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## THE ANCIENT EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 6:2, 4

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

\* \* \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup>U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I: From Adam to Noah. Gen 1-6*<sup>8</sup> (Jerusalem: Magnes and Hebrew University, 1961); H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); W. A. Van Gemeren, "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4," *WTJ* 43 (1981) 320-48.

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

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

#### THE SUPERNATURAL INTERPRETATION

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

#### LXX

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

<sup>4</sup>J. W. Wevers, "Septuagint," *IDB* 4 (1962) 273; E. M. Blaiklock, "Septuagint," *ZPEB* 5 (1976) 343-44.

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

text in a supernatural direction, even though ἄγγελος sometimes means a human messenger (e.g., Gen 32:3, 6). This variant is already cited and discussed by Philo,<sup>6</sup> so apparently predates the 1st century A.D. In Gen 6:4 נפלים is translated γίγαντες without textual variation. The Greek word, usually rendered “giant,” indicates a warrior of large stature<sup>7</sup> and translates גבר in Gen 10:8, 9.

### 1 *Enoch*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup>Philo, *On the Giants* 6.

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

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2. 163; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 618–19. M. Rist (“Enoch, Book of,” *IDB* 2 [1962] 104) would date this section later, ca. 100 B.C. In any case, fragments of this part of *Enoch* have been found at Qumran: see O. Betz, “Dead Sea Scrolls,” *IDB* 1 (1962) 796; J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 6. 139–40, 164.

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

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

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

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

### *Jubilees*

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

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

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

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

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

And against the angels whom He had sent upon the earth, He was exceedingly wroth, and He gave command to root them out of all their dominion, and He made us [one of the good angels is speaking] to bind them in the depths of the earth, and behold they are bound in the midst of them and are (kept) separate. (*Jub.* 5:6)

### *Other Pseudepigrapha*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>10</sup>Eissfeldt, *OT Introduction* 631-36; M. Smith, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *IDB* 4 (1962) 575-79; M. E. Stone, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *IDB Supp* (1976) 877.

### *Qumran*

Among the materials found in caves near the Dead Sea, both the Genesis Apocryphon [IQapGen] and the Damascus Document [CD] refer to the supernatural interpretation. The former is a retelling of Genesis in popular style, extant only in one fragmented ms, which has been dated paleographically to the late 1st century B.C. or early 1st century A.D.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of a detailed comparison of contents with *1 Enoch* and *Jub.*, Vermes believes that apGen is older and a source for both, "the most ancient midrash of all." Fitzmyer disagrees, dating apGen in the same era as the extant ms.<sup>12</sup> Certainly it is no later than the Roman destruction of Qumran about A.D. 68. In what little remains of the scroll's col. 2, Lamech is fearful that his wife's pregnancy (her child will be Noah) is due to "the Watchers and the Holy Ones," but she stoutly denies it.

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

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

### *Philo*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup>All dates are approximate throughout.



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

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

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

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

### *Josephus*

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup>Philo, *Giants* 6–7.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

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

<sup>18</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.73.

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

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

### *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*

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

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

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

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

### *Early Christian References*

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

<sup>20</sup>J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: University, 1969)

14; M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 86-89.

<sup>21</sup>Bowker, *Targums* 26; McNamara, *Targum and Testament* 178.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>22</sup>Justin, *Apology* 2.5.

<sup>23</sup>Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.1.10.

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

## THE NONSUPERNATURAL INTERPRETATION

The earliest extant examples of the nonsupernatural interpretations of Gen 6:2, 4 come from the 1st century A.D. and thus are later than the earliest specimens of the supernatural interpretation. Since all come centuries after Genesis was written, it is not possible to be sure which is the oldest.

*First Century Sources*

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

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

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

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

*Second Century Sources*

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

<sup>25</sup>G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 265-68.

<sup>26</sup>J. W. Wevers, "Aquila's Version," *IDB* 1 (1962) 176.

<sup>27</sup>J. W. Wevers, "Symmachus," *IDB* 4 (1962) 476.

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

### *The Targumim*

*Targum Neofiti* [*Targ. Neof.*] is the only complete extant ms of the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch. The ms is from the 16th century, but its text has been variously dated from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D.<sup>30</sup> In place of the Hebrew בני האלהים is the Aramaic בני יריינא, “sons of the judges,” using a cognate noun to the verb ירון appearing in the MT of Gen 6:3.<sup>31</sup> Nephilim is rendered by גיבריה, “warriors.” The text of the targum seems to reflect a nonsupernatural interpretation, unless we press the last sentence of 6:4—“these are the warriors that (were there) from the beginning of the world, warriors of wondrous renown”—so as to exclude human beings. However, the ms has many marginal notes, which presumably represent one or more other mss of the Palestinian Targum.<sup>32</sup> One such note occurs at 6:4 and reads: “There were warriors dwelling on earth in those days, and also afterwards, after the sons of the angels had joined (in wedlock) the daughters of the sons.”<sup>33</sup> Thus the text of *Targ. Neof.* seems to be nonsupernatural while a marginal note is clearly supernatural.

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

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

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

<sup>31</sup>A. Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1: Genesis* (Madrid and Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968) 33, 511.

<sup>32</sup>S. Lund and J. Foster, *Variant Versions of Targumic Traditions Within Codex Neofiti 1* (SBLASP 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977) 12, 14; our passage and marginal note are not discussed.

<sup>33</sup>Diez Macho, *Neophyti* 511.

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

### *Christian Interpretations*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>36</sup>J. W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and of Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum* (London: 1862–65; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1968), 1. 46; M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1982) 52.

<sup>37</sup>A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. C. Coxe and A. Menzies, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886), 6. 131.

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

### *Rabbinic Literature*

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

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

<sup>38</sup>H. L. Strack, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1931) 218, 65; I. Epstein, "Midrash," *IDB* 3 (1962) 376.

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

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

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

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

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

#### NT INTERPRETATION

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

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

<sup>39</sup>L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1937), 5. 152, explains how "Shamhazai" may be derived from "Uza."



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

## 2 Pet 2:4

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

Is this a reference to Gen 6 or to the primeval fall of Satan before Eden as proposed by Augustine? This example precedes a reference to the flood and to Sodom and Gomorrah, so the order would be chronological in either case. It is given as an example of judgment to the readers of the epistle, and examples, when not explained, can be presumed well-known to the original readers. The other two examples are both well-known because they occur in Scripture. The primeval fall, however, would be almost totally inference, whereas the supernatural view would see this as a popular understanding of Scripture at the time. Certainly some measure of popularity is to be inferred from its occurrence in the pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo and Josephus.

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

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

## Jude 6

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

Jude 14–15 contains a quotation that appears almost word-for-word in *1 Enoch* 1:9,<sup>41</sup> so it is difficult to argue that Jude knew nothing of *1 Enoch* 6. All the features of Jude 6 fit *1 Enoch* better

<sup>40</sup>BAGD, 805.

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

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

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

### *1 Cor 11:10*

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

This verse has puzzling elements for any interpreter because of its briefness and lack of explanation. So little is known about the activity of angels that one cannot rule out some obscure allusion to the presence of good angels at Christian worship who would be offended by unsubmitive women.<sup>42</sup> Yet one can easily find more serious offenses for the angels to be upset about in the Corinthian worship services, e.g., misuse of tongues (chaps. 12-14) and disorderly conduct at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). Yet the supernatural interpretation of Gen 6 would supply an excellent reason why this phrase would occur in this context and the statement would become far less cryptic. Tertullian so understood the passage by A.D. 200. This context might also fit the context tangentially, with woman being made for man (v 9) perhaps suggesting she was not made for angels, and the veiling indicating she is under the authority of father or husband.

<sup>42</sup>E.g., R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961) 445.

*1 Pet 3:19–20*

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

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

*Matt 22:30*

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

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

*Other NT Passages*

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

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Murray, *Principles of Conduct* 246; Stigers, *Genesis* 97; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (1875; reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), I, 131.

prison for some sort of supernatural locusts (Rev 9:1–11), and as the source for the beast (Rev 11:7)—are consistent with either view, though somewhat parallel to the binding beneath the earth described in *1 Enoch* and *Jub*. So is the reference to the binding of Satan in Rev 20. A Sethite-Cainite view of Gen 6:1–4 might serve as a basis for Paul's remarks about mixed marriages in 1 Cor 7:9, 15, but these could easily be generalized from OT regulations against intermarriage with Gentiles. In spite of the interpretation commonly given to Matt 22:30 and parallels, the evidence seems strong that the NT adopts a supernatural interpretation of Gen 6:1–4.

#### SOURCES OF THE INTERPRETATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>45</sup>Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 163.

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

Particulars of their [fallen angels’] history may have been from time to time incidentally revealed which have not been mentioned in the volume of inspiration, but may nevertheless form a true basis for various traditions concerning them. This seems probable from the way in which both St. Peter and St. Jude speak of them, citing certain facts of the history, not elsewhere revealed, as well-known truths.<sup>49</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>47</sup>Patte, *Hermeneutic* 183, 201.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 183.

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

<sup>50</sup>See Patte, *Hermeneutic* 184, and throughout, on anthological style.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 67.

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

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

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

So it will happen on that day,  
That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high  
And the kings of the earth, on earth.  
And they will be gathered together  
Like prisoners in the dungeon [lit. “pit”]  
And will be confined in prison  
And after many days they will be punished.

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

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

<sup>52</sup>BHK, 641n.

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

Most of the angelic names in *Enoch* are modeled on the biblical angelic names “Michael” and “Gabriel,” using the theophoric element “El” for God and either angelic spheres of authority or divine attributes.<sup>53</sup> One exception is “Shamhazai,” but Ginzberg sees the first syllable as שׁמ, “name,” a common targumic substitute for the divine name. “Azazel,” too, is of special interest, and it may suggest that other angelic names are derived from OT texts. The name (or something close to it) occurs in the scapegoat passage in Lev 16:8. One goat is for the LORD, the other for Azazel, taking עֲזָזִיל as a proper noun instead of a term meaning “entire removal.”<sup>54</sup> The word may well have been puzzling, and the reference in Lev 17:7 to goats as objects of worship might have led early interpreters to speculate that there was something supernatural about “Azazel.” Charles notes that “Dudael,” the place of Azazel’s binding in *1 Enoch* 10:4, is in the wilderness and on “rough and jagged rocks” just like the place to which the scapegoat is taken in *Tg. Ps.-J.*<sup>55</sup>

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

#### CONCLUSIONS

We have now examined the ancient interpretation of Gen 6:2, 4 in Jewish literature, in Christian literature and in the NT in particular. The earliest extant view is the supernatural one, that the “sons of God” were angels and that the “Nephilim” were their gigantic offspring. The sin in this case was the unnatural union between angels and humans. Going beyond the text of Genesis, this view pictures the offending angels as being bound and cast into dark pits until the day of judgment. This interpretation seems to have been popular at the time of Christ. The nonsupernatural interpretations are not extant

<sup>53</sup>See Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 191; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5. 152–53; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, on 4QEn<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>54</sup>BDB, 736.

<sup>55</sup>Charles, *Pseudepigrapha* 193.

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

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

Do Jude and 2 Pet *endorse* this interpretation or only mention it? One might be inclined to dismiss Jude's reference as an *ad hominem* argument against opponents who accepted the OT pseudepigrapha since he apparently quotes *1 Enoch* 1:9 in v 14 and cites a no longer extant portion of the *Assumption of Moses* in v 9.<sup>56</sup> Yet there is no hint in the context that Jude in any way distances himself from these citations. In 2 Pet 2, the whole structure of the argument (vv 4–9) indicates that Peter endorses the historicity of this angelic sin: if God judged those notorious sinners of antiquity, then he will judge these current false prophets who engage in similar activities.

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

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

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

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



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

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