

## WHO ARE THE SONS OF GOD? — A NEW SUGGESTION

One of the strangest episodes in the Book of Genesis — and, arguably, the entire Bible — is the story of the “sons of God” who lusted after the daughters of man, producing “the heroes of old, men of renown”. These mysterious “sons of God” are often interpreted as angels <sup>1</sup>, which would explain why their coupling with human women results in the birth of Nephilim — that is, giants <sup>2</sup>. Yet, the real surprise lies in the fact that a tale so redolent of pagan myth managed to make its way into the Bible at all.

### I. PRIOR INTERPRETATIONS

In an attempt to quench these mythical overtones, various commentators have proposed that the “sons of God” are not angels but men referred to as “the sons of God”. There are three main variations of this approach <sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This reading tradition developed during the Second Temple period. See references to various studies that favor this approach in: L.T. STUCKENBRUCK, “The Origins of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 in the Second and Third Centuries B.C.E.”, *The Fall of the Angels* (eds. C. AUFFARTH – L.T. STUCKENBRUCK) (Themes in Biblical Narrative 6; Leiden 2004) 87-118; *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (eds. A.K. HARKINS – K.C. BAUTCH – J.C. ENDRES) (Minneapolis, MN 2014) 2 n. 2; A.T. WRIGHT, *The Origin of Evil Spirits* (Revised edition; Tübingen 2013) 61-76; M. E. GÖTTE, *Von den Wächtern zu Adam. Frühjüdische Mythen über die Ursprünge des Bösen und ihre frühchristliche Rezeption* (WUNT II/426; Tübingen 2016). Some understand the obligation for women to cover their hair “because of the angels” mentioned in 1 Cor 11,10 as related to this episode — out of fear that women attract the attention of angels. See S.M. LEWIS, “‘Because of the Angels’: Paul and the Enochic Traditions”, *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (eds. A. K. HARKINS – K. C. BAUTCH – J.C. ENDRES) (Minneapolis, MN 2014) 81-90.

<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint already identifies the Nephilim with the giants, and this reading has been widely accepted throughout history, especially due to the words of the spies in Numbers: “And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of the giants of the Nephilim” (Num 13,33). See R.S. HENDEL, “The Nephilim were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context”, *The Fall of the Angels* (eds. C. AUFFARTH – L.T. STUCKENBRUCK) (Leiden 2004) 11-34, esp. 21-22. He believes they are called “Nephilim” because they “fell” (נפלו) during the flood.

<sup>3</sup> Compare: F. DEXINGER, “Jüdisch-christliche Nachgeschichte von Genesis 6,1-4”, *Zur Aktualität des Alten Testaments. Festschrift für Georg Sauer zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. S. KREUZER – K. LÜTHI) (Frankfurt am Main – New York 1992) 155-175; A.S. DESNITSKY, “Sons of God: Humans or Spirits: A History of Exegesis of Genesis 6:2”, *Vestnik Drevnei Istori* 262 (2007) 184-199.

(1) “Sons of God” — judges, men of authority (or their sons). This reading is prevalent in Jewish exegesis. Already found in some Midrashim, it is widely accepted by medieval Jewish commentators<sup>4</sup>. The use of the word אלהים as a synonym for rulers is certainly possible (as seen in Gen 23,6; Exod 4,16, and elsewhere); moreover, in the ancient world rulers often perceived themselves as gods, or as descended from divinity, which could conceivably lead to the adoption of language that rulers and kings used about themselves<sup>5</sup>. According to this reading, the text is mockingly referring to these leaders with their own pompous language. These haughty leaders believed that their “divine” status allowed them to do as they pleased. The noble class would freely take any pretty women from the lower classes, the “daughters of men”.

There are two main problems with this prevalent reading. Firstly, from a linguistic perspective, it is problematic to assume that the “sons of God” vs. “the daughters of man” hints at an interclass struggle. Why should “daughters of men” refer to the lower class? Even after reading Ps 49,3: “Sons of men (בני אדם), sons of people (בני איש), richer and poor together,” it is hard to claim that this is the plain meaning of our verse. Another problem lies in the interpretation of the plot, according to this reading. What is wrong with the nobility’s actions? The expression “and they took wives for themselves” is the usual biblical description of marriage (see, for example, Gen 24,67; Exod 6,20.23; Ruth 4,13). There is nothing unusual about the higher classes taking beautiful wives from the lower classes. Some argue that this is a polemic against polygamy<sup>6</sup>, while others hold that it alludes to the custom of *droit du seigneur*, “the right of the first night,” where the local ruler seizes brides on their wedding night<sup>7</sup>. These readings are possible, but if this were the main narrative problem, we might have expected more explicit language to this effect in the text itself.

<sup>4</sup> See G. OBERHÄNSLI-WIDMER, “Göttersöhne, Menschentöchter und Giganten – unheilvolle Allianzen als Urgrund des Bösen: Genesis 6,1-4 biblisch, apokalyptisch und rabbinisch gelesen”, *Judaica* 66 (2010) 229-258.

<sup>5</sup> M. KLINE, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1961) 187-204. Of course, it must be taken into account that even if there were lone kings who claimed that they were descended from Divinity, this is not such a prevalent phenomenon, and there are no known governments who referred to themselves as “the sons of God”; see D.J.A. CLINES, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ (Gen 6,1-4) in the Context of Primeval History (Gen 1–11)”, *JSOT* 13 (1979) 33-46.

<sup>6</sup> KLINE, “Divine Kingship”, and similarly A.R. MILLARD, “New Babylonian ‘Genesis Story’”, *TynBul* 18 (1967) 3-18, esp. 12.

<sup>7</sup> J. WALTON, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4”, *The Genesis Debate* (ed. R. YOUNGBLOOD) (Nelson 1986) 184-209. This custom is already documented in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: “He mates with the lawful wife; He first, the groom after” (Tablet 2, lines 61-70). It is intriguing that Enkidu expresses disgust at this phenomenon: “Enkidu blocked the door to the wedding with his foot, not allowing Gilgamesh to enter” (ibid. 98-99), which reveals that there were always those who opposed this dreadful custom.

(2) “The sons of God” refer to descendants of Seth’s line who took wives from Cain’s line<sup>8</sup>. This reading is especially prevalent in early Christian exegesis. This reading also eliminates any elements of divinity from the scene, but its advantage over the first is that it interprets the verses within their immediate narrative context. The previous scene deals with the dynasty of Seth, whose members “began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen 4,26) and who “walk with God” (5,24), thus justifying their description as “sons of God” (as opposed to Cain’s line)<sup>9</sup>. Alternatively, some hold that the opposite is true: that the “sons of God” refers to Cain’s descendants, while “the daughters of man” are of Seth’s line<sup>10</sup>. They have also pointed out a connection between the sons of God *seeing* how beautiful (טובות) the daughters of man are, and how Eve *sees* how good (טוב) the forbidden fruit appears (3,6). Just as Eve lusts (תאווה) for the forbidden fruit, so the sons of Eve, Cain’s descendants, lust for the daughters of Seth<sup>11</sup>.

Yet neither of these interpretations does much to justify the particular choice of the phrases “the sons of God” vs. “the daughters of man”. These terms reflect a deeper, more inherent difference between them, rather than just a difference in ancestry<sup>12</sup>.

(3) “The sons of God” can also theoretically be read in a figurative sense: as the servants of God (like the common expression “the sons of the prophets”), whereas “the daughters of man” reflect the rest of humanity<sup>13</sup>. This, too, dispels any trace of a mystical atmosphere.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: C.F. KEIL – F. DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (trans. J. MARTIN; Grand Rapids, MI 1900) vol. 1, 128-140; L. BIRNEY, “An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1-4”, *JETS* 13 (1970) 43-52, esp. 45-47 (Sethite men were marrying women in general); J. E. COLERAN, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6,2”, *Theological Studies* 2 (1941) 488-509; J. E. HARTLEY, *Genesis* (NIBC; Peabody, MA 2000) 96. This reading is prevalent in classic Christian exegesis (Scipio Africanus, Augustine, Luther, Calvin).

<sup>9</sup> BIRNEY, “Exegetical Study”, 46. He believes that the “daughters of man” are not necessarily the daughters of Cain, but a name for all women — daughters of Seth and Cain.

<sup>10</sup> L. ESLINGER, “A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha’elohim* and *benoth ha’adam* in Gen 6:1-4”, *JSOT* 13 (1979) 65-73.

<sup>11</sup> On this analogy see also K.A. MATHEWS, *Genesis* (NAC; Nashville, TN 1996) vol. 1, 33.

<sup>12</sup> J. SCHARBERT, “Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Gen. 6:1-4”, *BZ* 11 (1967) 66-78; L. RUPPERT, *Genesis I: Gen 1,1 – 11,26* (FzB 70; Würzburg 1992) 272-279; J. DAY, “The Sons of God and Daughters of Men and the Giants: Disputed Points in the Interpretation of Genesis 6.1-4”, *From Creation to Babel. Studies in Genesis 1-11* (LHB/OTS 592; London 2013) 77-97, here 78; S. FOCKNER, “Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God”, *JSOT* 32 (2008) 435-456.

<sup>13</sup> FOCKNER, “Reopening the Discussion”; cf. H. HÜBNER, *Die Weisheit Salomos. Liber Sapientiae Salomonis* (Göttingen 1999) 69-70; C. SAVASTA, “‘Figli di Dio’ e ‘Giganti’ (Gen 6,1-4): Una proposta di identificazione”, *Bibbia e Oriente* 36 (1994) 193-215.

Yet this reading is not convincing. Firstly, the term “daughters of man” does not easily exclude believers from what is usually a general reference to humanity. Secondly, why should marriage between people who worship God and people who do not produce supernatural, giant offspring? The same is true, of course, of any argument which interprets “the sons of God” and “the daughters of man” as two sets of mortal beings.

These interpretations are calculated to dispel the mythological, decidedly unbiblical atmosphere that hovers around the verses if the characters are read as angels. Yet such a reading is prevalent and ancient: it is described in the *Book of Enoch* (chapter 10 and following) and the *Book of Jubilees* (4,22; 5,1). Modern scholars have also embraced this reading, as it fits in with the language and plot. Elsewhere in the Bible, the expression “sons of God” refers to angels and the heavenly hosts, especially in the Book of Job, where the members of the heavenly court gather around God: “One day the sons of God presented themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came along with them” (1,6; also 2,1; Dan 3,25). In Job 38,7, “the sons of God” refers to the celestial bodies.

As mentioned above, from the point of view of plot, it certainly seems more likely that “the sons of God” describes a non-human entity, for their cohabitation with human women results in the birth of supernatural offspring — of “the men of renown,” and perhaps the Nephilim, the giants (Num 13,23, though this reading is subject to interpretation — see below). The meaning of this episode is difficult to grasp if the “sons of God” refers to the ruling class, the nobility <sup>14</sup>.

Yet the reading that views “the sons of God” as a reference to angels is not without its own difficulties. Firstly, there is no other biblical context in which divine beings have any trace of sexuality, or any means of cohabiting with humans. Other biblical angels are otherworldly, unearthly beings, characterized in a completely different light, which makes this episode all the more jarring <sup>15</sup>. In fact, while “the sons of God” is usually associated

<sup>14</sup> The narrative has a certain ancient pagan feel; see, especially, P.D. HANSON, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11”, *JBL* 96 (1977) 195–233; E.G. KRAELING, “The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6.1–4”, *JNES* 6 (1947) 193–208. At the same time, the story’s unique nature is evident from a first reading: the characters are named as “the sons of God,” not “the gods”, and the children born of these unions are not immortal.

<sup>15</sup> The strange portrayal of “the sons of God” in this story has led Hendel to claim that this is precisely the narrative objective: to depict the cosmic confusion which led to the flood (HENDEL, “Nephilim”, 20). Some scholars view the breaking of boundaries between heaven and earth as the narrative’s main objective. Schüle perceives the first chapters of Genesis as an age when the boundaries between heaven and earth were more fluid, which thus allowed for an episode that resulted in a shortened human lifespan and a more defined border between heaven and earth (A. SCHÜLE, “The Divine-Human Marriages

with divine beings, it is nonetheless a rare term — angels appear throughout Genesis, but they are generally referred to as מלאכים (“angels”) or אנשים (“men”). Why are these divine beings portrayed so differently, and described with a different name<sup>16</sup>? As R. F. Cefalu observes:

Job is the only place where the exact phrase occurs. Thus, we have no other biblical contexts with which to compare the “sons of God” terminology except the Job passages and Gen 6. Therefore, to automatically conclude that the phrase’s usage in Gen 6 is a reference to angels because of its usage in Job is to commit the fallacy of “unwarranted restriction of the semantic field,” and to fail to take into account other possibilities that may offer a more plausible interpretation. In fact, angels are seen throughout the book of Genesis, but they are never referred to as “sons of God.” Rather, the term used to identify them is מלאך<sup>17</sup>.

The *Book of Jubilees* refers to these figures as “angels of God” (5,1), but this is not the name used in Genesis<sup>18</sup>.

There is, however, another detail that should be taken into account — a detail with dramatic implications for the identification of “the sons of God”.

## II. THE PLACEMENT OF VERSE 3

The placement of verse 3 is surprising: “Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit will not abide in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days will

[Genesis 6:1-4] and the Greek Framing of the Primeval History”, *TZ* 65 [2009] 116-128. Clines (“Sons of God Episode”) already saw the motif of this blurring of boundaries as one of the ideas that integrate this episode into the broader section of Genesis 1–11. For further discussion of the violation of these boundaries and their reestablishment, see H. SEEBASS, “Die Gottessöhne und das menschliche Mass: Gen 6,1-4”, *BN* 134 (2007) 5-22.

<sup>16</sup> They are not serving as God’s messengers in this narrative, and so the term מלאכים, meaning “messengers”, is less appropriate; for this reason, this particular expression may have been chosen in order to express their status within reality without connection to their usual role.

<sup>17</sup> R. F. CEFALU, “Royal Priestly Heirs to the Restoration Promise of Genesis 3:15. A Biblical Theological Perspective on the Sons of God in Genesis 6”, *WTJ* 76 (2014) 351-370, esp. 355.

<sup>18</sup> Ron Hendel claims that the phrase “sons of God” may have been borrowed from the Canaanite language, where this expression literally referred to the children of El, and this sense may have developed in Hebrew meaning “angels”. He shows that one of the chief Babylonian gods, named “El”, is “the father of the sons of El” (HENDEL, “Nephilim”, 18). There are further difficulties with the prevalent reading that the sons of God are angels, including the arguments that Keil and Delitzsch use to show that they are human; for one, they claimed that the verb “took” does not describe sexual actions but the legal act of marriage: “for the marriage relation established by God at the creation and is never applied to πορνεία, or the simple act of physical connection”. If so, then this verb is more suited to the human world than the divine world. (KEIL – DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary*, 131)

be a hundred and twenty years”<sup>19</sup>. At first glance, this verse seems to interrupt the logical narrative flow. The report of the heroes’ birth (v. 4) ought to follow the report of relations between the sons of God and the daughters of man (v. 2) before God evaluates the situation (v. 3), but the present form of the sequence dictates otherwise: the sons of God lie with the daughters of man; God sees this and makes a decree to limit human lifespan and strength (“My spirit will not abide in man forever”), and only then does the reader hear of the birth of supernatural heroes. As Gunkel wrote: “V. 3 stands here, then, in a loose relationship to its context”<sup>20</sup>. In the words of Ginsberg: “This verse is clearly out of place, for it ought not to come immediately after verse 2, but after verse 4”<sup>21</sup>, or, in the words of Rofé: “Regardless of the interpretation of this verse, one thing is clear — it disrupts the sequence”<sup>22</sup>. It is no wonder that some rearrange the verses in question, or omit v. 3 altogether, thus solving the problem<sup>23</sup>. But can the verse be left in place, with this surprising sequence justified<sup>24</sup>?

<sup>19</sup> For the reading that the word בַּשָּׂגֵם (= because, since) refers to the sons of God, and is related to the word בַּשְּׂגִיגָה, see O. GRUPPE, “War Genesis 6:1-4 ursprünglich mit der Sintflut verbunden?”, *ZAW* 9 (1889) 135-155, esp. 146-147. On the proposal that this word is intentionally ambiguous, see D. CHRISTENSEN, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 6:3”, *HS* 27 (1986) 20-24. Kraeling (“The Significance”, 199) is loath to interpret בַּשָּׂגֵם in this sense. For an extensive discussion of this issue, see M. VERVENNE, “All They Need is Love: Once More Genesis 6.1-4”, *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed*. Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer (eds. J. DAVIES et al.) (JSOTS 195; Sheffield 1995) 19-40, esp. 28-30.

<sup>20</sup> H. GUNKEL, *Genesis*. Translated and Interpreted (trans. M. E. BIDDLE; Macon, GA 1997) 57.

<sup>21</sup> H. I. GINSBERG, “נַפְלִיִּים”, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, vol. V, 897.

<sup>22</sup> A. ROFÉ, *Angels in the Bible*. Israelite Belief in Angels as Evidenced by Biblical Traditions (Jerusalem 2012) 54 (Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> As already proposed by Julius Wellhausen (*Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* [Berlin 31899] 307-309), and many in his wake. See, for example: KRAELING, “The Significance”; HERRMANN, “Gottessöhne”, *ZRGG* 12 (1960) 242-251; C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis*. A Continental Commentary (trans. J.J. SCULLION; Minneapolis, MN 1985) vol. I, 366; SAVASTA, “‘Figli di Dio’ e ‘Giganti’”; G. DARSHAN, “The Story of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Men (Gen. 6:1-4) in Light of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*”, *Shnaton* 23 (2014) 155-178, esp. 158-159 (Hebrew). Bartelmus claims that as there is no parallel to v. 3 in the *Book of Enoch* it should be considered a very late addition (R. 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 [ATHANT 65; Zürich 1979] 151-193). Others have shown that the style and composition of the verse testify to its belonging to the narrative; see J.J. COLLINS, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men”, *Sacred Marriages*. The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity (eds. M. NISSINEN – R. URO) (Winona Lake, IN 2008) 259-274, esp. 260.

<sup>24</sup> John Day (“Sons of God”, 91) proposed that the narrative separation of the birth of the Nephilim and the relations between the sons of God and the daughters of man softens the mythical atmosphere that accompanies the story. David Petersen (“Genesis 6:1-4: Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos”, *JSOT* 13 [1979] 47-64, esp. 48) contends

Marzel suggests two possible contributions that v. 3 makes:

Verse 3 is in its correct place, for two purposes: 1) Contact between the sons of God and the daughters of man is immediately evaluated. There is no postponement of God's justice; 2) To clarify that the "men of renown" are weak people whose maximum lifespan is 120 years. There is no reason to admire them or deify them. Their weakness stems from their limited lifespan<sup>25</sup>.

While I concur with Marzel's conclusions, it must be admitted that a similar effect would have been achieved had v. 3 appeared after v. 4. Rather, it seems to me that the particular order of verses may well touch upon the essence of this narrative, and upon the identity of the sons of God.

To clarify this issue, I wish to explore v. 4, which describes — as generally assumed — the offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of man<sup>26</sup>: "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also later, when the sons of God came to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown".

While it is usually assumed that the Nephilim are the children of these relations, it does not actually state that they were "born" from them, but rather that they "were" in the land. Even those who claim that this is a description of birth have no choice but to explain "were" in the sense of "came into being": "In those days, in the same year that the sons of God married women from the daughters of man, they were in the land — that is, they came into the land... the Nephilim"<sup>27</sup>. Verse 3, then, is out of sequence only if we assume that the Nephilim are *born* from the sons of God and the daughters of man. However, as others have pointed out, in such a case we would expect that the word would appear with a *wāw* ("and") as an expression of consequence (as in Gen 1,3, for example)<sup>28</sup>.

If we dismiss this assumption, then a more straightforward reading presents itself: this description is simply important background information for the narrative. The Nephilim were in the land "at that time" — during the time when the story took place<sup>29</sup>. Compare this, for example,

that this is done to emphasize that God is so concerned that he enters the scene even before the demigod race had been born.

<sup>25</sup> Y. MARZEL, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Man, Development and Annihilation", *Beit Mikra* 27 (1982) 203-219, esp. 215 (Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> This approach is already evident in *1 Enoch* 7,2, and in *Jubilees* 5,1, and many propose that this is the plain meaning of these verses.

<sup>27</sup> GINSBERG, "Nephilim", 897.

<sup>28</sup> KEIL — DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary*, 137; MATHEWS, *Genesis*, 337.

<sup>29</sup> Compare: G. VON RAD, *Genesis* (trans J. H. MARKS) (OTL; London <sup>2</sup>1963) 111; B.S. CHILDS, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (SBT 27; London <sup>2</sup>1962) 56-58;



with Gen 12,6: “And Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the Oak of Moreh. *And the Canaanites were then in the land*”. The Canaanites were obviously there at the time of Abram’s journey, not *as a result* of his journey. Our own verse should be read in the same way: the Nephilim were in the land when this story was taking place. If not for this description, the reader would not be able to understand the story. Before God appears to Samuel, for example, the narrator explains: “In those days, the Lord’s word was precious; vision was hardly rampant” (1 Sam 3,1). Without this explanation, the reader might not understand why it does not occur to Samuel that God is speaking to him, and so the narrator explains: “In those days — perhaps unlike your own time, reader — the Lord’s word was rare indeed”. Here, too, in order to understand the story, the narrator takes care to inform the reader that in those days, there were Nephilim around. At one stage they disappeared, but at the time they were still around. As H.S. Kvanvig observes:

The reference to the time of the *nēfilīm* is not a consequence of the speech of YHWH, but describes the initial situation, given in v 1. At the time when the humans started to multiply there were the *nēfilīm* on earth. Thus the narrative gives two indications of what time we are dealing with: the time of multiplication (v 1) and the time of the *nēfilīm* (v 4)<sup>30</sup>.

Archie Wright’s interpretation of the verse leads him to conclude:

The Nephilim do not stand in the role of the offspring of the union. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days when the sons of God came into the daughters of men<sup>31</sup>.

Based on this reading, another possible conclusion is that the sons of God mentioned in the stories are in fact the Nephilim themselves, and it is for this reason that the narrator takes care to mention them. It is worth emphasizing that until this point there is no mention of any descendants born from the coupling described in v. 2, and so it is problematic to assert that the Nephilim are necessarily the offspring of the sons of God. Rather, this detail seems to clarify the scene itself: the sons of God, the Nephilim, once lived in the land, and took wives from the daughters of man.

H. SEEBASS, *Genesis I: Urgeschichte (1,1 – 11,26)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn<sup>3</sup>2009) 189, 191; DAY, “Sons of God”, 82-83.

<sup>30</sup> H.S. KVANVIG, “Gen 6,1-4 as an Antediluvian Event”, *SJOT* 16 (2002) 79-112, esp. 82. Compare with CEFALU, “Royal Priestly”, 359.

<sup>31</sup> WRIGHT, *The Origin of Evil Spirits*, 82.



According to this reading, then, the “sons of God” are not angels; rather, they seem to be some kind of mythical race, a different race than humans — they are giants, some other kind of sentient beings<sup>32</sup>.

The ancient world, as reflected in literary traditions both biblical and extra-biblical, was fascinated with giants<sup>33</sup>. In the Bible, there is testimony to the presence of giants in the land of Canaan (Num 13,22.28; Deut 2,10.20-21; 3,11; Josh 15,14; Judg 1,20; Amos 2,9)<sup>34</sup>. Of particular relevance is the confrontation between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), which implies that giants were incorporated into armies and served as a special deterrent; they were not only larger and stronger, but were perceived to have bodily differences: “And yet another war broke out, in Gath. There was a man of gigantic proportions, who had six fingers and six toes on his hands and feet, twenty four in all” (2 Sam 22,20). Various legends from all over the world attempt to trace the origins of these giants. Greek mythology in particular, has extensive descriptions of the descendants who were born to Uranus and Gaia: the three *Hecatoncheires* (Ἑκατόγχεϊρες), who were giants with a “hundred hands”; the one-eyed Cyclops<sup>35</sup>; and the Titans, a race of giants, led by Cronus, who ruled the earth for generations<sup>36</sup>. No culture is too small to contain a giant, often tucked away in its literary traditions<sup>37</sup>, and giants have continued to clomp their

<sup>32</sup> For the debate as to whether this is a reference to giants in general or to a specific race of giants, see: KRAELING, “The Significance”, 204, who inclines towards the latter reading.

<sup>33</sup> For a broad overview, see B.R. DOAK, “The Giant in a Thousand Years: Tracing Narratives of Gigantism in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond”, *Ancient Tales of Giants from Qumran and Turfan. Contexts, Traditions, and Influences* (eds. M. GOFF – L.T. STUCKENBRUCK – E. MORANO) (Tübingen 2016) 13-32; see also GUNKEL, *Genesis*, 59; C. LEMADELÉ, “Une gigantomachie dans la Genèse? Géants et héros dans les textes bibliques compilés”, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 227 (2010) 155-174.

<sup>34</sup> Scholars are divided as to whether there is clear evidence of giants in ancient times. Taub claims there was never such a thing, and that this refers to tribes who had very long necks because of the rings they wore around them. Weisman, in contrast, shows that there is documentation of people who were 3.2 meters tall who lived in the Middle East. See M. SUSSMAN, “Sickness and Disease”, *ABD* 6: 13.

<sup>35</sup> The *Odyssey* tells of Odysseus' encounter with the cyclops Polyphemus in the land of Cyclops. These creatures are characterized as cultureless individuals who do not live in a community, produce any form or art, or work in agriculture. They do not practice the art of seafaring either, which was one of the most salient features of Greek culture. They also rejected Greek hosting etiquette, as is clear from Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus. Rather, they lived in caves, and ruled over their wives and children as they deemed fit.

<sup>36</sup> Cronus was the leader of the Titans until his son, Zeus, overthrew him at a time that marked the end of the Titan age and the rise of Olympus, whose pantheon was then led by Zeus.

<sup>37</sup> Before Greek mythology there have also been references to giants, albeit few references. Especially worthy of mention is Ubelluris/Upelluri, a Hittite mountain-sized

way into contemporary literature, whether hidden away in dark forests or working as groundskeepers in certain magical boarding schools.

This background is relevant for our discussion, too, for it turns out that in the ancient world, giants roamed the earth and were considered heroes, men of renown. The giant Goliath, for one, certainly struck fear into the hearts of the people:

Then the go-between of the Philistine forces came forth; his name was Goliath, of Gath, and he was six cubits and a span tall [...] And the Philistine concluded, “I challenge the ranks of Israel today: give me a man, and let us duel!” When Saul and all of Israel heard the Philistine’s speech, they were seized with panic and terror. (1 Sam 17,4-11)

The description that “the Nephilim were in the land” at that time clarifies who these sons of God are; they are giants who took human wives for themselves, and the children born of these unions were far mightier than regular men: “When the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them — they were the heroes of old, men of renown” (Gen 6,4).

There is one obvious disadvantage to this reading, however: why are the Nephilim initially referred to as “the sons of God”? Were these giants especially close to God<sup>38</sup>? On the other hand, it is possible to take into account another use of the word אֱלֹהִים. This word is sometimes used to connote something huge, immense, colossal, such as: כְּהַרְרֵי אֵל (“godly mountains”), אֵל אֲרִזֵי אֵל (“godly cedars”), שְׁלֵהַב־תִּיהַ (“the Lord’s own flame”). Nineveh, the big city, is described as עִיר גְּדוּלָה לְאֱלֹהִים (Jonah 3,2), and the most common translation is: “Now Nineveh was a very large city” (NIV)<sup>39</sup>.

god who supports the western edge of the sky on his shoulders. According to the myth “the Song of Ullikummi”, “When they built the heavens upon me, and the earth, I knew nothing / When they divided the heavens from the earth with a knife, I did not know this either / Now my right shoulder pains me a little, but I do not know who is this god” (he refers to the god that Ea mentioned to him before; *ANET*, 125). In Hurrian mythology, Ubelluris the giant has a different function, and he is known as “the dreaming god”.

<sup>38</sup> Even if the aforementioned myths give this impression, it is difficult to believe that the Bible would adopt this view. On the contrary, some claim that these ancient giants had a certain kind of deformity and disease. See, for example, the article by Sussman in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, where giants are discussed in the context of “disease”, under the sub-entry of “deformities” (SUSSMAN, “Sickness and Disease”, 6-15). If this is true, is it likely that they would be referred to as “the sons of God”?

<sup>39</sup> On deliberations for how to understand this term, see: J.M. SASSON, *Jonah. A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB; New York 1990) 227-230. In contrast to my proposal above, some see the phrase as an expression of belonging: e.g., “And Nineveh was a large city, belonging to God, a three days’ walk across” (R.F. PERSON, Jr, *In Conversation with Jonah*. Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah (JSOTSup 220; Sheffield 1996) 34.

Rachel names Bilhah's son Naphtali because "I have had a *great* struggle (נפתולי אלהים) with my sister" (Gen 30,8). Similarly, the ורוח אלהים of Gen 1,2 could mean "mighty wind" (NAB)<sup>40</sup>, and עד למחנה גדול כמחנה אלהים (1 Chr 12,23) might be interpreted as "until the camp became as large as the largest camp"<sup>41</sup>.

It is true that, according to this reading, the giants are called by two different names in verse 4: "The *Nephilim* were on the earth in those days and also later, when *the sons of God* came to the daughters of men and had children by them". However, the use of two different terms does not pose any difficulty to this suggested reading. First, the phenomenon of different names used for the same character, even in the same sentence, is common in the biblical narrative<sup>42</sup>, which tends to prefer variegation (in contrast to the common style in Ancient Eastern literature). Many examples of this tendency exist. It suffices to cite several from Genesis alone: "With the coming of dawn, the *angels* urged Lot [...] When he hesitated, the *men* grasped his hand" (Gen 19,15-16; NIB); "And the *child* grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that *Isaac* was weaned" (Gen 21,8; NAS); "two of Jacob's sons, *Simeon and Levi*, Dinah's brothers, took their swords [...] *The sons of Jacob* came upon the dead bodies and looted the city" (Gen 34,25-27; NIB); "Then ten of *Joseph's brothers* went down [...] So *Israel's sons* were among those who went to buy grain" (Gen 42,3-5; NIV).

In some instances, the translators sought to facilitate easier reading by using the same English term for different synonymous words, as in:

"*The sheep* (הכשבים), on the other hand, Jacob kept apart, and he made *these animals* (הצאן) face the streaked or completely dark animals of Laban" (Gen 30,40; NAB).

Thus, repeating the term "sons of God" and then using the variant term "Nephilim" should not surprise us. Moreover, if we view these two nouns as terms that underscore different qualities of the giants, then this would

<sup>40</sup> R. GILBOA, "Who 'Fell Down' to our Earth? A Different Light on Genesis 6:1-4", *BN* 111 (2002) 66-75, esp. 70 (see also the references there in note 14).

<sup>41</sup> J.M. MYERS, *I Chronicles*. Introduction, Translation and Notes (AB; New York 1965) 93. This use of the name אלהים can be found also in Ugaritic, as shown by O. EISSFELDT, *El im ugaritischen Pantheon* (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Band XCVIII, Heft 4) (Berlin 1951), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Nachmanides already made this methodological point in his commentary on Gen 30,40, citing as an example, "Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the *hill country*, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the *hill country of Gilead*" (Gen 31,25; NAS). This phenomenon also occurs in ancient Near Eastern literature, as demonstrated by K. A. KITCHEN, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London 1966) 119-125.

conform with a common phenomenon in biblical narrative. In this regard, Adele Berlin cites the following remarks of Uspensky:

In a literary work, one character may be called by several different names or designated by a variety of titles. Frequently, different names are attributed to one and the same person in a single sentence or in closely connected passages <sup>43</sup>.

As Berlin proceeds to demonstrate, the usage of a variety of terms often serves a specific literary function. In our case, too, we may posit several different theories as to the benefit of using different terms in reference to the giants. The reader's interest is piqued by the mention of these legendary creatures, and recognizes them by their familiar name. But as the verse continues in describing how these giants would take the daughters of men for wives, who then bore heroes, it is appropriate to revert to the names that were used at the beginning of the story. These immense giants would take the daughters of men for wives — this seems to convey that it went on for centuries, for as long as the Nephilim were in the land — and thus the famous giants, the men of renown, were born. The change in their name, from “the sons of God” to “Nephilim,” which is derived from the root נפיל <sup>44</sup>, may reflect the change in their status after they take the daughters of man for themselves: from self-important, mighty beings, to fallen figures who become weak and mortal and fleeting.

Even if we adopt this reading, however, a nagging question lingers: why was this story incorporated into the Book of Genesis, just before the grand story of the flood? How does it contribute to the overall plot? While this describes union between two different kinds of beings — between giants and men — this can hardly be seen as a sin in itself, and there is no real expression of divine anger or punishment.

In order to understand the scene's contribution, I wish to point out connections between these four brief verses and the Flood Narrative. Some scholars deny any connection between the first four verses of the chapter and the Flood Narrative (which they hold begins only in 6,5) <sup>45</sup>, while others read this scene as its introduction, even claiming that these lines

<sup>43</sup> A. BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield 1983) 59-60.

<sup>44</sup> “The term itself almost certainly means ‘fallen ones’, whether morally fallen in the general sense or fallen from heaven in a more specific sense” (R.F. YOUNGBLOOD, “Giants”, *NIDOTTE*, vol. 4, 678).

<sup>45</sup> See: GUNKEL, *Genesis*, 59-60; WESTERMANN, *Genesis*, 363-383; J. L. SKA, “El relato del diluvio: Un relato sacerdotal y algunas fragmentos redaccionales posteriores”, *Estudios Bíblicos* 52 (1994) 37-62; W. BÜHRER, “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter: Gen 6,1-4 als innerbiblische Schriftauslegung”, *ZAW* 123 (2011) 495-515, and many others.

contain the sin which led to the world's destruction<sup>46</sup>. I favor the latter approach, given the textual connections between these two scenes. It is noteworthy that “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”<sup>47</sup>. Also important in this regard is the structure of the narrative unit. These connections will be examined through a discussion of how exactly the “daughters of man” are portrayed in the text.

### III. BEAUTIFUL OR GOOD?

The daughters of man are described as *טובות*, a quality that attracts the attention of the “sons of God”. What exactly does *טובות* mean in the context? The term is widely understood to mean “beautiful”, and this reading is certainly logical: beautiful women attract male attention. Nonetheless, others read this adjective as a moral trait: the sons of God perceived that the daughters of man were virtuous. This reading may be surprising, but it is based on a convincing argument. On its own, the word *טוב* does not mean “beautiful” anywhere else in the Bible. When a woman is described as beautiful, she is said to be *טובת מראה* (literally, “good-looking”, as in Gen 24,16; 26,7; 2 Sam 11,2; Esth 1,11; 2,2-3; 2,7; cf. *טובת-הן* in Nah 3,4)<sup>48</sup>. There is room for debate about what exactly Samson’s Philistine father-in-law means when he tries to convince Samson to marry his wife’s sister instead of his own wife, who has been given to another Philistine: “Isn’t her sister *better* (*טובה*) than her?” (Judg 15,2). If we adopt the widely accepted reading that “better” means “prettier,”

<sup>46</sup> KRAELING, “The Significance”. While adopting different perspectives, HENDEL (“The Sons of God and the Flood”), R.W.E. FORREST (“Paradise Lost Again: Violence and Obedience in the Flood Narrative”, *JSOT* 62 [1994] 3-18), KVANVIG (“Antediluvian Event”, 92-99) and DARSHAN (“The Sons of God”) reach a similar conclusion that perceives these verses as an introduction to the Flood Narrative.

<sup>47</sup> V.P. HAMILTON, Jr. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI 1990) vol. 1, 271.

<sup>48</sup> E. VAN WOLDE, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men in Genesis 6:1-4”, *Words Become Worlds. Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden 1994) 63-74, esp. 73-74; IDEM, *Stories of the Beginning. Genesis 1–11 and Other Creation Stories* (trans. J. BOWDEN; London 1996) 113; C.M. KAMINSKI, “Beautiful Women or ‘False Judgment’?: Interpreting Genesis 6:2 in the Context of the Primeval History”, *JSOT* 32 (2008) 457-473. She adds that precisely in this judgment the sons of God were mistaken: they assumed that the daughters of man were morally worthy of them, but they were mistaken, as the continuation of the story reveals. MARZEL (“Sons of God”) claims that the adjective *טובות* refers to their fertility, but he does not explain the basis for this reading.

then this would be an example of the word טוב meaning “beautiful” on its own, and so provide support for the traditional interpretation of the term in Gen 6,2<sup>49</sup>.

But even if we do accept this meaning, the question still remains as to why the regular expression is reduced to טוב alone. I believe this is related to the narrative structure and its connection with the next scene — the beginning of the flood (6,5-8)<sup>50</sup>:

- A. 6,1-2: When *humans began to increase* in number over the earth [...] *the sons of God saw* that the daughters of man were טובות and they took themselves wives from *whomever* (כל) they chose.
- B. 6,3: Then the Lord said, ‘My spirit will not abide in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days will be a hundred and twenty years’.
- C. 6,4: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also later [...] They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
- A<sup>1</sup>. 6,5: *The LORD saw how the wickedness of humankind on earth had increased*, and that *every* (כל) inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was solely evil *all* (כל) the time.
- B<sup>1</sup>. 6,6-7: And the LORD said, ‘I will wipe out the human race I have created from the face of the earth’
- C<sup>1</sup>. 6,8: But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

The opening of these scenes is strikingly similar: just as the sons of God *see*, so God *sees*. The sons of God see how “good” the daughters of man are, while God sees how “evil” man has become<sup>51</sup>. While humanity “increases” in the first scene, humanity’s evil “increases” in the second, and there is even the use of the all-inclusive word כל (“all”) in the opening of both scenes.

In order to encourage the connection between the two scenes, the regular expression טובות מראה may have been shortened to just טובות in order to establish a contrast with the “evil” of man in the second scene. This does not mean that טובות necessarily means moral goodness in the

<sup>49</sup> DAY, “Sons of God”, 81. It is worth noting that in Judges there is extensive play with the words טוב and ערע, which may have led the narrator to omit the full expression and use just טובה. See J. GROSSMAN, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and its Contribution to the Literary Formation* (Ph.D. diss.; Bar Ilan University 2006) 56-58. There may also be room for debate regarding the description of the sheaves in Pharaoh’s dream (Gen 41,5, and later on in the chapter).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. the proposal of MATHEWS (*Genesis*, 322), who demonstrates the cohesion of 6,1-8 based on connections between this unit and chapter 5, Seth’s line.

<sup>51</sup> MATHEWS, *Genesis*, 340.

first scene; rather, it implies that the usual phrase for “beauty” has been abridged in order to encourage the connection between the scenes.

#### IV. FLESH VS. SPIRIT

It is not only the two opening lines that are parallel to each other. The two scenes unfold similarly: after the sons of God “see” the women and take them for wives, God makes a decree: “My spirit will not abide in man forever” — moving away from the original, ideal state. This decree limits human power and reduces human life to a mere one hundred and twenty years. Similarly, once God “sees” what is happening on earth, He is moved to make another decree, which will unleash death upon the world. This time, not only will human life be reduced to one hundred and twenty years, but life will be wiped out altogether: “I will wipe out the human race I have created from the face of the earth”. Both scenes then conclude with a similar third component: despite God’s decree, there is some saving grace. Despite humanity’s reduced life span, there are still heroes, men of renown. Despite humanity’s impending doom, Noah has found favor in the eyes of God, and he will be saved.

These structures strongly imply that the story of the sons of God serves as a prelude to the flood, as the first step of God’s destruction of the world. The opening verse of the narrative alludes to the creation of humanity: “When humans began to increase in number over the earth and daughters were born to them” (6,1). This appears to be a fulfillment of God’s blessing of humanity following its creation: “Be fruitful and become many; fill the earth and subdue it” (1,28)<sup>52</sup>. Now, indeed, humanity is becoming many, but this increase seems to be leading to an unexpected result: disorder and evil. This time, God does not see “that it is good”; rather, “[t]he LORD saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth” (6,5).

From this perspective, the story of the sons of God should not be discussed as an isolated unit, but rather as an introduction to the Flood Narrative. The story of the giants is yet another example of God’s disappointment with His world. In what sense is the story of the giants who take human wives an example of corruption that leads to the flood? The answer may lie in the final verse of the opening scene: “these are the heroes of old, men of renown” (6,4). These “heroes” are celebrated as

<sup>52</sup> For further discussion, see L.A. TURNER, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSup 96; Sheffield 1990) 28. After the flood, God repeats this blessing to Noah, albeit with some important changes. See also J. GROSSMAN, *Genesis. A Tale of Beginnings* (Tel Aviv 2017) 185-207.



the peak of human physical glory, and they are admired heroes, men of renown. Yet this physical celebration comes at the price of a different kind of quality: “My spirit will not abide in man forever, since he is but flesh”. In this story, flesh and spirit are two irreconcilable elements; when flesh is increased, spirit is reduced<sup>53</sup>. Humanity revels in its mighty, physically powerful heroes, but the text hints that the vital spirit of God diminishes, rather than grows, within their powerful frame. The concept of **נש** — “renown,” “fame,” or literally, “name” — will be a recurring motif in the next section of the narrative. The story of the giants, “men of renown,” is in dialogue with the Tower of Babel Narrative, where humanity seeks out **נש** for themselves (11:4), yet in contrast with these two stories, it is Abraham — the descendant of Shem (**שם**) — who takes center stage as one who seeks not his own name, but to “call on the name of the Lord” (12,8)<sup>54</sup>. It is Abraham, calling on God’s name, whose own name becomes great (12,2), while the mighty heroes and the tower builders scatter and fade away.

The story of the giants is essentially an introduction to the Flood story because in it flesh is elevated above spirit, and the “name” of humanity is elevated above the “name” of God. In contrast to these heroes stands Noah, who is unique because he has found favor in the eyes of God. He does not achieve a “name” through strength and power, but through his relationship with God<sup>55</sup>.

Reading this story as a prelude to the Flood Narrative, and as an expression of the tension between flesh and spirit, also illuminates humanity’s new lifespan: “And the Lord said, ‘My spirit will not abide in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days will be a hundred and twenty years’” (6,3). How can this number be understood? Some suggest that there will be another one hundred and twenty years until the flood before humanity is wiped out: “This means, not that human life should in future never attain a greater age than 120 years, but that a respite of 120 years should still be granted to the human race”<sup>56</sup>. This reading is reflected in the Qumran

<sup>53</sup> A similar suggestion is raised by Breukelman. He believes that chapters 1–11 of Genesis seek to present the image of the **צדיק**, the righteous, as a foil to these giants, whose advantage lies in their physical strength (F.H. BREUKELMAN, “The Story of the Sons of God Who Took the Daughters of Humans as Wives”, *Voices from Amsterdam*. A Modern Tradition of Reading Biblical Narrative [ed. M. KESSLER] [Atlanta, GA 1994] 83-94). On the contrast between the divine (**רוח**) and the human (**בשר**) in this verse, see VERVENNE, “All They Need is Love”, 37.

<sup>54</sup> HAMILTON, *Genesis*, 271; HENDEL, “Nephilim”, 16.

<sup>55</sup> In the context of this discussion, it is interesting that Noah names his son “Shem”, and that this son is the one in whose tents God will dwell (Gen 9,27).

<sup>56</sup> KEIL – DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary*, 136.

scrolls and some ancient translations<sup>57</sup>, and some scholars favor this direction<sup>58</sup>. The advantage of this reading is that it explains why people still had long lifespans after the flood. Nonetheless, the most convenient reading is that God responds to the relations between “the sons of God” and the “daughters of man” by shortening the human lifespan. This is expressed through the phrase, “*his days will be one hundred and twenty years*”. This seems to be an ongoing description, consistent with the broader context of the formation of human culture. From now on, people will live for a mere one hundred and twenty years, not a thousand<sup>59</sup>. While after the flood people still lived for several centuries, the lifespan of people born after the flood grows noticeably shorter (Shem lives for 600 years, while his son Arpachshad lives for 438). A second turning point occurs in Peleg’s lifetime (from over 400 years to around 200, and people’s lifespans begin to dwindle until Moses himself dies at precisely the age of 120 (Deut 34,7).

This motif is also present in the Babylonian flood stories: both conclude with the gods’ decision to limit the human lifespan, if not by an all-consuming flood, then by other means. In *Atrahasis*, humanity becomes mortal (prior to the flood, humans, like gods, were immortal), and they are additionally sentenced with various afflictions that will limit the growth of the population, such as infertility, infant mortality, and more<sup>60</sup>. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, human life is not shortened, but various disasters promise to limit his strength and lifespan<sup>61</sup>:

Instead of your bringing on a flood,  
Let the lion rise up to diminish the human race!  
Instead of your bringing on a flood,  
Let the wolf rise up to diminish the human race!

<sup>57</sup> In the Neophiti translation; Targum Onkelos; Pseudo-Jonathan; *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael*; The Babylonian Talmud: *Sanhedrin* 108a. See further P.W. VAN DER HORST, “His Days Shall Be One Hundred and Twenty Years: Genesis 6:3 in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity”, *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context. Selected Essays on Early Judaism, Samaritanism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (ed. P.W. VAN DER HORST) (WUNT 196; Tübingen 2006) 66-70.

<sup>58</sup> Such as KEIL and DELITZSCH, quoted above; HAMILTON, *Genesis*, 269; H.S. KVANVING, “Gen 6:1-4 as an Antediluvian Event”, *SJOT* 16 (2002) 79-112; FOCKNER, “Reopening the Discussion”.

<sup>59</sup> See J. KLEIN, “The ‘Bane’ of Humanity: A Lifespan of One Hundred and Twenty Years”, *Acta Sumerologica* 12 (1990) 58-70. CHILDS (*Myth and Reality*, 54) claims that Herodotus presents a similar view (*History*, 1:163; 3:23), but DAY (*From Creation to Babel*, 92 n. 38) disagrees and argues that this does not refer to the reduction of the human lifespan. I concur with Day, since Herodotus does not mention one hundred and twenty years as a brief lifespan, but as a long life.

<sup>60</sup> *Atra-asis*, Tablet III, lines 316-333.

<sup>61</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet XI, lines 186-193.

Instead of your bringing on a flood,  
Let famine rise up to wreak havoc in the land!  
Instead of your bringing on a flood,  
Let pestilence rise up to wreak havoc in the land!

If the story of sexual union between giants and humans is read as an introduction to the Flood Narrative, then the juxtaposition of a shortened human lifespan and a universal flood is also present in the Book of Genesis.

Department of Bible  
Bar Ilan University  
Ramat-Gan 5290002  
Israel

Jonathan GROSSMAN

#### SUMMARY

The identity of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 is the focus of many studies. Those who hold the position that this phrase refers to humans of a certain status or genealogical line are faced with a fundamental problem: why should sexual union between humans of different status or lineage result in the birth of giants? Through analysis of v. 3 and its placement in the narrative, this article proposes that the sons of God are in fact the giants mentioned in v. 4, whereas the “heroes” described at the end of the story are the results of these giants’ coupling with the daughters of man. Interconnections, such as juxtaposition and wordplay with the Flood Narrative, reveal how this brief episode serves as a kind of introduction to the Flood Narrative.