

THE NEW TESTAMENT APPROPRIATION

a. *Gen. 5 and Matt. 1:1-17*

The NT has two genealogies of Jesus. Matt. 1:1-17 includes forty-two generations, covering the time span between Jesus and Abraham. The genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 reckons Jesus as the seventy-seventh descendant of Adam. It is beyond the scope of this book to enter into a discussion of how these two lines relate to each other. It is our purpose only to show their (possible) use of the Genesis material.

In at least two ways Matt. 1:1-17 shows more affinity with Gen. 5 than does Luke 3:23-38. First, both Matt. 1 and Gen. 5 (LXX) start with the phrase *bímblos genéseōs*, and in both instances the title refers only to the genealogy and not to subsequent material. Second, Matthew starts with his genealogy of Jesus, then follows with the story of Jesus. Similarly, Gen. 5 begins with the genealogy of Noah, then follows with the story of Noah. In contrast, Luke tells us something about Jesus' life before giving us his genealogy, just as Exodus gives us biographical information about Moses before it gives us Moses' genealogy (Exod. 6:14-25).¹

But these structural similarities must be placed beside a major difference between Gen. 5 and Matt. 1. The genealogy in Gen. 5 is a genealogy of Adam's descendants. The genealogy of Jesus is a genealogy of his ancestors. Jesus is not the subject, but the object, the one toward whom the action moves. "In Christian salvific history there can be no genealogy of Jesus' descendants because history has reached its goal in Jesus."²

b. *Gen. 5:21-24 and Heb. 11:5, 6*

Enoch is one of three pre-Abrahamic saints cited by Heb. 11 as exemplars of faith. The text of Heb. 11:5 is closer to the LXX than it is to the MT. The LXX of Gen. 5:24 reads, "And Enoch pleased God, and he was not found

34. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, p. 161.

1. R. E. Brown, "Genealogy (Christ)," *IDBS*, p. 354.

2. R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), p. 67.

because God translated him." The most obvious difference is that LXX's "and he was not found" replaces MT's ambiguous "and he was not." Not only does Heb. 11:5 cite the LXX of Gen. 5:24, it also augments it with "so that he should not see death." The addition of this phrase highlights the exaltation of Enoch into heaven, an understanding that was prominent in intertestamental Judaism (1 Enoch 12:3; 15:1; 2 Enoch 22:8; 71:14; Jub. 4:23; 10:17; 19:24-27; Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.4 [85]). Heb. 11:5 also adds the point that Enoch pleased God. (The verb for "please" is used in the NT only in Hebrews—see 11:5, 6; 12:28; 13:16.)

F. THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF HUMANKIND: ILLICIT RELATIONSHIPS (6:1-4)

- 1 *When mankind began to become numerous over the surface of the ground, and daughters were being born to them,*
- 2 *the sons of God saw how attractive the daughters of humankind were. So they took as their wives any of them they chose.*
- 3 *Then Yahweh said, "My Spirit shall not remain in mankind forever inasmuch as he is but flesh. His days shall be one hundred and twenty years."*
- 4 *(The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and later on too.) Whenever¹ the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of humankind, they fathered children by them. These were the mighty men of old, men of reputation.²*

1 One of the functions of this verse is to link the genealogy of Adam (5:1-32) with the following event that is narrated in 6:2-4. Not only does it serve as an introduction to what follows, but it also summarizes the story about the rapid increase of Adam's progeny. Human beings were multiplying in the land. Thus it is something of a postscript, just as 2:1-3 summarizes

1. I understand the imperfect verb here, and in v. 1, to have frequentative force. This nuance is already advocated by the LXX *hōs ān eiseporeúonto*. What is envisaged here is not one single event, but a scenario that is ongoing and habitual.

2. Lit., "men of name." This may be compared with the expression *'dm šm* that appears in column 3, line 13 of the Phoenician inscription of Azitawadda, which F. Rosenthal translates incorrectly as "a man who is (just) called a man," and then explains in a footnote, "an ordinary human being without titles of any sort" (*ANET*, p. 654 n. 6). The line is best rendered "if a man, who is a man of renown, shall expunge the name of Azitawadda." One may also compare the Old Akkadian name *a-wi-il šu-mi-im*, "man of name," which occurs at Mari (see S. Gevirtz, "West-Semitic curses and the problem of the origins of Hebrew Law," *VT* 11 [1961] 142 n. 4).

1:1–31 and 5:1–2 summarizes the Adam and Eve story. This connection is reinforced by the use of *ground* in 5:29 and 6:1.

Chapter 5 concentrated exclusively on the sons born to these antediluvians. 6:1 focuses on the daughters born to these men. Mankind is still fulfilling God's mandate to "multiply and fill the earth." But even those areas where God's blessing operates become a stage for the intrusion of evil.

2 Enter the problematic *sons of God* (Heb. *benê-hā'ēlōhîm*). Who are they? From whence do they come? They appear without fanfare or explanation. The narrator's assumption is that they are readily identifiable by his audience. But if his audience knew their identity, it has been lost to subsequent readers. Accordingly, our only recourse has been to raise some possibilities with the greatest strengths and the least weaknesses. The chief suggestions are as follows.

① (1) The *sons of God* are angels. Many of the ancient versions so understood it, as witnessed by LXX *ángeloi tou theou*. The major support for this interpretation is that elsewhere in the OT the expression "sons of God" does indeed refer to heavenly beings.³ Examples come from both prose (Job 1:6; 2:1) and poetry (Job 38:7, where "sons of God" parallels "morning stars";⁴ Ps. 29:1; 82:6; 89:7 [Eng. 6]; cf. also Dan. 3:25, "a son of the gods"). Heb. *benê-hā'ēlōhîm* is the same linguistically as Ugar. *bn il*, "the sons of El." In Canaanite mythology *bn il* are major gods who form part of the pantheon of which El is the head. By contrast, "the sons of God" in OT thought are angels who are members of the Lord's court and who expedite his bidding. They have no divine pedigree.

Some have simply dismissed this interpretation, labeling it "bizarre," while others deny its possibility on the grounds that the NT teaches that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:29–30; Mark 12:24–25; Luke 20:34–36).⁵ The major

3. See G. Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *ZAW* 76 (1964) 22–47.

4. This interesting parallelism may be compared with *UT*, 76:1:3–4, where *bn il* ("the sons of El") balances *phr kkbm* ("the assembly of the stars"), perhaps indicating that the "sons of God" in Job 38:7 are the stars. See W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 296.

5. For the former, see L. Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 24, who so dismisses it. For the latter, see H. Stigers, *Commentary on Genesis*, p. 97. W. A. van Gemeren ("The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 [An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?]," *WTJ* 43 [1981] 320–48) calls for a positive reevaluation of the angel hypothesis, and suggests that conservative interpreters have avoided it not on exegetical grounds but only because they insist on a rational explanation of the event. Angels and women copulating is not "rational." Cf. too R. C. Newman, "The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4," *GTJ* 5 (1984) 13–36.

contextual argument against this identification is that it has mankind being punished for the sins of angels. If the angels are the culpable ones, why is God's judgment not directed against them? Why do the innocent suffer for the sins of the guilty, and why do the guilty go unjudged? This is not a conclusive argument, for in the very next event recorded in Scripture, the Flood, we are told that the sin of *man* (6:5) results in the divine annihilation of not only man but *beast, creeping thing, and birds* (6:7). Later on, King David protests that God ought not to direct his wrath against the innocent people but against David himself for his sin in taking the census (2 Sam. 24:17). Must the populace bear the consequences of the sins of their monarch?

This interpretation assumes that the angels took corporeal form, which has support elsewhere in Scripture. For example, one need only recall the bold anthropomorphisms that are associated with the epiphany of the "angel of the Lord." On the darker side this idea extends into magic in which the incubus (or succubus) assumes a male (or female) body and has intercourse with the unsuspecting sexual partner.

Genesis 1–11 abounds with illustrations of human beings who were not content with being merely human. Accordingly they reached for divine status and attempted to overstep the boundaries that had been imposed on them. This story, with this approach, supplies another illustration of such transgression, albeit in the opposite direction. Here the divine or angelic world illegitimately impinges on the human world.⁶

② (2) The sons of God are dynastic rulers, an early royal aristocracy.⁷ The daughters of men, whom they took as wives, constituted the royal harems of these despots. The sin, then, is polygamy, along the lines of Lamech, who also "took wives" (4:19). A variation of this interpretation combines it with

6. See R. Maars, "The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4)," *RestQ* 23 (1980) 220–21.

7. See M. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4," *WTJ* 24 (1962) 187–204; A. R. Millard, "A New Babylonian 'Genesis' Story," *TynBul* 18 (1967) 12, and nn. 27–29; cf. Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:363–83, esp. pp. 371–73. E. Kraeling ("The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," *JNES* 6 [1947] 193–208) prefers to identify the "mighty men" of v. 4 as the biblical adaptation of the Babylonian tradition of the antediluvian kings, rather than as the "sons of God." For the "heroes" interpretation cf. also F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Gen 6:2–4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetischen Methode* (Vienna: Herder, 1966), pp. 31–37. Dexinger makes the most extensive appeal to the Ugaritic material. Appropriate criticisms of Dexinger's handling of the Ugaritic sources are made by H. Haag, "bēn," *TDOT*, 2:158.

the first one, so that the sons of God are *both* divine beings *and* antediluvian rulers, much as Gilgamesh of Akkadian literature is both a historical figure (king of Uruk) and one about whom legendary features accrued (one-third human, two-thirds divine).⁸

Kline especially makes much of the fact that in the Keret epic from Ugarit King Keret is called *bn il*. This is a significant part of the titulary of the pagan ideology of divine kingship. Kline also appeals to verses in the OT where those who administer justice are called *'ēlōhīm* (Exod. 21:6; 22:7, 8, 27 [Eng. 8, 9, 28]); and a son of David is called the son of God (2 Sam. 7:14 par. 1 Chr. 17:13; perhaps Ps. 82:6).

The major advantages of this view are that it removes Gen. 6:1-4 from any mythological or nonhistorical understanding; it allows the unit to serve as an appropriate introduction to the Flood story; and it attempts to be faithful to the immediately preceding context about Cainites and Sethites. The major weakness is that while both within the OT and in other ancient Near Eastern texts individual kings were called God's son, there is no evidence that groups of kings were so styled.

③ (3) The sons of God are the godly Sethites and the daughters of humankind are the ungodly Cainites.⁹ The sin, then, is a forbidden union, a yoking of what God intended to keep apart, the intermarriage of believer with unbeliever. This approach is quite close to the previous one. But the objection aimed at the previous identification applies here too. Nowhere in the OT are Sethites identified as the sons of God. Again, this proposal forces on the word *'ādām* in vv. 1 and 2 two different meanings. In v. 1 *'ādām* would have to be "mankind" and in v. 2 *'ādām* would be a specific group of men ("daughters of men," i.e., "daughters of Cainites").

In response we observe that while *sons of God* is indeed an enigmatic phrase, and appears here for the first time in the OT, notes about godliness abound in the context (4:26; 5:24, 29). Furthermore, the OT does not lack instances of a shift from a generic to a specific use of a word in one context.¹⁰ Thus, *'ādām* as "mankind" in v. 1 and as "Cainites" in v. 2 is not impossible.

8. See D. 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) 34-35.

9. See J. Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 243-49, for a reasoned defense of this position. It is the interpretation pursued by most Protestant conservative scholars.

10. Examples provided by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., vol. 1: *The Pentateuch*, tr. J. Martin, 3 vols. repr. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:130-31.

It is possible, however, to reverse this identification and see the daughters of men as Sethites and the sons of God as Cainites (really "Eveites").¹¹ For example, the birth of daughters occurs only among the Sethites of ch. 5. Again, the taking of wives for oneself (6:2) is paralleled by the Cainite Lamech (4:19). Could it be that here we have a replay of Gen. 3? As Eve the initiator led Adam astray, so the sons of God led astray the daughters of men.

Suffice it to say, it is impossible to be dogmatic about the identification of "sons of God" here. The best one can do is to consider the options. While it may not be comforting to the reader, perhaps it is best to say that the evidence is ambiguous and therefore defies clear-cut identifications and solutions.

We do know that the stimulus for the behavior of the sons of God was that the human daughters were *attractive*. Again, the description of the sons' activities is reminiscent of Eve's in the garden. She saw that the tree was "good" (*kī tōb*), and these sons saw that the daughters of men were "attractive" or "good" (*kī tōbōt*).

The Bible has no shortage of stories in which human beauty is central to the context. See the stories concerning Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12:11, 14), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24:16), Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29:17), a prisoner of war who is an attractive woman (Deut. 21:11), Samson's sister-in-law (Judg. 15:2), David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2), Absalom's sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1), Absalom's daughter (2 Sam. 14:27), David's nurse (1 K. 1:3-4), Vashti (Esth. 1:11), Esther (Esth. 2:7), Job's daughters (Job 42:15), and of course the bride in Canticles.

The sons of God *took* wives. The Hebrew verb here, *lāqah*, commonly describes marital transactions, including taking a wife for oneself (4:19; 11:29; 12:19; 20:2, 3; 25:1; 36:2, 6; Exod. 34:16) and taking a wife for another (Gen. 21:21; 24:4, 40, 48). One might also take somebody else's wife (2 Sam. 11:4). Most of the former instances involve polygamy or potential adultery but not rape. When indiscriminate rape is described some verb like "forced" (2 Sam. 13:14) is necessary. Furthermore, in the OT (Gen. 36:2; 2 Sam. 1:20, 24; Isa. 3:16) *benōt* ("daughters") followed by a gentilic or a place name normally designates those who are eligible for marriage, another indication that we are dealing here with marriage rather than rape.¹²

3 The order of the two remaining verses in this pericope is interest-

11. See L. Eslinger, "A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha'elohim* and *benoth ha'adam*," *JSOT* 13 (1979) 65-73.

12. See G. Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, p. 111 n. 26.

ing. That is, the word about the divine displeasure comes between the cohabitation scene (v. 2) and the reference to the children produced by this union (v. 4). By placing the verse where it is, the author is making the point that this forbidden union itself is offensive to Yahweh, rather than the fact that such a union produced (hybrid) offspring.

God's decision is: *My spirit shall not remain in mankind forever*. The translation *remain* for Heb. *yādôn* is far from certain; it is based principally on LXX *katameinē* and Vulg. *permanebit*. But what is the source of the LXX rendering? It would seem to translate Heb. *yādûr* (from *dûr*, "to dwell") or *yâlûn* (from *lûn*, "to lodge"). If the form in question is to be connected with the verb *dîn*, "to judge" (as in Symm. *krinei*)—"my spirit shall not judge"—one would expect *yādîn*, not *yādôn*.¹³

Unable to find an explanation within the Hebrew Bible of the verb in question, scholars have turned to related languages. J. Scharbert connects Heb. *yādôn* with Arab. *dun*, "to be humbled, humiliated, brought low"—"my spirit will not be humiliated in man forever."¹⁴ The problem with this interpretation is that man's sins may anger and distress God, but not humble or humiliate him. Speiser identifies *yādôn* with the Akkadian root *dnn* and its nominal forms *dinānu*, *andunānu*, which mean "personal substitute, surrogate, scapegoat."¹⁵ Thus 6:3 says "my spirit shall not answer for man forever." That is, the time is coming when human beings will have to shoulder the consequences of their behavior. However, as early as Gen. 3 human beings have been held accountable for their actions, and God was not one who shielded the guilty. Thus it is difficult to fit Speiser's suggestion into the larger context of Gen. 3–6, however linguistically attractive his proposal may be.

Another possibility is to associate *yādôn* with Akk. *danānu*, "to be strong, powerful, rule."¹⁶ So understood, *yādôn* would be a stative Qal

13. One suspects that behind AV "to strive" is an association with the verb *dîn*, which has the meaning "to contend, dispute" only in Eccl. 6:10. Those who would translate "my spirit shall not rule in man forever" also appeal to the verb *dîn* in Zech. 3:7—"you shall rule [*tādîn*] my house."

14. J. Scharbert, "Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gen. 6:1–4," *BZ* 11 (1967) 68 and also n. 9. This suggestion is reflected in JB "shall not be disgraced" (and in the French original *ne soit pas . . . humilié*). Incidentally, NEB "he for his part is mortal flesh" goes back to G. R. Driver's suggestion that the text be read as *bēšārô gam hû' bāšar*, "(as for) his flesh, even it is flesh," in "Once Again Abbreviations," *Textus* 4 (1964) 89–90.

15. E. A. Speiser, "YDWN, Genesis 6:3," *JBL* 75 (1956) 126–29 (repr. in *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, ed. J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1967], pp. 35–40). See also idem, *Genesis*, p. 44.

16. Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 114.

imperfect form from the geminate root *dnn*. A verb with this meaning appears in several Ugaritic texts, and may be reflected in the Dannah of Josh. 15:49 ("stronghold, fortress"), an Israelite town in the vicinity of Debir.¹⁷ But in what way is an imposition of life reduction for humanity a lessening of the strength of God's spirit in humanity? We follow the LXX and Vulg. at this point simply out of preference, but admit the inconclusiveness of this position. The verb *dānan* or *dûn* appears with the meaning "remain" in the Talmud and in Aramaic; Rabin argues for its presence in the Hebrew Bible in Gen. 30:6.¹⁸

We have already drawn attention to the echoes of Gen. 1–5 in this unit. Here is another one. The withdrawn Spirit of 6:3 calls to mind the hovering Spirit of 1:2. Where it hovers there is order, and chaos is restrained. Where it is withdrawn, chaos flourishes unchecked. (Strangely, *Spirit* is treated, correctly, as fem. in 1:2, but here it is the subject of a masc. verb. This is unusual, but Job 4:15 illustrates the same phenomenon.) The *forever* of this verse also evokes the "and live forever" of 3:22.

A second problem in this verse concerns the clause *inasmuch as [bēšaggam] he is but flesh*. As it stands in the MT *bēšaggam* is made up of three words: the preposition *bē*, "in"; the relative *šē*, "who, which"; and the adverb *gam*, "also." So it translates literally "in which also." Thus the verse says that the stimulus for God's retaliation is man's nature—he is flesh—rather than man's activity. It is what man is, rather than what man has done, that incites God not to permit his Spirit to remain in mankind forever.

A slight change in the MT, reading *bēšaggām* for *bēšaggam*, easily circumvents the awkwardness of the verse. Indeed, a number of ancient Hebrew manuscripts support this reading.¹⁹ In revocalizing the word, what one now has is the preposition *bē* and the infinitive construct form of the verb *šāgag* (or more likely *šāgâ*), "to move (in error), to stray." The verse would then say, "my spirit shall not remain in man forever; in their going astray he [i.e., man] is flesh." The problem with this interpretation is that *šāgag* is frequently used in the OT to describe wrongs that are perpetrated

17. See R. S. Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4," *JBL* 106 (1987) 15 n. 10.

18. C. Rabin, "Etymological Miscellanea," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8 (1961) 388–89.

19. The ms. evidence is accumulated by C. D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (repr. New York: Ktav, 1966), p. 1021; for references see "Index of Principal Texts." Five of twenty-one mss. (those listed by Ginsburg on pp. 514, 712, 737, 942, 955) prefer the *ā* under the *g*. The remainder follow the MT with an *a*.

inadvertently, but of which the performer is conscious.²⁰ So, sins committed "inadvertently" are sins that result either from negligence or from ignorance. Certainly the sons of God act neither from negligence nor out of ignorance.

Sense can be extracted from the MT as it stands. First, we take the preposition *be* with causal force, "for, inasmuch," a nuance supported by LXX *diá tó einai autoús*. Second, the proclitic relative *še* in the Pentateuch is not strange or inexplicable, although many scholars consider it so.²¹ It appears thirty-two times in Canticles and sixty-eight times in Ecclesiastes (compared with the generally much more common *'ašer*, which occurs 89 times in Ecclesiastes).²²

These statistics do not permit us to say that this relative particle is late simply because it appears preponderantly in OT books that scholars consider late. On the contrary, its appearance in the early Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:7) testifies to its antiquity. Similarly, the personal name from Ugarit *šb'l* (to be vocalized *šu-ba'al* or *šuba'la*) may mean "the one of Baal," and thus give additional support for the early use of this particle.²³ Gen. 6:3, then, provides us with the only illustration of this relative in the Pentateuch.

The fact that God's judgment is directed at man would argue strongly for the fact that the culprits must be mortals. That being the case, this portion of the verse suggests that the ultimate root behind the sin of these sons of God was that they were *flesh*. Here is man at his weakest and most vulnerable. Man is many things—formed and animated by God, a divine image bearer, but he is also flesh. To be sure, the OT in general, and the opening chapters of Genesis in particular, do not teach that simply being flesh is sinful, as if the two were synonymous. After all, the man used this same word to describe his partner in 2:23, and together they became "one flesh" (2:25). But *bāšār* does seem to be a general term to describe the

20. The rich nuances in this word are creatively discussed by J. Milgrom, "The Cultic *šegāgā* and Its Influences in Psalms and Job," *JQR* 57 (1967) 115–25. See also D. Christensen, "Janus Parallelism in Genesis 6:3," *HS* 27 (1986) 20–24.

21. See G. Bergstrasser, "Das hebräische Präfix *š*," *ZAW* 29 (1909) 40–56.

22. For Canticles see D. Broadribb, "Thoughts on the Song of Solomon," *Abr-Nahrain* 3 (1961/62) 11–36, esp. pp. 31–32, who identifies 7 functions of this relative particle in Canticles. The first of these is the meaning "because" in 1:6 and 4:2, a meaning that may apply to Gen. 6:3. For Ecclesiastes see M. J. Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth II," *CBQ* 33 (1952) 44–45.

23. See M. Dahood, "Hebrew Ugaritic Lexicography X," *Bib* 53 (1972) 401. Dahood also refers to *UT*, 1020:3–4, *hny lpn mlk šink itn*, which he translates, "Plead for me before the king. I will give you what you don't have (*šink*)." Gordon, however, translates *šb'l* not as "the one of Baal" but "man of Baal" (*UT*, p. 488).

limitation and fallibility of humankind. And it is this fallibility that makes possible any kind of trespass.²⁴

The third problem in the verse is interpreting the force of *His days shall be one hundred and twenty years*. Is this an age limit, or is it a period of grace prior to the Flood (i.e., his [remaining] days shall be 120 years)? The first alternative faces the difficulty that most of the people in the rest of Genesis lived well beyond 120 years. It is possible to interpret the longer life spans of the patriarchs as a mitigation or suspension of the divine penalty, just as an earlier announced divine penalty ("on the day you eat of it you shall surely die") was not immediately implemented.

But the (imminent) withdrawal of the divine Spirit as a means of lowering the life span of humanity does not make a great deal of sense. Rather, it seems to presage some event that is about to occur. Accordingly, we prefer to see in this phrase a reference to a period of time that prefaces the Flood's beginning. It is parallel to Jon. 4:5, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." God's hand of judgment is put on hold.

4 In a parenthetical phrase we are told that *Nephilim* were present during this scenario. But in what capacity? Are they simply contemporaries? Or are the *Nephilim* the result, the fruit, of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men? Or are the *Nephilim* the sons of God and therefore the perpetrators of the crime?²⁵ Had v. 4 preceded v. 3, the likelihood would have increased that we are to understand the *Nephilim* as the bastard offspring of this union. But the present order of the verses argues the contrary.²⁶

The only other OT reference to the *Nephilim* is Num. 13:33, where they form part of the pre-Israelite population of Palestine. This passage indicates strongly that the *Nephilim* (here associated with the sons of Anak) were individuals of imposing stature beside whom the Hebrew spies appeared as grasshoppers. Probably for this reason the LXX (and see AV)

24. Interestingly, H. Wolff (*Anthropology of the Old Testament*, pp. 26–31) labels his discussion of flesh (*bāšār*) as "Man in his Infirmary." *BDB*, p. 142, cites Gen. 6:3 as an illustration of *bāšār* under its fifth meaning for the word—"man over against God as frail or erring." See also D. Lys, "L'arrière-plan et les connotations vétérotestamentaires de *sarx* et de *sōma* (étude préliminaire)," *VT* 36 (1986) 163–204, esp. p. 178. For Lys *bāšār* is what God is not, and what humankind is.

25. Few embrace the latter view. For a sympathetic treatment see L. Birney, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4," *JETS* 13 (1970) 43–52. Birney goes this direction only because he is tied down to the causal use of *'ašer*, when in fact a temporal use is much more likely. Support for Birney's interpretation is, however, as old as the Palestinian Targum, which translates v. 4 as "Shamhazzai and Uzziel fell from heaven and were on earth in those days."

26. See B. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, p. 58.

translated Nephilim as “giants” (*hoi gígantes*). The use of the definite article with the word argues for a specific and well-known group of individuals. Perhaps we can see here a parallel between the unusual physical development of some people and the unusually long lives of others at this time.²⁷

A literal translation of *Nephilim* is “fallen ones.” The full implication of the passive adjectival formation (*qaṭīl*) can best be brought out by something like “those who were made to fall, those who were cast down.”²⁸ *Nephilim* is not the passive plural participle of *nāpal* (which would be *neṗūlīm*). The active form of the participle (*nōpeṗīm*, “the falling [fallen] ones”) does occur in Deut. 22:4; Ps. 145:14; Ezek. 32:22–24. This form refers to those who fell down of their own accord, or who fell down in a natural manner and died.

The translation we have offered understands the Nephilim to be distinct from *the mighty men*, who alone are the offspring of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Thus we have set off the first part of the verse in parentheses. Such explanatory, perhaps pedantic, asides may be compared with similar phenomena in Deut. 2:10–12; 2:20–23; 3:9; 3:11; 3:13b–14. Almost all modern versions of the Bible put these five passages from Deuteronomy in parentheses. Such “frame-breaks” supply extra information from the narrator (e.g., Deut. 2:10, “[The Emim formerly lived there. . .]”). The expression “as it is to this day” occurs frequently (Deut. 2:22; 3:11, 14), and that is the equivalent of Gen. 4:6—“and later on too.”²⁹ It makes much better grammatical sense to take the antecedent of *hēm̄mā* (“these”) as the understood object of “they fathered children” rather than “Nephilim.”³⁰

The children produced by this union are called *the mighty men* (*haḡgibbōrīm*).³¹ They are described further as being *of old* (*mē’ōlām*, the same word for “forever,” *le’ōlām*, in v. 3), and *men of reputation*, that is, famous. What produced such fame, or infamy, we are not told.

27. See G. Aalders, *Genesis*, p. 156.

28. See R. S. Hendel, *JBL* 106 (1987) 22 n. 46. A parallel formation would be *’asirīm*, “imprisoned ones” (Gen. 39:22), alongside *’asūrīm* (39:20).

29. R. Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist* [New York: Seabury, 1980], pp. 30–31) notes that such frame-breaks are a frequent device by which an author may involve his readers more in his message.

30. See J. Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14 (1939) 84–86, 106–7.

31. *gibbōrīm* is normally a term for soldiers (2 Sam. 10:7; 16:6; 20:7; 23:8, 9, 16, 17, 22; 1 K. 1:10), most often associated with David. W. Wifall (“Gen. 6:1–4—A Royal Davidic Myth?” *BTB* 5 [1975] 294–301) suggests that Gen. 6:1–4 is a hybrid and reflects both pre-Israelite royal traditions and historical events from the David story. I believe the connection is more likely with the first of these two traditions than with the second.

The use of the name motif in Gen. 1–11 appears several times. It surfaces with a negative connotation in the Tower of Babel episode, where the builders wished “to make a name” for themselves (11:4). This self-aggrandizement contrasts with the promise of God that he, not Abraham, would make great the patriarch’s name (Gen. 12:2; 2 Sam. 7:9). In other contexts to give someone a name means to engage in an act of intelligence (Gen. 2:20). Interestingly, the way Adam names his wife after they sin (3:20) is akin to the formula by which he named the animals, but different from the way he named her before they sinned (2:23).

By virtue of its placement, the incident in 6:1–4 is obviously intended as an introduction to the Flood story. Until this point the Scripture has discussed the sins of individuals: Adam, Eve, Cain, Lamech. Now for the first time the emphasis shifts to the sins of a group, “the sons of God,” with the result that God’s punishment is directed not against a man, but against mankind. This emphasis of the sins of a group is perpetuated in the Flood event.

THE NEW TESTAMENT APPROPRIATION

Gen. 6:1–4 and Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4

There is no doubt that intertestamental literature heavily favored the “angel” interpretation of Gen. 6:1–4. This is most clear in the book of 1 Enoch.¹ Do these two NT references to sinning, apostate angels support that view? At best the evidence from 2 Pet. 2:4 is mute, for here the allusion is to angels (note that in the Greek text *angélōn*, “angels,” is anarthrous, i.e., “even angels”) who sinned and thus were cast into hell. Peter does not elaborate on the nature of the angels’ sin.

Jude 6 is another matter. He refers to angels who “left their proper habitation” and thus fell under divine judgment. V. 7 goes on to say, “as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, having in like manner with them [*toútois*] given themselves over to fornication and indulged in unnatural flesh.” The crucial question is the identification of the antecedent of “them” (*toútois*). NIV circumvents the problem by simply ignoring “them”: “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality.”

If we identify the antecedent of *toútois* as Sodom and Gomorrah, we

1. See P. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 195–233; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 383–405.

need to read and punctuate as follows: "as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities in like manner with them, gave themselves. . . ." We know that *toútois* (masc.) cannot refer back to *póleis*, "cities" (fem.), unless we have here a case of gender confusion.

If we identify the antecedent of *toútois* as the angels of v. 6, then Jude must be seeing in Gen. 6:1-4 not marriage, but rape and fornication, and titanic lust, an interpretation favored by pseudepigraphical literature. See 1 Enoch 6-11 and Jub. 4-5, in which the sons of God are seen as rebels from heaven, and their fornication with earthly women, after whom they lusted, is their sin. It is quite obvious that Jude was very familiar with the book of 1 Enoch. Not only did he quote directly from it (Jude 14, 15 is from 1 Enoch 60:8), but he also used phrases that have parallels in 1 Enoch. For example, in the incident under discussion (the fallen angels), compare the following:

1 Enoch

[The angels] have abandoned the high heaven, the holy eternal place (12:4)

Bind Azaz'el hand and foot (and) throw him into the darkness (10:4)

that he may be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment (10:6).

Jude

And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling (6a)

have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom (6b)

until the judgment of the great day (6c).

G. THE GREAT FLOOD (6:5-9:29)

1. THE REASON FOR A FLOOD (6:5-10)

- 5 *When Yahweh saw how extensive was man's wickedness on the earth, and that every scheme in man's imagination was nothing but evil perpetually,*
- 6 *Yahweh regretted that he had made man on the earth, and there was pain in his heart.*
- 7 *Yahweh said: "I will wash from the earth the man whom I have created, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I regret that I made them."*
- 8 *But Noah found favor¹ with Yahweh.*

1. There may be a pun in this verse. In Hebrew both "Noah" and "favor" are made up of the same two consonants, but in reversed order, *nh* and *hn*, respectively. See J. Sasson, "Word Play in Gen. 6:8-9," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 165. NEB "to win favor" (6:8) is challenged by A. N. Barnard, "Was Noah a Righteous Man?" *Theology* 74 (1971) 311-14.

- 9 *These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous person. Among his contemporaries he was blameless. With God Noah walked.*
- 10 *He fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

5 The God of the OT never acts arbitrarily; he does not run his world amorally, claims the author of this verse. Nobody will receive this divine judgment simply because he is human. God is moved to anger by man's deliberate violations of the code by which God wills his world to live. The only innocuous bystanders are the animals.

Here, first of all, is what God saw (v. 5), then how he felt (v. 6), then what he intends to do (v. 7). What God saw was both the extensiveness of sin and the intensiveness of sin. Geographically, the problem is an infested earth. Note that in 6:5-13, *the earth* (*hā'āreṣ*) is mentioned eight times. Thus the description has all the appearances of a universal condition rather than a local one. To be sure, *'ereṣ* is frequently rendered as "(local) land," "ground," and even "underworld." When *'ereṣ* refers to a particular piece of land, however, it is often followed by a prepositional phrase that further identifies the land (e.g., the land of the Canaanites, land of the east, land of the fathers), except in those places where mention is made theologically of the land promised to Israel. Furthermore, the reference in 7:3 to the animals of *kol-hā'āreṣ* argues for an understanding of *'ereṣ* elsewhere in the Flood narrative as "earth" in that almost all uses of *kol-hā'āreṣ* (outside Deuteronomy and Joshua-Samuel) are references to the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28; 11:1; Exod. 9:14, 16; 19:5). Yet, verses such as Gen. 13:9, 15 show that even in Genesis *kol-hā'āreṣ* refers to the whole land.

The situation is further aggravated because such depravity controls not only man's actions but also his thoughts (*māḥšēbōt*): *every scheme in man's imagination was nothing but evil*. The mind, too, has been perverted, an emphasis made again in 8:21. *scheme*, Heb. *yēšer* (or, "imagination, desire"), is a nominal form of the word used in 2:7, 19 to describe the "formation" of man and animal from the soil. There God was the potter, fashioning man. Now man himself has become the potter, fashioning his thoughts. What God forms is beautiful; what man forms is repulsive. *perpetually*. Finally, this verse informs the reader that this kind of malaise is a chronic condition, not just a spasmodic lapse.

It is important to observe that right at the beginning there is a clear-cut moral motivation behind sending the Flood. The Gilgamesh Epic (an Akkadian story about a flood), which does have clear parallels with Gen. 6-9, lacks such a parallel here. The closest it comes is: "when their heart led the great gods to produce the flood" (Tablet XI, line 14). That vague statement

is left unamplified. Later in that same tablet (line 179) the god Ea speaks to Enlil (the one who sent the flood): "How could you, unreasoning, bring on the deluge?"

According to a related flood story, the Atrahasis Epic,² twelve hundred years after man's creation his noise and commotion has become so loud that Enlil starts to suffer from insomnia. Enlil sends a plague to eradicate boisterous humanity, only to have his plan thwarted. Next he tries drought and famine, which are also unsuccessful. Finally a flood is sent, which Atrahasis survives by building a boat. To call this noise moral turbulence or to understand the clamor of mankind as man's chronic depravity reads into the text far too much. The problem is simply that there are too many people, with the result that there is too much noise. There is a limit on Enlil's auditory capacities. It really should not surprise us that in a system of thought where the gods are not necessarily morally superior to human beings, and where the line between good and evil is blurred, there is no recording of the fact that man is to be drowned because he is a rebel and a sinner.

6 Viewing the debacle man has fomented, God is grieved, even to the point of experiencing *pain in his heart*. Note again here the echo of earlier language in Genesis. Previously Eve (3:16) and Adam (3:17) were the pain bearers. Now Yahweh himself feels that stab. Eve's and Adam's pain, however, is imposed due to their sin. Yahweh's is not. Rather, his pain finds its source in the depth of the regret he experiences over fallen humanity, and in the fact that he must judge such fallenness. It is easy, of course, to dismiss such allusions as anthropopathisms, and to feel that they can tell us nothing about the essential nature of God. But verses like this remind us that the God of the OT is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse. To call him the Impassible Absolute is but part of the truth.

Yahweh regretted [*yinnāhem*] that he had made man. This point is made again in v. 7b, "I regret [*emheh*] that I made him." The AV translates *nĥm* as "repent." Here we are introduced to the idea of God repenting! As a matter of fact, the Niphal of the root *nĥm* (as here) occurs forty-eight times in the OT, and in thirty-four of these the subject (expressed or implied) is God.³

Interestingly, the LXX usually translates Heb. *nāham* with *metanoō* or *metamēlōmai*, "to be sorry, repent, change one's mind," but here and in v. 7 it avoids either of those verbs. It reads "And God considered that he had

2. See W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḥasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969).

3. These 38 passages are listed in J. B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *JBL* 98 (1979) 499 n. 7.

made man" (v. 6) and "because I have become angry that I made them" (v. 7).⁴ Here the LXX translators hesitated to have God repenting.

The Hebrew root in question (*nĥm*) is related to the noun *nehāmā*, "breath" (Ps. 119:50; Job 6:10), which describes the life-giving effect of God's word in a time of oppression. The Niphal and Hithpael stems have six basic meanings: (1) suffer emotional pain (Gen. 6:6); (2) be comforted (Gen. 37:35); (3) execute wrath (Isa. 1:24); (4) retract punishment (Jer. 18:7-8); (5) retract blessing (Jer. 18:9-10); (6) retract (a life of) sin (Jer. 8:5-6).⁵

It should be noted that only a few passages that speak of God's repentance refer to God repenting over something already done. The vast majority of the instances of Yahweh's *nĥm* have to do with his possible change of will concerning a future plan of action.⁶ This is one significant difference between God's repentance and man's. Still, the fact that the OT affirms that God does repent, even over a *fait accompli*, forces us to make room in our theology for the concepts of both the unchangeability of God and his changeability.⁷

7 Yahweh's decision is to eliminate the source of the problem—man. The verb used to describe this intended action is appropriate. The root in question (*mĥh*) means "to erase by washing." Thus "to blot one's name out of a book" (Exod. 32:32-33) means to erase written words by washing off letters with water. In the trial of a woman suspected of adultery, the priest is "to write the curses in a book and then wash them off" (Num. 5:23). The psalmist prays that his enemies "be blotted" out of the book of the living (Ps. 69:29 [Eng. 28]). Exod. 17:14 also refers to God's blotting out Amalek.

In a positive sense the verb is used in the idiom, "the washing away of sins" (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; Jer. 18:23; Ps. 51:3, 11 [Eng. 2, 9]; Prov. 6:33). God not only erases sins, but he erases sinners—he judges them by drowning them.

4. Similarly, Exod. 32:12, "repent of the evil against your people," becomes "and be merciful concerning this evil." Exod. 32:14, "and Yahweh repented of the evil which he spoke to do to his people," becomes "and the Lord was propitiated concerning the evil he said he would do to his people."

5. See H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NĥM," *Bib* 56 (1975) 512-32. It will be noticed that there is a polarity between several of these meanings; thus, *nĥm* means both "be pained" and "be relieved of pain." It means both "execute wrath" and "retract wrath." Such polarization appears in the verb *bārak* (Piel), which means "to bless" and "to curse."

6. See Jörg Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes: Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1975).

7. On the "repentance of God" see L. J. Kuypers, "The Repentance of God," *RefR* 18 (1965) 3-16; idem, "The Suffering and the Repentance of God," *SJT* 22 (1969) 257-77.

both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air. Again we note the wide impact of God's judgment. Not only humans but animals as well are mentioned as objects of divine wrath. Either the animals contributed to the depravity in the world, or else they are innocent victims. The form of judgment, a deluge, would of necessity kill all forms of life. It would be temerarious to suppose that this verse teaches a threefold division of the animal kingdom into beasts, insects, and fowl. The expression is to be understood as a hendiadys and means "all living creatures, human as well as animal."

8 Most translations of the Bible have Noah "finding" favor with Yahweh. A few (e.g., NEB) have Noah "winning" favor with Yahweh. There is a significant difference between the two. The former denotes no moral quality on the part of the person who is designated as having found favor. On these grounds Noah's election would be just that, and no causal relationship should be seen between Noah's finding favor (v. 8) and his character (v. 9).

The latter option, "winning favor," shows a nexus between the two verses, with the line of argumentation being effect to cause (i.e., substantiation) rather than cause to effect (i.e., causation). Of course, had the order of the two verses been switched, there would have been no doubt that Noah's righteousness and blamelessness were intended to supply a rationale for his election and escape from the Flood. If we translate Heb. *hēn* as "grace" instead of "favor," then further support for "finding" is available. Grace is found or received, not won.

The phrase "find favor in one's eyes" occurs a number of times in Genesis with a wealth of nuances that cannot be captured by one English equivalent. Thus, 18:3, "My lord, if I may beg of you this favor"; 19:19, "if you would but indulge your servant"; 32:5; 33:8, "in the hope of gaining your favor"; 39:7, "he took a fancy to."⁸

9-10 Here is the second instance in Genesis of the formula *These are the descendants of X* (cf. 2:4). The source critics, who assign such titles to P, suggest that there are here two introductions to the Flood story: 6:5-8 (J) and 6:9-11 (P). It seems more accurate to designate 6:5-8 as a preview to the whole story, the main emphasis of which is to let us see the major actor in this drama—Yahweh, with a quick look at a lesser light—Noah. In 6:9-11 the emphasis shifts to Noah and the earth as the major participants in the drama.

The previous verses first detailed the wickedness in the earth (vv. 5-7), then focused on Noah's exemption from divine judgment (v. 8). Vv. 9ff.

8. The translations are those of Speiser. Gen. 6:8 is the only place where he translates the idiom literally. See his *Genesis*, pp. LXVII and LXVIII.

reverse that order, targeting first Noah's exemplary character (v. 9), then describing a corrupted earth (vv. 11ff.).

Verses 9-10 picture Noah both as the first entry in a list of generations (the listing of his three sons) and as one who stands unique in his own generation. The allusion to Noah's character seems to interrupt the genealogical material. One might have expected the order to be v. 9a, 10, 9b, or v. 9b, 9a, 10. In sequence at least, the text gives preference to how Noah lived, rather than to how he reproduced himself.

Noah was a righteous person. Among his contemporaries he was blameless. With God Noah walked. These three sentences are only ten words in Hebrew. We remember too that Noah is the tenth generation from Adam according to the selective genealogy of Gen. 5:1-32. By using this sequence of ten words, perhaps the author is underscoring the fact that Noah formed the tenth generation from creation. In Hebrew, this section describing his behavior both begins and ends with his name.⁹ The author must intend to put Noah in the spotlight, giving him as much attention as possible.

The word *blameless* means free from defect, as may be observed in the many passages describing the unblemished animal presented to God (Exod. 12:5; Lev. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; etc.). It is especially prominent in texts dealing with the cult and in Ezekiel. Of course, Noah was not "free from defect." He was *tāmîm*, but not sinless. Perhaps a word like "wholesome" or "sound" or "candid" would be appropriate when applying this word to people (see Gen. 17:1; Deut. 18:13; Ps. 15:2; 18:24 [Eng. 23] = 2 Sam. 22:24; Prov. 11:5; Job 12:4). Two of the more prominent Hebrew words for "sinner" are *hōtē'* and *hattā'*. In form the only basic difference is that the medial consonant in the second one is doubled. But in meaning the difference is quite significant. The first word designates the person who sins only occasionally. By contrast, the second word refers to the habitual sinner. The word for *righteous person* (*šaddîq*) is interesting. With *šdq*, "righteous," the only possibility is the one we have here—*šaddîq*, that is, one who is habitually righteous. There is no *šōdēq* (participle), for Scripture makes no room for the person who, with God's blessing, practices righteousness only occasionally. Of course, the righteous, the *šaddîq*, may turn from and repudiate his righteousness (*šēdeq*), and thus die in and for his sin (Ezek. 3:20).

9. See J. Sasson, "Word Play in Gen. 6:8-9," *CBQ* 37 (1975) 165-66; idem, "Wordplay in the Old Testament," *IDBS*, p. 969. Sasson may be overdoing the puns here when he compares Enoch and Noah, both of whom walked with God, and notices that the consonants in Enoch's name—*hnk*—reappear in reverse order in the last three letters of v. 9—*knh*.