

**THE 'SONS OF GOD' EPISODE IN GENESIS 6:1-4
AND SOUTH AFRICA TODAY**

by

NEIL T OOSTHUIZEN

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF P J VAN DYK

November 1998

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ABSTRACT

The story about the 'sons of God' has been interpreted in different ways by commentators. To understand this text fully it must be interpreted as myth.

Following the historical-critical method, a working text is ascertained and the author discussed; the complexity of the text investigated, and the genre identified.

The authors modified a myth to explain our limited life-span and the origin of giants and heroes, to stress that YHWH is in control of history, to warn rulers not to overstep boundaries, and to remind readers that salvation lies in a *Tôrah*-lifestyle. This obscure text speaks its ancient message into South Africa today. Finally, Jesus is offered as a foil to the 'sons of God', and as a model for living.

In conclusion, interpreting this pericope as myth not only enables the exegete to find a clear message, but frees the text to speak its God-message into every situation.

KEY TERMS

Genesis 6:1-4; 'sons of the gods'; 'daughters of men'; mythical deities; angels; myth; divine boundaries; God and history; *Nephilim*; Flood; living the *Tôrah*

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יברכך יהוה וישמרך
יאר ויהוה פניו אליך ויחנך
ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום

*The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make His face
to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn His face towards you
and give you peace.*

(Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION - INTERPRETING GENESIS 6:1-4

This brief segment is one of the most difficult in Genesis both to translate and interpret. Certain words are rare or unknown. Issues of coherence arise at many points. These verses may be a fragment of what was once a longer story, or scribes may have added to or subtracted from the text. The fact that the text presents ambiguity may be precisely the point, however: the mode of telling matches the nature of the message (Fretheim 1994:382).

1. A PROBLEMATIC PASSAGE.

As an ordained minister in the *Methodist Church of Southern Africa* I am often called upon, and privileged, to lead people in the study of God's Word. Unless asked to tackle a particular Biblical-book, theme, or subject, I usually begin by asking the participants if there is any particular theme or passage of Scripture they'd like us to look at. Their answers invariably include 'the part about the sons of God in Genesis chapter six'!

However, this passage is not only problematic for the average reader of the Old Testament today, but has been problematic down through the ages.

2. SOME INTERPRETATIONS THROUGH THE AGES.

Our 'problematic passage' has been interpreted in various ways through the centuries - we turn now to a brief discussion of some of these interpretations (This discussion is neither detailed nor all inclusive. I have chosen a sampling of what I consider the most important changes in interpretation through the centuries).

2.1. Early Jewish exegesis.

2.1.1. *1 Enoch*.

The earliest exegesis we have on this passage is in the pseudepigraphal *1 Enoch*. Originating in Judea, this composite book was completed by the first century BCE, although the 'Book of Noah' (containing the sections appropriate to this study) dates to the late third- or early second century (Isaac 1983:7). Our chapters were found extant at Qumran, showing that they were in their present form by the middle of the second century (Hanson 1977:197). The book was popular among both Jewish and Christian faithful for several centuries (Rist 1962:104).

In those days, when the children of man had multiplied, it happened that there were born unto them handsome and beautiful daughters. And the angels, the children of heaven, saw them and desired them; and said to one another, 'Come, let us choose wives for ourselves from among the daughters of man and beget us children' (*1 En* 6:1-2, text from Isaac 1983).

The angels accept responsibility for their actions, and 200 descend to earth, led by the dekadarchs. They 'take wives unto themselves' (7:1), and teach them magical medicine and homeopathy. These women give birth to giants, who eat all the food produced by the humans, eventually devouring all the animals (and even each other). The people complain, and so (in an attempt to placate them, Wagner 1996:140), the various dekadarchs (referred to as 'Watchers') teach them how to make weaponry, ornamentation, and make-up; and then teach them incantations and astrology (8). This new evil spreads throughout the populace. The cry of the people is heard by the archangels, who report to the Most High (9). God issues His judgement, and Uriel is sent to warn Noah of the immanence of a great flood (to cleanse the earth of the corruption it has suffered as a result of the angels); Gabriel is dispatched to destroy the giants, Raphael binds Azazel (the chief Watcher) and casts him into a hole in the desert to await punishment on Judgement Day, while Michael binds and casts the other angels into the 'valleys of the earth' for seventy generations, also awaiting the great Judgement (10).

I Enoch clearly sees the בני האלהים as fallen angels, who are punished for creating giants through sexual intercourse with human women, for teaching them skills not yet intended for them, and for leading them astray into astrology.

2.1.2. Jubilees.

The book of *Jubilees*, a later pseudepigraphal work dating from the latter half of the second century BCE (Tedesche 1962:1002), is an ‘expanded retelling of Genesis and part of Exodus’ (Newman 1984:17), stressing that the patriarchs lived by the *Tôrah*.

In *Jubilees*, some angels (called the ‘Watchers’ - indicating a reliance on *I Enoch*) descend to earth to instruct the humans in how to live godly lives (*Jub* 4). However, the Watchers are smitten by the beauty of the human women, the resultant cohabitation resulting in a race of giants. Faithful angels are commanded to bind the Watchers and secure them in the depths of the earth (5).

2.1.3. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

Another pseudepigraphal book, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, dates from the second or third century CE, with certain sections clearly dating to early second century BCE (Smith 1962:575), although the complexities of the text make this dating a subject of much debate (Stone 1976:877).

In the *Testament of Reuben* 5:5-7 the faithful are warned to prevent their wives from wearing make-up and ornamentation, for in the past the Watchers, in the form of men, caused such women to lust after them, and thus a race of giants was born. All women who adorn themselves are deserving only of eternal punishment (Newman 1984:18).

This passage is obviously dependant on our Genesis passage, and *I Enoch*; but with an interesting reason for the Watchers being attractive to the women, and of special interest is the women being judged the guilty ones, for having lusted after the angels.

2.1.4. *Damascus Rule.*

The *Damascus Rule*, found at Qumran, is a brief history of the covenant-community at Qumran, written to urge its members to greater faithfulness.¹ The document is dated to about 100BCE (Vermes 1975:95).

In 2:16-19 the faithful are warned to guard against ‘eyes of lust’, for it was such ‘guilty inclinations’ that led the Watchers to fall, in that they did not keep the commandments of God. In the same way their sons, who were ‘as tall as cedars’, also sinned against God (Newman 1984:19).

Here, as in *Testament of Reuben*, the story has been transformed into a ‘sermon’ on correct behaviour - the ‘sin’ of the angels (and their gigantic offspring) is not keeping the commandments of God².

2.1.5. Philo.

The Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo, in his treatise *On the Giants* (mid- to late first century BCE), was obviously influenced by *I Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and *Testament of Reuben*, and by the version of Genesis which he used as his base text (Wagner 1996:141). Various versions of the Septuagint, and in particular *Codex Alexandrinus*, translate בני האלהים as οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (‘sons of God’) and as ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ (‘angels of God’), and, in addition, גיגנאים is rendered as γίγαντες (‘giants’); Philo discusses the merits of the various texts, before declaring his preference for the text used in his treatise.

In *On the Giants* 6-7 he declares the heavenly beings to be actual angels (i.e. not to be understood mythically). However, he later (*Gig* 60) allegorizes the passage, seeing the offspring of the angel/human marriages as either ‘earth-born’, ‘heaven-born’, or ‘God-born’ (Newman 1984:20) - the ‘earth-born’ are those (like Nimrod), who spurn the things of God, and live only to appease their lustful appetites; those who are ‘heaven-born’ give themselves to divine philosophy and ethical living, and when they die they return to the heaven from whence they came; the ‘God-born’ are the elect few imbued with the Spirit of God (like Moses), who will live eternally beyond the heavens, in God’s presence (Wagner 1996:142).

While adhering to the popular identification of the בני האלהים as angels, Philo succeeds in turning the pericope into an allegory of the soul's journey to fulfilment in God.

2.1.6. Josephus.

The Jewish-Roman historian, Flavius Josephus, published his *Antiquities of the Jews* in 93CE (Whiston 1981:ix), in which he retells the history of his people from Adam to the start of the Jewish-Roman War.

In discussing the Sethites, he notes that they forsook the ways of God:

But for what degree of zeal they had formerly shown for virtue, they now shewed by their actions a double degree of wickedness, whereby they made God to be their enemy; for many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength, for the tradition is that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants (*Ant* III.1; text from Whiston 1981).

While it is to be expected that Josephus sees the בני האלהים as angels, it is interesting that he identifies the 'supernatural' sin of the angels with the 'nonsupernatural' sin of the Sethites (a thesis which would be developed only a century later, Newman 1984:20), and refers to similar myths being held by the Greeks (discussed in chapter 2).

2.1.7. *Genesis Rabbah*.

In the *Genesis Rabbah*, a midrash dating to the third century CE (Epstein 1962:376; although Newman 1984:26 dates it at c 400) reports on the stand made by Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (130-160CE) with regard to the translation of בני האלהים:

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai called them the sons of the nobles; Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai cursed all who called them sons of God (Alexander 1972:61).

2.1.8. Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan*.

The Aramaic Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan*, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Pentateuch including midrash on the text (originally developed as many worshippers no longer understood Hebrew), was 'canonized' by the mid-third century CE (McNamara 1976:860), although it contains sections that date back to the start of the first century BCE (Deist 1988:123). It renders our text as:

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 (i e בני רברביא) 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 (בני רברביא) 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 (Newman 1984:21).

Thus Targim *Pseudo-Jonathan*, building on *1 Enoch* ('Shamhazai and Azael' and the stress on make-up and ornamentation), *Jubilees* (the beauty of the women), and *Testament of Reuben* (the women leading them astray), offers a 'nonsupernatural' interpretation of בני האלהים, seeing them as nobility. It is interesting to note that the author has not rejected a supernatural explanation, but has separated it from the actions of the בני האלהים.

2.1.9. *Babylonian Talmud*.

By the time the *Babylonian Talmud* was finished in the sixth century CE, Jewish interpreters were settled on the 'nonsupernatural' interpretation of בני האלהים, seeing the fact that those who perished in the Flood (i e humans) were those who had brought this punishment about through their sinful sexual relations (*Sanhedrin* 108a; Newman 1984:27).

2.2. Early Christian exegesis.

2.2.1. New Testament.

The New Testament does not comment on our passage directly, but alludes to it through references to *1 Enoch* (1 Peter 3:19-20, 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6), and *Jubilees* and *Testament of Reuben* (1 Corinthians 11:10). Each of these verses agrees with the book it refers to that the בני האלהים are angels.

Over the next three centuries the Christian Fathers often appealed to our text, usually referring to it through one of the references already discussed. It is interesting to see how a shift in understanding (the interpretation of the בני האלהים going from supernatural to nonsupernatural) occurred at a time similar to that in Jewish interpretation.

2.2.2. Ignatius.

Ignatius of Antioch (died c 110) cited our passage in response to a disciplinary crisis in the Church in Asia: just as rebellion and sin had started with the angelic rebellion, and spread to earth, so salvation has begun on earth in Christ, and will spread to the spiritual realms. The faithful must reflect God's salvation in their life and witness, and not the anarchic rebellion of the fallen angels (Wagner 1996:145).

2.2.3. Justin Martyr.

Justin Martyr (100-165) alluded to our passage by reference to *1 Enoch* in addressing the proliferation of cults in the Church of his day (*Second Apology* 2.5): the angels had been entrusted with caring for, and educating, humanity (as in *Jubilees*), but instead they lusted after women, and so begat demons. They then taught them magic, fear, and idolatry (Newman 1984:22).

2.2.4. Tertullian.

Tertullian (160-225) refers to our pericope several times, each time adopting the supernatural interpretation.

In the opening lines of *On Idolatry* he declares that the greatest sin of the world is idolatry, and that this sin was taught to the world by the angels of *1 Enoch* (Newman 1984:22). He takes this argument further in the *Apology*, stating that sin entered the world through these fallen angels, and that they are still working only for the destruction of God's faithful followers (*Apol 22*, Wagner 1996:146). In *Prescriptions against Heretics* he argued that to search out unknown 'secrets' or 'knowledge' was to fall into the same snare as the angels had - Christians are to accept only that which was entrusted to them within their Christian faith (Wagner 1996:147).

In his treatise *Against Marcion* (5.18), Tertullian argues that the 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm' of Ephesians 6:12 does not refer to the Gnostic evil-creator-god, but to 'the time when the angels were entrapped into sin by the daughters of men' (Newman 1984:22). His 'anti-women' vitriolic is at its starkest in *On the Veiling of Virgins* (especially pericope 7), in which he accuses women of having defaced the image of God (in Eve), and therefore being responsible for the necessity of Christ's suffering and death; in addition, they wear make-up and revealing clothes so as to lead men and angels astray (as they did centuries before) - therefore Paul instructs women to cover their heads in 1 Corinthians 11:7-10 (Newman 1984:22).

2.2.5. Julius Africanus.

A new interpretation of בני האלהים appears in Julius Africanus' (160-240) *History of the World*:

When men multiplied on the 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 (Newman 1984:25).

Newman argues that, as Julius does not refer to any other works, he must have derived this view on his own. However, it is interesting to note that Julius wrote at a time similar to that

of the Targummim, in which the 'supernatural' interpretation begins to give way to the 'nonsupernatural'.

2.2.6. Augustine.

In his *City of God* the great fourth century theologian Augustine (354-430) refers to our passage, seeing in it an allegory: the בני האלהים are those who belong in the 'city of God', while the 'daughters of man' are from the 'city of man'. While the בני האלהים are also human, they have attained another nature through the grace of God (*CivD* 15:22, Newman 1984:25). In response to 2 Peter 2:4 he denies that God's holy angels could fall from grace (Peter is obviously referring to the fall of Satan), and rejects all apocryphal writings.

2.3. Later interpretation.

2.3.1. Na'hmanides.

The Spanish doctor and philosopher Moses ben Nahman, better known as Na'hmanides (born c 1195) became known as a religious-thinker of note amongst the Jewish population of Europe for his attempts to bring about reconciliation during the Maimuni-controversy in 1232. It was this public stand that led him to be challenged to defend his Faith in a public debate with the Jewish Christian-convert Pablo Christiani before King Jayme I of Aragon in 1263. Following the five-day debate (which both 'sides' claimed to have won), Na'hmanides published his full argument. This work was declared 'heresy', and he was expelled from Spain. He eventually settled in Acre in Palestine, where he published his great commentary on the *Tôrah* (Newman 1960:1-3).

In the commentary on our verses, Na'hmanides quotes Rabbi Rashi (and the *Genesis Rabba*) - the בני האלהים are 'the sons of princes and judges' (Newman 1960:91), and their sin was taking wives for themselves 'as they chose', even if the women were married (i.e. their sin was the misuse of position and power). God therefore limits the life-span of humanity to prevent further corruption and destruction.

However, Na'hmanides notes that God did not need to limit human life-span at this point, for He has already pronounced them finite (Gn 3:19). Enlarging on the midrash of Rabbi Abraham, our commentator then offers his own interpretation of these verses: The first inhabitants of earth (i e Adam and Eve) were בני האלהים, for they were created in His image. So, too, were their offspring (i e Seth, and Enoch) born in the image of God (and were therefore also בני האלהים). As בני האלהים, these great ancestors, with their wives and children, were 'perfect people' - tall, handsome, athletic, sinless. However, after Enoch, sin began to mar the 'image of God', and so the future generations are no longer בני האלהים. At some point the (בני האלהים) sons of Enoch took wives from their descendants (no longer בני האלהים - now simply בנות האדם), and so the children born to these בני האלהים were smaller, weaker, less impressive, inferior (i e נפלים), although still more noticeable than the other children born to the בנות האדם (i e fathered by 'sons of men'). Therefore, when 'men' hearkened back to their days of glory, they would remember these 'inferior ones' (i e נפלים) as ancestors to be looked up to, when in fact they were not בני האלהים as their Creator had intended (Newman 1960:94). Our verse 3 is to be understood as God lamenting that those created in His image are now just like the rest of creation (i e 'flesh'), and no longer בני האלהים (Newman 1960:92).

While Na'hmanides retains the tradition that he has inherited (that the בני האלהים are humans), it is interesting to note how he has built on the ideas handed down to him.

2.3.2. Luther.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), the great German Reformer, committed the last years of his life to 'an exposition of the Books of Moses' (Luther 1958:IX). Luther began these lectures in July 1535, delivering the lectures on our text later the following year. Unfortunately the texts of these lectures that are available to us are not from the pen of Luther himself, and so may not be 'pure-Luther' (Luther 1958:X), although they certainly are strongly based on his thoughts and ideas.

Luther, following on with the concept of the בני האלהים being human, sees them as the Righteous, who have moved their focus from God, and the things of God, and instead turned

to sate their own desires. In doing this they have not only sinned in fulfilling the lustful desires of their hearts, but have rejected the righteous practices of their parents (in only marrying people from godly families), and turned their own sexual gratification into an idol:

The true meaning of the passage is that Moses designates as sons of God those people who had the promise of the blessed Seed. It is a term of the New Testament and designates the believers, who call God Father and whom God, in turn, calls sons. The Flood came, not because the Cainite race had become corrupt, but because the race of the righteous who had believed God, obeyed His Word, and observed true worship had fallen into idolatry, disobedience of parents, sensual pleasures, and the practice of oppression (*Works of Luther*, XLII:270, Luther 1960:12).

This sinful sexual indulgence gave rise to people who continued the sin of their wicked fathers by turning further away from God, and growing in fame due to their own arrogance and sinful pride. In relation to their righteous forefathers these 'fallen ones' (i.e. נפלים) appeared as giants in the memory of their descendants (Luther 1960:32).³ God therefore decides to withdraw His Spirit from them after a period of 120 years, a time during which His prophets would seek to minister God's Truth, to give these 'fallen' time to see the error of their ways and repent. Failure to repent brings about the judgement of the Flood (Luther 1960:24)⁴.

For Luther, then, the בני האלהים are the righteous, who turn from God, and fall into lustful idolatry. The children born of these unions grow in sin, and so appear 'giants' in their arrogant self-reliance. God grants humanity 120 years grace before sending His judgement.

2.3.3. Calvin.

The Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) begins his commentary on our text by rejecting the supernatural interpretation:

That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious (Calvin 1948:238).

Calvin interprets the בני האלהים as the 'posterity of Seth', who had profaned the name of God (Whose name they bore) by rejecting the grace poured into their lives by mingling with the 'children of Cain' (Calvin 1948:238). They rejected the will of God for them by marrying according to their lustful desires, rather than the wives chosen by God. In so doing they not only married outside of the Faithful, but would soon have fallen away from the Faith themselves.

In response to this sin God Himself speaks words of judgement, allowing this sinful world 120 years to repent. Disagreeing with Luther, he sees God as leaving these fallen humans to their own devices (without the attempted input from prophets) for the 120 years, after which God's judgement is declared to Moses (Calvin 1948:242).

These heinous marriages gave birth to people who modelled themselves on a race of giants who were alive at the time (Calvin does not see the offspring as large in stature), and so arrogantly destroyed and despoiled as they chose. This abuse of their God-given talents and abilities was evidence of how far they had fallen from grace - a fact borne out by the reverence that these offspring inspired in their descendants (Calvin 1948:246).

Calvin therefore agrees with Luther's interpretation that the בני האלהים are the Righteous, but identifies them clearly with the descendants of Seth, and the בנות האדם with the line of Cain. His interpretation of the נפלים is particularly interesting.

2.3.4. Matthew Henry.

In similar vein, Matthew Henry, in his landmark English commentary (published in 1708) interpreted the בני האלהים as the 'professors of religion', and the בנות האדם as 'those that were profane, and strangers to God and godliness' (Church 1960:24). A few lines later he identifies the godly as the descendants of Seth, and the others as 'the excommunicated race of Cain'. However, Henry identifies the sin as that of Believers being 'unequally yoked together' with Unbelievers (c f 2 Corinthians 6:14). He goes on to interpret the 120 years as a sign of God's 'patience and forbearance towards provoking sinners' (Church 1960:25), noting that God judges them guilty, but does not destroy them immediately.

3. THE MAIN INTERPRETATIONS OFFERED TODAY.

As down through the centuries, theories abound as to the identification of the בני האלהים and the בנות האדם⁵, and as to what exactly YHWH dished out punishment for.

Von Daniken has suggested that the בני האלהים were 'technically skilled space travellers from another star' (Von Daniken 1968:51) - an argument supported by several of the many websites dealing with this passage on the World Wide Web!

Siverns (1987) argues that the בני האלהים were in fact *Jinni* - the *Jinn* is a small 'ill-defined being' (1987:51) found in the *Qur'an* (e.g. *Surah* 72:1-18). These little creatures, half-demon and half-human, work amongst people for good or evil (much like the *leprechaun* in Irish mythology, or the *tokoloshe* in African folk-lore), although they usually align themselves with sinful humanity, against Allah. The *Jinni* are known to enjoy sexual relations with human women (especially beautiful ones). Such unions give birth to superhuman, but finite, offspring. The נפלים were such 'superhuman' progeny, so YHWH had to limit their life-span.

However, serious scholarship ('serious' in my opinion, at any rate) can be divided into four main interpretations (with two others noted).

3.1. Mythical deities overstep their God-given boundaries.

This interpretation sees our passage as an ancient myth used by our author for a specific theological purpose (both origin and author are discussed in the next chapter). While the original myth arose in a polytheistic milieu, where there were various levels of gods in the pantheon, our author uses it (largely unchanged) in reference to his monotheistic faith (Hendel 1987a:10).

The scholars who hold to this interpretation therefore see the בני האלהים as divine beings 'belonging to the god-class of beings' (Hong 1989:423), who are 'superior to the human race' (Westermann 1987:44). These 'god-beings', divine members of the heavenly council (Marrs 1980:219), lust after the beautiful human women, and have sexual relations with them (there is no concept of rape or other violence in the text, Walton 1986:200). In so doing these 'god-beings' have overstepped their God-given boundaries, as have the human women with whom they had sex; and so the humans have the restriction placed on them to prevent any further attempts to transgress human limitations (Westermann 1987:44). These divine-human copulations result in the birth of a 'super humanity' (Von Rad 1963:112).

Several reasons are given for this interpretation:

- ▶ In other Near Eastern literature from the same period the term 'sons of the gods' refers to subservient divine-beings within the heavenly pantheon (Huey 1986:192), notably in Canaanite lore (Hendel 1987a:10-11);
- ▶ The term בני האלהים refers to mythical angelic beings in its other usages within the OT: Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 89:6 (HT 7). The Hebrew text behind the Septuagint reading of Deuteronomy 32:8 refers to the בני האלהים (as opposed to the Masoretic Text 'sons of Israel', Shanks 1998:154). While some scholars also refer to Psalm 29:1 and Daniel 3:25, the בני האלהים could be interpreted as 'righteous Israelites' in the psalm, and as 'angels' in the prophet;
- ▶ The cohabitation of members of the divine order and humans gives the best explanation for the 'giant' offspring born to them; and
- ▶ This interpretation is in keeping with the apparent 'age' of the myth.

3.2. Fallen angels envelop the cosmos in sin.

This interpretation, agreeing with the early Church Fathers, sees the בני האלהים as referring to angels, who lust after, and are sexually joined to, human women. Here, too, the humans are punished for having allowed themselves to be used by the angels in the over-stepping of God-ordained boundaries. The offspring of these relationships are the 'famous giants of old'.

There are some strong arguments given in support of this interpretation:

- ▶ A number of versions, translations, and commentators translate בני האלהים as 'angels' in the verses referred to in the previous section;
- ▶ The idea of angels falling from grace, and being punished for sinning within the human realm certainly seems to be supported by the New Testament: e.g. 1 Peter 3:19-20; 2 Peter 2:4-5; Jude 6. It is generally agreed that Peter is referring here to the angels referred to in our text (Hiebert 1982:152, Omanson 1982:441); however, while Peter and Jude are no doubt referring to *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*, they are not necessarily referring to our pericope; and
- ▶ The cohabitation of angels and humans gives the best explanation for the 'giants'.

However, there are also several arguments offered against this thesis:

- ▶ While the angelic interpretation was popular for the first few centuries, it was soon surpassed by the 'nonsupernatural' interpretation;
- ▶ Several scholars, as did Calvin, express abhorrence at the thought of angels being sexual beings - 'the whole conception of sexual life, as connected with God or angels, is totally foreign to Hebrew thought' (Birney 1970:45). However, the OT appears to refer to both male (Dn 9:21) and female (Zch 5:9) angels, and it is apparent that angels possess not only a sense of right and wrong, but the free will to choose between them (Lee 1994:55); and
- ▶ If God punishes humanity, then surely the sinners must be human too (Hong 1989:421). However, the author is concerned, not with angelic history and punishment, but with the human lot, and so focuses only on YHWH's response towards the human sinners (Huey 1986:200).

3.3. God-fearers intermarry with the heathen.

This interpretation approaches the text from the basic premise that the ones being punished are the humans (vs 3), and it is the בני האלהים who commit the sin, so the בני האלהים must be human (Eslinger 1979:65).

This, the first of the ‘nonsupernatural’ interpretations, stresses that our text must be read in its wider context (i.e. race of Cain, Gn 4; and race of Seth, Gn 5, Goodnick 1984:51). In this interpretation, as in Calvin, the בני האלהים are those who are descended from the righteous race of Seth (i.e. are godly), while the בנות האדם are the descendants of Cain (i.e. the ungodly). The sin of the godly is therefore to have married into the heathen races (as in Matthew Henry above). The offspring born to these ungodly unions are spiritual bastards, ‘fallen’ from grace (i.e. נפלים), and arrogant in their sinful pride (i.e. ‘giants’).

There are four main arguments used against this thesis:

- ▶ It calls for a change in translation of the word אדם between verse 1 and verse 2 - in verse 1 it is translated as the generic ‘humanity’, while in verse 2 it suddenly takes on the meaning ‘ungodly humanity’;
- ▶ It can be argued that the term בני האלהים is not used in the OT to refer to humans (Huey 1986:194), although I believe it does refer to righteous Israelites in Psalm 29:1;
- ▶ Stating that all the descendants of Seth were deeply religious while all the descendants of Cain (especially the young women) were ‘ungodly’ is flimsy in the extreme; and
- ▶ Seeing the action described as being sex between two religiously-different human groupings does not explain the extraordinary children they bring into the world.

3.4. Ancient nobility abuse their privileged position.

Several scholars claim that the בני האלהים are ancient royalty or nobility, who marry women ‘as they chose’, i.e. they took more than one wife. In this interpretation the sin of the בני האלהים is that they used their authority and position to commit polygamy (Birney 1970:49).

Birney (1970:51) takes this thesis one step further, seeing the נפלים as the perpetrators of this polygamy, i.e. the נפלים were the בני האלהים.

However, I cannot see polygamy as being the reason for such harsh judgement by YHWH; if polygamy was a sin then His anointed king, Solomon, was a sinner indeed.

In a more acceptable interpretation, some scholars, agreeing that the בני האלהים are nobility/royalty who abuse their privilege and position, see the 'taking to themselves wives' as the practice of *jus primae noctis* (i e 'law of the first night'), according to which the king/ruler is entitled to have sex with a bride on her wedding night, before she may join her newly-wedded husband (Walton 1986:200). The offspring of such unions would be almost a race apart - children of the king/ruler, but not a part of his family; these 'bastards' would be able to arrogantly act as giants and heroes, secure in their royal parentage, but free from the confines of court-life.

That the very 'shepherds' of the people should abuse their privilege in this way cannot go unpunished; and so YHWH speaks words of judgement.

3.5. Two other interesting interpretations.

An interesting alternative to paragraph 3.3 above is given by Eslinger (1979), who agrees that the sin committed was the righteous overstepping their God-ordained limits by marrying the heathen. However, he suggests that the בני האלהים are the Cainites (i e those who, like their mother Eve, attempt to 'become God' by wilfully disobeying Him). The בני האדם are therefore the (righteous) descendants of Seth.

An interesting interpretation, as God then punishes those who have committed the sin. However, he is not supported by any other author I consulted:

- ▶ Eslinger still falls into the quagmire of changing the interpretation of אדם from verse 1 to verse 2.

Goodnick offers a 'psychological' interpretation to this view: Cainites focussed on physical prowess (therefore בני האדם), and so amassed material wealth; while the Sethites focussed on spiritual and intellectual growth (therefore בני האלהים); so the offspring of these two groups were both wealthy and spiritually- and intellectually-mature, truly 'men of renown' (Goodnick 1984:51).

4. INTERPRETING OUR TEXT TODAY.

For thousands of years this story has scandalized readers of the Bible, and for good reason. The story appears to go against the grain of our understanding of biblical religion. But the story is there, and since it is, perhaps our traditional understanding is what's wrong. Perhaps, to paraphrase Hamlet, there are more things in heaven and earth, and in the Bible, than are dreamt of in our philosophy (Hendel 1987a:8).

I approach this dissertation from the premise that the difficulty experienced in arriving at an understanding of our paragraph is because 'our traditional understanding is what's wrong'!

In this dissertation I therefore propose to show that Genesis 6:1-4 should be interpreted as a mythical narrative:

- ▶ the story is enacted in mythical time;
- ▶ the action described occurs in mythical space;
- ▶ our pericope therefore refers to mythical figures; and
- ▶ our verses are freed to speak their message into our context when interpreted as myth.

We will respond to this hypothesis in terms of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation. In our next chapter we will therefore:

- ▶ clarify the text upon which we are focussing;
- ▶ identify the 'author' and his/her context;
- ▶ note how the author edited the story received by him/her; and
- ▶ examine the genre of our pericope.

Having ascertained an accurate text, set it in its context, and clarified the genre, we will then turn to the interpretation of our pericope (chapter three), as we:

- ▶ ascertain the message of our author to his/her original readers/listeners; and
- ▶ suggest a possible meaning for South Africa today.

In the concluding chapter we will note how interpreting this story as a mythical narrative has not only allowed us to arrive at a clear interpretation; but has, in fact, freed the ancient text to speak its message anew into our context.

Endnotes to Chapter One:

1. While many scholars question whether the Dead Sea Scrolls did actually originate at Qumran, I see them as integrally connected to the community. The debate is well documented in Shanks 1998:82-105 & 132-163.
2. It is interesting to note that in the fragmentary 4Q *Ages of Creation*, a pesher is given on our verses and *1 En*, equating the giants with the sworn enemies of the Essenes, the Jerusalemite Hasmoneans (Sanders 1969:286-287)!
3. Always a child of his time, Luther equates 'the pope and the bishops' with these נפליים (1960:33)!
4. Luther says some very flattering things about 'ministers and preachers' here!
5. Newman makes the interesting point that it is most often the 'liberal' scholars (accepting the role of myth in the Old Testament) who claim that the בני האלהים are human, while the 'conservatives' (denying any concept of myth in the Old Testament) interpret them as angelic (Newman 1984:13).

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING OUR PASSAGE

This paragraph... is one of the obscurest in the Pentateuch (Cassuto 1961:291).

There are three main ‘problems’ that need to be addressed in seeking an understanding of this ‘obscure paragraph’:

- ▶ The text itself is difficult, as it contains several words that are difficult or unknown;
- ▶ The author and origin of our passage is not clearly stated, neither is its purpose; and
- ▶ The modern reader is uncertain as to how to read the text: is it to be taken literally, dismissed as a ‘fairy story’, or read in some other way?

In this chapter we will therefore:

- ▶ clarify the text upon which we are focussing;
- ▶ identify the ‘author’ and his/her context;
- ▶ note how the author edited the story received by him/her; and
- ▶ examine the genre of our pericope.

1. CLARIFYING THE TEXT.

Not only is this passage difficult to understand, but the text is fraught with difficulties for the translator.

1.1. My base text.

The starting point of any textual criticism is the choice of which textual tradition to focus on (Würthwein 1979:112). I have chosen to focus on that tradition represented by the Hebrew

Text as published in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1983, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft), as my base text.

Aware of the shortcomings of the BHS (notably within the critical apparatus, Deist 1988:76-83, who actually states that BHS is 'not really fit for any truly scholarly work.' 1988:205), and that this edition follows the Codex Leningradensis closely (thereby largely ignoring the many other witnesses to the OT), I have chosen it as my base text for one reason: the majority of Bible Societies throughout the world have chosen BHS as the base text for their translations of the Old Testament. This means that the BHS has become 'canonized' by the Church as its major OT witness *today* (this may well change with the discovery of new texts, etc, in the future - but *for now* BHS is the 'canonized text' of the OT).

1.2. Translating a difficult text.

As stated above, this text is difficult, as it contains several difficult or unknown words. I translate the text as follows:

Genesis 6

- 1. And it came to pass that when humanity began to increase across the earth,
and daughters were born to them*
- 2. then the sons of the gods saw that the daughters of the humans were beautiful,
and they took wives for themselves from among them all,
as they found them sexually attractive.*
- 3. And YHWH said, 'My spirit of life shall not remain forever in the human
race, for indeed they are mortal!
Their life-span shall be 120 years.'*
- 4. The Nephilim were in the land in those days, and for some time to come,
when the sons of the gods came in to the human daughters, and they
bore them children:
these were the mighty men of old, the heroes.*

Verse 1

<i>humanity</i>	הָאָדָם	literally 'the man', using the definite article to denote the generic 'mankind' or 'humanity'
<i>across the earth</i>	עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה	lit. 'upon the face of the ground'

Verse 2

<i>sons of the gods</i>	בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים	lit. 'sons of the gods', often translated 'sons of God'. I prefer not to treat הָאֱלֹהִים as a proper noun referring to God: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ my translation fits in better with the meaning of the passage (discussed in the next chapter); and▶ this passage is written by J, who seldom uses אֱלֹהִים as referring to God without affixing the holy Tetragrammaton יְהוָה (also discussed later)
<i>beautiful</i>	טֹבַת הֵנָּה	lit. 'they were good', from the adj. טוֹב 'pleasant, agreeable, good' (BDB 373)
<i>as they found them sexually attractive</i>	אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ	lit. 'which they chose', from בָּחַר 'to choose' (BDB 103)

Verse 3

my spirit of life רוחי

the noun רוח translates as 'spirit', 'breath', and 'wind' (BDB 924). While several scholars translate it here as 'my spirit' I prefer to tie it in with YHWH 'breathing into his nostrils the breath of life' in Gn 2:7

shall not remain לא ידון

this verb is unknown in Hebrew. Various suggestions have been made, the two most plausible being:

► ידון is a scriptographical error, and should be written ילון 'to cause to rest', Hiph. Impf. of the verb לון or לין 'to lodge, pass the night' (BDB 533, Snaith 1947:44)

► the Akkadian verb דנן 'to remain or exist perpetually in a given place' is found in the Qal in Talmudic Aramaic, and possibly in Hebrew. The verb should then be translated as 'to abide permanently' (Cassuto 1961:296)

for indeed they are mortal בשגם הוא בשר

lit. 'in also they are flesh'

► בשגם - ב = prep. 'in', ש = a

late relative, possibly Northern dialect (Snaith 1947:44-45), גם = adv. 'also, moreover, yea' (BDB 168)¹

▶ הוא = 3.m.pl. pron.

▶ בשר = n.m. 'flesh' (BDB 142)

life-span

ימיו

lit. 'their days'

Verse 4

Nephilim

הנפלים

probable root נפל 'to fall' (BDB 658). The translation of this word is discussed in Chapter 3

and they bore children

וילדו

lit. 'and they bore' from ילד 'to bear, bring forth, begat' (BDB 408): 'children' is implied

mighty men

הגברים

pl. adj. of גבור 'strong, mighty' (BDB 150)

the heroes

אנשי השם

lit. 'the men of name'

Having ascertained an acceptable text with which to work, we now address the question of the author: who wrote these verses, when, and why?

2. THE 'AUTHOR' AND HIS/HER CONTEXT.

While the Bible text claims Mosaic origin for the first five books of the OT in several places (e.g. Nm 36:13, Dt 1:1, 3), the tradition soon grew that Moses was not only the originator of

the contents of the books that bore his name, but was the actual author (e.g. Ex 24:4, Mt 4:4). In the first century CE Philo of Alexandria, soon followed by the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, declared Moses to be the actual author of all five books of the *Tôrâh* (Schmidt 1984:46). This viewpoint was soon assimilated by both Judaism and Christianity, where this great body of literature is often referred to as being of Mosaic authorship (e.g. Jn 1:17), and is often simply referred to as 'Moses' (e.g. Lk 16:29).

Unswerving belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch continued for several centuries. This position was first questioned by the Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra in the twelfth century, who noted that certain parts of Deuteronomy obviously refer to events which only occurred long after the death of Moses (Blenkinsopp 1994:308). Gradually more and more scholars began to agree with Ibn Ezra, until only the most conservative of Jewish and Christian Scholars still held the Philonic view.

2.1. The 'documentary hypothesis' of Pentateuchal authorship.

Developed over three centuries, this theory was articulated in its 'classic' form by the great German scholar Julius Wellhausen, in the late nineteenth century². While several scholars have rejected the theory, the vast majority have embraced this viewpoint. It must be noted, however, that several new theories of authorship are challenging this view (discussed briefly in Blenkinsopp 1992:19-25).

2.2. The documentary hypothesis.

The theory, as developed by Wellhausen, can briefly be explained as follows:

Nomadic Israel gradually drew her various oral traditions, histories, and laws together as she developed from twelve loosely-linked tribes into a more-organized confederation. These oral traditions eventually began to take on a set form, used for remembrances at cultic festivals.

These traditions reached a 'fixed form' in the twelfth/eleventh century BCE (scholars refer to this body of tradition as **G** = *Grundlage*).

When drawn together as a nation by King David (a movement reaching its culmination under David's son, Solomon) during the tenth century BCE, court theologians set out to interpret G for a new national, political, and religious situation. These theologians (referred to as **J** = *Jahwist*, for they use the name יהוה = *YHWH* to refer to God prior to the giving of the divine name in Ex 3) not only re-interpreted G, but rewrote many of its stories, in order that the ancient traditions might speak afresh into their new situation. Some scholars argue for a J recension (**Jr**) after the division of the kingdom (Simpson 1952:445-448), but before the northern exile.

While J re-interpreted G in Jerusalem, the ancient traditions continued to circulate in the north of the kingdom. Theologians in this part eventually began to re-interpret this oral tradition, a process completed once the United Kingdom had split after Solomon's death. These northern theologians (called **E** = *Elohist*, as they use the divine name אלהים = '*elohim*' prior to Ex 3) rewrote G, stressing the importance of God reaching His people through dreams and prophets (as Jerusalem was no longer accessible to them). E probably reached its final form during the ninth century BCE.

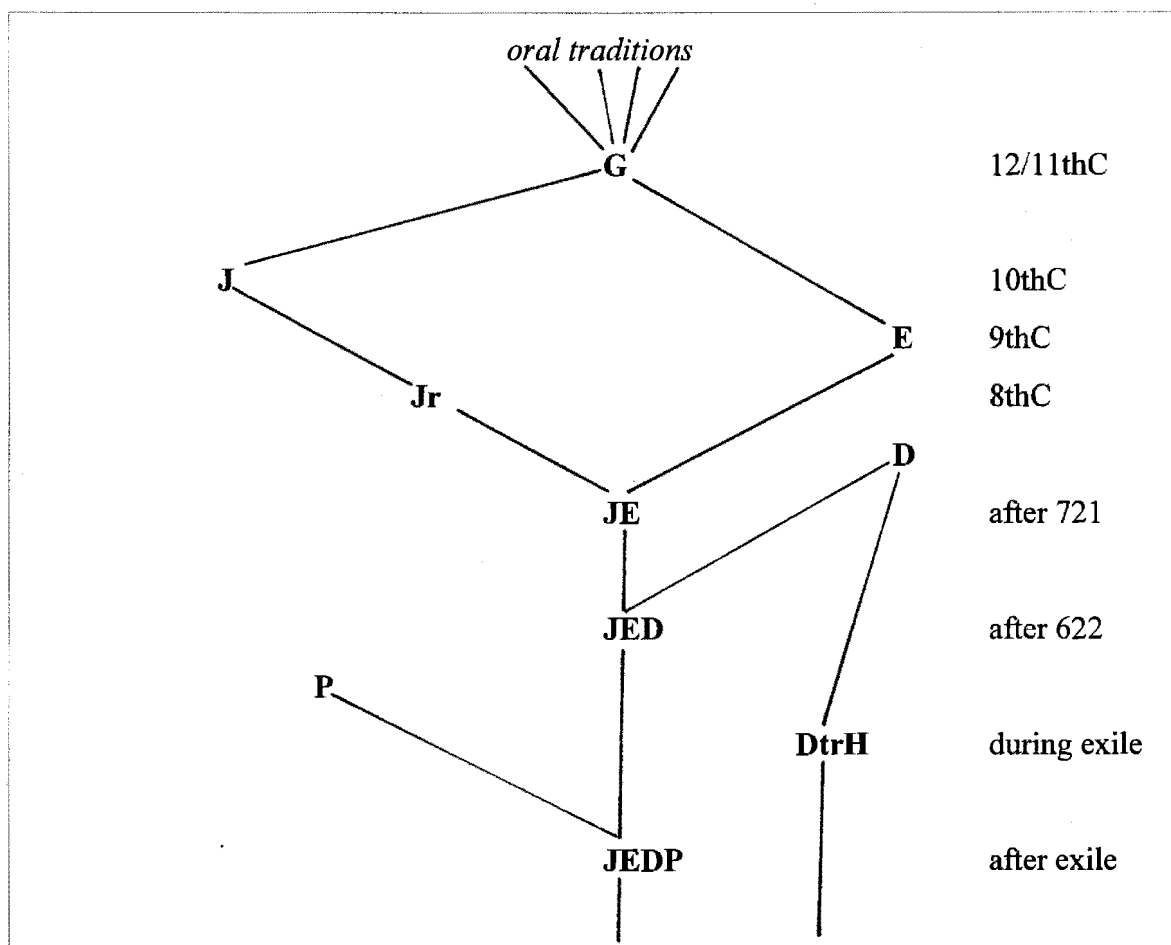
After the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile in 721 BCE, E came south, and a *Jahwist* redactor wove J and E together, using J as the main text (this enlarged document is referred to as **JE** = *Jehovistic*).

In the eighth century BCE Levites in the Northern Kingdom had compiled a book of cultic laws and observances (Soggin 1976:121-122). This book, an early version of *Deuteronomy* (therefore referred to as **D**), had also come south after 721, and was 'discovered' during the Josianic Reform in 622 BCE. It was added to JE, with only some minor reinterpretation occurring (**JED**).

During the next two centuries Levites in Jerusalem developed and collected the various cultic laws and traditions. This body of work is referred to as **P** (= *Priestly writer*).

During the Exile (mid fifth century BCE) Deuteronomistic theologians were faced with the spiritual crisis caused by the political upheaval, and so (utilising earlier historical recollections) wrote down the great history of Israel (Joshua - II Kings), adding a few chapters to Deuteronomy. This great historical epic is referred to as **DtrH** (= *Deuteronomistic Historian*).

During the latter years of the Exile, or (more probably) soon after the return to their devastated homeland, the Levitical authors of **P** added their work to the great collection **JED**. Their addition and redaction rendered the Pentateuch in the form we have it today (**JEDP**).³



Schematic representation of the 'classic' documentary hypothesis

It is important to note that while it is convenient to talk of 'books' and 'documents', and whilst these collections were most probably written documents, they were written for oral presentation (Niditch 1996).

2.3. Challenges to the documentary theory.

In recent years several scholars have challenged the entire documentary hypothesis:

e.g. Rendtorff (discussed briefly in Blenkinsopp 1992:23-24) has argued for a 'fragmentary hypothesis' - seeing the Pentateuch made up of large blocks of collected oral material, collated by DtrH during the exile, or soon afterwards. Van Seters (while earlier acknowledging a Deuteronomic J2 redaction during the Exile, 1972:459), more recently sees the entire J-strand as having originated at the hand of a Deuteronomic writer during the Exile, this compiler simply using older blocks of material (of which E may have been such a 'block') to piece together his great history (Van Seters 1992). This 'J-compilation' was used as the foundation for the later Priestly writers, who simply added their material to that of the Yahwist. Van Seters refers to this theory as the 'supplementary hypothesis' (Van Seters 1994:42).

However, while I can see merit in the various arguments offered (discussion of such arguments is beyond the scope of this dissertation), I am left with the feeling that most scholars who reject the documentary hypothesis are arguing 'from a vacuum', i.e. they have rejected the one theory, and are now desperately trying to postulate a theory to fill the vacuum, often arguing from the silence of the text (as noted a scholar as Joseph Blenkinsopp, 1992:27, agrees with my uneasiness in this regard!).

While the majority of scholars accept the documentary hypothesis, they have (of course) suggested certain modifications to the 'classic' theory. Some of these variations do not affect our debate as to the author of Genesis 6:

e.g. Schmidt (1984:51) suggests that D existed parallel to JE and the later JEP, and that the final redactor (rD) finalized the Pentateuch in the light of Deuteronomy.

However, some scholars suggest variations that do affect the date of our passage:

e.g. Several modern scholars state that J shows later developments (e.g. hints of the universality of YHWH in Genesis 2 and 3, allusion to the great Ziggurat of Babylon in Genesis 11, etc), and should rather be considered exilic or post-exilic (Blenkinsopp 1994:313).

I agree that J does show some later developments, but prefer to attribute this to a later Jahwist redactor (J2) during the exile, or even post-exilic (so Blenkinsopp 1994:315), but before P did the final redaction.

Therefore, I agree with the documentary hypothesis of Pentateuchal authorship, but believe that the 'classic' theory needs modification.

2.4. Modifying the documentary hypothesis.

I agree with the classic hypothesis that theologians linked to the court (i.e. *Yahwist*) collated, and rewrote the ancient traditions (i.e. *G*), in Jerusalem, during the reign of Solomon. This first recension of *J* was much as we have it today, although the 'prehistory' sections (e.g. the Eden story, Noah, Babel) were not yet there.

However, the sacred history from Abraham to the death of Moses was not the only concern of these court theologians, who continued their great history to its natural conclusion - the settlement of the land of Canaan and appointment of David as king (Eissfeldt 1966:245); although various scholars argue for a different 'concluding chapter' for the *J* strand in the Former Prophets (Kaiser 1975:165-168). The Elohist theologians of the Northern Kingdom had also written an extended history (further discussion of the formation of DtrH is beyond this dissertation).

This sacred (Pentateuchal) history was edited by later court theologians (*Jr*) soon after the northern exile (722BCE), and later had parts of the northern *E* woven into it (now *JE*).

After the ‘discovery’ of an early version of Deuteronomy during the Josianic reform JE was added to D, with some editing being done by the Deuteronomic theologians (JED).

During the Exile these Deuteronomic theologians took the extended histories collected by J and E, combined them, extending them to the start of the southern exile. This great history (DtrH) was edited to speak a new message: rather than expressing the presence of God with His people, and legitimising the Davidic dynasty (discussed below), this new history now challenged those in exile with the Deuteronomic call to a godly life.

At about the same time (i.e. early in the Exile) Priestly theologians also compiled their great history of the southern kingdom (1 & 2 Chronicles = ChronH), challenging those being punished by the Exile to return to correct cultic worship and practice.

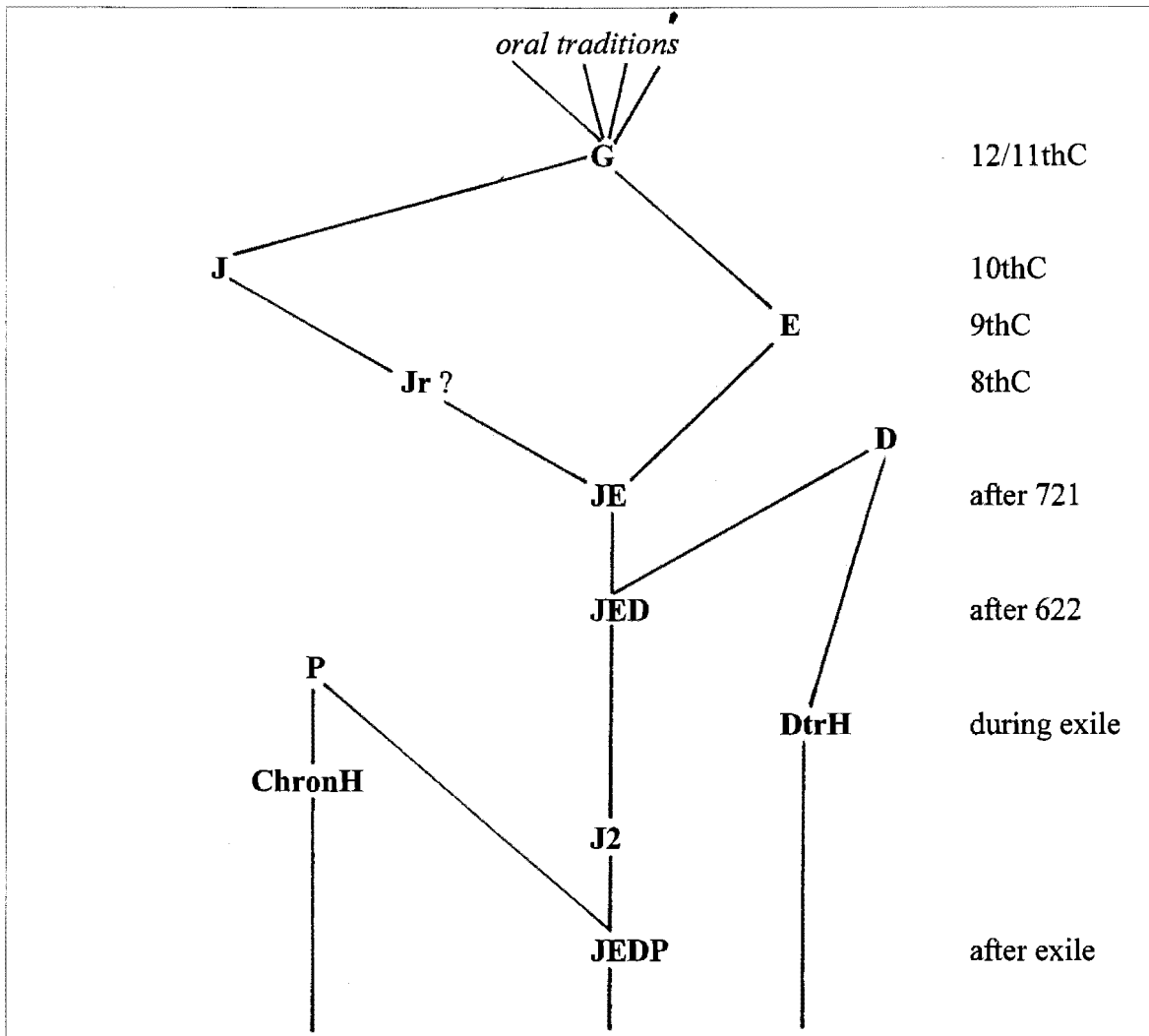
Later in the Exile, in response to the theological crisis brought about by their defeat and enslavement, Yahwist-theologians edited the sacred history (JED), adding certain of the prehistory sections (J2). This redaction was greatly influenced by the great Deuteronomic History.

Soon after the completion of this redaction (possibly even post-Exilic) the Priestly theologians edited the history for the last time, including various genealogical and cultic-law passages. The Pentateuch was finally complete (JEDP).

A schematic representation of this ‘modified’ hypothesis is on page 31.

2.5. My standpoint - our author was J2.

I find the documentary hypothesis (as outlined in the previous paragraph) completely plausible, and probable. Therefore, I see the main narrative strand of the Pentateuch as being compiled in the tenth/ninth century BCE, by a school of historically-minded theologians, in Jerusalem.



Schematic representation of my 'modified' documentary hypothesis

However, this school of court-theologians continued to edit the sacred books throughout the history of the kingdom, until the finalization of the Pentateuch after the Exile.

The final redaction by J2 included the adding of the Primeval History - Eden, Cain and Abel, Lamech, our pericope, Noah, and Babel. Our paragraph is considered 'late' for three reasons (Rogerson 1991:69):

- ▶ the monotheistic nature of the myth;
- ▶ the language used; and
- ▶ its apparent relationship with other myths (discussed below).

2.6. The context and dating of the *Yahwist*.

'Israel' had been formed as a few small tribes, bound together by a common tribal-lineage and the worship of the unseen god YHWH, entered into Canaan over (through!) the Jordan River, where they joined up with existing familial-tribes of Hebrews (who also worshipped YHWH). Over a period of time this loose confederation of tribes subdued almost all of the land between the Jordan and the coast, from the Galilean Sea to the Judaen desert. They then 'formalised' their relationship, covenanting themselves to each other and YHWH at the cultic centre of Shiloh.

This closely-bound tribal group continued to live separately, ruled by their traditional tribal rulers or 'judges'. However, they were beholden to one another through their familial connection, worship of the One God, and common cultic celebration, and so regularly rallied to arms when an individual tribe was threatened. Under immense political and military pressure the cry went up to '*be like the other nations*' (1 Sm 8:5), and so Saul was appointed king. Under Saul the tribal confederacy became a 'nation' for the first time, as their king attempted to unite not only the tribes, but their traditions too.

Saul's successor, David, ushered in a new age for the fledgeling nation: he declared Jerusalem the political and religious capital, extended her borders, and ushered in a golden age of peace and prosperity. Solomon continued the reign of his father, permanently determining the nation's capital by building a magnificent temple to YHWH. The final years of Solomon's reign were plagued by apostasy and rebellion; and the nation was torn in two shortly after his death.

The *Yahwist* theologians began their work under David (1000-961 BCE), bringing it to its full magnitude under Solomon (961-922 BCE)⁴, or shortly afterwards (Schmidt 1984: 76). These court theologians continued their theological endeavours throughout the history of Judah, and so reworked their ancient traditions again in response to the crises presented by the Exile.

Our passage dates to this final *Yahwist* recension (J2).

2.7. The purpose of the *Yahwist*.

Soggin (1976:102) states this purpose rather simply:

We may therefore consider the J collection to be something like an apologetic writing intended to justify and legitimate the monarchy in Israel.

However, I believe J's purpose was far greater (and more noble) than that!

As is obvious from the brief discussion above of the *Sitz in Leben* of the *Yahwist*⁵, he was living in a time of immense social, political, religious, and spiritual change (Von Rad 1975:36-48):

- ▶ Socially, the 'Israel' of the time of J was a far cry from the days of the 'fathers' - nomadic herdsmen had become a settled 'nation', living in cities, farming agriculturally, now a united nation to be feared by its enemies. How did the ancient laws apply to their new situation... in fact, did they apply at all?
- ▶ Politically, the loose collection of tribal clans had become moulded together as a 'nation', governed by a king, with the usual state apparatus and court-life. Whilst YHWH, and His commands, had always governed life; now the king controlled the lives of the people, and the laws of the state were to be obeyed unquestioningly! Would a God who revealed Himself to their ancestors in their desert wanderings still be faithful to those who had rejected the lifestyles of those revered forefathers?
- ▶ Religiously, the old ways were gone forever, firmly laid to rest beneath the cornerstone of a magnificent temple. The religious life of the confederacy had always centred on annual feasts held at the shrines determined by the ancestors; now the Ark of the Covenant was permanently situated in Jerusalem, and not at Shiloh, Bethel, or a number of other once-sacred sites. Would the God who revealed Himself at Shiloh respond to prayers offered in Jerusalem?
- ▶ However, the time of David and (especially) Solomon was definitely not a time of doom and gloom. While the new life-situation definitely caused a crisis in the minds of the people (and especially those trained to think theologically); the unprecedented peace, stability, and prosperity also set those minds free to create, dream, and question. Now

that Israel's prime focus was no longer individual- and group-survival, they were set free spiritually to look beyond their immediate context: no longer needing to focus on 'Where are we going to?', they could now ask 'Where did we come from?' (Schmidt 1984:77).

In response to the many-faceted crisis brought on by the change, success, and resultant secularization, of Israelite society, the *Yahwist* looked back in history, and offered a new interpretation of that history; and therefore the assurance of YHWH's presence in the present. Whilst the guidance and blessings of God had always been seen to be experienced mainly within the cultic life, J looked at the history of Israel in 'a fundamentally different way' (Von Rad 1963:28) - *all* of life was the domain of YHWH, and not just the cultic. Therefore YHWH was at work in the life (and lives) of His people, in both the 'sacred' and the 'profane'; guiding, growing, and empowering them to be *His* great nation under *His* chosen king! Thus several scholars refer to a Yahwist 'theology of history' (Schmid 1986:25).

2.8. An author inspired.

The Yahwist was most certainly not just a Solomonic spin-doctor, but a devout thinker, touched by the God he worshipped, who had the ability to see beyond the ancient traditions, beyond the present situation; and see the God Who was at work in His people down through the centuries.

A witness in the theological sense of the word arises only in relation to a preceding divine act of revelation; and it is really quite unthinkable that the Yahwist spoke to his people without such a backing for his words (Von Rad 1963:28).

Aware of the many questions raised by their new context, royal theologians set out to re-examine their sacred history in order that, as guided by their God, they could show His continued presence, and so call His people to renewed covenant commitment.

2.9. A renewed purpose for J2.

Like his theological predecessors, the final Yahwist redactor was also a devout thinker, inspired and guided by the God in whom his life and faith found full meaning.

While the J2 editor stood firmly in the tradition of his illustrious fathers, believing that YHWH controlled all of Israel's life and history, and that He was at work in His chosen People, he was faced with a new concern: if YHWH is God-of-all-of-our-life, and is at work in all of our history (as the still-developing Pentateuch stated), and only punished us because of our sinful disobedience (i.e. DtrH) and lack of correct worship (i.e. ChronH) - and is holy and righteous - then where did our sin and disobedience come from? In addition, if YHWH is the 'God of Israel', how can He have any jurisdiction in this foreign land (cf Ps 137)?

It was to include answers to these important questions that J2 edited the existing JED, and added the Primeval History, including our complex text.

3. UNRAVELLING A COMPLEX TEXT.

Even a cursory reading of our passage leaves one with the feeling that we are dealing with a 'garbled text' (Blenkinsopp 1992:75).

Verses 1 and 2 clearly follow on one-after-the-other:

1. *And it came to pass that when humanity began to increase across the earth,
and daughters were born to them*
2. *then the sons of the gods saw that the daughters of the humans were beautiful,
and they took wives for themselves from among them all,
as they found them sexually attractive.*

It is obvious that verse 4 follows on after the first two verses, explaining the offspring of the cosmic/human miscegenation:

4. *The Nephilim were in the land in those days, and for some time to come,
when the sons of the gods came in to the human daughters, and they
bore them children:
these were the mighty men of old, the heroes.*

However, verse 3 jars with the verses preceding and following it:

3. *And YHWH said, 'My spirit of life shall not remain forever in the human race,
for indeed they are mortal!
Their life-span shall be 120 years.'*

It is apparent that YHWH's judgement is pronounced in response to the behaviour of the בני האלהים and the בנות האדם, and to the birth of הגברים, and so this verse naturally fits in as the conclusion to the story.

Our passage therefore makes more sense if seen as two separate passages (verses 1,2, and 4, with verse 3 inserted at a later date).

It is interesting to note that Westermann (1987:43) also sees this as a composite of two different strands, one regarding the בני האלהים and the בנות האדם giving birth to the נפלים; the other a mythical tale in which the cosmic miscegenation results in God punishing the human race by limiting its life-span. I can't but help wonder why he has chosen to find a complex intertwining of the two strands, when my suggestion is far simpler and more logical.

Several scholars have argued that our verse 3 was not a part of the Yahwist pericope, but was only added three centuries later (e.g. Van Seters 1992:153). However, verse 1, 2, and 4 do not make any sense on their own within the structure of the great Yahwist history (discussed in chapter three). Therefore, while verses 1, 2, and 4 were undoubtedly part of a larger body of ancient material (Von Rad 1961:111), our author has combined them with the interpolating verse to form a 'complete narrative structure' (Petersen 1979:48). These verses therefore need to be read as a whole.

With this in mind, we now turn to the question 'What type of writing are we dealing with here?'

4. THE GENRE OF OUR TEXT.

The remarkable story about the 'sons of God' who become attracted to the daughters of men, mix blood with them, and so produce the race of giants, is commonly regarded as one of the most mythological texts in the OT (Otzen 1980b:58).

4.1. Towards the genre of our text.

While the majority of scholars agree that we are dealing here with an ancient myth, albeit one that has received much 'reworking' by its present author (Childs 1960:55), several scholars have insisted that what we are dealing with here (and in all of the prehistorical Genesis 1-11) is history and not myth (Oswalt 1977:168). Positions such as that adopted by Oswalt are taken because 'myth' is equated with 'fairy story'. The study of myth, and the development of myth, has shown that this is far from the truth (an excellent summary on the study of myth in relation to the OT is to be found in Rogerson 1974). To gain a clearer understanding of myth, we look briefly at the other genres often equated with myth (a more detailed study is beyond the scope of this dissertation).

4.1.1. Fairy-tale.

A fairy-tale is a work of fiction, although it may often appear to be rooted in history. The purpose of the fairy-tale is 'primarily to satisfy the ordinary human impulse to entertain, and to be entertained, by a good story' (Otzen 1980a:6). Those who believe the OT to be of religious significance will agree that it does not contain this genre of literature.

4.1.2. Legend.

A legend is a story of a famous hero (or heroes), rooted in a known historical and geographical framework, which ‘presents the hero in a favourable and biased way and is strongly coloured with fantastic and unbelievable deeds performed by the hero’ (Van Dyk 1987:56). The legend always has an ‘edifying thrust’ (Otzen 1980a:7). There are several stories in the Old Testament which can be classified as ‘legend’ (e g the fantastic exploits of Elijah and Elisha, the stories of Daniel in captivity, etc).

4.1.3. Saga.

A saga is also a story of a famous ancestor (or ancestors), but is rooted in a time before recorded history (although the author usually attempts to ‘historicize’ the story by placing it in a certain time and geographic location - thus ‘a saga attempts to be history’ Otzen 1980a:6). While the saga often includes the supernatural and the divine, the ‘hero’ is a human (Van Dyk 1987:55). The saga is usually explanatory, and is told to give later generations an understanding of their ancestral roots, and of important phenomena in the natural world (Otzen 1980a:6). Sagas in the OT are plentiful (e g Lot’s wife, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, etc).

4.1.4. Myth.

A myth is a story told of the gods (or God), and is set in a time long before recorded history. The myth is told to explain the origin of things. Van Dyk (1987:55) has defined a myth as:

It is a story:

- ▶ which (although unhistorical) is the highest expression of a people’s religious, social, and economic truths;
- ▶ in which God (or the gods) are the chief character(s);
- ▶ which is usually enacted at the dawn of time. That is, it deals with ‘primeval’ events which are of decisive importance in the situation of ancient (and modern?) man.

Therefore, the myth, while rooted in the distant mists of time, is developed for the time of the author, and is faithful to his/her understanding of events or phenomena. However, we must

not simply categorise mythical thought as a 'primitive' or 'prescientific' attempt to understand the intricacies of existence (Rogerson 1974:176). The myth is developed as a way for the person with a certain worldview (i.e. that the world is always in the 'process of becoming' as the God/s act on the life and world of the devout believer; Childs 1960:18) to understand, and exist in, a changing world. In so doing the myth 'stabilizes and orders, or regenerates and gives meaning to, what is seen as the chaos of human ... existence' (Moye 1990:579).

In addition, the myth is also firmly rooted in the world of the cult (Soggin 1976:47), as a retelling or re-enactment of the myth enables the worshipper to enter into the 'factual reality' (Usher 1981:558) of the primeval event, and enables the truth of that original event to impact on his/her life in the present (Childs 1960:19). However, Rogerson (1974:177) warns against seeing the myth as only linked to the cult.

From this definition it is obvious that there are several myths within the Old Testament (e.g. creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, Babel, as well as distinct mythical elements in several Psalms and in the Major Prophets).

It is also clear that our text (verses 1, 2, and 4) can be classified as 'myth':

- ▶ it is enacted in the dawn of time;

It is important to note that this mythical story is set outside of chronological/historical time and space: the drama plays out in a mythical time when there is no division between heaven and earth, and the actors are free from chronological experience like aging, sickness, and death (Jason 1977:193-194). The significance of this is discussed more fully in chapter 4.

- ▶ it involves God/s as the main character/s; and
- ▶ it is an attempt to explain the origin of certain phenomena, and convey the highest truth that its author was capable of understanding.

While the first point is obvious from the text, the other two points will be discussed later.

4.2. The myth of the בני האלהים and other ancient myths.

While there are many parallels to our story in the myths of other nations of the Ancient Near East, (each in some way hankering back to a mythical time when things were vastly different to today, when 'puny humanity was much bigger, stronger, and therefore more invincible' Gibson 1981:160), our passage cannot be directly linked to other known myths (Petersen 1979:53). However, there are some ancient myths that have a direct bearing on the wider story of Genesis 1-11, and so on our story.

4.2.1. *Epic of Gilgamesh.*

The oldest of these myths is the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (or '*Enuma Elish*'), originating c 2000 BCE.

In this story the hero, Gilgamesh, two-thirds god and one-third human, is a great king. He befriends Enkidu, a subhuman monster sent by the gods to kill him. After several great adventures with Enkidu, Gilgamesh is wooed by the goddess Ishtar, whose favours he declines. Enkidu adds insult to injury by threatening Ishtar with death. For this Enkidu is struck down, and dies. In mourning for his friend, Gilgamesh decides to discover the secret of immortality, and so journeys to the 'far-away place' to see Utnapishtim, who (with his wife) is the only mortal ever to have achieved immortality. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh his story: the gods decided to destroy the earth, and so planned a great flood. However, the god Ea warned Utnapishtim, who built a large ship, and rode out the flood, thus achieving immortality. Utnapishtim promises Gilgamesh just such immortality if the exhausted king can stay awake for six days and seven nights. Gilgamesh dozes off immediately, but is given a second chance, and so collects the 'plant-of-life' from the bottom of the sea. Gilgamesh is afraid to eat of the plant, and so hesitates - during which time a snake eats the whole plant. The Epic ends with Gilgamesh recounting his adventures to his adoring subjects.

It is apparent that while Tablet XI⁶ (flood story and the eating of the 'plant of life') are of great interest for the study of our Flood narrative and the Garden of Eden story in Gen 3, the Epic does not seem to offer much assistance in studying our myth:

- ▶ the destruction of the earth is seen as the whim of the gods, rather than the righteous judgement of a wronged Creator (Fisher 1970:394); and
- ▶ no mention is made of the 'sons of the gods'.

However, Clines (1979:34-36) sees the real value in the Epic of Gilgamesh in the ideal 'model' that it provides for the much-questioned בני האלהים: is Gilgamesh not such a 'son of the gods' - partly human, partly divine, a great ante-diluvian ruler? Thus Clines allies himself with the thesis that the בני האלהים were great kings who used their royal position to acquire wives from the common בנות האדם - their 'sin' was the abuse of divinely-ordained power. This thesis will be taken up in the next chapter.

4.2.2. The *Atrahasis Epic*.

The second of these myths is the Babylonian *Atrahasis Epic*. Originating 'no later than 1700 BC' (Frymer-Kensky 1977:150), this ancient tale tells of how the gods, tiring of doing all the manual labour themselves, create humanity by mixing mud and the blood of a slain god. However, these humans soon multiply, and the gods become wearied by the constant noise (which disturbs godly slumber), and so decide to destroy them. The gods bring plague, followed 1200 years later by a drought, and a famine (also 1200 years later). When this does not succeed, the gods decide to bring a great flood upon all the earth. One of the gods, Enki, has Atrahasis build an ark, and so all of humanity is not destroyed. However, after the flood the gods create an 'abortion demon', as well as an order of women/priestesses who will always be barren. (At this point the text is lost to us).

While it is clear that the Flood Narrative (Gen 6-9) and the *Atrahasis Epic* have a 'common patrimony' (Oden 1981:27), it is equally clear that the Genesis Flood narrative is not reliant on the Mesopotamian one:

- ▶ in *Atrahasis* the humans are created as slaves, in Genesis they are created to have fellowship with YHWH, and to care for the earth on His behalf;
- ▶ the gods in *Atrahasis* decide to destroy the earth because the humans are stupid and noisy, while in the Biblical story it is because of the all-pervasiveness of sin (Jacobsen 1981:529); and

- ▶ the god Enki saves the human race through Atrahasis without the knowledge of the other gods, while YHWH deliberately uses Noah to ensure the continuance of the created order once He has eradicated sin.

While the *Atrahasis Epic* is of particular interest in the study of the Flood as a complete narrative, it bears no resemblance to our four verses of myth. However, there may be a correlation between the '1200' years in *Atrahasis* and the '120 years' in our myth - this is examined in the next chapter.

4.2.3. The *Hesiodic Catalogue*.

The third myth of particular interest to us is the Greek *Hesiodic Catalogue*. In Greek mythology the gods are 'born' from the earth, as is humanity (at the command of Zeus). In some of these myths the first humans are 'giants', Zeus soon replacing them with an inferior race. This happens five times (the so-called 'five races' of humanity, Van Seters 1988:3), each 'race' being smaller and weaker than the next, until the fifth 'race' is humanity as we are today. However, another myth states that Zeus declares that it is wrong of the 'children of the gods' (τέκνα θεῶν) to mate with 'wretched mortals' - from henceforth the demigods will live completely separate from humanity, who will now live in toil and sorrow. To punish the earth Zeus then inflicts the Trojan War on the nation, a war which results in great natural catastrophes and even greater human suffering (Van Seters 1988:6).

Hendel (1987:19) argues that this myth has a parallel in the OT Flood myth, with the Trojan War replacing the Deluge. He notes particularly the fact that the punishment was meted out because the τέκνα θεῶν overstepped their divine boundaries⁷.

While the *Hesiodic Catalogue* does contain several similarities to our myth, and does appear to be paralleled by our myth, this could be simply because of Oden's 'common patrimony'.

However, whether this myth is directly related to ours or not, it does give us a guide in understanding the term בני האלהים, as here the τέκνα θεῶν are obviously to be understood as lesser deities within the divine pantheon.

4.2.4. A common patrimony.

While the three myths outlined above bear many similarities to our Flood myth, due to Oden's 'common patrimony', it is apparent that our myth is not directly reliant on any of them (Scullion 1985:15). However, each of these myths does offer clarity in the understanding and interpretation of our text, and in how our author reworked an ancient myth.

4.3. The development of our text.

I believe that the author of our text took a myth (either in its entirety, or just a segment of a larger whole), and used it for his own purpose within the wider story he was compiling. This original myth was probably a 'good' myth, in which the idea of the Nephilim and giants was seen as a positive development in the history and development of the world. However, our author saw this story in a negative light, and so interpolated verse 3 into the ancient tale, thus transforming its meaning.

It is to the 'meaning' of our story, for both its original hearers/listeners, and us today, that we now turn.

Endnotes to Chapter Two:

1. Rosenberg sees this difficult word as only explicable when seen as a gimatria - 'using the numerical values of the letters to arrive at new and creative understandings of the text' (1993:256). The gimatria value of בשגם is 345, the same as the gimatria for משח - the gimatria reading of this text is then "*My breath of life shall not remain with the man forever; Moses is flesh and his days will be 120 years.*" (Rosenberg 1993:259). Interesting, but unacceptable in the context of the verse.
2. For an excellent summary and critique on the history of Pentateuchal criticism see Deist 1978. Unfortunately it lacks the various arguments offered in the last twenty years, but an adequate discussion of the latest points under debate can be found in Blenkinsopp 1992:1-30.
3. An excellent summary of this theory is in Freedman 1962.

4. These dates from Anderson 1978:603.
5. As I have intimated above, the 'Yahwist' was a school of theologians operating over a 60 to 80 year period (and then again several centuries later). However, for grammatical ease and simplicity I will refer to this group of theologians by the singular masculine pronoun.
6. Some scholars argue that while the Epic is very old, Tablet XI dates to the 7th century BCE (Rapaport 1983:102). However, this would still mean that it predates the Genesis Flood narrative by two centuries.
7. Interestingly, in several later histories it is stated that Greece lost at war because her noblewomen had sex with lower-caste men (Stehle 1989).

CHAPTER THREE

THE MESSAGE OF THE 'SONS OF THE GODS' EPISODE

We expect every verse - or at least every paragraph - of Scripture to have some meaning for us...but when we read just the words that are there, they do not in fact say very much. No doubt their origin can be traced to myths of divine-human sexual encounters and legends about giants in the earth...It is tempting to interpret this as just another piece...where the reason for the difficulty of the language is the impossibility of the subject - the existence of evil in a world created and ruled by a good God. But it seems wise not to build too much theology on a text that is as unclear as this one (Gowan 1988:86).

While our four verses may well present the modern reader with all sorts of problems and questions (as articulated by Gowan), they were considered important enough by the *Yahwist* 'authors' of the Pentateuch to be worked into their great sacred history.

We turn now to examine the importance of this pericope to its authors, and original readers/hearers; before offering an interpretation for our own context as South Africans.

1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE J2 AUTHOR

The Yahwist author used an ancient myth (with a common patrimony to several other myths), 'remythologising' it to speak a message from YHWH into the lives of his readers/listeners.

1.1. An aetiological passage.

We have already noted that the myth, while set in the prehistorical mists of time, is in fact developed to enable the reader to understand better the world in which he/she lives. Childs

(1974:393) states that for a tale to be aetiological it must show 'mythical causality', i.e. the story must fit our earlier description of a myth, and the reader/hearer must be able to differentiate between a cause and an effect (e.g. Cause: God puts a rainbow in the sky; and Effect: we see a rainbow after a rainstorm).

In terms of this definition our story is clearly aetiological.

1.1.1. An explanation for shorter life-spans.

It is obvious that the primary focus of our pericope is the YHWH interpolation:

3. And YHWH said, 'My spirit of life shall not remain forever in the human race, for indeed they are mortal! Their life-span shall be 120 years.'

The reader of the genealogies of Genesis 5 is immediately struck by the extraordinary age reached by the venerated ancestors: Adam living to be 930 years old, with Methuselah reaching a monumental 969 years, while Enoch is taken up to the heavens at a mere 365 years! It is interesting to note that these figures differ in the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Septuagint (Borland 1986:169); but while the age of an individual may differ in each OT witness, the ages reached are still exceedingly great. In the genealogy after the Flood (Gn 11) the ages gradually reduce: from Shem (600) to Peleg (239) to Abram (175). Three generations after Abraham it is noted that Joseph lives to 110 (Gn 50:22). The greatest of all prophets, Moses, lives to the perfect age of 120 years (Dt 34:7). By the time of our author it is generally accepted that the average life-span will be 70 years (or perhaps a few more, e.g. Ps 90:10). While there is much debate as to the 'historical accuracy' of these ages, with some scholars seeing the ages as eschatological calculations (Christensen 1986); the text presents them as actual ages, and it is in this way that they are to be understood by the reader.

It must be added that several scholars, noting that the post-diluvian ancestors still attained ages well in excess of their allotted 120 years, have interpreted this sentence as a warning that YHWH was granting a 120 year respite before sending the Flood as His judgement on sinful humanity (as did Luther and Calvin). This thesis is given added impetus by the 1200 year

respite between plagues in the *Atrahasis Epic*, these scholars citing the Sumerian sexagesimal system as the background to their interpretation (Clines 1979:42). However, this understanding removes the myth from the 'present reality' of J2, and so is unacceptable.

However, Cassuto (1961:258) notes that in the Sumerian sexagesimal system the number 120 represents 'a long, but limited, time'. Thus, for Cassuto, the author is not stating that humanity will only live to be 120 years old, but that its life-span would be limited.

Our pericope answers the question 'Why do we live to be only seventy or eighty years old, when our ancestors lived to be so much older?'

YHWH has restricted our life-span because of our sin at the beginning of time!

The major problem with this aetiological myth is that while it is apparent that YHWH's judgement is pronounced in response to the behaviour of the בני האלהים and the בנות אדם, the judgement is spoken against the innocent parties - the humans (Westermann 1987:44)!

This dilemma is a twentieth century concern - the sixth century BCE mind would not have questioned the right, or righteousness, of YHWH in imposing this sentence upon wayward humanity.

1.1.2. The origin of the *Nephilim* and the 'mighty men of old'.

Most scholars see our myth as providing the aetiological explanation for the existence of the גברים and the נפלים:

4. The Nephilim were in the land in those days, and for some time to come, when the sons of the gods came in to the human daughters, and they bore them children: these were the mighty men of old, the heroes.

Cassuto (1961:299-300) states it clearly:

The reader...might ask: I have now learnt how the human families, the offspring of Adam and Eve by the natural process of procreation, were born

and multiplied and became ramified; but I know that in the past there lived upon earth giants, men of far greater stature and strength than ordinary people, and we have a tradition from our forbears that when they entered the Land they still found there some of the surviving giants. What was their origin, seeing that they did not resemble human beings like ourselves? To this question, which might arise in the reader's mind, the Torah proceeds to give an answer in our paragraph.

However, whilst the majority of scholars equate the נפלים with the גברים (e.g. Cassuto 1961:300; Hendel 1987a:11; Von Rad 1961:111), this is certainly not what the text says: the text implies that the offspring of the divine/human miscegenation were the heroic גברים - and that the birth of these ancient heroes occurred at a time when the נפלים were around before the Flood (they apparently survived the Deluge, hence the parenthetical '*and for some time to come*').

We, therefore, examine the aetiological clause about the גברים, and then look more closely at the נפלים.

1.1.2.1. The origin of the heroic גברים.

Israel, like all ancient peoples, knew legendary stories about great heroes of old. The first of the גברים was Nimrod (Gn 10:8-12 // I Chr 1:10), the founder of Babylon and Assyria (Gn 10:10-12 and Mi 5:6), who was known as a great and powerful hunter (Blenkinsopp 1992:75). While some scholars see Nimrod as a tyrant (Simpson 1952:561), the double reference to YHWH makes it clear that He approved of this mighty hunter's prowess (Fretheim 1994:408). Van Seters (1988:14) sees the double reference to YHWH in these verses as confirming Nimrod's status as more than 'mere mortal'.

Our passage is therefore an aetiological response to the question: 'Where did the גברים like Nimrod come from?'

However, the writer of our pericope makes it clear that the reader is not to hearken back to such גברים, or try to emulate them, for fundamentally they were not of YHWH, but were bastards born in the sinful disobedience of YHWH's orderly universe (Cassuto 1961:300).

1.1.2.2. The origin of the נפלים.

When the Israelite spies were sent out to reconnoitre the Land of Canaan, they returned with frightening news:

'And there we saw the Nephilim (the descendants of 'Anaq come from the Nephilim). And we were in our own sight like grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight too' (Nm 13:33, my translation).

In response to the aetiological question: 'Where did the legendary נפלים come from?', our paragraph offers a simple answer: 'No one knows, but they were alive even before the Flood.'

According to Deuteronomy 2:11 the *'Anaqim* were not the only נפלים living in Canaan, for the *Rephaim* were also encountered by the invading Israelites (Dt 2:11). However, the *Rephaim* were defeated, with only their king, Og, surviving (Dt 3:1-11). The *'Anaqim* and *Rephaim* were defeated by Moses (Jos 12:4-6 // Jos 13:11-12), Joshua (Jos 11:21), and Caleb (Jos 15:14, Jdg 1:20). Eventually there were no נפלים left in Canaan, although they still existed in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Jos 11:22). Israel did battle against these נפלים under David (2 Sm 21:18-22 // 1 Chr 20:4-8); in fact, Goliath of Gath (1 Sm 17) was probably one of these legendary giants.

But what is the purpose of these giants in the Biblical story? We have seen that the noun comes from the verb נפל 'to fall' (BDB 658). Jeremiah warns the false prophets and priests that they will *'fall among the fallen'* ('fallen' = *nophelim*. Jr 6:15), while Ezekiel refers to heathen warriors who have died as the נפלים (Ezk 32:27).

The function of the Nephilim-Rephaim-Anaqim, the giant demi-gods - half god, half human - is constant in all these traditions. They exist in order to be wiped out: by the Flood, by Moses, by David and others. The function of the Nephilim in Israelite tradition is to die (Hendel 1987a:11).

The existence of the נפלים after the Flood does raise one further question: ‘How did these strange beings survive the great Flood?’

While the Bible is silent in this matter, Jewish tradition has offered two answers:

- ▶ In one ancient tradition (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 23) it is told that Og, king of Bashan, rode out the Flood perched on the roof of the ark (Goldstein 1987:45); and
- ▶ In the third-century BCE *Pseudo-Eupolemus* it is stated that Noah and his sons (and their wives) were all giants, as were his descendants (who built the Tower of Babel), and, ultimately, so was Abraham (Reeves 1993:112)!

While this theory is not attested to in any other known work, it is strongly refuted in both the *Genesis Apocryphon* (found at Qumran - *IQapGn* 2:1-7 and 2:14-18) and in the Pseudepigraphal *I Enoch* (106:18 and 107:2). To be refuted so strongly by the authors of these two works this theory must have been fairly prevalent during the third century BCE (Reeves 1993:110-111).

While we have no satisfactory answers as to the origin, nature, or purpose of the נפלים, our author related them closely to the גברים:

If the ancient reader wanted to know what these warriors [i.e. גברים] were like, the Nephilim would be a good analogy (Fretheim 1994:383).

1.1.3. A third suggestion - the origin of death.

Schwarzbaum has argued that this episode is used by the author to explain the origin of death, seeing death as ‘just the best solution to the overpopulation problem’ (Schwarzbaum 1957:72). Comparing this myth with ‘explanation of death’ myths in other cultures (from ancient times to the Middle Ages) he suggests that the author obviously thought that YHWH had created humanity immortal, and in this passage offered an explanation as to why our days are numbered, and we die.

I must admit to finding his thesis difficult to entertain:

- ▶ the אדם has already been pronounced mortal

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food

*until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;
for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gn 3:19);*

While several scholars have noted that mythic time is not chronological (e.g. Jason 1977:205), J2 has placed the various myths that make up his Primeval History so as to be read chronologically. While the ancient myths with which our myth shares its common patrimony may have been about cosmic population-control at some stage in its development, in the mind and scheme of our *Yahwist* redactor it is certainly not.

- ▶ In addition, I find it difficult to agree with Schwarzbaum that the mythological reason for death being introduced is to control overpopulation - in the sixth century BCE?! It is, however, interesting to note that Kilmer (1972:173) cites the problem of overpopulation as being the reason for the Flood in the Atrahasis Epic; and
- ▶ The covenant-blessing granted to Noah immediately after the flood includes the command to *‘be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’* (Gn 9:1). In the light of this passage Frymer-Kensky (1977:150) states ‘the flood story is emphatically not about overpopulation’.

1.1.4. Not (just) aetiological.

We have seen above that our paragraph is clearly aetiological, although several scholars question this: Von Rad (1961:112) questions whether the ‘demythologization’ of the *Yahwist* (discussed below) has not destroyed any aetiological concern expressed by the original myth, while Van Gemeren (1981:345) goes so far as to state ‘any aetiological purpose of the story is only a twentieth-century guess’. However, I believe that such scholars are limiting the power of this ancient myth by ‘demythologizing’ from it its original aetiological concern - the myth was, and in its present context is, concerned with the origins of our shortened life-span, the heroes of old, and the legendary giants of antiquity.

Van Dyk (1990) argues that so-called ‘aetiological elements’ which are not central to the ‘plot’ of the narrative are, in fact, ‘rhetorical’; i.e. they are included in the story to interest the listener, and enhance the credibility of the story. For example, the inclusion of the aetiological tale of the rainbow in the Noah story: the listener is more interested in the story because of the familiarity of the rainbow, and because the rainbow is obviously true so is the rest of the story!

Six 'conditions' are outlined by Van Dyk; if a so-called aetiological element within a narrative falls within most, or all, of these conditions, it is probably included as a rhetorical device rather than an aetiological explanation:

- ▶ if the element is used to affirm and entertain the listener;
- ▶ if the element falls outside the plot;
- ▶ if the narrative contains important cultural symbols (i.e. 'a stereotyped belief within that community' Van Dyk 1990:25);
- ▶ if more than one aetiological element is found within a single story;
- ▶ if the phenomena 'explained' in the story are in a remote (but specific) place (or time); and
- ▶ if the aetiological element can be excluded without damaging the plot of the story (Van Dyk 1990:26-27).

If we consider the plot of our story to be

- ~ introduction: in the distant mists of time,
- ~ complication: angels overstepped their divine boundaries, and
- ~ conclusion: YHWH instituted a limited life-span for humanity as punishment;

then these 'conditions' would apply to our story as follows:

- ▶ the נפלים and the גברים affirm and entertain the listener, as they are an integral part of his/her tradition and belief system;
- ▶ these two elements are not central to the plot;
- ▶ the story is based on the vital cultural symbol of 'obedience to the ordinances of YHWH';
- ▶ the story contains more than one aetiological element;
- ▶ the נפלים and גברים are certainly remote from the listener, although unquestionably attested to in tradition; and
- ▶ the verse about the נפלים and the גברים can be excluded without affecting the plot.

Van Dyk's thesis therefore suggests that our story is not aetiological at all, but that the 'origin elements' were included to 'seduce' the listener into believing the narrative and its symbol (1990:29)!

While I find this thesis interesting, I am not sure it is fully convincing, in that the aetiological elements are not included as 'the response to a question of a child concerning a prominent

attribute or social custom' (Van Dyk 1990:19): the aetiological elements are an integral part of the function of the myth as the author seeks to make sense of a changing world (discussed in the previous chapter), and their inclusion is a result of the 'growth and transmission of folklore and oral traditions' (Rogerson 1974:175).

They [i.e. the aetiological elements] are the stock and trade of the learned historian (Van Seters 1986:54).

However, if we agree with Van Dyk's thesis it does not change the significance of our passage in the J2 narrative, as the aetiological elements are not the only, or the primary, concern of our verses within the great *Yahwist* history (Otzen 1980:51).

1.2. The function of our episode in the sacred history of the *Yahwist*.

The book of Genesis does not present the reader with historical narrative, at least in any modern sense. Its primary concerns are theological and kerygmatic. Those responsible for the material as we now have it (and no doubt at other stages in its transmission) were persons of faith concerned to speak or reflect on a word of God to other persons of faith. The voice of a living community of faith resounds through these texts. Rooted in history in this way, Genesis is not socially or historically disinterested; it was written - at each stage of transmission - with the problems and possibilities of a particular audience in view (Fretheim 1994:326-327).

We have already noted that the *Yahwist* J2 compiled his history at a time when Israel was undergoing massive religious, political, and social crisis during the Exile. Wondering whether YHWH had any power in this foreign land, he sought to make sense of her history, her identity, and her covenant-relationship with God. It was to provide a 'God-answer' to this crisis that the royal theologian reworked the ancient traditions:

He was reflecting upon the nature of things, not as objects of curiosity or scientific interest, but as incidents in the encounter of man's soul with God (Richardson 1953:18).

1.2.1. The purpose of the *Yahwist* (J2) redactor.

While the *Yahwist* theologians had always had absolute faith in their God, they had always seen him as *their* God (the Canaanites belonged to Ba'al, the Egyptians to Osiris, and Israel to YHWH). In Exile, as they wrestled with the question as to whether-or-not YHWH could still guide them whilst in captivity, these theologians had begun to understand that YHWH was not just Israel's God, but *the* God - the God Who had created *all* of the world, and Who was working out His covenantal-love (רַחֲמֵי) in *all* the world. They now perceived YHWH as the Giver of all life (Brueggemann 1982:73).

J2 therefore added the Primeval History, to stress that YHWH was the only God, and to show history as a move from the harmony of His creation to disharmony and violence (to be examined further in the next paragraph) - and to show that YHWH is recreating His world (despite the violence and disharmony) through the 'ups' and 'downs' of human history (Moye 1990:588). This history is in the hands of His chosen People, personified in their anointed representatives - Noah, Abraham, Jacob/Israel, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Judges, Saul, and David.

1.2.2. The problem - sin.

For our *Yahwist* redactor the whole of history (and not just that part of life relating directly to the cultus) is the outworking of the battle being waged between YHWH and the forces of evil. However, evil is not just a matter of human behaviour (that can be addressed through better education and job-creation), but is intrinsic in the wider world (Richardson 1953:94-95), which seems to exist in a state of 'universal violence' (Forrest 1994:7). Thus the Primeval Cycle in Genesis is characterized by a series of mythical transgressions of boundaries that result in a range of divine responses (Hendel 1987a:13):

- ▶ Adam and Eve disobey their Creator because they want to '*be like God, knowing good and evil*' (Gn 3:4) - as punishment they are pronounced mortal, and barred from the Garden; but God graciously clothes them by killing His own creation;
- ▶ Cain kills Abel, taking life that YHWH has bestowed - and is sentenced to wandering the earth for all of his days; but YHWH places an identifying mark on him, that he will not be hounded and killed by others; and

- ▶ The angels of YHWH transgress the boundary created between the heavenlies and her celestial inhabitants and the earth and her mortal children ¹ - YHWH pronounces a limited life-span; but does not destroy all of His creation.

However, this spreading of sin, from the first earth-couple, to community-life, to the heavenly realms, cannot be left to spread any further:

The stain of evil, so pervasive in the earth, is now being transmitted into the entire cosmos. What began as the eating of fruit has evolved into a nearly universal disaster. God must act to stop this disaster (Williams 1991:51).

So YHWH sends the Flood. However, while the Deluge is widespread in world religions (including most African traditions, Taylor 1997), it is important to note how J2 changes the myth: while all other religions/traditions see the Flood as punishment for sin (or, as in the case of the *Atrahasis Epic*, noise), for J2 the Flood is the means of YHWH getting rid of a world 'thoroughly polluted' (Frymer-Kensky 1977:152). While YHWH initially responded in much the same way as the deities in the other myths (Gn 6:5-7), He changed His devastating plan because of the righteousness of Noah. J2 therefore transforms our myth from an ancient aetiological tale into a means of introducing Noah - the righteous one, the vehicle of YHWH's salvation (Forrest 1994:14-15).

1.2.3. The solution - live the *Tôrah*.

We have seen that for J2 YHWH created the cosmos in a 'state of righteousness' (Miller 1987:68-69), and that this state was steadily corrupted by the spread of evil throughout the cosmos. Therefore, for J2, the purpose of all history is YHWH restoring the $\square\text{ל}\psi$ to His creation - and He is doing this recreation through His righteous people (like Noah).

Therefore, for our *Yahwist* theologian, the only answer to this all-encompassing chaos is to live the *Tôrah* - correct worship is not sufficient, neither is just keeping oneself pure from this evil chaos: what YHWH requires to recreate His world is *Tôrah*-obedience (Forrest 1994). Our myth therefore 'stabilizes and orders, or regenerates and gives meaning to, what is seen as the chaos of human, or secular and profane, existence' (Moye 1990:578-579).

1.3. A warning to readers of the *Tôrah*.

However, J2, always the practical theologian, did not just rework the sacred history of his forbearers in order to answer deep theological questioning, but to offer guidance and warnings to his readers/hearers.

1.3.1. The 'sin' of the בני האלהים.

Petersen (1979:54-56) has identified our pericope as a 'myth of organization', in which the position of God versus humanity is stressed (1979:59). We have already noted that for the *Yahwist* J2, YHWH has created the world a complex place, and has set limits for both celestials and earthlings. Therefore, in our myth, the trespass against which God intervenes is the 'transgression of limits' (Westermann 1987:43).

It is interesting to note that the sin in the *Atrahasis Epic* was also rebellion, 'and the source of this rebellion is the human tendency to over-reach its limits and to encroach upon divine territory' (Oden 1981a:208).

1.3.2. The transformation of a myth.

However, while the 'original myth' no doubt referred to the sinful rebellion of minor deities, Israel's monotheism did not allow for a pantheon, and so J2 reduced the בני האלהים to בני האלהים. Handy (1990:19) notes a four-tiered structure in the pantheon of Ugarit:

Highest authority	the 'senior god', who governs the universe
Major gods	assist the Highest Authority, each ruling over a particular area of life
Craft gods	responsible for creating the things (of beauty and destruction) needed by the Major gods
Messenger deities	blindly obey the orders of the three 'higher' gods

The original myth probably involved the Major gods, as they are able to make decisions (at times even going directly against the Highest authority). The early interpreters (*I Enoch*, *Jubilees*, etc) interpreted the בני האלהים as Craft gods (who taught the בני האדם

weaponry, the use of cosmetics, and magic) - but J2 had in fact turned them into the messenger deities, i.e. the lowest form of angels (Cassuto 1961:300). In doing so the passage is 'elevated' to mainstream monotheistic theology.

1.3.3. A warning to the nobility.

Through the early Primeval History J2 has made it clear that all of the created order (natural, human, and cosmic) is subject to limitations placed by YHWH (Marrs 1980:220). In this myth he warns against the 'confusion of boundaries' (Rogerson 1991:69).

Our author therefore intends this myth to serve as a warning against those whose social or political position elevates them above the rest of the populace (i.e. those who consider themselves, or who were considered by others, to be בני האלהים): do not overstep the boundaries set for you (and your position) by YHWH! While this story serves as a warning against an 'uncontrollable monarch' (Walton 1986:204), it speaks its stern message to all who hold positions of higher authority.

1.3.4. Another possibility - a warning against the worship of Asherah.

My friend and colleague, the Reverend Des Bussey, has suggested a possible second warning contained in these four verses: the prophets of Israel were continually calling the People of YHWH back from the chains of apostasy, predominantly from turning to *Ba'al* and his consort *Asherah*. Many of the exiles would have been faced with the temptations of apostasy for the first time when they were integrated into the political apparatus of Babylonia. In addition, the fertility-rites enjoined by many of the Babylonian gods must have seemed very attractive to those used to austere YHWH-worship.

Could these verses be a subtle warning against wayward YHWH-worshippers turning to the worship of these foreign gods, and resorting to sexual 'fertility rites' with the priestesses of *Asherah/Ishtar*?

'You who are the בני האדם must not have sex with the בנות האלהים - look what happened last time these boundaries were crossed!'

An interesting suggestion, and quite possible.

1.4. A possible warning to those placing their trust in a 'Davidic' saviour.

Wifall (1975) argues that the Yahwist made use of the Sumerian *Atrahasis Epic* and the Egyptian understanding of divine kingship to 'modify' an ancient myth, in order that this myth may speak a word of rebuke and judgement on the great Israelite king, David. In the Egyptian understanding of royalty, the king was a 'son of the gods'. Therefore, David was the בן האלהים who saw that Bathsheba (the בת האדם) was sexually attractive, and so took her as his wife (2 Sm 11:1-5). The bastard born of this illegitimate union (נפל = 'untimely birth, abortion', BDB 658), Solomon, took his place among the גברים, and received wishes at his coronation that his name would be more famous than that of his predecessors (1 Ki 1:47) (Wifall 1975:295).

I think Wifall has a very real point, although he does not take it far enough: while our paragraph certainly fits the story of David and Bathsheba, it was included into the sacred history four centuries after the great Israelite ruler. However, starting just before the Exile (e.g. Is 11), and gaining impetus during the Exile, various prophets had begun to prophesy the raising up of a 'second-David' (e.g. Zch 9:9-17); one who would be as mighty (if not even mightier) than his illustrious predecessor; and who would not only make *his* name great, but would make the name of *the whole nation* famous once again!

The faithful J2 holds no faith in any human agent, but in YHWH alone. He therefore offers our myth as a warning to those who are placing their faith in a 'second-David' - 'Do not place your trust and hope in one who calls himself a בן האלהים, but through abusing his position and power will lead you into the state of the נפלים - rather trust in the One Who is האלהים, and seek to live His *Tôrah!*'

1.5. Conclusion - a word of grace.

Our Yahwist author offers one more 'message' through this mythological tale: in the other myths related to ours the gods decide to destroy all the humans for the sin committed (by them

or the lesser-deities), and humanity is only spared through the deviousness of a lesser-god - but in our paragraph the idea of destroying the בנות הַאֱלֹהִים does not enter YHWH's mind. The One who our author has shown to be the Giver of all life assures all, even sinners, of a reasonable life-span (Brueggemann 1982:72).

YHWH will never renege on His covenant-love.

2. INTERPRETING OUR PASSAGE FOR THE 'SONS OF GOD' IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

This kind of literature was told not just to recall the past but to help one understand one's own encounter with the same realities....[This story] contains a meeting between humans and God, and it becomes revelation for us when the story enables us also to encounter that same God (Gowan 1988:8-9).

In our dissertation thus far we have examined the various interpretations offered for our text, offered a readable translation, examined its origins and genre, and noted its various purposes when used by the *Yahwist* theologians (J2) in the fifth century BCE. In doing so we have regarded the text of Scripture as the object to be studied by us (the subject). However, this is not the purpose of the text in its canonical form:

The main question is no longer 'How did this text emerge and develop?' but 'What is the message of the text in its final form?' (Rendtorff 1998:44).

We therefore 'consciously stand back' (Wink 1973:25) from the text, and acknowledge ourselves as the object, to be addressed by the text (now the subject); in order that He Who is the Subject of all may address us through His holy Word.

But how can a centuries-old myth, of vague origin, speak into our rational scientific-world at the end of the 20th century? I believe that it can speak into our world exactly *because* it is a centuries-old myth: 'I regard myth as the indispensable matrix of faith' (Manley 1994:30).

So what does this obscure, centuries old, text say into my life as a South African Christian at the close of the 20th century?

2.1. A word into our history.

While the Yahwist author/s and redactors were writing to convey a God-message to their readers/hearers, I believe that same *Yahwist* message is as relevant to all South Africans today:

This kind of literature was told not just to recall the past but to help one understand one's own encounter with the same realities. [This story] could function as self-affirmation in many different times and places' (Gowan 1988:8).

Dare we, as South Africans living at the end of the twentieth century, hear the message of the Yahwist theologians again?

YHWH is at work in all of history (both the 'good' and the 'bad'), restoring His sin-wrecked world to harmony and wholeness (י e םלש).

Von Rad summarises the great J-history as 'a history with God' (1961:32) - the great sacred history of the *Yahwist* theologians challenges all South Africans to come to the realization that the history of the beloved country is, indeed, a 'history with God'. This will free us to be active participators, with Him, in that history.

2.2. A warning into our present.

As the great *Yahwist* history speaks into our South African context today, so do our four mythical verses.

2.2.1. Live the God-life.

It has become apparent that the overstepping of boundaries by the בני האלהים was caused by their lust. Because of their lusting after that which was not conferred on them by YHWH,

their lives (and those of the women for whom they lusted) were greatly reduced. This is exactly what happens in our lives today:

A rebellious and unnatural act of rebellion against the Most High has pernicious and grotesque results (Hanson 1977:199)².

Therefore it is imperative for every South African to hear the clarion-call of the Yahwist: live the God-life each day. And we can commit ourselves to this noble and sacred challenge, knowing that He who is the God of grace remains true to His covenant, even when we fall.

2.2.2. Do not abuse power granted by God.

In the same way, the warning spoken by the ancient theologians is as relevant today as it was when first written. Contrary to the popular song, God is not 'watching us from a distance', He is deeply involved in the evolution of His creation from chaos to לש , and sees all that happens (Briscoe 1987:87). In fact, our sin causes God pain (Briscoe 1987:88), and always results in consequences - Paul reminds us that as we sow we shall reap (2 Cor 9:6).

This message is particularly pertinent for those who have been appointed to lead us (whether on a national, provincial, or local level) as we live out our 'God-history'. By overstepping their ordained boundaries they will reduce the life and לש of all our people, and will reduce their own lives too - any attempt by humanity to become more than we are results in us becoming less (Eslinger 1979:72).

2.3. The בני האלהים and the Son of God.

We have noted that the *Yahwist* J2 calls us to live the 'God-life' in our twentieth century world. But what is this 'God-life'? How is it experienced? What is the result of such a life? To avoid the sin and fall experienced by the בני האלהים we need to keep focussed on the Son of God, through Whom we too become sons and daughters of God.

Paul encapsulates the nature, attitude, and victory of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11. Certain scholars acknowledge that while Paul is quoting a well-known hymn in these verses, his thoughts could be based on an 'angelic-rebellion myth' (Scott 1955:48-49) - that contained in our pericope, and the various references to it in later books (e.g. *1 En, Jub*, etc, Sanders 1969).

If this passage is read in parallel with our 'angelic-rebellion myth' we see that the Son of God celebrated in these verses is exactly the opposite of the בני האלהים:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus³:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made Himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

As the Son of God Jesus did not consider Himself a גבר or a hero.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled Himself

and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!

Rather than using His powers to rebel against the ordinances of God,

He was completely obedient to the Father.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place

This obedience resulted, not in 'fallenness', but in resurrection and exaltation.

and gave Him the name that is above every name,

Jesus is not simply a איש השם for a while, but is given a 'name' that is above all - for it is bestowed by Him Who is above all.

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

Through obedient and sacrificial love He has received His bride, and not taken her - therefore all can become children of God through Him.

to the glory of God the Father.

While the disobedience of the בני האלהים brought about divine pain and retribution, this graceful obedience brings only glory and praise to YHWH God (Wifall 1975:300-301).

It is my daily prayer that all who consider themselves sons and daughters of God in South Africa today will hear the declaration, warning, and hope proclaimed by the ancient *Yahwist* theologians, and seek to live the God-life daily, aware that we are all active participants in this 'celestial drama' (Scott 1955:51) we call 'life'.

Endnotes to Chapter Three:

1. Greig (1987) suggests that the story was included by J as an attempt to 'correct' the impression created by Gen 3 that women were to blame for sin: here the women are innocent, while the 'righteous men' commit the sin. While his argument is sound, I do not see an ancient writer articulating this view this clearly.
2. I am indebted to my friend and colleague, the Reverend Peter Crundwell, for articulating this argument so clearly.
3. This quotation from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984.

CHAPTER FOUR

REMYTHOLOGIZING THE OLD TESTAMENT

The fact is that the details of the story lend themselves to diverse interpretations. But *because* myths (like dreams) are told in concrete detail they restrain us from abstract thinking. We are urged to stay within the multidimensional scenario of life. And so, whereas myth may well be set in an other-worldly *illud tempus*, its thrust is towards the immediate; it rubs our noses in the many textured multiformity of *now*, there to find meaning, an autonomous, a-temporal continuity that we may own as 'truth' (Manley 1994:30).

1. DEMYTHOLOGIZING OUR TEXT.

In this dissertation I have argued that the mythical passage in Genesis 6:1-4 can best be understood when interpreted as a myth, following the historical-critical method of exegesis:

- ▶ ascertaining an 'accurate' text from which to work. This involves deciding on the limits of the passage to be studied, deciding on which textual tradition to focus on, and ascertaining as accurate a text as possible within that tradition;
- ▶ setting the text within its context. This means identifying the author/s of the passage, and setting him/her/them within the original context;
- ▶ clarifying the redaction process which the text underwent (if any);
- ▶ identifying the genre;
- ▶ allowing the text to speak its original message; and
- ▶ enabling the text to address this message into our context today.

This method sets the text free to speak into my scientific world - in fact, its genre frees it from the necessity to agree with the scientific world-view held by me, and allows it to speak its timeless message into my life afresh:

- ▶ the fact that the story takes place in mythical time frees it from being restricted to a particular historical time, and so frees it to speak its message into each new context, even one at the end of the twentieth century;
- ▶ the action occurring in mythical space also sets it free from any limitations as to when and where it can be interpreted, whether that be in a technologically-advanced society, or an illiterate rural community; and
- ▶ the story involving mythical figures allows it to speak into the life of every person, and not just those whose lives mirror that of the 'heroes' (or antiheroes) of the story.

In interpreting a text such as ours in this way we are, in fact, 'demythologizing' it, as we allow the ancient mythical tale to speak its message loudly and clearly into our context today.

2. REMYTHOLOGIZING OUR TEXT.

However, by reinterpreting it in language, symbols, and world-view that is twentieth century South African, I have, in a manner of speaking, remythologized our text (Russel 1993:359).

We have already noted that mythology was/is but one world-view in which people have attempted to understand the world in/on which we live, and bring order to the chaos we call 'life. This is exactly what my scientific world-view does for me! Therefore, to glean an understanding from the ancient myth, but phrase it in my language and thoughts, is to remythologize the passage in a form that is culturally-acceptable to me.

I must, therefore, avoid the notion that I have discovered the 'ultimate truth' contained in this myth, and that all other exegetes must agree with my erudite gleanings. By demythologizing our text I have remythologized it in the world-view and thought-patterns which I own as mine.

An exegete with another world-view may (and, perhaps, should) arrive at a different, but no less relevant, understanding.

3. CONCLUSION: REMYTHOLOGIZING THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The task of every exegete, therefore, is to 'demythologize' the sacred texts we call the 'Old Testament', and to 'remythologize' them in the language, symbols, and thought-forms of his/her own context. In so doing we allow the ancient texts to speak their language afresh into our context. We also prepare the text/s for the demythologization/remythologization by exegetes who come after us.

In the case of the mythical pericope in Genesis 6:1-4, the only way to demythologize and remythologize it is to treat it as a myth, for 'if mythology is the language of antiquity, it is also the language of modernity' (Russel 1993:356).

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