sanders, “Dissenting Deities and Philippians 2,1–11,” *JBL* 88 no. 3 (1969): 279–290. According to Sanders, Phil 2:1–11 is to be read with foreknowledge of 1 *En.* where ‘sons of God’ who descended because of selfish motivation, as opposed to Christ who descended, without considering himself being equal to God as ἀπαγγέλλας (Phil 2:6).

⁹¹ The story of 1 *Enoch* 6–11 is generally considered to be a conflation of two traditions, one about Shemhaza as leader of the fallen angels and one about Asael in a similar function. Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 no 3 (1977): 383–405.

leader of the fallen angels, Asael, who taught the use of metallurgy as applied in the preparation for warfare; he furthermore taught the use of cosmetics and the wearing of jewellery to women which subsequently lead to fornication. Other fallen angels provided instruction in various kinds of magic, sorcery and astrology. When things begin to get out of control, people start to complain. The heavenly archangels cannot help, but notice the bloodshed on earth and thus bring the case before God. As a verdict, God announces an approaching deluge which will end the world; to Noah, that he escape this punishment, God commands that he hide himself. Furthermore, Asael is to be bound and thrown into darkness, for in the desert he will be buried under rocks until the day of the last judgement.⁹² The giants, the offspring of angels and women, are to attack and destroy each other. Shemhaza and the other angels are to be imprisoned for seventy generations, until after the day of judgement they shall be thrown into the fiery abyss where they are to be immured forever. In the meantime, righteousness on earth is to be restored (*1 En.* 8–11). Then Enoch enters the story. His task is to announce God's verdict to the fallen angels who beseech Enoch to intercede for them. God declines their request because angels are to intercede for man and not man for angels. God further

⁹² The name Asael is also written as Azazel, probably an allusion to Azazel in Lev 16 where it most probably functions as a proper name (contrary to the LXX which translates τῷ ἀπομπαίῳ 'for casting out'). Cf. Gispén, *comm. Lev* (COT) 1950, 242–244. The change of name may reflect a possible assimilation of a non-biblical story to the biblical story, cf. John J. Collins, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 267 nt. 33. See also Philip R. Davies, "Women, Men, Gods, Sex and Power: The Birth of a Biblical Myth," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 197–198; according to Davies the background to the name Azazel in Lev 16 is the story (also) told in *1 En.* 10:4–6; Azazel being the fallen angel, buried under rocks in the desert, to whom all sins will be ascribed (*1 En.* 10:8). Sending the sin-laden goat to Azazel as is recounted in Lev 16, then, would refer to the ultimate destruction of Israel's sins when Azazel will be judged as is recounted in *1 En.* See also Paul D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in *1 Enoch* 6–11," *JBL* 96 no. 2 (1977): 220–225, who considers the Azazel episode in *1 En.* as intending to emphasise the meaning of the Shemhaza-story by relating it to Lev 16. Robert Helm, "Azazel in Early Jewish Tradition," *AUSS* 32 no. 3 (1994): 221, suggests a common, though non-preserved, tradition for both *1 En.* and Lev 16. However, George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth in *1 Enoch* 6–11," *JBL* 96 no. 3 (1977): 399–404, emphasises instead the possible connection to Gen 4:22–24 and the Prometheus myth. Interestingly, even a conservative interpreter such as Noordtzijs, *comm. Lev* (KV) 1955, 163, states that Azazel was a demon of the desert but not one of the fallen angels as *1 En.* suggests. Modern scholarly research is more cautious of a too hasty ascription given that at least three options are available to help interpret the name Azazel: (1) the name or epithet of a demon, (2) a geographical designation meaning 'precipitous place', and (3) a combination of words, meaning 'the goat which goes away'. See B. Janowsky, "Azazel," in *DDD*, 128–131.

explains how the souls of the slain giants will reappear as evil spirits on earth (1 *En.* 12–16).⁹³

Intertextuality between Gen 6 and 1 *En.* is undeniable, yet the interesting question is: What is the nature and the direction of this literary dependency between 1 *En.* and Gen 6? Four possibilities present themselves, partly overlapping, partly contradicting each other:

(1) The *Book of Watchers* of 1 *En.* is an elaboration of Gen 6:1–4,⁹⁴ (2) The opposing solution: Gen 6:1–4 is a summary⁹⁵ of the story found in 1 *En.*,⁹⁶ (3) Gen 6:1–4 and 1 *En.* independently draw from the same tradition but digest it in different ways,⁹⁷ and (4) 1 *En.* has a different immediate cause and source but makes use of Gen 6 to give the narrative a biblical aureole.

The last solution perhaps explains the tenor of the Enoch narrative the most comprehensively.⁹⁸ The author, then, uses mythical language as a disguise to

⁹³ A reference to evil spirits issuing from angels and women is also found in the magical text “Testament of Solomon” (1st–3d century C.E.), *T. Sol.* 5:3, cf. 6:2. (Translation: D. C. Duling, “Testament of Solomon”, *OTP* 1:965, 967). The author may have intended to connect the existence of evil spirits in his own days to the tale pertaining to their coming into existence, cf. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers, and Apocalyptic* (OTS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 204–211.

⁹⁴ Cf. Philip S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *JJS* 23 no. 1 (1972): 60, who considers 1 *Enoch.* 6–11 to be an elaborate midrash on Gen 6:1–4. Collins, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men,” 264, argues that it makes more sense to understand 1 *En.* as an elaboration of Gen 6, than *vice versa*.

⁹⁵ Or polemic against, so Ida Fröhlich, “Újraírt szövegek,” in *Az utókor hatalma: Újraírt szövegek* (ed. Ida Fröhlich, Kréné 4; Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005), 28–29.

⁹⁶ Cf. J. T. Milik, “Problèmes de la littérature Hénochique à la lumière des fragments Araméens de Qumrân,” *HTR* 64 (1971): 349–350. This implies that the original of 1 *En.* 6–19 preceded the final redaction of the first chapters of Genesis; idem, ed., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 30–31. Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Translation* (SVTP 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 125, argues for “the priority of the Enoch tradition, ... to which Gen 6 is briefly alluding” but, at the same time, suggests the possibility that both Gen 6 and 1 *En.* draw upon a common literary tradition. However, even an early dating of ‘The Book of Watchers’ in 1 *En.* at the end of the fourth century B.C.E. does not discredit the fact of Genesis already being regarded as an authoritative document, thus the Enoch-story is best understood as a paraphrase of Gen 6, cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 168.

⁹⁷ Cf. Helge S. Kvanvig, “The Watcher Story and Genesis: An Intertextual Reading,” *SJOT* 18 no. 2 (2004): 181–182. According to Kvanvig, Gen 6:1–4 and the Enoch tradition mutually influenced each other but are separate and also conflicting interpretations of Mesopotamian primeval stories.

⁹⁸ Cf. Paul D. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 no. 2 (1977): 219: “Under circumstances within which the victims of oppression find themselves powerless to eradicate the evil they see engulfing them, they give expression both to their bitter frustrations and their fervent hopes by creating a new myth. Though new in particular details, however,

describe his contemporary situation in order to stimulate the reader to await divine help. Living in a social and historical situation full of violence, he was able to find the necessary connecting elements in Gen 6:1–4, and thus elaborated upon this biblical data in a way which yielded a new story, one based on ancient story elements resulting in a narrative with an air of biblical authority.

In view of the proposed dating of the earliest parts of *1 En.*, the wars of the Diadochi (323–302 B.C.E.) may form its historical setting.⁹⁹ Thus, the narrative may also contain scarcely disguised polemic opposing the claim of divine provenance for themselves by a select number of the Diadochi.¹⁰⁰ If this explanation has any credibility, the assumption of a common, non-preserved tradition behind Gen 6:1–4 and *1 En.* 6–11 is superfluous. The author of *1 En.* could simply have used the scanty data of Gen 6 combined with his own experience of his historical circumstances and his limitless imagination. As a whole, *1 En.* moves far beyond Genesis. This may also be an explanation for the theological shift between Genesis and *1 En.*: while Genesis 1–11 takes mankind as the offender, responsible for its deeds, *1 En.* views mankind mainly as the passive victim of sin, in this case of heavenly origin.¹⁰¹

The *Book of Enoch* is, in all its complexity, probably the first known exponent of the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. As such, it was able to become the source of similar narratives which had considerable conceptual impact on the early exegesis of Gen 6:1–4.¹⁰² The work itself was held in high esteem¹⁰³ until the third

it reuses an age-old mythic pattern, which is given the aura of biblical authority by the imitation of several expository techniques common to the time.”

⁹⁹ Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 no. 3 (1977): 389–391; idem, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Nickelsburg suggests this tentatively in his 1977 article “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11,” 396, and more definitively in his 2001 *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 170.

¹⁰¹ Genesis 6:3, about the withdrawal of the spirit of YHWH, and the limitation of 120 years, is not found in the text of *1 En.* unless *1 En.* 10:9–10 is to be an allusion to Gen 6:3, where it is said that the giants, the children of the Watchers will not have lengths of days, despite their hoping to live a period of five hundred years. The *Book of Enoch* also makes a break from the usual notion of YHWH’s actions being integrated within history – something very characteristic for prophetic literature – in pushing God’s intervention entirely into the realm of the *eschaton*. In *1 En.* the deluge flows over into the last judgement. Cf. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven,” 219.

¹⁰² For an overview of its influence on New Testament and Patristic literature, see *APOT* 2:180–184. For the reception of the Enochic tradition in Judaism and Christianity, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially 84–121.

¹⁰³ Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode* (WBT 13; Wien: Herder, 1966), 102–104, provides an overview: Even if the book of Enoch was not considered to be of canonical authority, the *Epistle of Barnabas* 16:5

century C.E. after which it slipped into discredit and consequently into oblivion, only in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church¹⁰⁴ and among Ethiopian Jews¹⁰⁵ was the book attributed canonical authority.

3.4.3 (Slavonic) 2 Enoch

The book of *2 Enoch* is known only from manuscripts in Old Slavonic. The work is an elaboration of Gen 5:21–32, beginning with the story of Enoch and extending to the onset of the flood. There exist a longer and a shorter version of this work. The provenance of and the date attributed to the text remains problematic.¹⁰⁶ The fallen angels – called ‘Grigori’¹⁰⁷ – appear in *2 En.* 18:3–6 where they take wives who gave birth to giants and great monsters.¹⁰⁸ In terms of its relation to Gen 6:1–4, it can be observed that *2 En.* is evidently an exponent of the angels-interpretation. However, because the date and provenance of *2 En.* remain obscure, the book contributes very little in establishing the drift of the history of exegesis.

(prior to 140 C.E.), alludes to *1 En.* 89:66 introduced by λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή, cf. *ANF* 1:232. (*Barn.* 4:3 refers directly to Enoch with the words γέγραπται, ὡς Ἐνὼχ λέγει “it is written, as Enoch says”, cf. *ANF* 1:213). Tertullian admits that, although the book of Enoch is not generally accepted because it is not included in the Jewish canon, the work receives a testimony from the letter of Jude. Augustine shares the same view, arguing that the apostle Jude quotes the book of Enoch, therefore it cannot be ignored; nonetheless, the book is not without reason considered to be non-canonical. About 380 C.E. the *Apostolic Constitutions* refutes the book of Enoch as being contrary to truth. Cf. *Apos. Con.* 6,16 (*ANF* 7:680).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 106–107. Nickelsburg suggests that the book arrived in the Ethiopian Church via the ties of this church with Egypt, where *1 Enoch* was much read. Cf. also Jacques van Ruiten, *Zwervende teksten van Qumran tot Qur’an* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2013), 24.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Daniel C. Olson, *Enoch: A New Translation: The Ethiopic Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch, Translated with Annotations and Cross-References by Daniel C. Olson in Consultation with Archbishop Melkesedek Workeneh* (North Richland Hills, Tex.: Bibal Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁰⁶ F. I. Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” *OTP* 1:95: “There must be something very peculiar about a work when one scholar, Charles, concludes that it was written by a hellenized Jew in Alexandria in the first century B.C.E., while another, J. T. Milik, argues that it was written by a Christian monk in Byzantium in the ninth century C.E.”

¹⁰⁷ I.e. ‘Watchers’, the word ‘grigori’ is a transcription of the Greek word οἱ ἐγγήγοροι in Koine-pronunciation.

¹⁰⁸ Translation: Anderson, *OTP* 1:130–133.

3.4.4 Jubilees

The book of *Jubilees* dates from the late second century B.C.E. and consists of the ‘rewritten’ narrative from Genesis 1 through Exodus 19.¹⁰⁹ The book is commonly classified as being among the literary genre of the ‘rewritten Bible’, characterised by ‘applied exegesis’, which means that the author tried to justify contemporary beliefs and customs by connecting them to the Bible.¹¹⁰ The document draws its name from establishing its own divisions of world history into jubilee-periods of forty-nine years each.¹¹¹ Most probably, *Jubilees* was originally written in Hebrew.¹¹² The complete text of *Jubilees* has only survived in Ethiopic manuscripts, though Greek and Latin fragments also are extant,¹¹³ as well as Hebrew ones from Qumran.¹¹⁴ The intent of the book was to provide a type of bulwark against the onslaught of Hellenistic culture.¹¹⁵

According to *Jub.* 4:15, in the days of Jared “the angels of the LORD, who were called Watchers, came down to earth,” in this case without the intent to commit sin, as in *1 En.* 6, but “in order to teach the sons of man, and perform judgment and uprightness upon the earth.”¹¹⁶ It was only later that a number of the angels who were on earth for the purpose of teaching good things to man “sinned with the daughters of men because they began to mingle themselves with the daughters of men so that they might be polluted.”¹¹⁷ Enoch turns up as the one who gives witnesses condemning these sinning angels, *Jub.* 4:22. The full story of Gen 6:1–4 is retold in *Jub.* 5:1–2.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, “Genesis herschreven en geïnterpreteerd in het boek *Jubilees*,” nader toegelicht met een vergelijking van Genesis 17 en *Jubilees* 15,” *NTT* 64 no. 1 (2010): 33. According to R. H. Charles, *APOT* 2:6, the document was written between 109 and 105 B.C.E.; O. S. Wintermute, *OTP* 2:43, dates the document before 100 B.C.E.

¹¹⁰ The terms ‘rewritten Bible’ and ‘applied exegesis’ were coined by Geza Vermes, cf. Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, *Primeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the book of Jubilees* (JSJSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 3–4. Rewritten Scripture can be defined as “a genre that functions interpretively to renew (update, correct) specific earlier traditions by recasting a substantial portion of those traditions in the context of a new work that locates itself in the same discourse as the scriptural work it rewrites,” Molly M. Zahn, “Genre and Rewritten Scripture: A Reassessment,” *JBL* 131 no. 2 (2012): 286.

¹¹¹ Cf. Charles, *APOT* 2:2.

¹¹² Cf. Wintermute, “*Jubilees*,” *OTP* 2:43.

¹¹³ Cf. Charles, *APOT* 2:2–4.

¹¹⁴ 4Q216–4Q224, and fragments of Pseudo-Jubilees, 4Q225–4Q227, see *DSSSE* 459–483.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Charles, *APOT* 2:1.

¹¹⁶ Wintermute, *OTP* 2:62.

¹¹⁷ *Jub.* 4:22, Wintermute, *OTP* 2:62.

And when the children of men began to multiply on the surface of the earth and daughters were born to them, that¹¹⁸ the angels of the LORD saw in a certain year of that jubilee that they were good to look at. And they took wives for themselves from all of those whom they chose. And they bore children for them; and they were the giants. And injustice increased upon the earth, and all flesh corrupted its way; man and cattle and beasts and birds and everything which walks on the earth. And they all corrupted their way and their ordinances, and they began to eat one another. And injustice grew upon the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of all mankind was thus continually evil.¹¹⁹

Consequently, mankind is punished with the flood, the giants kill each other, and the fallen angels are imprisoned in the depths of the earth until the last judgement, *Jub.* 5:3–11. The sons of the Watchers and the daughters of men were the ‘Naphidim’, *Jub.* 7:22. In the wake of the flood, demons began to mislead humankind, *Jub.* 7:27; the teaching of the Watchers was rediscovered, for it was engraved in stone, and in this way survived the deluge. It was from these inscriptions that people learned to observe omens from the heavenly bodies, *Jub.* 8:3. The spirits of the sons of the Watchers turned into evil spirits on earth, leading people astray. Nine tenths of them are imprisoned to await their judgment, one tenth remain active on earth, subject to Satan, *Jub.* 10:1–12. Later, these ‘cruel spirits’ assist people in fabricating and worshipping idols, *Jub.* 11:4–5. They appear to be the same spirits which God had designated to rule the nations “so that they might lead them astray from following him,” *Jub.* 15:31, hence identical with the gods these peoples worshipped.

Jubilees and *1 En.*, thus, commonly share the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 but differ in the purpose for the descent of the angels. *Jubilees*, furthermore, makes a connection between the rise of idolatry and the influence of evil spirits which were believed to be the offspring of the Watchers and the daughters of men.

3.4.5 Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum of Pseudo-Philo

Pseudo-Philo’s¹²⁰ *Biblical Antiquities* also belongs to the literary category of ‘rewritten Bible’. It retells the history from Adam to David. The work is only extant in Latin manuscripts which were translated from Greek versions, the original work

¹¹⁸ Sic! Probably is meant “it happened when ... that the angels” or “when ... the angels”.

¹¹⁹ Wintermute, *OTP* 2:64. For a detailed comparison with Gen 6:1–4, see Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted*, 183–196.

¹²⁰ The Latin text of *L.A.B.* was transmitted together with Latin translations of Philo’s works, although, most probably, Philo was not its author. See D. J. Harrington, “Pseudo-Philo,” *OTP* 2:299–300.

having supposedly been written in Hebrew.¹²¹ The date of its composition is difficult to determine but it can be best placed in the first century C.E.¹²²

In *L.A.B.* 3:1–3, the retold version of Gen 6:1–3,¹²³ the author adheres faithfully to the Hebrew text with the translation *filii Dei*,¹²⁴ ‘sons of God’, without any further explanation. As can be seen from *L.A.B.* 34:2–3, the author is aware of transgressing angels who had revealed magic to men before they were condemned but does not connect this in so many words to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4. He perhaps identified the ‘sons of God’ as godfearing Adamites¹²⁵ but it is also possible that he considered them to be angels, identical with the gods of other nations, therefore any undue attention paid to them could easily be considered as idolatry.¹²⁶ There is no direct polemic against the views of the Enochic literature or Jubilees. It is possible that disagreement with these interpretations can be ascertained in the striking absence of a reference to Gen 6:4 about the giants¹²⁷ and in the author’s reticence to comment on the passage of Gen 6:1–3. The entire section concerning the ‘sons of God’ seems to follow a conservative rabbinical line of thinking¹²⁸ as it pertains to this passage from Genesis, without any fanciful angelology.

3.4.6 Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are meant to be documents in which the final parting words of the twelve sons of Jacob to their children and grandchildren are reported. The text of the documents is transmitted in Greek, which is probably the original language of the documents, but fragments in Hebrew and Aramaic also

¹²¹ Cf. Harrington, *OTP* 2:298–299.

¹²² Cf. Harrington, *OTP* 2:299.

¹²³ The 120 years are explained as ‘*in quos posuit terminos seculi*’, ‘in which he set the limits of lifespan’. Cf. Daniel J. Harrington and Jacques Cazeaux, *Pseudo-Philon: Les antiquités bibliques* (Tome 1, CH 229; Paris: Cerf, 1976), 68.

¹²⁴ Harrington and Cazeaux, *Pseudo-Philon: Les antiquités bibliques*, 66.

¹²⁵ Cf. Charles Perrot and Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon: Les antiquités bibliques* (Tome 2, CH 230; Paris: Cerf, 1976), 85–86. The authors refer to *L.A.B.* 19:9 where the Israelites are called ‘sons of men’ and to *L.A.B.* 28:8 which consists of a vision in which the ones who came forth from the light are called ‘man’. Cf. *L.A.B.* 11:1, 12:4.

¹²⁶ Cf. Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1–4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2005), 70.

¹²⁷ Similarly to the story about the twelve spies in *L.A.B.* 15, the spies make no mention in their report of any giants, as in Num 13:33, saying only: “You cannot inherit the land, because it has been locked up with iron bars by its mighty men”, *L.A.B.* 15:2, cf. Harrington, *OTP* 2:323. The book as a whole tends towards a more ‘rationalistic’ tenor; Balaam’s donkey does not speak (18:9), the witch of Endor was not in fact conjuring Samuel (64:7).

¹²⁸ Cf. Wright, *Origin of Evil Spirits*, 70.

exist.¹²⁹ The date of origin may be about 150 B.C.E., except for those few possibly later interpolations therein.¹³⁰

The *Testament of Reuben* contains a special warning about promiscuity, stressing how women have a tendency to seduce men. Within this context, *T. Reu.* 5:6 refers to an interpretation of the narrative in Gen 6:1–4:

For it was thus that they charmed the Watchers, who were before the Flood. As they continued looking at the women, they were filled with desire for them and perpetrated the act in their minds. Then they were transformed into human males, and while the women were cohabiting with their husbands they appeared to them. Since the women's minds were filled with lust for these apparitions, they gave birth to giants. For the Watchers were disclosed to them as being as high as the heavens.¹³¹

Here the Watchers have no veritable sexual contact with women but their apparitional presence induced the birth of giants.¹³² Thus, the theme of the narrative has shifted to one of seduction and, contrary to the description in Gen 6:1–4, *1 En.* and *Jub.*, women here are blamed as the initiators. This shift in how responsibility is viewed – a most interesting detail – appears for the first time in *T. Reu.*¹³³ Apart from all the differences in interpretation compared with *1 En.* and *Jub.*, the common denominator is that the 'sons of God' from Gen 6:1–4 are also here identified as angels.

The *Testament of Naphtali* only superficially mentions the story of Gen 6:1–4, and that in the form of the Enochic tradition, falling in line with the angels-

¹²⁹ 1 Q21 (*T Levi*), 4 Q215 (*T Naph.*), 4Q484 (*T Jud.?*), 4Q540 (*T Levi*, ar), 4Q541 (*T Levi*, ar).

¹³⁰ Cf. H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *OTP* 1:777–778. Yet, opinions differ about its date and character; according to John J. Collins, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men," in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 265, the work "incorporates Jewish traditions but is Christian in its present form and dates to the 2nd or 3rd century C.E." Paulo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History* (JSPSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 36, argues that it is no longer tenable to consider it as a Christian work.

¹³¹ Kee, *OTP* 1:784.

¹³² Described in a way faintly similar to how Gen 30:37–43 describes the birth of variously patterned animals in Jacob's flock. A similar idea can be found also in *Gen. Rab.* 26:7.3 where rabbi Berekhiah is quoted: "A woman could go out to the market place and see a young man and lust after him and have sexual relations and produce a young man like him." (Translation: Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (BJS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 287.

¹³³ Cf. Prescott H. Williams, Jr., "The Watchers in the Twelve and at Qumran," in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers* (ed. W. Eugene March; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 73–74. The notion of women as the seducers became commonly accepted in the patristic Sethites-interpretation, see below.

interpretation. It warns against idolatry, that one should not breach the order of nature, “[l]ikewise the Watchers departed from nature’s order; the Lord pronounced a curse on them at the Flood,” *T. Naph.* 3:5.¹³⁴

3.4.7 (Syriac) 2 Baruch

The pseudepigraphic work *2 Baruch* is an apocalyptic document giving semblance of being written after the destruction of the first temple in 587 B.C.E. but, in fact, refers to the fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The text is extant in Syriac, but Greek fragments are also known, as well as an Arabic translation. Based on its content, the text most probably can be dated to the first half of the second century C.E., about the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt.¹³⁵ *2 Baruch* 56 refers to the transgression of Adam which caused untimely death and countless negative things. It was from this original sin that additional and more heinous sins sprang forth, as *2 Bar.* 56:11–15 recounts.

For he¹³⁶ who was a danger to himself was also a danger to the angels. For they possessed freedom in that time in which they were created. And some of them came down and mingled themselves with women. At that time they who acted like this were tormented in chains. But the rest of the multitude of angels, who have no number, restrained themselves.¹³⁷

Thus, *2 Bar.* offers the same interpretation already encountered in *1 En.* and *Jub.*, identifying the ‘sons of God’ of Gen 6:1–4 as angels.

3.4.8 Acts of Thomas

In the New Testament apocryphal work *Acts of Thomas*,¹³⁸ the apostle Thomas meets a dragon which tells him that it had been the driving force in the tempting of Eve in paradise, in the murder by Cain and in the hardening of the Pharaoh’s heart. It had also seduced Israel in the desert to initiate the fabrication of the golden calf; it had been the force behind the murderous wrath of Herod; it had instigated Caiaphas to make a false accusation before Pilate and had urged Judas to betray Jesus. But the dragon also claims that

¹³⁴ Kee, *OTP* 1:812.

¹³⁵ Cf. A. F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” *OTP* 1:615–617.

¹³⁶ Scil. Adam.

¹³⁷ Klijn, *OTP* 1:641.

¹³⁸ Dating from the 3d century, originally written in Syriac. Cf. A. F. J. Klijn, *Apokriefen van het Nieuwe Testament II* (Kampen: Kok, 1985), 56–66.

I am the one who threw down the angels from above and enchanted them with the desires of women, in order that earthborn children would be born from them, so that I could accomplish my will in them.¹³⁹

In Syriac Christianity the Sethites-interpretation became popular¹⁴⁰ but despite its Syriac provenance¹⁴¹ *Acts Thom.* adheres to the more traditional angels-interpretation.

3.4.9 Testament of Adam

The *Testament of Adam* appears to be the only known pseudepigraphic work that hints at a Sethites-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. The text in its present form is a Christian redaction which probably has to be dated to the third century C.E. The place of origin is most probably Syria or Palestine.¹⁴² The document introduces Adam who prophesies to his son Seth.

You have heard, my son Seth, that a Flood is coming and will wash the whole earth because of the daughters of Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel out of passion for your sister Lebuda, since sins had been created through your mother, Eve.¹⁴³

3.5 QUMRAN

Among the texts from the Judean desert there are fragments which explicitly¹⁴⁴ pertain to the angels-interpretation of the story Gen 6:1–4.¹⁴⁵ Fragments which apparently do not belong to the Enochic literature still exhibit a dependence on this Enochic tradition. Evidence from the Qumran texts reflects only the angels-interpretation when there exists a connection to Gen 6:1–4. Except for the Enoch-

¹³⁹ ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ἄνωθεν κάτω ῥίψας καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν γυναικῶν αὐτοὺς καταδῆσας, ἵνα γηγενεῖς παῖδες ἐξ αὐτῶν γένωνται καὶ τὸ θέλημά μου ἐν αὐτοῖς διαπράξωμαι. *Acts of Thomas* 32. Text: C. Tischendorf, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1851), 218.

¹⁴⁰ See below, 3.8.20.

¹⁴¹ Cf. S. P. Brock, "Early Syrian Ascetism," *Numen* 20 no. 1 (1973): 8.

¹⁴² Cf. S. E. Robinson, "Testament of Adam," *OTP* I:990–991.

¹⁴³ *T. Adam* 3:5, cf. Robinson, *OTP* I:994. Syriac text and Latin translation: *Testamentum Adam*, fragm. II,3 (PS I,2:1343–1344).

¹⁴⁴ Fragments referring only to the Gibborim of Gen 6:4 are found in 1Q23, frags. 9+14+15, 2–5: נְבִרִין (DSSSE 1:64–65) and 4Q370 I,6–8: וְהִנֵּן [בִּיר]ִים (DSSSE 2:732–733).

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed overview, see Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (JSPSup 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), especially 288–323.

fragments from Qumran already mentioned in 3.4.5, these texts will be examined in the following sections.¹⁴⁶

3.5.1 The Genesis Apocryphon

In the *Genesis Apocryphon*, a dialogue between Lamech and his wife Bitenosh takes place in which Lamech is afraid that not he, but one of the fallen angels, is the father of his son, Noah, who is soon to be born.

Behold, then, I thought in my heart that the conception was (the work) of the Watchers (עִירִי), and the pregnancy of the Holy Ones, and it belonged to the Nephil[im] (1QapGen^{ar} II,1)... When Bitenosh, my wife, realized that my countenance had altered ... [...] then she suppressed her anger, speaking to me: ... I swear to you by the Great Holy One, by the King of the hea[ven]s [...] that this seed comes from you, that this pregnancy comes from you, that the planting of [this] fruit comes from you, [...] and not from any foreigner nor from any of the watchers or sons of heav[en] ([עִירִי בְנֵי שָׁמַיִם]). (1QapGen^{ar} II,12–16).¹⁴⁷

3.5.2 (The Cairo Genizah Copy of the) Damascus Document

The so called *Damascus Document* had already been uncovered among the texts from the Cairo Genizah years before it was also discovered in Qumran, 4Q266–273.¹⁴⁸ Reference to the story of the Watchers is found in an exhortation:

(14) And now, sons, listen to me and I shall open your eyes so that you can see and understand the deeds of (15) God, so that you can choose what he is pleased with and repudiate what he hates, so that you can walk perfectly (16) on all his paths and not allow yourselves to be attracted by the thoughts of a guilty inclination and lascivious eyes. For many (17) have gone astray due to these; brave heroes stumbled on account of them, from ancient times until now. For having walked in the stubbornness (18) of their hearts the Watchers of the heavens (עִירֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם) fell; on account of it they were caught, for they did not heed the precepts of God. (19) And their sons, whose height was like that of cedars and whose bodies were like mountains, fell. (20) All flesh which there was on the dry earth expired and

¹⁴⁶ Dimant proposes that the Greek fragment 4Q127 may be a part of hitherto unknown apocryphal or pseudepigraphic work. In fragment B the word ἀγγέλω[ν] is found in the close neighbourhood of τακρυ, reconstructed as τὰ κρυπτά, ‘the hidden things’. According to Dimant, the text may have referred to the sin of the fallen angels as known from the Enochic tradition. Cf. Devorah Dimant, “4Q127: An Unknown Jewish Apocryphal Work?” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 805–813.

¹⁴⁷ DSSSE 1:28–31. Cf. 1QapGen^{ar} V, 3–5 and VI, 19–20, which also represent the same angels-interpretation.

¹⁴⁸ R. H. Charles, *APOT* 2:785–834, referred in 1913 to the text as “Fragments of a Zadokite Work”.

they became as if they had never been, because they had realized (21) their desires and had failed to keep their creator's precepts, until his wrath flared up against them. (CD-A, Col. II, 14–21).¹⁴⁹

3.5.3 Ages of Creation

The text fragments called *Ages of Creation* refer to angels in the story of Gen 6:1–4 as retold in the Enoch-tradition:¹⁵⁰

(7) [And] interpretation concerning 'Azaz'el and the angels (וְהַמְּלָאכִים) wh[o] came to the daughters of man] (8) [and s]ired themselves giants (גִּבּוֹרִים). (4Q180 frag. 1,7–8).¹⁵¹

3.6 RABBINIC TRADITION

Although the scriptural recording of oral rabbinic tradition is dated to beyond the second century C.E., it may contain older traditions. The already mentioned text of *Genesis Rabbah* 26:5.1 provides the first clue for an alternative Jewish interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. The passage from *Gen. Rab.* introduces the interpretation of rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai (2nd century C.E.) who identified the 'sons of God' as 'sons of the nobility' while cursing anyone who called them 'sons of God'.¹⁵² His approach most probably influenced the translations of Symmachus¹⁵³ and the Targumim.¹⁵⁴ Despite the curse on the earlier angels-interpretation, the Targumim¹⁵⁵ and later Jewish tradition retained traces of it. According to the Babylonian Talmud,¹⁵⁶ there is an authoritative Tannaitic rule external to the

¹⁴⁹ DSSSE 1:553–555 (= 4Q266 (*4QDamascus Document*^a), frag. 2 col. II, 13–21, DSSSE 1:585.)

¹⁵⁰ As also found in a fragment from the *Book of Giants* which mentions Azazel, the Watchers and the Gibborim: "(5) ... Then he punished, and not (6) us, [bu]t Aza[ze]l and made [him ... the sons of] Watchers, (7) the Giants (גִּבּוֹרִים עִירִין); and n[o]ne of [their] be[loved] will be forgiven [...] ... he has imprisoned us and has captured yo[u]." (4Q203 frag. 7 col. I). DSSSE 1:410–411.

¹⁵¹ DSSSE 1:370–373. Similarly 4Q181 frag. 2,2 (DSSSE 1:374–375).

¹⁵² Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (BJS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 282. See also 3.1.3. Because 'sons of God' is a literal translation of the Hebrew text, the curse must have been addressed at adherents of the angels-interpretation.

¹⁵³ See 3.1.3.

¹⁵⁴ See 3.1.6–3.1.8.

¹⁵⁵ See 3.1.10.

¹⁵⁶ Tractate Yoma 67b.

Mishnah (*baraita*) from the school of Rabbi Yishmael.¹⁵⁷ In this understanding, the term Azazel indicates “that it atones for the act of Uza and Azael”, these being names which refer to the fallen angels known from the Enochic tradition.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, a name of a fallen angel known from the Enochic tradition occurs in the Talmud,¹⁵⁹ where Sihon and Og (Num 21:21–35) are considered to have been sons of “Ahijah the son of Shamḥazai”.¹⁶⁰

Later Jewish literature fully accepted the angels-interpretation anew, as is clear from *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*,¹⁶¹ chapter 22, where the fall of the angels is described in a way comparable to the Enochic tradition.¹⁶² The cabalistic literature of the thirteenth century also gives evidence of this view.¹⁶³ Thus, the dissenting exegesis of Simeon bar Yoḥai appears to be a minority voice within the literature of the Second Temple period and thereafter, while the angels-interpretation remained dominant in Jewish literature and also entered Christian theological reflection at its very beginnings.¹⁶⁴

3.7 NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament contains no verbatim quotations from Gen 6:1–4. Reference to this Old Testament passage¹⁶⁵ can therefore only be present in the form of allusions

¹⁵⁷ Contemporary of Akiva, however, Yishmael did not share Akiva’s opposition to the angels-interpretation. Cf. 3.1.3, nt. 22.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo’ed* (London: Soncino, 1938), 316 nt. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Tractate *Niddah* 61a.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Tohoroth* (London: Soncino, 1959), 433 nt. 7. Interestingly, the comparison of Biblical references to Og as residing in Ashtaroth and Edrei (Josh 12:4, 13:12) with Ugaritic literature in which *Rp’u* is described as ‘the god who dwells in Astharoth and judges at Edrei’, also suggests something like superhuman ancestry. See 2.4.1 nt. 236.

¹⁶¹ Aggadic work of the eighth century, cf. *EncJud* 16:182–183.

¹⁶² Translation: Gerald Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (New-York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), 160–163.

¹⁶³ E.g. *Zohar* I:25a-b, where also the names of Uzza and Azael occur. Translation: Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, *The Zohar: Volume I* (London: Soncino, 1978), 99. Nevertheless, *Zohar* I:37a views the ‘sons of God’ also as descendants of Cain!

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 67.

¹⁶⁵ The NT usually refers to the OT in the translation of the LXX and not to the MT, cf. Eep Talstra, “Eenheid en veelheid in de Bijbel,” in *Omhoog kijken in Platland: Over geloven in de wetenschap* (Cees Dekker, René van Woudenberg, and Gijsbert van den Brink, eds.; Kampen: Ten Have, 2007), 137. It is therefore possible that the authors of the NT used a version in which ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 was

to it. Passages which supposedly refer in some way to Gen 6:1–4 appear to support the angels-interpretation.¹⁶⁶

3.7.1 Jude and 2 Peter

The letter of Jude mentions an apostasy of angels (Jude 6) in a context in which the author asserts that God will punish heretics. To underscore his statement, Jude uses three Old Testament examples:

(5) Now I wish to remind you, though you are aware of it, that the Lord¹⁶⁷ once rescued a people from the land of Egypt but later destroyed the ones who did not believe, (6) and angels, who did not keep their own realm but abandoned their proper dwelling place, he has been keeping with eternal chains under the gloom of the netherworld for the judgment of the great day, (7) just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, which in the same way as these¹⁶⁸ committed fornication and have gone after another kind of flesh,¹⁶⁹ lie exposed as an example, suffering the penalty of eternal fire. (Jude 5–7).

It is possible that Jude refers here to the fall of Satan and his angels before the fall of Adam because he gives no explicit link to any concrete biblical narrative. Van Houwelingen initially pointed to the *Dream Visions of Enoch* (1 En. 85–88) to demonstrate that the Enoch tradition also recounts a fall of angels preceding the

translated as ‘angels of God’.

¹⁶⁶ The order of the subsequent New Testament passages is not to be seen as chronological but treats the passages which allude the most clearly to Gen 6:1–4 first.

¹⁶⁷ The variant reading Ἰησοῦς could be preferred as *lectio difficilior* but can also be the result of confusion of the *nomina sacra* arising when scribes read IC or XC instead of Κύριος, written as KC, a reading that gives the best textual sense.

¹⁶⁸ The word τοῦτοις refers to the angels of vs. 6, not to the unbelievers of vs. 5, because in the latter case the description of the committed sin does not coincide (fornication and going after ‘other’ flesh), cf. Van Houwelingen, *comm. 2 Pet / Jude* (CNT-3) 1993, 137. The demonstrative pronoun can neither refer to the connection between Sodom and Gomorrah with the other cities (because πόλεις is feminine) nor to the male inhabitants of Sodom as a kind of *constructio ad sensum*, cf. Greijdanus, *comm. 1–2 Pet / 1–2–3 John / Jude* (KNT 13) 1929, 622 (because the participles ἐκπορνείσασαι and ἀπελθοῦσαι are feminine).

¹⁶⁹ The expression ‘another (kind of) flesh’ most logically refers to the angels; the ‘flesh’ of the heavenly messengers arriving in Sodom was ‘strange’ “in the sense of being of a different kind”, Green, *comm. Jude / 2 Pet* (BECNT) 2008, 72. Similarly, as in Van Houwelingen, *comm. 2 Pet / Jude* (CNT-3) 1993, 137: “andersoortige wezens”. Given that angels, strictly speaking, have no ‘flesh’, Greijdanus argues that the verse is about homosexuality or bestiality. (Greijdanus, *comm. 1–2 Pet / 1–2–3 John / Jude*, 622–623). However, in homosexual practice, the flesh is not ‘different’, cf. Bauckham, *comm. Jude / 2 Pet* (WBC) 1983, 54. Even if it is true that on the level of *history* the male inhabitants of Sodom perceived the celestial visitors only as men (cf. Davids, *comm. 2 Pet / Jud* 2006, 53), on the level of the *narrative*, the *reader* knows that the visiting ‘men’ in reality were angels.

event of Gen 6:1–4.¹⁷⁰ However, this part of *1 Enoch* does not speak about a fall of *angels* (plural) as a description of background information to Gen 3 but about one single angel while Jude uses a plural form. This means that Jude possibly refers to *both* events at the same time and not solely to the first, at least not when argued from *1 En.* 85–88.

1 En. 85–88 relates, in allegorical language, the history from the creation to the exodus. First it is said how one star (Satan?¹⁷¹) fell from heaven amidst black cows (offspring of Cain?), whereupon this star lived among them, 86:1. Afterwards, more stars fell from heaven (the angels of Gen 6:1–4?), which impregnated the dark cows. From these unions, elephants, camels and donkeys (the giants?) were born which struck fear into the cattle and then began to devour them, 86:2–6. The first star was bound and thrown into an abyss, 88:1; the elephants, camels and donkeys began to attack each other, 88:2, (described in a similar way as in 10:9 where it is mentioned how the giants killed each other) while the other stars were bound and cast into the pits of the earth, 88:3.

Jude's theme is divine punishment, therefore his description of the fall of the angels is more restrained¹⁷² than it is in the Enochic literature. Nonetheless, Jude 6 tersely evokes the interpretative tradition from the Second Temple period which expands the story of Gen 6:1–4. Arguments favouring this view¹⁷³ are the following: first is the fact that Jude knew the Enoch-tradition because he quotes *1 En.* 1:9 in vs. 14–15;¹⁷⁴ second, the element of imprisoned angels, mentioned by Jude which is

¹⁷⁰ P. H. R. van Houwelingen, *De tweede trompet: De authenticiteit van de tweede brief van Petrus* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 167–168. The author later revised this perception as can be seen in his commentary on 1 Peter and Jude, cf. Van Houwelingen, *comm. 2 Pet / Jude*, 60.

¹⁷¹ Or it could possibly be either Azaz'el who was the first to be bound and thrown into darkness, *1 En.* 10:4, cf. 88:1, or perhaps also Semyaza who later suffered the same fate, *1 En.* 10:11–12, cf. 88:3. For this view, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The 'Angels' and 'Giants' of Genesis 6:1–4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation: Reflections on the Posture of Early Apocalyptic Traditions," *DSD* 7 no. 3 (2000): 370.

¹⁷² Green, *comm. Jude / 2 Pet*, 68: "Jude's use of the tradition, though perplexing to a contemporary reader, is restrained in comparison with other texts that retell this story." Green observes that because Jude does not specify the sexual nature of the angels' sin and neither mentions the giants, nor Enoch's role in proclaiming judgment, he does not understand this fall of angels as the origin of sin in the world, nor does he trace back the origin of evil spirits to this event and thus refrains from accepting the more fanciful details of the tradition.

¹⁷³ See also Schreiner, *comm. 1–2 Pet / Jude* (NAC) 2003, 448.

¹⁷⁴ The quotation is not a literal one from the extant texts of *1 En.* but contains enough constitutive elements to be recognised. Jude may either have reworked the text or quotes from memory. It is also possible that he used the Aramaic text. For comparison of the Greek text of *1 En.* 1:9 with Jude 14b–15, see Green, *comm. Jude / 2 Pet*, 104. Similarly to Jude 14, *1 En.* 60:8 also describes Enoch as having the epithet 'the seventh from Adam'.

missing in Gen 6:1–4 but present in the Enoch-tradition; third, in vs. 7 Jude observes a parallel between the sexual nature of the sin of the angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “who in the same way as these (the angels) committed fornication and have gone after another kind of flesh”; fourth, the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 most frequently found in the Second Temple period, one which refers to an apostasy of angels. In fact, the Enoch tradition was so well known at the time that, if Jude would not have wanted to allude to this sin of the angels as reported in this tradition, he should have explicitly emphasised this.¹⁷⁵

2 Peter 2:4–7 resembles *qua* content Jud 5–7.¹⁷⁶ Like Jud 6, 2 Pet 2:4 also mentions the sin of angels, although the verbal similarity between the two passages is relatively small. The focus of the text of 2 Peter is also different, emphasising the fact that God can save his people in the midst of his passing judgment on sinners.

(4) For, if God did not spare angels who sinned, but, after he cast them into the netherworld in bonds of gloom, handed them over to keep them for judgment, (5) and if he did not spare the ancient world but protected Noah, herald of righteousness, together with seven others, while he brought a deluge upon the world of the godless, (6) and if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes, making them an example for future godless ones, (7) but saved the righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the way of life in licentiousness of the lawless, (8) ... (9) then God knows how to rescue the godly from trial and to keep the unjust for the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet 2:4–9).

Peter refrains from entering into details about the nature of the sin of the angels but it is likely that, in the context of that time, the allusion was understood as referring to Gen 6:1–4 in the ‘mode’ of the Enochic tradition.¹⁷⁷ As Newman argues, “[i]t 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.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ So F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut?*, 89.

¹⁷⁶ The question of literary dependence cannot be discussed here. Certainly both Jude and Peter could draw on common Jewish sources of much used parenetic examples, as listed by Bauckham, *comm. Jude / 2 Pet* (WBC) 1983, 46. The examples occur in varied order in Sir 16:7–10, CD-A 2:17–3:12, 3 Macc 2:4–7, *Jub.* 20:5, *Sanh.* 10:3, *T. Naph.* 3:4–5: the Watchers, the giants, the generation of the Flood, the sons of Noah, the generation of the dispersion, Sodom, the sons of Jacob, Israel in Egypt, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the generation of the wilderness, the company of Korach, Israel at Kadesh, and the spies. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV,16:2 (PG 7:1016) who uses a similar catalogue: Abraham, Lot, Noah, and Enoch.

¹⁷⁷ See Van Houwelingen, *comm. 2 Pet / Jude*, 59–61; Schreiner, *comm. 1–2 Pet / Jude*, 336.

¹⁷⁸ Robert C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4,” *GTJ* 5 no. 1 (1984): 28.

3.7.2 1 Peter

The passage of 1 Pet 3:18–20 is the most difficult in the entire letter, but for the present study only the address of Christ’s proclamation is important: to whom does the word ‘spirits’ in vs. 19 refer?

(18) For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, as righteous on behalf of unrighteous ones, in order to lead you to God, although put to death by flesh,¹⁷⁹ but made alive by the Spirit, (19) by whom, after he ascended,¹⁸⁰ he also proclaimed to the spirits in custody, (20) who were disobedient once, when the patience of God was awaiting, in the days when Noah was constructing the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were preserved through the water (1 Pet 3:18–20).

The spirits to whom Christ proclaimed are located (‘in custody’), identified (‘who once were disobedient’) and also dated (‘in the days of Noah’). The main question is whether these ‘spirits’ have to be identified as deceased humans or as disobedient angels as known from the interpretative tradition of Gen 6:1–4.

In the New Testament the plural πνεύματα, ‘spirits’, is usually accompanied by a qualifier which leaves no question as to whom the word refers. In most occurrences, the reference is to non-human beings.¹⁸¹ The rare use of the word without further qualification refers in most cases to supernatural (malevolent) beings.¹⁸² When 1 *Enoch* mentions ‘spirits’ without qualification, this refers to

¹⁷⁹ I.e. ‘mortal men’, see Achtemeier, *comm. 1 Pet* 1996, 239; Van Houwelingen, *comm. 1 Pet* (CNT-3) 1991, 129–130. The text, then, does not deal with the two natures of Christ.

¹⁸⁰ The participle πορεύεις refers probably to the ascension just as vs. 22 states this *expressis verbis*. See also Van Houwelingen, *comm. 1 Pet*, 131–132; Achtemeier, *comm. 1 Pet*, 258. Cf. also the use of πορεύομαι in Acts 1:10–11. The words ‘leading you to God’ of vs. 18 show the same upward movement. This fits perfectly in the described order of events: Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. The ascension, then, becomes already by itself the triumph-proclaiming fact. It is only after 190 C.E., beginning with Clement of Alexandria and after him Origines, that 1 Pet 3:19 is connected to the *descensus Christi ad infera/inferos*, cf. Elliot, *comm. 1 Pet* (AB) 2000, 706–709. The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* 10 also refers to this descent of Christ into Hades, see C. Tischendorf, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1851), 199. For an overview of other interpretations, see Elliot, *1 Peter*, 648–650.

¹⁸¹ E.g. ‘unclean spirits’, Matt 10:1; 12:43–45; Mark 3:11; 5:13; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 6:18; Acts 5:16; 8:7; Rev 16:13; ‘evil spirits’, Acts 19:12–13; ‘deceitful spirits’, 1 Tim 4:1; ‘ministering spirits’, Heb 1:14; ‘the seven spirits (of God)’, Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; ‘spirits of demons’, Rev 16:14.

¹⁸² Cf. Matt 8:16; Luke 10:20; 11:26. Possible exceptions are 1 Cor 12:10, ‘the distinguishing of spirits’ and 1 John 4:1 ‘test the spirits’, but there the word πνεῦμα is rather used in the sense of ‘mentality, mind-set’, as in the variant reading of Luke 9:55, “you do not know of what spirit you are”. Unclear is Heb 12:9 which mentions God as the ‘father of the spirits’, but there the expression can well be understood as referring to God as the father of the heavenly beings, see Weiss, *comm. Heb* (KEK) 1991, 653.

angels¹⁸³ or evil spirits.¹⁸⁴ In the case where spirits of humans are envisaged, this is explicitly indicated, both in the New Testament and in *1 Enoch*.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, the ‘spirits in custody’ in 1 Pet 3:19 are most probably not to be viewed as the spirits of deceased human beings.¹⁸⁶ To interpret, however, the proclamation of Christ’s victory to disobedient spirits¹⁸⁷ in 1 Pet 3:18–20 as addressed to the fallen angels as they are known from the Enochic tradition makes perfect sense, all the more so because in this tradition these spirits are also placed in custody. Viewed thus, Peter encourages oppressed believers by pointing to the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ who also suffered unjustly. Already by the fact of his resurrection and ascension, Christ proclaimed that he had defeated all evil powers, just as Enoch, according to the tradition, proclaimed to the fallen angels their final condemnation.¹⁸⁸ This explanation corresponds with 1 Pet 3:22 which mentions Christ’s ascension and enthronement at the right hand of God, while all ‘angels,¹⁸⁹ authorities, and powers¹⁹⁰’ are subject to him.¹⁹¹ To envisage the ‘disobedient spirits’

¹⁸³ E.g. *1 En.* 13:6, 15:4–8; see Achtemeier, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 256. Cf. also the use of מַלְאָכִים for (fallen) angels in texts from Qumran: 1Q33 X,12; 1Q33 XIII,3–12; 4Q502, frag. 27,1–4; 1QH^a V,14; 1QH^a IX,10–13; 4Q185, frag. 1–2, col. I, 7–9; 4Q216 V (=Jub. 2:1–4); 4Q286 frag. 2, frag. 3, frag. 7 col. II 3–8; 4Q287 frag. 2.

¹⁸⁴ E.g. *1 En.* 15:12.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 14:32 ‘the spirits of the prophets’; Heb 12:23 ‘the spirits of righteous (people) who have been made perfect’; Rev 22:6 ‘the spirits of the prophets’; *1 En.* 20:3.6 ‘the spirits of men’; 22:3 ‘spirits of the souls of the dead’; 22:9 ‘spirits of the dead’; 22:13 ‘souls of the people’; 98:3 ‘their [referring to people] spirits shall be cast away’; 103:4 ‘the spirits of those who died in righteousness’. Cf. Elliott, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 702.

¹⁸⁶ 1 Peter 4:6 is not a counter-argument, as if stating that the gospel was preached to persons who were already deceased at the time this preaching occurred. This verse simply takes up the wording of the preceding vs. 5 which mentions how Christ will judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:6, then, states that Christians who had already died, although they were possibly oppressed and despised by men during their lifetime, had been spiritually made alive by God during their earthly life through the preaching of the gospel. Cf. Van Houwelingen, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 149–153.

¹⁸⁷ Achtemeier, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 255 nt. 181, draws attention to the fact that in the formulation of the expression the spirits appear to have been already spirits at the time they became disobedient, something which cannot be said about deceased humans. In the latter case, one would expect a wording like ‘to the spirits of those who disobeyed’ (τοῖς πνεύμασιν τῶν ἀπειθεσάντων).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. *1 En.* 12:4–5; 14:4–7; 16:3. See also Andrew J. Bandstra, “‘Making Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison’: Another Look at 1 Peter 3:19,” *CTJ* 38 (2003): 120–124.

¹⁸⁹ According to Elliott perhaps to be interpreted as reference to the ‘disobedient spirits’ in vs. 19, cf. Elliott, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 688.

¹⁹⁰ *Test. Adam* 4:1.4–5 also mentions ‘angels, authorities and powers’ in an exposition about heavenly powers, cf. S. E. Robinson, “Testament of Adam,” *OTP* 1:995.

¹⁹¹ Achtemeier, *comm. 1 Pet.*, 261 nt. 250, observes that “[s]uch an emphasis is also apparent in the Pauline tradition: The rulers of this age, who crucified Christ (1 Cor 2:8) and who blind unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4), were conquered by the risen Christ (Col 2:15; Eph 4:8); that victory allows Christians to fight

in the sense of the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4, as witnessed by the Enochic tradition,¹⁹² leaves the least number of questions unexplained and views the passage as a coherent part of the literary context. Against this background, the identification of the ‘disobedient spirits’ becomes close to being certain, especially because Peter also mentions these spirits as being connected to the time of the flood.¹⁹³ “Once the interpretive tradition of Gen. 6:1–4 preserved in 1 Enoch was lost, theological issues, not exegesis, drove the interpretation of 1 Pet. 3:19–21”.¹⁹⁴

3.7.3 1 Corinthians

Notoriously difficult to understand is the apostle Paul’s passage in his first letter to the Corinthians, 1 Cor 11:2–16, pertaining to the covering of their heads by women during Christian worship. The difficulty for the present-day reader arises from the lack of concrete background knowledge of the given issue. The *crux interpretum* of the passage is 1 Cor 11:10, “*therefore, a woman ought to have authority over¹⁹⁵ her head, because of the angels.*”

The main thrust of the passage seems clear: women should cover their heads in public worship. However, the motivation of Paul’s statement is not so transparent. Hidden premise in most exegesis of the passage is that Corinthian women themselves, for whatever reason, wanted to remove the cover from their heads and in that way broke the codes of decent social behaviour. But in this case one would not expect Paul to say that women ought to have ‘authority’ over their heads, apparently in the sense that they can decide for themselves. On the contrary, in the given context, one would expect the statement that women have *no* authority over their heads. To overcome this logical problem, some exegetes translate ἐξουσία as ‘a sign of authority’, that is to say, some kind of veil.¹⁹⁶

successfully against them (Eph 6:12) until they are finally disposed of (1 Cor 15:24–27).”

¹⁹² The Enochic tradition belonged to common cultural knowledge, even if not everybody was familiar with the book of Enoch. Jobes, *comm. 1 Pet* (BECNT) 2005, 245, compares this phenomenon with the fact that today also people can be familiar with the concept of purgatory, who are neither Roman-Catholics, nor can cite texts in which the doctrine about purgatory is stated.

¹⁹³ The story of Noah and the flood appears to have been prominent in Asia Minor, the area where the addressees of the letter lived (1 Petr 1:1). Cf. Jobes, *comm. 1 Pet*, 245–247.

¹⁹⁴ Jobes, *comm. 1 Pet*, 250.

¹⁹⁵ The translation ‘authority / control over’ is disputed but fits best to Greek grammar, see Garland, *comm. 1 Cor* (BECNT) 2003, 525.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *comm. 1 Cor* (ICC) 1914, 232–233.

Anderson may be right when suggesting that exegesis here should not only look at socio-cultural data but more at the way how people ought to dress during worship.¹⁹⁷ In ancient Corinth, a city virtually dominated by the Aphrodite temple atop Acrocorinth and the impressive Apollo temple in the centre of the city, this could be an important clue for exegesis.¹⁹⁸ According to Anderson, in the 'Greek rite', the ones who presented their sacrifice were not required to cover their heads – in contrast to the 'Roman rite' where they were¹⁹⁹ – something which may help clarify the underlying causes of the problem which Paul is addressing. Against this background, it could be possible that it was not *women* who wished to participate with their heads uncovered in Christian worship but it was more *men* who were expecting women to do so,²⁰⁰ either in accordance with the Greek rite in ancient worship or in opposition to the Roman²⁰¹ rite, something women may have experienced as being forced to undress in public. This, at least, makes Paul's referring to the women's ἐξουσία, 'authority', over their own heads more understandable.²⁰² Still defying all interpretation is Paul's argumentation that women ought to cover their heads 'because of the angels'. According to Tertullian this is a reference to Gen 6:1–4 explained in terms of the Enochic tradition of fallen angels lusting after women.²⁰³ This interpretation of angels with the intent of seducing women, however, is not likely, because, according to that very same tradition, these angels were placed in custody in order to put a stop to their behaviour.²⁰⁴ Yet, there may be a connection to 1 Cor 6:3, where Paul asserts that believers are to judge angels one day.²⁰⁵ For the scope of the present study it suffices to conclude that, however

¹⁹⁷ Anderson, *comm. 1 Cor* (CNT-3) 2008, 150–154.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Garland, *comm. 1 Cor*, 9–13 for a summary of diverse religious influences in Corinth of that time.

¹⁹⁹ See for this fact also D. E. Aune, "Religion, Greco-Roman," *DNTB*, 922. For pictures, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 177–178.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Corinthians 11:2–16: An Interpretation," *BSac* 135 (1978): 46.

²⁰¹ Since 44 B.C.E., the rebuilt city of Corinth, destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C.E., was a Roman colony. See e.g. Christoph Auffarth, "Korinth," *RGK* 4:1687–1688.

²⁰² Cf. J. J. T. Doedens, "Vrijgevochten vrouwen in Korinte? Een Copernicaanse wending in de uitleg van 1 Korintiërs 11:2–16," *Ref* 80 no. 46 (2005): 853–856.

²⁰³ Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 1:7. See 3.8.7. Similarly argues John P. Meier, "On the Veiling of Hermeneutics (1 Cor 11:2–16)," *CBQ* 40 no. 2 (1978): 220–222.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Anderson, *1 Korintiërs*, 156.

²⁰⁵ Paul takes up Jewish eschatological motifs, cf. Dietmar Neufeld, "Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1–11," *BibInt* 8 no. 4 (2000): 396–397. Cf. also Paul M. Hoskins, "The Use of Biblical and Extrabiblical Parallels in the Interpretation of First Corinthians 6:2–3," *CBQ* 63 no. 2 (2001): 292–297.

baffling the explanation of the passage may seem, the likelihood that Paul alludes to the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 is very minimal.²⁰⁶

3.8 THE CHURCH FATHERS

Genesis 6:1–4 cannot be interpreted as any key text in Christian theology or preaching. Despite this fact, its presence in the writings of the early church fathers is relatively prominent, this perhaps being partially due to its expanded interpretation in Jewish pseudepigrapha, but more generally due to its enigmatic content which demanded exegetical answers. The next part of this chapter offers a survey of the works of the church fathers pertaining to their interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4.

The writings of the church fathers can only be put into approximate chronological order. Furthermore, it is not possible to place them in watertight compartments representing Syriac, Greek and Latin fathers in respect of their theology. Even though schools and regions had their respective specialities, the main streams in patristic theology transcend regional categories.²⁰⁷ Hence, the main dividing principle in the next section is, on one hand, the angels-interpretation and, on the other hand, the Sethites-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. This will result in an equally approximate chronological order. The analysis of the works of each investigated church father furthermore intends to provide an impression of the writer’s original purpose when interpreting the passage from Genesis.

3.8.1 Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr²⁰⁸ explains in his *Second Apology* how the coming into existence of demons was due to “the angels who, transgressing this (God-given) order, yielded to women in sexual intercourse, and begot children who are the so called demons.”

²⁰⁶ For a more detailed discussion, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10),” *SCJ* 4 (2001): 220–232.

²⁰⁷ Cf. the Greek church father Irenaeus from *Asia Minor*, who was bishop in *Lyon*: “Through their (the Romans’) instrumentality the world is at peace, and we walk on the highways without fear, and sail where we will.” *Adversus haereses* IV, 30:3 (*ANF* 1:843).

²⁰⁸ Ca. 110–165, Christian philosopher and apologist, born in Flavia Neapolis, a city of Samaria, near the site of biblical Shechem, modern Nablus (< Neapolis). Cf. *ANF* 1:244.

Οἱ δ' ἄγγελοι, παραβάντες τήνδε τὴν τάξιν, γυναικῶν μίξεσιν ἡττήθησαν, καὶ παῖδας ἐτέκνωσαν, οἳ εἰσιν οἱ λεγόμενοι δαίμονες.²⁰⁹

These demons enslave people; their evil effects are readily evident in murders, wars, adultery, and the like. Justin mentions that the poets and ‘raconteurs’²¹⁰ – through lack of knowledge – ascribed this activity of the transgressing angels and their demonic offspring to the Greek pantheon.²¹¹

A passage from his *Dialogue with Trypho*²¹² also deals with the subject of fallen angels. Within this exchange, Trypho accuses Justin of blasphemy because of his assertion that angels acted wickedly and revolted against God.²¹³ In responding to this, Justin does not refer to Gen 6 among the biblical evidence which he presents in support of his view. This is probably because the interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 was the subject under attack, therefore Justin intentionally gets round the sensitive point²¹⁴ by citing other biblical texts. Justin’s aim in referring to the angels-interpretation is to explain the origin of evil.

3.8.2 Athenagoras

In his *Embassy for the Christians*,²¹⁵ Athenagoras²¹⁶ explains how Christians, in addition to their faith in the Triune God, also believe that powers hostile to God do exist. Based on the witness of the prophets, Christians know that “on the one hand, these (angels) have fallen into lust for virgins and became submitted to flesh, on the other hand, this one²¹⁷ became negligent and ill-willed in the management of the

²⁰⁹ Justin, *Apologia secunda pro christianis* 5:88–89 (PG 6:452).

²¹⁰ μυθολόγοι.

²¹¹ Justin, *Apol. sec.* 5:89–93 (PG 6:452–453).

²¹² The temporal setting of the dialogue may be during or after the Bar Kokhba revolt, cf. *ANF* 1:305.

²¹³ ἄγγέλους γὰρ πονηρευσάμενους καὶ ἀποστάντας τοῦ Θεοῦ λέγεις, Justin, *Dial.* 79 (PG 6:661); see also Philippe Bobichon, *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon* (Vol. 1; Introduction, Texte grec, Traduction; Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003), 402–405.

²¹⁴ ἐνδοτικώτερον τῇ φωνῇ παρασκευάσαι αὐτὸν βουλόμενος πρὸς τὸ ἀκούειν μου, “wanting by (tone of) voice to make him more yielding, in order that he would listen to me”, Justin, *Dial.* 79 (PG 6:661).

²¹⁵ *Legatio pro christianis*, around 176 presented to the emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, cf. Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 100. English translation, *ANF* 2:200–236.

²¹⁶ Christian philosopher from Athens. Cf. Berthold Altaner and Alfred Stuiber, *Patrologie: Leben, Schriften und Lehre der Kirchenväter* (9th edition; Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 74.

²¹⁷ Athenagoras changes to the singular because he had already mentioned one power (δύναμις) in particular which is hostile to God, μία μὲν τὴν ἀντίθεον, Athenagoras, *Leg.* 24 (33) (PG 6:945), whom he calls “this ruler of matter and its various forms” (οὗτός τε ὁ τῆς ὕλης καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ εἰδῶν ἄρχων), *Leg.* 24 (39) (PG 6:948). Athenagoras was the first to use Greek philosophical terms in his rendition of the Enochic tradition, cf. D.-A. Giulea, “The Watchers’ Whispers: Athenagoras’s *Legatio* 25,1–3 and the

things that were entrusted to him. Thus, from the ones who had relationships with the virgins, the so-called giants were born.”

ἐκεῖνοι μὲν, εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν πεσόντες παρθένων, καὶ ἥττους σαρκὸς εὐρεθέντες· οὗτος δὲ, ἀμελήσας, καὶ ποιηρὸς περὶ τὴν τῶν πεπιστευμένων γενόμενος διοίκησιν. Ἐκ μὲν οὖν τῶν περὶ τὰς παρθένους ἐχόντων, οἱ καλούμενοι ἐγεννήθησαν γίγαντες.²¹⁸

Athenagoras calls them ‘angels fallen from heaven’ (οἱ ἄγγελοι οἱ ἐκπεσόντες τῶν οὐρανῶν) who are no longer able to participate in heavenly things, acting with ill will in the world, similarly to ‘the demons that roam through the world’ (οἱ περὶ τὸν κόσμον εἰσὶ πλανώμενοι δαίμονες), who are ‘the souls of the giants’ (αἱ τῶν γιγάντων ψυχὰι).²¹⁹ These demons are the powers that draw men to idolatry.²²⁰

Athenagoras’ interpretation of demons comes very close to that of *1 Enoch* 15:8–12, with the difference that, in his view, the wicked angels are not detained in custody; they can still do harm, despite being confined to the air and the earth. By referring to this tradition, Athenagoras has the intention of explaining the origin of idolatry and of evil in the world.

3.8.3 Irenaeus

Irenaeus²²¹ explains in Book 4,16 of his five-volume work *Against Heresies*²²² how righteousness cannot be attained by circumcision. Among the examples of Abraham, Lot and Noah, none of whom were circumcised, Irenaeus also includes Enoch who functioned as a legate to the angels and was a witness of the righteous judgment of God “because even angels who transgressed have fallen to earth for judgment”, *quoniam angeli quidem transgressi deciderunt in terram in iudicium*.²²³ This remark clearly concurs with *1 En.* 15–16 where Enoch is charged with delivering to the fallen angels the message of their doom.²²⁴ The transgressing

Book of Watchers,” VC 61 (2007): 258–281.

²¹⁸ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 24 (40) (PG 6:948).

²¹⁹ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 25 (PG 6:948).

²²⁰ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 26 (PG 6:949–951).

²²¹ Ca. 120–202, bishop of Lyons, cf. *ANF* 1:508.

²²² Written between 182 and 188, original title: Ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπή τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως, ‘Refutation and overthrowing of knowledge falsely so called’, commonly called *Adversus haereses*, cf. *ANF* 1:512.

²²³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4,16:2 (PG 7:1016).

²²⁴ The extra information added to the narrative of Gen 6 can possibly be due to Jewish influence, although such influence is difficult to trace, cf. P. L. Wansink, *Irenaeus en het Oude Testament: Gnostische en heilshistorische exegeze in de tweede eeuw* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2000),

angels are mentioned again in *Adv. haer.* 4,36:4 where the nature of their sin is also indicated: “in the days of Noah (God) brought the deluge, to extinguish that most perverted generation of men then existent, who could not bear fruit for God anymore, because the transgressing angels became commingled with them.”

*et temporibus Noe diluvium inducens, uti extingueret pessimum genus eorum, qui tunc erant homines, qui jam fructificare Deo non poterant, cum angeli transgressores commisti fuissent eis.*²²⁵

Irenaeus’ writings, thus, reflect the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. Irenaeus actually only mentions this exegetical tradition in passing while preferring to accentuate other themes.

3.8.4 Clement of Alexandria

In two of his works, Clement of Alexandria²²⁶ refers to the ‘sons of God’, identifying them as angels in the way already evidenced in the Enochic tradition. In *The Instructor* 3,2, Clement writes negatively about the use of cosmetics and, in this respect, points to the fallen angels as a signal to be heeded: “Let an example of these things be for you the angels who abandoned the beauty of God for a beauty that fades, and, for so much, fell from heaven to the ground.”

Δείγμα σοι τούτων οἱ ἄγγελοι, τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ κάλλος καταλελοιπότες διὰ κάλλος μαραινόμενον, καὶ τοσοῦτον ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἀποπεσόντες χαμαί.²²⁷

In *Miscellanies* 3,7, writing about sexual self-control, Clement mentions how “already some angels, who became unable to control themselves and were caught by their desires, fell down from heaven.”

Ἦδη δὲ καὶ ἄγγελοί τινες, ἀκρατεῖς γενόμενοι, ἐπιθυμίᾳ ἁλόντες, οὐρανόθεν δεῦρο καταπεπτώκασιν.²²⁸

Later on, in *Miscellanies* 5,1, writing about faith, Clement argues that the Greek philosophers copied directly their principal dogmas from Moses and the prophets. He adds as an example that “these angels, who had obtained an upper rank but having submerged into pleasures, gave away to the women the secrets which had come to their knowledge, while the other angels concealed them, keeping them rather until the coming of the Lord.”

118–126.

²²⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4,36:4 (PG 7:1093).

²²⁶ Titus Flavius Clemens, ca. 153–ca. 217, head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, cf. *ANF* 2:260–262.

²²⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3,2 (PG 8:576).

²²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3,7 (PG 8:1161).

οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐκεῖνοι οἱ τὸν ἄνω κλῆρον εἰληχότες, κατολισθήσαντες εἰς ἥδονάς, ἐξεῖπον τὰ ἀπόρρητα ταῖς γυναιξίν, ὅσα τε εἰς γνῶσιν αὐτῶν ἀφῖκτο, κρυπτόντων τῶν ἄλλων ἀγγέλων, μᾶλλον δὲ τηρούντων εἰς τὴν τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσίαν.²²⁹

It is clear that Clement knew the tradition about Gen 6:1–4 as found in 1 Enoch and Jubilees because he not only mentions the fall of some of the angels but also their betrayal of secrets to mankind. However, this tradition functions in his writings only as an example elucidating one of his themes.

3.8.5 Bardaisan of Edessa

The Syrian author Bardaisan of Edessa²³⁰ answers in his *Book of the Laws of the Countries* the question why God could not have created man in such a way that he could not have sinned. His reasoning is that, just like the angels, man also has freedom. “We understand therefore, that if angels would not have had their own freedom, they could not have married the daughters of men and could neither have sinned, nor have fallen from their place.”

*Intelligimus enim etiam, angelos si propriam libertatem nem haberent, non potuisse se coniungere cum hominum filiabus et non peccavisse et non cecidisse a locis suis.*²³¹

3.8.6 The Pseudo-Clementine Literature

The anonymous writings attributed to Clement I, bishop of Rome, are known in two forms, the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*.²³² The *Recognitions* retell from I,27 onwards the biblical creation account. Book I,29 retells the prologue of the flood: righteous men were seduced by the beauty of women and deviated into promiscuous and illicit intercourse with them. From this a new generation of giants was born, something which the author supports by referring to the finds of enormous bones in certain sites. This terrible generation was wiped out by the flood: “Thus were completed all things in the sky, on the earth and in the waters, but when the human kind multiplied, in the eighth generation righteous people,

²²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5,1 (PG 9:24).

²³⁰ Ca. 154–222, Syrian philosopher and astrologer who was influenced by gnosticism. Cf. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 101.

²³¹ Bardaisan of Edessa, *Liber Legum Regionem* 9 (PS I,2:548). Latin translation of the Syriac text.

²³² Date is uncertain, between 2nd and 4th century, provenance is probably Syria. Cf. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 134–135. As to their content, the Pseudo-Clementina rather fit into the category of apocryphal literature.

who had lived a life of angels, deviated to promiscuous and illicit sexual relationships, seduced by the beauty of women. Therefore acting in all things senselessly and against order, they changed the state of human affairs and of the divinely given order of life, so that they compelled all men, either by persuasion or by force, to sin against God, their Creator. Consequently in the ninth generation giants were born, the ones who were called ‘from of old’,²³³ not dragon-footed, as the fables of the Greeks recount, but issued forth with immense bodies, whose bones of immense size are still shown in some places as evidence. But it was against these that God’s righteous providence released the flood upon the world, so that the world might be washed from their pollution and all places might be turned into a sea through the destruction of the impious.”

*Igitur consummatis omnibus quae in coelo et in terris sunt, atque in aquis, multiplicato etiam hominum genere, octava generatione homines justi qui angelorum vixerant vitam, illecti pulchritudine mulierum, ad promiscuos et illicitos concubitus declinaverunt, et inde iam indiscrete et contra ordinem cuncta agentes, statum rerum humanarum et divinitus traditum vitae ordinem permutarunt, ita ut omnes homines, vel persuasione, vel vi peccare in Creatorem suum cogerent Deum. Exin nona generatione nascuntur gigantes, illi qui a saeculo nominantur, non δράκοντόποδες, ut Graecorum fabulae ferunt, sed immensis corporibus editi, quorum adhuc ad indicium in nonnullis locis ossa immensae magnitudinis ostenduntur. Sed adversum hos iusta Dei providentia diluvium mundo introduxit, ut orbis quidem terrarum ab eorum contagione dilueretur, omnis vero locus ab impiorum nece verteretur in pelagus.*²³⁴

The name of Seth is not mentioned in this explanation, but as to its content, it belongs to the Sethites-interpretation even though the influence of the angels-interpretation can still be perceived: the ‘angels’ of the exegetical tradition are understood here as “righteous men, who lived a life of angels”, an expression which may reflect the monastic ideal of virginity.²³⁵ The *Recognitions* are only extant in

²³³ The author apparently paraphrased here Gen 6:4 LXX: οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος, οἱ ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὀνομαστοί.

²³⁴ Pseudo-Clement, *Rec.* I,29 (PG 1:1223).

²³⁵ The expression became a term for monastic life: ἀγγελικὴ διαγωγή, βίος τῶν ἀγγέλων. See Ambrosius, *De virginibus* I,3:11; I,9:51–52, written around 377, (translation NPNF² 10:632–700), *Epistle* 63:71 (NPNF² 10:789). Chrysostom described the ‘Christian philosophy’ as ‘angelic life’, that is to say, a life being free from passions. This ‘angelic life’ as a description of ascetism was most visible – but not exclusively – in monasticism, cf. A. Appleton Packard, “Chrysostom’s True Christian Philosophy,” *AthR* 45 no. 4 (1963): 396–406. Cf. also Patrick Henry, “What was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?” *CH* 45 no. 1 (1976): 28–29; Ellen Muehlberger, “Ambivalence about the Angelic Life: The Promise and Perils of an Early Christian Discourse of Ascetism,” *J ECS* 16 no. 4 (2008): 447–478. Understanding the resurrection as attaining an angelic existence formed the thrust for an ascetic ideal, cf. J. Warren Smith,

Rufinus' Latin translation, thus it is possible that Rufinus²³⁶ adapted the *Recognitions* to orthodox views.²³⁷

The other part of the Pseudo-Clementine literature consist of the *Homilies*. *Homily* 8 depicts in utterly fantastic detail how the lowest class of angels requested permission to enter earthly life. As soon as their request was granted they changed themselves not only into objects and animals but also into humans. They engaged in intercourse with women; they showed them the possibilities of metallurgy, astronomy and magic.²³⁸ Their children were giants, "taller in height than humans, because they originated from angels, but not as tall as angels, because they were born from women"

μείζους μὲν ἀνθρώπων τὰ μέγεθῃ, ἐπεὶ περ ἐξ ἀγγέλων ἐγένοντο, ἀγγέλων δὲ
ἐλάττους, ἐπεὶ περ ἐκ γυναικῶν γεγέννητο.²³⁹

These giants were not able to find food in sufficient quantities on earth, and although God gave them manna to prevent them from starving, they regarded the option of cannibalism as one which offered a better menu.²⁴⁰

In the *Homilies* there is no trace of a Sethites-interpretation; the work incorporates an obvious full-scale angels-interpretation much as it is found in the Enochic tradition.²⁴¹

"The Body of Paradise and the Body of Resurrection: Gender and the Angelic Life in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *HTR* 29 no. 2 (2006): 207–228. It has also been observed that since the beginning of the Constantinian era, the ascetic became the successor of the martyr, cf. S. P. Brock, "Early Syrian Ascetism," *Numen* 20 no. 1 (1973): 2–13.

²³⁶ Tyrannius Rufinus of Aquileia (Northern Italy), ca. 345–410.

²³⁷ Rufinus also translated *De principiis* of Origen into Latin, as much as possible omitting heterodox views. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 392–394. See also Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Die Ehen der Söhne Gottes mit den Töchtern der Menschen: Eine theologische Untersuchung zur exegetischen historischen, dogmatischen und und praktischen Würdigung des biblischen Berichtes Gen. 6,1–4* (Berlin: J. A. Wohlgemuth, 1857), 39–40.

²³⁸ Cf. 1 *En.* 8.

²³⁹ Pseudo-Clement, *Hom.* VIII, 15 (PG 2:233–236).

²⁴⁰ Pseudo-Clement, *Hom.* VIII, 12–16 (PG 2:231–236).

²⁴¹ See Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, "Manna-Eaters and Man-Eaters: Food of Giants and Men in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 8," in *The Pseudo-Clementines* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer; SECA 10; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 114. Tigchelaar argues that the author of the 8th Homily transformed the Watcher-myth for his own purposes.

3.8.7 Tertullian

The founding father of Latin Christianity, Tertullian,²⁴² commented in several works of his abundant oeuvre on the fallen angels. In his *Apology*, he explains the existence of demons which are the root of wickedness, illness, and – in order to provide miracles – even giving healing from diseases, thus leading people astray from the true God towards idolatry. “We learn, in general, from the sacred books, how, from certain angels who freely choose to become corrupted, a more corrupted race of demons sprang, which was condemned by God together with the race of their progenitors, and together with him to whom we already referred as their chief.”

Sed quomodo de angelis quibusdam sua sponte corruptis corruptior gens daemonum evaserit damnata a Deo cum generis auctoribus,²⁴³ et cum eo quem diximus principe, apud litteras sanctas ordine cognoscitur.²⁴⁴

Here, the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 is clearly present as an explanation for the existence and influence of demons, although this scriptural passage is not explicitly mentioned.²⁴⁵

In his treatise *On Idolatry*, Tertullian assails astrology because that is specifically the art taught by the fallen angels: “I propose one thing, these angels who deserted God and were lovers of women, were also the traitors of this curiosity (i.e. astrology) and were therefore also condemned by God.”

Unum propono, angelos esse illos desertores Dei, amatores feminarum, proditores etiam huius curiositatis, propterea quoque damnatos a Deo.²⁴⁶

Tertullian had already earlier mentioned the fallen angels by quoting “Enoch, who had already gone before, predicting that the demons and the spirits of the deserted angels would turn into idolatry all the elements, all the assets of the universe, the

²⁴² Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, ca. 145– ca. 220, born in Carthago, brilliant apologetic writer, later joined the Montanist sect. Cf. *ANF* 3:7–8.

²⁴³ According to Dale Basil Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” *JBL* 129 no. 4 (2010): 657–677, Tertullian was the first to equate fallen angels with demons. However, Tertullian clearly distinguishes between demons and their procreators. The expression ‘a more corrupted race of demons’ (as if the fallen angels were already demons) can also be understood as ‘a more corrupted race, namely of demons’. The notion of fallen angels having become demons is expressed by Lactantius, *Div. inst.* II,15 (PL 6:330–331). Cf. 3.8.12.

²⁴⁴ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 22 (PL 1:464–465).

²⁴⁵ Tertullian’s theology can certainly be called contextual because during the third century C.E. the interest in the occult – although definitely not new to the third century – was no longer a secondary issue but received increasingly a place in ‘official’ culture as a consequence of neoplatonism, cf. Clarence L. Lee, “Tertullian’s Electric Guitar,” *LQ* 25 no. 2 (1973): 153.

²⁴⁶ Tertullian, *De idolatria* 9 (PL 1:747).

things that are included in heaven, in the sea and on the earth, so that these would be consecrated as god in opposition against God.”

*Antecesserat Enoch praedicens omnia elementa, omnem mundi censem, quae caelo, quae mari, quae terra continentur, in idololatriam versuros daemones et spiritus desertorum angelorum, ut pro deo adversus deum consecrarentur.*²⁴⁷

In his book *On Prayer*, Tertullian comments on the words ‘because of the angels’ in 1 Cor 11:10. Referring to Gen 6:2, these few words mean, according to Tertullian, that “he (Paul) states that women ought to veil themselves *because of the angels*, for the angels have abandoned God because of the daughters of men,”

*Nempe propter angelos ait velari oportere, quod angeli propter filias hominum desciverunt a Deo.*²⁴⁸

The same line of thought is worked out more exhaustively in a special treatise entitled *On the Veiling of Virgins*. “They ought to veil themselves, because of a face so perilous, that it threw stumbling blocks as far as heaven”.²⁴⁹

In his book *Against Marcion*, Tertullian expounds upon Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which was considered by Marcion to be the letter to the Laodiceans. Paul’s writing about spiritual wickedness, Tertullian explains, implies that “[a]lso the apostle knew that in the heavens the unclean spirits of the angels operated, which also were entrapped into sinning with the daughters of men,”

*Sciebat enim et Apostolus in coelis operata esse spiritalia nequitiae angelorum scandalizantium in filias hominum.*²⁵⁰

Tertullian discusses broadly how the fallen angels taught women the use of jewellery and cosmetics in his treatise *On the Apparel of Women*,²⁵¹ explaining the activities of the fallen angels in a way comparable to what can be found in 1 En. 8.²⁵²

The works of Tertullian, then, side with the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. As it turns out, the author was familiar with the Enochic tradition and viewed the

²⁴⁷ Tertullian, *De idol.* 4 (PL1:741).

²⁴⁸ Tertullian, *De Oratione* 22:5 (PL 1:1292–1293).

²⁴⁹ *Debet ergo adumbrari facies tam periculosa, quae usque ad coelum scandala iaculata est*, Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 7 (PL 2:948).

²⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion* V,18:14 (PL 2:551).

²⁵¹ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* I,2 and 4 (PL 1:1419–1423).

²⁵² Tertullian was familiar with what the book of Enoch recounted about the fallen angels but is well aware that it is not accepted by some, much as it is not accepted in the Jewish ‘bookcase’, *Scio scripturam Enoch, quae hunc ordinem angelis dedit, non recipi a quibusdam, quia nec in armarium Judaicum admittitur*. Tertullian thinks it possible that Noah took the book with him onto the ark or restituted its contents by divine inspiration after the flood. He adds that Enoch ‘possesses a witness’ from the letter of Jude, *Eo accedit, quod Enoch apud Judam apostolum testimonium possidet*. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* I,3 (PL 1:1421–1422).

story about angels who cohabited with women as one providing a reason for the preservation of virginity.

3.8.8 Origen

Origen²⁵³ explains in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* that not only mankind but also angels have fallen from perfection. By combining Gen 6:2 directly with Jude 6, he explains the ‘sons of God’ to be angels: “Not only man has fallen from perfection into imperfection but also ‘the sons of God who saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and took for themselves from whomever they chose’, that is to say, all ‘those who left their own dwelling place and did not keep their own office’.”

Οὐ μόνος δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τελείου ἐπὶ τὸ ἀτελές, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἰδόντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅτι καλαί εἰσι, καὶ λαβόντες ἑαυτοῖς ἀπὸ πασῶν ὧν ἐξελέξαντο, καὶ ἀπαξαπλῶς πάντες οἱ ἀπολείποντες τὸ ἴδιον οἰκητήριον, καὶ μὴ τηρήσαντες τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχήν.²⁵⁴

In this same commentary, he refutes the gnostic ideas of Herakleon who “says²⁵⁵ to inquire whether some angels can be saved, (namely) those who descended to the daughters of men”.²⁵⁶

According to Origen’s treatise *Against Celsus*, it was argued by Celsus that Jesus was not the only angel coming from heaven to earth. To provide support for this, Celsus referred to the book of Enoch. Origen subtly comments that it apparently escaped Celsus’ attention “that in the churches the books attributed to Enoch are not quite referred to as divine”.²⁵⁷ Origen subsequently admits that Celsus could have discovered in the book of Genesis the narrative about the ‘sons of

²⁵³ Origenes Adamantinus, ca. 185–ca. 254, successor of Clement at the Catechetical School of Alexandria during the time of intensive persecutions of Christians in Alexandria. Later on, he moved to the theological School of Caesarea. Origen was one of the few church fathers who knew Hebrew. Cf. *ANF* 4:405–411.

²⁵⁴ Origen, *Commentariorum in evangelium secundum Ioannem*, 13:37 (PG 14:464).

²⁵⁵ Thus, it is not Origen himself who says this, as Dexinger states, cf. Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode* (WBT 13; Wien: Herder, 1966), 99.

²⁵⁶ Ζητεῖσθαι δὲ φησι περὶ τινῶν ἀγγέλων εἰ σωθήσονται, τῶν κατελθόντων ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων θυγατέρας. Origen, *Comm. in Ioan.* 13:59 (PG 14:516).

²⁵⁷ ὅτι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις οὐ πᾶν φέρεται ὡς θεῖα τὰ ἐπιγεγραμμένα τοῦ Ἑνώχ βιβλία, Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5,54 (PG 11:1268).

God’ and the ‘daughters of men’, but then assures that “already earlier someone²⁵⁸ among us gave the interpretation that this passage is about souls who longed for a human life in a body, which means that the daughters of men, he says, are spoken of metaphorically”.²⁵⁹ Yet, according to Origen, “whatever may be the meaning of the sons of God desiring the daughters of men”,²⁶⁰ Celsus’ claims about Christian teaching are ridiculous.²⁶¹

From these passages it turns out that Origen was aware of the Enochic interpretation of Gen 6:1–4, as he explicitly makes mention of this. But for Origen the Enoch-tradition is – apart from being non-canonical – far too materialistic. In accordance with his exegetical method, he tends to explain the Genesis passage allegorically, understanding the ‘sons of God’ as bodiless souls who long for corporeal existence, something which the book of Genesis metaphorically calls ‘daughters of men’. However, Origen seems to be uncertain about this exegesis because he refers to ‘someone else among us’ and leaves the more precise exegesis open-ended. For the modern reader the intriguing question remains why Origen did not apply the Jewish interpretation which regards the ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the judges’ or ‘mighty ones’, an exegesis which he surely must have known about while compiling his *Hexapla*.

3.8.9 Cyprian

Cyprian²⁶² wrote a treatise *On the Dress of Virgins* to stimulate modesty and chastity, reminding his readers that mankind learnt the art of cosmetics from fallen angels. This description fits the tradition found in *1 En.* 8. According to Cyprian, these are not things from God, who, after all, did not create sheep to be scarlet or purple.²⁶³ “Sinning and apostate angels made all these things known through their

²⁵⁸ Perhaps Philo? Origen “greift sehr häufig auf seinen orthodoxen Vorgänger zurück, ohne ihre Namen zu nennen.” Henry Chadwick, “Origenes” in *Alte Kirche I* (ed. Martin Greschat; Vol. 1 of *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), 152.

²⁵⁹ ὅτι καὶ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν τις ταῦτα ἀνήγαγεν εἰς τὸν περὶ ψυχῶν λόγον, ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ γενομένων τοῦ ἐν σώματι ἀνθρώπων βίου, ἅπερ τροπολογῶν ἔφασκε λελέχθαι θυγατέρας ἀνθρώπων. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5:55 (PG 11:1268).

²⁶⁰ ὅπως ποτ’ ἂν ἔχη καὶ τὰ περὶ τοὺς ἐπιθυμήσαντας θυγατέρων ἀνθρώπων υἱοὺς θεῶν, Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5,55 (PG 11: 1268–1269).

²⁶¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5,55 (PG 11:1268–1269).

²⁶² Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, ca. 200–258, from 248 on bishop of Carthago, died as martyr. Cf. *ANF* 5:474–475.

²⁶³ Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 14 (PL 4:465). See also Commodian, *Instructiones adversus gentium deos* I,33 (PL 5:203–204), who also mentions that the angels taught the art of dying wool. See 3.8.10.

arts when they fell down to succumb to earthly and bad influence and gave up their heavenly vitality.”

*Quae omnia peccatores et apostatae angeli suis artibus prodiderunt quando, ad terrena contagia devoluti, a coelesti vigore recesserunt.*²⁶⁴

Another tractate attributed to Cyprian describes how people who act like the ones whom Paul mentioned in 2 Tim 3:6 “cannot be changed anymore, much as we also know about angels who meddled with women”.²⁶⁵

3.8.10 Commodian

Of the writings of Commodian²⁶⁶ only poems survived. Among them are *Instructions against the Gods of the Heathen*. One verse in this poem recounts the fall of the angels: “When God, the Almighty, beautified the nature of the world / He wanted this earth to be visited by angels / Whose laws they despised as soon as they were sent: / So much was the beauty of women, who turned them aside / That they, being stained, could not return to heaven. / Rebels against God, they uttered words against him. / The Most High therefore uttered his sentence upon them; / From their seed the giants are said to have been born. / Through them on earth arts have been spread; / They taught the dying of wool, and whatever is accomplished. / The mortals erected images for them when they died. / The Almighty, however, because they were of a depraved seed, / did not approve that they, having died, were brought back from death. / In that way wandering now, they ruined many persons: / Especially you who today worship them and pray to them as gods.”

*Cum Deus omnipotens, exornaret mundi naturam, / Visitari voluit terram ab angelis istam, / Legitima cuius spreverunt illi dimissi: / Tanta fuit forma feminarum quae flecteret illos, / Ut coinquinati non possent coelo redire. / Rebelles ex illo contra Deum verba misere. / Altissimus inde sententiam misit in illos; / De semine quorum gigantes nati feruntur. / Ab ipsis in terra artes prolatae fuerunt; / Et tingere lanas docuerent, et quaecumque geruntur. / Mortales et illis mortuis simulacra ponebant. / Omnipotens autem, quod essent de semine pravo, / Non censuit illos recipi defunctos e morte. / Unde modo vagi subvertunt corpora multa: / Maxime quos hodie colitis deos et oratis.*²⁶⁷

The view of Commodian partly concurs with *Jub.* 4:15, stating that the angels were already on earth as instructors of mankind but eventually became unfaithful. The

²⁶⁴ Cyprian, *De hab. virg.* 14 (PL 4:466–467).

²⁶⁵ *De singularitate clericorum*, attributed to Cyprian, but also to Augustin or Origen, 59: *Nos iam non valent flectere, qui novimus et angelos cum feminis cecidisse.* (PL 4:935).

²⁶⁶ Ca. 240, probably bishop in North Africa. ANF 4:369.

²⁶⁷ Commodian, *Instr. adv. gent. deos* I,3 (PL 5:203–204).

influence of the Enochic tradition can be perceived in his mentioning how the giants as offspring of the ‘sons of God’ lived on after their death. For Commodian this explains the origin of idolatry.

3.8.11 Methodius

Methodius²⁶⁸ produced a work entitled *On the Resurrection*, in which he refutes Origen’s thesis whereby the human body fetters the soul. In a part of this work, summarised in a work of Photius, Methodius is quoted as having said “that this is the nature of angels, that they were created by God with the purpose of caring for the structures created by him”.²⁶⁹ The devil (διάβολος), as one of these angels, forfeited this position, “similar to the ones who afterwards lusted after bodies and had intercourse with the daughters of men.”

ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα σαρκῶν ἐρασθέντες, καὶ ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς φιλοτησίαν ὁμιλήσαντες θυγατράσιν.²⁷⁰

Thus, Methodius can be viewed as a representative of the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. The belief that angels were created as guardians of created order concurs with ideas also expressed in the book of *Jubilees*.

3.8.12 Lactantius

In his second book of the *Divine Institutions*, Lactantius²⁷¹ writes about the origin of sin. In chapter 15, he comments on the corruption of angels and the coming into existence of two kinds of demons. God “sent angels to the earth, to protect and develop mankind”,²⁷² Lactantius explains, to prevent the devil from corrupting or destroying mankind. They were commanded not to become contaminated by the

²⁶⁸ Ca. 260–312, bishop of Olympus and Patara, in Lycia, southern coast of modern Turkey, later in Tyre. Mainly known as opponent of Origen. Suffered martyrdom. *ANF* 6:511–512.

²⁶⁹ Τοῦτο γάρ ἡ τῶν ἀγγέλων σύστασις, τῷ Θεῷ ἐπὶ προνοίᾳ γεγονέναι τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ διακεκοσμημένοις. Methodius, *De resurrectione* III,7 (PG 18:293).

²⁷⁰ Methodius, *De resurr.* III,7 (PG 18:293). Also Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315–403) cites this in a long quotation of Methodius in order to refute Origen, cf. Frank Williams, ed. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III (Sects 47–80, De Fide)* (NHS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 141–188. See Epiphanius, *Panarion* II,1, Haeresis 64,21 (PG 41:1104). The angels-interpretation, then, is probably, but not necessarily, Epiphanius’ own view.

²⁷¹ Lucius Cae(c)ilius Firmianus Lactantius, ca. 260–330, probably born in Northern Africa, teacher of rhetoric, invited by the emperor Diocletian to settle in the eastern residence of the empire, Nikomedia. After his conversion to Christianity, he settled in Gaul. The emperor Constantine made him tutor of his son Crispus. Cf. *ANF* 7:5–8.

²⁷² *misit angelos ad tutelam cultumque generis humani*. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* II,15 (PL 6:330).

earth, so that they would not forfeit the dignity of their heavenly nature. However, the devil gradually seduced them into committing vice and “stained them through intercourse with women. Because of their sins in which they had become submerged, they were no longer received in heaven but fell to earth. In this way, the devil made from angels of God accomplices and servants for himself. The ones who were procreated from them, because they were neither angels nor humans, but were of a middle nature, are not received in hell, just as their parents are not admitted in heaven. Thus there came to be two kinds of demons, one heavenly, the other earthly. These are the unclean spirits, the authors of all wickedness which is done.”

*et mulierum congressibus inquinavit. Tum in coelum ob peccata, quibus se immersant, non recepti, ceciderunt in terram. Sic eos diabolus ex angelis Dei suos fecit satellites, ac ministros. Qui autem sunt ex his procreati, quia neque angeli, neque homines fuerunt, sed mediam quamdam naturam gerentes, non sunt ad inferos recepti, sicut in coelum parentes eorum. Ita duo genera daemonum facta sunt, unum coeleste, alterum terrenum. Hi sunt immundi spiritus, malorum, quae geruntur, auctores.*²⁷³

Interestingly, Lactantius shows views similar to those found in *Jub.* 4:15, according to which the angels’ original task was to develop mankind.²⁷⁴ His opinion on the origin of demons, however, concurs with the Enoch-tradition.

3.8.13 Alexander of Lycopolis

One of the minor writers, Alexander of Lycopolis,²⁷⁵ wrote the tractate *On the Teachings of the Manicheans*. In this treatise, he labels the stories about giants as ‘outright myths’²⁷⁶ and therefore as tales which ought to be understood allegorically. He approaches Gen 6:1–4 in a similar way: “When Jewish history says that ‘the angels came together to have sexual intercourse with the daughters of men’: such an expression signifies the nourishing powers of the soul which came from above to the things on this earth.”

οἶον ὅταν ἡ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἱστορία φῇ, Τοὺς ἀγγέλους ταῖς θυγατράσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς ἀφροδισίων συνελθυθέναι μίξιν· τὰς γὰρ θρεπτικὰς δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ἄνω ἐπὶ τὰ τῇδε ἡ τοιαύτη προφορὰ τοῦ λόγου σημαίνει.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ Lactantius, *Div. inst.* II,15 (PL 6:330–331).

²⁷⁴ See 3.4.4.

²⁷⁵ Around 301, bishop of Lycopolis, in upper Egypt. Cf. *ANF* 6:411–413.

²⁷⁶ ἄντικρυς μῦθος ἐστίν, Alexander of Lycopolis, *De placitis Manichaeorum* 25 (PG 18:445).

²⁷⁷ Alexander of Lycopolis, *De plac. Manich.* 25 (PG 18:445).

Alexander clearly opts for an allegorical interpretation of Gen 6:1–4, probably in accordance with Neoplatonism, which originated in Alexandria in the third century.²⁷⁸

3.8.14 Eusebius

Eusebius²⁷⁹ mentions in his *Preparation for the Gospel* how Hesiod divided rational beings into four groups: gods, demons, heroes, and humans.²⁸⁰ Heathen worship is, according to Eusebius, not addressed to the gods but to evil demons. Eusebius subsequently suggests that the story told in Gen 6:1–4 could be the background for pagan tales about giants and demons which later ensued in the myths about the gods. “Possibly what is said in the divine Scripture about the giants before the deluge deals with such things; and it is about the ones that were engendered by them, about whom it is said: ‘When the angels of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful, they took from them as wives from whomever they chose: from them were born the giants who were famous of old.’ For someone might say, that these (demons) are those (giants), and that their spirits were deified by later (generations of) man, and that their battles, the disagreements among them and their wars are told as the things about the gods.”

Μήποτε ἄρα τοιαῦτα ἦν τὰ περὶ τῶν πρὸ τοῦ κατακλυσμοῦ γιγάντων ἐν τῇ
θείᾳ Γραφῇ λεγόμενα· τὰ τε περὶ τῶν τούτους γεγεννηκότων, περὶ ὧν εἴρηται·
Ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅτι καλαί εἰσιν,
ἔλαβον ἑαυτοῖς γυναῖκας ἐκ πασῶν ὧν ἐξελέξαντο· ἀφ’ ὧν ἐγεννήθησαν οἱ
γίγαντες οἱ ὀνομαστοὶ ἐξ αἰῶνος. Εἴποι γὰρ ἂν τις, τούτους ἐκείνους εἶναι,
καὶ τὰ ἐκείνων πνεύματα παρὰ τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα ἀνθρώποις τεθεοποιημένα καὶ
τὰς ἐκείνων μάχας, τὰς τε πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαστάσεις, καὶ τοὺς πολέμους, ταῦτ’
εἶναι τὰ ὡς περὶ θεῶν μυθεύμενα.²⁸¹

Even though Eusebius connects the story of the ‘sons of God’ in a traditional way with angels and demons, and in doing so he does not deny all reality behind pagan cult, in his very wording (‘someone might say’) a certain distance and scepticism is perceptible towards Greek mythology about gods and giants.

²⁷⁸ Neoplatonism as a philosophical school emerged about 245 c.e. when Plotinus moved from Alexandria to Rome, where he began to teach his interpretation of Plato. One of Plotinus’ teachers was Ammonius Saccas, who founded his school in Alexandria around 200 c.e., cf. Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), 1–6.

²⁷⁹ Ca. 260–ca. 340, bishop of Caesarea, writer of the famous *Ecclesiastical History*. Cf. *NPNF*² 1:5–11.

²⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* V,4 (PG 21:320).

²⁸¹ Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* V,4 (PG 21:324).

3.8.15 Cyril of Jerusalem

Cyril of Jerusalem²⁸² wrote several *Catechetical Lectures*. These instructions for the ‘enlightened’ (φωτιζόμενοι) were meant for candidates preparing for immediate baptism.²⁸³ In his *Second Catechetical Lecture*, Cyril focuses on repentance and remission of sins. To demonstrate God’s patience, he relates how God waited one hundred years before he sent the flood.²⁸⁴ “The giants sinned, and then much lawlessness was poured over the earth, and because of that the deluge had to come.”

Ἡμαρτον οἱ γίγαντες, καὶ παρανομία πολλὴ τότε τῆς γῆς κατεχύθη, καὶ διὰ ταύτην κατακλυσμὸς ἔμελλεν ἐπερξεσθαι.²⁸⁵

Here the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 is only mentioned in a condensed way because the author’s aim is to emphasise the extended period of God’s patience. It is only said that the giants committed evil, there is no mention of the angels or of the origin of the giants. Hence it can be assumed that Cyril either took the angels-interpretation for granted or that he intentionally avoided referring to angels when using Gen 6:1–4 as an illustration.

3.8.16 Ambrosius

Ambrosius²⁸⁶ refers in several of his works to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4. In his book *On Noah and the Ark*, he comments on Gen 6:4 concerning the giants: “The narrator of the divine Scripture did not want to consider these giants as sons of the earth²⁸⁷ in the sense of the poets, but asserts that they issued from angels and women.”

*Non poetarum more gigantes illos terrae filios vult videri divinae Scripturae conditor: sed ex angelis et mulieribus generatus asserit.*²⁸⁸

²⁸² Ca. 315–386, consecrated as bishop of Jerusalem around 350, was present at the Council of Constantinople, 381. Cf. *NPNF*² 7:3–17.

²⁸³ Cf. *NPNF*² 7:25.

²⁸⁴ Gen 5:32 combined with Gen 6:6.

²⁸⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis secunda* 8 (PG 33:392).

²⁸⁶ Ca. 340–397, bishop of Milan. Cf. *NPNF*² 10:12–15.

²⁸⁷ The expression ‘sons of the earth’ refers to the ancient Greek etymology of the word γίγας, cf. e.g. Philastrius, *De haeresibus* 108 (PL 12:1224): *Gigas enim per etymologiam, terrae monstrum dicitur, ex duobus nominibus compositum*. Cf. *Acts Thom.* 32 (See 3.4.11), which describes them as γηγενεῖς παῖδες, with possible connotations: ‘earthborn, primeval, Titanic’.

²⁸⁸ Ambrosius, *De Noe et Arca* I,3:8 (PL 14:385). His *Apology of the Prophet David Addressed to Theodosius* mentions in passing that “also heavenly angels, as Scripture commemorates, have been expelled from their power and influence”, *etiam angeli coelorum, ut Scriptura commemorat, de sua virtute et gratia dejecti sunt*, Ambrosius, *Apologia prophetae David* 1:4 (PL 14:894). However, this reference (*ut Scriptura commemorat*) may be mainly to 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6.

The 8th Sermon of the *Exposition on Psalm 118* recounts Gen 6:2 in a short treatise on the activities of the devil and his relation to the angels: “Finally it is written that angels loved daughters of men”, *denique scriptum est quia angeli amaverunt filias hominum*.²⁸⁹ Also in his treatise *Concerning Virgins*, Ambrosius refers to the fall of the angels: “How splendid it is that angels have fallen from heaven into the world because of their intemperance but that virgins have passed from the world to heaven because of their chastity.”

*Quam praeclarum autem angelos propter intemperantiam suam in saeculum cecidisse de coelo, virgines propter castimoniam in coelum transisse de saeculo.*²⁹⁰

In this matter, Ambrosius advocates throughout his writings the angels-interpretation of the ‘sons of God’. With the exception of his work about Noah, which is of a more exegetical character, all the other references are mainly used for illustration.

3.8.17 Sulpicius Severus

Sulpicius Severus²⁹¹ wrote a *Sacred History* in which he describes world history from creation until his own time. He recounts Gen 6:1–4 in the following way: “By this time, when the human kind had become abundant, certain angels, whose place was in heaven, were captivated by the beautiful appearance of virgins, and pursued illicit desires; and even degenerated from their own nature and origin, left the higher places they inhabited, and mingled themselves in marriages with mortal women. These angels gradually sowed noxious habits, by which they corrupted the human offspring: from these unions giants are said to have come forth, as the mixing of diverse kinds produces monsters.”

*Qua tempestate, cum iam humanum genus abundaret, angeli, quibus coelum sedes erat, speciosarum forma virginum apti, illicitas cupiditates appetierunt; ac naturae suae originisque degeneres, relictis superioribus, quorum incolae erant, matrimoniis se mortalibus miscuerunt. Hi paulatim mores noxios conserentes, humanum corrumpere progeniem: ex quorum coitu gigantes editi esse dicuntur, cum diversae inter se naturae permixtio monstra gigneret.*²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Ambrosius, *Expositio in psalmum CXVIII*, Sermo 8:58 (PL 15:1388).

²⁹⁰ Ambrosius, *De virginibus* I,8:53 (PL 16:214).

²⁹¹ Ca. 363–420, trained as an orator, attached himself to Martin of Tours. Cf. *NPNF*² 11:2–3.

²⁹² Sulpicius Severus, *Historia sacra* I,2 (PL 20:96–97).

Thus, Sulpicius Severus' *Sacred History* presumes the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. In the expression 'dicuntur', 'they are said', perhaps some doubt can be perceived,²⁹³ but probably the term is only used as a narrative convention.²⁹⁴

3.8.18 Julius Africanus

The earliest among the Christian writers known to have proposed the Sethites-interpretation as an alternative exegesis to the angels-interpretation is Julius Africanus.²⁹⁵ He wrote a *Chronology*²⁹⁶ of world history of which only fragments are extant. Africanus refers to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4²⁹⁷ in the following way: "When people multiplied on earth, angels of heaven came together with daughters of men. In some copies I found *the sons of God*. Therefore, what is said is²⁹⁸ – as I suppose – that the descendants of Seth are called 'sons of God' by the Spirit, on account of the righteous ones and the patriarchs who have sprung from him until the time of the Saviour. But he designates the descendants of Cain as the seed of men, as they had nothing of the divine in them any longer, because of the wickedness of their race, and also because of the dissimilarity of their nature, so that, when they were mingled together, the indignation of God was evoked. But if it should be supposed that these refer to angels, then it must be taken as those who deal with magic and witchcraft, and who taught the knowledge of numbers and of the movement of the heavenly bodies to the women from whom they brought forth the giant children,

²⁹³ So Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 101.

²⁹⁴ "Vague attributions like 'it is believed', 'some people say', or 'there is a tradition' are a common device, popularized by Herodotus and mocked by Lucian." William Adler, "Sextus Julius Africanus and the Roman Near East in the Third Century," *JTS* 55 no. 2 (2004): 528.

²⁹⁵ Sextus Julius Africanus, died after 240. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 209–210. Adler, "Sextus Julius Africanus," 521–522, concludes – based on a fragment of Africanus' *Kestoi* from the Oxyrhynchus papyri – that Africanus was born in Jerusalem after the city was renamed as Colonia Aelia Capitolina, the name that Africanus mentions as 'his former patria'. Cf. idem, "The *Chronographiae* of Julius Africanus and Its Jewish Antecedents," *ZAC* 14 no. 3 (2010): 497.

²⁹⁶ The *Chronographia* consisted originally of five books and was written in 221, cf. Martin Wallraff, "The Beginnings of Christian Universal History From Tatian to Julius Africanus," *ZAC* 14 no. 3 (2010): 551.

²⁹⁷ The section bears the heading 'Αφρικανου περι των ἐγγεγόρων, "From Africanus about the Watchers", yet, it is likely that this title was given by Georgius Syncellus in whose *Ecloga Chronographica* the fragment survived. Cf. Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, and William Adler, eds., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments* (GCS 15; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 48.

²⁹⁸ Another possible translation is: 'this is to be understood figuratively' or 'this is related mythically', cf. Wallraff et al., eds., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments*, 49.

because of whom, when wickedness culminated, God decided to destroy the whole (disobedient)²⁹⁹ race of living beings in the deluge.”

Πλήθους ἀνθρώπων γενομένου ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἄγγελοι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ θυγατράσιν ἀνθρώπων συνῆλθον. Ἐν ἐνίοις ἀντιγράφοις εὗρον, οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μυθεύεται δὲ, ὡς οἶμαι, ἀπὸ τοῦ Σῆθ, ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος, οἱ υἱοὶ Θεοῦ προσαγορεύονται, διὰ τοὺς ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ γενεαλογουμένους δικαίους τε καὶ πατριάρχας, ἄχρι τοῦ Σωτῆρος· τοὺς δ’ ἀπὸ Καῖν ἀνθρώπους ἀποκαλεῖν σποράν, ὡς οὐδέτι θεῖον ἐσχηκότας διὰ πονηρίαν γένους, καὶ διὰ τῆς φύσεως ἀνόμοιον, ἐπιμιχθέντων αὐτῶν, τὴν ἀγανάκτησιν ποιήσασθαι τὸν Θεόν.³⁰⁰ Εἰ δὲ ἐπ’ ἀγγέλων νοοίτο ἔχειν τούτους, τοὺς περὶ μαγείας καὶ γοητείας, ἔτει δὲ ἀριθμῶν κινήσεως, τῶν μετεώρων ταῖς γυναιξὶ τὴν γνώσιν παραδεδωκέναι, ἀφ’ ὧν ἐποίησαν τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς γίγαντας, δι’ οὓς τῆς κακίας ἐπιγενομένης, ἔγνω πᾶν ἀφανίσαι ζώων γένος ὁ Θεὸς ἐν κατακλυσμῷ ἄπιστον.³⁰¹

Based on the variant reading ‘sons of God’ instead of ‘angels of God’, Julius Africanus proposes the Sethites-interpretation. However, he leaves open the possibility of the angels-interpretation, as this followed more naturally from other manuscripts at his disposal.³⁰² “Africanus withholds judgment as to which text was superior, preferring instead to explore the interpretative implications of accepting one or the other.”³⁰³ The reading ‘sons of God’ suggested to him the Sethites-interpretation but the reading ‘angels of God’ rather supported the story found in the Enochic³⁰⁴ interpretative tradition.

²⁹⁹ Thus PG 10:65. The word ἄπιστον is lacking in one of the manuscripts of Syncellus. It possibly can be a gloss either by Syncellus himself or by an early editor, to be translated as ‘not credible’, expressing disbelief in the interpretation that angels actually had intercourse with women. Cf. Wallraff et al., eds., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments*, 51 nt. 4. Yet, it fits also with the word τὸ γένος.

³⁰⁰ The text seems corrupt but is intelligible. PG 10:66 nt. 35, proposes ‘εἰς ἀγανάκτησιν κινήσασθαι’.

³⁰¹ Julius Africanus, *Chronographia* 2 (PG 10:65). Cf. Wallraff et al., eds., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments*, 48–51.

³⁰² Africanus apparently used manuscripts of the LXX. His skills in Hebrew are a matter of dispute: his own asserted familiarity with this language was met with polite scepticism by Origen, cf. Adler, “The *Chronographiae* of Julius Africanus,” 498–499.

³⁰³ Adler, “The *Chronographiae* of Julius Africanus,” 508.

³⁰⁴ Africanus must have been aware that the authority of the book of Enoch was not universally accepted, cf. Adler, “The *Chronographiae* of Julius Africanus,” 508. However, Africanus could readily have accepted the Enochic tradition because he had a somewhat open attitude towards magic, it appearing to be unrelated to his system of beliefs, cf. Francis C. R. Thee, *Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic* (HUT 19; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1984), 5–6.

It would, however, be interesting to know the provenance of his Sethites-interpretation. Is Julius Africanus the inventor of this exegesis or was this interpretation already handed down to him through previous sources?³⁰⁵

According to Jörg Frey, a reference to the Sethites-interpretation is already found in the literature of Qumran. This opinion has not met with much response in exegetical literature. But if true, it would crucially change the view on the provenance and date of the Sethites-interpretation.

The expression *שֵׁת בְּנֵי* occurs in 4Q417, frag. 2 col. I:15.³⁰⁶ However, the referent of this expression *שֵׁת בְּנֵי* is unclear. It is explained by some exegetes with the help of Num 24:17c: *שֵׁת בְּנֵי שֵׁת וְקִרְקֹר כָּל מוֹאָב וְקִרְקֹר כָּל בְּנֵי שֵׁת*, “he shall crush the temples (forehead) of Moab, and destroy all the sons of Sheth”.³⁰⁷ The expression ‘sons of Sheth’ in Num 24:17 in its turn has been explained with the help of Jer 48:45c *שֵׁת בְּנֵי שֵׁת וְקִרְקֹר כָּל מוֹאָב וְקִרְקֹר כָּל בְּנֵי שֵׁת*, “it has consumed the forehead of Moab, the hairy skull of the sons of strife”.³⁰⁸ Anyhow, in Num 24:17c the *שֵׁת בְּנֵי* are mentioned in parallel with Moab, which suggests that the expression refers to a tribe in Transjordan.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 110, suggests that the Sethites-interpretation has its provenance in Syriac theology. The *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*, where the Sethites-interpretation is also present (see 3.8.6), probably have their origin in Syria as well. But possibly Pseudo-Clement’s *Rec.* is from a later date than the work of Julius Africanus. Julius Africanus lived for some time at the court of king Abgar the Great of Edessa, cf. Adler, “Sextus Julius Africanus,” 530–539. Perhaps this is where he was exposed to the Sethites-interpretation. H. M. Ohmann, “Zonen Gods en dochteren der mensen in Gen. 6:1–4: Een oude kwestie,” *Ref.* 68 no. 2 (1992): 21–22, suggests gnostic influences to be present in the contrast between Sethites and Cainites. See also Uwe-Karsten Plisch, “Sethianismus,” *RGK* 7:1236–1238, and Roman Hanig, “Kainiten,” *RGK* 4:738. The *Apocalypse of Adam* from the Nag Hammadi texts is an example of such a gnostic document – to be dated between the first and the fourth century C.E. – in which Seth’s posterity is equated with a branch of the gnostics, cf. G. MacRae, “Apocalypse of Adam,” *OTP* 1:707–719. Cf. also Frank Williams, ed. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1–46)* (2d ed.; NHMS 63; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 276–282, where Epiphanius mentions the sect of the Sethians.

³⁰⁶ The expression is reconstructed in 4Q418 frags. 43.44.45 col. I:12. Cf. Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning for the Understanding Ones: Reading and Reconstructing the Fragmentary Early Jewish Sapiential Text 4QInstruction* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 86–88.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London: Routledge, 1996), 55. Numbers 24:17 is quoted more often in the Qumran scrolls, namely in 4Q175:13; 1QM col. XI:6; CD-A col. VII:21.

³⁰⁸ Cf. e.g. Jagersma, *comm. Num* (POT) 1988, 162.

³⁰⁹ Cf. John Strugnell, Daniel J. Harrington, and Torleif Elgvin, *Qumran Cave 4 XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2* (DJD 34; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 163. Others see in the expression *שֵׁת בְּנֵי* a reference to the nomadic tribe of the Sutu who are mentioned in Egyptian texts, cf. Budd, *comm. Num* (WBC) 1984, 256. Niehr suggests that the expression refers to the Egyptian god Seth as opponent of the God of Israel, cf. H. Niehr, “Die Weisheit des Achikar und der *musar lammebin* im Vergleich,” in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (ed. C. Hempel, A. Lange, and H. Lichtenberger; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 186.

As already noted, according to Frey, the passage from 4Q417 in which the **שִׁיר בְּנֵי** are mentioned, refers to the tradition about the fall of the angels during the time of the sons of Seth.³¹⁰ If true, this would be the earliest reference to a Sethites-interpretation. However, the passage from 4Q417 is difficult to interpret, therefore few things can be concluded from it. At most it can be said that the wisdom text 4Q417 appears to mention the **שִׁיר בְּנֵי** as opponents of God (note that their punishment appears to be mentioned in 4Q417 frag. 2, col.I:14) in contrast to the line of Enosh and to a ‘spiritual people’ (**עַם רִיחַ**, 4Q417 frag. 2, col.I:16). Apart from that, there is no evidence that 4Q417 refers to an early form of the Sethites-interpretation.

3.8.19 Athanasius

Athanasius³¹¹ opts immediately for a Sethites-interpretation. In his *Interpretations from the O.T.*, he answers the question as to who are to be considered as the ‘sons of God’ in Gen. 6:1–4 with the explanation: “From Adam Seth was born, who was the third after Abel, and from Seth Enosh was born. He hoped to be called the Lord and God. Therefore the children born from him bear the name ‘sons of God’, just like we also from the name of the master Christ are called Christians. The race of Seth was segregated and not mixed with the race of Cain because of the curse which was laid on him by the God of the universe. But later, when they observed how beautiful the daughters of Cain’s family were, they became enchanted and took them for themselves as wives, thus ruining their ancestral nobility.”

Ἐκ μὲν τοῦ Ἀδὰμ ἐγεννήθη ὁ Σήθ· τρίτος γὰρ ἦν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀβελ· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ Σήθ ὁ Ἐνὼς. Οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸν Κύριον καὶ Θεόν. Ὅθεν οἱ ἐκ τούτου γεννηθέντες παῖδες υἱοὶ Θεοῦ ἐχρημάτισαν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς τοῦ δεσπότης Χριστοῦ προσηγορίας Χριστιανοὶ καλούμεθα. Καί γὰρ κεχώριστο τοῦ Σήθ τὸ γένος, καὶ οὐκ ἐμίγνυτο τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ Κάϊν διὰ τὴν ἐπενεχθεῖσαν αὐτῷ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων ἀράν. Ὑστερον καὶ εὐειδείς θεασάμενοι τὰς θυγατέρας τῆς τοῦ Κάϊν συγγενείας, καὶ καταβελχθέντες, ἔλαβον αὐτὰς ἑαυτοῖς εἰς γυναῖκας, καὶ διέφθειραν τὴν οἰκείαν συγγένειαν.³¹²

³¹⁰ Cf. Jörg Frey, “The Notion of Flesh in 4QInstruction and the Background of Pauline Usage,” in *Sapiential, Liturgical, and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet* (ed. Daniel K. Falk, F. García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 218.

³¹¹ Ca. 296–373. Pupil of the Alexandrian School, bishop of Alexandria, attended the council of Nicea in 325, key figure in the opposition against Arianism, in exegesis he hardly used any form of allegory. See J. J. Brogan, “Athanasius,” in *DMBI*, 129–133.

³¹² Athanasius, *Interpretationes ex V.T., Quaestio* 65 (PG 28:740).

Athanasius is the first attested Greek church father who exegetically underpins the Sethites-interpretation with the help of the Septuagint translation of Gen 4:26. This passage reads: “Enosh hoped to invoke (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι) the name of the Lord God”.³¹³ The verbal form ἐπικαλεῖσθαι is ambivalent. Understood as a middle voice, it means ‘to call upon, to invoke’, as passive voice ‘to be called by the name of, to be surnamed’. Evidence suggests that a middle voice was meant by the Septuagint as all early references take it that way.³¹⁴ Yet, later on, ecclesiastical authors from the fourth century onwards sided with a passive interpretation, taking the verse to mean that Enosh himself was called by God’s name or even called ‘God’.³¹⁵ If the Sethite Enosh was called by the name of God, then, logically, his sons were ‘sons of God’. That is also the reason why adherents of the Sethites-interpretation regularly mention both Seth and Enosh together.

Athanasius’ exegesis is the first documented explanation in the texts of the Greek church fathers which interpreted the infinitive ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in Gen 4:26 as a passive. This had a visible influence on later exegesis of Gen 6:1–4. However, Athanasius’ interpretation of Gen 4:26 may be derived from Syriac contemporaries, for a similar approach is found in Eusebius of Emesa and Ephrem the Syrian. Yet, for them, Gen 4:26 appears to have less a key function than for the Greek church fathers. It can be said of the provenance of Athanasius’ interpretation that it points in the direction of a derivation from the Syriac fathers; that which was an additional element in their exegesis becomes an essential feature in the exegesis of the Greek fathers.

3.8.20 Eusebius of Emesa

Prior to 1980, fragments of Eusebius of Emesa’s³¹⁶ commentary on Genesis were mainly known from *catena* manuscripts and from a commentary of Procopius of Gaza but in the same year a newly discovered ancient Armenian translation of his

³¹³ Ἐνώς, οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ. LXX Gen 4:26.

³¹⁴ See Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (SBLMS 30; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 10–11.51–62.

³¹⁵ See the summary in 3.8.35.

³¹⁶ Ca. 300–ca. 359, representative of the so-called Antiochene school. Cf. S. Müller-Abels in *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur* (ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 215–216.

commentary was published.³¹⁷ The passage expounding on Gen 4:26³¹⁸ reads: “In Hebrew it does not say so,³¹⁹ but ‘This one hoped to be called with the name of the Lord God’, that means, ‘to be called son of God and God’, because the descendants of Seth became the righteous ones, hence Scripture says later on, in consistence with itself: ‘And the sons of God saw the daughters of men’, that means ‘the righteous ones’, because there was no mixing of the sons of Seth with those of Cain.”

Ἐν τῷ Ἑβραϊκῷ³²⁰ οὐχ οὕτως λέγει ἀλλ’, Οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τῷ ὀνόματι Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ· τοῦτ’ ἔστιν Υἱὸς Θεοῦ λέγεσθαι καὶ Θεός· οἱ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ Σὴθ δίκαιοι γεγόνασιν· ὅθεν ἡ Γραφή ἐαυτῇ ἀκολουθοῦσα μετὰ ταῦτά φησι· Καὶ ἴδον οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων· τοῦτ’ ἔστιν οἱ δίκαιοι· οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐπιμιξία τῶν υἱῶν Σὴθ πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ Καὶν.³²¹

Similarly to Athanasius’ exegesis, this fragment also combines the passive voice understanding of ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in Gen 4:26 with the interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as referring to Sethites in Gen 6:1–4. The author paraphrases Gen 4:26 in such a way that Seth was called both ‘God’ and ‘son of God’. Interestingly enough, this Sethites-interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4, based upon the explanation of Gen 4:26 in a way that Seth hoped to be called by the name of God, is found in the works of his contemporaries Athanasius and Ephrem the Syrian as well. Because Eusebius of Emesa was a Syrian who came from Edessa, yet studied successively in Caesarea, Antioch and Alexandria, he may well have been a link between early Syriac and Antiochian exegesis as well as an intermediary connection with the Alexandrian tradition.³²²

³¹⁷ Cf. R. B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa’s Commentary on Genesis* (TEG; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 3.19–26.

³¹⁸ The same passage is also found in Procopius of Gaza (see 3.8.34). Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation*, 63 nt. 49, assumes the attribution to Eusebius to be correct.

³¹⁹ Eusebius possibly accentuates here the Hebrew בְּשֵׁם of Gen 4:26, the word he translated with the dative τῷ ὀνόματι, contrary to the LXX’s accusative τὸ ὄνομα. Cf. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation*, 63. “[A] factor which makes Eusebius’ work stand out among the commentaries of his colleagues [is] the appeal to alternative readings and his interest in translation problems.” Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress*, 4.

³²⁰ It is disputed whether Eusebius of Emesa had independent access to the Hebrew text. He can have made use of informants or may have compared to Syriac, which he knew to be a ‘neighbour language’. Cf. Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress*, 47–64.

³²¹ Eusebius of Emesa, *Fragmenta exegetica in Pentateuchum*, II (PG 86:556).

³²² Cf. A. G. P. Janson and L. Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër: Uitleg van het boek Genesis* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 22–23; Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress*, 3.

3.8.21 Didymus the Blind

Didymus the Blind³²³ applies the passive interpretation of ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in Gen 4:26 as referring to the *imago Dei*: “(Scripture) says: *He hoped to invoke the name of the Lord*”, Οὗτός, φησιν, ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου. This is a quotation from the Septuagint, in which the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι (‘to invoke’) most likely has to be understood as a middle voice. However, in the sequel of his explanation it turns out that Didymus takes it more as a passive voice (‘to be called with’): “which is a practice fitting to a man of virtue, for this is the hope to resemble the real God as much as possible; to hope to be called by the name of the Lord God supposes someone who submits himself both to divine authority and doctrine.”

προσήκουσα δὲ αὕτη ἀνθρώπῳ ἐναρέτῳ πράξις· ἐλπὶς δὲ ἡ τῷ ὄντι³²⁴ αὕτη ἐστὶν τὸ ὁμοιωθῆναι τῷ Θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ἐλπίζειν δὲ ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ ἅμα καὶ ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν διδασκαλίαν τὴν θείαν ἐστὶν ἑαυτὸν ὑποτάττοντος.³²⁵

Didymus, however, does not correlate this explanation to Gen 6:2. He adheres to the angels-interpretation and discusses several solutions to the question of what actually happened: “Many wondered whether angels united themselves physically [... or] that something else is said in the passage.”

Ζητεῖται παρὰ πολλοῖς πότερον ἄγγελοι φύσει συνεμίγησαν ταῖς γυναιξίν³²⁶ ἕτερον ἔχει τό λεγόμενον.³²⁷

Didymus mentions several alternative solutions: some exegetes say that demons begot children with women, something which is impossible according to Didymus. Others give an allegorical explanation, meaning that angels wanted to have physical bodies. Still others explain the text in a way that it speaks of demons which made

³²³ Ca. 310–ca. 398. Cf. B. Neuschäfer in *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, 168–170. Jerome called Didymus the Blind ‘the seer’ (*videns*), cf. Richard A. Layton, *Didymus the Blind and His Circle in Late Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 172 nt. 51.

³²⁴ ὁ ὢν, ‘the one who is’, is an epithet for Christ in the iconography of the Eastern Church, cf. Rev 1:4.8.

³²⁵ Pierre Nautin, *Didyme l’Aveugle sur la Genèse: Texte inédit d’après un papyrus de Toura* (SC 233; Vol. 1; Paris: Cerf, 1976), 332.

³²⁶ Some letters are missing, proposed is ἡ νοῦν by Pierre Nautin, *Didyme l’Aveugle sur la Genèse: Texte inédit d’après un papyrus de Toura* (SC 244; Vol 2; Paris: Cerf, 1978), 24, resulting in the translation: “or that what is said has another sense.”

³²⁷ Pierre Nautin, *Didyme l’Aveugle sur la Genèse: Texte inédit d’après un papyrus de Toura* (SC 244; Vol 2; Paris: Cerf, 1978), 24.

use of evil men, with the help of whom the demons in a certain way could unite with women through the sins of these men.³²⁸

3.8.22 Ephrem the Syrian

The hymnographer and theologian Ephrem the Syrian³²⁹ mentions the ‘sons of God’ in the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 as “chaste ones, who suddenly yielded to sin”, in one of his hymns on the nativity of Christ.³³⁰ Similarly, he mentions “Seth, Enosh and Cainan who were called sons of God”.³³¹ In his *Hymns on Paradise*, he describes the Cainites poetically as the ones who lived in the lower territories, far from Paradise, and the Sethites as the ones who lived on the slope of a mountain still close to the fence of Paradise. These Sethites were called ‘sons of God’ and descended to take the daughters of Cain as wives.³³² The same line of thought about daughters of Cain who seduce Sethites is found in his *Commentary on Genesis*.³³³ In Ephrem’s commentary, the explanation of Gen 6:1–4 forms a coherent unity with the preceding chapters. According to Ephrem in his comment on Gen 4:23–24, the curse on Cain would come into effect only after the seventh generation. Indeed, as Ephrem explains, after the seventh generation only girls were born to the Cainites, which meant that the Cainite tribe would die out. Ephrem sees this conclusion confirmed by Gen 6:1, implying that ‘man’ in Gen 6:1 pertains to the Cainites. Therefore the Cainites deliberately made their daughters attractive for the sons of Seth, with the purpose of assuring the continued existence of their people, and in such a way to circumvent by ruse the punishment on Cain. By mixing with the Sethites, the Cainites expected to receive grace instead of the foreordained doom. Until then,

³²⁸ Cf. Pierre Nautin, *Didyme l'Aveugle sur la Genèse: Texte inédit d'après un papyrus de Toura* (SC 244; Vol 2; Paris: Cerf, 1978), 24–25.

³²⁹ Ca. 306–373, born in Nisibis, Nusaybin in modern Turkey, studied at the School of Nisibis, founded when Christianity reached the city. After the city was ceded to the Persians, Ephrem joined the exodus of Christians to Edessa where he became a teacher and an ascetic. Ephrem was present at the council of Nicea in 325 as personal assistant of his bishop. Cf. *NPNF*² 13:197–225.

³³⁰ Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity* I:22. Cf. François Graffin and François Cassingena-Trévedy, eds., *Éphrem de Nisibe: Hymnes sur la nativité* (SC 459; Paris: Cerf, 2001), 33.

³³¹ Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity* I:48. Cf. Graffin, *Éphrem de Nisibe: Hymnes sur la nativité* (SC 459), 38.

³³² Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* I:11. Cf. René Lavenant and François Graffin, eds., *Éphrem de Nisibe: Hymnes sur le paradis* (SC 137; Paris: Cerf, 1968), 40.

³³³ Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (Fathers of the Church 91; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 132. See also D. A. B. Caillau, ed., *S. Ephraem I: Commentarium in Genesim*. *Collectio Selecta Ss. Ecclesiae Patrum* 34; Paris: Méquignon-Havard, 1832), 80: *Filios Dei etiam filios Seth appellavit, qui utpote filii justi Seth, populus Dei dicti sunt. (Comm. in Gen. 6:2).*

Ephrem notes, the Sethites were not willing to have contact with the Cainites, therefore Lamech killed Cain and one of Cain's sons,³³⁴ in order to remove the main barrier between the two peoples. The plan turned out to be successful, helped by the animal meat they offered as food to the Sethites and by the music they played for them. Subsequently, the sons of Seth moved from their high country to descend to the home of the Cainite maidens.³³⁵

Ephrem calls the Sethites 'sons of God' – in a similar way as his contemporaries Eusebius of Emesa and Athanasius – with the help of the translation of Gen 4:26 which he interpreted as speaking of Seth as one who hoped to be called by the name of the Lord after Enosh was born. Ephrem interprets the verb 'to call' in this verse to be a passive voice, probably based on his reading of the Septuagint, for it is difficult to see how this understanding can be derived from a Syriac translation.³³⁶

Interestingly, Ephrem reads the expression 'sons of God' in Gen 6:2 as 'sons of the gods' (note the plural), and identifies them as sons of Seth.³³⁷ Yet, in his comment on Gen 6:4, he alternatively interprets 'sons of God' as 'judges' who come down to marry the daughters of men.³³⁸ This alternative interpretation, with

³³⁴ Ephrem's explanation of Gen 4:23 in which Lamech is reported to say: "I killed a man for wounding me and a young man for striking me."

³³⁵ Cf. A. G. P. Janson and L. Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër: Uitleg van het boek Genesis* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 53–55. The same view is expressed in the *Cave of Treasures*, *SpTh* 6:1–23, cf. Alexander Toepel, *Die Adam- und Seth-Legenden im Syrischen 'Buch der Schatzhöhle': Ein quellenkritische Untersuchung* (CSCO 618; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 205–207. *Cav. Tr.* is dated to the late sixth, early seventh century, cf. Toepel, *Adam- und Seth-Legenden*, 6.

³³⁶ Ephrem shifts in his explanation from the active voice 'to call, to call upon' to a passive, 'to be called (with the name of)'. Cf. Janson and Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër*, 86 nt. 253. Similarly Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (SBLMS 30; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 92–93. Both a passive and an active understanding of the verb 'to call' in Gen 4:26 is found in Isho'dad of Merv, cf. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation*, 97–104.

³³⁷ Latin translation: R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* (CSCO 153 / Scriptores Syri 72; Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955), 44. Ephrem reads 'alâhê, 'gods', cf. Janson and Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër*, 88 nt. 260. The Peshitta provides a transcription of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים, see 3.1.11. Text: R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* (CSCO 152 / Scriptores Syri 71; Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955), 55.

³³⁸ See Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum*, CSCO 153, 45: "quia ingressi sunt iudices ad filias hominum et peperunt eis gigantes a saeculo, gigantes famosus". See also Caillau, *S. Ephraem*, 82. The same is found in the Armenian translation of Ephrem's commentary, see Edward G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 573; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), XXX.

doubtless Jewish exegetical influence,³³⁹ is not fully incorporated into his exegesis because he keeps calling these ‘judges’ Sethites. Ephrem does not provide any clarification for the provenance of the word ‘judges’. He explains that the giants were taller than Cainites because Cainites were of a smaller and weaker stature³⁴⁰ than the Sethites. Thus, he provides a rational explanation without any mythological reference: these giants were only relatively ‘giant’ when compared to the smaller Cainites. In sum, it can be said that, in the works of Ephrem, the Sethites-interpretation is favoured. No rejection of the angels-interpretation is found; the mighty ones-interpretation is only touched upon.

3.8.23 Hilary of Poitiers

In his commentary on Psalm 132:3 (LXX), Hilary of Poitiers³⁴¹ provides his readers with historical, geographical and etymological information about Mount Hermon. He explains that Mount Hermon is to be translated as ‘cursed’ (*anathema*). Hilary refers – without knowing author or title – to the book of Enoch in the following manner: “There is told that there exists a book – although I do not know from whom – about angels who, desiring daughters of men, when they descended from heaven, did come together on this very high mountain. But let us pass over this. Whatever is not contained in the book of the law, that we do not have to know, either.”

*Fertur autem id, de quo etiam nescio cuius liber exstat, quod angeli concupiscentes filias hominum, cum de coelo descenderent, in hunc montem maxime excelsum convenerint. Se haec praetermittamus. Quae enim libro legis non continentur, ea nec nosse debemus.*³⁴²

3.8.24 Diodore of Tarsus

An interesting exegetical variant is found in the work of Diodore of Tarsus.³⁴³ He identifies the ‘sons of God’ (and not their offspring) as the giants. These giants were the people who are mentioned because of their unusual longevity. According to Diodore “[t]he giants were at that time on earth, which means, the ones who lived

³³⁹ The translation ‘sons of the judges’ is found in *Tg. Neof.* Cf. 3.1.7.

³⁴⁰ *Homines* “humilis staturae, corporisque constitutionis infirmae”

³⁴¹ Ca. 315–367, bishop of Poitiers. Cf. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 361–366.

³⁴² Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus in CXXXII Psalmum* 6 (PL 9:748–749).

³⁴³ Born in the first quarter of the fourth century, died ca. 394. Head of the catechetical school in Antioch, teacher of John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Emphasised the factual meaning over against the allegorical meaning of biblical texts. From 378 onwards, bishop of Tarsus. Cf. R. C. Hill “Diodore of Tarsus,” in *DMBI*, 375–378.

many years. For (Scripture) says: ‘They were the giants, the famous men of old’, that is to say, ‘the sons of God who came to the daughters of men:’ from them they begot sons who no longer belonged to God, so that they could be named after him, or be called his sons, but people begot for themselves people who focussed on mortal and perishable things.”

οἱ δὲ γίγαντες τότε ἦσαν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τουτέστιν οἱ πολλὰ ἔτη βιοῦντες. Φησὶ γοῦν, ἐκεῖνοι ἦσαν οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὀνομαστοί· δηλαδὴ οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ πρὸς τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰσπορευόμενοι· ἔκτε αὐτῶν γεννῶντες υἱοὺς, οὐκ ἔτι τῷ Θεῷ· ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὀνομάζεσθαι, ἢ ἐκείνου υἱοὺς λέγεσθαι· ἀλλ’ ἑαυτοῖς ἐγέννων ἄνθρωποι ἀνθρώπους θνητὰ καὶ ἐπίκηρα φρονοῦντας.³⁴⁴

In Diodore’s perception, the ‘sons of God’ are the same as the giants, perhaps they are seen more as giants in age than in stature. Their sons could no longer be called ‘sons of God’ because of the spoiled mentality of their fathers. The identity of the ‘daughters of men’ remains unknown. Even if not explicitly mentioned, Diodore’s interpretation can be classified as a variant of the Sethites-interpretation. This is indicated by his mentioning longevity as this especially plays a part in Gen 5, which consists of the genealogy of Seth. Diodore’s commentary regarding giants and ‘sons of God’ has an implicit tendency to downplay the issue.

3.8.25 John Chrysostom

In John Chrysostom’s³⁴⁵ homily on Gen 5:32–6:1, there is a distinct disapproval of the angels-interpretation. He gives a long explanation ‘to refute the fanciful fictions’, ἀνατρέψαι τὰς μυθολογίας.³⁴⁶ His argument is twofold: firstly, “only human beings are called ‘sons of God’ but angels nowhere,” “Ἀνθρωποι μὲν γὰρ ἐκλήθησαν υἱοὶ Θεοῦ, ἄγγελοι δὲ οὐδαμῶς;³⁴⁷ secondly, Chrysostom describes how improbable it is that angels would have longed for a bodily existence. Thus, he calls it a ‘summun of folly’, ἀνοίας ἀνάμειστον, to say that angels descended to have

³⁴⁴ Diodore of Tarsus, *Fragmenta in Genesin* 6:4 (PG 33:1570). (With correction of some Greek diacritics).

³⁴⁵ Ca. 347–407, deacon and priest in Antioch, afterwards patriarch of Constantinople, one of the most influential preachers and exegetes in the early church. See M.M. Mitchel, “John Chrysostom,” in *DMBI*, 571–577.

³⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homily* 22:2 on Genesis 5 and 6 (PG 53:187).

³⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 22:2 (PG 53:187). Similarly Basil of Seleucia, *Oratio* 6:2 (PG 85:89). Chrysostom clearly used the text of the LXX for this statement, otherwise Job 1:6 and 2:1 would have posed difficulties.

intercourse with women. To underscore his arguments, he cites Mat 22:30.³⁴⁸ For Chrysostom it is clear that “these people originated from Seth and from the one who was born from him and was called Enosh. For he, says (Scripture), hoped to call upon³⁴⁹ the name of the Lord God, so those who were afterwards born from him are called sons of God by the divine Scripture,”

Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ Σήθ οὗτοι κατήγον τὸ γένος, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ τεχθέντος καὶ προσαγορευθέντος Ἐνώς. Οὗτος γὰρ, φησὶν, ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα³⁵⁰ Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐξ ἐκείνου λοιπὸν οἱ ἐξῆς τικτόμενοι υἱοὶ Θεοῦ προσηγορεύθησαν παρὰ τῆς θείας Γραφῆς.³⁵¹

Subsequently, the giants are explained to be physically strong people: “I suppose that the divine Scripture calls giants here the ones who were strong in body”, Γίγαντας ἐνταῦθα τοὺς ἰσχυροὺς τὸ σῶμα οἶμαι λέγειν τὴν θείαν Γραφήν.³⁵²

Interestingly, also Chrysostom refers to Gen 4:26 for his understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as Sethites.

Chrysostom’s view is summarised in his *Synopsis of Genesis*, in which he quotes Ps 82 – but not Gen 4:26 – to explain the expression ‘sons of God’: “Catalogue of descendants of Adam and of Seth until the descendants of Noah, and accusation of the men because of the unseemly intermarriages and other lawlessness. (Scripture) calls here ‘sons of God’ those who originate from Seth because it has also been said ‘I said, you are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High’. Daughters of men are called the ones who originated from Cain.”

Κατάλογος τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδάμ, καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Σήθ, ἕως τοῦ Νῶε, καὶ κατηγορία τῶν ἀνδρῶν διὰ τὰς οὐ προσηκούσας ἐπιγαμίας καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς ἀνομίας. Υἱοὺς δὲ Θεοῦ ἐνταῦθα καλεῖ τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ Σήθ κατὰγοντας τὸ γένος· καὶ γὰρ εἴρηται· Ἐγὼ εἶπον, Θεοὶ ἐστε, καὶ υἱοὶ Ὑψίστου πάντες. θυγατέρας δὲ ἀνθρώπων τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ Κάιν.³⁵³

3.8.26 Philastrius

Philastrius³⁵⁴ wrote a *Book on Heresies* in which the angels-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 is mentioned among the heresies. “There is another heresy which asserts

³⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 22:2 (PG 53:188).

³⁴⁹ Also Chrysostom reads the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι as a passive voice, as his interpretation demonstrates.

³⁵⁰ One text-edition reads τῷ ὀνόματι, cf. PG 53:189.

³⁵¹ John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 22:3 (PG 53:189).

³⁵² John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 22:4 (PG 53:191).

³⁵³ John Chrysostom, *Synopsis Genesis* (PG 56:318).

³⁵⁴ Died ca. 397, bishop of Brescia. Cf. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 369.

about the giants that prior to the flood angels intermingled with women, and that, as a result, giants are imagined to have been born”, *Alia est haeresis, quae de gigantibus asserit, quod angeli miscuerint se cum feminis ante diluvium, et inde esse natos gigantes suspicatur*.³⁵⁵ His objection to this heresy is that angels are spiritual. However, “if one has thought it to be justified that angels, transformed into flesh, sinned in that way, and that they also remained in the flesh, or if one believed that they committed such carnality, history will decide that this is a bad explanation; like also the lies of the pagans and the poets assert that the gods and goddesses were guilty of horrible unions.”

Si qui autem putaverit esse iustum, angelos ita peccasse transformatos in carne, ut in ea remansisse, aut ita factos carnales crediderit, violenta ratione decernit historia; sicuti et paganorum, et poetarum mendacia asserunt deos deasque transformatos, nefanda coniugia comisisse.³⁵⁶

Philastrius provides an alternative explanation to the giants in Gen 6:1–4. In this exegesis, he refers to Nimrod who was the son of a human being, namely of Cush, and not of a spirit or angel. Nevertheless, he was called ‘giant’, *gigas est appellatus*.³⁵⁷ He refers also to Goliath who is described as a human being in the Scriptures.³⁵⁸ According to Philastrius, fallen angels can enter humans only spiritually, meaning that they persuade man to do evil things, as the author demonstrates with the example of Judas. Of him “is written, as (Scripture) says: The Satan went into Judas”.³⁵⁹

3.8.27 Aphrahat

The Syrian writer Aphrahat³⁶⁰ wrote treatises on several theological subjects. In his treatise *On the Sabbath*, he mentions that Noah was righteous because of his chastity.³⁶¹ “When he had seen that the generation of Seth had commingled itself

³⁵⁵ Philastrius, *De haeresibus* 108 (PL 12:1224).

³⁵⁶ Philastrius, *De haer.* 108 (PL 12:1226).

³⁵⁷ Philastrius, *De haer.* 108 (PL 12:1224).

³⁵⁸ Philastrius, *De haer.* 108 (PL 12:1225).

³⁵⁹ *Intravit, inquit, Satanas in Judam*. Philastrius, *De haer.* 108 (PL 12:1225).

³⁶⁰ Also known als Aphrates, the Persian Sage; died after 345. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 342.

³⁶¹ Aphrahat explains that Noah did not procreate during his first five hundred years. Because of his chastity, he was chosen to save the world and only subsequently he begot three sons. Noah became in this way the model for the monastic way of life in Syriac Christianity. “Virginity, not faith, appears as the real criterion for Noah’s righteousness”, Naomi Koltun-Fromm, “Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Noah’s Righteousness in Light of the Jewish-Christian Polemic,” in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (TEG; Judith Frishman and Lucas van Rompay, eds.; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 59. There is a slight difference between Aphrahat and rabbinical

with the accursed sons of the house of Cain, he decided to take neither a wife nor to beget sons, lest he would be commingled and doomed together with this accursed offspring, the family of Cain.”

[C]um vidisset generationem Seth cum filiis domus Cain maledictis se commiscuisse, in animum induxit uxorem non accipere, filiosque non procreare, ne cum familia Cain, semine maledicto, commiscerentur et maledicerentur.³⁶²

He expresses a similar thought in his treatise *On Virginity and Sanctity*, where it turns out that for Aphrahat the earth began to be polluted with sin when people abandoned the notion of maintaining chastity: “The sons of Seth were beautiful because of their virginity, but when they had intermingled with the daughters of Cain, they were erased by the waters of the flood”, [*F*]ilii Seth virginitate sua erant speciosi; cum autem filiabus Cain se immiscuissent, aquis diluvii deleti sunt.³⁶³ Aphrahat, thus, sees the eradication of the distinction between Sethites and Cainites as the cause of the corruption of mankind that would lead to mankind’s being eradicated by the deluge.

Aphrahat’s exegesis fits well into the picture of ancient Oriental Christian understanding of Gen 6:1–4, in which Sethites lived an ‘angelic life’ consisting of chastity, prior to their intermarriages with the Cainites. In Syriac biblical exegesis Sethites before their ‘fall’ became the prototypes for monastic life; after their ‘fall’ they became an admonishing example.

3.8.28 Jerome

In the work of the biblical scholar of early Christianity, Jerome,³⁶⁴ the influence of his knowledge of Hebrew is evident. He comments on Gen 6:2: “But when the sons

exegesis. Both the rabbis and the Syriac fathers explained that Noah only at five hundred years begot sons. In Syriac Christian literature this was because of Noah’s chastity, in rabbinical literature (*Bereshit Rabba*) this was because until that time God had made Noah infertile, cf. Koltun-Fromm, “Aphrahat and the Rabbis,” 60–61. In early Syriac Christianity, a life of asceticism, prayer and sexual abstention were important. The Syriac church fathers try to depict the patriarchs like Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as role models of this lifestyle. Cf. A. G. P. Janson and L. Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër: Uitleg van het boek Genesis* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 17. See also Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁶² Aphrahat, *De Sabbato, Demonstratio* 13:5 (PS I,1:449–450). Latin translation of the Syriac text.

³⁶³ Aphrahat, *De virginitate et sanctitate, Demonstratio* 18:9 (PS I,1:837–838).

³⁶⁴ Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, ca. 340–420, born in Stridon, near modern Ljubljana. His biblical scholarship was shaped by Jewish influences, e.g. by the works of Philo. He was the only church father of the fourth century who knew Hebrew. Jerome became famous for his Bible translation, known as the Vulgate. For his exegesis he borrowed from the Antiochene and from the Alexandrian School. Cf. D. Brown, “Jerome,” in *DMBI*, 565–571.

of God saw that the daughters of men were good.’ The Hebrew word *eloim* is common in number, for it can denote at the same time God or gods. That is why Aquila dared to say in plural ‘sons of the gods’, understanding by this holy gods or angels. ‘For God stood in the congregation of the gods: in their midst he examines the gods.’ Therefore also Symmachus, adhering to a meaning of that kind, said: ‘when the sons of the mighty ones saw the daughters of men’ etcetera.”

Videntes autem filii dei filias hominum quia bonae sunt. *Verbum hebraicum eloim communis est numeri: et deus quippe et di similiter appellantur: propter quod Aquila plurali numero filios deorum ausus est dicere, deos intellegens sanctos sive angelos.* Deus enim stetit in synagoga deorum: in medio autem deos discernit. *Unde et Symmachus istius modi sensum sequens ait videntes filii potentium filias hominum et reliqua.*³⁶⁵

In view of Jerome’s scholarship, it is no surprise that he also was familiar with the book of Enoch. In his *Tractate on Psalm 132* he commentates on the words ‘Mount Hermon’:³⁶⁶ “The dew of the Hermon. We read in an apocryphal book that during the time when the sons of God descended to the daughters of men, they had descended on Mount Hermon and they made a pact there that they should go to the daughters of men to unite with them.”

*Ros Ermon. Legimus quendam librum apocryphum, eo tempore quo descendebant filii Dei ad filias hominum, descendisse illos in montem Ermon, et ibi inisse pactum, quomodo venirent ad filias hominum, et sibi eas sociarent.*³⁶⁷

Jerome, then, discusses that this apocryphal story has an explanation as a story about angels who longed for bodily existence. Jerome mentions that this view is part of the Manichean heresy. He takes no time to refute this but simply mentions that the name Hermon means ἀνάθημα, condemnation.

In a scholarly way Jerome proffers several exegetical options. He refutes the angels-interpretation, yet his own view remains unclear. By mentioning this at the end of his argument, it is possible that he was in agreement with Symmachus’ translation the most.

³⁶⁵ Jerome, *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim* 6:2 (CCSL 72:9).

³⁶⁶ Cf. Hilary of Poitiers, 3.8.23.

³⁶⁷ Jerome, *Tractatus de psalmo CXXXII*, 3 (CCSL 78:280–281).

3.8.29 Augustine

In the works of Augustine,³⁶⁸ the Sethites-interpretation is propagated over and above all other explanations. Augustine is of the opinion that Gen 6:1–4 equates righteous people with ‘angels’ or ‘sons of God’. In his *Questions on the Heptateuch* he commentates on Gen 6:1–4: “It can also be asked in what way angels could have had intercourse with daughters of men, from which union giants are said to have been born; nonetheless, some Latin and Greek codices do not have ‘angels’ but ‘sons of God’. To resolve this question, some have assumed these to have been righteous men, who also could be named ‘angels’. Furthermore, about the man John is written: ‘Behold, I send my angel before your face, who will prepare your way’. But this raises the question how either by human intercourse giants could have been born or how they could have united with women, if they have been no human beings, but angels. But I do not think it miraculous, about giants, that is to say about extremely tall and strong people, that they could have been born of humans, because, also, after the flood such ones have been found to exist, and even in our times there existed human bodies which were giant-like in an incredible way, not only from men but also from women. Therefore, it is much more credible to say that righteous people, who either are called ‘angels’ or ‘sons of God’, fell into desire and have sinned with women, than that angels, who have no flesh, could have descended into this kind of sin. Yet about certain demons, which would long for women, so much is said by so many, that it would not be easy to define an opinion about this.”

Item quaeritur quemadmodum potuerint angeli cum filiabus hominum concumbere, unde gigantes nati esse perhibentur; quamvis nonnulli et latini et graeci codices non angelos habeant sed filios dei. Quos quidam ad solvendam istam quaestionem iustos homines fuisse crediderunt, qui potuerunt etiam angelorum nomine nuncupari. Nam de homine Iohanne scriptum est: ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam, qui praeparabit viam tuam. Sed hoc movet, quomodo vel ex hominum concubitu nati sint gigantes vel feminis misceri potuerint, si non homines sed angeli fuerunt. Sed de gigantibus, id est nimium grandibus atque fortibus, puto non esse mirandum, quod ex hominibus nasci potuerunt, quia et post diluvium quidam tales fuisse reperiuntur et quaedam corpora hominum in incredibilem modum ingentia nostris quoque temporibus extiterunt non solum virorum verum etiam feminarum. Unde credibilis est homines iustos appellatos vel angelos vel filios dei concupiscentia lapsos peccasse

³⁶⁸ Aurelius Augustinus, 354–430, bishop of Hippo. C. Kannengiesser, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *DMBI*, 133–140.

*cum feminis quam angelos carnem non habentes usque ad illud peccatum descendere potuisse; quamvis de quibusdam daemonibus, qui sint inprobi mulieribus, a multis tam multa dicantur, ut non facile sit de hac re definienda sententia.*³⁶⁹

In Book XV of his *City of God*,³⁷⁰ Augustine works out several exegetical questions concerning primaeval history. He explains that the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 were faithful men belonging to the city of God who fell in love with girls from the earthly city. “By these two names (i.e. ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’) these two cities are adequately distinguished. For also these persons were by nature sons of men but began to receive an other name by grace, because in the same scriptural passage, where it is said that the sons of God had fallen in love with the daughters of men, they are also called angels of God. That is why many think they were not men but angels.”

*Quibus duobus nominibus satis civitas utraque discernitur. Neque enim et illi non erant filii hominum per naturam: sed aliud nomen coeperant habere per gratiam. Nam in eadem Scriptura, ubi dicti sunt dilexisse filias hominum filii Dei, iidem dicti sunt etiam angeli Dei. Unde illos multi putant non homines fuisse, sed angelos.*³⁷¹

Augustine goes on to discuss whether the passage could be about angels. He does not consider it completely impossible that some spirits could mingle with women, referring to rumours about sylphs and fauns who harassed women, but he does not believe that God’s angels could sin in such a manner. In his view, also the passage of 2 Pet 2:4 does not refer to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 but to an earlier event when angels, together with the devil, apostatised from God. Furthermore, Augustine illustrates the possible existence of giants with a concrete example of a tall woman, whose parents were of normal height, who lived in Rome just before the city’s destruction. From Gen 6:4 he deduces that the giants are said already to have existed prior to the time that the ‘sons of God’ mixed with the ‘daughters of men’: “The words of this divine book [Gen 6:1–4 being quoted] sufficiently indicate that there already were giants on earth in the days when the sons of God took the daughters of men as wives.” *Haec libri verba divini satis indicant, iam illis diebus*

³⁶⁹ Augustine, *Quaestiones in heptateuchum* I:3 (CCSL 33:2–3). Written around 419, see C. Kannengiesser, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *DMBI*, 136. For Augustine on ‘giants’, see also *De civitate Dei*, XV, 9.

³⁷⁰ The first Latin Christian attempt to produce a philosophical overview of history, written between 413 and 426, see C. Kannengiesser, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *DMBI*, 136.

³⁷¹ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 22 (PL 41:468).

*fuisse gigantes super terram, quando filii Dei acceperunt uxores filias hominum.*³⁷²

That these sons of Seth can also be called angels, Augustine explains by means of the original meaning of this word, namely ‘messenger’: “That (Scripture) says ‘and they begot for themselves’ shows sufficiently that earlier, before the sons of God fell in this way, they begot children for God, not for themselves, that is to say, not dominated by the lust for sexual intercourse, but faithful to their duty to procreate, not to make a family for themselves, but citizens for the city of God: to these they announce just like God’s angels, that they should place their hope in God, in the same way as he who was born from Seth, the son of the resurrection, also hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God: in which hope they together with their offspring would be co-heirs of eternal goods, and under God the Father brothers of the sons.”

*Quod autem ait, Et generabunt sibi, satis ostendit quod prius, antequam sic caderent filii Dei, Deo generabant, non sibi, id est, non dominante libidine coeundi, sed serviente officio propagandi; non familiam fastus sui, sed cives civitatis Dei: quibus annuntiarent tanquam angeli Dei, ut ponerent in Deo spem suam, similes illius qui natus est de Seth, filius resurrectionis, et speravit invocare nomen Dei: in qua spe essent cum suis posteris cohaerere aeternorum bonorum, et sub Deo patre fratres filiorum.*³⁷³

Interestingly, Augustine also quotes Gen 4:26. Yet he reads this passage in a typological way as in being applied to Christ, thus understanding the verb *invocare* in an active way.

Augustine argues that the reading of Gen 6:3 “my Spirit shall not forever remain in these men (*in hominibus his*)” also supports the fact that the ‘sons of God’, or ‘angels of God’, as his manuscripts read, are human beings.³⁷⁴ Augustine was also familiar with the translation of Aquila, reading ‘sons of the gods’, (*fili deorum*), a translation that, according to Augustine, refers to human beings, as seen from Ps 82:6. He thinks the fables of the apocryphal scriptures are best not to be taken into consideration, although, he argues that one cannot totally ignore what is found in the book of Enoch, as is evident from the quote found in the letter of Jude.³⁷⁵ Augustine thus concludes that the ‘sons of God’, who genetically descended

³⁷² Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 23:2 (PL 41:469).

³⁷³ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 23:2 (PL 41:469).

³⁷⁴ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 23:3 (PL 41:470).

³⁷⁵ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV 23:3–4 (PL 41:470–471), cf. also *De civ. Dei* XVIII, 38: *Sed ea [scripta] castitas canonis non recepit, non quod eorum hominum, qui Deo placerunt, reprobetur auctoritas, sed quod ista esse non credantur ipsorum.* “But the purity of the canon did not accept these writings, not

from Seth, (*qui secundum carnem de Seth propagati sunt*), have deviated into the society of the city of men.³⁷⁶ The 120 years, mentioned in Gen 6:3, are, according to Augustine, to be understood as the remaining period until the flood; God said this when Noah was 480 years, a number which the Bible rounds off up to 500 years.³⁷⁷

3.8.30 John Cassian

John Cassian³⁷⁸ in his *Conferences*³⁷⁹ also prefers the Sethites-interpretation because “it is in no way to be believed that spiritual beings can have sexual intercourse with women,” *nullo modo credendum est spirituales naturas coire com feminis carnaliter posse*.³⁸⁰ For if this happened once, why does it no longer happen today? Therefore, the narrative in Gen 6:1–4 pertains to the two lines of Cain and of Seth, and “[a]s long as therefore this separation between these two lines of them remained, this offspring of Seth, because it came forth from an excellent root, was named for the merits of its sanctity, ‘angels of God’, or, as some copies have it, ‘sons of God’.”

*Donec ergo perseveravit inter illas generationes eorum ista discretio, semen illud Seth, utpote de optima radice procedens, pro merito sanctitatis, angeli Dei, sive, ut diversa exemplaria continent, filii Dei vocati sunt.*³⁸¹

Interestingly, however, a trace of the Enochic tradition still appears to be present in Cassian’s description according to which the ‘fallen’ Sethites learnt, “also by inspiration of demons”,³⁸² magic and idolatry from the Cainites who “taught their posterity to forsake that sacred worship of the divine name, and to honour and worship the elements, or fire, or demons of the air.”³⁸³ Cassian argues that these arts were able to survive the flood through the mediation of Ham, the son of

because it rejects the authority of these men who pleased God, but because it is believed that these books are not written by them.” (PL 41:598).

³⁷⁶ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 23 (PL 41:468–471).

³⁷⁷ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* XV, 24 (PL 41:471).

³⁷⁸ Johannes Cassianus, ca. 360–435, born in Scythia minor, modern Rumania and Bulgaria, lived with monks in Egypt, founded ca. 415 a monastery and a nunnery in Marseille. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 452–454.

³⁷⁹ *Collationes patrum*, writings in the form of a dialogue with Egypt’s most important monks. Cf. Altaner, *Patrologie*, 452.

³⁸⁰ John Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De principatibus seu potestatibus*, 21. (8th Conference: About Principalities and Powers) (PL 49:755).

³⁸¹ John Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De princ.* 21 (PL 49:757).

³⁸² *instinctu quoque daemonum*. John Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De princ.* 21 (PL 49:758).

³⁸³ *docens posteros suos, ut sacro illo cultu divini nominis derelicto, vel elementa haec, vel ignem, vel aereos daemones venerarentur et colerent*. John Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De princ.* 21 (PL 49:758).

Noah.³⁸⁴ Ham knew that he could not smuggle books on magic into the ark, therefore he inscribed his knowledge onto metals and rocks, data carriers which could withstand the devastation inflicted by water.³⁸⁵

It is interesting to see how a changing view on sexuality influenced the decline of the angels-interpretation and the rise of the Sethites-interpretation of Gen 6:1–4. In Oriental Christianity the chastity of the Sethite-generation became an example for monastic life. The term ‘angels’ became incorporated into the notion that monastics lived a ‘life of angels’. In Occidental Christianity the refutation of the angels-interpretation was based upon a more ‘physical’ approach, namely that angels, as incorporeal beings, cannot engage in physical relationships with humans. The qualification of Sethites as ‘angels’ from this perspective is due to their holiness, without any direct linkage to monastic life. It can be expected that John Cassian could have incorporated both approaches, at least as can perhaps be deduced from his background. Yet his approach reflects more the Western than the Eastern view.

3.8.31 Cyril of Alexandria

Cyril of Alexandria³⁸⁶ wrote a treatise on the Pentateuch entitled *Glaphyra* (*Elegant Comments*). In Book II, he comments on Noah and the ark, explaining that the ‘sons of God’ are descendants of Seth. “That we rightly understand this passage is also very much confirmed by the interpretation of the other translators. Aquila says: ‘When the sons of the gods saw the daughters of men’. On the other hand, instead of ‘sons of the gods’, Symmachus rendered the expression as ‘sons of the rulers’. They called the descendants of Seth and of Enosh sons of the gods, or better, sons of the rulers, because of the piety and godliness which was in them, and because they could defeat all adversaries: while God, I suppose, in all likelihood came to their aid, and made known all around this pious and holy generation, which was not mixed with that other one, that is to say, with the descendants from Cain and, what is more, from Lamech.”

Ἐμπεδοῖ δὲ μᾶλλον ἡμῖν ὁρθῶς ἔχουσιν τὴν τοιάνδε γραφὴν, καὶ ἡ παρὰ τῶν ἑτέρων ἐρμηνευτῶν ἀπόδοσις. Ἀκύλας μὲν γὰρ φησιν, Ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Σύμμαχος δὲ αὖ ἀντὶ τοῦ, υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν,

³⁸⁴ A thought also found in *Jub.* 8:3, cf. 3.4.4.

³⁸⁵ John Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De princ.* 21 (PL 49:758–759).

³⁸⁶ Ca. 378–444, archbishop of Alexandria, representative of a middle course between Alexandrian and Antiochene school of exegesis, nevertheless, his exegesis is deeply influenced by that of Origen. See J. A. McGuckin, “Cyril of Alexandria,” in *DMBI*, 338–343.

ἐκδέδωκεν οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων. Υἱοὺς δὲ θεῶν καὶ μὴν καὶ δυναστευόντων τοὺς ἀπὸ γε τοῦ Σῆθ καὶ τοῦ Ἐνῶς ὠνόμαζον, διὰ τε τὴν ἐνοῦσαν αὐτοῖς ὁσιότητα καὶ φιλοθεΐαν, καὶ τὸ πάντων δύνασθαι καταθλεῖν τῶν ἀνθεστηκότων· ἐπαμύνοντός που κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ περιφανὲς ἀποφαίνοντος τὸ ἱερώτατόν τε καὶ ἅγιον γένος· ὅπερ ἦν ἄμικτον τῷ ἐτέρῳ, τουτέστι, τοῖς ἀπὸ Κάϊν καὶ μὴν καὶ Λάμεχ.³⁸⁷

Although Cyril of Alexandria was familiar with Symmachus' rulers-interpretation, derived from Jewish exegesis, he interprets the translation of the expression 'sons of the gods' in Aquila and 'sons of the rulers' in Symmachus both as referring to Sethites.

Cyril also clearly opts for a passive interpretation of the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in the Septuagint translation of Gen 4:26: "Enosh hoped to be called with the name of the Lord his God by others, that is to say, (to be called) God."

Ἦλπισε τοίνυν Ἐνῶς κληθῆσθαι παρ' ἐτέρων ἐπ' ὀνόματι Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ αὐτοῦ· τουτέστι, Θεός.³⁸⁸

This is why also the offspring of Seth can be called 'gods': "And he [Noah] was the tenth from Adam in the genealogy of Seth, it having extended up to him, that the ones who were born from Enosh, who was called after God, were to be called by everyone 'gods'."

Καὶ ἦν δέκατος ἐξ Ἀδὰμ διὰ Σῆθ γενεαλογούμενος, μέχρις αὐτοῦ διήκοντος τοῦ διακεκλησθαι δεῖν πρὸς ἀπάντων Θεούς, τοὺς ἐξ Ἐνῶς γεγονότας τοῦ ἐπὶ κλην Θεοῦ.³⁸⁹

Cyril gives a similar explanation in his book *Against Julian*, the apostate emperor, who argued, based on Gen 6:1–4, that there is more than one Son of God, for Moses called the angels gods.³⁹⁰ Cyril, then, explains that this passage pertains to two lines, to that of Seth and Cain: "The races were not mixed with each other, and from the impure ones the pure ones were set apart, whom they therefore called 'sons of God' in the times of Noah."

Ἀμικτα δὲ ἦν ἀλλήλοις τὰ γένη, καὶ ἀπεινοσφίζοντο τῶν βεβήλων οἱ καθαροί· οὗς δὲ καὶ υἱοὺς ἐκάλουν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔν γε τοῖς τοῦ Νῶε καιροῖς.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra in Genesim* II, 2 (PG 69:53).

³⁸⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra in Genesim* I, 3 (PG 69:48), cf. *Glaph. in Gen.* II, 2 (PG 69:49–52).

³⁸⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaph. in Gen.* II, 2 (PG 69:52).

³⁹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Adversus Julianum* IX (PG 76:945).

³⁹¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Adv. Jul.* IX (PG 76:956).

3.8.32 Theodoret of Cyrus

Theodoret of Cyrus³⁹² rejects the angels-interpretation in strong words. In the question of whom does Moses call the ‘sons of Gods’, he answers: “Some stupid and very silly persons understand them to be angels.”³⁹³ He goes on to explain how the Sethites are called ‘sons of God’ and that they at a certain time became mixed with the Cainites. Interestingly, Theodoret provides literary quotations from Athanasius’ *Interpretations from the O.T.*, with some slight alterations.³⁹⁴ “The historian has said how Seth was born from Adam, and Enosh from Seth, but he adds: ‘He hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God’. Yet Aquila translates this in the following way: ‘Then has begun the [process of] being called with the name of the Lord’. The word adumbrates how he [Enosh] as the first one as result of his piety has obtained this divine appellation, and was called ‘God’ by his contemporaries, from where the ones who were born from him bore the name ‘sons of God’, just like we also from the name of our master Christ are called Christians. ... For the generation of Seth was segregated and was not mixed with the people from Cain, because of the curse that was put upon him by the God of the universe. But after a long time had passed, ... they gazed at the well-shaped girls of the family of Cain, and enchanted, as is likely, by the musical instruments that were invented by them ... they had intercourse with these girls, and so utterly destroyed their ancestral nobility.”

Εἰρηκῶς γὰρ ὁ συγγραφεὺς, ὅπως ἐκ μὲν τοῦ Ἀδάμ ὁ Σήθ ἐγεννήθη, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ Σήθ ὁ Ἐνὼς, προσέθηκεν, οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ δὲ Ἀκύλας οὕτως τοῦτο ἡρμήνευσεν, Τότε ἤρχθη του καλεῖσθαι τῷ ὀνόματι Κυρίου· αἰνίττεται δὲ ὁ λόγος, ὡς διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν οὗτος πρῶτος τῆς θείας προσηγορίας τετύχηκε, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν συγγενῶν ὠνομάσθη Θεός· ὅθεν οἱ ἐκ τούτου φύντες υἱοὶ Θεοῦ ἐχρημάτισον· ὥσπερ δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς τοῦ δεσπότου Χριστοῦ προσηγορίας Χριστιανοὶ καλούμεθα. . . . Ἐκεχώριστο γὰρ τοῦ Σήθ τὸ γένος, καὶ οὐκ ἐπεμίγνυτο τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ Κάϊν, διὰ τὴν ἐπενεχθεῖσαν αὐτῷ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων ἀράν. Ἀλλὰ χρόνου συχνοῦ διεληθόντος . . . εὐειδείς θεασάμενοι τῆς τοῦ Κάϊν συγγενείας τὰς θυγατέρας, καὶ καταθελχθέντες, ὡς εἰκὸς, τοῖς παρ’ αὐτῶν ἐπινοηθεῖσι μουσικοῖς ὀργάνοις, . . . ἐπεμίγησαν αὐταῖς, καὶ διέφθειραν τὴν οἰκείαν εὐγένειαν.³⁹⁵

³⁹² 393–458, born in Antioch, bishop of Cyrus, eastern Syria. See C. T. McCollough, “Theodoret of Cyrus,” in *DMBI*, 972–975.

³⁹³ Ἐμβρόντητοί τινες καὶ ἄγαν ἡλίθιοι, ἀγγέλους τούτους ὑπέλαβον. Theodoret, *Quaestiones in Genesin* 6, question 47 (PG 80:148).

³⁹⁴ Cf. 3.8.19.

³⁹⁵ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaest. in Gen.* 6, question 47 (PG 80:148–149).

Several observations can be made. Firstly, Theodoret, also, bases his interpretation of Enosh being called ‘God’ upon his understanding of the middle voice of the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in Gen 4:26 (LXX) as having a passive meaning.³⁹⁶ Secondly, Theodoret bases his interpretation of the passage on Aquila’s variant translation of Gen 4:26. Thirdly, the reference to musical instruments by means of which the Sethites were weakened is characteristic of the Syriac tradition.³⁹⁷

3.8.33 Basil of Seleucia

Basil of Seleucia³⁹⁸ responds in his *Sermons* to the question as to who the ‘sons of God’ are: “Some have imagined that with this term angels are indicated”.³⁹⁹ But according to Basil, “[t]he sons of Seth are called ‘sons of God’, bearing that name as a symbol of their relationship with God.”

Οἱ μὲν οὖν υἱοὶ Θεοῦ χρηματίζουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Σήθ, σύμβολον τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν οἰκειότητος τὴν προσηγορίαν ἐπιφερόμενοι.⁴⁰⁰

3.8.34 Later Church Fathers

In the writings of the Fathers of the church from the fifth until the twelfth century it is the Sethites-interpretation which is found exclusively. The following examples can support this observation.

*Gennadius*⁴⁰¹ explains: “The ones who descended from Seth are called, with this special word, ‘sons of God’”.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁶ See also Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (SBLMS 30; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 80 nt. 104.

³⁹⁷ Cf. R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* (CSCO 152 / Scriptores Syri 71; Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955), 55; Latin translation: R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* (CSCO 153 / Scriptores Syri 72; Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955), 42. Dutch translation: A. G. P. Janson and L. Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër: Uitleg van het boek Genesis* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 85. Cf. also Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Genesim* 6 (PG 87:268): ‘Ανθρώπους δὲ τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ Κάϊν, οἱ ψαλτήριον εὔρον καὶ κιθάραν καὶ χαλκευτικήν. Also Photius, *Amphilochia*, Question 255, mentions the musical instruments, quoting Theodoret without mentioning him (PG 101:1065–1068).

³⁹⁸ Died ca. 468, bishop of Seleucia, Mesopotamia. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 335.

³⁹⁹ Τινὲς μὲν οὖν ἀγγέλους ἐνταῦθα τῇ κλήσει μνηύεσθαι ἐφάντασθησαν. Basil of Seleucia, *Oratio* 6:2 (PG 85:88).

⁴⁰⁰ Basil of Seleucia, *Or.* 6:2 (PG 85:89).

⁴⁰¹ From 458–471 bishop of Constantinople. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 335–336.

⁴⁰² Υἱοὺς Θεοῦ κατ’ ἐξαίρετον λόγον τοὺς τοῦ Σήθ ἀπογόνους ὠνόμασεν. Gennadius, *Fragmenta in Genesim* 6 (PG 85:1641).

*Procopius of Gaza*⁴⁰³ writes in his *Commentary on Genesis*: “It is also written ‘Angels of God’. Some say that this is said about fallen powers; the mingling of angels with women, however, is impossible and against nature”.⁴⁰⁴ He is also aware of an exegesis stating that angels inhabited men and, in such a way, entered into the relationships with women.⁴⁰⁵ He further observes that in Gen 6:3 humans are reprimanded, so it is obvious that it must have been humans who committed the aforementioned sin. Therefore, he concludes that Scripture “calls the chosen race ‘angels’ or ‘sons of God’, namely the ones who originated from Seth and Enosh, and they are called such because of their holiness”.⁴⁰⁶ In Procopius, the literal same passage is found as is also known from Eusebius of Emesa, in which the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in Gen 4:26 is understood as having a passive meaning, namely that Enosh was called by the name of God. This explanation of Gen 4:26, then, is combined with Gen 6:2, and so the expression ‘sons of God’ is interpreted as referring to the offspring of Enosh and Seth.⁴⁰⁷

A trace of the Enochic tradition, about the arts taught by the fallen angels, still appears to be present in the writings of *John Malalas*,⁴⁰⁸ but now in a positive manner. John Malalas explains the expression ‘sons of God’ as follows: “The people of that time addressed him [Seth] as ‘God’, because he invented the letters of the Jewish alphabet, the practice of naming the stars, and, moreover, people also admired the magnitude of his piety”.⁴⁰⁹ Malalas, then, also combined the exegesis of Gen 4:26 with Gen 6:1–4. The giants that were born, according to John Malalas, were “because of the righteous Seth, strong and tall, and because of the unjust and impure Kain, evil and very ugly”.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰³ Died ca. 538. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 516.

⁴⁰⁴ Γράφεται καὶ ὡς ἄγγελοι Θεοῦ καὶ φασὶ τινες τὰς ἀποστατικὰς αὐτὸν λέγειν δυνάμεις, καίτοι πρὸς γυναῖκας ἀγγέλων μίξις ἀδύνατος καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ἐστίν. Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Genesim* 6 (PG 87:265).

⁴⁰⁵ Ἀνδράσι, φασὶ τινες, οἰκήσαντες, δι’ αὐτῶν τὰς μίξεις εἰργάζοντο. Procopius, *Comm. in Gen.* 6 (PG 87:265).

⁴⁰⁶ Ἀγγέλους οὖν καὶ υἱοὺς Θεοῦ καλεῖ τὸ γένος τὸ ἐκλεκτὸν, τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ Σήθ καὶ Ἐνὼς, οὓς οὕτως ἐκάλουν δι’ ὁσιότητα. Procopius, *Comm. in Gen.* 6 (PG 87:265–268).

⁴⁰⁷ Procopius, *Comm. in Gen.* 4 (PG 87:261), cf. 3.8.20.

⁴⁰⁸ Historiographer, died ca. 577. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 234.

⁴⁰⁹ Θεὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι προσηγόρευον διὰ τὸ ἐξευρεῖν τὰ Ἰουδαϊκὰ γράμματα, τὰς τῶν ἀστέρων ὀνομασίας, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτοις καὶ τὴν πολλὴν αὐτοῦ εὐσέβειαν θαυμάσαντες. John Malalas, *Chronographia* 1 (PG 97:69).

⁴¹⁰ γίγαντες, διὰ μὲν τὸν δίκαιον Σήθ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ μέγιστοι, διὰ δὲ τὸν ἄδικον καὶ βέβηλον Κάϊν ποιητοὶ καὶ κάκιστοι. John Malalas, *Chron.* 1 (PG 97:72).

An author from the seventh century, *Anastasius Sinaita*,⁴¹¹ explains that Enosh, born from Seth “hoped to be called by the name of God, as [Scripture] says, that is to say, to be called God by others”.⁴¹² Because Seth received this honorary name, his offspring were called ‘sons of God’. “So the sons of him who bore the name of God, took the daughters of men, that is of Cain, for themselves as wives, something which was prohibited for them long ago”.⁴¹³ Anastasius is well aware of different manuscripts with variant readings; he mentions Symmachus who translates instead of ‘sons of God’ ‘sons of the gods and of the rulers’,⁴¹⁴ and he also mentions versions which read ‘angels of God’. “Therefore some interpreters attribute the accusation of love of the flesh to the angels who have fallen”.⁴¹⁵ According to Anastasius, it is near foolishness to say that spirits, who are far superior to carnal beings, would have carnal desires. Therefore, he prefers the reading ‘sons of God’.⁴¹⁶

In the ninth century, *Photius*⁴¹⁷ discusses the identity of the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis. Similarly to Anastasius Sinaita, he also refers to the Septuagint translation of Gen 4:26 and explains how the descendants of Seth were called ‘sons of God’, because Enosh received the designation of ‘God’. However, Photius also mentions the variant reading of Gen 4:26 in the translation of Aquila: “At that time [mankind] began to call upon the name of the Lord”.⁴¹⁸ He furthermore quotes Ps 82 to provide support to the view that human beings can be called ‘gods’. Subsequently, Photius cites Theodoret’s extended quotation from Athanasius pertaining to the Sethites who could not avoid being mixed with the Cainites.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹¹ Abbot of St. Catharine’s Monastery at Mt. Sinai, died shortly after 700. See Altaner, *Patrologie*, 524.

⁴¹² ἤλπισε, φησὶν, ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τῷ ὀνόματι Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ, τουτέστι, λέγεσθαι παρ’ ἐτέρων Θεός. Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaestio* 25 (PG 89:552). Anastasius changes the accusative of the word ὄνομα in Gen 4:26 (LXX) to a dative, something which strengthens the passive explanation: “to be called with / by the name”.

⁴¹³ Τούτου τοίνυν τοῦ ἐπὶ κλην Θεοῦ υἱοί, τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων θυγατέρας, τουτέστι τῶν ἀπὸ Κάιν, ἔλαβον ἑαυτοῖς εἰς γυναικάς, ὃ ἦν αὐτοῖς πρῶην κεκωλυμένον. Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaest.* 25 (PG 89:552).

⁴¹⁴ υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων, *Quaestio* 25 (PG 89:552). Anastasius, in fact, combines the translations of Aquila and Symmachus.

⁴¹⁵ Εἴτα περιτρέπουσί τινες τῆς φιλοσαρκίας τὰ ἐγκλήματα πρὸς τοῖς ὀλισθηκόσιν ἀγγέλοις. Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaest.* 25 (PG 89:552).

⁴¹⁶ Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaest.* 25 (PG 89:552).

⁴¹⁷ Patriarch of Constantinople, ca 810–894. See Christian Stephan, “Photius,” in *RGG*⁴ 6:1322–1323.

⁴¹⁸ Τότε ἤρξατο καλεῖν ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου. Photius, *Amphilochia*, Question 255 (PG 101:1065).

⁴¹⁹ Photius, *Amphil.* Quest. 255 (PG 101:1065–1068), cf. Theodoret, *Quaest. in Gen.* 6, Question 47 (PG 80:149). See 3.8.32.

Anyhow, according to Photius, “those who suppose the ‘sons of God’ to be angels are deranged”.⁴²⁰

Most interestingly, in the tenth century, the old Syriac tradition⁴²¹ can be seen to have been revived in the writings of *Eutychius of Alexandria*.⁴²² According to Eutychius, “after the death of Adam, the family of Seth separated itself from the accursed family of Cain. Therefore Seth, taking with him his firstborn son, Enosh, and Kainan, the son of Enosh, and Mahlaliel, son of Kainan, together with their spouses and children, moved to the summit of the mountain where Adam was buried. But Cain, together with all his sons, remained below in the valley where Abel was killed”.⁴²³ He explains further how “the sons of Seth practised purity and chastity on this mountain, they heard the voices of angels, to whom they were close, and praised and celebrated God together with them, therefore they were called, together with their spouses and children, ‘sons of God’”.⁴²⁴ He goes on to tell how in the meantime the Cainites lived a life of promiscuity, and used musical instruments that could be heard on the mountain where the Sethites lived. Hearing that, one hundred men of the Sethites descended from their mountain “and when they had descended and noticed the beautiful daughters of the accursed race of Cain, who were naked without shame, they were ignited with desire”.⁴²⁵ The rest of the story can easily be guessed. Eutychius rejects the angels-interpretation: “The Sethites are called *Bani Elohim*, that is ‘Sons of God’, because of their sanctity and because they inhabited the holy mountain. Those err who say that angels descended to the daughters of men, because the substance of angels is of a single entity, so that the

⁴²⁰ Οἱ μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὑπονοήσαντες, μαίνονται. Photius, *Amphil.* Quest. 255 (PG 101:1065).

⁴²¹ Cf. 3.8.22.

⁴²² Saʿīd ibn al-Bitrīq, 877–940. His works were originally written in Arabic. See Stephen Gerö, “Eutychius,” *RGG*⁴, 2:1687.

⁴²³ *Post mortem autem Adami subduxit se familia Sethi a familia Kaini maledicti. Seth ergo, assumptis secum filio primogenito Enosho, et Kainano Enoshi filio et Mahlaliel Kainani, una cum uxoribus et liberis ipsorum, traduxit in montis fastigium, ubi sepultus est Adam, Kain vero, omnesque ipsius filii infra substiterunt in valle ubi occisus est Abel.* Eutychius of Alexandria, *Annales* (PG 111:911).

⁴²⁴ *Coluerunt autem filii Sethi in isto monte puritatem et sanctimoniam, vocem angelorum, a quibus prope aberant, audientes, unaque cum ipsis Deum laudantes et celebrantes; appellatique sunt ipsi cum uxoribus et liberis suis, filii Dei.* Eutychius of Alexandria, *Ann.* (PG 111:911).

⁴²⁵ *cumque descendissent filias Kaini maledicti specie pulchras et sine pudore nudas conspicientes, cupidine exarserunt.* Eutychius of Alexandria, *Ann.* (PG 111:913).

use of sexuality does not fit their nature”.⁴²⁶ The readers are warned with the words: “Take care that not one of you is to descend from that holy mountain”.⁴²⁷

During the twelfth century, *John of Zonara*⁴²⁸ explains that Scripture calls the descendants of Seth ‘sons of God’, and the female offspring of Cain ‘daughters of men’.⁴²⁹ However, he also mentions that “Josephus says that angels took the daughters of men, calling like this, I think, the ones who are pleasing to God and take care of their own civil duty”.⁴³⁰

Among ancient interpreters it remained more or less common knowledge that some explanations understood the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6 as referring to angels. This was most likely a result of the Septuagint manuscripts reading ‘angels of God’ instead of ‘sons of God’.

3.8.35 Septuagint Genesis 4:26 and the Sethites-Interpretation in Patristic Literature

The Septuagint translation of Gen 4:26 plays an important part in the Sethites-interpretation, as has been demonstrated. The verse makes the following remark about Enosh: οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ. The infinitive ἐπικαλεῖσθαι is ambiguous and can be translated as a middle voice, resulting in the translation: ‘He hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God’, but also as a passive: ‘He hoped to be called with the name of the Lord God’. In the interpretation of Athanasius, a translation as a middle voice still could be retained,⁴³¹ although Athanasius’ subsequent exegesis of the passage seems to bear witness to a passive understanding of the word ἐπικαλεῖσθαι. Later patristic literature at least assumes the verb to have a passive meaning.⁴³² In this way, Gen 4:26 became a key text for

⁴²⁶ *Sethiadae enim ob sanctitatem suam, et quod montem sanctum incolerent, appellati sunt Bani Elohim, id est Filii Dei. Errant ergo, qui dicunt angelos descendisse ad filias hominum, cum substantia angelorum substantia simplex sit, nec competat naturae ipsorum veneris usus.* Eutychius of Alexandria, *Ann.* (PG 111:913).

⁴²⁷ *Cavete ne descendat vestrum quis de monte hoc sancto.* Eutychius of Alexandria, *Ann.* (PG 111:913).

⁴²⁸ Mid 11th century–mid 12th century, historian. See Heinz Ohme, “Zonaras, Johannes,” *RGG*⁴ 8:1899.

⁴²⁹ John of Zonara, *Annales* 4 (PG 134:60).

⁴³⁰ Ὁ δὲ Ἰώσηπος ἀγγέλους λέγει τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαβεῖν, οὕτω καλέσας, οἶμαι, αὐτοὺς, ὡς εὐαρεστούντας Θεῷ, καὶ τὴν ἐκείνων πολιτείαν ἐπιτηδεύοντας. John of Zonara, *Ann.* 4 (PG 134:60–61).

⁴³¹ Athanasius, *Interpretationes ex V.T.*, Question 65, especially if the Latin translation is considered: *Ex Seth autem natus est Enos, qui in Dominum Deum spem habuit et invocavit eum.* (PG 28:739). Yet this rendering can have been influenced by the Vulgate. See further 3.8.19.

⁴³² So explicitly Eusebius of Emesa (3.8.20), Ephrem the Syrian – probably based on the Septuagint and not on the Peshitta (3.8.22), Chrysostom (3.8.25), Cyril of Alexandria (3.8.31), Theodore of Cyrus (3.8.32), Anastasius Sinaita (3.8.34), and Photius (3.8.34). This interpretation is also present in

the Sethites-interpretation. Interestingly, this Sethites-interpretation even later on echoes at times the sounds from its probable source in Syriac Christianity, where the Sethites are said to have lived close to the angels,⁴³³ or even to be ‘like the angels’.⁴³⁴

In this way, the refuted angels-interpretation became partly integrated into the Sethites-interpretation, a necessity most likely caused by the Septuagint manuscripts reading ‘angels of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. Elements from the Enochic tradition and from the book of *Jubilees* also turn out to be persistent, for example, the view that Cainites taught idolatry and astrology to the Sethites and that these instructions survived the flood because they were inscribed on stone plates,⁴³⁵ or that Seth is considered to be the inventor of the Hebrew alphabet and the instigator in the naming of the stars.⁴³⁶ Similar notions can be found when later on in the history of exegesis the Sethites are not only equated with the ‘sons of God’ but also with the ‘Watchers’.⁴³⁷ Even the number of one hundred Sethites, descending from the so-called paradise-mountain, is exactly half of the number of two hundred angels descending on Mount Hermon as found in *1 En.* 6:6.⁴³⁸ From these observations can it be concluded that older exegesis still remained influential because exegetes tried to integrate results of earlier traditions within their own Sethites-interpretation.

Georgius Syncellus, who explains that Enosh was the first ‘to be called by the name of God’, (τοῦτ’ ἔστι προσαγορεύεσθαι ὀνόματι θεοῦ). Syncellus provides his readers with an explanation from Julius Africanus, who referred to the etymology of the name ‘Enosh’, meaning ‘man’ in Hebrew, and to the Saviour (σωτήρ), who was also called ‘son of man’, cf. Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, and William Adler, eds., *Iulius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments* (GCS 15; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 44–45. The interpretation of the verb as a passive can still be felt in the Greek *katharevousa* Bible translation of Neophytos Vamvas from 1850: Τότε ἔγενεν ἀρχὴ νὰ ὀνομάζωνται μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου. (Gen 4:26).

⁴³³ E.g. Ephrem the Syrian (3.8.22), and Eutychius of Alexandria (3.8.34).

⁴³⁴ E.g. John Cassian (3.8.30). But also the anonymous *Pascal Chronicle* of ca. 630 (PG 92:108) considers the Sethites to have been ‘like angels’. Quoted from Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation* (SBLMS 30; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 85.

⁴³⁵ E.g. John Cassian (3.8.30). See also Josephus, *A.J.* 1.2.3:70–71, where it is mentioned that the Sethites built two pillars inscribed with their cultural discoveries.

⁴³⁶ E.g. John Malalas (3.8.34).

⁴³⁷ George Syncellus (ca. 800), *Chronographia*, quoted from Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation*, 86–87.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Eutychius of Alexandria (3.8.34).

3.9 LATE MIDDLE AGES AND REFORMATION

Christian exegesis of Gen 6:1–4 maintained the Sethites-interpretation during the Middle Ages and Reformation, as can be demonstrated from the writings of Nicholas of Lyra, Martin Luther, and John Calvin.

*Nicholas of Lyra*⁴³⁹ is well aware of the exegetical discussion on Gen 6:1–4. Though he opts for the Sethites-interpretation, he mentions how the text “is explained in several ways. One of the ways is that this has to be understood as being about evil demons who are called sons of God because of their spiritual nature, therefore, also in the first chapter of Job it is said that Satan was among the sons of God and they have mingled with the human race through women, and from them the giants were born, as is told later”.⁴⁴⁰ Although he does not consider this explanation irrational, Nicholas of Lyra adds that the “flood was not meted out as a punishment for demons, but only for man”.⁴⁴¹ He then quotes the exegesis of Rashi,⁴⁴² who explained the ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the judges’ or ‘sons of the rulers’, because the word ‘Elohim’ can be used to indicate ‘God’, or plural ‘gods’, or even ‘judges’, as is the case in Exod 22. The action of the ‘sons of the judges’ is explained by Rashi as ‘the right of the first night’.⁴⁴³ Yet Nicholas of Lyra does not consider this a rational option because the flood is not released for a particular sin of a certain social group but for the sin of all humanity. Therefore, he maintains the Sethites-interpretation.

⁴³⁹ Ca. 1270–1349, born in Lyre, Normandia, one of the most influential exegetes during the late Middle Ages because of his thorough exegetical method and his use of every available source. He knew Hebrew and also used the works of Jewish interpreters. See C. Carvalho, “Nicholas of Lyra,” in *DMBI*, 770–776.

⁴⁴⁰ *Hoc exponitur multipliciter. Uno modo quod per hoc intelligentur daemones incubi, qui dicuntur filii Dei, propter naturam spiritualem, unde & Iob. I. cap. dicitur: Satan fuisse inter filios Dei, & illi in specie humana commiscuerunt se mulieribus, & unde nati sunt gigantes, unde dicitur infra.* Nicholas of Lyra, in Strabus Fulgensis (Walafrid Strabo), *Bibliorum sacrorum cum glossa ordinaria* (Venice: Giunta, 1603), 138.

⁴⁴¹ *diluvium autem nunquam fuit in poenam daemonum, sed tantum hominum.* Nicholas of Lyra, in *Glossa ordinaria*, 138.

⁴⁴² Nicholas of Lyra often refers to Ra.Sa = Rashi, cf. Frans van Liere, “The Literal Sense of the Books of Samuel and Kings: From Andrew of St Victor to Nicholas of Lyra,” in *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture* (ed. Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith; SHCT 90; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 75–76.

⁴⁴³ *quando dabantur ad nuptias, quod accedebant ad ipsa cognoscento eas carnaliter, antequam mariti eas cognoscerent.* Nicholas of Lyra, in *Glossa ordinaria*, 139.

*Martin Luther*⁴⁴⁴ identifies the ‘sons of God’ as the offspring of Seth,⁴⁴⁵ and rejects the angels-interpretation as utter nonsense. Interestingly, he does not exclude the possibility that evil spirits can beget offspring in some way. It is only for angels that he considers this unthinkable.⁴⁴⁶

According to *John Calvin*,⁴⁴⁷ the expression ‘sons of God’ means ‘pious men’. “The old fairytale about angels who slept with women is, by its absurdity, abundantly refuted, therefore, it is surprising that learned men in the past have been fascinated by such gross and astonishing foolishness. The interpretation of the Chaldean⁴⁴⁸ exegetes is equally futile, namely that promiscuous relationships between sons of the nobles and spouses from the common people are condemned. Thus Moses distinguishes the sons of God from the daughters of men not in such a way as though their nature were dissimilar, or as though their origin were different, but because they were by adoption sons of God”.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁴ 1483–1546. See K. Hagen, “Luther, Martin,” in *DMBI*, 687–694.

⁴⁴⁵ “Denn das er nennet Gottes kinder / ist eigentlich zu deuten auff die menschen / auff den stamm und linien von Seth Adams son ... Das rede ich darumb / das unsere schreiber hierüber irre gewesen / und mancherley ding erdacht haben / wer die Gottes kinder gewesen weren / weil sie nicht gewonet waren / das man menschen auff erden / solt Gottes kinder und heilig heissen / so doch das Vater unser / so wir teglich beten / uns das in mund gibt / das wir Gottes kinder sind.” Martin Luther, *Auslegung uber das erste Buch Mose* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1552), 49–50. See also WA 42, 269 *fili Dei (hoc est, illi, qui habebant promissionem Seminis benedicti et pertinebant ad benedictum Semen)*.

⁴⁴⁶ “Aus solchem unverstand trewmenn etliche / das die Engele dadurch gemeinet werden / welche rechte Gottes kinder sind / als seien sie zu menschen töchtern gangen / und sie beschlaffen / daraus denn grosse Risen oder Giganten sollen geboren sein / Es ist aber narren teiding. Möglich ists wol / wie man sagt / das der böse geist sich zu den Zeuberin thun kan / und sie auch Schwengern / und alles unglück anrichten / Daher haben sie gedacht / es were hie mit den Engeln auch so zugangen.” Martin Luther, *Auslegung uber das erste Buch Mose*, 50.

⁴⁴⁷ 1509–1564. See D. L. Puckett, “Calvin, John,” in *DMBI*, 287–294.

⁴⁴⁸ Calvin means the Targumim.

⁴⁴⁹ *Vetus illud commentum de angelorum concubitu cum mulieribus, sua absurdate abunde refellitur, ac mirum est, doctos viros tam crassis et prodigiosis deliriis fuisse olim fascinos. Frigida etiam Chaldaei interpretis sententia, damnari promiscua coniugia inter filios magnatum et plebeias uxores. Filios itaque Dei a filiabus hominum non ideo discernit Moses, quasi dissimilis fuerit natura, vel diversa origo: sed quia adoptione filii Dei erant.* John Calvin, *Commentarii in quinque libros Mosis* (CR 50), 111.

3.10 NEWER EXEGESIS

During the nineteenth century, the angels-interpretation reappears as a possible solution for the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4. As a result, an ardent debate arose in German scholarly circles: Kurtz⁴⁵⁰ wrote a long polemic against Keil⁴⁵¹ in which he refuted the Sethites-interpretation and fervently defended the angels-interpretation on grammatical and lexicological grounds.⁴⁵² He published a similar pamphlet against Hengstenberg⁴⁵³ in defence of his earlier treatise.⁴⁵⁴ Kurtz referred to several conservative biblical interpreters at the beginning of the nineteenth century, who, in contrast to the then generally accepted Sethites-interpretation, opted for an identification of the ‘sons of God’ as supernatural beings.⁴⁵⁵ In 1865, Scholz,⁴⁵⁶ with a treatise, defended the Sethites-interpretation against the supporters of the angels-interpretation.⁴⁵⁷

Probably the first exegete who identified the ‘sons of God’ as ‘heavenly beings’ or ‘members of the heavenly council’ was Gunkel,⁴⁵⁸ this being around 1910. In his view, the belief in angels found in Israel is a remnant of earlier polytheistic religions. Therefore, he explains the expression ‘sons of God’ as ‘beings belonging to

⁴⁵⁰ Johann Heinrich Kurtz, 1809–1890, conservative Lutheran, church historian and professor of Old Testament. See Stephan Bitter, “Kurtz, Johann Heinrich,” *RGG*⁴ 4:1906. The author wrote also a book on the Bible and astronomy, *Bibel und Astronomie: Eine Darstellung der biblischen Kosmologie und ihrer Beziehungen zu den Naturwissenschaften* (4th ed.; Berlin: J. A. Wohlgemuth, 1858).

⁴⁵¹ Friedrich Karl Keil, 1807–1888, representative of Lutheran orthodoxy. See H. Gunkel, “Keil, Friedrich Karl,” *RGG*¹ 3:1054.

⁴⁵² Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Die Ehen der Söhne Gottes mit den Töchtern der Menschen: Eine theologische Untersuchung zur exegetischen historischen, dogmatischen und praktischen Würdigung des biblischen Berichtes Gen. 6,1–4* (Berlin: J. A. Wohlgemuth, 1857).

⁴⁵³ Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, 1802–1869, conservative Lutheran theologian and church politician. See Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm,” *RGG*⁴ 3:1624–1625.

⁴⁵⁴ Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Die Söhne Gottes in 1 Mos. 6,1–4 und die sündigenden Engel in 2 Petr. 2,4–5 und Jud. Vs. 6.7: Eine Streitschrift gegen Herrn Dr. Hengstenberg* (Mitau: Aug. Neuman, 1858).

⁴⁵⁵ E.g. Johann Friedrich von Meyer (1772–1849, see Glaue, “Meyer 9,” *RGG*¹ 4:365–366) already in 1819. Kurz refers further shortly to Krabbe, Hofmann, Baumgarten, Delitzsch, Stier, W. Neumann, Nägelsbach, W. F. Gass, Dietlein, Huther, Zezschwitz, G. L. Hahn, cf. Kurtz, *Die Söhne Gottes*, 18.

⁴⁵⁶ Paul Scholz, 1828–1900, Catholic theologian. See Bertholet, “Scholz 4,” *RGG*¹ 5:368–369.

⁴⁵⁷ Paul Scholz, *Die Ehen der Söhne Gottes mit den Töchtern der Menschen: Eine exegetisch-kritische, historische und dogmatische Abhandlung über den Bericht Genesis 6,1–4* (Regensburg: Georg Joseph Manz, 1865).

⁴⁵⁸ Herman Gunkel, 1862–1932, one of the most influential exegetes of the Old Testament in the 20th century. See Ernest Nicholson, “Gunkel, Herman,” *RGG*⁴ 3:1332.

the category of the *אֱלֹהִים* and suggests that hidden behind this an even earlier polytheistic belief is to be presumed, namely that of beings which are begotten by the gods, and thus, literarily, are ‘sons of the gods’. Yet, the section header of Gen 6:1–6 in his commentary – ‘Die Engelehen’ – still reflects the exegetical tradition of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵⁹ From that time on, the interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as a fixed expression for ‘gods’, or ‘members of the heavenly council’, gradually became generally accepted in exegetical literature.

While the reevaluation of the earlier angels-interpretation in the nineteenth century induced vehement exegetical debate in Germany, in the United Kingdom it kindled the fantasy⁴⁶⁰ of poets and playwrights.⁴⁶¹ In the field of graphic art, however, the story of Genesis 6:1–4 is hardly represented at all,⁴⁶² perhaps due to its enigmatic character, or due to the fact that the subsequent story of the flood provided ample material to depict.

3.11 CONCLUSIONS TO THE HISTORY OF EXEGESIS

Angels-Interpretation (A-1)

a) The angels-interpretation appears to be the earliest known explanation of the expression ‘sons of God’ as it occurs in Gen 6:1–4. The evidence for this conclusion can be drawn from the reading ‘angels/messengers of God’ in several Septuagint manuscripts, from traces in Targum Neofiti I and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan reflecting the angels-interpretation, from the works of Philo and Josephus, from the book of *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *2 Baruch*, and from several documents uncovered in the Judean desert. This mode of interpretation is demonstrably dominant from the second century B.C.E. on, until the second century C.E., as far as it can be discerned in the extant documents.

⁴⁵⁹ Herman Gunkel, *comm. Gen* 1910, 55–56.

⁴⁶⁰ E.g. Lord Byron, in one of his plays, has a woman say to the angels: “Descend and share my lot! / Though I be formed of clay, / And thou of beams / More bright than those of day / On Eden’s streams, / Thine immortality can not repay / With love more warm than mine”. George Gordon Noel Byron, “Heaven and Earth,” in *The Works of Lord Byron* (Vol. 1; London: John & Henry L. Hunt, 1824), 206.

⁴⁶¹ See Steven W. Holloway, “Imagining the Unspeakable: Genesis 6:1–4 in the Nineteenth Century,” *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 28 (2008): 25–40. (With thanks to Dr. Eric A. Seibert, Associate Professor of Old Testament Education, Messiah College, Philadelphia, who sent me a copy of the article.)

⁴⁶² See Holloway, “Imagining the Unspeakable,” 33.

b) The authors of the New Testament texts 1 Peter 3:18–20, 2 Peter 2:4–7 and Jude 5–7, which refer to sinning angels, appear to have been familiar with the added information from the Enochic tradition. Yet, they refrain from giving further details, as, for example, found in *1 Enoch*; they only mention the fact that some angels sinned and were punished accordingly. Apparently, both Jewish and Christian literature drew on a common catalogue of parenetic examples, in which the fall of the angels was one of the repeating elements.

c) Research based on patristic documents shows that the angels-interpretation was commonly accepted in patristic exegesis until the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century.

d) The Enochic tradition considerably influenced the conceptualisation and the wording of the angels-interpretation in patristic exegesis. This can be demonstrated when an explanation introduces details not present in Gen 6:1–4, details which can only have been gleaned from the Enochic tradition. These extra-biblical data are, for example, present in the writings of *Justin Martyr* (the coming into existence of demons), *Athenagoras* (demons originating from the spirits of the slain giants),⁴⁶³ *Irenaeus* (the legation of Enoch to the fallen angels), *Clement of Alexandria* (angels teaching several skills to humans), the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (competence in metallurgy, astronomy and magic), *Tertullian* (mentioning demons, astrology and idolatry, the use of cosmetics and even referring explicitly to Enoch), *Cyprian* (mankind learning the use of cosmetics from fallen angels), *Commodian* (angels being sent to earth as instructors for man, the turning away from God, the teaching of all kind of arts, the existence of demons and their role in idolatry), *Lactantius* (angels being sent to earth as guardians against evil, the angels' falling into sin, the origin of evil spirits), *Ambrosius* and *Sulpicius Severus* (giants as offspring of angels and women).

e) The variant readings in the Septuagint version of Gen 6:1–4 may have strengthened the angels-interpretation. Some of its manuscripts read 'angels of God' in Gen 6:1–4.

⁴⁶³ For further study, see Tobias Georges, "Die Götter als Dämonen bei Justin, Athenagoras und Tertullian," in *Gott – Götter – Götzen: XIV. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie (11.–15. September 2011 in Zürich)* (ed. Christoph Schwöbel; VWGTh 38; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 431–442.

Several authors only cite the reading ‘angels of God’ (Eusebius). Others mention the existence of the alternative reading ‘sons of God’ in some copies (Julius Africanus, Augustine). Still other authors refer only to ‘sons of God’ (Origen, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrus, Basil of Seleucia). Exegetes who quote the reading ‘sons of God’ may also refer to the existence of copies which read ‘angels of God’ (Anastasius Sinaita). The alternative translations of Aquila and Symmachus remained equally well-known in patristic exegesis, yet these versions did not always induce an appropriately different exegesis (Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Photius).

f) Several authors connect Gen 6:1–4 via the Enochic tradition with the origin of idolatry and the activity of evil spirits (Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Commodian, Lactantius, and Eusebius). This line of thought even appears in the work of John Cassian, an author who is representative of the Sethites-interpretation.⁴⁶⁴

g) The angels-interpretation did not cause dogmatic, historical or ethical problems for those authors who opted for an allegorical explanation of the passage Gen 6:1–4. These include Philo, Origen and Alexander of Lycopolis. Any questions evoked by the passage concerning dogmatics, historicity and morality were in this way easily evaded.

Mighty Ones-Interpretation (B-1)

h) In Jewish exegesis from the Second Temple period and thereafter, the mighty ones-interpretation did turn up, as is demonstrated by the translation of Symmachus and the Targumim. Yet, this new direction in interpretation was not undisputed, as evidenced by the words of Simeon bar Yoḥai quoted in *Genesis Rabbah*. The fact that this mighty ones-interpretation did not go unchallenged can

⁴⁶⁴ A similar view about the influence of evil spirits is expressed in the ‘Freer logion’ in Mark 16:14, found in the Codex Washingtonensis, dated to the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century. Cf. photograph 30, Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 114. See also Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels* (SBLTCS 5; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 196: “The central theme of the Freer logion resonates with a frequency shared by early Christian apologists.” For a narrative analysis of the logion, see Thomas R. Shepherd, “Narrative Analysis as a Text Critical Tool: Mark 16 in Codex W as a Test Case,” *JSNT* 32 no. 1 (2009): 83–90.

also be inferred from the persistent traces of the angels-interpretation in the Targumim and from its later reappearance in Jewish writings.

i) The mighty ones-interpretation was known at least to some of the Christian exegetes, yet they incorporated the translation ‘sons of the judges’ or ‘sons of the rulers’ into their own interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as Sethites. The examples which can be mentioned are Ephrem the Syrian, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria and Anastasius Sinaita.

Sethites-Interpretation (B-2)

j) The earliest appearance of the Sethites-interpretation can be dated to the first half of the third century in the works of Julius Africanus, who mentions the possibility of a Sethites-interpretation together with the until then traditional angels-interpretation. The Sethites-interpretation became ever-increasingly accepted from the beginning of the fourth century, while at the same time the angels-interpretation gradually became to be viewed as heretical. Throughout the fourth century, the angels-interpretation and the Sethites-interpretation appear to have co-existed. The definite change of the interpretive direction does not seem to have been influenced directly by a changed view of pseudepigraphic works, because Origen, who favoured the angels-interpretation, explicitly mentions the book of Enoch as being refuted by the church as a canonical document. Nevertheless, the fact that the Enochic tradition fell into oblivion may indirectly have facilitated the spreading of the Sethites-interpretation.

k) The Sethites-interpretation possibly has its provenance in the Syriac tradition.⁴⁶⁵ Julius Africanus, as far as is known its initial propagator, spent time at the Syriac court of king Abgar of Edessa, perhaps it was there that he learned of the Sethites-interpretation. Ephrem the Syrian, in his writings, sides with the Sethite-interpretation, without issuing any polemics against other views, so the interpretation must have been fairly well-established at the time. His contemporary, Eusebius of Emesa, who was born in Edessa and studied in Antioch and Alexandria, may be the link to Athanasius’ Sethites-interpretation. It appears less probable that the Sethites-interpretation has its origin in gnostic thinking about Sethites and Cainites, as has been proposed by a few exegetes.

⁴⁶⁵ For a more detailed summary, see Jacob J. T. Doedens, “The Indecent Descent of the Sethites: The Provenance of the Sethites-Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *SF* 16 no. 3–4 (2012): 47–57.

l) The spiritual background of the Sethites-interpretation appears to be a changing perception of sexuality as compared to that of the Old Testament.⁴⁶⁶ This changed perception emphasised chastity and virginity. This notion was already present in writings representing the angels-interpretation, for example in Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. It became even more extrapolated in the Sethites-interpretation of Syriac Christianity. There the Sethites, in their original state, are depicted as proto-monks, representing the monastic ideal by living an ‘angelic life’. In their fallen state, the Sethites become an example of warning.

m) Both the angels-interpretation and the Sethites-interpretation explain Gen 6:1–4 from a male perspective and also from a negative one on sexuality. By engaging in sexual relations with human females, angels lose the pure and spiritual aspect of their being.⁴⁶⁷ By entering into love affairs with Cainite females, the Sethites similarly lower⁴⁶⁸ themselves, losing their character as a pious people. In both interpretations the ‘daughters of men’ are repeatedly considered to be the initiators⁴⁶⁹ and perpetrators, while the ‘sons of God’ are polluted by them.⁴⁷⁰

n) Throughout the history of exegesis, the motivation behind a Sethites-interpretation underwent a shift. In Oriental Christianity, Sethites are viewed as the ones who lived in accordance to the monastic ideal, hence they are called ‘sons of God’. Occidental Christianity provided a more physical explanation: angels gradually came to be seen as having no corporeal substance.⁴⁷¹ Exegetes reasoned that the non-corporeality of angels made sexual intercourse between angels and humans impossible, therefore, the angels-interpretation is rejected in favour of the Sethites-interpretation.

⁴⁶⁶ H. W. De Knijff, *Venus aan de leiband: Europa's erotische cultuur en christelijke sexuele ethiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), 53–63, describes the rise of asceticism as already beginning in late Antiquity, prior to being taken up by Christianity.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Philo (3.2).

⁴⁶⁸ Especially in the Syriac tradition described quite literally as a descent from the high mountain where they lived close to the fence of paradise, cf. e.g. Ephrem the Syrian (3.8.22).

⁴⁶⁹ This shift in how responsibility was viewed is first attested in *T. Reu.*, cf. 3.4.6.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. *1 En.* 7:1, 9:8, 10:11, 12:4, 15:2–4 (3.4.2), *Jub.* (3.4.4), Pseudo-Clement, *Rec.* (3.8.6).

⁴⁷¹ The earliest tradition still considered the angels to be of a very light ethereal substance. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 50:1–2, 51:1. Online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>. Cited 20 December 2011.

o) The key text for the Sethites-interpretation is – especially in Greek patristic literature – the passive interpretation of the middle voice infinitive ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in the Septuagint of Gen 4:26, and thus understood in a way that Enosh ‘hoped to be called with the name of Lord God.’ If Enosh could hope to receive the designation of ‘God’, his offspring, consequently, were able to be called ‘sons of God’. This Septuagint translation probably influenced the perception of Ephrem the Syrian, for he also reads the verb as passive, although a Syriac translation has no basis for this. Still other exegetes, for further support of their exegetical solution, refer to Exod 22 and Ps 82, where human beings were thought to be endowed with the title אֱלֹהִים.

p) Interestingly enough, traces of the Enochic tradition remained present in the Sethites-interpretation. An example of this phenomenon is the statement that Sethites learnt all kinds of arts and sorcery from the Cainites, a notion which may originate from Gen 4:20–22 (Jabal, Jubal, Tubal-Cain, and Na’amah), but which is also characteristic for the activity of the fallen angels in the Enochic tradition. This line of thought is found in John Cassian and John Malalas. The qualifications of Enoch, ‘the scribe, as depicted in Jewish literature, when transferred to Christian literature, are often attributed to Seth.⁴⁷² For example, in the writings of John Malalas, Seth is described as the inventor of Hebrew letters and as an astrologer. Further influence of the Enochic tradition can be observed in ancient Syriac literature, namely, that Sethites lived on a high mountain where Adam’s grave is located and where they lived in close proximity to the fence guarding paradise, so that they could hear the voices of angels. From this mountain the Sethites descended (!) to the Cainites who lived beneath in the valley where Abel was murdered. This tradition is found in Ephrem the Syrian’s *Hymnes on Paradise*, in the so-called *Cave of Treasures*, but also in Eutychius’ *Annales*.

q) The exegetes of the Reformation maintained the Sethites-interpretation. A more thoroughgoing humanistic approach of going *ad fontes* could also have resulted in a return to the earlier angels-interpretation. Yet, based on their more rational argumentation, their interpretation of Gen 6:1–4 left little room for an angels-interpretation. Nevertheless, the exegesis of the reformers is still pre-modern:

⁴⁷² Cf. A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 48–53.

Luther, for example, apparently agrees with Augustine in considering the possibility that evil spirits begetting offspring from a sorceress in some way or other.

Divine Beings-Interpretation (A-2)

r) The nineteenth century witnesses a revival of the angels-interpretation which is followed by the divine beings-interpretation taking its beginnings at the onset of the twentieth century.

Interpretation and Historical Context

s) Part of the diverse explanations of Gen 6:1–4 can be related to the historical context of each of the particular interpreters. The Enochic tradition possibly can be placed to the time of the Diadochi, and thus reverts to biblical motifs to shed light upon the difficult situation of contemporary readers. The same may be true for the angels-interpretation *en vogue* in patristic exegesis until the fourth century. Because the church lived in a context of paganism, the angel-interpretation provided a popular explanation⁴⁷³ for the existence and influence of demonic activity behind all forms of idolatry. From the time from which Christianity became a *religio licita*, a worldly lifestyle gradually became one of the threats which the church had to address. Within this context, the Sethites-interpretation provided a useful illustration by which it warned people not to imitate the apostate Sethites.

t) Even if the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 about the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ may seem to belong in the category of *adiaphora*, but when viewed from a systematic-theological perspective, its interpretation made a significant impact on the evolution of angelology and demonology. Seen from the perspective of ethics, the Sethites-interpretation provided a model for monastic life which harked back almost to the creation of the world. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this short passage, then, is more comprehensive and more varied than is expected at first sight.

⁴⁷³ Cf. J. A. Meijer, *Verantwoorde hoop: Christelijke apologetiek in een hellenistische wereld* (Kamper Bijdrage 27; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1988), 26 nt. 88.

4

At the Crossroads: Weighing Exegetical Solutions

Οὐ γὰρ τοῖς τὰ πολλὰ λέγουσιν ἔχαιρον ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί,
ἀλλὰ τοῖς τἀληθῇ διδάσκουσιν¹

4. AT THE CROSSROADS: WEIGHING EXEGETICAL SOLUTIONS

4.0 INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

The present chapter intends to determine the nature of the solutions proposed in explaining the meaning of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. Thus, the different arguments will be classified in order to evaluate their exegetical strength.

The results originating from the history of exegesis on the subject can now be analysed according to four categories of solutions. The *preternatural category* considers the ‘sons of God’ to be angels (4.1). Viewed as a *social category*, the ‘sons of God’ mentioned in Gen 6:1–4 are interpreted as rulers or otherwise mighty men (4.2). The *religious category* places the ‘sons of God’ in the group of god-fearing men, usually identified as the offspring of Seth, the so called ‘Sethites’ (4.3). Placed in the *mythological category*, the ‘sons of God’ are considered to be members of the so-called ‘divine council’, and therefore can be described as divine beings (4.4). For an evaluation of this last position, the concept and type-scene of the divine council in extrabiblical and biblical literature will be dealt with more closely. Some minor exegetical variants on the above-mentioned four main categories, or combinations of them, will be reviewed in a short section (4.5). Every section dealing with the main exegetical solutions will not only describe the actual arguments and objections, but also determine their *nature* and, in this light, their exegetical value. The chapter ends with conclusions (4.6).

¹ “For unlike many, I was not pleased with those who say many things, but with those who teach true things.” Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (ca. 125 C.E.), cited by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39:3 (PG 20:297).

The arguments in favour or against a given exegetical solution differ from each other in nature. This diversity makes it possible to devise a *hierarchy of arguments*. In the present chapter this hierarchy of arguments is applied in the following order:²

(Table 7)

hierarchy of arguments		
1	lexical	based on the possible range of meanings within the language
2	contextual	based on the textual context in which the expression is embedded
3	extrabiblical	based on the use of similar expressions in ancient Near Eastern texts
4	conceptual	based on the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ within the conceptual world of the Old Testament
5	developmental	based on how the interpretation of the expression developed in later narrative and interpretative literature
6	theological	based on theological reflection

1. This classification of arguments can be envisaged as ever-wider concentric circles moving outwards around the text.

2. The inner circle is formed by *lexical* (1) observations; the lack of a firm lexical base invalidates any further argumentation.³ The next circle of arguments seeks verification within the close *context* (2) in which the expression is functioning, in

² Comparable elements can be found in the exegetical model presented by Talstra, cf. Eep Talstra, *Oude en nieuwe lezers: Een inleiding in de methoden van uitleg van het Oude Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 92.

³ For the primacy of the system of the language over the premise of a literary device or a theological intention, cf. Talstra, *Oude en nieuwe lezers*, 115; idem, *Solomon's Prayer: Synchrony and Diachrony in the Composition of I Kings 8,14–61* (CBET 3; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), 20. See also Jakob van Bruggen, *Het lezen van de bijbel: Een inleiding* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), 20–21.

the case of Gen 6:1–4, the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Interpretation based on *extrabiblical* (3) data is actually seeking lexical arguments in ancient Near Eastern literature using similar expressions. Within the reach of *conceptual* (4) arguments belong considerations which analyse the expression ‘sons of Gods’ in Gen 6:1–4 for its possible function within the conceptual world of the Old Testament. The range of *developmental* (5) considerations searches for solutions from rewritten narratives based on Gen 6:1–4 and early interpretative literature from the Second Temple period. For the purpose of the present study, arguments based on New Testament passages that apparently allude to Gen 6:1–4 are labelled under this heading also, because these passages view Gen 6:1–4 through the lens of the Enochic tradition. The outer sphere comprises arguments derived from *theological* (6) reflection.

3. The hierarchy of arguments, thus, ranges from considerations in which faith convictions play a less important part through arguments in which they are more important.
4. The first four categories are focussing relatively more on how the implied audience, ‘the Israelite of Old Testament times’, might have understood Gen 6:1–4; the following two categories concentrate comparatively more on how later readers of the intertestamental and the New Testament period may have understood the passage, and also on how modern readers might interpret it.
5. Whenever arguments appear to outbalance each other, primacy will be given to the ones which rank higher in the hierarchy.
6. The fact that arguments are put into a hierarchical order does not imply that some considerations are less valuable. Within the exegetical debate the whole range of arguments has its legitimate place.
7. As will turn out, not all observed categories apply to each proposed explanation. Borders are sometimes fuzzy, and, for that matter, distinctions intertwine. Nevertheless, determining and categorising the nature of exegetical arguments to assess the meaning of Gen 6:1–4 may appear to be a useful instrument to clarify the exegetical discussion.

4.1 THE PRETERNATURAL CATEGORY: 'SONS OF GOD' INTERPRETED AS ANGELS

The English word 'angel' and its equivalents in many modern languages is derived from the Greek word ἄγγελος, 'messenger', which is the translation of Hebrew מַלְאָךְ. The use of the word 'angel', however, has an inherent twofold source for possible misunderstanding. Firstly, the word מַלְאָךְ is used both for human messengers sent by a human, and for – human⁴ and heavenly – messengers,⁵ sent by God, whereas the English word 'angel' is exclusively used for God's heavenly messengers. Secondly, the word 'angel' is an umbrella term for any of God's heavenly attendants, while, by contrast, the Old Testament displays a whole range of terms for heavenly beings in the service of God.⁶ Within this range, the word מַלְאָךְ originally was used solely⁷ for the ones whom God veritably commissioned as messengers. It is only in the literature from the Second Temple period and in the New Testament⁸ that the words מַלְאָךְ and ἄγγελος develop into generic terms for any of God's heavenly servants, independently from whether they serve as messengers or not.⁹ In the Old Testament the word מַלְאָךְ appears to have a narrower meaning, even in Daniel 3:25.¹⁰ In the exegesis of Gen 6:1–4, and, by consequence, also in the present study, it is this collective sense which is referred to by the word 'angel'; the term signifies any of God's heavenly attendants.

⁴ Only seldom, see e.g. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17.20; 19:28; 2 Chron 36:15–16; Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7.

⁵ In the function of a *go-between* (sent by a human, e.g. Gen 32:4, or by God, e.g. Gen 19:1), an *escort* for people who were travelling under protection of a sender (sent by a human, e.g. 1 Sam 25:42; 2 Sam 11:4, or by God, e.g. Gen 24:7.40; 32:2; Ps 34:8; 91:11), or an *executive* (commissioned by a human, e.g. Josh 7:22; 1 Sam 19:11–21, or by God, e.g. 2 Kgs 19:35; Ps 103:20). A more general translation would be 'delegate', in German 'Beauftragte'.

⁶ E.g. מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, 'the host of heaven' (e.g. 1 Kgs 22:19); רוּחַ, 'spirit' (e.g. 1 Kgs 22:21, so often in literature of Qumran); כְּרוּב, 'cherub' (e.g. Gen 3:24; 2 Sam 22:11); שֶׁרָפִים, 'seraphim' (Isa 6:2.6); עֲיִרִי, 'watchers' (Dan 4:10.14.20); קְדָשִׁים, 'holy ones' (Dan 4:10.14.20); שָׂרִים, 'princes' (Dan 10:13; 12:1, cf. Josh 5:14–15).

⁷ Cf. S. A. Meier, "Angel I" in *DDD*, 47: "Thus, an early Israelite from the period of the monarchy would probably not have identified the theriomorphic cherubim and seraphim as *mal' ākīm* 'messengers'."

⁸ Though the word ἄγγελος is sometimes still used for human messengers, see Luke 7:24; 9:52; Jas 2:25.

⁹ Cf. S. A. Meier, "Angel I" in *DDD*, 47. See also Dale Basil Martin, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129 no. 4 (2010): 664–665.

¹⁰ See the analysis below in 4.4.3.1 under *Daniel* 3:25.

4.1.1 The Angels-Interpretation — Lexical Arguments (1)

The main lexical argument for the angels-interpretation is the similarity in wording between Gen 6:1 and 6:2. In vs. 1, the expression **הָאָדָם** is used in the general sense of ‘mankind’. It is likely that in vs. 2 **הָאָדָם**, as part of the expression **בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם**, ‘daughters of men’, is used in the same general way. Since the expression **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** is used in contrast to **בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם**, it can be argued that by **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים**, the ‘sons of God’, beings are meant which are beyond the human realm.¹¹

Countering the argument that **הָאָדָם** in the sense of ‘mankind’ should mean the same in Gen 6:1 as in 6:2, and that therefore the ‘sons of God’ have to be identified as non-human beings, is the view that the expression **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** could still mean a specific subset of humanity in general, namely those human beings who can be qualified as being ‘sons of God’.¹² However, the passage, then, would only describe marriages of a specific group of men with women in general, a narrative which has little topical value.

When considered from a lexical point of view, one can wonder why Gen 6:1–4 does not apply a clearer expression, for example **מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים**, as in Gen 28:12 and 32:2, if the expression **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** would refer to angels? Why an intricate term where an ordinary word would suffice?¹³ This would argue against the angels-interpretation, though an answer could be that, in any case, the term **מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים** would not be appropriate for this situation, because, if the expression in Gen 6:1–4 has God’s messengers in view, these ‘messengers’ act rather out of character. Perhaps if in Job 1:6, 2:1 and 38:7 an expression like **מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים**, referring to angels, had been used, this would eventually fit the context, especially when viewed from how the Enoch-literature describes the function of angels. However, these texts use the term **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים**, which is understandable, because the ‘sons of God’ do not function as messengers here. This may indicate that the expressions were not equivalent (as they eventually became in the Enoch-literature) at the time Job was written.

It has been observed¹⁴ that in all the other Old Testament texts in which **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** or a similar expression functions, it refers to at least supra-mundane

¹¹ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 291–292.

¹² See W. Vrijvinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” *TheolRef* 17 no. 3 (1974): 183–184. But cf. 2.2.2.

¹³ This objection is phrased by Cassuto, *comm. Gen*, 292. His answer is that the ‘sons of God’ are angels of a lower rank (294).

¹⁴ See the overview in 2.2.1.

beings, which in most of the texts also might be understood as ‘angels’ in the modern sense of the word.¹⁵

According to Keil and Delitzsch, the angels-interpretation is only correct if lexical research permits no other solutions. In their view, however, the Hebrew expression does allow for other translations which place ‘sons of God’ into the human realm, based on the observation that the Old Testament can refer to Israelites as ‘sons of YHWH’ (Deut 32:5; Ps 73:15; Hos 2:1).¹⁶

In the evaluation of the pros and cons of the angels-interpretation, lexical arguments indeed ought to be given priority. If lexicography unambiguously demonstrates that the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים is a set phrase for beings who can also be referred to as ‘angels’, this is sufficient to settle the case. A set phrase can consist of an idiom (e.g. ‘red herring’) or of a unique referent (e.g. ‘Red Sea’). Independently of how the constitutive parts of a set phrase can be explained separately, in their specific combination, the expression has only one referent.

The statistical base for valid conclusions from lexicographical research pertaining to the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים is rather limited. The expression occurs only two times in exactly the same form in one other place of the Old Testament, in Job 1:6 and 2:1. However, the research in chapter 2 demonstrates that slightly variant expressions also can be integrated into a full lexical analysis which results in a total of eleven Old Testament occurrences, these including the variant readings from Deut 32 and the two occurrences in Gen 6:1–4.¹⁷ These other occurrences provide a more significant foundation for any lexical analysis. As a result of this analysis, there remains doubt as to whether in all circumstances ‘angels’ is an adequate interpretation for the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים or its variants. Comparison of the passages shows that a rendering as ‘angels’ is possible in Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7 and Dan 3:25, but impossible in Ps 82:6, and less appropriate or illogical in Deut 32:8.43

¹⁵ Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Gen* 1887, 146, who calls the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים *nomen naturae* over against מַלְאָכִים, which is a *nomen officii*. Similarly Dillmann, *comm. Gen* (KEH) 1892, 119. See also Driver, *comm. Gen* 1948, 82–83; Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 292; Gispén, *comm. Gen* (COT) 1974, 218–222; Willem A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 348; F. B. Huey, Jr., “Are the ‘Sons of God’ Angels? Yes,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 193–194; M. J. Paul, e.a., eds., *comm. Gen / Exod* (SBOT) 2004, 75.

¹⁶ Cf. K&D 1,128. See further 4.3.3.

¹⁷ See 2.2.1. Cf. also the variable wording of the New Testament expression ‘kingdom of heaven’ and ‘kingdom of God’: both set phrases have the same referent.

(Qumran/LXX). In Ps 29:1 and 89:7, the use of the expression is ambivalent as to whom exactly it is referring.¹⁸

A grammatical-historical approach, therefore, leads to the provisional conclusion that an early Israelite, on hearing the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, would have envisaged beings belonging to the heavenly realm but probably would not have specifically equated these beings with ‘angels’ in the later sense of the word (viz. as God’s heavenly servants).

4.1.2 The Angels-Interpretation — Contextual Arguments (2)

A contextual argument in favour of the angels-interpretation states that it solves more exegetical problems concerning Gen 6:1–4 than the ‘human-marriage’ version. In the ‘human-marriage’ view, the nature of the offence has to be extrapolated from the text, while an interrelationship of angels and humans requires – according to Van Gemeren – no further explanation as to the transgression which is implied.¹⁹ In his view, the cohabitation between angels and women provides an acceptable explanation for the offspring of Nephilim / Gibborim issuing from these marriages. The story of Gen 6:1–4, then, provides a rationale for the flood through whose effect also these hybrid beings, originating from these mixed relationships, were eradicated from the earth.²⁰

As an objection to the angels-interpretation, it is argued from the context of the passage that angels are not mentioned previously in the book of Genesis. Therefore, their textual appearance in the passage of Gen 6:1–4 is not anticipated, whereas the pious are already commented upon in Gen 4:26.²¹ However, the sudden appearance of a concept not defined earlier is no exception. Also, the כְּרִבִּים in Gen 3:24 are neither mentioned before, nor is their nature explained. An expression already known by the reader as part of his/her conceptual world needs no explanation. This conceptual world has been in existence prior to the text. Only expressions which do not – or no longer – belong to the conceptual world of the intended reader need to be explained, as is, for example, demonstrated by 1 Sam 9:9.²²

¹⁸ See further the more detailed discussion in 4.4.3.1.

¹⁹ Cf. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God,” 346–347.

²⁰ Cf. Huey, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? Yes,” 201–204.

²¹ Cf. K&D 130; Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NAC) 1996, 326.

²² “The prophet of today was formerly called a seer.”

4.1.3 The Angels-Interpretation — Extrabiblical Arguments (3)

In extrabiblical literature, expressions like ‘sons of the gods’ are used to denote ‘gods’ or ‘deities’.²³ It has been argued, therefore, that a similar wording had been incorporated into the religion of Israel, in which these beings came to be seen as angels and not as deities.²⁴

However, ancient Near Eastern literature is also advanced on a conceptual level in terms of an objection to the angels-interpretation, arguing that such sexual relationships between deities and humans are attested nowhere, save in the Greek myths.²⁵ The angels-interpretation and the divine beings-interpretation, then, would make Gen 6:1–4 an exception among ancient Near Eastern narratives.

4.1.4 The Angels-Interpretation — Conceptual Arguments (4)

As a general conceptual objection to the angels-interpretation, it is remarked that if in Gen 6:1–4 it is angels which are to be understood, then these angels would be acting totally out of character as compared with the behaviour of angels in other parts of the Old Testament. As Cassuto phrases it, angels are normally “depicted as pure and exalted beings, who represent the Lord, speak in His name and carry out His mission; but here we are confronted by personalities that act on their account, and not necessarily with overmuch purity”.²⁶

Other conceptual objections to the angels-interpretation mainly circle around the question whether or not angels are sexual beings. If angels are indeed thought of as sexual beings, heaven should have taken care of the fulfilment of their sexual needs, thus rendering superfluous (though not impossible) their rush towards human females.²⁷ Even if the Old Testament relates how angels are able to eat terrestrial food,²⁸ nowhere is it said that they can procreate.²⁹ According to Kidner, the angels-interpretation therefore “defies the normalities of experience”.³⁰

²³ The extrabiblical references to ‘sons of the gods’ will be addressed more extensively in section 4.4.2.

²⁴ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen.* 293–294.

²⁵ Cf. Jacob, *comm. Gen.* 1934, 171. See also Ronald S. Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 no. 1 (1987): 16 nt. 16. For evidence to the contrary, see 5.4.3.

²⁶ Cassuto, *comm. Gen.* 292.

²⁷ Cf. Jacob, *comm. Gen.* 170.

²⁸ Gen 18:8, 19:3.

²⁹ Leroy Birney, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JETS* 13 no. 1 (1970): 45; Vijfinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” 185; Mathews, *comm. Gen.* 327; Waltke and Fredricks, *comm. Gen.* 2001, 116; S. Hre Kio, “Revisiting ‘The Sons of God’ in Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 52 no. 2 (2001): 235; Currid, *comm. Gen.* 2003, 174.

³⁰ Kidner, *comm. Gen.* 1974, 84.

Confronted with the lack of other firm Old Testament evidence for sexual relationships of angels with women, Walton concludes: “That fallen angels intermarried with human women at some point in ancient history is certainly not impossible, but it is incredible”.³¹ In order to resolve this matter, usually arguments from the New Testament are inferred. Among New Testament counter-arguments to the angels-interpretation, the passage from Matt 22:30 (as its parallels in Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:34–36) is significant in demonstrating that angels cannot engage in sexual relations. In Matt 22:30 Jesus answers a question about the possibility of resurrection: “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.” The wording of the parallel passage from Luke is a little more elaborate and mentions angels and ‘sons of God’ in parallelism: “they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to the angels and are sons of God (ἰσάγγελοι γάρ εἰσιν καὶ υἱοὶ εἰσιν θεοῦ) because they are sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). These texts are viewed as demonstrating the angels-interpretation to be untenable because, contrary to Jesus’ statement, the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6 do marry, therefore, they cannot be identified as angels.³²

However, the passages from Matt 22:30, Mark 12:25 and Luke 20:34–36 give no definite clue which might disprove the angels-interpretation. These texts display Jesus’ refutation of Sadducee objections to the possibility of resurrection. The answer implies that angels do not marry but does not state that angels cannot marry. It neither implies that fallen angels never could have had sexual relationships. The Old Testament recounts that angels in earthly appearance are “dressed as men, eat, drink, walk and are subject to being molested (Gen. 18:1,2,8; 19:1,5)”, as Van Gemenen formulates.³³ There is, then, no reason to exclude beforehand the possibility of sexual relationships entered into by angels.

4.1.5 The Angels-Interpretation — Developmental Arguments (5)

According to some scholars, Gen 6:1–4 provides a short summary of an already earlier existent tale which is found in the Enochic tradition.³⁴ If it could indeed be documented that the flow of literary dependence leads from the Enochic tradition to Gen 6:1–4, the angels-interpretation would be the only correct one.

³¹ Walton, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? No,” 195.

³² Cf. Jacob, *comm. Gen*, 170; Youngblood, *comm. Gen* 1991, 81.

³³ Willem A. Van Gemenen, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 346.

³⁴ See 3.4.2.

However, it is more likely that the Book of Enoch expounds on Gen 6:1–4 than that Gen 6:1–4 summarises the Enochic tradition.³⁵ In this case, it has to be concluded that the angels-interpretation is the earliest attested interpretation of Gen 6:1–4.³⁶

Several interpreters consider the very antiquity of this exegesis to be evidence supporting the angels-interpretation.³⁷ Although the antiquity of this exegesis is of significant weight, it certainly is not decisive, for it is not known whether these sources consist of authoritative interpretation or of nothing more than applied exegesis within Second Temple literature.³⁸ At least, there are signs of a minority view in Second Temple Jewish interpretation which contested the angels-interpretation.³⁹

Furthermore, several authors argue that the angels-interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 depends on the post-exilic development in which the Old Testament use of the expression was interpreted as referring to angels. This later understanding, therefore, does not necessarily reflect the expression’s original meaning.⁴⁰

The New Testament furthermore provides additional support for the angels-interpretation. The passages from 1 Peter 3:18–20, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6–7 refer to an apostasy of angels. Although these passages do not provide much detail about

³⁵ See 3.4.2, cf. also Andreas Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel: Der literar- und theologiegeschichtliche Diskurs der Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (ATANT 86; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 224–225. If Gen 6:1–4 is considered to be part of J (see 1.3.2), it must predate 1 En.

³⁶ See 3.11.

³⁷ Cf. Huey, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? Yes,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990) 191–192.

³⁸ Cf. John H. Walton, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? No,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 196–200; idem, *comm. Gen* (NIVAC) 2001, 192–193.

³⁹ See 3.1.3 and 3.6.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979), 16. See also Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut: Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegese-geschichtlichen Methode* (Wien: Herder, 1966), 127; Vijfinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” 185; Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 166; idem, “Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible,” *BR* 35 (1990): 18–35.

this ‘fall of the angels’, they allude to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4.⁴¹ However, Peter and Jude do this by referring to the Enochic tradition: all these passages mention the imprisonment of the apostate angels, something which is a constitutive element of the Enoch tradition but totally absent in Gen 6:1–4. It may be that Peter and Jude – for parenetic purposes – are borrowing elements from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition which were well-known by their readers.⁴² Yet, the purpose of the present study is to best determine the presumed understanding of the text by earlier Israelites, in order to discover its original meaning. This may differ from how Peter and Jude understood Gen 6:1–4.

4.1.6 The Angels-Interpretation — Theological Arguments (6)

Some interpreters argue in favour of the angels-interpretation by stating that not only humans but also angels can sin, this being based on notions in the Old Testament as found in Job 4:18: “Even in his servants he puts no trust, and he charges his angels with error”⁴³ and Job 15:15: “Even in his holy ones he puts no trust, and the heavens are not clear in his eyes”.⁴⁴ However, these texts must be used with caution as they represent the theology of Eliphaz, which is not concordant with the teaching of the book of Job as a whole. The reasoning that even angels are not totally free from sin is used by Eliphaz as rhetorical device to illuminate the incomparable righteousness of God. Furthermore, the possibility that angels can sin is not proof that in Gen 6:1–4 angels are referred to; however, this does not exclude angels *a priori* from the list of candidates for the identification of the ‘sons of God’.

An ethical-theological objection to the angels-interpretation is the ever-returning question as to why humans are punished⁴⁵ for a sin which angels

⁴¹ See 3.7.

⁴² Cf. J. Daryl Charles, “The Angels under Reserve in 2 Peter and Jude,” *BBR* 15 no. 1 (2005): 47. In a similar way, the names of Jannes and Jambres function in 2 Tim 3:8 as a practical shorthand to bring the story of the Exodus to mind. These names are not found in the Old Testament but only in extrabiblical Jewish literature, cf. *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 7:11, *T.Sol.* 25:4 (*OTP* 1:985), *L.A.B.* 47:1 (*OTP* 2:361), *Jan. Jam.* (*OTP* 2:437–442).

⁴³ The word מַלְאָכָיו is a *hapax*, but from the context of Job 4:17–19 it is clear that the reasoning moves from major to minor: how can man be righteous before God, if even his heavenly servants are not?

⁴⁴ See Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” *BZ* 11 no. 1 (1967): 73.

⁴⁵ Depending on the exegesis of Gen 6:3 a verdict implying a lifespan limited to 120 years, or a time of respite until the flood.

committed. Already Theodoret⁴⁶ argued from this observation that the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 were humans:

From all this it is clear that they are men who have fallen in love with the unlawful life. For if angels would have had intercourse with the daughters of men, man would have been wronged by the angels, for it is clear that they seduced their daughters perforce, so they would also have been treated unjustly by the God who created them, if they were punished for angels who engaged in sexual intercourse. But I think even the father of lies does not dare to say that. For through many things the divine Scripture teaches that also man has sinned, and it is upon man that the divine verdict is pronounced.⁴⁷

By contrast, the pseudepigraphic literature alluding to Gen 6:1–4 is very explicit and elaborate on the verdict imposed on the fallen angels.⁴⁸

Yet, this ethical-theological objection that it would be unjust if mankind is punished for a sin committed by angels constitutes no decisive argument against the angels-interpretation, for in the flood story, also, animals are punished for the sins perpetrated by mankind.⁴⁹ In the case that the Nephilim / Gibborim are to be viewed as the hybrid offspring of humans and non-humans, the punishment, formulated in Gen 6:3, equally applies to these mixed beings. They are, then, considered to share the fate of humans in having their lifespan reduced. It is also possible that Gen 6 simply does not mention the punishment meted out the ‘sons of God’.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See 3.8.32.

⁴⁷ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaest. in Gen.* 47 (PG 80:148): Ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ἀνθρώπους εἶναι δηλοῖ, τοὺς τὸν παράνομον βίον ἡγαπηκότας. Εἰ δὲ ἄγγελοι ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπεμίγησαν θυγατράσιν, ἡδίκηνται οἱ ἄνθρωποι παρὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων· βία γὰρ δηλονότι τὰς τούτων θυγατέρας διέφθειραν· ἡδίκηνται δὲ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πεποιηκότος Θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἀγγέλων λελαγνευκότων αὐτοὶ κολαζόμενοι. Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲ αὐτὸν οἶμαι φάναι τολμῆσαι τὸν τοῦ ψεύδους πατέρα. Διὰ πολλῶν γὰρ ἐδίδαξεν ἡ θεία Γραφή, καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἡμαρτηκέναι, καὶ κατ’ ἀνθρώπων τὴν θείαν ἐξενηνέχθαι ψήφον.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jacob, *comm. Gen.* 171; Gustav E. Closen, *Die Sünde der ‘Söhne Gottes’: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Genesis* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1937), 127–129; Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 123; Leroy Birney, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4,” 45; Vijfinkel, “De *bene ha’elohim* in Genesis 6:1–4,” 185; Mathews, *comm. Gen.* 326–327; S. Hre Kio, “Revisiting the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6.1–4,” 235.

⁴⁹ See Gen 6:7. This is the more significant because according to Gen 9:5 animals can be held accountable for manslaughter. Dillmann mentions also Jer 12:4; 14:5–6; Hos 4:3; Joel 1:18; Zeph 1:2–3 as examples where nature suffers for the sins of mankind. Cf. Dillmann, *comm. Gen* 1892, 125.

⁵⁰ According to Morgenstern, Ps 82:6–7 expounds upon the punishment of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6, viz. that they participate in the same shortened lifespan of human beings, and thus are punished by the loss of their immortality. Cf. Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14 (1939): 72–82.

4.1.7 The Angels-Interpretation — Evaluation

One of the strong points of the angels-interpretation is that it sets the ‘sons of God’ in the heavenly realm. The lexical arguments for this approach are more convincing than taking the ‘sons of God’ to be human beings.

These lexical arguments are supported by the contextual arguments that the reference to the extraordinary offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’ is easier to understand if Gen 6:1–4 is targeting superhuman beings with the expression ‘sons of God’. The developmental arguments which observe that in later narrative literature, which elaborates Gen 6:1–4, these ‘sons of God’ are envisaged as ‘angels’ also strengthens a ‘superhuman’ approach.

There are, however, indications, that an early Israelite upon hearing the expression ‘sons of God’, as used in Gen 6:1–4, would not have envisaged ‘angels’ in the sense of a general term for God’s heavenly attendants. Later interpretation viewed these ‘sons of God’ as heavenly beings who generally became called ‘angels’. This could be attributed to the growing insight that heavenly beings in the service of YHWH can only be angels. However, this later interpretation may at the same time also blur the nuances and functions of the term ‘sons of God’ which were still discernable for the implied audience of the texts in which ‘sons of God’ are mentioned.

Moreover, even if the identification of the ‘sons of God’ as angels would fit the narrative of Gen 6:1–4, this interpretation is less appropriate, or even impossible, for several of the Old Testament texts in which a similar expression is present.

4.2 THE SOCIAL CATEGORY:

‘SONS OF GOD’ INTERPRETED AS MIGHTY ONES

The translations of Symmachus,⁵¹ Targum Onqelos,⁵² Neofiti I,⁵³ Pseudo-Jonathan,⁵⁴ variant readings of the Samaritan Targum⁵⁵ and of the Peshitta,⁵⁶ render the expression ‘sons of God’ as ‘sons of the judges’, ‘rulers’, or ‘mighty ones’.

⁵¹ See 3.1.3.

⁵² See 3.1.6.

⁵³ See 3.1.7.

⁵⁴ See 3.1.8.

⁵⁵ See 3.1.9.

⁵⁶ See 3.1.11.

The argumentation for this translation is apparently based on lexical arguments (1) which particularly focus on the meaning of the second term of the expression ‘sons of God’, אֱלֹהִים. Actually, the word אֱלֹהִים, ‘god(s)’, is read here as a means to denote rulers or judges.

Later interpreters take this interpretation of אֱלֹהִים as their starting point. They base their solution mainly on the conceptual argument (4) that humans sometimes are deified in ancient Near Eastern literature, as occurring in the concept of the so-called ‘divine kingship’.

4.2.1 The Mighty Ones-Interpretation — Lexical Arguments (1)

The main argument to identify the ‘sons of God’ as ‘mighty men’ is provided by the ancient translations which interpret the word אֱלֹהִים in Exod 21:6 and 22:6–12 as ‘judges’.

Exodus 21:5–6 deals with the situation of the obliged manumission of a slave after he has served his master for six years. If, however, the slave does not want to be released, Exod 21:6 prescribes that “his master shall bring him אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים and shall bring him to the door or the doorpost, and bore his ear through with an awl”. *Targum Onqelos* and *Pseudo-Jonathan* read for אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים the word רִיבִיּא, the Peshitta *dyn*, ‘judges’.⁵⁷ The Septuagint interprets the phrase as: πρὸς τὸ κριτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘to the lawcourt of God’.

A similar interpretation is given for Exod 22:6–12. This passage is a law describing a purgatory procedure in case of missing or damaged property that was given in deposit. In case no suspect is found, the party who had been given goods in deposit can clear himself / herself of suspicion by appealing אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים (Exod 22:7). In the case of ‘word against word’, both the plaintiff and the accused have to appear עַד הָאֱלֹהִים and whom the אֱלֹהִים (plural) declare guilty (יִרְשָׁעוּ),⁵⁸ shall be liable (Exod 22:8). Also here, interpreters explain the word אֱלֹהִים as denoting judges, an exegesis which possibly is inspired by Exod 22:27 (“You shall not revile אֱלֹהִים, nor curse a ruler (נָשִׂיא) of your people”), where אֱלֹהִים (translated by *Tg. Onq.* as ‘judges’) is found in a parallelism with ‘ruler’.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See the apparatus of *BHS* ad locum.

⁵⁸ The verb is in the plural. The Samaritan Pentateuch has, because of its singular subject (יְהוָה), the verb also in the singular (יִרְשָׁעוּ) with a suffix 3 sg., applying an ipf. energicum, or energetic *nun*. Cf. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SubBi 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 160, § 61f.

⁵⁹ For a short overview, see Cyrus H. Gordon, “אֱלֹהִים in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges,” *JBL* 54 (1935): 139–144; James E. Coleran, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2,” *TS* 2 no. 4 (1941): 489–491.

If the word אֱלֹהִים in the discussed texts from Exodus 21–22 indeed can denote ‘judges’, it could possibly also be interpreted likewise in the expression בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים. Taking their departure from this interpretation, exegetes identified the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 as ‘judges’, ‘rulers’ or ‘potentates’.⁶⁰

According to Lettinga, scholars who interpret the word אֱלֹהִים in Exod 21:6 and 22:6–12 as ‘judges’ do so for theological reasons.⁶¹ In Lettinga’s view, these prescriptions about ‘going to אֱלֹהִים’ describe several juridical procedures for which the involved individuals had to go to the sanctuary⁶² of YHWH or of other gods,⁶³ or perhaps to the תַּרְפִּים, the household-gods.⁶⁴ The requirement for a divine judicial authority can be elucidated in both cases: in the case of manumission, the slave who wanted to remain with his owner had to confirm his wish *coram Deo*, lest the owner should have devised that the slave wanted to stay.⁶⁵ Exodus 22:6–12 describes deadlocked legal situations in which no witness is found, making it a case of one man’s word against another’s. As evident especially in the cases of Exod 22:6–12, no human judge could possibly settle the case. The best solution, therefore, is to translate אֱלֹהִים in the Exodus passages mentioned above in a neutral way as ‘the deity’.⁶⁶ There is, then, no reason to translate the word here as ‘judges’, independent

⁶⁰ Jean Astruc, *Conjectures sur les memoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s’est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genese* (Brussels: Fricx, 1753), 344: “les fils des chefs, des puissants, des juges”; see also Jacob, *comm. Gen* 1934, 170; Akio Tsukimoto, “Der Mensch ist geworden wie unsereiner: Untersuchungen zum zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Gen. 3,22–24 und 6,1–4,” *AJBI* 5 (1979): 20.

⁶¹ Lettinga also notes that the parallel of Exod 21:2–6 in Deut 15:12–18 does not mention the ‘bringing to אֱלֹהִים’, cf. J. P. Lettinga, “Psalm 82: De levende God en de stervende afgoden,” in *Almanak FQI* (Kampen: FQI, 1988), 140. See also Gordon, “אֱלֹהִים,” 140: “[I]n the later Deuteronomistic recension of this law (Dt. 15:17) the ceremony is purged of אֱלֹהִים”.

⁶² According to Childs, *comm. Exod* (OTL) 1974, 469, the expression ‘bring to אֱלֹהִים’ “is a stereotyped term signifying to the nearest sanctuary for a judgment”.

⁶³ The use of אֱלֹהִים with the definite article and the plural of the verb in Exod 22:8 can be an indication for the plural meaning of אֱלֹהִים, although there are other cases in which אֱלֹהִים is accompanied by a plural predicate, whereas the singular meaning of אֱלֹהִים is beyond doubt. Gert Kwakkel, *According to My Righteousness: Upright Behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26 and 44* (OTS 46; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 165 nt. 68, mentions Gen 20:13, 35:7 (in the latter verse also with the definite article!) as examples, and Exod 32:4.8, 1 Sam 4:8 as possible examples. Cf. also 4.2.1 nt. 58.

⁶⁴ Cf. Gen 31:19.30.

⁶⁵ For a slightly different explanation, see Anne E. Draffkorn, “Ilāni / Elohim,” *JBL* 76 no. 3 (1957): 216–224, who demonstrates from the Nuzi legal records that the house gods functioned as the protectors of the family property. Draffkorn explains the procedure in Exod 21:5–6 analogically as a case which altered the personal configuration of the family stakes, and therefore required divine participation.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kwakkel, *According to My Righteousness*, 165 nt. 68.

of the exact interpretation as to which deity the text refers. This is all the more clear because the purgatory oath⁶⁷ before the gods is also known from other ancient Near Eastern sources. Examples are found in the Nuzi court records where accused persons swear before the gods (*ilâni*) or – in case of bad conscience – refuse to do so out of fear of the gods, and by this very refusal declare themselves guilty.⁶⁸ The Akkadian equivalent of the ceremony indicated by אֱלֹהִים אֶל קָרַב is found in the words *ana ilâni qarâbu*.⁶⁹ In Hammurabi's Code the purgatory oath is expressed by the formula: *ni-iš i-lim i-za-kar-ma ú-ta-aš-šar*, 'he shall pronounce the oath⁷⁰ of the god, and shall go free'.⁷¹ The Laws of Eshnunna use a similar formula.⁷²

Excursus: Other Uses of אֱלֹהִים to Denote Human Beings?

1 Samuel 28:13 is also referred to as example that אֱלֹהִים can refer to a human being. The passage relates how the necromanceress consulted by Saul tells the king: אֱלֹהִים רָאִיתִי עֲלֵי מֵן הָאָרֶץ 'I see gods / a god⁷³ coming up from the earth'. In reply to Saul's question of what the apparition looks like, the woman says that she sees an old man coming up (vs. 14). Some authors argue that ancient Near Eastern literature refers to deceased ancestors as gods.⁷⁴ However, this phenomenon is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament;⁷⁵ furthermore, other literature

⁶⁷ Kwakkel, *According to My Righteousness*, 165–171, observes that Exod 22:6–8 does not explicitly mention a purgatory oath and therefore the purgatory procedure, theoretically, could also have been decided by means of a verdict in the form of an oracle or an ordeal. However, it is also possible that the purgatory oath mentioned in vs. 10 throws light on the method of the purgatory procedure in vs. 6–8.

⁶⁸ Cf. Gordon, "אֱלֹהִים," 140–143.

⁶⁹ Cf. Gordon, "אֱלֹהִים," 143, who refers to Nuzi tablets N I 89:10–12.

⁷⁰ Literally: 'to swear on the life of the god', cf. CAD 11:290 (*nīšu A*).

⁷¹ Cf. Gordon, "אֱלֹהִים," 141 nt. 10. For a purgatory oath, see e.g. CH §20 (case of a runaway slave); CH §103 (a case of robbery); CH §131 (a case of accusation of adultery); CH §249 (a case of a hired ox which suddenly dies). Translation: cf. "The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:338.342.344.350). On further examples of the ordeal and purgatory oath in Mesopotamia and Elephantine, see Kwakkel, *According to My Righteousness*, 158–165.

⁷² Cf. F. Charles Fensham, "New Light on Exodus 21:6 and 22:7 from the Laws of Eshnunna," *JBL* 78 no. 2 (1959): 160: "be-el bîtim i-na bâb bîth^b ^atišpak ni-iš i-lim i-za-kar-šum," 'the owner of the house shall swear for him on the life of the god in the gate of the temple of Tishpak'.

⁷³ Perhaps a singular translation is to be preferred, despite the plural participle עֲלֵי, because Saul asks: "What is *his* appearance (תֵּאֲרֵהוּ)?" (vs. 14). According to Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 219, a plural translation is to be preferred.

⁷⁴ Cf. Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 219; Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 115–116.

⁷⁵ Contra Tropper, *Nekromantie*, 219, who considers Isa 8:19 to demonstrate the custom among Israel.

of the ancient Near East does not indicate that the deceased were called ‘gods’⁷⁶ but only that the term was generally used in necromancy to indicate gods who participated in the ritual which was performed to bring back the dead.⁷⁷ There is, however, hardly reason to argue that the use of אֱלֹהִים in 1 Sam 28:13 can support an interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 as human beings, all the more because they, arguably, were not deceased persons at the time they engaged in sexual relationships with the ‘daughters of men’.

It, then, can be concluded that the interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 as ‘(sons of the) judges’ does not pass the test of exegesis because the translation of אֱלֹהִים as ‘judges’ in the aforementioned passages from Exod 21–22 cannot be warranted. Besides, such an explanation cannot account for the presence of the Gibborim and Nephilim.⁷⁸ The translation ‘judges’, nonetheless, fails when applied to Job 1:6 and 2:1, unless בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים is not a set phrase and is able to be used in different contexts with completely different meanings, something which is unlikely.

In Hebrew the word אֱלֹהִים can also be used to indicate a superlative in order to determine something as ‘divine’, ‘mighty’ or ‘enormous’. Examples are Gen 23:6 נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים, ‘a mighty prince’,⁷⁹ Gen 30:8 נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים, ‘superhuman wrestling’, 1 Sam 14:15 חֲרָדַת אֱלֹהִים, ‘enormous panic’, Jonah 3:3 עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים, ‘an exceedingly great city’. In a similar way בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים could mean something like ‘mighty sons’, referring to a quasi superhuman kind of men.⁸⁰ Adherents of the mighty ones-interpretation consider this superlative use of the word אֱלֹהִים as a

⁷⁶ It has to be noted, though, that the word אֱלֹהִים has a broader sense than the English word ‘god’, see 5.3 nt. 19.

⁷⁷ Cf. Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1994), 215–218.

⁷⁸ Cf. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4,” 337.

⁷⁹ Or perhaps ‘one brought along by God’, so M. H. Gottstein, “Short Notes: נָשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים (Gen. XXIII 6),” VT 3 no. 3 (1953): 298–299.

⁸⁰ See H. M. Ohmann, “Zonen Gods en dochteren der mensen in Gen. 6:1–4: een oude kwestie: I,” *Ref* 67 no. 49 (1992): 972–973. Other possible examples in Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6,2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetisch-geschichtlichen Methode* (WBT 13; Wien: Herder, 1966), 42–44. See also David Winton Thomas, “A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew,” VT 3 no. 3 (1953): 209–216.

possible argument in favour of their exegesis.⁸¹ In Ugaritic the same phenomenon is assumed to be present, in which case the word *il* is used to denote a superlative.⁸²

In the case of the argument associated with the use of אֱלֹהִים as a superlative, the meaning of the expression would not be ‘mighty ones’ but ‘mighty sons’. Moreover, within these expressions the word אֱלֹהִים appears to retain some of its religious significance. The superlative degree is attributed to the fact that it connects a person or object to ‘God’, therefore it is more than an expression of something great or mighty.⁸³ It has also to be noted that the examples of superlative expressions through the use of אֱל or אֱלֹהִים always lack the definite article. Were בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים to mean ‘mighty sons’, it would rather be construed as בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים, without the article.

4.2.2 The Mighty Ones-Interpretation — Conceptual Arguments (4)

The possibility of explaining the word אֱלֹהִים in Gen 6:1–4 in the expression בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים as a superlative case forms a bridge comparing it with ancient Near Eastern literature in which it is claimed that certain kings possess divine status. Is it possible that the mysterious ‘sons of God’ be perhaps potentates or ‘divine kings’? And could the word אֱלֹהִים be an indication of this?⁸⁴

According to Dexinger, the expression *bn il* in Ugaritic can have a second meaning apart from the one of ‘sons of El’, denoting heroes or kings, as happens in the case of *Kirta* in the epic of that same name.⁸⁵ The author argued that, in the same way, the Hebrew expression בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים may be an indication of beings also named Nephilim and Gibborim.⁸⁶ Later on, he revoked this identification.⁸⁷

⁸¹ For representatives, see Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 41.

⁸² For possible examples, see Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 44. According to Thomas, “Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative,” 216–218, the examples from Ugarit are ambiguous and other extrabiblical examples from Arabic or Syriac are of little or no help.

⁸³ For a detailed overview, see Thomas, “Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew,” 209–219.

⁸⁴ Thus, affirmative, Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WthJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 191–199; Jagersma, *comm. Gen* 1995, 83; Stephen Hre Kio, “Revisiting ‘the Sons of God’ in Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 52 no. 2 (2001): 237–239. Cf. also James E. Coleran, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2,” *TS* 2 no. 4 (1941): 491 nt. 1. Coleran mentions that אֱלִים can be used for mighty men, as in Job 41:17 (RSV 41:25) and Ezek 32:21. But this is probably a defective spelling for אֱלִיִּם, ‘chiefs’, cf. Ezek 17:13; 31:11.

⁸⁵ Cf. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 38.

⁸⁶ Cf. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne*, 45.

⁸⁷ “Die Identifikation der Elohimsöhne und der Nephilim läßt sich nicht aufrechterhalten. (...) Die Elohimsöhne ... sind ‘jene unsterblichen, heldenhaften Wesen, die zum Hofstaat Il’s gehören und selbst Götter sind.’” Ferdinand Dexinger, “Jüdisch-Christliche Nachgeschichte von Gen 6,1–4,” in *Zur*

Walton suggests that the ‘sons of God’ can be interpreted as being mighty men who possibly claimed the *ius primae noctis*. For this hypothesis, he refers to Gilgamesh who practised this ‘right’ and who was also considered to be of semi-divine origin.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Walton admits that “[t]he fact that it fits does not of course prove that it is right”.⁸⁹

It is, therefore, important to get a picture of the real extent of the so called ‘divine kingship’ in the ancient Near East. A brief assessment of this phenomenon is described here beneath.

In Mesopotamia, kings could possess divine status, as seen in literature and iconography. However, this did not mean that such kings were exclusively gods and not men, for the concept of divine kingship did not adhere to a binary logic according to which one belonged either to the class of gods or to that of men. It was also possible to be member of a category to a certain degree. Moreover, divine status was not restricted to kings but could also apply to natural phenomena, emblems and paraphernalia, professions and cultural achievements, as turns out from Mesopotamian classifications using the DINGIR-marker to determine the divine nature of things.⁹⁰

Naram-Sin (2254–2218 B.C.E.) of Akkad is the first known ruler in Mesopotamia who was considered to be divine. He earned his godlike status because he successfully defended his city in time of trouble. However, the title was not hereditary; his son had no such title.⁹¹ In Ur, most notably king Shulgi (2094–2047

Aktualität des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Georg Sauer zum 65. Geburtstag (ed. Siegfried Kreuzer and Kurt Lüthi; Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1992), 157. See also the evaluation of Dexinger’s exegesis by Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 124–126; idem, *Schöpfung und Mythos: Mensch und Welt nach den Anfangskapiteln der Genesis* (SBS 32; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 37–38.

⁸⁸ Cf. John H. Walton, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? No,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood* (ed. Ronald Youngblood; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 196–200; idem, *comm. Gen* (NIVAC) 2001, 293. (This was also Rashi’s solution, cf. 3.9).

⁸⁹ Walton, “Are the ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6 Angels? No,” 204.

⁹⁰ Cf. Gebhard J. Selz, “The Divine Prototypes,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. Nicole Brisch; OIS 4; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 15–26.

⁹¹ Cf. Piotr Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur: A Short Century of Divine Rule in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. Nicole Brisch; OIS 4; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 34–35.

B.C.E.) was viewed as divine.⁹² There are indications that the deifying of Naram-Sin and Shulgi did not constitute the final culmination of their power, but, on the contrary, was construed after a near collapse of the state.⁹³ The names of later kings of the Ur III dynasty were likewise denoted with the divine determinative but they were not the objects of worship in temples dedicated to their names, as were the earlier kings. Perhaps their divine status was simply a matter of tradition.⁹⁴ According to Michalowski, the significance of divine kingship “has been highly overstated. The phenomenon had a short shelf life, perhaps no more than a decade or so under Naram-Sin, and just over sixty years during the time of the Ur III kings In the more than three thousand years of written Mesopotamian history, this is but a short moment”.⁹⁵ The inevitable death of a divine king had the further undesired side effect of undermining the sacral nature of kingship.⁹⁶ However, a connection of some nature between a king and divine power seems to have been a requirement for a monarch to rule within the religious and political constellation of those days, independent of whether a king himself was considered to be divine or not.⁹⁷ The behaviour of the Mesopotamian gods did not differ so much from that of the Mesopotamian people; perhaps this is why, in the words of Bernbeck, “deification of kings could occur several times in ancient Mesopotamia. However, even in ancient Mesopotamia, the godly and human worlds were kept separate, with a few exceptions”.⁹⁸ According to Cooper, in Mesopotamia, “kingship was always sacred, but only rarely divine”.⁹⁹ Moreover, Mesopotamian divine kings were most likely ranked only among the lesser deities.¹⁰⁰

⁹² The king claimed to be, like Gilgamesh, the son of the goddess Ninsun and the deified Lugalbanda, therefore to be a brother of Gilgamesh. Cf. A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (vol. I; Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), 108–109.

⁹³ Cf. Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur,” 39.

⁹⁴ Cf. Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur,” 40.

⁹⁵ Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur,” 41.

⁹⁶ Cf. Michalowski, “The Mortal Kings of Ur,” 41.

⁹⁷ Cf. Irene J. Winter, “Touched by the Gods: Visual Evidence for the Divine Status of Rulers in the Ancient Near East,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. Nicole Brisch; OIS 4; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 76.

⁹⁸ Reinhard Bernbeck, “Royal Deification: An Ambiguation Mechanism for the Creation of Courtier Subjectivities,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. Nicole Brisch; OIS 4; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 158.

⁹⁹ Jerrold S. Cooper, “Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia, a Fleeting Phenomenon,” in *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (ed. Nicole Brisch; OIS 4; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 261.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Cooper, “Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia,” 263.

Similarly for Egypt, the concept of the Pharaohs as gods should not be oversimplified. Egyptian kings were considered ‘gods’ but they wrought no miracles; they were dependent on the gods and would eventually die. At the same time, the Pharaoh was also more than just a human being; he functioned as mediator between gods and men, maintaining the cosmic order together with its earthly counterpart of law and order.¹⁰¹ However, only during limited periods did Egyptians in fact worship the Pharaoh as a god; veritable ruler-cult seems more to be a Greek innovation.¹⁰²

In the Syro-Palestinian area, the king was viewed as a human being and kingship was primarily of an administrative character.¹⁰³ Kings could acquire a divine status posthumously. Despite deceased kings in Ugarit apparently being called ‘god’ or ‘divine’, according to the ‘Ugaritic King List’,¹⁰⁴ there are no signs of ‘full-scale’ deification. Deceased rulers did not occupy the same place as the gods El or Baal in the Ugaritic pantheon, nor has any trace of their worship been found.¹⁰⁵

The above-mentioned analysis of the concept of divine kingship demonstrates that the phenomenon is ambiguous and rather exceptional in Mesopotamia. Even in Egypt, where divinity was a ‘standard ingredient’ of the Pharaoh’s kingship, kings were seldom worshipped as gods, as has been shown above. In the Syro-Palestinian area, divine kingship is not attested.

Notwithstanding the rarity of the phenomenon in ancient Near Eastern literature, if the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 is to be viewed as referring to deified kings, this would come closest to the Egyptian concept of kingship. However, the collective use of the expression in Gen 6:1–4 would be unique in comparison with extrabiblical literature, for, in the extant ancient Near Eastern texts,

¹⁰¹ Cf. Jac. J. Janssen, “The Early State in Ancient Egypt,” in *The Early State* (ed. Henry J.M. Claessen and Peter Skolnik; The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 218–219; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31–32.

¹⁰² Cf. J. W. van Henten, “Ruler Cult” in *DDD*, 711–712.

¹⁰³ Cf. Allan Rosengren Petersen, *The Royal God: Enthronement Festivals in Ancient Israel and Ugarit?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 100–101.

¹⁰⁴ *KTU* 1:113 (verso). See “Ugaritic King List,” translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 1.104:357). See also Nicolas Wyatt, “The Religious Role of the King in Ugarit,” in *Ugarit at Seventy-Five* (ed. K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 57–69. Wyatt observes that living kings were not clearly viewed as divine, whereas deceased kings appear to have become in some way members of the pantheon.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *COS* 1.104:357, nt. 3.

kings are never referred to as ‘sons of the gods’ as a group.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the notion of divine kingship does not appear in other places in the Old Testament, except for two possible exceptions: Ps 2:7 and Ps 45:7.

In Ps 2:7, YHWH is quoted as saying to his king on Mount Zion: “You are my son, today I have begotten you”. This solemn declaration (see 2 Sam 7:14) is not a statement about biological parentage, as if the king is of divine nature, but is – interpreted in its ancient Near Eastern context – a performative proclamation of adoption and a sign of the king’s divine election.¹⁰⁷

Probably the only place in the Old Testament where a king appears to be referred to as ‘god’ or ‘divine’ is Ps 45:7. However, the meaning of this verse is highly debated and several emendations or alternative interpretations are proposed.¹⁰⁸ But even if in Ps 45:7 the word אֱלֹהִים is to be viewed as a vocative by which the king is addressed (“your throne, o god, is for ever and ever”), this would not necessarily mean that the king is deified by being thus addressed. “In whatever sense the king was ‘divine’, it was not an actual or intrinsic divinity that he possessed.”¹⁰⁹ The use

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Hamilton, *comm. Gen* (NICOT) 1990, 264; Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NIVAC) 1996, 329.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. John Goldingay, *comm. Ps 1*, 100; Craigie, *comm. Ps 1*, 67. See also Sam Janse, “You Are My Son”: *The Reception History of Psalm 2 in Early Judaism and the Early Church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 19–21. According to Granerød, Ps 2:6–7 expresses the king’s divine election by metaphorical use of possible procreative terminology; he explains the verb נָסַךְ in Ps 2:6, based on comparison with Egyptian royal ideology, as referring to the outpouring of semen but observes also the differences between Ps 2 and Egyptian divine kingship. Cf. Gard Granerød, “A Forgotten Reference to Divine Procreation? Psalm 2:6 in Light of Egyptian Royal Ideology,” *VT* 60 no. 3 (2010): 323–336. According to Gunn, Ps 2:7 is not based on an ancient Near Eastern coronation ritual but solely on 2 Sam 7:14, expressing the relationship between YHWH and the Davidic kingship, cf. George A. Gunn, “Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah,” *BibSac* 169 (2012): 432.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J.P. Lettinga, “Psalm 82: De levende God en de stervende afgoden,” 141 nt. 9. Cf. also Hans-Winfried Jüngling, *Der Tod der Götter: Eine Untersuchung zu Psalm 82* (SBS 38; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969), 35–37. Jüngling mentions several alternative explanations: a) the Elohist redactor read יְהוָה instead of אֱלֹהִים, and therefore changed this to אֱלֹהִים, b) a shortened expression, to be translated as ‘Your throne is (as the throne of) God’, c) a superlative construction, ‘a divine throne’ to be understood as ‘a mighty throne’, d) a vocalisation as אֱלֹהִים, a Pi. of a denominative *כָּסַא with suffix 2 sg. masc, resulting in the translation: ‘your God has enthroned you forever’. For an overview of other proposed emendations and interpretations of the present text of MT, see Murray J. Harris, “The Translation of *Elohim* in Psalm 45:7–8,” *TynBul* 35 (1984): 69–77. According to Gaster, the Psalm can be understood as a marriage-song for any couple and not specifically for a king. For this, he refers to the custom in the Near East to treat a bridal couple as ‘royal’, cf. Theodor H. Gaster, “Psalm 45,” *JBL* 74 no. 5 (1955): 239. Interestingly, Heb 1:8 quotes Ps 45:7 with the sense that the king in the Psalm is addressed as ‘God’.

¹⁰⁹ Harris, “*Elohim* in Psalm 45,” 83.

of the word אֱלֹהִים may therefore be explained by the king's divine election¹¹⁰ and adoption as God's son (2 Sam 7:14) as a form of hyperbolic language.¹¹¹

Without going into more detail, it can be concluded that, within the context of the song, the reading of a vocative ("o god") in Ps 45:7 can be afforded a positive attribution without resorting to a more 'minimalist' interpretation. However, in the absence of such a context, it is insufficient to refer to the use of אֱלֹהִים in Ps 45:7 in interpreting the expression 'sons of God' as pertaining to 'divine kings'. Were the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4 to be kings, one would expect a more detailed explanation in the text, considering how unique this phenomenon would be in the Old Testament.¹¹²

4.2.3 The Mighty Ones-Interpretation — Evaluation

Analysis of the lexical and conceptual arguments for the mighty ones-interpretation leads to the conclusion that this solution cannot be warranted. This is based on the fact that the texts from Exod 21–22 do not give sufficient evidence of the word אֱלֹהִים to be referring to 'judges'. Furthermore, 'divine kingship' was less than an evident phenomenon in the ancient Near East.

Moreover, this mighty ones-interpretation renders Gen 6:1–4 to be an exception, for in all the other passages in which the same or a similar expression is used the reference is undoubtedly to heavenly beings and not to humans.

4.3 THE RELIGIOUS CATEGORY: 'SONS OF GOD' INTERPRETED AS SETHITES

The determination 'Sethites-interpretation' is used here as a collective term for all solutions which define the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4 as god-fearing people in contrast to the godless ones. In most of the interpretations, these pious people are identified as being the descendants of Seth. The impious ones are viewed as issuing from Cain.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Claus Schedl, "Neue Vorschläge zu Text und Deutung des Psalmes XLV," *VT* 14 no. 3 (1964): 316–317.

¹¹¹ Cf. Harris, "Elohim in Psalm 45," 84–85.

¹¹² Cf. Willem A. Van Gemeren, "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)" *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 340.

4.3.1 The Sethites-Interpretation — Lexical Arguments (1)

In Gen 6:1, the word **אָדָם** is most likely used as a generic term to denote mankind. It is difficult to imagine that the same word in vs. 2 would indicate only a subset of this same humanity, presumably (the daughters of) the Cainites.¹¹³ Within the framework of the Sethites-interpretation, the transgression of the Sethites is that they marry these specific women, namely the daughters of the Cainites, not that they marry women in general. For many interpreters this equivalent use of the word **אָדָם** in the two verses constitutes the decisive argument by which to reject the Sethites-interpretation.¹¹⁴

It has also been observed that the contrast between the expression **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** and **בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם** is especially evident in the second term of both expressions, stressing the distinction between the divine and the human realms, which might be an extra indication that the ‘sons of God’ are not to be viewed as human beings.¹¹⁵ Lexical analysis, then, makes it difficult to insist that in Gen 6:2 it is ‘daughters of Cain’ who are meant by the designation ‘daughters of men’. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to explain the expression ‘sons of God’ as referring to ‘sons of Seth’.

4.3.2 The Sethites-Interpretation — Contextual Arguments (2)

Key text for the Sethites-interpretation in patristic literature is the explanation of Gen 4:26 as rendered by the Septuagint. Genesis 4:26 recounts the birth of Enosh, the son of Seth. The Greek version’s reading is ambivalent: “He hoped¹¹⁶ to invoke / to be called with (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι) the name of the Lord God,” allowing for an explanation of the verb as being a middle voice (‘to invoke’) or a passive voice (‘to be called with’). The latter solution implies that Enosh was granted the epithet ‘of God’, which, by consequence, would qualify his sons as ‘sons of God’. Church fathers who argued from Gen 4:26, preferred the passive interpretation of the

¹¹³ See also 4.1.1.

¹¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Franz Delitzsch, *comm. Gen* 1887, 147; Dodds, *comm. Gen* 1909, 31; Skinner, *comm. Gen* 1930, 142; Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WithJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 189; Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 51; Gispén, *comm. Gen* (COT) 1974, 219; Kidner, *comm. Gen* 1974, 84; Rick Marrs, “The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4),” *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 219; Hamilton, *comm. Gen* 1990, 264; Waltke, *comm. Gen* 2001, 116.

¹¹⁵ Proksch, *comm. Gen* 1924, 62; Gispén, *comm. Gen* 1974, 219.

¹¹⁶ The LXX most likely read the verb **הִנָּחַל** (Hophal of **חָלַל**, ‘to begin’) as **הִנָּחִיל**, Hiphil of **יָחַל**, ‘to wait’.

verb,¹¹⁷ most likely inspired by the presence of the description ‘he hoped to’ in the translation of the verse, which better fits the passive interpretation of the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι as ‘to be called with’ than ‘to invoke’. A changed view on sexuality and the rise of the monastic movement may subsequently have furthered this exegesis.¹¹⁸ These two factors, the interpretation of Gen 4:26 and the social context, led to a new understanding of Gen 6:1–4.

Some interpreters argue that the Hebrew text of Gen 4:26 also allows for the alternative reading that mankind ‘began to be called by the name YHWH’, hence the sons of Seth can be called ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4.¹¹⁹ Yet philological evidence points to another interpretation of this text. The expression יהוה בן אדם is a standard expression in Genesis for a cultic activity, meaning ‘to invoke the name of YHWH’ (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). It is unlikely that Gen 4:26 is an exception to this rule.

It is further argued that Genesis draws two lines of descent; the genealogies of Cain (Gen 4:17–24) and Seth (Gen 4:25–5:32), the latter being characterised by justice and holiness as turns out from Gen 4:26 (Seth), 5:24 (Enoch) and 5:29 (Lamech).¹²⁰ Their holy lifestyle would earn them the title ‘sons of God’, therefore Gen 6:1–4 refers to these Sethites as ‘sons of God’ to distinguish them from the Cainites.¹²¹

The problem with this reasoning, according to Walton, is that it “assumes that the lines of Cain and Seth remained separate for millennia, and extrapolates from the statements about Enoch and Lamech that the entire line of Seth was godly and the entire line of Cain was wicked. ... These points do not constitute evidence, they are simply unwarranted presuppositions”.¹²² But even if the expression ‘sons of God’ possibly can denote godly men, it is far more difficult to understand why wicked

¹¹⁷ See 3.8.35. This line of exegesis is still actual in the Greek Orthodox Church, as turned out from an internetforum, <http://orthodoxos.forumup.com/about25-15-orthodoxos.html>: Ο Εινώς που γεννηθήκε από τον Σηθ είχε ελπίσει, ότι θα ονομάζεται με τον όνομα του Κυρίου και Θεού, δηλαδή ότι από τους άλλους θα ονομάζονταν Θεός . . . Οι γιοι λοιπόν του Εινώς που ονομάζονταν Θεός πήραν για γυναίκες τις θυγατέρες των ανθρώπων, “Enosh, who was born from Seth, had hoped to be called with the name of the Lord God, namely, that they would be called ‘God’ by the others ... The sons, then, of Enosh, who were called ‘God’ took the daughters of men as wives”. Cited 25 January 2011.

¹¹⁸ Cf. 3.8.35.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Currid, *comm. Gen* 2003, 175.

¹²⁰ Cf. Coleran, “The Sons of God,” 505–506; Currid, *comm. Gen*, 174–175; Hamilton, *comm. Gen*, 264.

¹²¹ Cf. Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis,” in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. Tkunboh Adeyemo; Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 21; Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 450–451.

¹²² Walton, *comm. Gen* (NIVAC) 2001, 292–293.

women are presented as ‘daughters of men’.¹²³ According to Van Gemenen, the context rather suggests that the mentioned ‘daughters’ originated from the line of Seth.¹²⁴

It has also been argued that if in fact Sethites are meant by ‘sons of God’, it is difficult to understand why religiously mixed liaisons would bring forth the Gibborim.¹²⁵ One would readily understand the rise of a hybrid race as a result of relationships between superhuman and human beings, and, if necessary, also as offspring of mighty humans, but hardly as result of religiously mixed marriages, such as the Sethites-exegesis presupposes.

4.3.3 The Sethites-Interpretation — Conceptual Arguments (4)

Several Old Testament passages mention Israel as son of YHWH: Exod 4:22 “Thus says YHWH: Israel is my first-born son (בְּנִי בְּכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל)”; Hos 11:1 “Really, Israel was a boy, and I loved him; and from Egypt I called my son (וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבִנִי)”.

The Israelites as a group are also called sons of God: Deut 14:1 “You are sons of YHWH, your God (אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם)”; Deut 32:5 “They are no longer his (YHWH’s) sons (לֹא בָנָיו)”; Hos 2:1 “And in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not my people’, will be said to them, ‘sons of the living God’, (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים)”; Ps 73:15 “the generation of your (God’s) sons (דּוֹר בְּנֵיךָ)”. If one identifies Israelites as sons of YHWH with ‘believers, followers of God’, this may indicate that also in Gen 6:1–4 the ‘sons of God’ are godly men.¹²⁶

According to Scharbert, it was the redactor of Genesis who reinterpreted the ‘sons of God’ as pious Sethites who married the ‘daughters of men’, that is to say, Cainite girls, in order to explain the dissemination of evil and to connect the passage to the subsequent narrative of the flood.¹²⁷ Scharbert dates this redaction to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, when there was also a controversy about mixed marriages. After that time, when mixed marriages ceased to be a problem, speculation about ‘sons of God’ as angels was introduced by the apocalyptic writers.¹²⁸ Others observe

¹²³ Cf. Walton, *comm. Gen.* 293.

¹²⁴ Van Gemenen, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4,” 332.

¹²⁵ Cf. Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WThJ* 24 no. 2 (1962): 190. Cf. also S. Hre Kio, “Revisiting ‘The Sons of God’ in Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 52 no. 2 (2001): 236: “Does the mixture of pagan and godly genes result in the DNA of the offspring being wild and grotesque?”

¹²⁶ So e.g. Heinisch, *comm. Gen.* (HSAT) 1930, 161; James E. Coleran, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2,” *TS* 2 no. 4 (1941): 494; Paul Heinisch, *Probleme der biblischen Urgeschichte* (Luzern: Verlag Räder & Cie, 1947), 119; W. Viefvinkel, “De bene ha’elohim in Genesis 6:1–4,” *TheolRef* 17 no. 3 (1974): 186–189.

¹²⁷ Josef Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gn 6,1–4,” *BZ* 11 no. 1 (1967): 76.

¹²⁸ Scharbert, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte,” 76–77.

that the warning against mixed marriages is already a theme of the Pentateuch (Gen 24:3–4; 26:34–35; 27:46; 28:1–3; 28:6–8.34) and consider this to be the strongest argument for the Sethites-interpretation.¹²⁹

However, the above-mentioned biblical passages refer to Israelites as sons of YHWH, but nowhere are Israelites referred by the exact formula בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים.¹³⁰ As a parallel to these passages, Gen 6:1–4 would have to use בְּנֵי יְהוָה, an expression that is nowhere attested in the Old Testament.¹³¹ Passages which mention Israelites as ‘sons’ of YHWH can perhaps be understood best as a kind of adoption formula,¹³² commenting, not on the piety, but on the relationship with YHWH of the persons being addressed. This can be gleaned especially from Hos 11, where the people’s ‘sonship’ serves as an appeal to call them back to YHWH. They are called ‘sons’ of God, but demonstrate a behaviour contrary to that of the godly. Moreover, in the description of YHWH’s fatherly relationship to Israel, nowhere is the exact formula בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים used. It also has to be noted that passages in which Israelites are called ‘sons’ of YHWH, the word ‘sons’ can be translated as ‘children’, referring to both male and female Israelites, whereas the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 definitely refers to male subjects only.

4.3.4 The Sethites-Interpretation — Theological Arguments (6)

The Sethites-interpretation keeps Gen 6:1–4 free of a supernatural or a mythological interpretation which is considered to be an additional factor in its favour.¹³³

Contrarily, several exegetes agree that the Sethites-interpretation overcomes many difficulties, but also admit that this solution avoids the straightforward understanding of the text for solely dogmatical reasons.¹³⁴ Van Gemenen sees the Sethites-interpretation as a form of reinterpretation of the text and wonders in what way this differs from demythologisation.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ E.g. Leroy Birney, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JETS* 13 no. 1 (1970): 46.

¹³⁰ Cf. Gunkel, *comm. Gen* (GHAT) 1917, 57.

¹³¹ Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 51.

¹³² Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, “Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature,” *VT* 27 no. 2 (1977): 188–189; see also Samuel Greengus, “The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,” *JAOS* 89 no. 3 (1969): 517–520.

¹³³ See e.g. Rick Marrs, “The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4),” *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 219.

¹³⁴ See Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 121; Davidson, *comm. Gen* 1973, 69; Zimmerli, *comm. Gen* (ZBK) 1991, 262; H. M. Ohmann, “Zonen Gods en dochteren der mensen in Gen. 6.1–4: Een oude kwestie III,” *Ref* 68 no. 2 (1992): 22.

¹³⁵ Willem A. Van Gemenen, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6.1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 320.

As other interpreters see it, the Sethites-interpretation has been possibly influenced by gnostic ideas in which Cain is a symbol for matter and in which Seth represents the spiritual realm.¹³⁶

4.3.5 The Sethites-interpretation — Evaluation

Based on lexical arguments, the interpretation of the ‘daughters of men’ as description of women from Cainite offspring is unlikely. There is no reason, then, to view the expression ‘sons of God’ as referring to pious men, these presumably being the offspring of Seth. The concept of Israel’s ‘sonship’ refers to the relationship between YHWH and his people, and not to the piety of the persons involved.

Moreover, an interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 as referring to Sethites would theoretically fit this particular context but is totally unapt for the other Old Testament occurrences of the same or a similar term. Furthermore, this solution does not answer the question how an ‘unequal yoke’ between pious and impious humans can possibly lead to extraordinary offspring, as is related in Gen 6:1–4.

In reviewing the arguments for the Sethites-interpretation it can be seen that these are wanting, despite solving the theological difficulties arising from a ‘superhuman’ approach.

¹³⁶ See Bräumer, *comm. Gen* (WSB) 1983, 149–150; Ohmann, “Zonen Gods en dochteren der mensen in Gen. 6:1–4,” 21–22. The church fathers mention gnostic sects, called Sethites or Cainites, cf. Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity: History of the Christian Church* (vol. 2; 5th ed., 1889; reprint; Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 370. The designation ‘Sethites’ or ‘Sethians’ may have been coined by the church fathers, there is no evidence that they called themselves in this way, cf. John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNH 6; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 55.

4.4 THE MYTHOLOGICAL CATEGORY: 'SONS OF GOD' INTERPRETED AS DIVINE BEINGS

Extrabiblical as well as biblical literature provides indications that the **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** could be regarded as members of the so called 'divine council'.¹³⁷ Because of the large amount of data relating to extrabiblical and conceptual arguments, the section dealing with the divine beings-interpretation will be divided into more elaborate sub-sections, such for reasons of readability. Nonetheless, these subsections will follow the general outline of the hierarchy of arguments as given in the introduction to the chapter (4.0).

For the sake of clarity it should be noted that not all exegetical literature makes a distinction between the angels-interpretation and the divine-beings interpretation; sometimes both solutions are treated together under one header. As a result, some of the counter-arguments to the angels-interpretation are concomitantly objections to the divine-beings interpretation, without this being explicitly mentioned. These arguments are: the lexical argument (1) that judges or potentates can be described as 'sons of God'; the contextual argument (2) that divine beings are not mentioned previously in Genesis; the extrabiblical argument (3) that it is only in Greek mythology that sexual relationships between deities and humans are attested; the theological argument (6) asking why it is that humans are punished when divine beings were in fact the true perpetrators.

4.4.1 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Lexical Arguments (1)

The lexical warrant that the expression **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** can be understood as referring to deities or divine beings is thought to be found in the phenomenon that in Hebrew the word **בֶּן** can function as a category-marker,¹³⁸ in the case of **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** marking the category of the divine. The examples in the following table provide an overview.

¹³⁷ In this study the term 'divine council' is used for what in the literature on the subject is also called 'heavenly council', or 'assembly of the gods'.

¹³⁸ Cf. *HAL* 1:131–132.

(Table 8)

בְּנֵי as category-marker:	
man, mankind:	בְּנֵי הָאָדָם Gen 11:5; בְּנֵי אָדָם Deut 32:8.
people, tribe:	בְּנֵי־חֵת Gen 23:3, 'Hittites'; בְּנֵי קְדָם Gen 29:1, 'sons of the East', 'eastern people'; בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל Gen 32:33, 'Israelites'; בְּנֵי הָרְאִיבִינִי and בְּנֵי־הַנָּדִי Gen 34:14, '(sons of) the tribe of Reuben / Gad'; בְּנֵי עֲנָקִים Deut 1:28, 'Anakites'; בְּנֵי הָעֲנָקִים Josh 15:14, 'Anakites'; בְּנֵי נֹכְרִי 2 Sam 22:45, 'foreigners'.
animal species:	מִן־בְּנֵי הַיּוֹנָה Lev 1:14, 'from the doves'; בְּנֵי־בָקָר Num 28:11, 'cattle'; בְּנֵי־נֶשֶׁר Prov 30:17, 'vultures'.
age-group:	בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה Exod 29:38, 'of x years old'.
quality:	בְּנֵי־חֵיל Deut 3:18, 'brave ones'; בְּנֵי־בְלִיעַל Deut 13: 14, 'wicked ones'; בְּנֵי־עוֹלָה 2 Sam 3:34, 'sinful ones'; בְּנֵי־שִׁחִין Job 28:8, 41:26, 'proud ones'; בְּנֵי בְלִי שֵׁם Job 30:8, 'senseless, nameless ones'; בְּנֵי שְׂאוֹן Jer 48:45, 'boasters'.
social group:	בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים 2 Kgs 2:3, 'prophets'; בְּנֵי־מוֹת 2 Sam 26:16, 'destined to die'; בְּנֵי הַתַּעֲרֵבוֹת 2 Kgs 14:14, 'hostages'; בְּנֵי תַּמּוּתָהּ Ps 79:11, 'condemned to die'; בְּנֵי־עֲנִי Prov 31:5, 'oppressed ones'; בְּנֵי חִלּוֹף Prov 31:8, 'desolate ones'; בְּנֵי גְלוּתָא (aram.) Dan 2:25, 'exiles'.
poetical:	בְּנֵי אֶשְׁפָּתוֹ Lam 3:13, 'arrows of his quiver'.

Understanding the function of the word בְּנֵי, 'sons of', as a category-marker in the expression 'sons of God' is a possible solution. Such a category-marker is a common phenomenon in biblical Hebrew. In this case, the expression is a set phrase for 'divine beings', namely the ones who belong to the category of the divine. This interpretation may gain credibility, especially with respect to the Ugaritic texts in which *bn ilm* is an indication for a god or gods.

4.4.2 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Extrabiblical Arguments (3)

One of the main arguments for the understanding of the expression 'sons of God' as a set phrase for divine beings is the occurrence of similar phrases in cognate languages and cultures which existed in the historical and geographical context of

Israel. In Canaanite¹³⁹ literature, the divine beings seem to be gods of a lesser rank and who are members of the already mentioned divine council.¹⁴⁰ According to Westermann, Gunkel¹⁴¹ was the first to explain the expression בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים in biblical literature as referring to divine beings.¹⁴² Gunkel still only argued on the basis of comparisons with other biblical passages in which the ‘sons of God’ appeared. The discoveries of Ugaritic texts convinced later interpreters of the correctness of this solution.¹⁴³ In the view of many exegetes, the exegetical debate of ages is considered to be finally settled as a result of this.¹⁴⁴

The following section addresses first the Ugaritic references to ‘sons of the gods’. After this, an overview will be given of the typical vocabulary used, the scene depicted and the identity of the members of the divine council in the ancient Near East.

(1) ‘Sons of the Gods’ in Ugaritic Literature

The most promising for a comparison with Hebrew בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים is the Ugaritic expression *bn ilm*. However, *bn ilm* is at the same time very difficult to interpret. At least three aspects in regard to this expression remain unclear. 1) Is *bn* to be read literally as ‘son(s) of’, or figuratively, ‘belonging to the class of?’ 2) Is *ilm* to be understood as a plural, ‘of the gods’, or as a singular with enclitic *-m*?¹⁴⁵ 3) If to be read as a singular, does *il* refer to a divine name, ‘of El’, or to a common noun, ‘of

¹³⁹ The term ‘Canaanite’ is used here to refer to ‘non-Israelite’ culture, being cognisant of the caveat of Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 116 nt. 50. Zevit argues that ‘Canaanite’ is not a correlate of ‘Israel’ because ‘Canaanite’ is a geographical term, while ‘Israelite’ is an ethnic description. Geographically, Israel could also be called ‘Canaanite’.

¹⁴⁰ See e.g. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41–53; Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *JSOT* 31 no. 3 (2007): 259; see also Michael S. Heiser, *The Divine Council*. Online: www.thedivinecouncil.com (cited 1 March 2011).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Gunkel, *comm. Gen* (GHAT) 1917, 55.

¹⁴² Cf. Westermann, *comm. Gen* (BKAT) 1974, 502.

¹⁴³ Cf. Horst Seebass, “Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß,” *BN* 134 (2007): 8.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Von Rad, *comm. Gen* (OTL) 1972, 114; Westermann, *comm. Gen*, 501–502. See 2.2.1 nt. 45 for a chronologically ordered overview of advocates of the divine beings-interpretation.

¹⁴⁵ It is not certain that the enclitic *-m* is a universal phenomenon in Ugaritic, cf. Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (AOAT 273; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 825–832, §89.2. The enclitic *-m* does not change the meaning of a word, it sometimes seems to be added for reasons of euphony, cf. Stanislav Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language: With Selected Texts and Glossary* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), 81, §58.2.

the god’?¹⁴⁶ This triple ambiguity leads to a multiple number of possible translations: ‘son(s) of the gods’, ‘gods’, ‘son(s) of El’, or ‘(son of) the god’. An easy comparison of Ugaritic *bn ilm* to Hebrew בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים is therefore not possible.

The fact that also *bn il* is attested, without *-m*, would advocate a plural understanding whenever *bn ilm* is encountered.¹⁴⁷ The word *ilm* without further specifications is often used as a plural, referring to the gods.¹⁴⁸ In the case where Athirat is called *qnyt ilm*, ‘the Creatress of the gods’, the word *ilm* cannot refer to El.¹⁴⁹ However, as Burns has noted,¹⁵⁰ there is a passage in which *ilm* alternates with *il*,¹⁵¹ which in this case makes *ilm* almost surely a reference to El and is therefore to be read as *il* with an enclitic *-m*.

The plural translation of *bn ilm* becomes also problematic in passages in which the god Mot, ‘Death’, is mentioned. He is called *bn ilm mt*,¹⁵² a reading in which *ilm* can be understood as *il* with enclitic *-m*, to be translated as ‘Mot, the son of El’, but perhaps also as a plural, resulting in the translation ‘divine Mot’, or ‘the god Mot’,

¹⁴⁶ See Alan Cooper and Marvin H. Pope, “Divine Names and Epithets in the Ugaritic Texts,” in *Rash Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible* (Vol. 3; AnOr 51; ed. Stan Rummel, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981), 432.

¹⁴⁷ So Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41. Cf. also Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (VTSup 2; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 49. Pope thinks a plural most likely which results in a translation of *bn ilm* as ‘divine beings’ without direct reference to El. Otherwise Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially in Hebrew,” *JBL* 76 no. 2, (1957): 89. Hummel argues that in Ugaritic the word *il* especially occurs with an enclitic *-m*. He refers for this view to Phoenician, where אֵלִים נֶרְגַל ‘the god Nergal’ is mentioned (91). However, it is possible that, in Phoenician, this is a plural used with a singular meaning, cf. *DNWSI* “*l*” 1:53–55. Younger observes that, in the Phoenician Azatiwada inscription, the word *lm* is used in a plural sense (‘gods’) but also as a plural of majesty or honorific plural. In the latter case, this is indicated by the use of the definite article or the demonstrative pronoun or both. See K. Lawson Younger, “The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading,” *JSS* 43 no. 1 (1998): 30–31. The Ugaritic, however, has no definite article (see Stanislav Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language*, § 52.6), therefore, it would be more difficult to recognise a similar phenomenon.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. *KTU* 1.15.III:17–19; 1.16.V:10–22; 1.17.V:19–21; 1.18.III:34–35; 1.18.IV:29–31; 1.2.I:18.25–26. 34–35; 1.3.V:38–39; 1.4.III:28–30; 1.4.IV:31–32; 1.4.VII:49–52; 1.15.I:9–11; 1.15.II:13; 1.6.VI:48; 1.114:2; 1.23:19; 1.23:23.

¹⁴⁹ *KTU* 1.4.III:26.30.34: *qnyt.ilm*. Cf. *KTU* 1.4.IV:32.

¹⁵⁰ John Barclay Burns, “Namtaru and Nergal — Down But Not Out: A Reply to Nicolas Wyatt,” *VT* 43 no. 1 (1993): 3.

¹⁵¹ *KTU* 1.3.III:43–46: *mḥšt.mddil.ar[š] / smt.‘gl.il.‘tk mḥšt.klbt.ilm.išt / klt.bt.il.dbb* “I fought Desi[re], the Beloved of El, I destroyed Rebel, the Calf of El, I fought Fire, the Dog of El, I annihilated Flame, the Daughter of El”. Text and translation: Mark S. Smith, *UNP*, 111.

¹⁵² *KTU* 1.4.VII:45; 1.4.VIII:11.15–16.29; 1.5.I:6.12–14.33–35; 1.5.II:8.11.14; 1.6.II:13.30; 1.6.V:9; 1.6.VI:7. 9.23; 1.133:1.

in this case derived from ‘son of the gods’ and indicating that Mot belongs to the category of the gods. Perhaps the first option is to be preferred because the occurrence of the word *ilm* without *bn* in the passage *byd.mdd.ilm.mt*, ‘by the power of the god Mot’¹⁵³ also points towards a singular reading of *il* with enclitic *-m*.

In one given case, a human being is also apparently considered to have divine status, that being when king *Kirta* is said to be a ‘god’, or a ‘son of El’. The expression used is *krt bnm il*,¹⁵⁴ and *krt bn il*.¹⁵⁵ However, divine nature does not seem to be something *Kirta* possessed by nature. The text states that he is *called* a god and stresses the fact that gods are immortal, something that is obviously in contrast with *Kirta*’s experienced reality, given that he is mortally ill at the moment: *ikm yrgm bn il krt, šph ltpn wqdš, wilm tmtn, šph ltpn lyh*,¹⁵⁶ “How is *Kirta* called a son of El, a descendant of the Kind and Holy One? For do gods die, will the descendant of the Kind and Holy One not live?” Thus, the focus of the text seems to be more on the ‘impossibility’ of *Kirta*’s illness, specifically because of his being called a god, than on a supposed ontologically divine status of the king.

But even when the precise translation of the expression *bn ilm* remains indecisive, due to intricacies of Ugaritic ‘theology’ which are still unclear, so much is known that the term is used for heavenly beings, more specifically gods, independently of the question whether one should translate either ‘god(s)’, or ‘son(s) of El’.

(2) *The Divine Council in Ancient Near Eastern Literature: Vocabulary*

In Ugaritic literature, diverse expressions are found which refer to a group of gods.

‘*dt*, ‘assembly, meeting’:¹⁵⁷ ‘*dt ilm*, ‘assembly of gods’: *KTU*¹⁵⁸ 1.15.II:7; *KTU* 1.15.II:11.

¹⁵³ *KTU* 1.4.VIII:23–24.

¹⁵⁴ *KTU* 1.16.I:10.

¹⁵⁵ *KTU* 1.16.I:20–21.

¹⁵⁶ *KTU* 1.16.I:20–23.

¹⁵⁷ *DULAT* I:151–152.

¹⁵⁸ *KTU* = *KTU*² Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU: second, enlarged edition)*, Münster: Ugarit Verlag 1995, (also abbreviated as *CAT* or *CTU*). Forthcoming is a third edition of *KTU*. For translations, see *UNP*, and “The Ba’lu Myth,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.86:241–273); “Dawn and Dusk,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87:273–283); “The Kirta Epic,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.102:333–343); “The ‘Aqhatu Legend,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.103:343–357); “The Ugaritic King List,” translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 1.104:356–357); “The Patrons of the Ugaritic Dynasty,” translated by Baruch A. Levine, Jean-Michel de Tarragon, and Anne Robertson (*COS* 1.105:356–358).

qbš, ‘clan’:¹⁵⁹ *bphr qbš dtn*, ‘in the assembly of the clan of Ditana’:¹⁶⁰ *KTU* 1.15.III:4; *KTU* 1.15.III:15; *qb[š ilm]*, ‘the assembly of the gods’: *KTU* 1.1.IV:2.
dr, ‘circle, association, chapter, cycle, generation’:¹⁶¹ *dr il*, ‘the circle of El’: *KTU* 1.15.III:17–19 (in parallel with *ilm*, ‘the gods’); *dr dt šmm*, ‘the circle of those of the heavens’: *KTU* 1.10.I:5; *kdr[d] dyknn*, ‘like the circle which produced us’ (Anat and Baal): *KTU* 1.10.III:6 (in parallel with *kqnyn*, ‘like our creator(s)’); *dr bn il*, ‘the circle of the sons of El’: *KTU* 1.40:25.33–34; *dr il wphr b’ l*, ‘the circle of El and the assembly of Baal’: *KTU* 1.39:7; 1.8:17–18; 1.162:16–17.
m’ d, ‘convention, assembly’:¹⁶² *pḥr m’ d*, ‘the assembled council’: *KTU* 1.2.I:14.15.17. 20.31.
sd, ‘council’(?):¹⁶³ *KTU* 1.20.I:4 (the council referred to is probably that of the spirits (of the dead), *ilnym*, *KTU* 1.20.I:1–7).
mrzh, ‘club, bacchanal’:¹⁶⁴ ‘cultic association, (cultic / funerary) banquet’:¹⁶⁵ *il ytb bmrzh*, ‘El sits in his bacchanal’ *KTU* 1.1.IV:4–5, similarly in *KTU* 1.114:15.
pḥr, ‘assembly, cluster, group, faction, family’:¹⁶⁶ *p[ḥr il]*, ‘the assembly of El’¹⁶⁷ (?): *KTU* 1.1.IV:4; *bphr qbš dtn*, ‘in the assembly of the collectivity of Ditana’: *KTU* 1.15.III:4; *pḥr m’ d*, ‘the assembled council’,¹⁶⁸ ‘the plenary assembly’:¹⁶⁹ *KTU* 1.2.I:14.15.17.20.31; *bp[ḥ]r bn ilm*, ‘in the assembly of the gods / the sons of El’: *KTU* 1.4.III:12–14; *pḥr kkbm*, ‘assembly of the stars’:

¹⁵⁹ *DULAT* II:693.

¹⁶⁰ Ditana (Ditan/Dedan) is considered to be one of the deified royal ancestors, see K. Spronk, “Dedan,” *DDD*, 232–233.

¹⁶¹ *DULAT* I:279.

¹⁶² *DULAT* II:520.

¹⁶³ *DULAT* II:753.

¹⁶⁴ “[A] kind of religious drinking society to which only the male members of the pantheon and sometimes nubile girls were admitted”, Marjo C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 271. Theodore J. Lewis translates the same term in *KTU* 1.114:15 as ‘bacchanal’, cf. *UNP*, 195.

¹⁶⁵ *DULAT* II:581.

¹⁶⁶ *DULAT* II:669–670.

¹⁶⁷ The name ‘*El pḥr*’ in a South Arabic inscription probably can be translated with the help of Ugaritic as ‘El of the Assembly’, cf. Ulf Oldenburg, “Above the Stars of El: El in Ancient South Arabic Religion,” *ZAW* 82 no. 2 (1970): 190.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. “The Ba’lu Myth,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.86:246). Pardee (see especially nt. 37), translates ‘Great Assembly’ as referring to the plenary council of all gods, including Baal also, who is known from ritual texts to have had his own council.

¹⁶⁹ *DULAT* II:669.

KTU 1.10.I:4 (in parallel with *bn il*, ‘sons of El’: *KTU* 1.10.I:3 and *dr dt šmm*, ‘the circle of those of the heavens’: *KTU* 1.10.I:5); []šr *pḥr*, ‘the assembly [si]ngs?’¹⁷⁰; *KTU* 1.23:57; *pḥr b’ l*, ‘the assembly of Baal’: *KTU* 1.162:17; *dr il wphḥr b’ l*, ‘the circle of El and the assembly of Baal’: *KTU* 1.39:7; 1.87:17–18; 1.162:16–17.

mphrt, ‘assembly, gathering’:¹⁷¹ *mphrt bn il*, ‘the assembly of the sons of El’: *KTU* 1.40:25; 1.65:3 (both passages in parallel to *dr bn il*).

The Ugaritic texts give the impression of diverse groups or sub-groups of gods, with El, the supreme god, at the head of the pantheon.

The El of the Ugaritic stories is, however, not only the distant and exalted deity modern readers might expect,¹⁷² but is, like Zeus of the Greek mythology, very human-like, as he is depicted as sexually active¹⁷³ and once so helplessly inebriated to the point that he slips in his dung and urine and collapses like dead.¹⁷⁴

Most often the word *pḥr* is used to refer to the divine council, probably indicating the general assembly, as opposed to more specific smaller groups of gods around a particular protagonist. This ‘general assembly’ is the equivalent of the Mesopotamian *puḥur ilāni*, ‘the assembly of the gods’.

In Mesopotamia this assembly of the gods is found in many texts,¹⁷⁵ for example, in a late redaction of the Atrahasis epic where the gods are also described as sons of Enlil:

[^dEnl]il il-ta-kan pu-ḥur-[šū]

[Enl]il held [his] assembly

¹⁷⁰ Thus Theodore J. Lewis, *UNP*, 212. However, Pardee reconstructs and translates this differently, explaining the passage as referring to pregnancy: “He sits down, he counts, to five for the [bulge to appear], [to t]en, the completed double”, see “Dawn and Dusk,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87:282). Because the text is unclear, it is impossible to define the nature of the mentioned assembly as either divine or human. Possibly here a human assembly is meant, gathered for a ritual in reaction to the birth of Dawn and Dusk, whom El begot of two women.

¹⁷¹ *DULAT* II:566.

¹⁷² El is called *ab šnm*, ‘the father of years’: *KTU* 1.1.III:24; 1.4.IV:24; 1.5.VI:2; 1.17.VI:48, and receives the epithet *ltpn ildpid*, ‘benificent El the benign’, e.g. *KTU* 1.1.III:22; 1.1.IV:13; 1.5.VI:11–12.

¹⁷³ See El’s suggestive proposal to Athirat, *KTU* 1.4.IV:38–39. El also begets the gods Dawn and Dusk, *KTU* 1.23.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *KTU* 1.114:20–22.

¹⁷⁵ See *puḥru* A 1. assembly, council, collegium, contingent, army, group, 2. totality, all, *CAD* 12:485–493. For countless examples of the ‘assembly of the gods’, see *CAD* 12: 486–487. The term is also used for a city council or an army contingent.

[iz-za]-ka-ra a-na ilâni MEŠ marê MEŠ-šú [He sa]id to the gods, his sons...¹⁷⁶

In Phoenicia the collectivity of the gods is referred to as גבול קדשם אל, 'the assembly of the holy gods of Byblos',¹⁷⁷ and as וכל דר בן אלם, 'and the entire circle of the sons of the gods'.¹⁷⁸

The Aramaic 'Balaam text'¹⁷⁹ excavated at Deir 'Allā also refers to gods who have set up¹⁸⁰ a council (*mw'd*),¹⁸¹ probably in opposition¹⁸² to El, in which they commanded the goddess Shagar to close the heavens with a thick cloud in order to bring darkness on earth.

(3) *The Divine Council in Ancient Near Eastern Literature: Scene*

The concept of a divine council apparently reflects the setting of ancient Near Eastern royal courts as being at a heavenly level. Similarly to daily life at a royal court, one of the functions of the assembly of the gods was feasting.¹⁸³ The assembly of the gods does not solely resemble a royal court session but also carries the traits of a 'family meeting', especially as it is depicted in Ugaritic literature. In Ugarit, the council presided by El also decides who of the gods will receive power,¹⁸⁴ just as the Mesopotamian gods, convened in their banquet, grant kingship to Marduk and offer him a seat in the assembly of the gods.¹⁸⁵ In general, one of the more important gods calls the assembly together and presides over it. Typical for the divine council

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Albert T. Clay, *A Hebrew Deluge Story in Cuneiform and Other Epic Fragments in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (Yale Oriental Series V-3; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 65.

¹⁷⁷ KAI I,A 4:4–5, Yahimilk-inscription, mid 10th century B.C.E, cf. KAI II,6. For translation, see KAI II,6, and "The Inscription of King Yahimilk," translated by Stanislav Segert (COS 2.29:146).

¹⁷⁸ KAI I,26A,III:19. Azatiwada inscription from Karatepe, 8th century B.C.E, cf. KAI II,35. For translation, see KAI II,37, and "The Azatiwada Inscription," translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (COS 2.31:150).

¹⁷⁹ Dated to mid-eighth century B.C.E, cf. "The Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscriptions," translated by Baruch A. Levine, (COS 2.27:141).

¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, the same verb (נָצַב) is used here as in Ps 82:2 "God stands up (נָצַב, Niphal) in the divine council", yet here probably as Piel, (נָצַבְו = נָצַבו), see Levine, COS 2.27:142, nt. 10.

¹⁸¹ Transcription Combination I:8, see J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla* (DMOA 19; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 173.

¹⁸² Cf. Levine, COS 2.27:141.

¹⁸³ Cf. KTU 1.1.IV:1–12; KTU 1.114.

¹⁸⁴ E.g. after Baal is killed by the god Mot, the personified Death, Baal's authority is given to Athtar but he cannot hope to equal Baal because, when seated on Baal's throne, "his feet do not reach its footstool, his head does not reach its top", KTU 1.6.I:59–61, translation Mark S. Smith, in UNP, 154.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Enūma Elish* III.130–IV.6,13–15. Cf. also E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 176–177.

is that the assembly is constituted when the other gods are seated.¹⁸⁶ Anyone who wishes to speak is to stand when addressing the assembly.¹⁸⁷ This portrayal is to be an apparent reflection of earthly court-scenes where the tribunal's being in session is also depicted by the king or judge 'being seated'.¹⁸⁸

It is mainly the Ugaritic texts which give some indication of the location of the divine council. The god El is believed to inhabit a mountain¹⁸⁹ and the residence of Baal is always mentioned as Mount Šapānu.¹⁹⁰

In view of the above, the general assembly of the gods or the smaller council of specific gods is, in Ugaritic literature, probably more a literary device meant to portray the gods as being together than an elaborate description of how gods govern the world. Mesopotamian literature, however, specifically mentions the divine council when the gods face a crisis requiring their attention.¹⁹¹ In general then, the picture of a council of gods is portrayed in recurring formulae, as Kee observes: "The repeated and commonly used expressions are effective literary devices that maintain a literary consistency and expectancy in the passages that describe the heavenly council".¹⁹²

(4) *The Divine Council in Ancient Near Eastern Literature: Members*

Rather unsurprisingly, the members of the divine council in ancient Near Eastern texts are always gods who can be called 'sons of the gods'. As has been discussed above, for the study of Gen 6:1–4 the Ugaritic texts are especially interesting, for here these gods are referred to not only as *ilm* but also as *bn ilm*.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ E.g. *Enūma Elish* III.118–119. For other examples, see Min Suc Kee, "The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene," *JSOT* 31 no. 3 (2007): 266–268.

¹⁸⁷ For examples, see Kee, "The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene," 265.

¹⁸⁸ See the excursus "Het 'gezeten-zijn' van koning en rechter," J. P. Lettinga, *Amos: Notities bij de Hebreeuwse tekst en proeve van vertaling* (Kampen: FQI Publicatiecommissie, 1995), 5–6, earlier published in *Ref* 32 (1956–57), 360.

¹⁸⁹ E.g. *KTU* 1.1.III:21–22.

¹⁹⁰ Mount Casius, ca. 10 km north of Ugarit. Mentioned often as Baal's abode, e.g. *KTU* 1.1.V:5; 1.3.I:20–21; 1.3.III:28–31; 1.3.IV:2; 1.4.IV:17–19; 1.4.V:53–55; 1.6.I:56–59; 1.6.VI:12–13; 1.100:9. Interestingly, this mountain is also mentioned in Isa 14:13 as the 'mount of the assembly, the summits of Šapôn' and is possibly alluded to in Ps 48:3 in a description of Mount Zion. Here, the expression *צִפּוֹן יְרֵכְתִּי* can also be translated as 'north side', cf. Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 250. Zevit proposes the hypothesis, based on archeological evidence from Arad, Hazor and Dan, that "[t]emples (or certain types of temples) were built on the north side of sites for religious, mythic reasons."

¹⁹¹ Cf. Mullen, *The Divine Council*, 114–115.

¹⁹² Kee, "The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene," 269.

¹⁹³ Also in Mesopotamian literature Enlil is attested to call the gods 'his sons', see above.

Apart from names of specific gods from the Ugaritic pantheon, several expressions are employed referring to the gods in general as members of the divine council,¹⁹⁴ namely, *ilm*, ‘gods’, *bn il*, ‘son(s) of El’, *bn ilm*, ‘son(s) of the gods / of El’, and *phr kkbm*, ‘the assembly of the stars’.¹⁹⁵

It can be concluded, therefore, that ancient Near Eastern literature uses the expression ‘sons of the gods’ as an indication for the gods. In such texts, the numerous gods form a rather undifferentiated group of not otherwise specified deities.¹⁹⁶ This divine council meets for more or less specific goals and for feasting as in a divine family meeting. The divine council also makes decisions similar to an assembly of a royal court of law. The sessions of the council are sometimes plenary but smaller meetings of subgroups are also described. In many cases the texts identify the deity who is presiding over the council. Members of the council are sometimes identified by their names, the majority of the participants in the council usually remaining anonymous. The use of the term ‘sons of the gods’ may indicate that the expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament also has to be understood as originally referring to divine beings. Yet, it has to be noted that a similar content – gods engaging in sexual relationships with humans – is an especially common theme in Greek mythology and to a lesser extent in the literature of the ancient Near East.¹⁹⁷

4.4.3 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Conceptual Arguments (4)

(1) Other Old Testament Passages Mentioning ‘Sons of God’

Comparison with other Old Testament passages in which the expression בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, or בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן occurs demonstrates that all of these parallel expressions refer to beings which are not human.¹⁹⁸ The interpretation of these texts will be addressed in the subsequent section.

¹⁹⁴ Mullen, *The Divine Council*, 181–186 argues that the members of the council constitute an entourage of warriors around El.

¹⁹⁵ Perhaps the stars are considered to be the visible apparitions of the gods.

¹⁹⁶ It has also been suggested that the expression *bn ilm* was used as a way to ensure that no god was accidentally overlooked, cf. Carola Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 16.

¹⁹⁷ This issue will be addressed in 5.4.3 below.

¹⁹⁸ See the overview in 2.2.1. Cf. also Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 124; John J. Collins, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men,” in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. Martti Nissinen & Risto Uro; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 260–261.

Deuteronomy 32:8.43: Qumran and Septuagint

Deuteronomy 32:8, as found among the Dead Sea scrolls, displays an interesting textual variant which is also reflected in the Septuagint. Deuteronomy 32:8–9, part of the ‘Song of Moses’,¹⁹⁹ reads as follows in translation from the Masoretic Text:

(8) When the Most High allotted inheritance to the peoples, when he separated the sons of men (בְּנֵי אָדָם), he established the areas of the nations according to the number of the sons of Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל).

(9) For the portion of YHWH is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.

Instead of ‘the sons of Israel’, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, in the Masoretic Text,²⁰⁰ 4QDeut^{j201} reads בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים.²⁰²

The fragment was first published by Skehan in 1954, at that time as a still unclassified fragment. According to the editor, it was difficult to make out whether the fragment reads בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים or בְּנֵי אֱלִים, because the text breaks off too soon after the consonants אֱל.²⁰³ In secondary literature it is often mentioned that 4QDeut^q reads בְּנֵי אֱלִים, while 4QDeut^j has the reading בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים.²⁰⁴ Yet newer research supersedes the preliminary publication from 1954 and concludes that the fragment containing the words בְּנֵי אֱלִים belongs to 4QDeut^j (frag. 34) and not to 4QDeut^q.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ At the end of the 19th century, the poem was usually dated late, however, since the discovery of religious texts from Ugarit, scholars tend to date the text again to an early period, even as early as the 11th century B.C.E. Cf. W. F. Albright, “Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy XXXII,” *VT* 9 (1959): 339–346, see Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 76–81.

²⁰⁰ The Samaritan Pentateuch has the same reading as the MT, see August von Gall (ed.), *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1918), 430.

²⁰¹ 4QDeut^j, col. XII:14. Cf. Eugene Ulrich et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4 (Vol.) IX: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* (DJD XIV; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 75–91; Eugene Ulrich, ed., *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants* (VTSup 134; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 240.

²⁰² Cf. Sidnie White Crawford, Jan Joosten, and Eugene Ulrich, “Sample Editions of the Oxford Hebrew Bible: Deuteronomy 32:1–9, 1 Kings 11:1–8, and Jeremiah 27:1–10 (34 G),” *VT* 58 (2008): 357. The authors presume that the original reading was אֱלִים, something which made it easier to insert יִשְׂרָאֵל before אֱלִים, resulting in the reading of MT.

²⁰³ Cf. Patrick W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut. 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954): 12, nt. 2.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Marc Vervenne, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6:1–4,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (ed. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson, JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 26; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 223, nt. 64; J. G. McConville, *comm. Deut* (AOTC 5) 2002, 448.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Ulrich, *Qumran Cave 4 (Vol.) IX*, 137.

The meaning of the expression **בני אלהים** in this textual variant is equivalent with ‘divine beings’, as is commonly agreed. The Septuagint may have had a similar *Vorlage*, otherwise the translation κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ would be difficult to explain.²⁰⁶ It is hard to decide which reading is the older one. The reading of the Masoretic Text coincides with the Samaritan Pentateuch which may be an indication of its early date. If the reading **בני אלהים** has to be dated still earlier, it may have referred to the deities of the peoples around Israel. In this case, the masoretic reading can be explained as being a theological correction²⁰⁷ with the aim of eliminating possible polytheistic connotations. If, on the contrary, the masoretic reading is of an earlier date, the readings of the Septuagint and Qumran may reflect post-exilic speculation about territory angels.²⁰⁸ However, such an assumption is less likely in Deut 32:43 where Qumran and Septuagint also differ from the Masoretic text. In this text, which will be covered below, notions are presented which could be interpreted as polytheistic and which are missing from the Masoretic text.

As already stated, the Septuagint and the texts from Qumran have a longer version of Deut 32:43. The Septuagint has eight cola, as compared to the Masoretic Text with only four cola, while in the Qumran text²⁰⁹ six cola are found:

²⁰⁶ According to David E. Stevens, the LXX did not necessarily have a different *Vorlage*. In his view, the reference to ‘angels’ (LXX) and ‘sons of God’ (Qumran) may reflect the theological milieu of the LXX and the community of Qumran. Stevens therefore prefers the MT, but also because the Samaritan Pentateuch coincides with the MT. Cf. David E. Stevens, “Does Deuteronomy 32:8 Refer to ‘Sons of God’ or ‘Sons of Israel?’” *BSac* 154 (1997): 136–137. Stevens suggests as an alternative explanation for the difference between MT and Qumran that a scribal error led to the disappearance of the consonants **ישר** of the word **ישראל**, leaving only the consonants **אל**, (138). Newer evidence made Stevens review his opinion, see David E. Stevens, “Daniel 10 and the Notion of Territorial Spirits,” *BSac* 157 (2000): 412, nt. 9.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO 36; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 211–214. According to John Day, the MT’s reading is hardly a scribal error. Cf. John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 175.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Labuschagne, *comm. Deut III* (POT) 1997, 231. E.g. Philo, *Post.* 89.91–92 draws upon LXX Deut 32:8 to explain that nations are guided by angels, cf. *Sir.* 17:17.

²⁰⁹ 4QDeut^a, col. II: frg. 5ii. Cf. Ulrich, *Qumran Cave 4 (Vol.) IX*, 141; idem, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 242.

Deut 32:43 LXX	Deut 32:43 MT	4QDeut ^a , col. II: frg. 5 ii
a) εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοὶ ἅμα αὐτῷ καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ		הַרְנִינוּ שָׁמַיִם עִמּוֹ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לוֹ כָּל אֱלֹהִים
b) εὐφράνθητε ἔθνη μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ	הַרְנִינוּ גִּוִּים עִמּוֹ	
c) ὅτι τὸ αἷμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκδικᾶται καὶ ἐκδικήσῃ καὶ ἀνταποδώσῃ δίκην τοῖς ἐχθροῖς	כִּי דָם בְּנֵי יְקוֹם וְנָקָם יֵשִׁיב לְצָרָיו	כִּי דָם בְּנֵי יְקוֹם וְנָקָם יֵשִׁיב לְצָרָיו
d) καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἀνταποδώσῃ καὶ ἐκκαθαριεῖ κύριος τὴν γῆν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ	וְכַפֵּר אֲדָמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ	וְלִמְשָׁנָאֵיו יִשְׁלַם וְיִכַּפֵּר אֲדָמָת עִמּוֹ

For the present study, the most interesting in these two textual variants is that they refer to ‘all the sons of God’ (LXX) or to ‘all the gods’ (Qumran) who have to ‘bow down to him’, namely to YHWH. The expression **כל אלהים** from the Qumran fragment is equivalent to **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים**, as is reflected by the Septuagint’s translation πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ.²¹⁰

Already before the fragments from Qumran were published, Winter argued in favour of the priority of the Septuagint’s reading of Deut 32:8.43 as reflecting more precisely the Hebrew original.²¹¹

²¹⁰ According to Patrick W. Shekan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut. 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954): 15, the LXX’s text conceals a Hebrew version “with even a better chance of being original”. Rudolf Meyer argues that it is not necessary to emendate the Hebrew text of Qumran with the help of the LXX. Cf. Rudolf Meyer, “Die Bedeutung von Deuteronomium 32, 8f. 43 (4Q) für die Auslegung des Moseliedes,” in *Verbannung und Heimkehr: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie Israels im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Festschrift Wilhelm Rudolph; ed. Arnulf Kuschke; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1961), 201 nt. 15.

²¹¹ See Paul Winter, “Der Begriff ‘Söhne Gottes’ im Moselied Dtn 32 1–48,” *ZAW* 67 (1955): 40–44.

Fokkelman puts forth reasons to follow the Masoretic Text in Deut 32:8.43. He rejects the emendation of *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* to *בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים* in Deut 32:8 based on a structural analysis of the strophe of Deut 32:8–9. According to his analysis, three terms for anonymous groups of peoples (*גּוֹיִם*, *בְּנֵי אָדָם*, and *עַמִּים*) are contrasted with three designations for the chosen people (*בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *עַמּוֹ*, and *יַעֲקֹב*), a balance which would be upset by emendation.²¹² A reading of six cola in Deut 32:43 similarly disrupts the symmetry of the section and of the two cola with seven syllables and the two cola with eight syllables in vs. 43.²¹³

Despite structural analysis which supports Deut 32:8 in its masoretic form, several arguments can support the reading of the fragments from Qumran and of the Septuagint. (a) Seen from a text-critical perspective, it is easier to explain why the reading ‘sons of God’ became altered into ‘sons of Israel’, than the other way around, given the fact that reading ‘sons of God’ is theologically the more difficult reading.²¹⁴ (b) From a literary point of view, the expression *בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים* forms a contrast with *בְּנֵי אָדָם*. (c) With regard to content, why should the nations receive their territories in accordance with the number of the Israelites?²¹⁵ It makes more sense when the text states that God allotted the peoples their areas according to the number of their gods,²¹⁶ which fits nicely to the comparative statement that “the portion of YHWH is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance”.²¹⁷ (d) Contextually, the reading of the Qumran fragment fits the theme of the poem. Israel is depicted as

²¹² Cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: At the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis*. Vol. I: Ex. 15, Deut. 32, and Job 3. (SSN 37; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998), 82–85.

²¹³ Cf. Fokkelman, *Major Poems*, Vol. I, 131.

²¹⁴ According to Hobbins, MT Deut 32:8–10.43 demythologise, which he illustrates by referring to Judg 11:24 with respect to Deut 32:8–10, and by comparing Deut 32:43 with Ps 29:1, 150:1, Job 38:7, cf. John F. Hobbins, “Critical Biblical Theology in a New Key: A Review Article,” *JESOT* 1 no. 1 (2012): 89. However, Heiser argues that even if it is beyond dispute that MT Deut 32:8–10.43 were altered, the question *when* and *why* the changes occurred cannot be answered, cf. Michael S. Heiser, “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?” *JESOT* 1 no. 1 (2012): 12.

²¹⁵ Unless the ‘seventy persons’ with whom Israel went to Egypt (Deut 10:22) have to be connected here with the ca. 70 peoples mentioned in Gen 10. Cf. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, 84; Labuschagne, *comm. Deut III* (POT) 1997, 233; J. G. McConville, *comm. Deut* (AOTC 5) 2002, 454.

²¹⁶ A similar concept is expressed in 1 Sam 26:19, where David is driven away so that he will have no share in the ‘heritage of YHWH’ (viz. Israel), with the words: ‘Go, serve other gods’ (viz. the gods of another country). Cf. Matitiah Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970): 123.

²¹⁷ A similar thought is expressed in Jer 10:16.

exchanging its God for other gods, who are in fact **שְׂדֵיִם**, ‘demons’ (Deut 32:17).²¹⁸ This reading is also in accordance with Deut 4:19–20: “Beware lest you lift up your eyes to the heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which YHWH, our God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven, but YHWH has taken you ... to be a people of his own possession”.

The comparison between Deut 32:43 Qumran/Septuagint on the one hand, and the Masoretic Text on the other hand, shows that in the masoretic version all ‘heavenly’ references are lacking: the ‘heavens’, ‘all the gods’ (4QDeut⁹), or ‘heavens’, ‘all the sons of God’, ‘all the angels of God’ (LXX). This may be either an omission in the Masoretic Text or an addition in the Septuagint and the Qumran text for theological reasons.

Even if the original text of Deut 32:8.43 cannot be reconstructed with certainty, the Septuagint and Qumran readings might be from an early date and their use of the expression ‘sons of God’ may refer to the deities of the peoples around Israel.²¹⁹ It can be noted that there is no reference to the divine council in these verses.²²⁰

Job 1:6 and 2:1

The prologue to the book of Job twice depicts a heavenly scene in which on a certain day²²¹ ‘the sons of God’, **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים**, present²²² themselves before YHWH. The ‘Adversary’ also appeared in their midst.²²³ The description leaves many questions

²¹⁸ Deuteronomium 32:17a perhaps is better not translated “they sacrificed to demons which were no gods” (RSV), but, “they sacrificed to demons (**שְׂדֵיִם**), not (to) God” (**לֹא לַיהוָה**, also in vs. 15 referring to the God of Israel, but there written *plene*); cf. also the LXX, ἔθυσαν δαίμονι τοῖς καὶ οὐ θεῶ.

²¹⁹ The question whether verses like Deut 32:8.43 (LXX / Qumran) witness a polytheistic view, which is unexpected for the Old Testament, will be addressed more broadly in 5.3. Cf. Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 75; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 136–188. Deuteronomium 32 is anyhow monotheistic in its purport, as can be gleaned from Deut 32:12.16.17.21.37–39.

²²⁰ Cf. Meyer, “Die Bedeutung von Deuteronomium 32,8f.,” 202; Craigie, *comm. Deut* 1976, 379; McConville, *comm. Deut*, 454.

²²¹ According to the Jerusalem Targum, in Job 1:6 New Year's Day, and in Job 2:1 the Day of Atonement, cf. Pope, *comm. Job* (AB) 1965, 9.

²²² The Hithp. of **עָבַד** with **עַל** indicates that someone is standing as servant or official. Cf. Pope, *comm. Job*, 9–10.

²²³ The article before **שָׂטָן** is an indication that the word here still designates a function (‘accuser, prosecutor, opponent, adversary’) rather than a proper name, as in the later development of its meaning. Cf. Horst, *comm. Job* (BKAT) 1968, 13; Marvin Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” *RevExp* 89 (1992): 462–463; K. Nielsen, “שָׂטָן” in *ThWAT* 7:745–751; Bruce Baloian, “שָׂטָן” in *NIDOTTE*

unanswered. On the literary level, the heavenly scene of the ‘sons of God’ coming into the presence of YHWH may intentionally mirror²²⁴ the earthly scene in which the sons of Job appear before him.²²⁵ Whether this ‘Adversary’ belongs to the same category of **הַאֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** remains unclear.²²⁶ In both scenes, Job 1:6 and 2:1, **הַאֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** function as mere onlookers. The Septuagint translates the expression as οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ but a translation ‘heavenly beings, deities’ is also possible.²²⁷ A linkage to the divine council is supported both by the content of the description as well as by the use of the verbal form **לְהִתְיַצֵּב**, ‘to present themselves’.²²⁸

Job 38:7

The theophany in Job 38:7 depicts God’s laying the foundations of the earth, “when all the morning stars (**בְּכָכְבִּי בֹקֵר**) rejoiced together and all the **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** shouted for joy”. The ‘sons of God’ are mentioned here in parallel with the morning stars, similar to how in an Ugaritic religious text²²⁹ *bn il*, ‘the gods’, *phr kkbm*, ‘the assembly of the stars’ and *dr dt šmm*, ‘the circle of those in heaven’, occur in parallel.

In Job 38:7 the expression **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** might also refer to ‘deities’ to express that all these divine beings were required to acknowledge the superiority of YHWH. No direct allusion to the divine council, however, is perceptible.

Psalms 29:1

Psalms 29:1 urges **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** to glorify YHWH. The wording of Ps 29:1–2 resembles that of Ps 96:7–9 but there **עַמִּים מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת**, ‘clans of the peoples’, are summoned to

3:1231–1232. This ‘Adversary’ appears to be one of the heavenly beings, “[p]erhaps there was one such being, who was the equivalent to a state prosecutor, or perhaps any member of the court could take on the role of accuser,” John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume Two: Israel’s Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 54.

²²⁴ Compare the mirrored wordplay on the word **בָּרַךְ**, used euphemistically as ‘to curse’, in Job 1:5 (Job about his sons), 1:11 and 2:5 (‘Satan’ about Job), 2:9 (Job’s wife to her husband).

²²⁵ The verb **וַיִּשְׁלַח** implies that Job’s children were invited for the ritual. Cf. Horst, *comm. Job*, 12.

²²⁶ The Hebrew text is ambiguous but might indicate that the ‘Adversary’ is to be dissociated from the other attendants. Cf. John G. Gammie, “The Angelology and Demonology in the Septuagint of the Book of Job,” *HUCA* 56 (1985): 7. Newer exegesis understands the text to depict the ‘Adversary’ as an intruder, cf. Hartley, *comm. Job* 1988, 72.

²²⁷ Cf. Pope, *comm. Job*, 9; Walter L. Michel, *Job: In the Light of Northwest Semitic: Volume I: Prologue and First Cycle of Speeches Job 1:1–14:22* (BibOr 42; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987), 15; Clines, *comm. Job* (WBC) 1989, 18–19.

²²⁸ Cf. 4.4.2, nt. 180.

²²⁹ *KTU* 1.10.I.3–5.

praise YHWH. A key publication on Ps 29 is that of Ginsberg²³⁰ from 1935, who argued that the psalm contains Canaanite elements. Further analysis of the Ugaritic texts confirmed allusions to Canaanite religious, linguistic and geographical motifs. Among the arguments are 1) the reference in Ps 29:1 to the **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**, which can be related to the occurrence of the *bn ilm* in Ugaritic texts,²³¹ 2) the sevenfold reference to the voice of YHWH compared to the seven times repeated lightning of Baal,²³² 3) the geographical references to Lebanon, Sirion²³³ and Kadesh,²³⁴ the last of these which is in this interpretation located in Syria,²³⁵ 4) the first discovery²³⁶ of an enclitic *mem* in biblical Hebrew, a common phenomenon in Ugaritic,²³⁷ 5) the interpretation²³⁸ of the expression **בְּהִרְת־קִרְשׁ** in Ps 29:2 which is, in this view, not employed to describe the worshippers ‘in holy array’ but is used for YHWH ‘when he appears in his sanctuary’. This interpretation is based on the Ugaritic use of *hdrt*,²³⁹ ‘vision’, but is, however, disputed.²⁴⁰ 6) The motifs of the psalm resemble those of the Baal myth: “YHWH defeats the waters of chaos, he gives forth his thunder and

²³⁰ H. L. Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti, Roma 23–29 settembre 1935*, (Rome: G. Bardi, 1938), 472–476. I am indebted to Dr. Peter Schmidtbauer of the *Istituto Austriaco di Studi Storici* in Rome, who sent me a copy of the article.

²³¹ Cf. David Noel Freedman and C. Franke Hyland, “Psalm 29: A Structural Analysis,” *HTR* 66 no. 2 (1973): 246.

²³² Cf. John Day, “Echoes of Baal’s Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI,” *VT* 29 no. 2 (1979): 143–145. See also Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” 473.

²³³ Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” 474, refers to Deut 3:9, where it is recounted that the Sidonians call Mount Hermon the Sirion.

²³⁴ Cf. Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” 473.

²³⁵ *KTU* 26.65: *mdbr qdš*. Cf. Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” 473; Dahood, *comm. Ps I* (AB) 1966, 178. Perhaps Kadesh on the Orontes, cf. Carola Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 40–41. Kloos observes that the region of Kadesh Barnea is never called ‘the desert of Kadesh’ but always ‘the desert of Sin’ or ‘the desert of Paran’. Cf. also Goldingay, *comm. Ps I* (BCOT) 2006, 419.

²³⁶ The first to suggest this enclitic *mem* was Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” 474.

²³⁷ Ps 29:6, **וַיִּרְקֹדְם**, ‘to make dance’, MT with suffix 3 pl. masc. is almost impossible. Cf. Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *JBL* 76 no. 2 (1957): 93.

²³⁸ Cf. Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 243–246, where also Ps 96:9, 1 Chron 16:29, 2 Chron 20:21 are discussed.

²³⁹ *KTU* 1.14.III.50–51: *krt yḥt . whlm / ‘bd il whdrt*, ‘Kirta awakes—it’s a dream! The servant of El—it’s a vision!’

²⁴⁰ The word *hdrt* is a *hapax legomenon* in Ugaritic and perhaps a scribal error for *dhrt*, as found a little earlier in *KTU* 1.14.I.35–36, *b ḥlmh il yrd b dhrt ab adm*, ‘in his dream El comes down, in his vision the Father of Man.’ See Craigie, *comm. Ps I* (WBC) 1983, 242–243.

lightning from his heavenly dwelling, he exercises power even over the realm of death”.²⁴¹

Literary undertones in Ps 29 referring to Canaanite literature are generally acknowledged in the exegesis of this Psalm, although no similar hymn is found among Ugaritic literature. It is therefore hypothetical to consider Psalm 29 as being a Canaanite hymn in which the name Baal has been replaced by the name YHWH. Nonetheless, there is evidence that such changes did occur.²⁴² Based on structural analysis, however, Pardee suggests that the poem is an original Hebrew composition, “a piece of anti-Baal propaganda”.²⁴³

Less far-reaching explanations for the observed similarities are, therefore, that Ps 29 is a parody on the Baal-religion or an expression of opposition to polytheism, thus confessing the sovereignty of YHWH above all Canaanite gods.²⁴⁴

Canaanite allusions in Ps 29 may help to explain the expression בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים.²⁴⁵ Similar to the expression *bn ilm* in Ugaritic texts, then, the expression refers to gods and can be translated as ‘deities, divine beings’.²⁴⁶ The gods of the Canaanites must honour YHWH as the supreme God who exhibits forces which are usually attributed to Baal in Ugaritic literature. Reading between the lines, the appeal to the gods to honour YHWH is perhaps in reality also addressed to Israelites who tended to worship these gods.²⁴⁷

In conclusion, it can be said that Ps 29:1 speaks of the בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים as divine beings or deities, who are, most likely, to be understood as the gods of the Canaanite pantheon. The demand that all other gods have to honour YHWH is in line with

²⁴¹ D. Pardee, “On Psalm 29: Structure and Meaning,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (eds. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr.; VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill 2005), 166. Pardee observes that the motifs even appear more or less in the same order (176).

²⁴² Usually, Ps 104 is compared to the *Hymn to the Aten*, although literary interdependence is not probable, cf. “The Great Hymn to the Aten,” translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.28:44–46), nt. 3. For a detailed evaluation see also Annette Krüger, *Das Lob des Schöpfers: Studien zu Sprache, Motivik und Theologie von Psalm 104* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 403–422.

²⁴³ Pardee, “On Psalm 29,” 158.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Craigie, *comm. Ps I*, 249; James L. Mays, “Psalm 29,” *Int* 39 no. 1 (1985): 62; John Goldingay, *comm. Ps I*, 414. Cf. also Peter C. Craigie, “Psalm XXIX in the Hebrew Poetic Tradition,” *VT* 22 no. 2 (1972): 143–151. According to Craigie, Psalm 29 is a Hebrew victory hymn, a stage in the development between the early song of Exod 15:1–18 and the later ‘Enthronement Psalms’.

²⁴⁵ The reading אֱלִילִים, ‘rams’, figuratively ‘leaders’, is less likely, though the LXX might have read this as object of the sentence, ἐνέγκατε τῷ κυρίῳ υἱοὺς κριῶν, ‘bring (sacrifice) young rams to the Lord’.

²⁴⁶ Some interpreters consider the final consonant *m* in *ilm* to be enclitic, rather than a plural ending, resulting in a translation ‘sons of El’, see Freedman and Hyland, “Psalm 29,” 242; Hummel, “Enclitic *mem*,” 101–102.

²⁴⁷ So Goldingay, *comm. Ps I*, 416.

other places in the Old Testament where the incomparability of the God of Israel is stated over and above any other god.²⁴⁸ A reference to the divine council is at best implicitly present.

Psalm 82

Psalm 82 is a unique hymn in which God²⁴⁹ is depicted as standing in the assembly of the gods, **אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵרַת־אֵל**. God standing there most likely indicates that he is posing as plaintiff (cf. Ps 109:6) and not as judge. In this case, the description is not meant to depict God here as presiding over the assembly of the gods because the judge or the king usually was seated as a sign of his presiding.²⁵⁰ All the same, the fact that he stands may simply be a sign of dignity here.²⁵¹ The expression **עֵרַת אֵל**, ‘council of God’, occurs only here in the Old Testament.²⁵² The expression originally may have been in the plural, **עֵרַת אֱלִים**, when compared with the Septuagint’s rendering *ἐν συνταγῶν θεῶν*, ‘in the assembly of the gods.’ But both in the plural as in the singular, the expression refers to the divine council,²⁵³ something which is supported by the Ugaritic cognate *‘dt ilm*.²⁵⁴

According to Ps 82:1b, God judges in the midst of the gods, **בְּקֶרֶב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט**. In what follows in Ps 82:2–4, God addresses in the second person plural the ones who fail to fulfill their duty as judges. Most likely, the addressed subjects are the **אֱלֹהִים** mentioned in vs. 1b. This interpretation is supported by Ps 82:6 where the **אֱלֹהִים** are addressed and where, moreover, the word **אֱלֹהִים** is definitely used as a

²⁴⁸ For examples, see Hans-Winfried Jüngling, *Der Tod der Götter: Eine Untersuchung zu Psalm 82* (SBS 38; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969), 44–46. This question will be addressed also in 5.3.

²⁴⁹ Psalm 82:1a.8 mention **אֱלֹהִים**, but as part of the Elohistic psalter YHWH is intended here, cf. J. P. Lettinga, “Psalm 82: De levende God en de stervende afgoden,” in *Almanak FQI* (Kampen: FQI, 1988), 139; similarly Matitiah Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970): 126. The other two occurrences of the word **אֱלֹהִים** in vs. 1b and 6a refer to ‘gods’.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Lettinga, “Psalm 82,” 143–144; Simon B. Parker, “The Beginning of the Reign of God – Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” *RB* 102 no. 4 (1995): 535–538. The verb **נֹצֵב** is also explained as ‘to preside’. For this view see Tate, *comm. Ps II* (WBC) 1990, 335, and Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., “Psalm 82,” *Int* 49 no. 3 (1995): 281.

²⁵¹ Cf. *KTU* 1.2.I:14–16, where it is said to the messengers of Yamm: “Do not bow down at El’s feet, do not prostrate yourselves before the Assembled Council; standing make your speech, recite your instructions”. Translation Mark S. Smith, in *UNP*, 98. Cf. *KTU* 1.2.I:30–32.

²⁵² The word **אֵל** in the expression **עֵרַת אֵל** may have adjectival force, as in Ps 36:7, **הַרְרֵי־אֵל**, cf. Michael S. Heiser, “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?” *JESOT* 1 no. 1 (2012): 19.

²⁵³ Cf. Lettinga, “Psalm 82,” 142–143.

²⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. *KTU* 1.15.II:7–11.

plural: “you are gods (אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם) all of you (כְּלָכֶם) sons of the Most High (בְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן)”. The following verse, Ps 82:7, which mentions that these אֱלֹהִים will die just as any human being, would make little sense if with these אֱלֹהִים it is humans who are meant.²⁵⁵ Since the decipherment of the Ugaritic texts, the arguments in favour of the meaning ‘gods’ have become more convincing, hence, in the words of Parker, it has been commonly agreed “that the question may be considered settled”.²⁵⁶

In Ps 82:2–5 God rebukes²⁵⁷ the gods. The formal charge against the gods is expressed in Ps 82:2–4: they are blamed for their violation of the law (vs. 2: “how long will you judge unjustly?”)²⁵⁸ and for their tolerating injustice (vs. 3–4: “give justice to the weak and the fatherless”).²⁵⁹ A similar description may be found in Psalm 58:2, if the rather unclear אֱלֹם would allow for a reading as אֱלִים: “Do you, gods, indeed decree what is right?”²⁶⁰

Psalm 82:6–7 provides a conclusion about what will happen to the gods who do not carry out their duty. These verses are commonly taken as pertaining to the verdict of YHWH.²⁶¹ However, Lettinga suggests²⁶² that verses 6 and 7 bear the

²⁵⁵ Cf. Jüngling, *Tod der Götter*, 24–29; Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 31; Lettinga, “Psalm 82,” 141.

²⁵⁶ Parker, “Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” 533. Alternatively, James M. Trotter, “Death of the אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82,” *JBL* 131 no. 2 (2012): 233–239, argues that the אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82 are to be viewed as divine kings.

²⁵⁷ שָׁפַט here with the specific meaning ‘to accuse of injustice’, see Parker, “Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” 536. Cf. also *HAL* 4:1500: “richten = strafen, bestrafen”.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, “History of Religion in Psalm 82,” in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor* (ed. Gary A. Tuttle; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 131. Gordon mentions the example of the goddess Anat who hired a murderer to take Aqhat’s bow, see *KTU* 1.18.IV:7–41.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Parker, “Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy,” 545. Parker refers to the Ugaritic epos of *Krt*, in which Yassub, son of the semi-divine Kirta, accuses his father of neglecting justice, *KTU* 1.16.VI:39–54. Cf. also the claims of Absalom in 2 Sam 15:3–4. The contrast is shown by Dan’el who cares for the cause of the widows and champions the needs of the orphans, *KTU* 1.17.V:7–8.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” 32; Lettinga, “Psalm 82,” 141.

²⁶¹ Cf. Jüngling, *Tod der Götter*, 94; Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly,” 129; Oswald Loretz, “Mythische Götterrebellion und königliche Socialpflichten als gemeinsamer altorientalischer Hintergrund von Ps 82,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt*. Fs. Albertz (ed. Ingo Kottsieper, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Jakob Wöhrle; AOAT 350; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 401; Yair Zakovitch, “Psalm 82 and Biblical Exegesis,” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism* (ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 222; W. S. Prinsloo, “Psalm 82: Once Again, Gods or Men?” *Bib* 76 no. 2 (1995): 226. By contrast, Frankel argues that *El* is the speaker in Ps 82:6–8, based on his translation of Ps 82:1 as ‘God stands in the council of *El*’, cf. David Frankel, “*El* as the Speaking Voice in Psalm 82:6–8,” *JHS*

thoughts of the author of the Psalm, who now appears in the song via direct discourse: “I had taken you for²⁶³ gods, all of you sons of the Most High, nevertheless²⁶⁴ you will die like men²⁶⁵ do, and you will fall as one of the princes”.²⁶⁶ The Psalm ends with the author’s appeal: “Arise, God, judge the earth; for to you belong all the nations (כִּי אֶתְּהָהּ הַנִּחַל בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם)” (Ps 82:8). This wording reflects that of Deut 32:8: “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance” (בְּהִנְחֵל עֲלֵיהֶן גּוֹיִם).

In Psalm 82, the concept of the divine council is apparently used in mythopoetic language.²⁶⁷ The aim of the song is to deride polytheistic thinking; other gods than the God of Israel are inadequate to the task they pretend to accomplish,²⁶⁸ therefore they will die²⁶⁹ like human beings. When the mortality of these ‘gods’ is declared, it means within Ps 82 that they are revealed to be sham gods. This concurs with the ancient Near Eastern idea that immortality is the unique attribute of the gods which

10 (2010): 1–24. Online: http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_144.pdf. Cited 1 September 2012. Arguments against Frankel’s view are given by Heiser, “Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism?” 18–19.

²⁶² Cf. Lettinga, “Psalm 82,” 147.

²⁶³ Cf. Goldingay, *comm. Ps II* (BCOT) 2007, 567. Differently explained as a performative formula: ‘I hereby declare’; cf. Hossfeld & Zenger, *comm. Ps II* (HTKAT) 2000, 489. According to Peter Höffken, “Werden und Vergehen der Götter: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung von Psalm 82,” *TZ* 39 no. 3 (1983): 136, the verb אֶמְרֵהֶם is an indication for the coming into existence of the gods by YHWH’s word.

²⁶⁴ It was discovered by K. Budde (1921) and rediscovered by C. J. Labuschagne (1962) that אֶמְרֵהֶם followed by כִּי in a subsequent clause means, ‘I had thought ... but’. Cf. Dahood, *comm. Ps II*, 270.

²⁶⁵ Loretz, “Mythische Götterrebellion,” 401, translates: ‘like Adam’.

²⁶⁶ Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14 (1939): 117, explains שָׂרִים as referring to fallen angels, e.g. Helel ben Shahar from Isa 14:12. Cf. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, Calif.: 1980), 243. Mullen translates ‘Shining Ones’; similarly Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *BSac* 158 (2001): 62 nt. 37. Heiser bases his translation on Akkadian *šarūru*, ‘radiance’ (cf. *CAD* 17/2:140–143) and on the fact that in Dan 10:13.20–21; 12:1 the word שָׂרִים is also used to identify heavenly beings.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Elmer B. Smick, “Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms,” *WThJ* 44 no. 1 (1982): 88: “the authors [of the OT] were not committed to myth but were keenly aware of contemporaneous mythology from which they drew colorful figures to enrich their theological expression.”

²⁶⁸ Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 38, considers Ps 82:2–5b as a later insertion and suggests that the story of Gen 6:1–4 originally was referred to in the part which has been replaced by vs. 2–5b. For a critical approach of Morgenstern’s view, see Roger T. O’Callaghan, “A Note on the Canaanite Background of Psalm 82,” *CBQ* 15 no. 3 (1953): 311–314.

²⁶⁹ Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 73 nt. 80, translates מוֹת as ‘to become mortal’, referring to Gen 2:17 and 3:3–4, where he translates not as ‘you will die’ but as ‘you will become mortal’.

differentiates them from men.²⁷⁰ In ancient Near Eastern thinking, this does not exclude the possibility that a specific god can be a victim of death by violence.²⁷¹ In Ps 82, the loss of the privilege of immortality seems to imply the loss of divinity by those addressed, all the more so because it is stressed that in their mortality they are similar to human beings (Ps 82:7). In the Old Testament, this is a unique verdict which proclaims the death of all gods other than YHWH and, for that matter, states that these so-called gods are in reality no more powerful than humans.

Psalm 82:6 presents the condemned gods to be בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, 'sons of the Most High'. The expression בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן can be considered to be equivalent to בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים and to refer to 'divine beings'.²⁷² Psalm 82:8 possibly expresses a development²⁷³ in the concept which is found in the Qumran reading of Deut 32:8: not to the diverse gods but to YHWH belong all the nations as inheritance, for other gods are incapable of fulfilling their divine duty.

It has been argued that in Ps 82:6 human judges are to be understood by the word אֱלֹהִים. This exegesis is commonly found in patristic exegesis and often based on John 10:34, where Jesus quotes Ps 82:6: "Is it not written in your law: 'I said, you are gods'?" However, in John 10:34–35 Jesus makes no statement about the identity of the ones who are called 'gods' in Ps 82.²⁷⁴ In the passage Jesus defends himself against the charge of blasphemy (John 10:33): "you, being a man, make yourself God". Jesus' reasoning goes from minor to major: the ones who are addressed in Ps 82 could be called 'gods' (John 10:35), although they committed injustice. (In this case, the phrase "to whom the word of God came" (John 10:35) refers to the charge of injustice against the gods as expressed in Ps 82:2–4). How could it be blasphemy, then, if Jesus calls himself son of God while doing *good* works?²⁷⁵ These 'good works' are mentioned in John 10:32: "I have shown you many good works from the Father".

²⁷⁰ Cf. *KTU* 1.16.I:22 *u ilm tmtn*, 'gods, do they die?' (about Kirta). Cf. also *KTU* 1.17.VI:25–41, where Anat offers Aqhat immortality in return for his bow so that he can 'count his years with Baal'. Aqhat, however, refuses and suggests that Anat is cheating him, for mortality is the fate of man – and, he adds ironically, 'bows are weapons for warriors, not for women.'

²⁷¹ Cf. the death of Yamm, *ym lmt*, *KTU* 1.2.IV:32–34 and of Baal, *b' l mt*, *KTU* 1.5.VI:23; 1.6.I:6. However, in the Baal Cycle, Baal comes to life again, cf. *KTU* 1.6.III:8–9. Cf. also how in *Enūma Elish* VI:29–34 the god Qingu is killed in order to use his blood as one of the ingredients from which humans are created: "Epic of Creation (*Enūma Elish*)," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.111:400–401). In the last of these, the death of the god was intended to be punishment. A similar story is found in *Atrahasis* 207–207 where the god Aw-ilu is sacrificed to create mankind from his blood, see "Atrahasis," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:451).

²⁷² Cf. Zakovitch, "Psalm 82 and Biblical Exegesis," 222.

²⁷³ Cf. Höffken, "Werden und Vergehen der Götter," 134. Psalm 82 and Deut 32:8 (Qumran) share much of their significant vocabulary, cf. Tsevat, "God and the Gods in Assembly," 133.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Lettinga, "Psalm 82," 149–151.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Smick, "Mythopoetic Language," 94.

A slightly different explanation is based on a Jewish midrash from the second century C.E. which says that Israel was protected against death in having received the Torah and that in this way God made ‘gods’ of the Israelites.²⁷⁶ Jesus may have referred to his listeners’ understanding of themselves in such a way, by quoting Ps 82:6 in John 10:34. As already mentioned, Jesus goes on to explain Ps 82:6 in John 10:35: “if he calls them gods *to whom the word of God came*”. In this exegesis, the phrase ‘to whom the word of God came’ refers to the reception of the Thora by the Israelites. Jesus’ argumentation, then, is that if Israelites can be called ‘gods’, he also can call himself ‘son of God’ by the mere fact that he is an Israelite. The difficulty with this approach is that, in this case, Jesus would not have furthered his argument; he only would have demonstrated that he was – like any Israelite – a human being. It, therefore, is more likely that Jesus wanted to bring his listeners’ attention to the fact that Scripture refers to other divine beings and that for this reason Jesus also can refer to himself as the son of God, John 10:36.

Psalm 89:6–9

In Psalm 89, YHWH is praised for his heavenly glory as exhibited in creation and for the victory bestowed on king David.²⁷⁷ Psalm 89:6–9 depicts YHWH’s entourage praising him. In this context, the **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים** are also mentioned as not being comparable to YHWH. Most exegetes consider these **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים** to function here as members of the retinue of YHWH. This claim will be tested in the following exegesis of the passage. Verses 6–9 of the Psalm read:

6. The heavens²⁷⁸ praise your wonders, YHWH, yes, your faithfulness in the congregation of the holy ones (**בְּקִהְל־קְדָשִׁים**).
7. For who in the clouds²⁷⁹ can be compared to YHWH, who is like YHWH among the divine beings (**בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**)?

²⁷⁶ Cf. James S. Ackerman, “The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John: John 10:34,” *HTR* 59 no. 2 (1996): 186–191; Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Said: You are Gods’: Psalm 82:6 and John 10,” *JBL* 108 no. 4 (1989): 655–663.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Michael H. Floyd, “Psalm LXXXIX: A Prophetic Complaint about the Fulfillment of an Oracle,” *VT* 42 no. 4 (1992): 447; Richard J. Clifford, “Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler’s Continued Failure,” *HTR* 73 no. 1 (1980): 42.

²⁷⁸ Subject of the first colon, as in Ps 97:5 “the heavens proclaim his righteousness”. Others see the preposition in **בְּקִהְל־** as pertaining to **שָׁמַיִם**, “in the heavens they praise”, see Dahood, *comm. Ps II*, 312; Goldingay, *comm. Ps II*, 660.

²⁷⁹ Singular **שָׁמַיִם**, as in vs. 38, used here as indicating the sky. Cf. Tate, *comm. Ps II*, 409.

8. God (אל) is greatly²⁸⁰ feared in the council of the holy ones (בסוד קדשים) and revered above his whole retinue (על-כל-סביביו).
9. YHWH is the God of hosts (אלהי צבאות); who is like you, powerful, YH, with your faithfulness²⁸¹ around you?

For the present study, the two expressions ‘divine beings’ (בני אלים), and ‘the congregation / council of the holy ones’ (סוד / קהל קדשים) are of primary importance. Beginning with the ‘holy ones’: in the Old Testament, the expression קדשים is used both to denote human and heavenly beings.²⁸² A comparable use is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls,²⁸³ although sometimes the dividing line between the heavenly host and the earthly community appears to be somewhat fluid therein.²⁸⁴ However, in the context of Ps 89, this expression refers clearly to heavenly beings. Job 15:15 illustrates this, here the word קדשים is used in contrast to man (Job 15:14.16) and in parallel with ‘heavens’ (שמים): “behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones (הן בקדשו לא יאמין), and the heavens are not immaculate in his eyes” (ושמים לא זכו בעיניו). Similarly, the use of the word in Job 5:1 “and to which of the holy ones will you turn?” (ואל מי מקדשים תפנה) most likely also refers to heavenly beings.

Yet, the conclusion that in Ps 89:6–9 the קדשים are to be equated²⁸⁵ with the בני אלים is premature. There are two possibilities: either the קדשים are mentioned in parallel and therefore are identical with the בני אלים, or the two expressions refer to a different group of beings.

1. In Ps 89:6–9, the ‘holy ones’ apparently are members of the retinue of YHWH, who all praise and revere him. As for the בני אלים, it is likely that this expression refers to ‘divine beings’ because they are presented as minor beings compared with

²⁸⁰ The word רבה is probably used adverbially here, as in Ps 62:3; 78:15. Cf. Goldingay, *comm. Ps II*, 661. In this case, the text does not have to be emended to רב הוּא or רב, cf. the apparatus in BHS ad locum. This reading also respects the masoretic *atnah*. under the word רבה.

²⁸¹ Mullen, *Divine Council*, 191, nt. 134, translates ‘your faithful ones’, referring to the celestial court, a concrete denotation for the abstract אֱמוּנָתְךָ, because of its chiasmic parallelism with קדשים in vs. 8a.

²⁸² Cf. C. H. W. Brekelmans, “The Saints of the Most High and Their Kingdom,” in *Oudtestamentische Studiën 14* (ed. P. A. H. de Boer; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 305–329; S. B. Parker, “Saints,” in *DDD*, 718–720; see also J. J. Collins, “Saints of the Most High,” *DDD*, 720–722.

²⁸³ Examples: 1QM Col. XV,13–15; 1QH^a Col. V,14; XI,22; XII,24 (בסוד קדשים); XXVI,6; 4Q181 Fragm. 1, col. II,4; 4Q403 Frag.1, col. I,40; 4Q511 Fragm. 8,8–9.

²⁸⁴ See Collins, “Saints of the Most High,” *DDD*, 720.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Mullen, *Divine Council*, 190–191; Annemarie Ohler, *Mythologische Elemente im Alten Testament: Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (KBANT; Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1969), 207.

YHWH; there would have been no sense in comparing human beings with YHWH. It is, therefore, possible that the expression **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** is an alternative term for **קְדָשִׁים**, both terms referring to members of YHWH's retinue,²⁸⁶ as some exegetes argue. According to Parker, "[q]ēdôšîm refers to the gods as a collectivity that is widely attested throughout the ancient Near East".²⁸⁷ However, his examples are all samples of an attributive ('the holy gods') and not of a substantive use of the word ('the holy ones'). A similar observation is made by Hossfeld and Zenger,²⁸⁸ but their reference to *KTU* 1.2.I:13–32 attests only to the expression *bn qdš*,²⁸⁹ which can be translated as 'holy ones' but might also mean 'children of Qdš'. The epithet Qdš, 'the Holy One', refers either to Asherah or, more probably, to El.²⁹⁰ In any case, there appears to be no exact conformity between **קְדָשִׁים** in Ps 89:6.8 and the *bn qdš* of the Ugaritic texts.

2. Alternatively, it is also possible to view the **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** as a category of beings who are different from the **קְדָשִׁים**. The structure of the passage may support this difference, providing a reason why the 'holy ones' fear YHWH. The passage forms an a–b–a–b pattern: (a) YHWH is praised in the congregation of the holy ones, vs. 6; (b) reason: he is not comparable to the 'divine beings', vs. 7; (a) YHWH is feared in the council of the holy ones, vs. 8; (b) reason: he is not comparable to anyone, vs. 9.

In the latter interpretation, the scene depicted in Ps 89:6–9 can be visualised in a way where YHWH is surrounded by the assembly of the holy. To stress YHWH's incomparability, the divine beings are mentioned by contrast as the ones who possibly might be compared with YHWH. In this case, it is not necessary that these divine beings are described as being present within the council. In this description, the **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** would be competing deities,²⁹¹ most likely 'outsiders' to the divine council surrounding YHWH, as depicted in Ps 89:6.8. In this interpretation, the **אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי** differ from the *bn ilm* in Ugarit where they are members of the assembly of the gods.

²⁸⁶ Even if these divine beings are described as being present in the council, they can be viewed as having been dethroned, cf. Kraus, *comm. Ps II* (BKAT) 1978, 787.

²⁸⁷ Parker, "Saints," *DDD*, 718.

²⁸⁸ Hossfeld & Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 590: "nach ugaritischem Sprachgebrauch wird damit wie mit dem Begriff 'Gottessöhne' die Göttersammlung Els bezeichnet."

²⁸⁹ *KTU* 1.2.I:21.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Parker, "Saints," *DDD*, 718. According to N. Wyatt, "Asherah," *DDD*, 100, *qdš* only can denote El and not Asherah because reference to her would require a final *t* to signify the feminine: "Reiteration of elementary errors of this sort by subsequent generations of scholars only compounds the error!"

²⁹¹ Cf. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *comm. Ps / Lam* (FOTL) 2001, 149. However, Gerstenberger sees the divine beings as surrounding YHWH.

Daniel 3:25

Daniel 3 relates how the three friends of Daniel are cast into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship the golden statue which Nebuchadnezzar had erected. Daniel 3:25 describes Nebuchadnezzar's reaction: he sees not three but four men walking freely, unhurt, in the heart of the fire. The "appearance of the fourth one is like a בֶּרֶךְ-אֱלֹהִים, 'a son of the gods'." Because there is only one being of this nature visible in the fire, the expression is mentioned in the singular here, yet the notion is similar to all the other occurrences in the Old Testament; Nebuchadnezzar sees a figure akin to a 'divine being'. The expression refers to a member of the class²⁹² of beings belonging to the divine realm,²⁹³ without more specifically defining the nature of this being. When, in the course of the narrative, it becomes increasingly clear as to what had exactly happened, this same being is referred to, in this case more precisely, as a messenger (מַלְאָךְ) of God (Dan 3:28). This implies that the expression 'son of the gods' is the broader term, used when the nature of the figure appearing in the fire was still indistinct.

With regard to the other biblical passages in which 'sons of God' are mentioned, it can be concluded that the term clearly refers to divine or, at least to beings who are not human. This interpretation has been ruled out for Ps 82:6 where the phrase אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם, 'you are gods', has been explained alternatively as referring to human judges. However, this interpretation is unlikely in the light of the Psalm's content. It is possible to ignore the variant readings of Deut 32:8.43 because of their not belonging to the Masoretic Text. But despite this, the remaining passages mentioning the 'sons of God' are obvious in their referring to divine beings not otherwise specified.

(2) The Divine Council in the Old Testament

It has been observed that a concept of the divine council as appearing in extrabiblical literature can be also found in the Old Testament. The next section addresses the vocabulary, scene and the nature of the members of this the divine council in the Old Testament.

²⁹² Cf. Collins, *comm. Dan* (HCHC) 1993, 190.

²⁹³ Patristic exegesis usually translated: 'the Son of God', to be identified with Christ. See Collins, *comm. Dan*, 190.

The Divine Council in the Old Testament: Vocabulary

In Biblical Hebrew, partially similar expressions are found as in Ugaritic, referring to the divine council, namely סֹד, עֵדָה and מוֹעֵד. Notably, the equivalent of Ugaritic *phr* is not attested in the Old Testament:

סֹד²⁹⁴

Jer 23:18, כִּי מִי עָמַד בְּסֹד יְהוָה,

for who stood in the council of YHWH?

Jer 23:22, וְאִם-עָמְדוּ בְּסֹדִי,

but if they had stood in my council ...

Job 15:8, הֲבִסֹד אֱלֹהֵי תִשְׁמָע,

did you listen in the council of God?

Ps 25:14, סֹד יְהוָה לִירְאָיו,

*the council of God is with those who
fear him ...*

Ps 89:8a, אֵל נִעְרָץ בְּסֹד קְדָשִׁים,

*a God feared in the council of the holy
ones*עֵדָה²⁹⁵

Ps 82:1, אֱלֹהִים נִצָּב בְּעֵדְתֵּי אֵל,

*God takes his stand in the divine
council ...*מוֹעֵד²⁹⁶

Isa 14:13, וְאָשַׁב בְּהַר-מוֹעֵד,

*I will take my seat on the mount of
the assembly ...*

²⁹⁴ Both the 'assembly' of intimates, and its result, 'counsel', cf. H.-J. Fabry, "סֹד" in *ThWAT* 5:777, cf. M. Sæbø, "סֹד" in *THAT* 2:145; H.-J. Fabry, "סֹד. Der himmlische Thronrat als ekklesiologisches Modell," in *Bausteine biblischer Theologie: Festgabe für G. Johannes Botterweck zum 60. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Schülern*, (BBB 50; ed. H.-J. Fabry; Köln: Hanstein Verlag, 1977), 99–126. The word implies a 'closed' assembly whose secrets are not to be shared, cf. A.R. Hulst, "Over de betekenis van het woord SÖD," in *Vruchten van de Uithof: Studies opgedragen aan dr. H.A. Brongers ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid* (ed. A.R. Hulst; Utrecht: Theologisch Instituut, 1974), 39–40.

²⁹⁵ The public meeting of free, adult men, equivalent of the Mesopotamian *puhrum*, in later rabbinical Hebrew the local congregation of the synagogue, only in Ps. 82:1 applied to the heavenly assembly, cf. D. Levy / J. Milgrom, "עֵדָה" in *ThWAT* 5:1081–1089. Mostly used for the worshipping congregation but can also be applied to a 'swarm' of bees, Judg 4:18, cf. Eugene Carpenter, "עֵדָה" in *NIDOTTE* 3:326.

²⁹⁶ Refers to the appointment to meet a person at a fixed place and/or time, mostly used for (cultic) celebrations, cf. K. Koch, "מוֹעֵד" in *ThWAT* 4:744–750; Hendrik L. Bosman, "מוֹעֵד" in *NIDOTTE* 2:871–873.

קָהָל²⁹⁷

Usually, the word קָהָל is used to denote a congregation consisting of humans, only once does it apparently refer to the celestial court,²⁹⁸

Ps 89:6b, אֱמוּנָתְךָ בִּקְהָל קְדָשִׁים, *your faithfulness in the congregation of the holy ones*

דֹּר²⁹⁹

It is possible that in a few passages דֹּר is also used in a similar way as the Ugaritic *dr* with the meaning ‘circle’,³⁰⁰ but in all the occurrences the references are to human assemblies, for example:

Ps 49:20, תָּבוֹא עַד-דֹּר אֲבוֹתָיו, *you will go to the assembly of his fathers ...*

Ps 73:15, הִנֵּה דֹר בְּנֵיךָ בִּגְדָתִי, *I would have been unfaithful to the congregation of your sons ...*

Only Amos 8:14 uses the word דֹּר perhaps as referring to a divine council when one accepts the conjecture of Neuberg,³⁰¹ who reads דִּרְךָ instead of the Masoretic Text’s דֶּרֶךְ, which results in a reading and translation:

וְאָמְרוּ חַי אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֵּן וְחַי דִּרְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ-שֶׁבַע, *they say, as your god lives,³⁰² Dan, and as your ‘pantheon’ lives, Beer-sheba.*

The Divine Council in the Old Testament: Scene and Members

A classical description of the divine council is found in 1 Kgs 22 (= 2 Chron 18), in the story of the prophet Micaiah ben Imla. The king of Israel, who only further on in the story is identified as Ahab (1Kgs 22:20), urges Jehoshaphat of Juda to fight with

²⁹⁷ ‘Assembly’, especially used for the (cultic) congregation, cf. F.-L. Hossfeld / E.-M. Kindl “קָהָל” in *ThWAT* 6:1210–1219.

²⁹⁸ See 4.4.3.1, Psalm 89:6–9.

²⁹⁹ Original meaning ‘circle, group’, from which the meaning ‘generation’ (as a circle or group of persons) developed, cf. G. J. Botterweck, “דֹּר” in *ThWAT* 2:181–184.

³⁰⁰ Thus Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *JSOT* 31 no. 3 (2007): 260.

³⁰¹ Cf. Frank J. Neuberg, “An Unrecognized Meaning of Hebrew *dôr*,” *JNES* 9 no. 4 (1950): 215–217.

³⁰² In the Masoretic Text, the oath on the life of YHWH is always formulated with יְיָ, in all other cases with הָיָה, see J. P. Lettinga, T. Muraoka, and W. Th. Van Peursen, *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (10th ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 189, §85n. Cf. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 583 §165e.

him against Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat approves of the idea but is cautious enough to seek first the consent of YHWH. The four hundred prophets at the court apparently know what the king expects of them and unanimously prophesy success in battle. But Jehoshaphat has the intuition that something is wrong and asks whether there is no other prophet of YHWH. It turns out that there is a prophet called Micaiah ben Imla whom the king dislikes because he never foretells positive things. When Jehoshaphat insists on hearing this prophet also, Micaiah is summoned. In the meantime, the narrative relates how the royal thrones are first installed at the entrance³⁰³ of the city-gate and then the kings are seated in all their pomp and circumstance. The messenger who is sent, quietly informs Micaiah of the prophecies offered by the other prophets, by this wanting to suggest that his message ought to be similar. Micaiah answers that he will communicate the very words of YHWH and nothing more. But, contrary to expectation, when asked to speak, Micaiah himself announces that the military mission will be successful. Somehow his words ring false and the king insists that Micaiah should relate nothing but the words of YHWH. Now that Micaiah has the king where he wants him, he goes on to say that he saw a vision of the troops of Israel scattered “as sheep without shepherd” (1Kgs 22:17, cf. Num 27:17). When the king does not seem to listen to this omen which in veiled words foretells his death, Micaiah launches into his capital speech in order to persuade the king to remain at home. In illustrious prose, Micaiah describes the heavenly background to the events which happened at the court of Ahab. He relates how he saw YHWH being seated on his throne, with all the heavenly host around him. YHWH asked if there was anyone who could entice Ahab to go to war and one of the spirits came forward to stand by³⁰⁴ God’s throne, promising that he would be a ‘lying spirit’ in the mouth of all the four hundred court-prophets.

One can ask whether Micaiah’s description is meant as a verbatim account of what happened in YHWH’s council. Such a question is legitimate because how is it possible that YHWH would propagate lies? To address this issue, Moberly³⁰⁵ argues that the story of 1 Kgs 22 does not depict YHWH as being involved in something morally abject,

³⁰³ For מִן־הַשָּׁעַר as the public open space at the city-gates, see Gray, *comm. 1–2 Kgs* (OTL) 1970, 450.

³⁰⁴ 1 Kgs 22:19, literally ‘above’, מֵעַל, depicting the attitude of a subordinate who stands while his superior is seated, cf. Gray, *comm. 1–2 Kgs*, 452.

³⁰⁵ R. W. L. Moberly, “Does God Lie to His Prophets? The Story of Micaiah ben Imlah As a Test Case,” *HTR* 96 no. 1 (2003): 1–23.

as some exegetes³⁰⁶ tend to say, because lying and encouraging others to lie both “seem to be on the wrong side of truth-telling”.³⁰⁷ Moberly states that prophecy is often not a prediction but a warning to hark back from a wrong choice. In his view, the scene about the divine council is part of Micaiah’s skilful strategy of communication in not stating the obvious, thus hoping that the king will change his mind. In plain words, Micaiah’s message to Ahab is: ‘Be careful, you are being deceived by your prophets’. Moberly’s conclusion is that it is an exegetical mistake if one considers YHWH here depicted as acting in an immoral way. “In essence, I suggest it is an example of scholars themselves unwittingly doing what they warn their first-year students against doing—that is, taking the text out of context.”³⁰⁸

If one accepts Moberly’s reasoning there is no need to see Micaiah’s message of the heavenly council as a verbatim report. In the above view, the council of YHWH is most likely introduced here as a heavenly reflection of the earthly court scene into which Micaiah entered. The prophet, then, uses this as literary device in a masterpiece of communication, in an ultimate effort to dissuade Ahab of his plans.

For the aim of the present research, it is important to note that the divine council as described in 1 Kings 22 differs from descriptions found in the literature of the ancient Near East.³⁰⁹ Here YHWH is the only supreme king, who is not to be seen as the first among his equals. About him it is only servants who are milling, these described as the ‘heavenly host’ and as ‘spirits’.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Sweeney, *comm. 1–2 Kgs* (OTL) 2007, 260, who suggests that YHWH has a treacherous side. DeVries, *comm. 1 Kgs* (WBC) 1985, 268, refers to Ezek 14:9 to demonstrate that a prophet can be enticed (Pual פָּהַל) by YHWH. But in Ezek 14:9 clearly it is not YHWH who is the deceiver, although the one who deceives is not mentioned. Japhet, *comm. 1–2 Chr* (OTL) 1993, 763, argues that Micaiah wants to “disprove their [the other prophets’] message, without denying their call,” and therefore raises the origin of the problem to a heavenly level, thus causing a theological problem.

³⁰⁷ Moberly, “Does God Lie to His Prophets?”, 2, quoting Robert Carroll.

³⁰⁸ Moberly, “Does God Lie to His Prophets?” 22. See also Brian P. Irwin, “Yahweh’s Suspension of Free Will in the Old Testament: Divine Immorality or Sign-Act?” *TynBul* 54 no. 2 (2003): 61; Irwin proposes to read 1 Kgs 22 within a literary context beginning with 1 Kgs 20, including the story in which Ahab used witnesses who lied in order that Naboth be condemned to death. Thus, that which happened to Ahab in 1 Kgs 22 can be viewed as a case of “poetic justice in which Ahab is treated as he has treated others”.

³⁰⁹ Cf. A.R. Hulst, “Over de betekenis van het woord *SŌD*,” in *Vruchten van de Uithof: Studies opgedragen aan dr. H.A. Brongers ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid* (ed. A.R. Hulst; Utrecht: Theologisch Instituut, 1974), 43–44, who argues that YHWH is neither part of the ‘assembly’, nor *primus inter pares*, he is only surrounded by a ‘circle’ of heavenly beings. Solely YHWH makes decisions, in which his attendants do not participate. According to Gray, *comm. 1–2 Kgs*, 452, a fusion is found here of the Israelite idea of YHWH as the military leader of the host of Israel with the Canaanite notion of God as the ruler of the forces of nature.

Isaiah 14:12–15 uses mythological literary motifs in the dirge about the king of Babylon, these also being known from Ugaritic literature.³¹⁰ The potentate whom the song laments is depicted as שֶׁחַר בֶּן הַיָּלֵל, ‘the Shining One,³¹¹ son of Dawn’, one who intended to ascend to heaven, מִמַּעַל לְכוֹכְבֵי אֵל, ‘above the stars of God / El’, to place his throne on high, to sit בְּהַר־מוֹעֵד, ‘on the mount of the assembly’, בְּיַרְכְּתֵי צָפוֹן, ‘on the peaks of the Saphon’,³¹² but fell and descended into the deepest pits of Sheol. No myth has been found which exactly resembles this description³¹³ but the passage bristles with mythological allusions. Isaiah possibly combined several mythological notions which were well-known to his listeners. For the scope of the present study it suffices to note that in Isa 14 the place of the divine council is alluded to as the ‘mount of the assembly’. There is no reference to the council of YHWH. The poem makes clear that Canaanite mythology and the concept of the divine council occurring in this mythology was known in Israel, as it could be referred to without further explanation.

Scenes which resemble the divine council of YHWH are described in *Dan 7:9–14* and *Zech 3*. Daniel 7 depicts how thrones were placed and God (‘the Ancient of Days’) takes his seat, while “a thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” (*Dan 7:10*). The description is that of a court of judgment. The fact that God is seated and the servants are standing is typical as a scene of the divine council, this being similar to the description in *1 Kgs 22:19*.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ As to the question whether it really is the king of Babylon who is meant here, there is no compelling reason to see Isa 14:4a as secondary and therefore to separate this verse from 4b–21. Cf. R. Mark Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b–21* (SBLABib 11; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 160.

³¹¹ Traditionally identified as epithet of the Morning Star, Venus. But it is also thought to represent a phase of the crescent moon, or has been identified with Nergal, Jupiter or Phaeton, cf. W. G. E. Watson, “Helel,” in *DDD*, 392–394. Cf. also Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges*, 67–79.

³¹² It is also possible to translate “in the far north” but the allusion to Mount Šapānu as the mountain of Baal can hardly be overlooked.

³¹³ Some similarity can be found in *KTU* 1.6.I:54–65, where Athtar is put on Baal’s throne on Mount Šapānu after Baal was killed by Mot. Athtar was literally unfit for the throne; his feet did not even reach the footstool. According to Craigie, Athtar has the epithet ‘rz, meaning rather ‘Luminous One’ than ‘tyrant’, which would reinforce a connection to this Ugaritic myth. However, this identification is not the generally accepted opinion, see Watson, in *DDD*, 394. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 87. Cf. also Donald V. Etz, “Is Isaiah XIV 12–15 a Reference to Comet Halley?” *VT* 36 no. 3 (1986): 289–301. Etz suggests that the poem alludes to Halley’s Comet, visible in 540 B.C.E. For other suggestions on the background of the myth, see Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges*, 9–24.

³¹⁴ Cf. Min Suc Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” *JSOT* 31 no. 3 (2007): 263–264.

Zechariah 3 uses to a lesser extent the vocabulary which is typical for the type-scene of the divine council, although the high priest Joshua is seen as standing in front of the angel of YHWH. YHWH's servants have to be seen most likely as being present, even if this is not mentioned at first, because, later on, to Joshua is promised the right of access (מִהֶלְכִּים) "among those who are standing here" (Zech 3:7). Neither in Dan 7 nor in Zech 3 is there any trace of anyone who could be the equal of YHWH in the council, unlike in the divine council of ancient Near Eastern literature where the supreme god is more or less the *primus inter pares*.

Unique for Israel appears to be the situation that humans can be granted access to the divine council, as the example of Joshua in Zech 3:1.7 demonstrates. However, it is unclear in which quality Joshua enters the divine council at the outset.

According to the study of Rose, the exact wording of Zech 3:1 reveals an interesting distinction pertaining to the arrangement taken by those in the divine council. Joshua is standing *in front of* (לִפְנֵי) the angel of YHWH, meaning that he is summoned to the council. The 'accuser' (הַשָּׂטָן) is standing *at the right hand* (עַל-יְמִינֵי) of the angel of YHWH, expressing his membership in the divine council. Appearing *before* the council, therefore, appears to differ from standing *within* the council.³¹⁵ Yet it seems as if the high-priest also is given a place among the members of the council. In Zech 3:7 Joshua is, according to traditional translation, "granted the *right of access* (מִהֶלְכִּים) among the ones who are standing here" if he fulfills the necessary requirements. This means that he was not only summoned to the heavenly council but potentially also to become one of its members. There are, however, difficulties with the translation as 'right of access'. According to Rose, the clause at the end of Zech 3:7 could better be translated as referring to 'intermediaries' between Joshua and the heavenly council: "then I will provide for you persons who go between these attendants".³¹⁶ Independently from the question of what the function of these intermediaries would be,³¹⁷ it can be concluded that, most probably, Joshua is *summoned* to the divine council but is not necessarily destined to become one of its members. This privilege appears to be reserved for prophets³¹⁸ in the Old Testament, as will be discussed below.

³¹⁵ Cf. Lorein and Rose, *comm. Dan / Ezra-Neh / Esth / Hag / Zech / Mal* (COTB) 2010, 270.

³¹⁶ Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (JSOTSup 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 78. Rose reads מִהֶלְכִּים as a Piel participle. For the full discussion, see Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel*, 73–82. Cf. also Petersen, *comm. Hag / Zech* (OTL) 1985, 207. Petersen acknowledges the problems with the interpretation of the word מִהֶלְכִּים, but still interprets the clause as stating that Joshua himself will acquire access to the divine council.

³¹⁷ The reference is probably to prophets, cf. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel*, 82.

³¹⁸ Cf. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel*, 79–80.

Short references to the divine council as the council of YHWH are found in *Jer* 23:18–22, where it is said about the false prophets that they did not stand (עמד) in the council (סוד)³¹⁹ of YHWH and that, therefore, their prophecies are unreliable.³²⁰

In *Jer* 23:18.22, it is not immediately clear whether the passage implies that humans have access to YHWH's council and, if so, in what way. The message seems to be that the false prophets did not stand in his council, for if they had, they would have proclaimed also his words. Because Jeremiah states that he is indeed proclaiming YHWH's words, the text implies³²¹ that the prophet's message has its origin in the divine council.

Based on *Jer* 23:18.22, it can be assumed that a prophet can be granted access to the divine council. Therefore, the prophet subsequently functions as the council's messenger.³²² The uniqueness of this phenomenon is disputed by Gordon who refers to ancient Near Eastern texts to demonstrate that it is not only in Israel that human beings are being admitted to the divine council.³²³ Gordon refers in general to the Mari letters,³²⁴ and more specifically to the Deir 'Allā texts.³²⁵ One of these texts depicts Balaam as knowing that the gods have gathered in a session.³²⁶ Albeit true

³¹⁹ For the meaning of סוד as 'secret council, inner circle', see Abraham Malamat, "The Secret Council and Prophetic Involvement in Mari and Israel," in A. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 137–139.

³²⁰ Cf. Robert P. Gordon, "From Mari to Moses: Prophecy at Mari and in Ancient Israel," in Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Versions: Selected Essays of Robert P. Gordon* (SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 127. According to Gordon, the unreliability of false prophecy may in *Jer* 23 also be underscored by the medium of the prophecy, namely the fact that these prophets repeatedly claim to have had dreams, *Jer* 23:25.27.28.32. In the Mari texts the main means by which prophets knew about the divine council were dreams. Dreams may have been the usual means of prophetic knowledge but Jeremiah 23 rejects there being an underlying reality to these dreams; these prophets did not "stand in the council of YHWH". Having had dreams by no means equals having a place in YHWH's council: "What has straw in common with wheat?" (*Jer* 23:28).

³²¹ Although the answer to the rhetorical question "who stood in the council of YHWH?" might also be: "nobody", cf. Hulst, "De betekenis van het woord SÖD," 41.

³²² Cf. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 283.

³²³ Robert P. Gordon, "Where Have All the Prophets Gone? The 'Disappearing' Israelite Prophet Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *BBR* 5 (1995): 78–85.

³²⁴ Mari text 208 in particular, a fragmentary text mentioning a discussion among the gods, which is perhaps witnessed by a prophet. See Robert P. Gordon, "From Mari to Moses: Prophecy at Mari and in Ancient Israel," in Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Versions: Selected Essays of Robert P. Gordon* (SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 126.

³²⁵ Cf. Gordon, "Where Have All the Prophets Gone?" 78.

³²⁶ Combination I:8, text and translation: J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla* (DMOA 19; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 173.

that, according to this text, it is revealed to Balaam that the gods met in council and that Balaam appears to be the one who reveals the decision of this council to man, it remains unclear whether he is depicted as having been admitted he himself into the council.³²⁷ Gordon also refers to a divination text published by Goetze.³²⁸ This text³²⁹ describes how the diviner underwent a cleaning ritual with cedar³³⁰ before he could “draw near to the assembly of the gods for judgment” (*a-na pu-ḫu-ur i-lí e-ṭe-eḫ-ḫi a-na di-nim*).³³¹ The ritual intends to provide a possibility of influencing the divine council by repeatedly asking judgment.³³² The text, then, does not imply the priest’s more-or-less free access to the divine council but describes how an intricate ritual is required of the priest in order to be heard by the gods. The texts from Mari have references to ‘prophets’³³³ who have been granted or denied access to an earthly secret council of a king or governor, rather than to a prophet’s access into the divine council.³³⁴ It appears, therefore, that, even if in the literature of the ancient Near East human beings are described as having knowledge stemming from a divine council, or as trying to influence such a council, the Old Testament prophet’s personal access to the council of YHWH is, as far as present knowledge goes, a unique phenomenon.

In a way similar to Jer 23:18–22, *Job 15:8* mentions the council (סֹד) of God: “Did you listen in the council of God?” The implied answer may be in the negative, meaning that the council of God is depicted here as inaccessible to human beings.

Deuteronomy 33:2–3 is considered to contain an allusion to the divine council in a more military setting. The Masoretic Text of these verses is extremely difficult; Cross and Freedman made the following reconstruction:

³²⁷ Cf. “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” translated by Baruch A. Levine (*COS* 2.27:142–143): the gods come to Balaam in a vision and reveal their plans (Combination I, line 1–4).

³²⁸ Cf. Gordon, “Where Have All the Prophets Gone?” 78.

³²⁹ Cf. Albrecht Goetze, “An Old Babylonian Prayer of the Divination Priest,” *JCS* 22 (1968): 25–29.

³³⁰ Interestingly, cedarwood is also used in the preparation of purification-water in Num 19:6, cf. Lev 14:4.6.49–52. Although Goetze translates ‘cedar (resin)’, it is not clear from descriptions whether cedarwood or resin is meant, see *CAD* 4:279 “*erēbu A*”.

³³¹ Goetze, “Old Babylonian Prayer of the Divination Priest,” 25 (transcription and translation lines 9–10).

³³² Goetze, “Old Babylonian Prayer of the Divination Priest,” 25–29: *i-na ik-ri-ib a-ka-ra-bu i-na te-er-ti e-pu-šu ki-it-tam šu-uk-nam*, “In the ritual act I prepare, in the extispicy I perform put your truth” (lines 12–13; 17–18; 32–33; 40–41; 48–49; 52–53; 56–57; 64–66).

³³³ For a critical approach of coining the oracles at Mari as prophecy, see Edward Noort, *Untersuchungen zum Gottesbescheid in Mari: Die ‘Mari-prophetie’ in der alttestamentlichen Forschung* (AOAT 202; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), 90–92.

³³⁴ Cf. Abraham Malamat, “The Secret Council and Prophetic Involvement in Mari and Israel,” in A. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 137.

Yahweh from Sinai came / He beamed forth from Seir / He shone from Mount Paran.

With him were myriads of holy ones / At his right hand proceeded the mighty ones / Yea, the guardians of the peoples.

All the holy ones are at thy hand / They prostrate themselves at thy feet / They carry out thy decisions.³³⁵

In this reconstruction, the divine council plays an important part. However, the restriction of Cooke is worth noting: "Although the reconstruction of verses 2–3 by Cross and Freedman is appealing, it must be admitted that the problematic character of the text precludes putting great weight on it in connection with the present study. This reconstruction may, however, gain some support from the rest of the Old Testament data which are being examined".³³⁶ Apart from this, there are indications that the divine council of YHWH also had a military function, especially when depicted as the 'host of heaven'.³³⁷

A related question is the possibility that the concept of the divine council could explain the occurrence of the enigmatic first person plurals in divine discourse, especially the ones in Gen 1:26, 3:22 and 11:7. This would mean that God is addressing his council when speaking in plural.³³⁸ Already in Philo and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 1:26, a similar exegetical solution can be found when the divine plurals are being explained as God speaking to the angels.³³⁹ According to Eslinger, these divine plurals are no sign of polytheistic thought but a literary device to differentiate between two classes of beings, namely between gods and men.³⁴⁰ If

³³⁵ Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (SBLDS; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 99.

³³⁶ Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 36.

³³⁷ Cf. Frank M. Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 no. 4 (1953): 274 nt. 1, who brings to attention the fact that in Akkadian the shift between 'council' and 'host' as military assembly is also present. Cf. also Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War," *VT* 18 (1968): 100–107; E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 181–201; Jung-Woo Kim, "A Semantic Approach to the Heavenly Council in the Psalms," *Chongshin Theological Journal* 10 no. 1–2 (2005): 94–95; Koert van Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan* (CHANE 45; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 284–290.

³³⁸ Cf. Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 22–23; Min Suc Kee, "The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene," *JSOT* 31 no. 3 (2007): 262; Paul Sumner, "Visions of the Heavenly Council in the Hebrew Bible," (2009): 5. Cited 19 April 2011.

Online: <http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/monotheism/council.pdf>.

³³⁹ Cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10)," *SCJ* 4 (2001): 221–222.

³⁴⁰ Lyle Eslinger, "The Enigmatic Plurals Like 'One of Us' (Genesis I 26, III 22, and XI 7) in Hyperchronic Perspective," *VT* 56 no. 2 (2006): 171–179.

this interpretive solution has any credibility, it might help to understand the plurals in Isa 6:8, where God asks:³⁴¹ “Who shall I send, and who will go for us?”³⁴² Less obvious are the plural imperatives in Isa 40, but here possibly an implicit reference to the council of YHWH could be present.³⁴³

Closer analysis of the above-mentioned passages reveals that the Old Testament knows in fact two types of references to the divine council. On the one hand, references are found which resemble the divine council as known from the mythology of the ancient Near East, partly with accompanying mythological allusions. Main evidence for this concept is Isa 14:12–15, Ps 82 and 89:6–9. Reference to this idea of the divine council appears to function mainly as a strong literary device evoking a metaphor originating from the common ancient Near Eastern conceptual world.

On the other hand, the Old Testament mentions the council of YHWH by referring to a body which has, by definition, some traits in common with the mythological divine council but is in its functioning clearly dissimilar from the council of the gods in ancient Near Eastern literature. The most distinct difference between the two concepts is the fact that the members of YHWH’s divine council are only present as servants,³⁴⁴ while the conceptual world around Israel depicts the divine council as consisting of gods who are more-or-less equal and who together make decisions. To place the council of YHWH on the same level as the divine council from the conceptual world of other ancient Near Eastern literature is, therefore, a premature conclusion.³⁴⁵ A similar terminology does not necessarily imply a

³⁴¹ Cf. Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” 262. Kee observes that both in 1 Kgs 22:19–23 and in Isa 6 a volunteer is asked to accomplish a difficult task.

³⁴² Cf. Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” 37–38. As Cook argues, the seraphim in Isa 6 are not necessarily to be seen as members of the divine host. He suggests that the concept of the divine council is present in Isa 6, although modified by the assignment of the prophet as messenger of the council.

³⁴³ Cf. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 187–188; Christopher R. Seitz, “The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah,” *JBL* 108 no. 2 (1990): 229–232; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51; Kee, “The Heavenly Council and Its Type-Scene,” 269–270.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, 282.

³⁴⁵ John Pairman Brown, *Israel and Hellas: Volume II: Sacred Institutions with Roman Counterparts* (BZAW 276; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 54–55, is in general correct that the traditional distinction between ‘Semitic’ and ‘Greek’ culture has to be reassessed, as it turns out that the culture of the Levant had far more cultural connections than often admitted. However, based on the differences between the divine council and the council of YHWH, it can be argued that his comparison of the council of YHWH

similarity of content. Distance in time and theology may have effected a change in the meaning of an expression.³⁴⁶ However, there may be occurrences where both concepts collude, especially where the *בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים* are mentioned in connection with a reference to the divine council. Viewed thus, one can discern three ways of how the Old Testament gives evidence of the divine council: 1) the divine council as also encountered in the Canaanite and other ancient Near Eastern literature, including an allusion to the ‘sons of God’, 2) the council of YHWH without mentioning of the ‘sons of God’, 3) the council of YHWH including a reference to the ‘sons of God’. These concepts are interconnected by similar terms, yet separated by a difference in content. The following Table 9 presents an overview:

(Table 9)

Evaluation Divine Council and ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament		
<i>Divine Council with Polytheistic Overtones:</i>		
text	significant vocabulary	‘sons of God’
Isa 14:12–15	הַר־מוֹעֵד, ‘mount of the assembly’, יָשָׁב, ‘to be seated’, כּוֹכְבֵי אֵל, ‘the stars of God / ‘El’, נִרְכָּתֵי צָפוֹן, ‘the peaks of Mt. Saphon’	alluded to, cf. Job 38:7 (‘morning stars’ parallel to ‘sons of God’)
<i>Council of YHWH:</i>		
text	significant vocabulary	‘sons of God’
Deut 33:2–3	קְדָשִׁים, ‘holy ones’	not mentioned
Jer 23:18.22	סֹדֵר יְהוָה, ‘council of YHWH’, עָמַד, ‘to stand’	not mentioned
Job 15:8	סֹדֵר אֱלֹהִים, ‘council of God’	not mentioned

with the family of gods in Hellas is too simple.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Rolf Rendtorff, “El, Ba‘al und Jahwe: Erwägungen zum Verhältnis von kanaänischer und israelitischer Religion,” *ZAW* 78 no. 3 (1966): 277–278. See also O. Loretz, “Aspekte der kanaänischen Gottes-So(|ö)hn(e)-Tradition im Alten Testament,” in *UF* 7, 589.

Evaluation Divine Council and ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament		
Ps 25:14	סֹדֵר יְהוָה, ‘council of YHWH’	not mentioned
1 Kgs 22:19–23	יָשָׁב, ‘to be seated’, כִּסֵּא, ‘throne’, צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם, ‘the host of heaven’, עָמַד, ‘to stand’, רוּחַ, ‘spirit’	not mentioned
Dan 7:9–14	יָתֵב, ‘to be seated’, כְּרִסֵּא, ‘throne’, קוּם, ‘to stand’	not mentioned
<i>Encounter of Both Concepts:</i>		
text	significant vocabulary	‘sons of God’
Job 1:6, 2:1	בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, ‘sons of God’, יָצַב (Hithp.), ‘to take a stand’	mentioned
Ps 29	בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, ‘sons of the gods’	mentioned
Ps 82	עֲדַת־אֵל, ‘divine council’, נָצַב (Niph.), ‘to take a stand’, אֱלֹהִים, ‘gods’, בְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן, ‘sons of the Most High’	mentioned
Ps 89:6–9	קְהַל קְדָשִׁים, ‘congregation of the holy ones’, סֹדֵר קְדָשִׁים, ‘council of the holy ones’, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, ‘sons of the gods’, אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת, ‘God of hosts’	mentioned

From this overview, it turns out that the ‘sons of God’ are only mentioned where the ‘classical’ Canaanite divine council in some way crosses the concept of the council of YHWH. In all the cases of the third category, the role of these ‘sons of God’ is that of being figurants who are onlookers (Job 1:6; 2:1), bowing to honour YHWH (Ps 29). They are described as not comparable to YHWH (Ps 89) or depicted as nothing but mortal beings *a priori* incapable of fulfilling their duties (Ps 82).

Other texts which mention the ‘sons of God’ have no clear connection to the divine council (Gen 6:1–4; Deut 32:8.43 Qumran/LXX; Job 38:7; Dan 3:25).

If the expression is to be interpreted as a set phrase,³⁴⁷ the meaning ‘divine beings’ can be assumed also for Gen 6:1–4. However, the use of the expression ‘sons of God’ is not automatically linked to the concept of the divine council. Both concepts, that of the ‘sons of God’ and that of the ‘divine council’, have to be distinguished from each other. It seems that when the ‘sons of God’ are mentioned in the Old Testament, they receive a subordinate role, especially when referred to in connection with the council of YHWH.

4.4.4 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Developmental Arguments (5)

It has also been argued that even if the expression ‘sons of God’ originally might have referred to divine beings, the meaning of the expression shifted to ‘angels’ in the course of tradition-history, as is demonstrated by post-exilic Jewish literature.³⁴⁸ Based on this observation, it has been suggested that the redactor of the passage Gen 6:1–4 had already considered the expression **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים** to mean ‘angels’.³⁴⁹ Yet, if the expression ‘sons of God’ also in Gen 6:1–4 were to be understood as referring to angels, it might be an indication that this passage is to be dated as of a much later period than is generally assumed.

4.4.5 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Theological Arguments (6)

Based on arguments of theological nature,³⁵⁰ it has been argued that the divine beings-interpretation conflicts with the presumed Old Testament monotheism. As the passage of Gen 6:1–4 is an integral part of a monotheistic text, there can be no room for other deities.³⁵¹ Understanding the ‘sons of God’ as divine beings, thus, conflicts with mainstream Old Testament theology because the canonical scriptures exclusively propagate the worship of YHWH. Although the existence of ‘strange gods’ is not always straightforwardly denied, their power and credibility is invariably repudiated.

³⁴⁷ See further 5.2 below.

³⁴⁸ See especially 3.2–3.6 above.

³⁴⁹ So e.g. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 293.

³⁵⁰ Cf. also Joseph Hong, “Problems in an Obscure Passage: Notes on Genesis 6.1–4,” *BT* 40 no. 4 (1989): 426. Hong is convinced that the expression **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים** is best rendered as ‘heavenly, divine, or supernatural beings’, but recommends that in a Bible translation “for the sake of easily offended Christians, it may be advisable to provide the alternative meanings (‘pious men’ or ‘Sethites’) in a note.”

³⁵¹ Cf. R. Gilboa, “Who ‘Fell Down’ to our Earth? A Different Light on Genesis 6:1–4,” *BN* 111 (2002): 67.

4.4.6 The Divine Beings-Interpretation — Evaluation

As has already been argued on behalf of the angels-interpretation, the evidence for the identity of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 points to a solution envisaging them as non-human. Based on extrabiblical evidence and on the comparison of other Old Testament texts using the same or similar expressions referring to the ‘sons of God’, it can be advanced that the divine beings-interpretation is refining the angels interpretation by focussing on the time-period of the implied audience of the text. It can be demonstrated that later readers understood the expression as referring to angels. But the Old Testament gives the impression that earlier readers most likely would have understood the term as relating to divine or heavenly beings not otherwise specified, perhaps also to the gods of other nations. Only later, these beings came to be identified as ‘angels’. The divine beings-interpretation is therefore not so much in opposition to the angels-interpretation. It only tries to specify the expression in a more nuanced way for the time-period of the originally implied audience of the text.

The theological problems linked to such a ‘superhuman’ approach of the identity of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 have to be addressed in Old Testament research as far as the divine beings-interpretation is concerned,³⁵² and for intertestamental and New Testament investigation as far as the angels-interpretation is found in these texts.

4.5 MINOR VARIANTS AND COMBINATIONS

For the sake of completeness, this section discusses exegetical solutions which can be listed as variants of the mainstream solutions for the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4. Some exegetes also combine diverse solutions in their understanding of the passage.

4.5.1 Variants on a Category

Closen combines the expression ‘sons of God’ with the *imago Dei*. In his view, the whole male branch of humanity forms the category of ‘sons of God’. Adam, as the image of God, can be understood as a ‘son of God’, hence all his sons are similarly

³⁵² This question will be discussed in more detail in 5.3.

‘sons of God’.³⁵³ The difficulty with this solution is that, according to Gen 1:27, both man and woman are created in the image of God.³⁵⁴ The term ‘daughters of men’ is, according to Closen, a term for women seen from the perspective of their earthly nature. In Gen 6:1–4, they are contrasted with the ‘sons of God’, as far as men see in them only an object of sexual desire.³⁵⁵

Another variant on the religious category is proposed by Eslinger who argues that by ‘sons of God’ descendants of Eve are meant, or more precisely, descendants of Cain.³⁵⁶ Because Eve considers herself to be ‘god-like’ in giving birth to Cain, Eslinger considers the expression ‘sons of God’ to be “an ironic description of the Cainites whose claims to divinity, tenuous even by pedigree, are further weakened by their actions in 6:2”.³⁵⁷ A variant which is interesting from the point of view of the history of science is, in the words of Skinner, the “eccentric theory of Stuart Poole, that the sons of God were a wicked pre-Adamite race”.³⁵⁸ In fact, these pre-adamite interpretations are among the first theories which tried to combine upcoming Darwinism with the biblical data.³⁵⁹

³⁵³ Cf. Gustav E. Closen, *Die Sünde der ‘Söhne Gottes’ Gen. 6,1–4: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Genesis* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1937), 157–170.

³⁵⁴ See also James E. Coleran, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2,” *TS* 2 no. 4 (1941): 505.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Closen, *Die Sünde der ‘Söhne Gottes’*, 170–184.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Lyle Eslinger, “A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha’elohim* and *benoth ha’adam* in Genesis 6:1–4,” *JSOT* 13 (1979): 65–73. For an evaluation of this view, see Sven Fockner, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 438–442.

³⁵⁷ Eslinger, “Contextual Identification,” 71.

³⁵⁸ Skinner, *comm. Gen* (ICC) 1930, 142.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Edward William Lane, *The Genesis of the Earth and of Man: Or the History of Creation, and the Antiquity and Races of Mankind, Considered on Biblical and Other Grounds* (ed. Reginald Stuart Poole; 2d ed.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1860), 83–84. Cf. also Alexander Winchell, *Preadamites; Or a Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam; Together with a Study of their Condition, Antiquity, Racial Affinities, and Progressive Dispersion over the Earth* (4th ed.; Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1888), 195–196. Lane and Winchell explain the ‘sons of God’ as pre-adamites. In the view of Winchell, the “brown races” possibly have their origin in the pre-adamites (346). For further study see: David N. Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (TAPS 82 part 3; Philadelphia: [American Philosophical Society], 1992). For a modern version of this interpretation, see Shubert Spero, “Sons of God, Daughters of Men?” *JBQ* 40 no. 1 (2012): 17, who suggests that the ‘sons of God’ belonged to the species *homo sapiens* and the ‘daughters of men’ are to be understood as female Neanderthals.

4.5.2 Combination of Categories

Ross introduces a combination of the preternatural and the social category, whereby Gen 6:1–4 has the intent of recounting how fallen angels indwelt human despots.³⁶⁰

Kolaska argues in favour of a combination of the religious and mythological category. In his view, the daughters of Cain destroyed the sons of Seth in the same way as in ancient mythology human women caused the fall of some of the inhabitants of heaven.³⁶¹

Westermann opts for a combination of the mythological and the social category. He argues that the ‘sons of God’ are originally heavenly beings. But in the context of primeval history, the term refers to mighty men who take whatever women they like. A human phenomenon, then, is told in mythical language.³⁶²

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

Reviewing the diverse solutions for the problem as to who are meant by the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 results in the observation that the ‘human’ approaches do not pass the test of exegesis, while the ‘superhuman’ approaches introduce theological problems with respect to the nature of angels and to the presumed monotheistic character of the Old Testament.

(Table 10)

	<i>exegesis</i>	<i>theology</i>
A-1 ‘angels’, preternatural category	possible	impossible
B-1 ‘mighty ones’, social category	impossible	possible
B-2 ‘Sethites’, religious category	impossible	possible
A-2 ‘divine beings’, mythological category	possible	impossible

³⁶⁰ Cf. Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 181–182.

³⁶¹ Cf. Alfred Kolaska, *Gottessöhne und Engel in den vorexilischen Büchern des AT und in der Raschamramythologie im Lichte des biblischen Monotheismus* (PhD diss., Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät der Universität Wien, 1953), 103–104.

³⁶² Cf. Westermann, *comm. Gen* (BKAT) 1974, 501.

For an evaluation, the hierarchy of arguments will be applied as listed at the beginning of this chapter.

4.6.1 Angels-Interpretation

The angels-interpretation has the advantage of being the earliest known interpretation. This interpretation is consistent with the observation that, within the Old Testament, the concept of the expression ‘sons of God’ refers to beings beyond the human realm. However, it seems that during the earlier Old Testament period the ‘sons of God’ were probably still not perceived as ‘angels’, as in later, especially post-exilic Jewish literature. If necessary, in most of the texts which mention the ‘sons of God’, the expression can be understood as referring to angels but not in all of them, especially not in Ps 82:6, where this identification is impossible. The angels-interpretation is, therefore, not so much to be seen as opposed to the divine beings-interpretation but as its evolution.

4.6.2 Mighty ones-Interpretation

The solution which sees the ‘sons of God’ as mighty men is ruled out by the lexical argument that the word **אַלֹהִים** as an indication for ‘judges’ or ‘kings’ cannot be warranted. Furthermore, the extrabiblical arguments that kings were sometimes considered to be divine does not provide sufficient evidence. Kings, as a group, were never collectively called ‘sons of the gods’ or ‘sons of God’. Moreover, the concept of ‘divine kingship’ was not a general concept for monarchy. With regard to contextual arguments, it has to be noted, that an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as mighty persons would yield an adequate explanation for Gen 6:1–4 only; the same explanation is not possible for any of the other passages about the ‘sons of God’.

4.6.3 Sethites-Interpretation

The Sethites-interpretation is an unlikely candidate because of lexical and contextual counter-arguments. The distinction between ‘sons of God’ as ‘Sethites’ and ‘daughters of men’ as ‘Cainites’ implies that the word **אָדָם** in Gen 6:1 and 6:2 has two different referents, which is improbable for lexical reasons. The Sethites-interpretation is more a theological construct, substantiated by the patristic exegesis of Gen 4:26. The interpretation was most likely furthermore inspired by an evolved view on sexuality and by the rise of monachism. The close context of Gen 6:1–4 provides no clue of Sethites being called ‘sons of God’.

The further claim that the Old Testament knows of concept pertaining to pious people who are called his ‘sons’ by God is in direct contradiction to the Old

Testament never applying the specific expression ‘sons of God’ to this group. Moreover, when people are called sons of YHWH, this is not so much an indication of their piety but of their ‘juridical’ status. They have been ‘adopted’ as children by YHWH, therefore, they are reminded to live in accordance with this status. It should also be noted that the explanation ‘Sethites’ only fits in Gen 6:1–4 but in none of the other passages which mention the ‘sons of God’.

4.6.4 Divine beings-Interpretation

Cumulative evidence supports the approach which views the expression ‘sons of God’ as referring to divine beings not otherwise specified. The lexical argument that the word בְּנֵי functions as a category-marker results in the interpretation of the term as one referring to those who belong to the category of the divine. It can be added that, in extrabiblical literature, the expression ‘sons of the gods’ is a set phrase for deities. The conceptual evidence establishes that an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as ‘divine beings’ fits all the other biblical passages in which the expression occurs. The remaining problems are mainly of a theological nature: even if a reference to ‘sons of God’ as divine beings is found in the Old Testament, how is this to fit into the presumed monotheistic mainstream of the Old Testament theology? Moreover, nowhere in the Old Testament is found a similar account in which divine beings have sexual relationships with human females. Such a narrative is even rare in the mythology of the ancient Near East. The only more-or-less contemporary literary body in which the narrative would fit, without making its readers raise an eyebrow, is Greek mythology.

Apart from the result that the expression ‘sons of God’ most probably has to be interpreted as referring to ‘divine beings’, another result issuing from research of the present chapter is that the ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament are probably not automatically considered to be members of the so called ‘divine council’. The Old Testament uses the concept of a divine council but this turns out to be different from the extrabiblical concept. When referring to the council of YHWH, no other deities are mentioned as possible members of this council. When the Old Testament refers to the council of YHWH and to ‘sons of God’, there is always a significant difference between YHWH and other divine beings, moreover, YHWH’s uniqueness is always respected.

If the expression ‘sons of God’ also in Gen 6:1–4 refers to divine beings, it will be necessary to focus on the question of what might its function be within this passage.

After all, it can be said to be unique for the Old Testament to have 'divine beings' engaging in sexual relationships with earthly women.

4.6.5 Perspectives

If, in order to understand the identity of the 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4, the 'human' solutions do not pass the test of exegesis, only the 'heavenly' solutions remain, as already covered above.

By concluding this, the exegetical results resemble an ellipse with two focus points. On the one hand, there exists the exegetical conclusion that for an early Israelite the expression 'sons of God' most probably was related to divine beings not otherwise specified. For a later audience, consisting of post-exilic readers, it became all the more clear that any heavenly being apart from YHWH can be but an angel.

It depends, then, in which direction the exegete wants to extend his gaze. Neither of the two foci of the exegesis are radically opposed to each other; they fit within the ellipse of the 'heavenly' solution. It could be argued that the angels-interpretation is built upon evolving insight and eventually on newer revelation. One might consider, then, the idea that Christian exegesis ought to accept the angels-interpretation, especially because the New Testament does so. Interestingly, later period Christian exegesis did not do so and devised a Sethites-interpretation which became the dominant solution from the fourth century onwards. Similarly, Jewish exegesis also included a minority which was opposed to the angels-interpretation.

The New Testament texts 1 Peter 3:19–20, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6–7 indeed point to the angels-interpretation. However, these texts do so *via* the Enoch-story about imprisoned fallen angels, therefore, they only indirectly refer to Gen 6:1–4. The New Testament has additional similar examples alluding to non-canonical tradition:³⁶³ 2 Tim 3:8, where the names of Jannes and Jambres³⁶⁴ are mentioned as the Egyptian sorcerers who are opposed to Moses; the story of Michael contending with the devil over the body of Moses in Jude 9; the quotation from 1 Enoch in Jude 14–15; and possibly also an allusion in Heb 11:37 to the manner in which Isaiah³⁶⁵ and Jeremiah³⁶⁶ met their deaths. In its use of non-canonical traditions, the New Testament presents Moses as receiving the law from the hand of angels, Acts 7:53,

³⁶³ Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 70–71.

³⁶⁴ Their names occur in *Tg.Ps.-J* on Exod 7:11, *T.Sol.* 254 (*OTP* 1:985), *L.A.B.* 47:1 (*OTP* 2:361), *Jan. Jam.* (*OTP* 2:437–442).

³⁶⁵ Isaiah was sawed in half, according to *Ascen. Isa.* 5 (*OTP* 2:163–164), *Liv. Pro.* 1:1 (*OTP* 2:385).

³⁶⁶ Jeremiah was stoned to death, according to *Liv. Pro.* 2:1 (*OTP* 2:386).

Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2. As these examples show, the New Testament sometimes uses set traditions in its understanding of the Old Testament but this still requires the exegete to search for the meaning of a given Old Testament text within its own context.³⁶⁷ As Talstra indicates, the New Testament shows many examples of appropriation and application of Old Testament texts which demonstrate that the Biblical tradition did not solely evolve according to what is nowadays considered to be a historically correct use of older texts.³⁶⁸ Such a process is already able to be traced within the Old Testament itself.³⁶⁹

The view of the New Testament pertaining to the story recounted in Gen 6:1–4 treats the ‘sons of God’ as transgressing angels, this as a consequence of the actual interpretative tradition in which its authors lived.

The present study, however, focusses on how earlier Israelites, in their Old Testament context, might have understood the passage of Gen 6:1–4 and argues that the divine beings-interpretation comes closest to this perception. As already mentioned, both solutions, the angels-interpretation and the divine beings-interpretation, give rise to theological problems. The following chapter will address these difficulties.

³⁶⁷ Cf. H. G. L. Peels, “Het Woord is leven: Over de Heilige Schrift,” in *Gegronde geloof: Kernpunten uit de geloofsleer in bijbels, historisch en belijdend perspectief* (ed. G. van den Brink, M. van Campen, and J. van der Graaf; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996), 90.

³⁶⁸ For examples, see Eep Talstra, *Oude en nieuwe lezers: Een inleiding in de methoden van uitleg van het Oude Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 20–21. See also idem, “Eenheid en veelheid in de bijbel,” in *Omhoog kijken in Platland: Over geloven in de wetenschap* (ed. Cees Dekker, René van Woudenberg, and Gijsbert van den Brink; Kampen: Ten Have, 2007), 135–139.

³⁶⁹ Talstra, *Oude en nieuwe lezers*, 21. An example is the way in which Chronicles takes up the history of Israel in a post-exilic situation: according to 1 Kgs 9:10–13 Solomon gives twenty cities to Hiram of Tyre, but in 2 Chr 8:1–2 it is Hiram who gave cities to Solomon. For other examples, see Zoltán Kustár, *A Krónikák könyve: A mű előállása, tanítása, szövegállományának és kanonikus forrásának szinopszisa* (Debrecen: DRHE, 2002), 21–22. For differences in the portrayal of king Manasseh between Kings and Chronicles, cf. Klaas A. D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (OTS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 129–190.

5

New Perspectives:
The Expression 'Sons of God'
as Literary Contrasting Device

*Bijbelonderzoekers hebben iets van de
schriftgeleerde Gamaliël¹*

5. NEW PERSPECTIVES: THE EXPRESSION ‘SONS OF GOD’ AS LITERARY CONTRASTING DEVICE

5.0 INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

The results from the previous chapter provide a working hypothesis in answer to the first part of the research question, namely that the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 refers to divine beings not otherwise specified.

The present chapter will put this hypothesis to the test. To achieve this, the lay-out of the argument supporting this divine beings-interpretation will be analysed (5.1). Following this analysis, a discussion on whether the expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament can be considered to function as a set phrase will ensue (5.2). Subsequently, several issues need to be dealt with. If the ‘sons of God’ are to be understood veritably as unspecified divine beings, the question arises as to how the Old Testament handles the theme of polytheism (5.3). Discussed also will be whether a divine beings-interpretation implies that Gen 6:1–4 is to be seen as a mythical fragment within the Old Testament. In order to answer this question, it is to be examined to what extent and in what way Israel borrowed mythological material from the conceptual world of the ancient Near East (5.4). The consequences of a divine beings-interpretation for the meaning of Gen 6:1–4 in its literary context will be assessed in a section pertaining to the possible function and

¹ “Bible scholars have something of the scribe Gamaliel,” Eep Talstra, “Eenheid en veelheid in de Bijbel,” in *Omhoog kijken in Platland: Over geloven in de wetenschap* (ed. Cees Dekker, René van Woudenberg, and Gijsbert van den Brink; Kampen: Ten Have, 2007), 129.

purport of Gen 6:1–4 (5.5). In this way, an answer to the second part of the research question will be provided, this question being: “How does the interpretation of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 contribute to the understanding of the whole passage within its literary context?” The chapter ends with final observations (5.6).

5.1 DIVINE BEINGS: ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENT

The result of the previous research demonstrates that it is plausible to understand the expression ‘sons of God’, occurring twice in Gen 6:1–4, as referring to divine beings not otherwise specified.

This hypothesis will be analysed with the help of Toulmin’s model.² The analysis is meant to elucidate the layout of the argument, thus providing insight into the amount of certainty implicit in the reasoning, and thus offering possibilities for falsifying the argument.

The general pattern of arguments is represented in the following chart in which the *data* (D) of the argument is linked to the *conclusion* or claim (C) by means of a hypothetical *warrant* (W), which has a *backing* (B) in the form of a categorical statement. A *qualifying expression* (Q) precedes the claim, indicating the amount of certainty, for example ‘presumably, probably, certainly’. Furthermore, exceptional circumstances are formulated, which may form a *rebuttal* (R) of the claim:

(Table 11)

Given <i>data</i> (D)	——— ———	so, <i>qualifier</i> (Q)	<i>claim</i> (C)
	since <i>warrant</i> (W)	unless <i>rebuttal</i> (R)	
	on account of <i>backing</i> (B)		

² Cf. Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 94–145. Cf. also V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (FCI 5; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 194–198. Long applies the scheme to biblical historiography.

For Gen 6:1–4 the following layout of the argument that the expression ‘sons of God’ is to be understood as referring to divine beings can be drawn as such:

(Table 12)

Given that (D)	— —	so, presumably (Q),	(C)
in the Old Testament the expression בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים and its variants, ³ בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים , בְּנֵי אֱלִים , בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן , and בְּרֵי אֱלֹהִיּוֹן ,	since (W) the expression appears to function as a set phrase in ancient Near Eastern literature,	unless (R) the expression is not a set phrase,	the expression בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים also refers to divine beings in Gen 6:1–4.
in all occurrences other than Gen 6:1–4 refers to divine beings,	on account of (B) the rule that a set phrase only has one unique meaning or referent,		

As can be surmised from the above analysis, the view that the expression ‘sons of God’ is a set phrase plays a crucial part in the reasoning. The next section, therefore, will address this issue.

³ Cf. Hans-Winfried Jüngling, *Der Tod der Götter: Eine Untersuchung zu Psalm 82* (SBS 38; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969), 41: “Doch wird man bei diesen Varianten wohl kaum an ernstliche Bedeutungsunterschiede denken müssen.” See also John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 22.

5.2 IS THE EXPRESSION ‘SONS OF GOD’ A SET PHRASE?

A set phrase is an expression whose meaning cannot, or only partly, be determined by the meaning of the individual constituents of the expression. A set phrase may consist of an idiomatic expression or have a unique referent.

In Hebrew, the words אֱלֹהִים and בָּן both can have varied meanings. However, the combination of both terms (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹהִים הַבְּנִי) appears always to be used as referring to divine beings, at least in all occurrences other than Gen 6:1–4. The same applies to the cognate expressions בְּנֵי אֱלִים and בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן and their Aramaic counterpart בְּנֵי אֱלֵהִין.⁴ This observation is affirmed by the use of similar expressions⁵ in other Northwest Semitic languages, especially in Ugaritic, all of them referring to divine beings.⁶ This interpretation fits quite well in Gen 6:1–4. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that here also the expression is a fixed term for divine beings, unless there is another interpretation which better fits *all* of the texts. But this is not the case, at least not for the existing solutions: an interpretation as ‘angels’, ‘mighty ones’, or ‘Sethites’ would only be suitable for a limited number of cases.⁷

If this observation is correct, it renders unlikely theoretically possible explanations based on the meaning or the use of the individual constituents of the expression. In other words, there is only one semantic field for a set phrase and not a combination of semantic fields.

This approach can further be tested by asking which alternative words or expressions the author of Gen 6:1–4 had at his disposal, were he really wanting to recount something about divine beings. Had he used only the word אֱלֹהִים, in a plural sense, it would have been too ambiguous. The same applies to the word קְדָשִׁים, ‘holy ones’, a term which can be used to refer to YHWH’s heavenly retinue but also to his people. It would have been possible to use an expression like בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם,

⁴ The variation occurring in the second term of the expression does not exclude *a priori* the possibility that it *functions* as a fixed expression, see 2.2.1 and 4.1.1.

⁵ A similar expression does not necessarily imply that also the *content* of the concept referred to by that expression was similar. Cf. C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (POS 5; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 32.

⁶ See 4.4.2.

⁷ See 4.6.

‘the sons of heaven’, which is indeed found in the Dead Sea scrolls.⁸ However, in these documents this expression refers in most instances to angels. This brief overview of the semantic field demonstrates that there were practically no alternatives for saying anything about divine beings in a general sense.

Of course, it can be asked whether a set phrase diachronically might not have evolved. Such an evolution cannot be demonstrated in the case of the Old Testament. The texts from Qumran which allude to Gen 6:1–4 understood the ‘sons of God’ as *עירי*,⁹ ‘Watchers’, *עירי השמים*,¹⁰ ‘Watchers of the heavens’, *קדישין*,¹¹ ‘Holy Ones’, *בני שמים*,¹² and *בני שמיין*,¹³ ‘sons of heaven’, or *מלאכים*,¹⁴ ‘angels’. This shows that, at that time, the expression ‘sons of God’ was *viewed* as referring to angels. Yet, for the *wording* of this interpretation they relied on diverse other expressions. In the few cases in which the Qumran documents literally use the expression ‘sons of God’, the referent of the term remains ambiguous.¹⁵ It, therefore, cannot be in the least demonstrated that the expression ‘sons of God’ acquired the (more specific) meaning of ‘angels’.

Whenever the Old Testament applies the expression ‘sons of God’ in other passages than Gen 6:1–4, the term has a broader, less specific meaning.¹⁶ This has been demonstrated even for Dan 3:24–30 where the general term ‘son of the gods’ (Dan 3:25), referring to a being belonging to the divine realm, is specified later on as a ‘messenger (‘angel’) of God’ (Dan 3:28).¹⁷

The expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament is, therefore, most likely also in Gen 6:1–4, functioning as a set phrase referring to divine beings not otherwise specified. The expression ‘sons of God’ is the broader term which leaves open a

⁸ Cf. 1QH^a Col. XI,22: *עדת בני שמים*, ‘the congregation of the sons of heaven’; 1QS Col. IV,22; 1QS Col. IX,8; 4Q418 Frags. 69 II,12; 4Q427 Frag. 7, col. II,18 read *בני שמים*, probably used to designate angels, see Appendix. In 1QapGen^{ar} Col. 7, and 4Q181 Frag. 1, col. II,2 the expression ‘sons of heaven’ reflects the Enochic tradition referring to Gen 6:1–4.

⁹ Cf. 1QapGen^{ar} Col. II,1.16.

¹⁰ Cf. CD-A Col. II, 18 (= 4Q266 Fragm. II, Col. II,17).

¹¹ Cf. 1QapGen^{ar} Col. II,1; Col. VI,20.

¹² Cf. 4Q181 Frag. I, Col. II,2.

¹³ Cf. 1QapGen^{ar} Col. II,5.16; Col. V,3–4; Col. VI,11.

¹⁴ Cf. 4Q180 Frag. I,7.

¹⁵ The expression *בני אלים* is found only four times: 1QH^a Col. XXIII bottom, 3; 1QH^a Col. XXIV bottom, 10 (*בני אל*); 5Q13 Fragm. I,6; Q381 Fragm. 15 (a quotation from Ps 89:7). See Appendix.

¹⁶ As has been covered in 4.4.3.1.

¹⁷ See 4.4.3.1, *Daniel 3:25*.

number of possibilities to narrow its meaning to a more specific designation of beings belonging to the heavenly realm.

5.3 DOES THE DIVINE BEINGS-INTERPRETATION IMPLY POLYTHEISM?

If the expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament refers to divine beings, does this also imply that some kind of polytheism can be found in the Old Testament? In other words, does the Old Testament, by mentioning other deities, evince traces of an earlier polytheism from which Israelite Yahwism is thought to have evolved?¹⁸

Wright outlines how Old Testament research arrived at such an evolutionary view in addressing the question as to whether, according to the Old Testament, other gods exist or not. As a generally accepted opinion, for the earliest stage of Israelite thought, the answer would have been: Yes, other gods do exist (polytheism). Later on, the answer would have evolved to: Yes, they do exist but YHWH is superior to all of them (henotheism). For the latest period of the Old Testament literature the answer would sound as: No, only YHWH exists (monotheism). However, as argued by Wright, this sketch of an evolution from ancient polytheism towards a later strict monotheism is too simplistic.¹⁹ Given that he views the issue as being more complex than that which can be addressed by a binary question, Wright suggests that the predicate of the question, ‘Do other gods exist, yes or no?’ should be provided with a qualifier: “Do other gods have existence of the same

¹⁸ Cf. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, especially 226–233; Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 62–128. For earlier literature, see Otto Eissfeldt, “Jahve und Baal,” in *Kleine Schriften I* (ed. Rudolf Sellheim and Fritz Maas; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1962), 1–12; idem, “Neue Götter im Alten Testament,” *Kleine Schriften II* (ed. Rudolf Sellheim and Fritz Maas; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1963), 145–146.

¹⁹ See also Michael S. Heiser “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?” *JESOT* 1 no. 1 (2012): 1–24. Heiser argues that the consensus view on Israelite religion as evolving from polytheism to monotheism cannot be demonstrated. In this context, he argues that the word בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים should not be understood as labelling the ontological attributes of its referent but as a general reference to beings from the invisible world, see especially 3–7. Similarly John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume Two: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 36: “Hebrew (...) thus uses the words translated ‘god’ differently from the way we use the word *god* in English.”

order as YHWH does?”²⁰ The point which the Old Testament makes first and foremost is conveyed in a message about the uniqueness of YHWH, and not in a message about the existence of other gods. Of course, this Old Testament confession about YHWH also has consequences as to how other gods are viewed.²¹ The existence of other gods is usually not denied because this is not the issue. The real topic is whether these gods indeed earn the recognition of being addressed as gods, or whether they fulfill the expectations.²² The Old Testament expresses this in several ways;²³ the worthlessness of the ‘gods’ mostly being expressed without excessive detail pertaining to their existence, yet there are also passages in which these gods are nothing more than their statues,²⁴ as in 2 Kgs 19:17–18 (par. Isa 37:18–19), where it is said that the kings of Assyria “have thrown their [the nations’] gods in the fire, because they are no gods but only the work of human hands, wood and stone; therefore they were able to be destroyed”.²⁵

To get a clearer picture of the situation, one should therefore especially pay attention to how the Old Testament views YHWH in comparison with all other gods. The Old Testament formulates its monotheism mainly in expressing how YHWH cannot be compared to anything, as the groundbreaking study of Labuschagne demonstrates.²⁶

Labuschagne argues that, although the notion of the incomparability of a specific god is also found in the polytheistic religious literature of Mesopotamia and

²⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 138.

²¹ Cf. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 138.

²² For a similar approach, see Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume 2*, 36–40.

²³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 142–161, discerns three Old Testament approaches to the identity of idols and gods: they are (1) objects within creation, (2) demons (Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37) or (3) the work of human hands.

²⁴ According to Wright, *The Mission of God*, 151, the Old Testament authors’ identification of the idols and their images was “not because they did not know that such a distinction was there in the minds of pagan worshippers but because ultimately there was no such distinction in reality.” [emphasis in original].

²⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 153, observes that especially when state-gods of other nations are in view – where the power of these gods seems to be experienced most strongly by Israel – their being only a product of human craft appears to be emphasised.

²⁶ C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (POS 5; Leiden: Brill, 1966). For further study, see also Reinhard Müller, “Der unvergleichliche Gott: Zur Umformung einer Polytheistischen Redeweise im Alten Testament,” in *Gott – Götter – Götzen: XIV. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie (11.–15. September 2011 in Zürich)* (ed. Christoph Schwöbel; VWGTh 38; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 304–319.

Egypt,²⁷ there is a significant difference to biblical literature when YHWH's incomparability is expressed. In Babylonian literature, the incomparability of a particular god was "not applied to one god at the expense of others. It is indeed nothing more than a stereotyped epithet expressing the profoundest adoration".²⁸ Labuschagne's conclusion is underscored by a hymn on the supremacy of the sun-god Shamash, in which nonetheless the moon-god Sin is called "god without equal".²⁹ Similarly, a hymn addressed to Marduk and Nabu is found, in which both gods simultaneously are praised as incomparable.³⁰ The notion of the incomparability of a god probably arose originally from the comparison of several revered gods but was never restricted severely to one god exclusively. As can be observed from the extant literature, the incomparability of a god functioned as a conventional epithet to praise that specific god, therefore, it yields no evidence whatsoever of a trend leading to monotheism.³¹

Incomparability applied to a god also occurs in Egyptian religion, already antedating the religious reforms of Akhenaten. Yet, texts from the Amarna period show that the worship of other gods was not forbidden, nor was the existence of other gods denied, even when the radiant sun-disk, the Aten, was seen as the highest god.³²

Labuschagne observes that the difference between Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern doxology consists of the fact that in Israelite religious literature the incomparability of Israel's God never became a conventional phrase which would express nothing but abundant praise. In the Old Testament, the 'comparison material' is always explicitly or implicitly present, be it the gods of other peoples or any power that claims divinity for itself.³³ The incomparability of YHWH in the Old Testament is based upon his redeeming actions in history, his maintaining justice,

²⁷ Interestingly, the concept of the incomparability of a god is not attested in Ugaritic literature, cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 62–63. However, rivalry among the gods is found here, as in *KTU* 1.4.IV:43–44 *mlkn aliy(n) b'l, tptn w in d'lnh*, "Our Mightiest King is Baal, our ruler, with none above him." Translation: Mark S. Smith, in *UNP*, 128. Cf. also Klaus Koch, "Zur Entstehung der Ba'al-Verehrung," in *Studien zur alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte: Zum 60. Geburtstag von Klaus Koch* (ed. Eckart Otto; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 194.

²⁸ Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 35.

²⁹ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 35.

³⁰ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 40–41.

³¹ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 48–55.

³² Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 59–62.

³³ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 64–81, who discusses *inter alia* Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; 4:7.34; 32:1–43; 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 77:14; 86:8; 89:7; 113:5–6; Isa 40:18.25; 44:7; 46:5; Jer 10:2–16.

his holiness, but also upon his proximity to people.³⁴ Included in the confession of YHWH's incomparability is the idea that other gods are placed into a lower category, because of their inferiority compared with YHWH.³⁵ Yet, the existence of other gods is not denied, in the words of Labuschagne: "It was not their existence, but their significance which was denied".³⁶ The Old Testament therefore appears to refer to other gods³⁷ as veritably existing entities, as for example in Exod 12:12, where it is said how YHWH will pronounce judgment on all the gods of Egypt.³⁸

In brief, the Old Testament approach to the existence of other gods is not ontological but functional and dynamic. The main question is not "To be or not to be?" but 'Do other gods fulfil the expectations of their worshippers?' When the Old Testament refers to them, they are proclaimed as nothing when compared to YHWH;³⁹ they are not worthy of their name nor honour, even if their worshippers think otherwise. But for the very reason of the presence of worshippers of other gods, these same gods are, in the view of the Old Testament, definitely powers to be reckoned with. Powers as observed within creation are able to be sufficiently awe-inspiring to entice people to be the objects of their worship. Consequently, it was a true temptation to bow down before the host of heaven, as noted in Deut 4:19.⁴⁰ That is why Deuteronomy avoids arguing here that these gods exist, but only states that they have been assigned to other peoples, in other words: Israelites are to cling to YHWH alone, their mutual special relationship being the basis for this. Tsevat underscores this existential way in which the Old Testament deals with the theme of polytheism: "If the modern reader is disillusioned with the polytheism and occultism of some parts of the Bible, let him consider that it is the aspect of actuality (reality) against actuality that makes the Bible a living book; where the issue is

³⁴ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 89–114.

³⁵ Cf. Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 144–147.

³⁶ Labuschagne, *Incomparability*, 148.

³⁷ According to Dale Basil Martin, "When did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129 no. 4 (2010): 658–662, even the word **שְׂדֵיִם**, Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37, based on the LXX usually rendered as 'demons', refers originally to the gods of foreign peoples, similarly **גִּדְרֵי**, 'Destiny', in Isa 65:11, **שְׂעִירִים**, 'satyrs' in Isa 13:21.

³⁸ Similar wording in Num 33:4, cf. also Matitahu Tsevat, "God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970): 124 nt. 4.

³⁹ I.e. they are **אֱלֹהִים** and not **אֱלֹהִים**, Lev 19:4; 26:1; 1 Chron 16:26; Ps 96:5; 97:7; Isa 2:8.18.20; 10:10–11; 19:1.3; 31:7; Ez 30:13; Hab 2:18. Cf. also Deut 4:35: "YHWH, he is the God (**הָאֱלֹהִים**), there is no one beside him (**עֹד מְלֻכָּדוֹ**)", similarly Deut 32:39: "I, only I am he (**אֲנִי הוּא**), there is no god next to me (**עִמָּדִי אֵין אֱלֹהִים**)".

⁴⁰ See also Deut 17:3; 29:24–25. Similarly Job 31:26–27, "If I have looked up to the sun when it was shining, or to the moon when it moved full of majesty, and my heart was secretly seduced, so that my mouth kissed my hand."

actuality against nonactuality, interest flags because battle with a strawman is no battle at all”.⁴¹ With regard to the question of polytheism in the Old Testament, Heiser similarly concludes that “[b]iblical data indicate that orthodox Israelite religion never considered Yahweh as one among equals or near equals Yahweh’s utter uniqueness against all other ’ēlōhîm is *monotheism on ancient Semitic terms*, and orthodox Israelite religion reflects this at all stages”.⁴²

The fact, however, that the Old Testament rejection of polytheism did not discourage Israelites from practising it in everyday life, coupled with the idea that strict Yahwism was often embraced only by a minority, is nowhere hidden from view in the Old Testament.⁴³ Archeological evidence from Israelite inscriptions also attests to the fact that both syncretistic and polytheistic beliefs were part of religious life in Israel, as inscriptions from *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud* and *Khirbet el-Qom* all the better testify.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly,” 125.

⁴² Michael S. Heiser, “Divine Council,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2008), 114 [emphasis added]. Cf. also Ernst-Joachim Waschke, “Religionskonflikt: Anmerkungen zu Israels Auseinandersetzung mit ‘Kanaan,’” in *Der Freund des Menschen: Festschrift für Georg Christian Macholz zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres* (ed. Arndt Meinhold and Angelika Berlejung; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 163–177; Hans-Winfried Jüngling, *Der Tod der Götter: Eine Untersuchung zu Psalm 82* (SBS 38; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969), 44–46.

⁴³ For detailed information on religions in Israel during Late Bronze and Iron I–II based on archeological data, inscriptions, biblical texts and onomastic references, see Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), esp. 123–609. For an introduction to folk religion under the umbrella of the official religions in Mesopotamia and Israel, see Karel van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (trans. Sara J. Denning-Bolle; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); Trans. of *Van haar wieg tot haar graf: De rol van de godsdienst in het leven van de Israëlitische en de Babylonische vrouw* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1987); cf. idem, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁴⁴ For a summary, cf. Jacob J. T. Doedens, “Ancient Israelite Polytheistic Inscriptions: Was Asherah Viewed as YHWH’s Wife?” *SF* 17 no. 1–2 (2013): 41–54. More recent (2012) is the discovery of structures and figurines at Tel Motza, believed to have belonged to a temple-complex dating from the early monarchic period, see Israel Antiquities Authority, “Temple and Vessels from Biblical Times Discovered at Tell Motza,” n.p. [published 26 December 2012; cited 31 December 2012]. Online: http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early+History++Archaeology/Temple_vessels_Biblical_Tel_Motza_26-Dec-2012.htm; Noah Wiener, “First Temple Period Ritual Structure Discovered Near Jerusalem,” n.p. [published 27 December 2012; cited 31 December 2012]. Online: <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/temple-at-jerusalem/first-temple-period-ritual-structure-discovered-near-jerusalem/>.

So far, so good, but what about passages from Isaiah which appear to refute the very existence of other gods? Are these statements not ontological declarations about there existing no gods other than YHWH?

Isaiah 40–48 repeatedly states that gods other than YHWH are ‘nothing’: “Tell what is to come hereafter, then we will know that you are gods! Really, do good or do evil,⁴⁵ that we will be afraid, and be terrified together. Look, you are nothing (נִאֲיִן), your work is worthless (נִאֲפֵסֶה)” (Isa 41:23–24ab). That other gods cannot fulfill their pretensions is revealed by the telling fact that only YHWH called forth (Isa 41:2–4.25; 44:28–45:7; 46:11; 48:14–15) and foretold (Isa 41:23.26–27; 44:7–8; 45:21; 46:10; 48:3–5) the victorious appearance of Cyrus resulting in the liberation of Israel from the exile. By announcing *beforehand* how he is going to act on behalf of his people, YHWH provides, as it were, empirical evidence that he is the only God and that other gods who do not speak and do not act, therefore, do not exist:⁴⁶ “before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (Isa 43:10c), “I am the first, I am the last, and beside me there is no god” (וְיִמְבֹּלְעֵרִי אֵין אֱלֹהִים) (Isa 44:6b). With variant wording “I am YHWH, there is no other, except for me there is no god” (אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵין עוֹד זִוְלָתִי אֵין אֱלֹהִים) (Isa 45:5a). YHWH is the unique Saviour as is proclaimed to all people from east and west (Isa 45:6); even foreign peoples will acknowledge YHWH’s unicity: “God is with you only, there is no other, no god beside him” (Isa 45:14, cf. 45:18.21–22).

The refutation of the existence of other gods is thus set in a soteriological framework; only Israel has a God who truly comes to the rescue of his people, other gods show no perceptible activity. This seems to imply that the message is primarily an existential proclamation of the worthlessness of any god beside YHWH, but, as such, also an ontological statement about the existence or non-existence of other gods.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ By mentioning both antonyms, the text either refers to a totality: “Do everything”, or to a minimum: “Do at least something!” For another example of the latter, ‘anything’, articulated as ‘good or bad’, see Num 24:13. See also Gen 2:9, “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”, perhaps referring to a totality: “the tree of knowledge of everything”. For Greek and Egyptian equivalents, see Cyrus H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publishers, 1953), 97–98.

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 4:32–39 expresses the same thought: because other gods do not speak (4:33) or act on behalf of their people (4:34), Israel has to conclude (by means of this empirical evidence) that there is no God beside YHWH (4:35 מִלְּבַדּוֹ עוֹד אֵין; 4:39 עוֹד אֵין), the God who speaks (4:33.36) and acts (4:34.37–38).

⁴⁷ Cf. Hans Wildberger, “Der Monotheismus Deuterocesajas,” in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 511. Wildberger argues that, although the ‘denial-statements’ may be primarily soteriological-pastoral, they also have an ontological meaning. Wildberger considers this to be a new development in Israel’s faith.

In other words, the lack of speech and action of the gods is brought forth as proof that they are not even present. The same thought is, for that matter, also expressed in terms of the incomparability of YHWH, Isa 44:7; 46:9. YHWH's struggle with the gods is a veritable battle, precisely because men consider idols to be true gods. What is at stake in this conflict is the *glory* (כְּבוֹד) of YHWH, as it is articulated in Isa 48:11: "I will not give my glory to another".

This primary function of the denial-statements becomes the more clear when these passages are compared with Isa 47:8.10, where Babylon utters similar claims about itself: "I am, and beside me is no one (אֲנִי וְאֵפְסִי עִיר),” (Isa 47:8b.10c). This claim does not mean that, ontologically, there did not exist other cities apart from Babylon but that, compared with Babylon, Capital with a capital 'C', the city without rival, other cities were totally insignificant.⁴⁸ Hence, the statements which apparently refute the existence of other gods, most probably have to be understood as emphasising the incomparability of YHWH over and above the insignificance of other gods.

The primary point which the prophet makes in Isa 40–48 about the existence of other gods is the question how this existence *manifests* itself. In the case of YHWH, this is seen in his glorious deeds of which the greatness is even enhanced by being already announced beforehand; in the case of the 'gods', there is nothing to be seen but lifeless statues.

A similar view of incomparability is expressed in the Psalms, for example in Ps 86:8, "There is no one like you among the gods, Lord, and there are no works like yours"; 96:4–5, "For great is YHWH, and greatly to be praised, he is feared above all gods, for all the gods of the peoples are idols, but YHWH made the heavens," which implies that the godhood of the 'gods of the peoples' is refuted; 135:5, "I know that YHWH is great, our Lord among all gods"; 138:1, "I praise you with all my heart; confronting (נִגַּד) the gods, I sing your praise". In a similar way the *Song at the Sea* praises YHWH, Exod 15:11, "Who is like you among the gods (מִי־כִמּוֹכָה בְּאֱלֹהִים), YHWH?" Basically, Isa 40–48 concurs with these Old Testament statements about other gods, by similarly accentuating YHWH's incomparability. However, the extra element here is that it extends the contrast between YHWH's greatness and the gods' futility so much to the extreme that other gods are shown to be even less than futile: gods which do not speak or act cannot be present. Even if, as is argued above, the primary point which Isa 40–48 wishes to make does not touch ontology, these

⁴⁸ Cf. Heiser, "Divine Council," in *DDD*, 115.

statements have consequences for how (at least a part of) the Old Testament views the (non-)existence of these gods ontologically, also.

In returning to the expression ‘sons of God’ it can be said that if the expression refers to unspecified divine beings, this does not necessarily conflict with the way in which a significant part of the Old Testament envisages other gods. YHWH has assigned these gods to all other peoples which, by itself, already demonstrates YHWH’s superiority. The Old Testament confesses YHWH to be in a class of his own, so far above any god or power to which their worshippers attribute divine authority that they are not even in the slightest way comparable to YHWH. Even if they are called gods in the Old Testament, they are not worthy of the term. If in Gen 6:1–4 the ‘sons of God’ are to be understood as divine beings, this still fits within the general picture of how the Old Testament views other gods, at least if also here it is implicated that they are incomparable to YHWH. It also fits with the lexical evidence that the word *אֱלֹהִים* is used in a broader sense than the English word ‘god’ in categorising different kinds of beings in the unseen realm.⁴⁹ Within this invisible world exist rank and hierarchy, even to the extent that YHWH is professed to be incomparable to all the other beings which inhabit this realm or are thought to do so.

5.4 IS GENESIS 6:1–4 A MYTHICAL FRAGMENT WITHIN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Exegetes who defend the divine beings-interpretation for Gen 6:1–4 usually consider this passage to be a mythical fragment which somehow happened to end up in the Old Testament.⁵⁰ After all, what could be more mythological than male deities begetting children with human women? However, to determine which common

⁴⁹ See 5.3 nt. 19.

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 267; Alter, *comm. Gen* 1997, 26–27; Hugh Rowland Page, Jr., *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (VTSup 65; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 110–120; Wolfram Herrmann, *Von Gott und den Göttern: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 259; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 44; Claus Westermann, “Die Gliederung der Mythen,” in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Hans-Peter Müller zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Diethard Römheld; BZAW 278; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 226.

myth or myths possibly formed the backdrop for Gen 6:1–4 has proven to be a less than easy task.

A different argument is that Gen 6:1–4 only makes an allusion to mythology⁵¹ – according to some scholars for rhetorical reasons⁵² – possibly in order to decry contemporary myths about gods begetting children with women.⁵³ Another and third argument denies or downplays any allusion of the passage to mythological material.⁵⁴ The following section evaluates methodological considerations, other biblical examples where mythological language is allegedly used and offers suggestions for dealing with the question as to Gen 6:1–4 consisting of an ancient myth or not.

5.4.1 Methodological Problems of Defining Myth

It is not easy to define myth or mythology; literature on the subject, however, is abundant ever since Euhemerus.⁵⁵ Yet, it is necessary to describe the purport of mythology in order to classify the extrabiblical data which is drawn upon in forming an explanation for the narrative of Gen 6:1–4.

Defining myth is further hindered by often being but a label attached to narratives by outsiders.⁵⁶ The people of the ancient Near East probably must have looked upon these narratives merely as a description of a past age which formed a

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Hellmuth Frey, *comm. Gen* (BAT) 1964, 95; Werner Schliesske, *Gottessöhne und Gottessohn im Alten Testament: Phasen der Entmythisierung im Alten Testament* (BWANT 17; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 31–32; Benedikt Otzen, Hans Gottlieb, and Knud Jeppesen, *Myths in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 58; Coats, *comm. Gen* (FOTL) 1983, 86; Wenham, *comm. Gen* (WBC) 1987, 138; Horst Seebass, “Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Maß: Gen 6,1–4,” *BN* 134 (2007): 7.

⁵² Cf. e.g. Elliott, *comm. Gen* 1961, 62–63.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 300; Werner H. Schmidt, “Mythos im Alten Testament,” *EvT* 27 no. 5 (1967): 243–246; Soggin, *comm. Gen* 1997, 119.

⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. Paul Heinisch, *Probleme der biblischen Urgeschichte* (Luzern: Räder, 1947), 121–122; Willem A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)” *WThJ* 43 no. 2 (1981): 344–345; Atkinson, *comm. Gen* 1990, 130; Waltke and Fredricks, *comm. Gen* 2001, 115 nt. 18.

⁵⁵ Greek writer, late 4th century B.C.E. In his *Hiera anagraphe* he historicised myth, arguing that the tales about gods were originally stories about human rulers who were later deified. Cf. Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* (trans. Thomas Marier; Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 192. The first philosophical critique on myths appeared already in the late 6th century B.C.E. with Xenophanes, cf. Hans-Peter Müller, “Mythos/Mythologie,” in *RGG*⁴ 5:1694. See also G. Stählin, “μῦθος,” *TWNT* 4:776–787 for an overview of shifting views on myth among Greek and Hellenistic writers.

⁵⁶ Cf. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 12–13.

continuity with their own time, even if there can be supposed to have been an awareness of these narratives differing from the experienced reality of daily life. In the words of Walton: “A Babylonian would consider the myths to be important because they offered explanations of how the world functioned. The inhabitants of Mesopotamia would not have considered their myths to be fanciful or fictional, though they would not have considered a myth the same as a court chronicle”.⁵⁷ The same must have been true for the narratives of other peoples.

More recent approaches of mythology have long abandoned the culturally biased view as evidenced in Bultmann’s reasoning in which the concept of mythology functions as the embodiment of all which is contradictory to a scientific world-view.⁵⁸ It has even been argued that, on a formal level, apart from content, mythical ontology is no less rational than its scientific counterpart.⁵⁹ In general, narratives about primordial times in which deities play an active part are called myths.⁶⁰ Yet, the boundary between ancient mythology and ancient historiography appears to be a fluid because (a) deities also play a part in historiography and (b) events from primordial times are drawn into historical times.

- (a) Roberts mentions examples of ancient Near Eastern historiography which refer to divine actions.⁶¹ History can be the object of theological reflection, as in the example of Nabonidus who, long after the events, considered Sennacherib’s devastation of Babylon as having its roots in Marduk’s anger.⁶²
- (b) In Mesopotamia, the story of the flood – generally called a myth – was not seen as an event in the timeless actions of the gods but simply as any

⁵⁷ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 43.

⁵⁸ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die weltgründende Funktion des Mythos und der christliche Offenbarungsglaube,” in *Mythos und Rationalität* (ed. Hans Heinrich Schmid; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1988), 108; Jan Heller, “Das Ringen der alttestamentlichen Überlieferung mit dem Mythos,” in *Mythos und Rationalität*, 127.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kurt Hübner, “Der Mythos, der Logos und das spezifisch Religiöse: Drei Elemente des christlichen Glaubens,” in *Mythos und Rationalität*, 29.

⁶⁰ Cf. Schmidt, “Mythos,” 237–238. Cf. Gerhard Oberhammer, “Mythos – woher und wozu? Zur Rationalität des Mythos,” in *Mythos und Rationalität*, 16: “Mythen [sind] *wahre* Geschichten von den Taten der Götter und der Halbgötter, aber auch anderen Wesen, Taten, die außerhalb der erinnerten, geschichtlichen Zeit getan wurden” [emphasis in original]. Oberhammer adds that myth is also foundational for how humans see their existence (17).

⁶¹ Cf. J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 63.

⁶² Cf. Roberts, *The Bible and Ancient Near East*, 68. Cf. also the account of Nabonidus’ rebuilding of the temple of Sin in Harran, in “The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus,” translated by Paul-Alain Beaulieu (COS 1.123A:310–312).

other event in history. The Sumerian King List includes the deluge within the chain of historical events, and Ashurbanipal proudly announced his being able to read cuneiform texts dating from before the flood.⁶³ Similar continuity can be demonstrated between the so-called primeval history in Gen 1–11 and subsequent biblical history: Abraham is not the first to have had a relationship with YHWH, Adam had already preceded him in this; Cain and Abel bring sacrifices to YHWH (Gen 4:3–4), people call upon YHWH's name after Seth was born (Gen 4:26), Noah differentiates between clean and unclean animals (Gen 7:2), and even Abraham's call from Ur apparently was not the beginning of his relation with YHWH (Gen 12:1–3).⁶⁴

What is called ancient Near Eastern myth is apparently firmly interwoven with what is called ancient Near Eastern historiography. This explains why newer approaches define myth more in connection with the present – ever-threatening – reality in which it is recounted.⁶⁵ That is to say, myth has a foundational function with respect to origins (where does the present world come from?) and operations (how does the present world work?).⁶⁶ Within this paradigm, myth can be defined as *an ancient way of addressing ultimate existential questions in the form of narratives about primordial events, in which acts of gods⁶⁷ lay the foundation and are the warrant for the continuity of reality.*⁶⁸ In this formula, the wording ‘ancient

⁶³ Cf. Roberts, *The Bible and Ancient Near East*, 65. See also Jens Bruun Kofoed, “Adam, What Are You? The Primeval History Against the Backdrop of Mesopotamian Mythology,” *Hiphil* 3 (March, 2006): 6. Cited 5 July 2011. Online: <http://www.see-j.net/hiphil>. Kofoed argues that “there was a continuous historical interest from the early Sumerian texts right down to the period of composition of the primeval history and that the epic material in the primeval history was combined with list-form material under the influence of this historical interest.”

⁶⁴ Cf. Roberts, *Bible and Ancient Near East*, 66.

⁶⁵ Cf. Edward Noort, “Zwischen Mythos und Rationalität: Das Kriegshandeln Yhwhs in Josua 10,1–11,” in *Mythos und Rationalität*, 149–150.

⁶⁶ Cf. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 12–13. Pákozdy compares the function of myth in religion to the function of a formula in mathematics: it can solve every possible appropriate case, cf. L. M. Pákozdy, “Hogyan prédikáljunk az Ószövetség igéi alapján?” in *“Hirdesd az igét”: Az igehirdetők kézikönyve* (ed. József Adorján; Budapest: Magyarországi Református Egyház zsinati irodájának sajtóosztálya, 1980), 56.

⁶⁷ The plural ‘gods’ excludes biblical narratives (and, additionally, also modern scientific explanations) from the category of myth. However, it can be argued that some narratives in the Old Testament offer a “view of origins and operations, in the same way that mythologies served in the rest of the ancient world and that science serves our Western culture.” (Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 13).

⁶⁸ Elements of this definition are found in Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 29–30; Schmidt, “Mythos,” 237–240; M. J. A. Horsnell, “Myth, Mythology,” in *ISBE* 3:456–457; Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the*

way of addressing' expresses temporal and cultural distance, while the phrase 'ultimate existential questions' accentuates universal proximity.

5.4.2 Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs in the Old Testament

Even if one takes the position that the Hebrew Bible contains no myths explicitly as such, it has to be conceded that motifs from ancient Near Eastern mythology, as part of a common conceptual world,⁶⁹ are found in the Old Testament.⁷⁰

Gaster discerns three categories of ancient Near Eastern mythological elements in the Old Testament: direct parallels, allusions, and figurative expressions.⁷¹ However, when one takes the Old Testament narratives at face value, it remains a question of interpretation as to what extent the authors actually wanted to allude to ancient Near Eastern mythology, or even adopted its elements. Descriptions may simply have been influenced by a common conceptual world. For the sake of an unbiased assessment, it is, therefore, preferable to differentiate between (a) narratives with similar elements, (b) poetry using common literary motifs and (c) explicit references, indicating that authors knew the mythological material, which may or may not imply that they affirmed its content.

(a) Similar Narrative Elements

Traditions from the ancient Near East exhibit motifs which are also found in the Old Testament narratives about *creation and paradise*. Common is the thought that humans are formed from clay or earth.⁷² Literature from the ancient Near East

Problem of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 40.

⁶⁹ For the spreading of myths, see Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 117 nt. 51: "The goings-on of the deities in Ugaritic myths were most likely local versions of myths widely circulated through the Middle Bronze period in the Levant. The presence of Canaanite deities in the Egyptian pantheon from the reign of Amenophis II (1436–1413 BCE) to the Roman period suggests that myths about these gods were circulated widely." For the dispersion of the Gilgamesh epic in the Levant, see "Map 9.1. Places with copies of the Gilgamesh epic," Daniel C. Snell, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 88.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ulf Oldenburg, "Above the Stars of El: El in Ancient South Arabic Religion," *ZAW* 82 no. 2 (1970): 206 nt. 120; Elmer B. Smick, "Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms," *WThJ* 44 no. 1 (1982): 88.

⁷¹ Cf. T. H. Gaster, "Myth, Mythology," *IDB* 3:481–485.

⁷² Somewhat different from Gen 2:7, in *Enūma Elish* VI:31–32 mankind is created from the blood of a slaughtered god, cf. *COS* 1.111:401, in *Atra-Ḫasis* I:208–239 from clay mixed with the blood of a god, cf. "Atra-Ḫasis," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:451).

contains allusions to a tradition of the Tree of Life.⁷³ Pictures of the so-called “Tree of Life” are also thought to exist in ancient Near Eastern iconography, though they are difficult to interpret due to lack of accompanying captions.⁷⁴ Moreover, the focus of creation of mankind in Mesopotamian myth is different from the creation story in the Old Testament, in that, in the Mesopotamian version, man is destined to take over the burden of work from the gods.⁷⁵

The ancient Near Eastern stories about the *flood* contain striking similarities in detail⁷⁶ to the Genesis account but, most notably, cites different causes for the flood: in Mesopotamia, the gods are annoyed by the noise of mankind; in Genesis 6:5, human sins make God decide to devastate the earth. A further difference is that, in the Mesopotamian version, even the gods are filled with fear from the immensity of the flood they had released.

(b) Common Poetical Motifs

Old Testament poetry uses motifs also found in ancient Near Eastern texts which mention the *Battle with the Dragon*. The monster is called Leviathan in Job 3:8, “Let those curse it [the day of Job’s birth] who conjure the day, those who are trained to conjure Leviathan”.⁷⁷ Psalm 74:14 praises YHWH because he was the one who “shattered the heads⁷⁸ of Leviathan and gave it as food to the glibbery

⁷³ In Mesopotamia known as the ‘plant of life’, cf. Hendrik Bergema, *De boom des levens in Schrift en historie* (Hilversum: Schipper, 1938), 342. A more neutral term is ‘sacred tree’ or ‘Assyrian Tree’, cf. Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy,” *JNES* 52 no. 3 (1993): 161–166.

⁷⁴ Cf. Jerrold Cooper, “Assyrian Prophecies, the Assyrian Tree, and the Mesopotamian Origins of Jewish Monotheism, Greek Philosophy, Christian Theology, Gnosticism, and Much More” (review of Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*; SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), *JAOS* 120 no. 3 (2000): 430–431.

⁷⁵ Humans are created when the gods, tired from heavy labour, went on strike (probably the first mentioned work stoppage in history) and burnt their tools, *Atra-Ḫasis* I:1–247, cf. *COS* 1.130:450–451. See also *Enūma Elish* VI:6–8.34, cf. *COS* 1.111.400–401.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Atra-Ḫasis*, see *COS* 1.130:450–452, see also W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Gilgamesh Epic, tablet XI, cf. “Gilgamesh,” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.132:458–460).

⁷⁷ Leviathan was believed to be a sea monster (cf. Ps 104:26), which could swallow the sun or the moon, thus causing an eclipse, an element which fits the context (cf. Job 3:5.9). Cf. Elmer B. Smick, “Mythology and the Book of Job,” *JETS* 13 no. 2 (1970): 101. There is no need to emendate the MT לִיָּתָן to לִיָּתָן, cf. Gregory W. Parsons, “Literary Features of the Book of Job,” *BSac* 138 (1981): 218, but the similar sound of both words may indicate an intentional wordplay, cf. Elmer B. Smick, “Another Look at the Mythological Elements in the Book of Job,” *WThJ* 40 no. 2 (1978): 215.

⁷⁸ In Ugaritic mythology, *ltn* (Lôtan), the equivalent of Leviathan, had seven heads, cf. *KTU* 1.3.III:42; 1.5.I:3.

creatures⁷⁹ of the sea”. Similarly, Isa 27:1 depicts YHWH as punishing Leviathan with his sword, “Leviathan, the agile (בָּרָךְ) serpent, Leviathan, the sinuous (עֲקָלָתוֹן) serpent”.⁸⁰ Leviathan’s appearance was so fearful that even the gods (אֱלֹהִים) were in fear of it (Job 41:17). The sea monster is also called *Tannîn*⁸¹ (Job 7:12; Ps 74:13;⁸² Isa 51:9), usually translated as ‘dragon’, or *Rahab* (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps 89:11; Isa 30:7; 51:9). In most of the texts the sea monster is associated with the apparently personified⁸³ Sea, *Yām*, (Job 7:12; 26:12; Ps 74:13; 89:10; Isa 51:10) or River, *Nahar*, (Ps 74:15, cf. Hab 3:8), much as in the Ugaritic Baal myth.⁸⁴ The motif of the battle of gods with the dragon has been found most evidently in Ugaritic mythology but is also present in Mesopotamia, as described in Marduk’s battle with Tiamat.⁸⁵ Similar stories are found in Hittite,⁸⁶ Egyptian⁸⁷ and Phoenician⁸⁸ literature. Yet, there exists a obvious difference from the Old Testament poetical motifs picturing YHWH’s battle with the dragon, namely that the Old Testament exhibits a historicising tendency. The literary motifs of the battle with the sea monster are used as a poetical description of the historical event of the Exodus (Ps 74:12–14; Isa 51:9–11).⁸⁹

Other Old Testament poetical motifs also known from ancient Near Eastern mythology appear to be part of a common conceptual world: the wind is depicted as winged⁹⁰ (2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; Ps 104:3; Hos 4:19) and there are references to the ‘Canaanite Olympus’, Mount Saphon⁹¹ (Isa 14:13). Interestingly, Ps 48:3 links the

⁷⁹ Following the conjecture לְעַמְלֵצִי, cf. “עַמְלֵצִי,” HAL 3:800, instead of MT לְעַמְלֵצִי, ‘people of the wilderness’ (?).

⁸⁰ In the Ugaritic Baal myth, Leviathan (Lôtan) is killed by Baal. Interestingly, Lôtan has the same epithets here as in Isa 27:1, *brh* and *qltn*, see *KTU* 1.5.I:1–2, and *qltn* in *KTU* 1.3.III:41.

⁸¹ As in the Ugaritic Baal myth, where it is Baal who binds the dragon, called *tnn*, see *KTU* 1.3.III:40. Cf. G. C. Heider, “Tannin,” *DDD*, 834–836 for a classification of the biblical references to *Tannîn*.

⁸² Here in plural, תַּנִּינִים.

⁸³ Note the absence of the article before the word ‘sea’ in Job 7:12; Ps 74:13; Isa 51:10.

⁸⁴ Although in Ugarit the personification is more recognisable, see *KTU* 1.3.III:38–39: *mdd il ym*, “Yamm, the beloved of El”, and *nhr il rbm*, “Nahar, the great god”.

⁸⁵ “Epic of Creation (Enûma Elish),” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.111:396–399).

⁸⁶ E.g. “The Storm-God and the Serpent (Illuyanka),” translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.56:150–151).

⁸⁷ E.g. “The Repulsing of the Dragon (Coffin Text 160),” translated by Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 1.21:32).

⁸⁸ Cf. Gaster, “Myth,” *IDB* 3:481–482.

⁸⁹ Cf. also Isa 30:7, where ‘*Rahab* who sits still’ is a moniker for Egypt.

⁹⁰ As in the story of Adapa who broke the wing of the South wind. Cf. “The Adapa Story,” translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.129:449). For an analysis of the Adapa narrative, cf. Mario Liverani, *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (London: Equinox, 2004), 3–23.

⁹¹ Most specifically known from the Ugaritic myths, the mountain of Baal and place of the assembly of the gods, cf. e.g. *KTU* 1.16.I:7 (and passim), where also Baal’s palace was built, cf. *KTU* 1.4.V:55.

summits of the Saphon to Mount Zion, as if polemically claiming that the mountain where God can actually be found is Zion. The Old Testament also depicts YHWH as riding on a cloud, (Ps 104:3, “who makes clouds his chariot”, *הַשָּׁמַיִם עָבִים רִכְבּוֹ*),⁹² apparently stripping Baal of his epithet ‘Rider upon the Clouds’.⁹³ A more-or-less hidden reference to an Ugaritic epithet of El, namely ‘Bull El’⁹⁴ may be present in Hos 8:6.⁹⁵

(c) Explicit References

Isaiah 14:4–23 apparently contains an allusion to a *revolt among the gods*. The passage bristles with mythological language known from the Ugaritic tales (especially vs. 12–15),⁹⁶ although an exact parallel is yet to be found. It is important to note that, also here, the metaphors taken from Canaanite mythology are applied to an actual political situation. Moreover, the words are put into the mouth of the king of Babylon, which may display Isaiah’s intention to add some *couleur locale* to the dirge.

⁹² Perhaps also Ps 68:5, *בְּעָרְבוֹת רִכַּב*, if not translated as ‘riding through the steppes’, but ‘riding on the clouds’, see “*עָרְבוֹת*,” HAL 3:833, which would give an exact parallel to *rkb rpt*, the Ugaritic epithet of Baal. Cf. similar imagery in the theophanies of 2 Sam 22:10–11; Ps 18:10–11; 97:2–5.

⁹³ *rkb rpt*, cf. *KTU* 1.2.IV:29; 1.3.II:40; 1.3.III:38; 1.3.IV:6; 1.4.III:18. Cf. also “Hesiod’s Catalogue of Women,” translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Fragment 7: “cloud-driving Zeus, king of the deathless gods.” n.p. [cited 7 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodCatalogues.html>.

⁹⁴ *tr il*, cf. *KTU* 1.1.III:26; 1.2.III:16–21; 1.4.III:31; *tr abh il*, ‘Bull El, his father’, *KTU* 1.2.I:33.

⁹⁵ If *מִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, ‘for from Israel’, which in this context defies interpretation, can be read as *כִּי מִי־שָׂר אֵל*, ‘for who is Bull El?’ (*שָׂר* for *שָׂר*, Ugar. *tr*, Greek *ταῦρος*), which fits the following words: “a craftsman made it, he is no god”, and also the reference to the “calf of Samaria” in Hos 8:5,6, cf. Gaster, “Myth,” *IDB* 3:484. The words may also form a deliberate double *entendre*, using the paronomasia of the expression, making it sound as ‘really, [that calf of Samaria is only something] from among Israel; a craftsman made it!’ and ‘really, who is that bull El? – a craftsman made it’. For other examples of possibly intended puns, see Ehud Ben Zvi, *comm. Hos* (FOTL) 2005, 68.139.151.152.169; cf. also Gert Kwakkel, “Paronomasia, Ambiguities and Shifts in Hos 5:1–2,” *VT* 61 no. 4 (2011): 603–615. Geza Vermes, *The Story of the Scrolls: The Miraculous Discovery and True Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 174–175, notes an example from 1QpHab (Col. XI,12–14) where the interpretation of Hab 2:16 is actually based on textual variants. See also David Noel Freedman, “Yahweh of Samaria and His Asherah,” *BA* 50 no. 4 (1987): 248; Freedman refers to Amos 8:14, “those who swear *בְּאִשְׁמֹת שְׁמֵרוֹן*, by the guiltiness of Samaria”, where the wording may be intended as a wordplay on *אֲשֶׁרֶת שְׁמֵרוֹן*, ‘the Asherah of Samaria’: “Such puns and parodies on divine names, especially of repudiated gods, are known in the Bible”.

⁹⁶ See 4.4.2.

Isaiah 34:14 contains a reference to demons known from ancient Near Eastern mythology: the satyr, שָׁעִיר⁹⁷ and Lilith, לִילִית.⁹⁸ This allusion also occurs in a prophecy with a historical intent which describes how Edom will be turned into a deserted and inhabitable country, depicted by Isaiah in all its eeriness.

Based on the preceding overview, several conclusions can be drawn regarding mythological motifs in the Old Testament:

1. In both narratives and in poetry, motifs can be found which are also known from ancient Near Eastern mythology.
2. In poetry, literary motifs also found in ancient Near Eastern mythology are tied to historical situations. They appear to function metaphorically, expressing historical events with the help of mythological imagery.
3. In some cases, mythological literary motifs appear to function mainly as figurative expressions,⁹⁹ providing witness to a common conceptual world.
4. The use of mythological elements in poetry carries with it, in some cases, possibly a polemical purport: deeds and epithets of gods known from mythology are attributed exclusively to YHWH: it is he, and not Baal, who is the 'Rider upon the Clouds'; it is YHWH, and not Baal, who has defeated the Dragon.
5. In summary, motifs in the Old Testament which are also found in ancient Near Eastern mythology most often serve to apply the message of a mythological motif in a given historical situation or to polemically correct known concepts.
6. If in Gen 6:1–4 divine beings are what are in question, the passage is unique in the sense that these beings are depicted as protagonists who act and not simply as minor characters or as the ones who are addressed.

⁹⁷ A goat-like demon, cf. John Rogerson, "Ancient Israel to the Fall of the Second Temple," in *Handbook of Ancient Religions* (ed. John R. Hinnels; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 240.

⁹⁸ Apparently a female demon, Akkadian *lilītu*, fem. of *lilū*, cf. CAD 9:190. In rabbinic literature, Lilith is equated with the queen of Sheba and viewed as the queen of demons, based on the Targum on Job 1:15, where שָׁבַא is translated as לִילִית מַלְכַּת זְמַרְנָד, cf. Wilhelm Bacher, "Lilith, Königin von Smargad," *MGWJ* 19 no. 4 (1870): 187–189; see also Tibor Marjovszky, "Korhatáros kérügma, Lilit, a sas, a számár és a többiek," in "Krisztusért járva követségben ...": *Teológia – igehirdetés – egyházkormányzás: Tanulmánykötet a 60 éves Bölcskei Gusztáv születésnapjára* (ed. Sándor Fazakas and Árpád Ferenc; Debrecen: DRHE, 2012), 43–47.

⁹⁹ In a similar way as Hammurabi's Codex in CH §45 and §48 does not describe an inundation or storm as a natural phenomenon but as 'Adad devastates one's field'. Cf. "The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:339).

5.4.3 Comparison of Genesis 6:1–4 with Known Mythology

Now that it has been established that mythological motifs are indeed present in Old Testament narrative and poetry, and that mythological references – not solely in biblical literature – are intertwined with ancient Near Eastern historiography, the focus of attention can turn again to Gen 6:1–4.

The possible degree of mythological content in Gen 6:1–4 depends, of course, on the identification of the ‘sons of God’. An exegesis identifying them as human beings is able to deny the presence of mythological elements; exegesis which considers them to be in some way non-human will have to face the question whether this passage has a touch of the mythological or not.

In the view of certain scholars, Gen 6:1–4 is a full-fledged myth within the Old Testament.¹⁰⁰ If the Old Testament uses mythological motifs known also from the ancient Near East, as has been pointed out above, this view deserves closer attention. Two questions, then, need to be addressed: (a) Is Gen 6:1–4 a complete, unabridged version of a known myth? (b) If so, what can have been the purpose of the author to use this myth?

An attempt to answer the latter question is borne out in that the author found the mythological material in his sources, yet deliberately downplayed the most offending mythological content.¹⁰¹ This view, however, invites an entire series of questions, the first of these being the one phrased by Hendel: “What could be more mythological than the sexual mingling of gods and mortals and the birth of semi-divine offspring?”¹⁰² So where is the ‘downplaying’ here? Why was the passage as a whole not left out (as the ultimate form of downplaying)?¹⁰³ In other words, what is it about the passage which was so important to the author that it had to be included in his text? Or could the original author have included it naively, as it were, him

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Claus Westermann, “Die Gliederung der Mythen,” in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Hans-Peter Müller zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Diethard Römheld; BZAW 278; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 226.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 56–59.

¹⁰² Ronald S. Hendel, “Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 no. 1 (1987): 14.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hartmut Gese, “Der bewachte Lebensbaum und die Heroen: Zwei mythologische Ergänzungen zur Urgeschichte der Quelle J,” in *Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Hartmut Gese and Hans Peter Rüger; AOAT 18; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 83; F. H. Breukelman, “Het verhaal over de zonen Gods die zich de dochters des mensen tot vrouw namen,” *Amsterdamsche cahiers voor exegese en bijbelse theologie: Cahier 1* (ed. K. A. Deurloo et al.; Kampen: Kok, 1980), 18–19.

being unaware of its offending content and is thus the adaptation of later editors, who, out of respect for the text, only altered it? Methodologically, there also remains the question as to how a myth can be recognised as being present in an *adapted* form when the original source is not extant.

To address the question whether Gen 6:1–4 consists of a – perhaps adapted – version of a myth, the most certain way is to find the same or at least a similar¹⁰⁴ narrative in the literature of the ancient Near East. However, as of yet, exact parallels are lacking and alleged parallels with similar elements share the main commonality of a general notion of sexual relationships between gods and humans.

When comparing ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs in which gods enter into sexual relationships, one can discern several categories:

The *first group* is to be characterised by relationships between gods and goddesses; an example is the Sumerian myth in which Enlil begets children with Ninlil.¹⁰⁵ Several Hittite myths have the same motif: in “Telipinu and the Daughter of the Sea God”, Telipinu, the Storm God, marries the daughter of the Sea God;¹⁰⁶ in one part of the *Kumarbi Cycle*, “The Song of Hedammu”, the netherworld-god Kumarbi plans to defeat his son and eternal rival, the weather-god Teššub. To attain this goal, he marries Sertapsuruhi, daughter of the Sea God, with whom he begets a monster named Hedammu, a sea serpent with an enormous appetite who is intent on devouring Teššub. However, Teššub’s sister succeeds in diverting the monster’s attention by using her feminine charms.¹⁰⁷ Among the Hittite myths were also found myths of Canaanite origin which fall into this category. In “Elkunirsa and Ashertu”, Ashertu, the wife of Elkunirsa, wants to sleep with Baal, who refuses to do so.¹⁰⁸

A *second category* is the mythological motif of a god copulating with a non-human being or with an object. In a given part of the *Kumarbi Cycle*, the “Song of

¹⁰⁴ The assertion of Bräumer, *comm. Gen* (WSB) 1983, 149, that only a complete congruency can count as analogy, may be overstated.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hermann Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil: Ein sumerischer Mythos aus Nippur* (SPSM 8; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978).

¹⁰⁶ CTH 322. Cf. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths* (2d ed.; ed. Gary M. Beckman; SBLWAW 2; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 26–27.

¹⁰⁷ CTH 348. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 50–55: “The Song of Hedammu”.

¹⁰⁸ CTH 342. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 90–92: “Elkunirsa and Ashertu”.

Ullikummi”, the god Kumarbi devises a plan to dethrone Teššub. In order to attain this, he copulates with a ‘great rock’ and, as a result, a great basalt is born¹⁰⁹ named Ullikummi by Kumarbi. The name given to the child is reflective of its hoped destiny, that being, to destroy Kummiya, the city of Teššub and, in doing so, to dethrone its king, Teššub. Once again, Teššub’s sister makes recourse to her proven strategy in trying to seduce the stony giant with her beauty but, this time, her plan fails because Ullikumi is deaf to her music and blind to her beauty.¹¹⁰ Another Hittite myth, “The Sun God, the Cow, and the Fisherman”, apparently recounts – the text being defective – how the Sun God copulates with a cow.¹¹¹

More interesting for comparison is a *third category*, one in which gods enter into sexual relationship with a human being. One section of the Hittite *Kumarbi Cycle*, “The Song of Silver”, relates how the god Kumarbi begets a son, named Silver, by sexual union with a mortal woman.¹¹² The Old Anatolian *Illuyanka Tales* relate how the Storm God is defeated by an enormous serpent. Inara, the daughter of the Storm God, requests the help of a human, called Hupasiya, who is only willing to give his aid if she first sleeps with him. However, there is no mention of any offspring issuing from this relationship.¹¹³ In another version of this myth, the Storm God, who was defeated by the serpent, marries the “daughter of a poor man”. With her he begets a son, who, in his turn, marries the daughter of the serpent. His father instructs him to request the serpent to return to him the heart and the eyes of the Storm God as a dowry.¹¹⁴ In Ugarit, a ritual¹¹⁵ text was found about El fathering the gods Dawn and Dusk¹¹⁶ with two women.¹¹⁷ Interestingly, the appetite of the

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, also in Philo of Byblos’ *Phoenician History*, the names of the mortal sons of Light, Fire and Flame are in some way connected to the names of mountains, cf. Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 14.

¹¹⁰ CTH 345. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 55–61: “The Song of Ullikumi”.

¹¹¹ CTH 363. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 85–87: “The Sun God, the Cow, and the Fisherman”.

¹¹² CTH 364. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 48–50: “The Song of Silver”.

¹¹³ CTH 321. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 11–12: “The Illuyanka Tales,” version 1, §8.

¹¹⁴ CTH 321. Cf. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 12–14: “The Illuyanka Tales,” version 2.

¹¹⁵ The first half of the text has directions for the use of rituals, cf. “The Birth of the Gracious Gods,” translated by Theodore J. Lewis in *UNP* 205.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *KTU* 1.23. Dawn and Dusk, *šhr wšlm*, *KTU* 1.23:53 are called in a parallel phrase ‘the gracious gods’, *ilm n’mm*, *KTU* 1.23:58. It is also possible that the ‘gracious gods’ were born after the birth of Dawn and Dusk, cf. E. Lipiński, “Fertility Cult in Ancient Ugarit,” in *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean: Papers Presented at the First International Conference on Archaeology of the Ancient Mediterranean, the University of Malta, 2–5 September 1985* (ed. Anthony Bonanno; Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1985), 211. However, Pardee argues convincingly that the description of these ‘gracious gods’ having “(one) lip to the earth, (the other) lip to the heavens” (*KTU* 1.23:61–62) can be

newborn ‘gracious gods’ is enormous,¹¹⁸ which calls to mind the unsatiable appetite of the giants in the Enochic tradition.

Sometimes a sexual relationship between gods and humans is implied but not explicitly related, as is the case with Gilgamesh,¹¹⁹ who is two-thirds deity and one-third human.¹²⁰ Throughout the epic, he is identified as divine, although he is also mortal, which is the hallmark of his being human: Babylonian gods were able to be killed but for Gilgamesh death is inevitable, as for any human being.¹²¹ Gilgamesh is depicted as being significantly taller¹²² than other men; he is a hero and warrior and, in addition, also a culture-hero. Even if the Gilgamesh epic does not recount the story of his birth, the epic touches upon the semi-divine provenance, the tall stature of the hero, the fact of him being a warrior and upon human mortality and lifespan.¹²³

All the above-mentioned cases, however, are individual cases of divine-human offspring. Myths which most approximate the story of Gen 6:1–4 in the sense that a

viewed as graphically depicting Dawn and Dusk, cf. “Dawn and Dusk (The Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods),” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87:274).

¹¹⁷ There exists discussion about whether these women are to be seen as humans or goddesses. Lipiński suggests that they are to be identified as Athirat and her double, Rahmay, cf. Lipiński, “Fertility Cult in Ancient Ugarit,” 210. The most recent view is that of Pardee who observes that the mothers of Dawn and Dusk are only mentioned as “two women”, while, generally in Ugaritic literature, the goddess Athirat has the epithet *qnyt’ lm*, “progenitress of the gods”. Cf. “Dawn and Dusk,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87:274).

¹¹⁸ Cf. *KTU* 1.23:61–64.

¹¹⁹ According to the versions of the epic, Gilgamesh was the son of the goddess Ninsun (OB II, col. 6:234–236; OB Hama, 42; Standard Babylonian Version I:35–36; III:22) and the deified human Lugalbanda (OB Nippur, 7–8; Standard Babylonian Version VI:165), which may explain his being “two-thirds” god and “one third” human, cf. A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Text* (vol. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 180–181; 242–243; 540–541; 574–575. In the *Sumerian King List* III:17–20, Gilgamesh’s father was a “phantom” (*lil.lá*), cf. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 103.

¹²⁰ The Epic of Gilgamesh, Standard Babylonian Version I:48; IX:49–51, cf. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 540–541; 668–669.

¹²¹ Cf. David Melvin, “The Gilgamesh Traditions and the Pre-History of Genesis 6:1–4,” *PRSt* 38 no. 1 (2011): 26. See also Georges, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 278–279, OB VA+BM III:3–5: “when the gods created mankind, for mankind they established death, life they kept for themselves”, 356–357, Assyrian MSy, 1: “[Only the gods] have dwelled for [ever in the sunlight.] As for mankind, [its day’s] are [numbered].”

¹²² The Epic of Gilgamesh, Standard Babylonian Version I:29.37, cf. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 539–541.

¹²³ According to Melvin, the Gilgamesh traditions may constitute the background both of Gen 6:1–4 and the Enochic tradition, cf. Melvin, “The Gilgamesh Traditions,” 23–32. Interestingly, the name of Gilgamesh also occurs in 4Q530, col. II:2 and in 4Q531, frag. 17:12, probably as the name of a giant.

whole race of semi-divine beings came into existence as result of sexual relationships between gods and humans, are, to the present, only known from Greek mythology.¹²⁴ This has been known for a long time but was generally considered of little importance for the study of Genesis since Greek influence in the ancient Near East was thought to have arisen only after Alexander the Great. However, increasingly more evidence is emerging that the Greek sphere of influence was in fact not so greatly a separated cultural bubble,¹²⁵ given that all the different cultures in the Mediterranean Basin formed a network, connected by literature,¹²⁶ religion,¹²⁷ traditions,¹²⁸ trade,¹²⁹ craftsmanship,¹³⁰ travellers, settlers,¹³¹ conflicts and diplomacy. This was already functioning from the second millennium B.C.E.

¹²⁴ Cf. Andreas Schüle, “The Divine-Human Marriages (Genesis 6:1–4) and the Greek Framing of the Primeval History,” *TZ* 65 no. 2 (2009): 122: “As a matter of fact, [Gen] 6:1–4 looks a lot less ‘awkward’ if one holds this text against the backdrop of Greek mythology.”

¹²⁵ Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publishers, 1953), 89–99; Herbert Haag, *Homer, Ugarit und das Alte Testament* (BibB 2; Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1962); John Pairman Brown, *Ancient Israel and Ancient Greece: Religion, Politics, and Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (trans. M. E. Pinder and W. Burkert; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995); Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSRC 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), especially 73–100, about the Greek fallen angels.

¹²⁶ In Hittite, Babylonian and Ugaritic epic literature, similar stylistic elements are found as in Homer’s epics, cf. Haag, *Homer, Ugarit und das Alte Testament*, 55.

¹²⁷ The Ugaritic Hephaistos-like craftsman-god *Ktr* had his home in *kp̄tr*, Crete, cf. *KTU* 1.3.VI:14–22, and in *hkpt*, Memphis, cf. *KTU* 1.3.VI:13–15, see N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and His Colleagues* (BS 53; 2d rev. ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 43. Cf. also Haag, *Homer, Ugarit und das Alte Testament*, 58. Known as Ptah, the same god was the main deity of Memphis, Egyptian capital until the end of the Old Kingdom, cf. M. Heerma van Vos, “Ptah,” *DDD*, 668–669. See also Burkert, *Orientalizing Revolution*, 20–21.

¹²⁸ Cf. John Van Seters, “The Primeval Histories of Greece and Israel Compared,” *ZAW* 100 no. 1 (1988): 1–22. Daniel Vainstub, “Some Points of Contact between the Biblical Deborah War Traditions and Some Greek Mythologies,” *VT* 61 no. 2 (2011): 324–334, compares the names of Deborah, Jael, and the word used for the vessel from which Jael gave Sisera milk to drink with data from Greek mythology.

¹²⁹ See Polyxeni Adam-Veleni and Evangelia Stefani, eds., *Greeks and Phoenicians at the Mediterranean Crossroads* (Exhibition Catalogue; AMTh 15; Thessaloniki: Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, 2012).

¹³⁰ Cf. Burkert, *Orientalizing Revolution*, 9–40.

¹³¹ The Philistines came from Caphtor, (cf. Deut 2:23; Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7), i.e. Crete, probably as members of the Mycena civilisation, cf. Ed Noort, *Die Seevölker in Palästina* (PA 8; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 37–39. A literary indication for the Aegean provenance of the Philistines is the title סַרְיִיִם, used exclusively for the ‘lords’ of the Philistines and probably derived from Greek τύραννοι, cf. “סַרְיִיִם” *HAL* 3:727; E. C. B. MacLaurin, “Anak / Ἀναξ,” *VT* 15 no 4 (1965): 472–473. Cf. also Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 132–135.

onwards,¹³² far before the rise of Alexander of Macedonia. Archeology also provides evidence of a Greek presence in the coastal regions of Syria-Palestine long before the emergence of Hellenism.¹³³ This may mean that Greek mythology was influenced by its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, as has been generally recognised.¹³⁴

Greek mythology known from Hesiod's "Catalogue of Women",¹³⁵ includes stories about gods and goddesses engaging in sexual relationships with mortals and tells of the existence of demigods, that is, offspring of deities¹³⁶ and humans, also known as the heroes. It also knows of Zeus who forbade sexual unions of the inhabitants of the divine world with the inhabitants of earth¹³⁷ – indeed clearly a case of *Quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi*. Greek mythology furthermore includes tales of rebellious Titans¹³⁸ who were cast into the *Tartarus* as punishment.¹³⁹ This cumulative evidence is sufficient for Schüle to argue that Gen 6:1–4

appears to be a text that aims at appropriating and at the same time critically evaluating elements of Greek mythology. It is a text that gives reason to assume that

¹³² The Mycenaean civilization in Greece during the late Bronze Age had a wide network of political, economic, and social relationships in the eastern Mediterranean. Cf. William H. Stiebing, Jr., *Out of the Desert? Archaeology and the Exodus / Conquest Narratives* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1989), 167–169. For mutual influence of Mediterranean cultures in Late Bronze and Iron Age, see Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*; M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹³³ Cf. Schüle, "The Divine-Human Marriages," 124.

¹³⁴ Cf. Melvin, "The Gilgamesh Traditions," 24.

¹³⁵ Cf. "Hesiod's Catalogue of Women," Fragment 68.II: "on those who were born of immortals and mankind verily Zeus laid toil and sorrow upon sorrow."

¹³⁶ Called "children of the gods, τέκνα θεῶν". Cf. "Hesiod's Catalogue of Women," Fragment 68.II. For a comparison with Gen 6:1–4, see Van Seters, "The Primeval Histories of Greece and Israel Compared," 5–9.

¹³⁷ Cf. "Hesiod's Catalogue of Women," Fragment 68.II: "Zeus ... would destroy the life of the demi-gods, that the children of the gods should not mate with wretched mortals."

¹³⁸ Children of Heaven (Οὐρανός) and Earth (Γαία). Cf. Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1–4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2005), 74. Wright suggests that "it is plausible that this tradition was behind the thinking of the author of Genesis 6, but he chose to humanize the language for his readers." For further study, cf. Jan N. Bremmer, "Remember the Titans!" in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; TBN 6; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 35–61.

¹³⁹ "Hesiod's Theogony," translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 713: "and bound them [the Titans] in bitter chains when they had conquered them by their strength for all their great spirit, as far beneath the earth to Tartarus." n.p. [cited 7 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodTheogony.html>. Cf. how 2 Pet 2:4 describes how God cast angels who had sinned "in bonds of gloom into the Tartarus, σειραῖς ζόφου ταρταρώσας." Hesiod's *Theogony* is to be dated around 700 B.C.E., cf. Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSRC 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 20.

its original audience was exposed to and familiar with certain themes that one finds primarily in myths originating from the Aegean.¹⁴⁰

However, based on the known motifs of ancient Near Eastern myths and on the fact that cultures in ancient Greece and the Levant reciprocally influenced each other, these Greek myths may have had ancient Near Eastern counterparts. As an example can serve the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos,¹⁴¹ which mentions the birth of gods, demigods and Titans. This *Phoenician History* is written in Greek but claims to be based on the work of Sanchuniathon, an ancient Phoenician author. It also claims that such Phoenician documents were the source of Hesiod's works and of Greek mythology.¹⁴² Even though the Greek myths about an entire race of semi-divine beings approximate the story of Gen 6:1–4 best, it is thus possible that these Greek myths incorporated elements from ancient Near Eastern mythology.

Although similarities with Greek and ancient Near Eastern mythology can be demonstrated in Gen 6:1–4, differences can also be found. A similar motif is the sexual relationships between divine beings and humans resulting in heroic hybrids. Dissimilarities are: there is no struggle between YHWH and (the offspring of) the divine beings and neither does YHWH impede the relationships between 'sons of God' and 'daughters of men', he only puts a limit upon human lifespan. The observed similarities and dissimilarities with known myths, then, beg for an assessment which concentrates on the function and truth claim of Gen 6:1–4.

5.4.4 Mentioning without Affirming

Apparently, the narratives in Gen 1–11 have an antiquarian intent,¹⁴³ therefore, it can be assumed that Gen 6:1–4 shares this intent, irrespective of the fact that it is difficult to determine in exactly what way Gen 1–11 refers to the history it intends to

¹⁴⁰ Schüle, "The Divine-Human Marriages," 118. [Emphasis in original]

¹⁴¹ Cf. Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (EPRO 89; Leiden, Brill, 1981).

¹⁴² For an evaluation of Philo's claims, see Baumgarten, *Phoenician History*, 1–6.

¹⁴³ A term coined by Halpern, cf. Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 13. Cf. also Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 10–16. Indications for the antiquarian intent of Gen 1–11 can be gleaned from the fact that the proper names fit well into the known onomastic environment of the early second millennium B.C.E., cf. Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (AOAT 234; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 3–106. Geographical names, however, appear to have been 'updated' in some cases, cf. K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 426–438.

narrate.¹⁴⁴ The very content of Gen 6:1–4 leaves the exegete nonplussed as to *how* this passage refers to *what* reality. To get closer to the heart of the matter, the speech-act theory¹⁴⁵ as applied to biblical literature by Vanhoozer¹⁴⁶ might be applied also to Gen 6:1–4. According to Vanhoozer, language is not only used as a tool for making references, for in an author's discourse there are not only *locutions*, "someone saying something about something to someone",¹⁴⁷ but also *illocutions*, "what someone says *in some way* about something to someone".¹⁴⁸ In an illocution it becomes clear what an author wants to *do* with a locution: to ask or to command, to affirm or to disagree, to praise or to reprove, to warn or to advise, and a whole range of other speech acts. Therefore it is crucial to see that what is *mentioned* in a locution is not necessarily the same as what is *affirmed*. Affirming is simply one option among a whole scale of possible illocutions.¹⁴⁹ Applied to Gen 6:1–4, this could mean that the text *mentions* mythological elements without intending to *affirm* them. This implies that the exegete has to pay attention not only to *what* but also to *how* authors say things; in other words, one should not confuse locutions with illocutions.

Therefore, it appears to be worthwhile to pursue this path of searching for a difference between what is mentioned and what is affirmed as applied to Gen 6:1–4. Research consists of two steps here. Firstly, it has to look for indications that the illocution of the text is more than simply affirming its locution. The remaining of section 5.4 will address this question. Secondly, if the illocution of Gen 6:1–4 is other than an affirmation of what it is mentioning, then the second step has to seek out the nature of the illocution: if it is not affirming then which other solutions can be possible explanations of the illocution of Gen 6:1–4? Section 5.5 will deal with this question.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. K. van Bekkum and G. Kwakkel, "Een veilige leefwereld voor de mens in dienst van God: Overwegingen bij alternatieve lezingen van het begin van Genesis," *TheolRef* 53 no. 4 (2010): 332–333. Similarly: Kofoed, "Adam, *What Are You?*" 6. Cf. also Iain W. Provan, "In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (ed. V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 169 nt. 19. Provan argues that the *nature* of the historical intention may vary between different historical narratives.

¹⁴⁵ The theory was introduced by Austin. Cf. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa; 2d ed; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁴⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48 no. 1 (2005): 89–114.

¹⁴⁷ Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation?" 106.

¹⁴⁸ Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation?" 106. [Emphasis in original]

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation?" 107.

The basic indication which gives rise to the assumption that what is mentioned in Gen 6:1–4 is not necessarily affirmed is the observation that Gen 1–11 tends to downplay or to counterbalance polemically the mythology of its surrounding contemporary world, especially in the case of the creation story.¹⁵⁰ Thus viewed, Gen 6:1–4 seems to be an exception within its larger context because, at first sight, this passage does not exhibit the alleged downplaying or counterbalancing of mythological motifs.¹⁵¹ There are thus two possibilities: (1) Gen 6:1–4 is an exception to the general picture of how the Old Testament deals with mythological motifs, meaning that it affirms the mythological motifs it is mentioning, or (2) Gen 6:1–4 conforms with the Old Testament mode of handling mythological motifs, in other words, its illocution does not affirm what it mentions.

This question can be addressed by looking for general indications that in a given text the illocution is other than an affirmation of its locution.¹⁵²

1. *Explicit reference*: when the author *explicitly* states that he is only mentioning but not making an affirmation. An illustration of this first guideline is the case where a text *mentions* that “there is no god” (Ps 14:1; 53:2). The text, however, does not affirm this, but explicitly *affirms* the contrary, namely, that “the fool says in his heart, there is no god”.
2. *Inference by comparison*: when texts on the same theme have different statements. For example: cosmic geographical descriptions *mention* “the pillars of the earth” (1 Sam 2:8; Job 9:6; Ps 75:4) but the earth can also be described as “hanging upon nothing”, (תִּלְהָ אֶרֶץ עַל בִּלְיִי מָה), Job 26:7b. Obviously, the conceptual world of the Old Testament used different concepts to express the theme, so probably the texts do not have the intention of affirming a cosmological theory.
3. *Use of irony*: when Isaiah 14 *mentions* that the king of Babylon aspired to put his throne on the ‘Mount of the Assembly’ – the place where the Canaanite gods gathered – (Isa 14:13) but is, in fact, this ended up being

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (London: Continuum 2004), 388; John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (UCOP 35; Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1985), 49.

¹⁵¹ For example, mythological motifs may be used to enhance poetical impact and expressiveness, cf. F. J. Mabie, “Chaos and Death,” in *Dictionary of Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 51.

¹⁵² Vanhoozer does not provide criteria how to discern in concrete texts that the desired illocution is not affirmation, other than referring to literary genres, cf. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation?” 110. Cf. Kofoed, “Adam, What Are You?” 6–7.

brought down to the *Sheol*, the text evidently neither *affirms* that such a meeting place of gods exists nor that Canaanite religious views are true.

4. *Metaphorical language*: when texts introduce metaphors which are sometimes explained (e.g. Jotham's fable, Judg 9:7–21; Isaiah's 'Song of the Vineyard', Isa 5:1–7) but can also leave their understanding to the imagination of the reader (e.g. large parts of the Song of Solomon).

5. *Literary conventions*: whenever a recurring literary pattern occurs, it may be an indication for an existing convention. When, for example, in apocalyptic parts of the Old Testament, God's approaching judgment is commonly expressed in terms of (diverse) natural disasters (e.g. Isa 24–25; Joel 1–2; Zeph 1), this possibly being an indication that these texts do not wish to affirm the advent of these specific catastrophes but that God's judgment will restore right and justice in the world, something which will resemble an upending of the presently existing social and political structures.

The first two of these guidelines are to be discounted as a means of discovering whether what is *mentioned* in Gen 6:1–4 differs from what is *affirmed* in the passage because there is no explicit reference in the text that its illocution differs from the affirmation of its locution, nor can Gen 6:1–4 be compared with a similar narrative in the Old Testament. The other indications of ironical or metaphorical language and the use of literary conventions are signalled in the exegetical literature on Gen 6:1–4. Therefore, these indications may be of help in deciding whether or not the illocution of this passage is something other than an affirmation. That such is indeed the case, will be shown in the next section (5.5).

5.5 FUNCTION AND PURPORT OF GENESIS 6:1–4

In taking up the working hypothesis that Gen 6:1–4 *mentions* mythological motifs without necessarily *affirming* them, this section tries to assess more precisely the possible illocutionary act of the passage. It will do so by mentioning first already existing approaches in exegetical literature. Then a new proposal will be developed in respect to the function (5.5.6) and purport (5.5.7) of Gen 6:1–4.

5.5.1 Aetiology?

Genesis 6:1–4 is considered by some scholars to be an aetiology to explain the origin of the נִפְלִיִּים¹⁵³ and the נִבְרִיִּים.¹⁵⁴ Others regard the passage as one intended to shed more light on the question of mortality and why humans have a maximal life-span of 120 years.¹⁵⁵ The Old Testament indeed includes aetiological remarks explaining, for example, a place name (Gen 28:19: Bethel / Luz) or a custom (Gen 32:32: why the Israelites do not eat the sinew from the hip). However, it is difficult to decide which origin (human lifespan or Nephilim / Gibborim) the passage intends to explain. It, of course, is also possible that the passage presents a double aetiology.

5.5.2 Polemic against Pagan Mythology or Cult?

Another solution in respect to the function of Gen 6:1–4 is one which contains polemical views vented against ancient Near Eastern mythology or polytheistic cult. The narrative, then, opposes the polytheistic views found around – and possibly also within – Israel by asserting that YHWH is the sovereign ruler who was able to restrain a race of superhuman beings.¹⁵⁶

Such an anti-mythological tenor of the story could be deemed acceptable, although, based on present knowledge, the narrative would do little more than oppose the brand of polytheism concerning a race of demigods and Titans as known from Greek mythology.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Cf. Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gen. 6,1–4 und verwandten Texten im Alten Testament und der altorientalischen Literatur* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1979), 22; Ruppert, *comm. Gen* 1992, 267.

¹⁵⁴ So e.g. Hartmut Gese, “Der bewachte Lebensbaum und die Heroen: Zwei mythologische Ergänzungen zur Urgeschichte der Quelle J,” in *Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Hartmut Gese and Hans Peter Rüger; AOAT 18; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 84. Cf. Skinner, *comm Gen* (ICC) 1930, 140.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Wolfram Herrmann, *Von Gott und den Göttern: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 259; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 48.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Cassuto, *comm. Gen* 1961, 300; Werner H. Schmidt, “Mythos im Alten Testament,” *EvT* 27 no. 5 (1967): 245; Werner Schlisske, *Gottessöhne und Gottessohn im Alten Testament: Phasen der Entmythisierung im Alten Testament* (BWANT 17; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 75; Breukelman, “Het verhaal over de zonen Gods die zich de dochters des mensen tot vrouw namen,” 14; Brueggemann, *comm. Gen* 1982, 71; Sarna, *comm. Gen* 1989, 45; Seebass, *comm. Gen* 1996, 191–192; Mathews, *comm. Gen* (NAC) 1996, 324; Soggin, *comm. Gen* 1997, 119; A. L. Th. de Bruijne, “Er wordt verteld; er is geschied: De bijbel in beeld 2,” in *Woord op schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel* (ed. C. Trimp; Kampen: Kok, 2002), 192–193.

¹⁵⁷ See 5.4.3.

Alternatively, the story could be directed against fertility cults and cultic prostitution.¹⁵⁸ Although the Old Testament mentions male קְדָשִׁים and female קְדָשׁוֹת, usually translated as ‘temple prostitutes’ (e.g. Deut 23:18; 2 Kgs 23:7; Hos 4:14), it remains a point of dispute whether these terms refer to prostitution, and if so, whether this prostitution truly had a ritual function, in other words, to what extent was it actually *cultic* prostitution. Sacral prostitution, in a strict sense, as a ritual act with magic or religious significance, is no longer generally accepted as having existed in Mesopotamia, while the so called *hieros gamos*, the ‘sacred marriage’, as a ritual marriage between a king and a goddess, cannot be classified as a form of prostitution.¹⁵⁹

5.5.3 One More Example of Overstepping Boundaries?

Genesis 6:1–4 can also be compared with the other narratives in Gen 1–11 in which boundaries are transgressed. The function of the passage, then, could be to provide an additional example of how mankind overstepped the borders of humanity, resulting in a type of superhuman race,¹⁶⁰ or how mankind tried to obtain immortality by an alternative route,¹⁶¹ seeing that access to the tree of life was rendered impossible (Gen 3:24). However, humans are apparently not the initiators

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Oswald Loretz, “Götter und Frauen (Gen 6,1–4): Ein Paradigma zu: Altes Testament – Ugarit,” *BibLeb* 8 (1967): 127; Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen: Teil 1: Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetischer Sicht* (PaThSt 4; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1984), 172; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1988), 182; Mirjam and Ruben Zimmermann, “Heilige Hochzeit der Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter? Spuren des Mythos in Gen 6,1–4,” *ZAW* 111 no. 3 (1999): 351; McKeown, *comm. Gen* 2008, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Newer research suggests that the alleged cultic or sacral prostitution is more based on the reports of Herodotus and Strabo than on ancient Near Eastern sources. Cf. Eugene J. Fisher, “Cultic Prostitution in the Ancient Near East? A Reassessment,” *BTB* 6 no. 2–3 (1976): 225–236; Karel van der Toorn, *Van haar wieg tot haar graf: De rol van de godsdienst in het leven van de Israëlitische en de Babylonische vrouw* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1987), 102–103 (translated as *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (trans. Sara J. Denning-Bolle; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “Tamar, *qēdēšā*, *qadištu*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia,” *HTR* 82 no. 3 (1989): 245–265; Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 493–497; Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH* (SBLit 73; New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Rick Marrs, “The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4),” *ResQ* 23 no. 4 (1980): 220–221; Westermann, *comm. Gen* (TT) 1986, 64.

¹⁶¹ Cf. David L. Petersen, “Genesis 6:1–4: Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos,” *JSOT* 13 (1979): 56–58.

of the act of trespassing. The narrative, therefore, differs in this respect from the other stories about transgression, in that here the superhuman realm infringes on the human world.¹⁶²

5.5.4 Allegory, Parody, or Irony?

Several interpreters highlight the presence of irony in Gen 1–11. Ironically, a formal definition of irony is hard to formulate but an informal one can be arrived at with the words of David Barr: “Irony is conveying the opposite of what you say”.¹⁶³ This means that the author had the intention of being ironical as well as delivering an expression which includes some kind of contradiction requiring the audience’s pensive reflection.¹⁶⁴

If Gen 6:1–4 has indeed an ironical undertone, it could mean that the passage wishes to convey the illegitimacy of human power and fame¹⁶⁵ or that the ‘sons of God’ are no gods at all: for example, in their appearing to act like God by calling something ‘good’ but being wrong in their assessment of the ‘daughters of men’ being ‘good’ enough for marrying, much as Eve was mistaken when she thought the fruit of the forbidden tree ‘good’ for eating.¹⁶⁶

Other exegetes see Gen 6:1–4 as a parody on mankind in terms of *imago Dei*.¹⁶⁷ Still others consider the passage to be a type of allegory, an encrypted critique on Davidic kingship.¹⁶⁸

The ironical undertones in Gen 1–11 are difficult to overlook. For example, the desired effect of eating from the forbidden tree does not result in the first human couple to be like God, (“your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God”, Gen 3:5) but to the discovery of their nakedness (“the eyes of both were opened, and

¹⁶² See also Marrs, “The Sons of God,” 220–221.

¹⁶³ David R. Barr, “John’s Ironic Empire,” *Int* 63 no. 1 (2009): 27.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Barr, “John’s Ironic Empire,” 27.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 86. See also Petersen, “Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos,” 49, who sees Gen 6:1–4 as an ironic reversal of the genre of *Schuld-Strafe* stories.

¹⁶⁶ Carol M. Kaminsky, “Beautiful Women or ‘False Judgment’? Interpreting Genesis 6.2 in the Context of the Primaeval History,” *JSOT* 32 no. 4 (2008): 470–473.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. David J. A. Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the ‘Primeval History’ (Genesis 1–11),” *JSOT* 13 (1979): 37; Marc Vervenne, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6.1–4,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (ed. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson; JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 36.

¹⁶⁸ For a summary, see Akio Tsukimoto, “Der Mensch ist geworden wie unsereiner”: Untersuchungen zum zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Gen. 3,22–24 und 6,1–4,” *AJBI* 5 (1979): 33–34.

they knew that they were naked”, Gen 3:7); or another example being where YHWH has to descend to earth to be able to discover the tower under construction which was reaching for the sky as its limit, Gen 11:1–9.¹⁶⁹ Genesis 6:1–4 may possibly include a comparable irony.

5.5.5 Narrative Convention?

All of the above-mentioned proposals are useful in that they draw attention to aspects which are certainly present in Gen 6:1–4. Yet, they do not provide a general picture of the meaning of the passage and also leave certain aspects beyond consideration. A more promising approach is to view Gen 6:1–4 as making use of a narrative convention. This approach will be pursued as a means of doing justice to as many elements of the passage as possible.

The study of *narrative conventions* is a recent development in textual studies. The concept was introduced in Old Testament research by Robert Alter. He observed that narrative conventions need to be discovered within the texts themselves because they are seldom explicitly codified.

[A]n elaborate set of tacit agreements between artist and audience about the ordering of the artwork is at all times the enabling context in which the complex communication of art occurs. Through our awareness of convention we can recognize significant or simply pleasing patterns of repetition, symmetry, contrast: we can discriminate between the verisimilar and the fabulous, pick up directional clues in a narrative work, see what is innovative and what is deliberately traditional at each nexus of the artistic creation.¹⁷⁰

Discovering narrative conventions, however, in a literary work of art from a different time and culture is not always easy for modern readers, who, in the words of Alter, “have lost most of the keys to the conventions out of which it was shaped”.¹⁷¹ A narrative convention can be presumed whenever the reader encounters a recurring story-pattern which was, for the original audience, as recognisable as the ‘sheriff who shoots faster than his shadow’ in the case of viewers of western-films.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ For other examples of irony in Gen 1–11, see Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 81–89.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011), 55.

¹⁷¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 55.

¹⁷² Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 56–59.

De Bruijne suggests that one might consider the possibility that myth, *by itself*, can also function as a narrative convention in Gen 6:1–4.¹⁷³ Yet, in his view, mythological motifs are only found in poetic and prophetic parts¹⁷⁴ but not in Old Testament narrative. If Gen 6:1–4 were to use myth as a means of narrative convention, according to De Bruijne, the passage would form a class with only one member, something which would make it impossible to recognise the passage as providing evidence of a *convention*.

As has already been pointed out,¹⁷⁵ however, the Genesis narratives about creation and flood include elements which resemble motifs equally present in the mythology of the ancient Near East. Genesis 6:1–4 may therefore also include mythological motifs or allusions to such motifs, even if it is difficult to maintain that – according to the suggestion of De Bruijne – the presence of a myth, as such, functions here as a narrative convention. Nevertheless, one element of the story, namely, the reference to the ‘sons of God’ could possibly function as a literary convention, all the more so because the expression ‘sons of God’ is found repeatedly in the Old Testament.

5.5.6 Literary Contrasting Device

In this section, the notion that the expression ‘sons of God’ functions as a literary convention is to be tested. To begin with, the occurrences other than in Gen 6:1–4 will be scrutinised for whatever common elements they have. Then, if it turns out that there are elements which all, or most of them share, the testing will be continued by examining whether these common elements can also be found in Gen 6:1–4.

Are there any similarities in the diverse occurrences of the ‘sons of God’? As has already been observed,¹⁷⁶ the expression is found with slight variations in narrative

¹⁷³ Ad de Bruijne, “Bijbelse geschiedenis,” in *Omhoog kijken in Platland: Over geloven in de wetenschap* (eds. Cees Dekker, René van Woudenberg, and Gijsbert van den Brink; Kampen: Ten Have, 2007), 121–122. In his earlier article, De Bruijne called this a possible *metaphorical* use of myth, see “Er wordt verteld; er is geschied: De bijbel in beeld 2,” in *Woord op Schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel* (ed. C. Trimp; Kampen: Kok, 2002), 190–193. Cf. also H. G. L. Peels, “Het Woord is leven: Over de Heilige Schrift,” in *Geground geloof: Kernpunten uit de geloofsleer in bijbels, historisch en belijdend perspectief* (ed. G. van den Brink, M. van Campen, and J. van der Graaf; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996), 84–86.

¹⁷⁴ For examples, see 5.4.2.

¹⁷⁵ See 5.4.2.

¹⁷⁶ See 2.2.1 and 4.4.3.1.

(Gen 6:2.4; Job 1:6; 2:1; Dan 3:25) and poetry (Deut 32:8.43 LXX; Job 38:7; Ps 29:1; 82:6; 89:7). In momentarily excluding Gen 6:2.4 from consideration, all the cases have as their common element the expression ‘sons of God’ referring to unspecified divine beings. In all instances, the ‘sons of God’ appear as a group, except in Dan 3:25, therefore this passage will be overstepped when hoping to discover how the expression referring to a *group* of unspecified divine beings functions in the Old Testament. Upon closer observation, all the occurrences, except in Job 1:6 and 2:1, project a situation in which these ‘sons of God’ are some way contrasted to YHWH. All cases give witness of a situation in which the supremacy or the integrity of YHWH is found to be at stake. The ‘sons of God’ form, as it were, the backdrop against which YHWH’s lordship becomes overwhelmingly evident. This can be observed in most of the passages.

Deuteronomy 32:8 LXX / Qumran — shows the contrast between the peoples who have been granted their place according to the number of the ‘sons of God’ and an Israel which belongs to YHWH.

Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX / Qumran — stresses that all the ‘sons of God’ / all the gods have to bow down before YHWH, the ‘sons of God’ have to acknowledge that YHWH is able to take vengeance on his adversaries.

Job 1:6; 2:1 — here the contrast between YHWH and the ‘sons of God’ is hardly present. In both (similar) passages YHWH’s integrity and Job’s honesty is at stake because the ‘adversary’ insinuates that YHWH is ‘buying the votes’ of his worshippers and that Job, therefore, is not serving God with honest motives. Between the lines he may also imply that if already Job, the worshipper *par excellence* — as is explicitly acknowledged by YHWH in Job 1:8; 2:3 — is dishonest in his motives, no one else can be honest in worshipping YHWH with the expectation of being rewarded for doing so. In both heavenly scenes, the ‘sons of God’ are passively present, becoming, as it were, the audience in the unfolding drama. The only sign of their being submissive to YHWH is that they are “presenting themselves” before YHWH (יָצַב, Hithp.). It is not clear whether the author deliberately depicted the ‘sons of God’ as the audience in order to accentuate the supremacy of YHWH above all other heavenly beings. Yet, there is one indication that this, in fact, is what is alluded to, because the ‘adversary’ steps forth from among the ‘sons of God’. If one in their midst criticises YHWH, everyone present forcibly witnesses the outcome of events.

Job 38:7 — depicts how YHWH alone is the Creator; the ‘morning stars’ and the ‘sons of God’ themselves watched from the tribune while YHWH was busy creating the cosmos.

Psalm 29:1 — urges the ‘sons of God’ to worship YHWH as their exclusive Lord. The Psalm evokes the imagery also known from the Ugaritic pantheon and, by doing so, enhances the contrast between YHWH as the Supreme King and all his possible rivals.

Psalm 82:6 — accuses the gods / ‘sons of the Most High’ of committing and allowing the spread of injustice. The Psalm condemns them to mortality and, in contrast, proclaims YHWH to be the one who upholds justice on earth.

Psalm 89:7 — contrasts the ‘sons of God’ to YHWH by proclaiming that they cannot be compared in any way to YHWH.

It is only in Job 1:6 and 2:1 that an *explicit* contrast between the ‘sons of God’ and YHWH is seen to be absent. In the other texts, the expression ‘sons of God’ tends to serve as a literary contrasting device, emphasising YHWH’s supremacy against the backdrop of other heavenly beings. This comparison between YHWH and other divine beings may have been an actual comparison in a context in which many people had polytheistic beliefs; in a different religious milieu, it might have become a more literary comparison. This observation gives sufficient reason to look also in Gen 6:1–4 for a similar function of the expression ‘sons of God’.

If in Gen 6:1–4 the reference to the ‘sons of God’ is used likewise, that is, as a literary contrasting device, the whole passage can be approached in this respect. Here, not otherwise specified beings appear who belong to the heavenly realm. They seriously overstep their boundaries by engaging in sexual relationships with humans. As a result, earthly superhuman beings are born. Their action is followed by a reaction from YHWH which imposes a time limit. An audience familiar with such a literary convention about the ‘sons of God’ would have known from the outset of the narrative that these heavenly beings will draw the short straw, even if this is not explicitly mentioned.

5.5.7 Is Genesis 6:1–4 also a Story about Origins?

If the term ‘sons of God’ is used in Gen 6:1–4 as a literary convention, more concretely as a contrasting device, what, then, is the message this short passage intends to convey? Interestingly, in Second Temple literature and early patristic exegesis, there is the (unexpected) notion which links Gen 6:1–4 to the origin of idolatry,¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ E.g. *1 En* 19:1, the spirits of the angels lead people astray, so that they will sacrifice to demons as to their gods, (*OTP* 1:23); *Jub* 10, the spirits of the defeated giants become demons, one tenth of these demons remains active (10:7–8), people make molten and graven images assisted by these cruel spirits (11:4), the same spirits rule the nations and lead them astray so that they will not follow God (15:31), (*OTP* 2:75–87). *L.A.B.* 2:8–9 seems to be a ‘secular’ version of the same motif: “In that time (of Jobal),

both in the angels-interpretation and the Sethites-interpretation. Did perhaps somehow a trace of the original meaning of the text survive?¹⁷⁸ If Gen 6:1–4 intends to relate the origin of idolatry, this would fit seamlessly within the context of Gen 1–11, which is a ‘book of origins’: of the world (Gen 1), of marriage (Gen 2:24), of pain in childbirth, fruitlessness of work and mortality (Gen 3:16–19) of clothes (Gen 3:21), of the worship of YHWH (Gen 4:26), of languages (Gen 11:7–9) and of Israel (Gen 11:27–12:3). In what follows, indications are presented which support this suggestion.¹⁷⁹

a) In the context of Gen 1–11, different narratives are found about the transgressing of thresholds followed by a *verbatim* reaction of YHWH. All these human actions effect a new state of affairs. Genesis 6:1–4 possibly shares this motif should it intend to relate the introduction of idolatry. The crossing of forbidden boundaries is a theme in Gen 3 (the tree of knowledge), Gen 4 (murder) and Gen 11 (heaven-challenging human power). In all these instances a *verbatim* reaction of YHWH is mentioned, either in the form of a monologue (Gen 3:22; 11:6–7) or a dialogue (Gen 4:9–15), in order to deflect the effects of the course humans have set for themselves. A similar *verbatim* reaction of YHWH is found in Gen 6:3. This may be an indication that Gen 6:1–4 also addresses a situation in which boundaries are transgressed.

b) Should Gen 6:1–4 allude to the origin of idolatry, then it provides the flood-story with one additional reason for the inevitability of the flood.

when those inhabiting the earth began to do evil deeds (each one with his neighbor’s wife) and they defiled them, God was angry. And he (Jobal) began to play the lyre and the lute and every instrument of sweet song and to corrupt the earth. ... Tubal ... showed men techniques in using lead and tin and iron and bronze and silver and gold. And then those inhabiting the earth began to make statues and to adore them.” (*OTP* 2:305); Justin Martyr, *Apol. sec.* 5.88–89 (PG 6:452): the children of angels and women are demons; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 26 (PG 6:949–951): the souls of the defeated giants are demons who draw men to idolatry; Tertullian, *De idol.* 9 (PL 1:747): fallen angels teach humans astrology, the spirits of the fallen angels use all the assets of the world against God; Commodian, *Instr. adv. gent. deos*, I,3 (PL 5:203–204): fallen angels are adored as gods; Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* V,4 (PG 21:324): demons are the spirits of the defeated giants and were deified by later generations of men; Cassian, *Coll. VIII, De princ.* 21 (PL 49:758–759): the fallen Sethites learnt idolatry from the Cainites.

¹⁷⁸ According to J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2005), 208, it is remarkable that idolatry is not mentioned in Gen 1–11.

¹⁷⁹ This suggestion was also made by De Bruijne, “Er wordt verteld; er is geschied,” 192–193, leaving open the possibility that the aim of Gen 6:1–4 was to describe the origin of idolatry.

c) Genesis 4:26 mentions that from the time of Enosh onwards, man began to call upon the name of YHWH, thus describing the origin of true worship.¹⁸⁰ A description of the origin of idolatry as a ‘counter-cult’ in Gen 6:1–4, dressed in the conventional language about the ‘sons of God’, may well fit this context.

Cult, for that matter, plays an important part in Genesis. Cain and Abel bring offerings to YHWH (Gen 4:3–5), and so do Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 12:7–8; 13:4; 22:13) and Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1–5). Moreover, there are indications that Abraham built his altar in Shechem at an existing cult-site¹⁸¹ (Gen 12:6) where in this verse, the ‘great tree of Moreh’ might mean something like the ‘soothsayer’s tree’¹⁸² (אלון מורה).¹⁸³

d) In other places the Old Testament uses metaphors originating from the realm of love, marriage and sexuality to describe the worship of the true God. The worship of idols is referred to as ‘playing the harlot, committing fornication’. This metaphoric language might form the backdrop for the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 by depicting divine beings engaging in sexual relationships with human females.

However, there remains the difficulty that Gen 6:1–4, as has been already noted above,¹⁸⁴ does not focus on how humans transgress borders but more on the behaviour of divine beings. Yet, idolatry is about humans acting errantly. This is less of a contradiction when one understands the image presented by the entire passage. As has been pointed out above, the term ‘sons of God’ is often used as a literary contrasting device with the aim of emphasising the incomparability of YHWH. This means that – as the well-versed reader immediately would have gleaned – the passage primarily intends to relate the actions of derailed divine beings which are deemed *a priori* as being fruitless. Genesis 6:1–4 describes how divine beings begin to interfere in human affairs by engaging in sexual relationships. Viewed from the aspect of humanity, this may signal the beginnings of idolatry, because the ‘daughters of men’ responded to the advances of the ‘sons of

¹⁸⁰ Also Seebass, *comm. Gen* 1996, 196, links Gen 6:1–4 to 4:26, where the beginning of the worship of YHWH is related, “[d]iese unbestimmte Redeweise [in Gen 4:26] erfährt durch 6,1–4 eine Präzisierung, insofern hier deutlich zwischen Gott und den Göttern unterschieden wird, obwohl den Göttern noch keine Verehrer zugewiesen werden.”

¹⁸¹ Cf. HAL II:592–593, “6. מִקְוֶה”.

¹⁸² In Judg 9:37 rendered as אֵלֹן מְעוֹנְנִים, ‘oak of the soothsayers’.

¹⁸³ Cf. Speiser, *comm. Gen* (AB) 1964, 86–87; Westermann, *comm. Gen II* (BKAT) 1981, 178–179; Wenham, *comm. Gen* (WBC) 1987, 279; Ruppert, *comm. Gen* (FB) 2002, 120.

¹⁸⁴ See 5.5.3.

God'. This latter element fits seamlessly within the context of the narrative. Given that Gen 6:1–4 is formulated in this specific way, this primarily shows that this combination of 'divine' and – although not explicitly mentioned – of human transgression of boundaries is doomed to be without success. Genesis 6:1–4, then, formulates this message through the use of effective images which were also used in the surrounding pagan world. Pagan worship was thus ridiculed *via* its own conceptual world.¹⁸⁵

Thus viewed, Gen 6:1–4 is not the sole passage in the Old Testament where not only human transgression is punished but also the 'supernatural' element behind it. Isaiah 24:21–22 refers to such a situation by telling how YHWH not only punishes earthly kings but also heavenly powers behind them: "(21) And it will be on that day that YHWH will punish the hosts of heaven in the heaven and the kings of the earth on the earth. (22) They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be detained in a prison and after many days they will be punished."¹⁸⁶ According to Goldingay, "[t]he reference to the heavenly army suggests an involvement of supernatural forces in the transgression on earth that the chapter has deplored. That parallels Genesis 1–11 with its account of the activity of the supernatural beings who took human women (Gen 6:1–4)".¹⁸⁷ Genesis 6:1–4, then, describes this interference of supernatural forces with humanity in a more physical way, by telling how heavenly beings entered into sexual relationships with women.

5.6 FINAL OBSERVATIONS

In taking up the conclusion from chapter 4 that the expression 'sons of God' in Gen 6:1–4 most likely refers to heavenly beings not otherwise specified, several questions are to be answered. As answers to these questions the following solutions can be provided, some being more certain in their nature, others more tentative.

¹⁸⁵ With this explanation the elements of polemic (see 5.5.2) and irony (see 5.5.4) are acknowledged.

¹⁸⁶ Isaiah 24:22, when combined with Gen 6:1–4, may in fact be the source for the description of the imprisonment of the fallen angels in the Enochic tradition.

¹⁸⁷ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume Two: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58.

1. The use of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 appears to be similar to identical expressions in other Old Testament texts. Evidence from comparison of these passages indicates that the expression functions as a set phrase, always referring to unspecified divine beings.
2. Understanding the ‘sons of God’ as divine beings does not, as a consequence, imply that the Old Testament acknowledges polytheism. The main issue of the Old Testament is not to deny the existence of other gods than YHWH but to state that these gods – whatever they are – are not worthy to be called gods and are insignificant when compared to YHWH. The Old Testament expresses this in various ways: by stressing the incomparability of YHWH or by declaring that these gods are not true gods, but only the product of human hands. Even so, within the Old Testament approach of this theme, there exists a certain diversity because several texts also underscore the worthlessness of idols by refuting their existence. Nonetheless, interpreting the ‘sons of Gods’ as divine beings does not contradict a significant amount of the Old Testament passages about ‘other gods’.
3. Should mythological motifs be present in Gen 6:1–4, then they come closest to the Greek narratives about gods begetting offspring with humans.
4. Based on the speech-act theory, it can be argued that the illocutionary aim of Gen 6:1–4 is not to offhandedly affirm the mythological motifs in the narrative about the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’. The interpreter can therefore consider the story to have other functions.
5. The Old Testament references to the ‘sons of God’ may function as a literary convention, both in narrative texts and in poetry. The hypothesis of the present chapter is that the expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament serves in most of its occurrences as such a literary contrasting device; when the Old Testament refers to these ‘sons of God’, they are commonly depicted in a manner which emphasises YHWH’s sovereignty.
6. More tentatively, it is suggested that the story about the ‘sons of God and the daughters of men’ intends to refer to the origins of idolatry as told in the form of a far-reaching interference of divine beings with humans, given that it is recounted how the boundaries between the heavenly and the earthly realm are transgressed. The observation that the expression ‘sons of God’ often functions as a literary

contrasting device indicates from the outset that the action of these beings is doomed to failure. Genesis 6:3 underlines this in so many words, describing a 'counter-measure' of YHWH which implicates that these divine beings can never pose as veritable rivals to YHWH.

6

The Road Goes On: Epilogue

Interpretive skills can be taught and improved, but only the glad of heart make good interpreters.¹

6. THE ROAD GOES ON: EPILOGUE

6.1 FROM BOULDER TO KEYSTONE TO STUMBLING BLOCK

The story about ‘sons of God’ engaging in sexual relationships with ‘daughters of men’ may seem to be a narrative backwater when compared with the grand tales of the Old Testament. There is, for that matter, every reason to steer clear of this passage, the more so because questions almost never find unambiguous answers here. It has been even said about the passage in question that “there is more disagreement here per square inch than almost anywhere in the Bible”.² Yet, the reader of Second Temple literature will soon discover it difficult to avoid the story of Gen 6:1–4. The ‘sons of God’ and the ‘giants’ lived on in new tales in that they mesmerised later authors. In this way, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 6:1–4 became far more extensive than might have been expected based on the text only. The story about ‘sons of God’ and ‘giants’ became more than just a contingent deposit left at the terminal moraine of textual growth. From boulder it became a keystone in apocalyptic literature, influencing angelology and eschatology.

However, its offensive character also led to efforts to neutralise the story by explaining the ‘sons of God’ within the human realm, thus freeing the narrative of its unwanted ‘super-human’ notions. Yet, the arguments for a ‘human’ understanding of the ‘sons of God’ turned out to be untenable. This leaves exegetes with

¹ Peter J. Leithart, “I Don’t Get It: Humour and Hermeneutics,” *SJT* 60 no. 4 (2007): 425.

² Robert L. Deffinbaugh, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men (Genesis 6:1–8),” online: bible.org/seriespage/sons-god-and-daughters-men-genesis-61-8. Cited 10 April 2012.

an almost perfect test case for how to handle texts which fall beyond the bounds of the exegete's likes or dislikes.

6.2 THE ORIGIN OF IDOLATRY

Comparison of the use of the expression 'sons of God' led to the conclusion that the term within the Old Testament always refers to divine beings not otherwise specified. Interestingly enough, the expression functions usually in a context which treats the incomparability of YHWH, in which the 'sons of God' form the backdrop where YHWH's glory becomes the all the more visible. This repeated occurrence may indicate that the Old Testament references to the 'sons of God' functioned as a contemporary well-known literary device which expressed the incomparability of YHWH and correspondingly the incomparability the worship of YHWH over and above the worship of all other deities. If this observation is anywhere near the mark, it can be assumed that, also in Gen 6:1–4, the incomparability of YHWH and worship which is his due plays an important role.

Given that the beginning of the book of Genesis is a narrative touching upon origins, it may be fruitful to look for a story of origins in Gen 6:1–4 as well. Genesis 1 describes the origins of the world as Israelites knew it.³ The origins of the basic elements in creation have archetypal significance; not only is it said that they are created, but it is also emphasised that they will remain constitutive elements of the created order.⁴ Genesis 2:24 recounts the origin of marriage: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife; they will be one flesh". Genesis 3:16–21 recounts the origin of the higher level of pain in childbirth, the origin of the fruitlessness of work, of mortality and of the introduction of clothes for human beings. Genesis 4:26 mentions the origin of the worship of YHWH, while Gen 11:7–9 relates the story behind the origin of different languages. Following this, Genesis 11:27 moves on to the grand tale pertaining to the origin of Israel.

When one combines the assumption that Gen 6:1–4, too, might be a tale of origins with the hypothesis that the expression 'sons of God' emphasises the

³ Cf. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 58.

⁴ Cf. Jacob J. T. Doedens, "Taal en teken van trouw: Over vorm en functie van Genesis 1," in *Woord op schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel* (ed. C. Trimp; Kampen: Kok, 2002), 84–86.

incomparability of YHWH, this results in the possibility of the story of Gen 6:1–4 alluding to the origin of idolatry. It, then, does so in formulations resembling the mythological beliefs which it hopes to denounce. As related by means of literary conventions and elements known from mythology, the narrative might be intended to reproach idolatry as being an illicit overstepping of boundaries. There may be a link to the metaphor for idolatry expressed as adultery as well. By telling the story in this specific way, the profound effects of idolatry on human existence can be shown as leading to a deviation from the created order. This may also explain the subsequent description of the flood as a reversal of created reality. If this approach withstands scrutiny, it can then be said that the narrative employs an effective language to make its point, given the conceptual world which the intended audience inhabited. However, its very compactness and the use of mythologically ‘enhanced’ elements made this story also susceptible to misinterpretation, all the more when the conceptual world of later readers changed.

Within this approach the other elements of Gen 6:1–4 equally fall into place. Divine beings not otherwise specified engage in sexual relationships with earthly women. The children who were born from these relationships were of an above-average stature. They are the heroes of ancient times. Although it is not said in so many words, these hybrid beings appear to share the human condition of being mortal, therefore, their activity is equally limited to the 120-year maximum lifespan which has been imposed by YHWH in reaction to the unions of divine beings and human women.

Interestingly, the consequences of what happened in Gen 6:1–4 are only delimited by YHWH. This action is comparable to YHWH’s reaction to the raising of the Tower of Babel: the consequences of human actions are kept in check but what is wanting in the attitude of man remains unchanged. Should Gen 6:1–4 in fact wish to recount the beginnings of idolatry, then it can be said that it emphasises what Israelites could perceive in everyday life: idolatry formed a part of everyday reality but, at the same time, was believed by the authors of Israel’s scriptures to be incompatible with the worship of YHWH.

6.3 ONGOING EXEGETICAL CONVERSATION

To formulate a definite answer to all questions issuing from Gen 6:1–4 is virtually impossible. This study offers a partial new solution. Without the aim of having the

last word in the exegetical debate, offered here is the intent to remain in dialogue with older and newer solutions for this intriguing passage. According to Vanhoozer “one tell tale sign of dishonest theology is an incapacity for conversation”.⁵ It is, therefore, hoped that this ongoing discussion will prove to be a sign of what is also valid for exegesis. Such an ongoing conversation between old and new readers may provide new perspectives on the interpretation of much debated texts by paying attention to literary conventions in the Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature. Or, as Vanhoozer formulates it: “In my more optimistic moments, I wonder whether the recovery of the Bible’s literary forms might galvanize a new reformation as did the recovery of the original languages of the Bible.”⁶

6.4 PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Included in an effort to understand Gen 6:1–4, it is also worthwhile to reflect upon one of the general philosophical presuppositions behind newer interpretation. As N. T. Wright analyses, European worldview since Renaissance and Enlightenment has seen the revival of Epicureanism, which has as one of its central theses the remoteness of the gods.⁷ Wright notes that Epicureanism is in fact *one* of the possible philosophies which one can retrieve from Antiquity, but it has been used as if it were the *only viable* option, even if this is not acknowledged in so many words.⁸ Independently of how one judges this decision, it offers no adequate model to understand the Jewish and Christian tradition, albeit perhaps in a negative way, by explaining that one can no longer share the worldview expressed in these texts.⁹ Revived Epicureanism inspired a mode of thinking which separated the ‘natural’ from the ‘supernatural’, effecting a redefining of these terms:¹⁰ the category of the ‘supernatural’, then, became to refer to ‘abnormality’, to things which do not

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (CSCD 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xvii.

⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 48 no. 1 (2005): 108.

⁷ Cf. N. T. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom: Mission and Theology in Early Christianity,” *SJT* 65 no. 4 (2012): 392–393.

⁸ Cf. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom,” 392–393.

⁹ Cf. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom,” 393–394.

¹⁰ Cf. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom,” 394.

happen on a daily basis (or are incapable of happening at all), while the ‘natural’ phenomena came to be seen as belonging to the realm of everyday experience.

However, this use of the distinction between ‘supernatural’ and ‘natural’ accepts both terms as setting the framework for the discussion, which may not be the best approach to biblical narrative, given that this difference is not inherent in it. Seen from Jewish and early Christian perspective, the Epicurean thought that God is not engaged with the world is reproached as being paganism: “He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).¹¹

Viewing the expression ‘sons of God’ to function as a literary convention honours this observation; it acknowledges – by using analytical instruments – that one cannot easily shed predominantly ‘Western’ approaches, given that all interpretation is enclosed within the hermeneutical circle. At the same time, the reference to literary conventions attempts to emulate an approach from within (*emic*),¹² by trying as much as possible to take as its point of departure the conceptual categories which are present in the text. In so doing, it recognises that the purpose of a narrative surpasses the mere supplying of information, while it similarly affirms that the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 *in this specific way* intends to refer to reality, which in the view of the Old Testament is supported in all its aspects by YHWH, its Creator.

6.5 MESSAGE IN CONTEXT

The story-line overarching Gen 1–11 exhibits two basic problems: the first being the alienation from God, as seen in Gen 3 (and 4), and the second being, by consequence, the fracturing of the human community, as related in Gen 11:1–9.¹³ For the latter problem, mankind’s solution consists of building a city and a tower, to

¹¹ Cf. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom,” 395. In rabbinical practice heretics are called *apikorsim*, a word derived from ἑπικουρεῖοι, Epicureans, cf. “Apikoros,” *EJ* 2:255–256.

¹² The terms *emic* and *etic* were originally developed in anthropology to indicate the difference between an (‘insider’) approach which describes a culture by accepting the conceptual categories adhered to by its members (*emic*) and an (‘outsider’) approach which uses concepts and hypotheses which are formulated by scholars studying a given culture (*etic*). For more information, see Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds., *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Frontiers of Anthropology 7; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990).

¹³ See N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 118.133.

prevent themselves from being scattered over the earth. This human solution, however, is met by measures unleashed by God and as a result the situation only deteriorates, in that they are not only dispersed by God but also separated into different language groups. To the first problem, that of being alienated from God, there is a solution which presents itself, which is to be found in the form of a physical connection to beings from the divine realm. This option is also met by a reaction from God which aggravates the situation in such a way that man's lifespan is reduced and, in the end, civilisation is devastated by the flood. While Gen 6:1–2.4 and 11:4 show how human solutions¹⁴ for alienation and fracturing only exacerbate the situation, this twofold problem is addressed by God in a positive way in his promise to Abram,¹⁵ Gen 12:2–3: God will bless him and his offspring, thus ending alienation, and through them “all the families of the earth” will be blessed, thus ending the fracturing of the human community.¹⁶

In this light, the message of the episode about the ‘sons of God’, the ‘daughters of men’ and their offspring becomes more clear. The mixing of heavenly beings with humanity appears to be an expression of what all types of idolatry offer: a connection with the divine and therewith the promise of power; the mighty children of this strange ‘marriage of heaven and earth’ – as it were a parody of which the glorious version depicted in Revelation 21–22 is the reality – can build a name for themselves, nothing apparently will stop them, they will be the rulers of the earth, humans (or at least some of them) will become superior beings, perhaps even immortality is an inviting perspective. This is the eternal myth about humanity building empires – with the help of the gods, or whatever they may be called in different epochs. But this Promethean dream excludes the true God and creator of the universe. It consists of worshipping things which are themselves perishable and therefore leads into a *cul-de-sac*. One of the Old Testament ‘rules’ is that the worshipper becomes similar to what or whom he or she worships (cf. Ps 135:18). Worshipping YHWH means becoming more human in reflecting the image of God, while idolatry results in dehumanisation. That is why YHWH draws the line, it being perhaps also a form of grace in disguise; humans still remain to be of ‘flesh’, they are mortals, and their lifespan is limited to 120 years.

¹⁴ It is perhaps not by chance that both in Gen 6:4 and 11:4 the human ‘name’ in the sense of ‘renown’ is mentioned.

¹⁵ Cf. Wright, *Justification*, 133. Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 14:6, where the thought is developed that Abraham himself (and not YHWH's covenant with Abraham) will redeem the sins of Adam.

¹⁶ Note that in Gen 12:2 again ‘name’ (renown) is mentioned, but there given by God to Abram.

When one reads further in the Old and New Testament, it appears that the longing for a 'marriage of heaven and earth', which results in an incorruptible creation, is not so much the problem as much as the *way in which* this can be reached, that is to say, not by human might or imagination.¹⁷ Perhaps one of the most impressive ways in which this is envisaged is the Apostle's hymn in Colossians 1:15–20 about the resurrection of Christ,

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.
For by him all things were created:
things in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
all things were created by him and for him.
He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
And he is the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,
so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (NIV)

¹⁷ Interestingly, 1 Peter 3:18–22 links the story of the fallen and imprisoned angels to the ascension of Christ.

APPENDIX

‘DIVINE COUNCIL’ AND ‘SONS OF GOD’ AT QUMRAN

Introduction

Several texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to a ‘divine council’ and to ‘sons of God’. However, the meaning of both expressions may differ from what is found in the Old Testament. In most cases the terms are ambivalent, therefore, it is difficult to determine an exact meaning.

‘Divine Council’

In the War Scroll 1QM col. I:10, the ‘assembly of the gods’¹⁸ is mentioned in contrast to the ‘congregation of men’. Because the following line recounts something similar, formulated as the battle between the ‘sons of light’ and the ‘lot of darkness’, it can be assumed that both lines are of a parallel construction. This may imply that the expression ‘assembly of the gods’ refers to all those who fight at God’s side, including heavenly and earthly beings.¹⁹ Similarly, the ‘dark side’ in this battle is represented by superhuman (‘Belial and his angels’) and human forces (‘the men of his lot’).²⁰

1QM 1QWar Scroll

Col. I (10) On this (day), the assembly of the gods (עֲדַת אֱלֹהִים) and the congregation of men shall confront each other for great destruction. (11) The sons of light and the

¹⁸ All English translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls in this Appendix are from *DSSSE*.

¹⁹ “There are numerous passages in the scroll where it is unclear whether, on close inspection, the text refers to angels, to men, or to both (e.g. 1QM 1:1–11; 12:1–8; 15:14; 17:6–8; 18:2).” Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 42; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 398.

²⁰ See 1QM col. I:15; col. XIII:4. Cf. also Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (JSPSup 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 299.

lot of darkness shall battle together for God's might, between the roar of a huge multitude and the shout of gods (אֱלֹהִים) and of men, on the day of the calamity.²¹

Several expressions occur in the *Hodayot*²² whose wording resembles that of the 'divine council' in the Old Testament: 'the congregation of the sons of heaven', 'the assembly of God' and 'the gods in the congregation of the community'. From the content of these passages, it appears, however, that these formulations most likely refer to the ones who belong to the congregation of the faithful and who, as such, enter into communion with the heavenly congregation.²³ The terminology is perhaps intentionally ambivalent, in a way that it might refer both to a heavenly and an earthly assembly.

1QH^a 1QHodayot^a

Col. XI (21) The depraved spirit you have purified from great offence so that he can take a place with (22) the host of the holy ones, and can enter in communion with the congregation of the sons of heaven (וּלְבֹא בִיהָרָם עִם עֲדַת בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם).²⁴

The terms 'holy ones' and 'sons of heaven' are – in any case in the Enochic fragments from Qumran – used for angels²⁵ but it is possible that here in *Hodayot* all faithful people are included – or, in the least, the members of the Qumran community.

²¹ DSSSE, 114–115.

²² For an introduction to the content and theology of the *Hodayot* scrolls, see Menahem Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Leiden: Brill, 1961).

²³ Cf. Esther G. Ghazou, "Liturgical Communion with the Angels at Qumran," in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo, 1998: Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet* (ed. Daniel K. Falk, F. García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller; STDJ 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 95–105; idem, "Liturgical Function in the Cave 1 Hodayot Collection," in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Sixth Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies in Ljubljana* (ed. Daniel K. Falk, Sarianna Metso, Donald W. Parry, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar; STDJ 91; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 137–138. Cf. also Carol Ann Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 182; Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 104–105.

²⁴ DSSSE, 164–165.

²⁵ For the expression 'קְדוּשִׁין / קְדוּשִׁים' in fragments from the Enochic tradition, see e.g. 4Q201 col. I:3; 4Q204 frag. 5 col. II: 26; 4Q206 frag. 2 col. II:5. For other references to 'holy ones', see e.g. 4Q400 frag. 1 col. I:2; 4Q401 frag. 14 col. I:7; 4Q491c frag. 1:2. Cf. also Dan 4:10.14.20. For 'בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם / בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם' in documents referring to the Enochic tradition, see e.g. 1QapGen ar col. VII:11; 4Q181 frag. 1 col. II:2 (partly reconstructed: [בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם]). For other references to the 'sons of heaven', see e.g. 1QS col IV:22; col. XI:8; 4Q418 frag. 69II:12–13 (partly reconstructed: [בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם]); 4Q427 frag. 7 col. II:18.

4Q427 4QHodayot^a

Frag. 7 col. I + 9 (8) [... who is like me] among the gods (בְּאֱלֹהִים) (9) [... who can measure what issues from my lips, who] will summon me with the tongue (10) [... I am friend of the kin]g, companion of the holy ones, and not shall come (11) [to me ... and] can not be compared [to] my [glo]ry, f[or] I, with the gods (אֱלֹהִים) is [my] position (12) [and my glory is with the sons of the kin]g. I will not crown myself [with pure gold], and gold <from Ophir> they will not (13) [place on me ...] will not be considered for me. Sing, favoured ones, sing to the king of (14) [glory, rejoice in the assem]bly of God (אֱלֹהִים), exult in the tent of salvation, praise in the [holy] residence, (15) [e]xalt together with the eternal host, ascribe greatness to our God and glory to our King.²⁶

The reconstructed expression ‘the assembly of God’ may also in this text refer to an earthly liturgy where the Qumranites viewed themselves as entering into communion with a heavenly liturgy. A similar description is found in col. II:

4Q427 4QHodayot^a

Frag. 7 col. II (7) ... Great is the God [who works wonders,] (8) for he brings down the arrogant spirit without even a remnant; and he raises the poor from the dust to [...] (9) and up to the clouds he extols him in stature and together with the gods in the congregation of the community (וְעַם אֱלֹהִים בְּעֶדְתָּ יְהוָה) ... (16) ... And what ... [...] (17) to recount these things from period to period, and to stand in position [...] (18) the sons of the heavens (בְּנֵי שָׁמַיִם)?²⁸

The word ‘gods’ may refer here to angels, as appears also to be the case in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.²⁹ However, this identification has also been disputed. In

²⁶ DSSSE, 896–897.

²⁷ See also 4Q431 frag.1:8–9.

²⁸ DSSSE, 896–897.

²⁹ According to Charlesworth and Newsom, apart from אֱלֹהִים also the word אֱלֹהִיִּים is used to refer to angels in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, although the latter term is sometimes ambiguous, either referring to God or to angels. They consider the term to be unequivocal in phrases like כּוֹל אֱלֹהִיִּים and מוֹלֵךְ אֱלֹהִיִּים. Cf. James H. Charlesworth and Carol A. Newsom, eds., *Angelic Liturgy: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. Vol. 4B of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1999), 6–7. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* focus on angelic liturgy in the heavenly temple. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* depict a heavenly liturgy in which angels function as priests, cf. Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry* (STDJ 12; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 282–296; Philip S. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 13–46. Communion with angels was apparently an important idea for the Qumranites, as it appears from the *Damascus Document*, the *Community Rule*, the *Hodayot*, the *War Scroll* and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, cf. John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels* (WUNT 287; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2010), 115; cf. also Angela Kim Harkins, “A New Proposal for Thinking about 1QH^A Sixty Years After Its Discovery,” in *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited: Texts from Cave 1 Sixty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Sixth Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies in Ljubljana* (ed. Daniel K. Falk, Sarianna Metso, Donald W. Parry,

the Qumran literature, an extremely high number of occurrences can be found in which ‘gods’ (אלים / אהוילים) are mentioned. Apart from some ambivalent cases, most of them can be identified as being most likely in the plural. This plural reference to ‘gods’ occurs partly in a superlative form, when it is said about God, in an almost classical manner, that he is ‘the God of gods’.³⁰ In several other cases, the term refers to gods other than YHWH.³¹ In a significant number of occurrences it is difficult to decide to exactly what the term is referring.³² Heiser has argued that this plural ‘gods’ refers to members of the heavenly host, God’s retinue in the divine council.³³ Yet, this does not exclude the possibility that the Qumran community viewed this ‘divine council’ as an assembly of angels. Perhaps the most that can be said is that the angelology of the Qumran documents is much more diverse than simply stating that apart from YHWH only angels exist as heavenly beings. But this complexity is already present in the Old Testament where, apart from the מלאכים, several other terms for heavenly beings are found: כרבים (e.g. Ezek 10), שרפים (Isa 6:1–7), עירין, קדישין (Dan 4:10.14.20), שרים (e.g. Dan 10:13). The Qumran documents also use the word ‘spirits’ (רוחות) to refer to superhuman beings.³⁴ The

and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar; STDJ 91; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 112.

³⁰ E.g. אלים אל in 1QM col. XIV:16; col. XVIII:6; 4Q491 frags. 8–10 col. I:13. Reconstructed in 4Q405 frags. 8–9:4; 11Q17 col. II:6.

³¹ E.g. 4Q368 frag. 2:7; 4Q387a fragm. 3 col. III:6; 4Q511 frag. 8:12; frag. 16:4; 4Q542 frag. 1 col. I:1; reconstructed in 1Q35 frag. 1 col. I:2; 4Q158 frags. 7–8:6; 4Q165 frag. 5:1.

³² E.g. 1QM xol. XV 14 ‘heroes of the gods’ (אלים בוריי [ג]); col. XVII:7 (אלים); Masik col. I:11 ‘eternal divinities’ (אלי עולמים); col. II:10 (אלוהים); 4Q400 frag. 1 col. II:7; frag. 2:5 ‘king of the gods’ (מלך אלוהים); 4Q401 frags. 1–2:5 ‘king of the gods’ (מלך אליהם); frag. 14 col. I:5 ‘divine divinities’ (אלי); frag. 14 col. I:8 ‘in all the camps of the gods’ (בכול מחני אלוהים); 4Q402 frag. 3 col. II:12 ‘king of the gods’ (מלך אלוהים); frag. 4:7 ‘the war of the gods’ (מלחמת אלוהים); frag. 4:10 ‘the gods run’ (אלוהים ירוצו); 4Q403 frag. 1 col. I:21 (אלים); frag. 1 col. I:38 ‘all the divinities of knowledge’ (כול אילי דעת); frag. 1 col. I:40 ‘with the joy of the gods’ (בשמחת אלוהים); frag. I col. I:43 ‘divine spirits’ (רוחי אלוהים); frag. 1 col. I:44 ‘the living gods’ (אלוהים חיים); frag. 1 col. II:16 ‘the chiefs of the construction of the gods’ (ראשי תבנית אלוהים); frag. 1 col. II:35 ‘among all the divinities of light’ (בכול אלי אור); 4Q405 frag. 3 col. II:11 ‘in the name of the powers of the divinities’ (בשם גבורות אלים); frag. 14–15 col. I:6 ‘figures of living gods’ (ברני אלוהים חיים); frag. 20 col. II:7 ‘the murmuring sound of gods’ (קול רממת אלוהים); 11Q17 col. VIII:6 ‘the sound of the lifting of the gods’ (מקול משא אלוהים).

³³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2004), no pages, chapter 7. Cited 27 March 2012. Online: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis.

³⁴ E.g. 1QM col. X:12; 1QH^a col. V:14 ‘the host of your spirits’ (צבא רוחיך); col. IX:10 ‘powerful spirits’ (רוחות עוז); col. IX:11 ‘eternal spirits’ (רוחות עולם); 4Q185 frag. 1–2 col. I:9; 4Q216 col. V:6; 4Q286 frag. 3:5 ‘spirits of the dominions’ (רוחי ממשלות); 4Q287 frag. 2:4 ‘spirits of the cloud(s)’ (רוחי ענן); 4Q502 frag. 27:1 ‘eternal spirits’ (רוחי עולמים), cf. Hebr 1:14 (λείτουργικὰ πνεύματα); 12:9 (τῶ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων).

reference to angels – or at least to heavenly beings – may also be the referent in 4Q286 frag. 7 col. I:6, where the ‘council of the pure divine beings’ (ס[ו]ר אלי טוהר) appears to be mentioned. A similar heavenly liturgy is described in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.

4Q400 *4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*^a

Frag. 1 col. I (=4Q401 15) (1) ... Praise (2) [the God of ...,] you, gods of all the most holy ones (אלוהי כול קדושי קדושים); ... (4) ... In the assembly of all the divinities (5) [of knowledge ([דעת] אלי לכול בעדה), and in the council of al the spirits] of God (ובסודי כול רוחות אלוהים), he has engraved his ordinances for all spiritual creatures.³⁵

The ‘council of the gods’ occurs further in 4Q491c and in 4Q511, although the exact referent remains unclear. However, it appears that, also here, the expression refers to the assembly of angels.

4Q491c *4QSelf-Glorification Hymn*^b

Frag. 1 (1) [...] has done awesome things marvellously [...] (2) [...] in the streng]th of his power the just exult, and the holy ones rejoice in [...] in justice (3) [...] he established [I]srael from eternity; his truth and the mysteries of his wisdom in al[generations [...] might (4) [...] ... [...] ... and the council of the poor for an eternal congregation. [...] the perfect ones of (5) [...] et]ernal; a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods (בעדת אלים) above which non of the kings of the East shall sit, and their nobles no[t ...] silence (?) (6) [...] my glory is in{comparable} and besides me no-one is exalted, nor comes to me, for I reside in [...], in the heavens, and there is no (7) [...] ... I am counted among the gods (יבום עני עם אלים) and my dwelling is in the holy congregation; [my] des[ire] is not according to the flesh, [but] all that is precious to me is in (the) glory (of) (8) [...] the holy [dwell]ling.³⁶

4Q511 *4QSongs of the Sage*^b

Frag. 10 (11) ... He judges in the council of gods and men (בסוד אילים ואנשים).³⁷

‘Sons of God’

Among the documents from Qumran only a few texts mention the ‘sons of God’ (בני אל / בני אלים). In these cases, the exact referent cannot be established. It has to be noted, though, that all the texts which evidently refer directly or indirectly to the expanded narrative of Gen 6:1–4 in the Enochic tradition, the expression ‘sons

³⁵ DSSSE, 806–809.

³⁶ DSSSE, 980–981.

³⁷ DSSSE, 1030–1031.

of God' has been replaced by 'sons of heaven' (בני שמים),³⁸ 'holy ones' (קדושים),³⁹ 'angels' (מלאכים),⁴⁰ or 'watchers' (עיריין).⁴¹ In the following fragments the expression 'sons of the gods' or 'sons of God' occurs:

1QH^a 1QHodayot^a

Col. XXIII bottom (3) [...] and in your land and among the sons of gods (ובבני אלים) and among the son[s of ...].⁴²

Col. XXIV bottom (10) [...] you have worked more than the sons of (11) God (בני אל) [...] the unjust works of the nations.⁴³

In the fragment of 5Q13 Noah is also mentioned, which might be an indication that the term 'sons of the gods' has to be understood as referring to the same group as is mentioned in Gen 6:1–4, yet the fragmented character of the document makes a solid assessment of the text extremely difficult.⁴⁴

5Q13 5QRule

Frag. 1 (2) [...] the God of everything [...] (3) [...] ... and founded up[on ...] (4) [...] store-rooms [...] (5) [...] them [al]one, like he ma[de ...] (6) [...] you chose from the sons of g[od]s (בחרתה מבני א[ל]ים) and [...] (7) [...] but to Noah you were favourable⁴⁵

Apart from these texts which mention the 'sons of the gods' or 'sons of God', there is also a quotation from Ps 89:7 in which the expression בבני האלים occurs:

4Q381 4QNon-Canonical Psalms B

Frag. 15 Ps. 89:7 [Who in the heavens compares with you] my God? And who among the sons of gods (בבני האלים)? And in the whole (7) [company of the holy ones?]⁴⁶

³⁸ Cf. 1QapGen ar col. VII:11; 4Q181 frag. 1 col. II:2. This usage can perhaps be compared with the description of the 'kingdom of God / of heaven' in the Gospels, cf. e.g. Matt 3:2, ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν // Mark 1:15, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

³⁹ Cf. 1QapGen ar col. VII:20; 4Q201 col. I:3.

⁴⁰ Cf. 4Q180 frag. 1:7.

⁴¹ Cf. 4Q202 col. IV:6; 4Q203 frag. 7 col. I:6; CD-A col. II:18; 4Q266 frag. 2 col. II:18.

⁴² DSSSE, 198–199.

⁴³ DSSSE, 200–201.

⁴⁴ It has been suggested that 5Q13 describes a ceremony for an annual renewal of the covenant in the Qumran sect, cf. Alison Schofield, *From Qumran to the Yahad: A New Paradigm of Textual Development for The Community Rule* (STDJ 77; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 176–177. Jutta Jokarinta, in *ThWQ* 1:464, lists בני אלים and בני אל among the "divine beings".

⁴⁵ DSSSE, 1134–1135.

⁴⁶ DSSSE, 756–757.

Conclusions

With regard to the 'divine council', the Qumran documents most likely use this term in all its variants in order to refer to an assembly of heavenly beings. However, the documents give the impression that human beings can also enter in communion with this community.

Apart from the quotation from Ps 89:7, the expression 'sons of the gods' or 'sons of God' appears to be used only three times in a context in which it is difficult to ascertain its exact meaning. Texts which refer to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 within the Enochic tradition clearly understand the 'sons of God' as angels. Yet, in these cases, a wording different from that of Gen 6:1–4 is used.

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and function of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4. In the course of the history of exegesis, four main solutions have been proposed to resolve the nature of the ‘sons of God’ in question: the ‘angels-interpretation’, the ‘mighty ones-interpretation’, the ‘Sethites-interpretation’ and the ‘divine beings-interpretation’.

In following the **Introduction** in which the research-question is formulated, **Chapter 2** provides a linguistic analysis of Gen 6:1–4. Based on this research, it is suggested that an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as beings belonging to the heavenly realm may be more plausible than viewing them as human beings, be it ‘judges’ or ‘Sethites’.

The expression ‘daughters of men’ most likely refers to women in general and not solely to Cainite women, as is proposed by the so-called ‘Sethites-interpretation’.

The reference in YHWH’s reaction to a limited time of 120 years has to be viewed as pertaining to a limit on human lifespan and not to a period of respite before the flood, in which conversion was still possible. In his reaction, YHWH emphasises that his life-giving spirit will not remain in man without end. Despite its apparently high aspirations, mankind remains erring and mortal.

The word *nephilim* most probably refers to beings of a tall physical stature; the term appears to be used to describe the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’. The use of this very term might have had a frightening effect for contemporary readers. Perhaps with the purpose of clarifying their nature, Gen 6:4 describes them also as being *gibborim*, the famous heroes of long ago. Both words, *nephilim* and *gibborim*, can be understood as referring to the same category of persons, these being the offspring of the sexual relationships mentioned in Gen 6:1–4.

Genesis 6:1–4, in its present context, forms the literary bridge between the genealogy of Gen 5 and the subsequent story of the flood, depicting the degeneration of humanity in a few words.

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the history of exegesis, concentrating on the early exegesis of Gen 6:1–4.

The *angels-interpretation* appears to be the earliest known explanation of the expression ‘sons of God’ as it occurs in Gen 6:1–4. This mode of interpretation is demonstrably dominant in especially Jewish exegesis from the second century B.C.E. on, until the second century C.E., as far as it can be discerned in the extant documents. It is probable that the Enochic-tradition provided the basic elements for this exegesis. New Testament texts alluding to the narrative of Gen 6:1–4 do so *via* the Enoch-tradition; they, therefore, understood this passage as relating to (fallen) angels. However, the New Testament refrains from giving details which are found in the Enochic tradition. Research based on the writings of the church fathers shows that the angels-interpretation was also commonly accepted in patristic exegesis until the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century. The Enochic tradition considerably influenced the conceptualisation and the wording of the angels-interpretation in patristic exegesis. This can be demonstrated when an explanation introduces details not present in Gen 6:1–4, details which can only have been gleaned from the Enochic tradition. Also the variant readings in the Septuagint version of Gen 6:1–4 may have strengthened the angels-interpretation, because some of its manuscripts read ‘angels of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 instead of ‘sons of God’. Several authors connect Gen 6:1–4 via the Enochic tradition with the origin of idolatry and the activity of evil spirits. Some authors who were advocates of the angels-interpretation adopted an allegorical explanation of Gen 6:1–4, thus avoiding any theological problem arising from this mode of interpretation.

In Jewish exegesis from the Second Temple period and thereafter, the *mighty ones-interpretation* made its appearance. Yet, this new direction in interpretation was not undisputed. The fact that this mighty ones-interpretation did not go unchallenged can also be inferred from the persistent traces of the angels-interpretation in the Targumim and from its later reappearance in Jewish writings. The mighty ones-interpretation was known at least to some of the Christian exegetes, yet they incorporated the translation ‘sons of the judges’ or ‘sons of the rulers’ into their own interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ as Sethites.

The earliest appearance of the *Sethites-interpretation* can be dated to the first half of the third century in the works of Julius Africanus, who mentions the possibility of a Sethites-interpretation together with the until then traditional angels-interpretation. The Sethites-interpretation became ever-increasingly accepted from the beginning of the fourth century, while at the same time the angels-interpretation gradually became to be viewed as heretical. Throughout the fourth

century, the angels-interpretation and the Sethites-interpretation appear to have co-existed. The definite change of the interpretive direction does not seem to have been influenced directly by a changed view of pseudepigraphic works, because Origen explicitly mentions the book of Enoch as being refuted by the church as a canonical document, but nevertheless favoured the angels-interpretation. Nonetheless, the fact that the Enochic tradition fell into oblivion may indirectly have facilitated the spreading of the Sethites-interpretation. The Sethites-interpretation possibly has its provenance in the Syriac tradition. It appears less probable that the Sethites-interpretation has its origin in gnostic thinking about Sethites and Cainites, as has been proposed by a few exegetes. The spiritual background of the Sethites-interpretation appears to be a changing perception of sexuality as compared to that of the Old Testament. This changed perception emphasised chastity and virginity. It has to be noted that the Sethites-interpretation explains Gen 6:1–4 from a male perspective in which the ‘sons of God’ are mainly victims. The key text for the Sethites-interpretation became the interpretation of Gen 4:26, which was understood in a way that Enosh ‘hoped to be called with the name of Lord God.’ If Enosh could hope to receive the designation ‘of God’, his offspring, consequently, were able to be called ‘sons of God’.

There exists an interesting difference between East and West pertaining to the motivation behind a Sethites-interpretation. In Oriental Christianity, Sethites were viewed as the ones who lived in accordance to the ideal of living in chastity, hence they were called ‘sons of God’. Occidental Christianity provided a more physical explanation: angels gradually came to be seen as having no corporeal substance. Exegetes reasoned that the non-corporeality of angels made sexual intercourse between angels and humans impossible, therefore, the angels-interpretation is rejected in favour of the Sethites-interpretation. Interestingly enough, traces of the earlier Enochic tradition remained present in the Sethites-interpretation.

While the exegetes of the Reformation maintained the Sethites-interpretation, the nineteenth century witnesses a revival of the angels-interpretation which is followed by the *divine beings-interpretation* taking its beginnings at the onset of the twentieth century.

As turns out from the history of exegesis, part of the diverse explanations of Gen 6:1–4 can be related to the historical context of each of the particular interpreters. Research on the history of exegesis also shows that the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this short passage is more comprehensive and more varied than is expected at first sight.

Chapter 4 provides an evaluation of arguments in defence of a given exegetical solution. This research leads to the observation that no proper evaluation of arguments has ever been formulated. Arguments are mentioned and discussed in exegetical literature, but nowhere is a classification of their *nature* to be found. The new aspect of the present study is that it attempts to weigh the value of arguments based on an analysis of their nature. Therefore, a hierarchy of arguments is applied in the following order: lexical, contextual, extrabiblical, conceptual, developmental and theological arguments.

The *angels-interpretation* has the advantage of being the earliest known interpretation. This interpretation is consistent with the observation that, within the Old Testament, the concept of the expression ‘sons of God’ refers to beings beyond the human realm. However, it seems that during the earlier Old Testament period the ‘sons of God’ were probably not yet perceived as ‘angels’, as in later, especially post-exilic Jewish literature. If necessary, in most of the texts which mention the ‘sons of God’, the expression can be understood as referring to angels but not in all of them. The angels-interpretation is, therefore, not so much to be seen as opposed to the divine beings-interpretation but as its evolution.

The solution which sees the ‘sons of God’ as *mighty men* is ruled out by the lexical argument that the word בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים as an indication for ‘judges’ or ‘kings’ cannot be warranted. Furthermore, the extrabiblical arguments that kings were sometimes considered to be divine does not provide sufficient evidence. Kings, as a group, were never collectively called ‘sons of the gods’ or ‘sons of God’. Moreover, the concept of ‘divine kingship’ was not a general concept for monarchy. With regard to contextual arguments, it has to be noted, that an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as mighty persons would yield an adequate explanation for Gen 6:1–4 only; the same explanation is not possible for any of the other passages about the ‘sons of God’.

The *Sethites-interpretation* is an unlikely candidate because of lexical and contextual counter-arguments. The Sethites-interpretation is more a theological construct, substantiated by the patristic exegesis of Gen 4:26. The close context of Gen 6:1–4 provides no clue of Sethites being called ‘sons of God’. The further claim that the Old Testament knows of a concept pertaining to pious people who are called his ‘sons’ by God is in direct contradiction to the Old Testament never applying the specific expression ‘sons of God’ to this group. Moreover, when people are called sons of YHWH, this is not so much an indication of their piety but of their ‘juridical’ status. They have been ‘adopted’ as children by YHWH, therefore, they are reminded to live in accordance with this status. It should also be noted that the

explanation ‘Sethites’ only fits in Gen 6:1–4 but in none of the other passages which mention the ‘sons of God’.

Cumulative evidence supports the approach which views the expression ‘sons of God’ as referring to *divine beings* not otherwise specified. The lexical argument that the word בְּנֵי functions as a category-marker results in the interpretation of the term as one referring to those who belong to the category of the divine. It can be added that, in extrabiblical literature, the expression ‘sons of the gods’ is a set phrase for deities. The conceptual evidence establishes that an understanding of the ‘sons of God’ as ‘divine beings’ fits all the other biblical passages in which the expression occurs. The remaining problems are mainly of a theological nature: even if a reference to ‘sons of God’ as divine beings is found in the Old Testament, how is this to fit into the presumed monotheistic mainstream of the Old Testament theology? Moreover, nowhere in the Old Testament is found a similar account in which divine beings have sexual relationships with human females. Such a narrative is even rare in the mythology of the ancient Near East. The only more-or-less contemporary literary body in which the narrative would fit is Greek mythology.

Apart from the result that the expression ‘sons of God’ most probably has to be interpreted as referring to ‘divine beings’, another result issuing from research of Chapter 4 is that the ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament are probably not off-handedly considered to be members of the so called ‘divine council’. The Old Testament uses the concept of a divine council but this turns out to be different from the extrabiblical concept. When referring to the council of YHWH, no other deities are mentioned as possible members of this council. When the Old Testament refers to the council of YHWH and to ‘sons of God’, there is always a significant difference between YHWH and other divine beings, moreover, YHWH’s uniqueness is always respected.

If the expression ‘sons of God’ also in Gen 6:1–4 refers to divine beings, it will be necessary to focus on the question of what might its function be within this passage. After all, it can be said to be unique for the Old Testament to have ‘heavenly beings’ engaging in sexual relationships with earthly women.

Chapter 5 intends to shed light on the possible functions of the expression ‘sons of God’ and of Gen 6:1–4 within its context. In taking up the conclusion from chapter 4 that the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 most likely refers to heavenly beings not otherwise specified, several questions are to be answered. As answers to these questions the following solutions can be provided, some being more certain in their nature, others more tentative.

The use of the expression ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4 appears to be similar to identical expressions in other Old Testament texts. Evidence from comparison of these passages indicates that the expression functions as a set phrase, always referring to unspecified divine beings.

Understanding the ‘sons of God’ as divine beings does not, as a consequence, imply that the Old Testament acknowledges polytheism. The main issue of the Old Testament is not to deny the existence of other gods than YHWH but to state that these gods – whatever they are – are not worthy to be called gods and are insignificant when compared to YHWH. The Old Testament expresses this in various ways: by stressing the incomparability of YHWH or by declaring that these gods are not true gods, but only the product of human hands. Even so, within the Old Testament approach of this theme, there exists a certain diversity, given that several texts underscore the worthlessness of idols by refuting their existence. Nonetheless, interpreting the ‘sons of Gods’ as divine beings does not contradict a significant amount of the Old Testament passages about ‘other gods’.

Should allusions to mythological motifs be present in Gen 6:1–4, then they come closest to the Greek narratives about gods begetting offspring with humans.

Based on the speech-act theory, it can be argued that the illocutionary aim of Gen 6:1–4 is not to offhandedly affirm the mythological motifs in the narrative about the offspring of the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’. The interpreter can therefore consider the story to have other functions.

The Old Testament references to the ‘sons of God’ may function as a literary convention, both in narrative texts and in poetry. The hypothesis of the present chapter is that the expression ‘sons of God’ in the Old Testament serves in most of its occurrences as such a literary contrasting device; when the Old Testament refers to these ‘sons of God’, they are commonly depicted in a manner which emphasises YHWH’s sovereignty.

More tentatively, it is suggested that the story about the ‘sons of God and the daughters of men’ intends to refer to the origins of idolatry as told in the form of a far-reaching interference of divine beings with humans, given that it is recounted how the boundaries between the heavenly and the earthly realm are transgressed. The observation that the expression ‘sons of God’ often functions as a literary contrasting device indicates from the outset that the action of these beings is doomed to failure. Genesis 6:3 underlines this in so many words, describing a ‘counter-measure’ of YHWH which implicates that these divine beings can never pose as veritable rivals to YHWH.

The study closes with an **Epilogue** in which it is observed that the story-line overarching Gen 1–11 exhibits two basic problems: the first being the alienation from God, as seen in Gen 3 (and 4), and the second being, by consequence, the fracturing of the human community, as related in Gen 11:1–9. For the latter problem, mankind's solution consists of building a city and a tower, to prevent themselves from being scattered over the earth. This human solution, however, is met by measures unleashed by God and as a result the situation only deteriorates, in that they are not only dispersed by God but also separated into different language groups. To the first problem, that of being alienated from God, there is a solution which presents itself, which is to be found in the form of a physical connection to beings from the divine realm. This option is also met by a reaction from God which aggravates the situation in such a way that man's lifespan is reduced and, in the end, civilisation is devastated by the flood. While Gen 6:1–2.4 and 11:4 show how human solutions for alienation and fracturing only exacerbate the situation, this twofold problem is addressed by God in a positive way in his promise to Abram, Gen 12:2–3: God will bless him and his offspring, thus ending alienation, and through them "all the families of the earth" will be blessed, thus ending the fracturing of the human community.

In this light, the message of the episode about the 'sons of God', the 'daughters of men' and their offspring becomes more clear. The mixing of heavenly beings with humanity appears to be an expression of what all types of idolatry offer: a connection with the divine and therewith the promise of power; the mighty children of this strange marriage of heaven and earth can build a name for themselves. This is the eternal myth about humanity building empires – with the help of the gods, or whatever they may be called in different epochs. But this Promethean dream excludes the true God and creator of the universe. It consists of worshipping things which are themselves perishable and therefore leads into a blind alley. That is why YHWH draws the line, it being perhaps also a form of grace in disguise; humans still remain to be of 'flesh', they are mortals, and their lifespan is limited to 120 years.

When one reads further in the Old and New Testament, it appears that the longing for a marriage of heaven and earth, which results in an incorruptible creation, is not so much the problem as much as the *way in which* this can be reached, that is to say, not by human might or imagination.

SAMENVATTING

Het doel van deze studie is om de betekenis en functie van de uitdrukking ‘zonen Gods’ in Gen 6,1–4 te onderzoeken. Gedurende de geschiedenis van de exegese zijn er vier hoofdlijnen van exegese ontstaan die een antwoord proberen te geven op de vraag wie met deze ‘zonen van God’ bedoeld worden: de ‘engelen-interpretatie’, de ‘machtigen-interpretatie’, de ‘Sethieten-interpretatie’ en de ‘goddelijke wezens-interpretatie’.

Na de **Introductie** waarin de onderzoeksvraag wordt geformuleerd, geeft **Hoofdstuk 2** een linguïstische analyse van Gen 6,1–4. Op basis van dit onderzoek wordt geconstateerd dat het plausibeler is om de ‘zonen Gods’ op te vatten als wezens die behoren tot de hemelse sfeer dan er vanuit te gaan dat het in deze uitdrukking gaat om mensen, hetzij ‘rechters’, hetzij ‘Sethieten’.

De uitdrukking ‘dochters van de mensen’ verwijst hoogstwaarschijnlijk naar vrouwen in het algemeen en niet alleen naar vrouwen die afstammen van Kaïn, een uitleg waar de Sethieten-interpretatie vanuit gaat.

De verwijzing in de reactie van JHWH naar een beperkte tijd van 120 jaar moet worden opgevat als een beperking van de menselijke levensduur, niet als een periode van respijt, voorafgaande aan de zondvloed, waarin nog bekering mogelijk zou zijn geweest. In zijn reactie benadrukt JHWH dat zijn leven-gevende geest niet altijd in de mens zal blijven: ondanks hun kennelijk hoge aspiraties blijven mensen zondig en sterfelijk.

Het woord *nefilim* beschrijft waarschijnlijk wezens van een meer dan gemiddelde lengte; de term lijkt gebruikt te worden om de afstammelingen van de ‘zonen van God’ en de ‘dochters van de mensen’ aan te duiden. Het gebruik van specifiek deze aanduiding zou bedoeld kunnen zijn om een afschrikwekkend effect te creëren voor toenmalige lezers. Genesis 6,4 beschrijft dezelfde wezens ook als *gibborim*, de beroemde helden van lang geleden. Beide woorden – *nefilim* en *gibborim* – kunnen opgevat worden als een verwijzing naar dezelfde categorie, namelijk de afstammelingen die voortkwamen uit de seksuele relaties die genoemd worden in Gen 6,1–4.

In de huidige context vormt Gen 6,1–4 de literaire brug tussen het geslachtsregister in Gen 5 en het daarna volgende verhaal van de zondvloed. Dit korte verhaal tekent de degeneratie van de mensheid in een paar schetsmatige lijnen.

Hoofdstuk 3 bevat een overzicht van de geschiedenis van de exegese van Gen 6,1–4. Dit overzicht concentreert zich vooral op de vroege exegese van de perikoop.

De *engelen-interpretatie* blijkt de oudst bekende uitleg te zijn van de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’, zoals die voorkomt in Gen 6,1–4. Deze wijze van uitleg is aantoonbaar dominant in vooral de Joodse exegese vanaf de tweede eeuw v. Chr. tot aan de tweede eeuw n. Chr. Waarschijnlijk leverde de Henoch-traditie de basiselementen voor deze exegese. Teksten uit het Nieuwe Testament die zinspelen op het verhaal van Gen 6,1–4 doen dat via de Henoch-overlevering. Dit betekent dat ze de passage opvatten als een verhaal over (gevallen) engelen. Het Nieuwe Testament is echter veel terughoudender in het geven van details dan de Henoch-traditie. Onderzoek gebaseerd op de werken van de kerkvaders laat zien dat de engelen-interpretatie in de exegese van de Oude Kerk algemeen aanvaard was tot aan het eind van de vierde en het begin van de vijfde eeuw. Het is opvallend hoezeer de Henoch-traditie de vormgeving en bewoording van de engelen-interpretatie in de werken van de kerkvaders beïnvloedde. Dit kan worden aangetoond wanneer in de uitleg details worden aangehaald die geen deel vormen van Gen 6,1–4, maar wel van de Henoch-traditie. De tekstvarianten in de handschriften van de Septuaginta hebben waarschijnlijk de engelen-interpretatie versterkt, omdat sommige handschriften de lezing hebben ‘engelen van God’ in plaats van ‘zonen van God’. Verschillende kerkvaders verbinden Gen 6,1–4 via de Henoch-traditie met het ontstaan van afgodendienst en de activiteit van boze geesten. Sommige kerkvaders die de engelen-interpretatie aanhingen, legden Gen 6,1–4 allegorisch uit, en vermeden op die manier theologische problemen die uit deze exegese konden voortvloeien.

In de Joodse exegese uit de periode van de Tweede Tempel en daarna komt de *machtigen-interpretatie* op. Deze uitleg was echter niet onomstreden. Dit kan ook worden geconstateerd op basis van hardnekkige sporen van de engelen-interpretatie in de Targumim en in latere Joodse geschriften. Deze *machtigen-interpretatie* was in ieder geval bekend bij enkele van de oudkerkelijke uitleggers. Zij combineerden de vertaling ‘zonen van de rechters’ of ‘zonen van de machtigen’ echter met hun eigen visie op de ‘zonen van God’ als Sethieten.

De vroegste opkomst van de *Sethieten-interpretatie* kan gedateerd worden in de eerste helft van de derde eeuw in de werken van Julius Africanus. Hij noemt de Sethieten-interpretatie als een mogelijkheid naast de tot dan toe gangbare engelen-interpretatie. De Sethieten-interpretatie werd steeds meer de algemeen geaccepteerde uitleg vanaf het begin van de vierde eeuw, terwijl tegelijkertijd de engelen-interpretatie steeds meer gezien werd als ketterij. Gedurende de vierde

eeuw lijken de engelen- en de Sethieten-interpretatie naast elkaar te hebben bestaan. De definitieve verandering van richting in de exegese schijnt niet zozeer te zijn beïnvloed door een veranderde visie op de pseudepigrafische boeken, omdat Origenes al expliciet vermeldt dat het boek Henoch door de kerk niet als canoniek geaccepteerd werd, hoewel hij wel de engelen-interpretatie volgde. Desondanks zou het feit dat de Henoch-traditie steeds meer in de vergetelheid raakte indirect de opkomst van de Sethieten-interpretatie hebben kunnen bevorderd. De Sethieten-interpretatie is waarschijnlijk afkomstig uit de traditie van de Syrische kerkvaders en niet uit de gnostiek, zoals ook wel is gesuggereerd. De geestelijke achtergrond van de Sethieten-interpretatie lijkt ook te liggen in een veranderde visie op seksualiteit, vergeleken met de visie van het Oude Testament. Deze veranderde visie benadrukte kuisheid en maagdelijkheid. Het is opvallend dat de Sethieten-exegese Gen 6,1–4 voornamelijk vanuit een mannelijk gezichtspunt benadert: de ‘zonen van God’ worden in die uitleg voornamelijk beschouwd als slachtoffers. De sleuteltekst voor de Sethieten-interpretatie was voor de kerkvaders meestal hun uitleg van Gen 4,26. Deze tekst werd gelezen op een manier dat Enos ‘met de naam van de Heer God genoemd hoopte te worden’. Als Enos een dergelijke verwachting kon hebben om omschreven te worden als ‘van God’, dan konden zijn nakomelingen bij gevolg ook ‘zonen van God’ genoemd worden.

Er blijkt een interessant verschil te bestaan tussen Oost en West wat betreft de motivatie achter de Sethieten-exegese. In het Oosterse christendom werden de Sethieten gezien als degenen die in overeenstemming met het ideaal van kuisheid leefden, vandaar dat zij ‘zonen van God’ werden genoemd. De Westerse christenheid gaf eerder een fysieke uitleg: engelen werden steeds meer gezien als wezens die geen lichamelijke substantie hadden. Daarom redeneerden exegeten dat deze onlichamelijkheid seksueel contact tussen engelen en mensen onmogelijk maakt, wat vooral de reden was waarom zij de engelen-hypothese verwierpen ten gunste van de Sethieten-exegese.

Terwijl de bijbeluitleggers uit de tijd van de Reformatie de Sethieten-exegese handhaafden, laat de negentiende eeuw de herleving van de engelen-interpretatie zien. Daarna, aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw, werd de *goddelijke wezens-interpretatie* steeds meer algemeen geaccepteerd.

Het is interessant dat een deel van de verschillende interpretaties van Gen 6,1–4 ook terug te voeren is op de historische context van de verschillende uitleggers. Het onderzoek van de geschiedenis van de exegese laat ook zien dat deze korte passage een *Wirkungsgeschichte* heeft die veelomvattender en gevarieerder is dan men op het eerste gezicht zou verwachten.

Hoofdstuk 4 bevat de evaluatie van argumenten die aangedragen worden voor de verschillende interpretaties. Studie van de exegetische literatuur leidt tot de waarneming dat er tot nu toe geen werkelijke evaluatie van deze argumenten heeft plaatsgevonden. Argumenten worden in het algemeen slechts opgesomd en bediscussieerd, maar nergens wordt echt gelet op de *aard* van de diverse aangedragen argumenten. Het nieuwe aspect van deze studie is dat gepoogd wordt om de waarde van de argumenten te wegen op basis van een analyse van hun aard. Daarvoor werd een hiërarchie van argumenten opgesteld, op een schaal die loopt van lexicale argumenten naar contextuele, buitenbijbelse en conceptuele argumenten. Vervolgens worden argumenten op basis van ontwikkeling en theologische argumenten gewogen.

De *engelen-interpretatie* heeft het voordeel dat dit de oudst bekende uitleg is. Deze uitleg komt ook overeen met de waarneming dat binnen het Oude Testament de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ altijd verwijst naar wezens buiten de menselijke sfeer. Het lijkt er echter op dat gedurende een eerdere periode deze ‘zonen van God’ in het Oude Testament niet als ‘engelen’ werden beschouwd, zoals dat in latere, post-exilische Joodse literatuur wel gebeurt. Eventueel zou de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ in de meeste teksten waar de uitdrukking voorkomt opgevat kunnen worden als een verwijzing naar engelen, maar dit kan niet in alle gevallen. De engelen-interpretatie kan daarom beter niet beschouwd worden als tegengesteld aan de ‘goddelijke wezens-interpretatie’, maar eerder als een verdere ontwikkeling daarvan.

De oplossing die de ‘zonen van God’ beschouwt als *machtige mannen* is uitgesloten op basis van het lexicale argument dat het woord אֱלֹהִים niet gebruikt kan worden als een aanduiding voor ‘rechters’ of ‘koningen’. Ook het buitenbijbelse argument dat koningen soms werden beschouwd als goddelijk, blijkt niet genoeg bewijsmateriaal te leveren. Koningen werden namelijk nooit collectief, als groep, aangeduid als ‘zonen van de goden’ of ‘zonen van God’. Bovendien was het concept van ‘goddelijk koningschap’ niet een algemene aanduiding voor een monarchie. Wanneer de ‘zonen van God’ worden opgevat als ‘machtigen’, zou dit alleen maar een aanvaardbare uitleg opleveren voor Gen 6,1–4; deze oplossing is niet mogelijk voor al de andere teksten waarin de ‘zonen van God’ genoemd worden.

De *Sethieten-interpretatie* is eveneens een onwaarschijnlijke kandidaat vanwege lexicale en contextuele tegenargumenten. De Sethieten-interpretatie blijkt per saldo meer een theologische constructie te zijn, die werd gedragen door de uitleg van Gen 4,26 in oudkerkelijke exegese. Ook de nabije context van Gen 6,1–4 levert geen aanwijzingen dat de Sethieten ‘zonen van God’ genoemd werden. Het

argument gebaseerd op de overtuiging dat in het Oude Testament vrome mensen soms door God ‘zonen’ genoemd worden is in rechtstreekse tegenspraak met het feit dat het Oude Testament voor deze groep mensen nooit de specifieke uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ gebruikt. Bovendien, wanneer mensen door JHWH ‘zonen’ genoemd worden is dat niet zozeer vanwege hun vroomheid, als wel vanwege hun ‘juridische’ status. Ze waren ‘geadopteerd’ door JHWH als zijn kinderen, daarom worden ze eraan herinnerd om in overeenkomst met die positie hun leven in te richten. Ook hier geldt dat de uitleg ‘Sethieten’ alleen past in Gen 6,1–4 maar in geen van de andere teksten die de ‘zonen van God’ vermelden.

De opeenstapeling van bewijsmateriaal wijst erop dat de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ ziet op niet nader aangeduide *goddelijke wezens*. Het lexicale argument dat het woord יְהוֹנִי kan functioneren als aanduiding van een categorie resulteert in de uitleg dat de term verwijst naar degenen die behoren tot de categorie van het goddelijke. Daaraan kan worden toegevoegd dat in buitenbijbelse literatuur de uitdrukking ‘zonen van de goden’ een vaste term is voor ‘goden’. Op grond van conceptuele argumenten kan daarbij ook nog gesteld worden dat wanneer de ‘zonen van God’ opgevat worden als ‘goddelijke / hemelse wezens’, deze uitleg past bij alle andere teksten in het Oude Testament waar een soortgelijke uitdrukking voorkomt. De moeilijkheden die op grond van deze exegese overblijven zijn voornamelijk van theologische aard: als met de ‘zonen van God’ werkelijk ‘goddelijke wezens’ bedoeld zijn, hoe past dit binnen de veronderstelde monotheïstische hoofdstroom van de theologie van het Oude Testament? Bovendien is elders in het Oude Testament geen soortgelijk verhaal te vinden waarin goddelijke wezens seksuele relaties aangaan met vrouwen. Een dergelijk verhaal is zelfs zeldzaam in de mythologie van het oude Nabije Oosten. Vergelijkbare verhalen zijn eigenlijk alleen te vinden in de Griekse mythologie.

Behalve dat de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ hoogstwaarschijnlijk verstaan moet worden als een verwijzing naar ‘goddelijke wezens’, is er nog een ander resultaat van het onderzoek in Hoofdstuk 4, namelijk dat de genoemde ‘zonen van God’ niet als vanzelfsprekend beschouwd moeten worden als leden van de zogenaamde ‘godenvergadering’ – een concept dat bekend is uit de buitenbijbelse literatuur. Ook in het Oude Testament komt de ‘godenvergadering’ voor, maar in de meeste gevallen blijkt dit concept een andere invulling te krijgen dan in de buitenbijbelse gegevens. Wanneer het Oude Testament verwijst naar de ‘raad van JHWH’, worden er geen andere goden genoemd als mogelijke leden van deze raad, verder is er altijd een significant verschil tussen JHWH en de andere aanwezigen.

Als de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ in Gen 6,1–4 inderdaad verwijst naar goddelijke wezens, is het noodzakelijk om de aandacht te richten op de vraag wat in dit geval de functie van dit korte verhaal zou kunnen zijn. Per slot van rekening is het uniek voor het Oude Testament dat ‘hemelse wezens’ seksuele verbindingen aangaan met aardse vrouwen.

Hoofdstuk 5 bedoelt meer helderheid te verschaffen over de mogelijke functies die de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ in Gen 6,1–4 heeft. Op basis van de conclusie uit Hoofdstuk 4 dat de uitdrukking waarschijnlijk slaat op niet nader aangeduide goddelijke wezens blijft er een aantal vragen over. Deze vragen kunnen als volgt beantwoord worden.

Het gebruik van de uitdrukking ‘zonen van God’ in Gen 6,1–4 lijkt niet te verschillen van dezelfde of soortgelijke uitdrukkingen in andere teksten in het Oude Testament. Vergelijking van de verschillende passages levert een aanwijzing op dat de uitdrukking als een vaste term functioneert, die in alle gevallen verwijst naar niet nader gespecificeerde wezens die tot de hemelse werkelijkheid behoren.

Een dergelijke uitleg betekent overigens niet dat het Oude Testament polytheïsme als juist zou erkennen. In dit opzicht is het belangrijkste punt voor het Oude Testament niet dat het bestaan van andere goden dan JHWH ontkend wordt; het voornaamste is dat het Oude Testament stelt dat deze goden – wie ze ook mogen zijn – de naam van goden niet verdienen en niets zijn in vergelijking met JHWH. Het Oude Testament drukt dit op verschillende manieren uit: door te benadrukken dat JHWH met niets en niemand te vergelijken is, of door te verklaren dat deze zogenaamde goden geen echte goden zijn, maar slechts het werk van mensenhanden. Er is binnen het Oude Testament een verschil van benadering als het gaat om ‘andere goden’, gezien de teksten die het accent leggen op de waardeeloosheid van de afgoden door zelfs hun bestaan te ontkennen. In ieder geval is een uitleg van de ‘zonen van God’ als goddelijke wezens niet in strijd met grote delen van het oudtestamentische materiaal over de ‘andere goden’.

Indien er in Gen 6,1–4 zinspelingen op mythologische motieven aanwezig zijn, dan komen die – voorzover de huidige kennis reikt – het dichtst bij de Griekse mythologie waarin goden regelmatig seksuele omgang met mensen hebben en op die manier kinderen voortbrengen.

Gebaseerd op de *speech-act* (‘taaldaden’) theorie kan gesteld worden dat het illocutionaire doel van Gen 6,1–4 wellicht niet is om in het verhaal over de afstamelingen van de ‘zonen van God’ en de ‘dochters van de mensen’ mythologische

motieven te bevestigen. In dat geval kan een exegeet op zoek gaan naar eventuele andere functies van dit verhaal.

De term ‘zonen van God’ zou in het Oude Testament zowel in de verhalende als in de poëtische gedeelten heel goed kunnen fungeren als een literaire conventie; waar deze ‘zonen van God’ voorkomen, worden ze gewoonlijk neergezet op een manier die de soevereiniteit van JHWH benadrukt.

Het is eventueel ook mogelijk dat het verhaal over de ‘zonen van God en de dochters van de mensen’ de bedoeling heeft om in metaforische taal iets te zeggen over de oorsprong van de afgodendienst, die in dat geval beschreven wordt als een vergaande vermenging tussen goddelijke en menselijke wezens, wanneer verhaald wordt hoe de grenzen tussen de hemelse en aardse werkelijkheid worden overschreden. Tegelijk is de waarneming dat de term ‘zonen van God’ vaak fungeert als een literair middel om contrast aan te geven een aanwijzing dat het handelen van deze wezens bij voorbaat kansloos is. Genesis 6,3 onderstreept dit met zoveel woorden door een ‘tegenmaatregel’ van JHWH te beschrijven, waaruit blijkt dat deze hemelse wezens nooit echte rivalen van JHWH kunnen zijn.

De studie sluit af met een **Epiloog** die signaleert dat de verbindende verhaallijn in Gen 1–11 vertelt over twee basisproblemen: in de eerste plaats de vervreemding van God, zoals blijkt in Gen 3, en in de tweede plaats de versplintering van de menselijke gemeenschap, zoals te lezen is in Gen 11,1–9. Voor dit laatstgenoemde probleem proberen mensen een oplossing te vinden die bestaat uit het bouwen van een stad met een toren, wat moet voorkomen dat ze over de aarde verspreid raken. Deze menselijke oplossingen botsen echter met Gods maatregelen, als gevolg waarvan de situatie alleen maar verslechtert. Ook voor het eerstgenoemde probleem, de vervreemding van God, dient zich een oplossing aan, die beschreven wordt als een fysiek contact met wezens uit de goddelijke sfeer. Maar deze oplossing loopt stuk op Gods reactie, die de situatie verergert omdat de menselijke levensduur verkort wordt en de samenleving tenslotte zelfs helemaal vernietigd wordt in de zondvloed. Terwijl Gen 6,1–2.4 en 11,4 laten zien hoe menselijke oplossingen voor vervreemding en versplintering de situatie alleen maar verergeren, pakt God dit dubbele probleem op een positieve manier aan in zijn belofte aan Abram, zoals beschreven in Gen 12,2–3: God zal Abram en zijn nakomelingen zegenen, wat een einde zal maken aan de vervreemding van God. Bovendien zullen “al de volken op aarde” gezegend worden, wat een einde maakt aan de versplintering van de menselijke gemeenschap.

Vanuit dit perspectief wordt de boodschap van de episode over de ‘zonen van God’, de ‘dochters van de mensen’ en hun afstammelingen ook duidelijker. De vermenging tussen hemelse en menselijke wezens laat zien wat alle vormen van afgoderij lijken te bieden: een verbinding met de goddelijke wereld en daarmee de belofte van macht; de machtige kinderen uit dit vreemde ‘huwelijk tussen hemel en aarde’ kunnen naam maken voor zichzelf. Het is de eeuwige mythe van mensen die imperia bouwen – met een beetje hulp van de goden, hoe die ook genoemd mogen worden in verschillende perioden van de geschiedenis. Maar deze Prometheus-achtige droom laat de echte God en schepper van het universum buiten beschouwing. Het bestaat uit het aanbidden van vergankelijke dingen en voert op een doodlopende weg. Dat lijkt de reden waarom JHWH een grens trekt, wellicht ook als een zegen in vermomming; mensen blijven ‘vlees’, ze zijn stervelingen, en hun levenstijd op aarde is op zijn hoogst 120 jaar.

Wie verder leest in het Oude- en Nieuwe Testament, ontdekt dat niet zozeer het verlangen naar een ‘huwelijk tussen hemel en aarde’ dat een onvergankelijke schepping zal opleveren het probleem is, als wel de *manier* waarop dit bereikt kan worden, dat wil zeggen: niet door menselijke macht of verbeelding.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

A jelen dolgozat célja az, hogy megvizsgálja az ‘istenfiak’ kifejezés jelentését és funkcióját 1Mózes 6,1–4-ben. Az exegézis története során az írásmagyarázat négy fővonala jött létre, amely feleletet próbált találni arra, hogy mit jelent ez az ‘istenek fiai’: az ‘angyalok-értelmezés’, a ‘hatalmasok-értelmezés’, a ‘setita-értelmezés’, illetve az ‘isteni lények-értelmezés’.

A Bevezetés után, amelyben megfogalmaztuk a kutatás kérdéseit, a **Második fejezet** az 1Móz 6,1–4 lingvisztikai magyarázatát adja. Ennek a kutatásnak az alapján megállapítjuk, hogy az ‘istenek fiai’ kifejezést megengedhető úgy értenünk, mint az isteni szférához tartozó lényeket, sokkal inkább mint az emberekre, azaz bírákra, vagy setitákra vonatkozó kifejezést.

Az ‘emberek leányai’ fogalom nagy valószínűséggel általánosságban vonatkozik asszonyokra, s nem kizárólag olyanokra, akik Káintól származnak, ahogyan azt a ‘setita-értelmezés’ kiindulópontnak veszi.

A Jahve reakciójában szereplő utalás a százhúsz évre, mint az emberi élet-tartam meghatározott idejére, nem úgy értendő, mint a vízőzönt megelőző haladék, amelyben a megtérés még lehetséges lett volna. Reakciójában Jahve hangsúlyozza, hogy életadó lelke nem marad mindig az emberben, annak elismerten magas aspirációja ellenére az ember bűnös és halandó marad.

A *nefilím* kifejezés valószínűleg átlagosnál magasabb termetű lényeket ír le, amely kifejezést az ‘istenfiak’ és az ‘emberek leányai’ leszármazottainak megjelölésére használnak. Speciálisan ennek a megjelölésnek a használata azt célozhatja, hogy az akkori olvasóban rémisztő hatást érjen el. Az 1Móz 6,4 ugyanezeket a lényeket *gibborím*-nak, a régi idő ismert hőseinek nevezi. Mindkét szót – *nefilím* és *gibborím* – úgy is olvashatjuk, mint egyazon kategóriára utalást, nevezetesen olyan leszármazottakra, akik az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben megnevezett szexuális kapcsolatból jöttek létre.

Az 1Móz 6,1–4 jelenlegi kontextusában irodalmi hidat képez az 1Móz 5 nemzetség táblázata és az ezt követező özönvíz-elbeszélés között. Ez a rövid elbeszélés néhány vázlatos vonallal rajzolja meg az emberiség degenerációját.

A **Harmadik fejezet** az 1Móz 6,1–4 exegézis történetének áttekintését adja. Ez az áttekintés mindenekelőtt a szakasz korai magyarázataira koncentrál.

Az *‘angyalok-értelmezés’* az *‘istenek fiai’* kifejezés legrégebbi ismert magyarázatának tűnik, ahogy az, az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben felbukkan. A magyarázatnak ez a módja hangsúlyosan domináns mindenekelőtt a zsidó írásmagyarázatban, a Kr.e. második századtól a Kr.u. második századig. Valószínűleg az Énok hagyomány ehhez az exegézishez alapvető elemeket nyújtott. Az Újszövetség szövegei, amelyek az 1Móz 6,1–4-re vonatkoznak, ezt az Énok hagyományokon át teszik. Ez azt jelenti, hogy a szakaszokat mint a (bukott) angyalok elbeszéléseként értelmezik. Az Újszövetség sokkal inkább visszafogott az Énok hagyomány részleteinek visszaadásával. Az egyházatyák műveire alapozott kutatás megmutatja, hogy az *‘angyalok-értelmezés’* az Ógyház írásmagyarázatában a negyedik század végeig és az ötödik század elejéig általánosan elfogadott volt. Feltűnő az, hogy az Énok hagyomány mennyire befolyásolta az egyházatyák műveit az *‘angyalok értelmezés’* formába öntésében és megfogalmazásában. Ez hangsúlyos lehet akkor, amikor a magyarázatban olyan részletek kerülnek elő, amelyek ugyan nem képezik az 1Móz 6,1–4 részét, de az Énok hagyományét igen. A Septuaginta kézírataiban szereplő szövegvariációk valószínűleg az *‘angyalok-értelmezést’* erősítették, hiszen néhány kézirat az *‘isten fiai’* helyett az *‘isten angyalai’* olvasatot ad. Különböző egyházatyák az 1Móz 6,1–4-et az Énok hagyományon keresztül összekötik a bálványimádás és a gonosz lelkek létrejöttével. Némely egyházatyák, akik az *‘angyalok-értelmezést’* követik, az 1Móz 6,1–4-et allegorikusan értelmezik és így megtakarítják a teológiai problémák létét, amelyek ebből az írásmagyarázatból származhatnak.

A Második Templom korában és azután a zsidó írásmagyarázatban a *‘hatalmasok-értelmezés’* kerül elő. Ez az értelmezés vitatott volt. Ez megállapítható a Targumok és későbbi zsidó iratok makacs *‘angyalok-értelmezés’* nyomaiból. A *‘hatalmasok-értelmezés’* mindenesetre ismert volt néhány ógyházi értelmező számára is. Összekombinálták a *‘bírák fiai’* vagy a *‘hatalmasok fiai’* fordítást a saját elképzelésükkel, amely szerint az *‘istenfiak’* a *‘setitákat’* jelenti.

A *‘setita-értelmezés’* legkorábbi előkerülését a harmadik század első felére, Julius Africanus műveire tehetjük. Ő, a *‘setita-értelmezést’* mint lehetőséget nevezi meg az addig érvényes *‘angyalok-értelmezés’* mellett. A *‘setita-értelmezés’* a negyedik század elejétől kezdve egyre inkább elfogadatottá vált, s az *‘angyalok-értelmezést’* egyre inkább eretnekségnek tekintették. A negyedik század folyamán az *‘angyalok-’* és a *‘setita-értelmezés’* egymás mellett létezőnek tűnik. Az exegézis irányának valódi megváltozását nem annyira a pseudográf könvekről való látás megváltozása befolyásolta, hiszen Origenész határozottan kimondja, hogy az Énok könyvét nem fogadja el kanonikusnak, mégis ő is az *‘angyalok-értelmezést’* követi. Mégis tény az, hogy az Énok hagyomány mindinkább a feledésbe sülyedt, s ez

előmozdíthatta a ‘setita-értelmezés’ előretörését. A ‘setita-értelmezés’ valószínűleg a szír egyházatyák hagyományából származik és nem a gnoszticizmusból, bármennyire is sugallmazák ezt. A ‘setita-értelmezés’ szellemi háttere a szexualitásról alkotott nézet megváltozásában keresendő, összehasonlítva az Ószövetség szemléletével. Ez a megváltozott látás az önmegtartóztatást és a szüzességet hangsúlyozta. Feltűnő, hogy az 1Móz 6,1–4 ‘setita-értelmezése’ mindenekelőtt hímnemű szemlélet alkalmaz: az ‘isten fiait’ a magyarázatban áldozatként szemléli. A ‘setita-értelmezés’ kulcsszövege az egyházatyák számára leginkább az 1Móz 4,26 általuk képviselt magyarázata volt. Ezt a szöveget úgy olvasták, hogy Énos Isten nevére remélte neveztetni magát. Amennyiben Énos ilyen várakozást írhatott körül, mint Istenről / Istenként neveztetni, akkor az ő leszármazottait ennek következtében ‘isten fiai’-nak nevezhették.

Érdekes különbség áll elő Kelet és Nyugat között a ‘setita-értelmezés’ motívációinak tekintetében. A keleti keresztyénségben a setitákat úgy szemlélik, mint akik az önmegtartóztatás ideáljának megfelelően éltek, és ezért nevezték őket ‘isten fiai’-nak. A nyugati keresztyénség azonban fizikai magyarázatot adott: az angyalokat sokkal inkább úgy tekintették, mint olyan lényeket, akik nem bírnak testi szubsztanciával. Ebből következett az írásmagyarázók azt, hogy az angyalok és emberek közti szexuális érintkezést a testetlenség lehetetlenné teszi, ez volt az oka leginkább annak, hogy miért vetették el az ‘angyalok-értelmezést’ a ‘setita-értelmezés’ javára.

Bár a Reformáció bibliaértelmezői a ‘setita-értelmezést’ képviselték, a tizenkilencedik században az ‘angyalok-értelmezés’ újra éledése látható. Ezután, a huszadik század elején egyre inkább elfogadták az ‘*isteni lények-értelmezést*’.

Érdekes, hogy az 1Móz 6,1–4 különböző értelmezéseinek egy része visszavezethető a különböző magyarázók történeti kontextusára. Az írásmagyarázat történetének kutatása megmutatja, hogy a *Wirkungsgeschichte* ilyen rövid szakasza sokkal jelentősebb és változatosabb annál, mint azt első pillantásra várnánk.

A **Negyedik fejezet** tartalmazza azoknak az érveléseknek a kiértékelését, amelyeket a különböző magyarázatok élénk tárnak. Az írásmagyarázati irodalom tanulmányozása elvezet addig a megállapításig, hogy mindeddig ezeknek az érveléseknek igazi kiértékelése nem történt meg. Az érveléseket csupán összegyűjtötték és vitatták, de sohasem szenteltek figyelmet a különböző előtárt érvelések *módjára*. E dolgozat új aspektusa az, hogy megkísérli az érvelések természetét mérlegre tenni. Így az érvelések hierarchiáját állítjuk fel egy olyan skálán,

ahol a lexikális érvelések, kontextuális, Biblián kívüli és konceptuális érvek felé közelítenek. Ezután az érvelések a teológiai érvek fejlődésének alapján méretnek le.

Az *'angyalok-értelmezés'* előnye az, hogy ez a legrégebb ismert magyarázat. Ez az értelmezés megegyezik az 'isten fiai'-nak Ószövetségén belüli értelmezésével, amely mindig az emberi szférán kívüli lényekre utal. Úgy tűnik, hogy az Ószövetségben, annak korai szakaszában, az 'isten fiai'-t nem angyalokként szemlélték, amint az a későbbi fogság utáni zsidó irodalomban történt. Bármennyire is az 'isten fiai' kifejezés a legtöbb olyan szövegben, ahol ez előfordul, az angyalokra történő utalásként érthető, mégsem igaz ez minden esetben. Az 'angyalok-értelmezést' ezért jobb nem úgy szemlélnünk, mint az 'isteni lények-értelmezés' ellentétét, hanem sokkal inkább mint annak továbbfejlesztett változatát.

Az a megoldás, amely az 'isten fiai'-t úgy szemléli, mint *hatalmas embereket*, kizárható azzal a lexikális érveléssel, hogy az מַלְאָכִים szó nem használatos 'bírák' vagy 'királyok' értelemben. Az a Biblián kívüli érvelés, hogy a királyokat gyakran tekintették isteninek, sem szolgáltat elegendő bizonyítékot. A királyokat tudniillik soha nem jelölték csoportként vagy kollektívumként, mint az 'istenek fiai'-t, vagy 'isten fiai'-t. Sőt, az 'isteni királyság' koncepciója sem szolgál a monarchia általános megjelölésére. Amikor az 'isten fiai'-t mint 'hatalmasokat' jelölik, ez csak az 1Móz 6,1–4 elfogadható magyarázatára szolgál, de ez nem lehet megoldás azokra az egyéb szövegekre, amelyek 'isten fiai'-t említik.

A *'setita-értelmezés'* is valószínűtlen megoldás a lexikális és kontextuális ellenérvek fényében. A 'setita-értelmezés' sokkal inkább egy teológiai konstrukció, amelyet az 1Móz 4,26 hordozott az ógyházi írásmagyarázatban. Az 1Móz 6,1–4 szűkebb kontextusa nem nyújt utalásokat arra, hogy a setitákat 'isten fiai'-nak nevezték. Az érvelés azon a meggyőződésen alapul, hogy az Ószövetségben a kegyes embereket néha Isten 'fiainak' nevezték. Ez szöges ellentétben áll azzal a ténnyel, hogy az Ószövetség az emberek ezen csoportjával kapcsolatban soha nem használja a 'isten fiai' elnevezést. Sőt, akkor, amikor embereket neveznek 'Jahve fiainak', azt nem annyira kegyességük, mint inkább 'jogi' helyzetük miatt teszik. Jahve, gyermekeiként 'adoptálta' őket azért, hogy emlékeztesse őket arra, hogy helyzetüket és életüket egységben folytassák. Ebben az esetben is érvényes az, hogy a 'setita-értelmezés' csak az 1Móz 6,1–4-re vonatkozik, de olyan egyéb szövegekre nem, amelyek 'isten fiai'-ról beszélnek.

A bizonyítékok egymásra halmozásra arra utal, hogy az 'isten fiai' kifejezés (pontosabban nem meghatározott) *isteni lényekre* vonatkozik. Az a lexikális érv, amely szerint a בְּנֵי szó egy bizonyos csoport megjelölésére szolgálhat, azt a magyarázatot eredményezi, hogy a kifejezés azokra vonatkozik, akik az isteni

kategóriában tartoznak. Hozzáfűzhető ehhez az, hogy a Biblián kívüli irodalomban az ‘istenek fiai’ állandó megfelelője az ‘istenek’-nek. A konceptuális érvek alapján az is állítható, hogy amikor az ‘isten fiai’ említetnek, ekkor ezek ‘isteni / égi lények’. Ez a magyarázat az Ószövetség egyéb szövegeire is vonatkozik, ahol ezek a kifejezések előfordulnak. Azok a nehézségek, amelyek ennek az írásmagyarázatnak az alapján megmaradnak, teológiai jellegűek: ha az ‘isten fiai’ valóban ‘isteni lényeket’ jelent, hogyan illik ez az Ószövetség teológiájának feltételezett monoteisztikus főáramlatába? Ezen felül, az Ószövetségben sehol sem található olyan, vagy ehhez hasonló elbeszélés, amelyben ‘isteni lények’ asszonyakkal kerülnek szexuális kapcsolatba. Efajta elbeszélések magában a régi közelkeleti mitológiában is ritkák. Hasonló elbeszéléseket kizárólag a görög mitológiában találunk.

Azon kívül, hogy az ‘isten fiai’ alatt legvalószínűbben isteni lényekre való utalást kell érteni, a negyedik fejezetben a kutatásnak még egy eredménye kerül elő, nevezetesen, hogy a fent nevezett ‘isten fiai’-t nem magától értetődően az ‘istenek tanácsa’ tagjainak kell tekinteni, ahogyan ez a koncepció a Biblián kívüli irodalomban ismeretes. Az istenek tanácsa az Ószövetségben is előfordul, de a legtöbb esetben ez a koncepció más tartalmat nyer, mint a Biblián kívüli adatokban. Amikor az Ószövetség Jahve tanácsára utal, nem nevez meg egyéb isteneket, mint ennek a tanácsnak lehetséges tagjait és minden esetben szignifikáns különbség van Jahve és a más jelenlevők között.

Abban az esetben, amikor az ‘isten fiai’ az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben ‘isteni lényekre’ utal, szükséges figyelmet szentelnünk annak a kérdésnek, hogy ebben az esetben ez a rövid elbeszélés milyen funkciót tölthet be. Végül is egyedülálló az Ószövetség számára, hogy ‘isteni lények’ földi asszonyokkal lépnek szexuális kötelékbe.

Az Ötödik fejezet fényt kíván deríteni az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben szereplő ‘isten fiai’ kifejezés lehetséges funkciójára. A negyedik fejezet következtetése alapján, nevezetesen, hogy a kifejezés valószínűleg pontosabban nem meghatározott ‘isteni lényekre’ vonatkozik, egy csomó kérdést vet fel. A következőkben ezekre a kérdésekre keresünk feleletet.

Az ‘isten fiai’ kifejezés használata az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben, úgy tűnik, nem különbözik az Ószövetség egyéb szövegeiben előforduló azonos vagy efajta kifejezéstől. A különböző szakaszok összehasonlítása olyan iránymutatással szolgál, hogy a kifejezés állandó meghatározásként funkcionál: minden esetben olyan pontosabban nem meghatározott lényekre utal, amelyek az égi valósághoz tartoznak.

Egy ilyen magyarázat nem jelenti azt, hogy az Ószövetség elismerné a politeizmust. Ebben a tekintetben a legfontosabb álláspont az Ószövetség számára nem az, hogy más Jahvén kívüli istenek létét tagadja, hanem a legfontosabb az, hogy ezek az istenek – akárkik legyenek is – nem szolgálnak rá az isten névre és Jahvéval nem hasonlíthatók össze. Ezt az Ószövetség különböző módon fejezi ki: annak a hangsúlyozásával, hogy Jahve semmivel és senkivel nem hasonlítható össze, vagy pedig azáltal, hogy az úgynevezett istenek nem valódi istenek, hanem csak emberi kéz művei. Az Ószövetségen belül megközelítési különbség van abban, hogy a más isteneket egyes szövegek értéktelennek ítélik, vagy létüket tagadják. Minden esetben az ‘isten fiai’-nak mint ‘isteni lényekként’ való magyarázata nem áll ellentétben az ószövetségi anyag más istenekről szóló szövegek nagy részével.

Amennyiben az 1Móz 6,1–4-ben mitológiai motívumokra való utalás van, akkor ezek – amennyire azt mai ismeretünk alátámasztja – a görög mitológiához állnak a legközelebb, amelyben az istenek rendszeresen emberekkel folytatnak szexuális kapcsolatot és ezen módon gyermekeket nemzenek.

A *speech-act* teória alapján állítható, hogy az 1Móz 6,1–4 illokucionáris célja talán nem is az, hogy az ‘isten fiai’ leszármazását és az emberek leányainak mitológikus motívumait megerősítse. Ebben az esetben az írásmagyarázó az elbeszélés számára más funkciót kereshet.

Az ‘isten fiai’ kifejezés az Ószövetségben, annak mind az elbeszélő, mind pedig költői részeiben egy olyan irodalmi konvencióként szolgálhat, amelyben az ‘istenek fiai’ úgy fordulnak elő és úgy ábrázoltatnak, hogy ezen a módon hangsúly kerüljön Jahve szuverenitására. Az is lehetséges, hogy az ‘isten fiai’ és az ‘emberek leányai’ elbeszélés szándéka az, hogy metaforikus nyelven mondjon el valamit a bálványimádás eredetéről, amelyet ebben az esetben egy, az isteni és az emberi lények között létrejött elegyedésként ír le, amely azt beszéli el, hogy az égi és földi valóság közti határok hogyan mosódnak el. Ugyanakkor megfigyelhető, hogy az ‘isten fiai’ kifejezés gyakran irodalmi eszközként szolgál, amely arra utal, hogy ezeknek a lényeknek cselekedete már a kezdet kezdetén esélytelen. Az 1Móz 6,3 ezt Jahve ellenintézkedésével írja le és húzza alá, amelyből kitűnik, hogy ezek az égi lények soha sem lehetnek Jahve valódi riválisai.

A dolgozat **Epilógussal** zárul, amely az 1Móz 1–11 két alapproblémáját jelzi és tárja elő: elsősorban az Istentől való elidegenedést, amint azt kitűnik az 1Móz 3-ból, másodsor az emberi közösség meghasadását, ahogy az az 1Móz 11,1–9-ben olvasható. Ezt az utóbbi problémát, amely a földön történt szétszóródásban áll előtűnk, az emberek város- és toronyépítéssel kívánják feloldani. Ezek az emberi

megoldások az isteni szabályokkal ütköznek és ezeknek következménye csak rontja a helyzetet. Az elsőként említett probléma, az Istentől való elidegenedés, megoldásaként az isteni szférából származó lényekkel történő fizikai érintkezést kínálja. De ez a megoldás megsemmisül Isten reakciója következtében, hiszen a helyzet rosszabbodik: az emberi élettartam megrövidül és a társadalom a vízözön által teljesen eltűnik. Amíg az 1Móz 6,1–2.4 és a 11,4 azt mutatja meg, hogy az elidegenedés és a meghasadás emberi megoldásai csak rontanak a helyzeten, addig Isten ezt a kettős problémát pozitív módon kezeli Ábrahámnak az 1Móz 12,2–3-ban lévő ígérete alapján: Isten meg fogja áldani őt és utódait, ami véget vet az Istentől való elidegenedésnek és ezen kívül “a föld minden népe” is megáldatik, amely véget vet az emberi közösség meghasadt voltának. Az ‘isten fiai’ és az ‘emberek leányai’ epizód üzenete s annak következménye ebből a perspektívából már világosabb. Az égi és emberi lények keveredése megmutatja azt a törekvést, amelyet a bálványimádás minden formája kínál: az isteni világhoz való kapcsolódást és a hatalom ígéretét; a torz ‘föld és ég közötti házasságból’ származó hatalmas gyermekeket, akik nevet szerezhetnek maguknak. Az ember örök mítosza, a birodalom-teremtés apró isteni segítséggel, bárhogy is nevezik ezt a történelem különböző szakaszaiban. Azonban ezt a Prométheusz-szerű álmot az igazi Isten, az univerzum teremtője, figyelmen kívül hagyja. Az elmúló dolgok imádatából származó lét zsákutcába vezet. Ez az oka annak, amiért Jahve egy határt húz, amely valójában egy áldás is lehet: embernek maradni, ‘testnek’, halandónak, és az életnek ideje a földön legfeljebb százhusz év.

Aki az Ó- és az Újszövetséget tovább olvassa, felfedezi, hogy a probléma nem annyira az ég és föld közötti házasság utáni vágy, amely egy el nem pusztuló teremtést hoz létre, hanem sokkal inkább, hogy ez milyen *módon* érhető el, nevezetesen: emberi hatalom és önálló elképzelés nélkül.

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