The Mystery of the Marriages between the 'Sons of God' and the 'Daughters of Men'. An Analysis of Genesis 6:1–4.

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Summary

This paper is an attempt to a short survey of the early Jewish interpretations of Gen 6:1–4, found in the Pseudepigrapha and the targums. As a comparison, I briefly discuss how the text is understood in a sample of modern scholarly commentaries. The method of the study is to try to find answers to exegetical problems in the pericope.

Of importance to the understanding of the whole pericope is the interpretation of the mysterious identity of 'sons of God' in Gen 6:2 and 4. It has been showed that there are mainly two answers to the question of their identity: The 'sons of God' are depicted either as angels, (e.g., *1 Enoch*, von Rad) or as human men from noble families.

In common to the first model of interpretation is that the angel-human intermarriages are seen as something wicked and unnatural, and thus a main reason for the deluge. The unions are not looked upon in neutral terms, a possible interpretation when reading the biblical text.

I presume that the main underlying reason for this interpretation in both kinds of material is that the term in other texts of the Bible also denotes angels (e.g., Job 38:7, Ps 29:1, etc.).

The targums attest to the second main understanding of the identity of the 'sons of God', i.e., they were mere humans of well-to-be families, leaders of the people. Most probably, this interpretation is to be seen as a reaction to the 'scandal of the angel-explanation', in addition to a general Rabbinic polemic against a too exuberant angelology after the fall of the Second Temple. The Rabbis could not accept the idea that angels, i.e., spiritual, heavenly beings, would be able to sexually intermingle with human women.

A problem related to the mystery of the 'sons of God' is how to identify the נפלים and the גבורים in Gen 6:4. As shown, the most common answer is that both terms signify the same creatures, i.e., the children born in the

mixed marriages. These children are in turn called giants, either in the real sense of the word as mythical beings, or as famous human men of extraordinary strength and stature. Naturally, the definition of the נפלים and the גבורים depends on who the fathers are claimed to be.

In targum *Ps-Jon.*, there is a slightly different interpretation; the נפלים refer to the two fallen angels Shamhazai and Azaz'el, two mayor characters in the legends surrounding the pericope that we recognize from *1 Enoch* 6–11. This targum displays a mixture of traditions, the reference to the fallen angels is most probably a remnant of the older interpretation of the text, which was later suppressed in Rabbinic Judaism, cf., the rendering 'sons of the great ones' in *Ps.-Jon* Gen 6:2.

Another line of interpretation is to be found *1 Enoch* 15–16 where the 'sons of God', i.e., the fallen angels, are the alleged fathers of the demons.

It is not possible to mention all of the various translations of the Hebrew verb ידון. The most common renderings are 'judge' or 'abide/remain'. In for example, the targums *Neof.* and *Ps.-Jon.* we find the first mentioned translation, and the interpretation of verse 3 is that God never again will judge future generations in the same way as the generation of the flood, a generation which is considered as evil. Thus, from the context, it seems clear that the marriages mentioned in verse 2 are not approved by God, and this applies also to *Onq.*

There are two main models regarding the interpretation of the 120 years in Gen 6:3. One is that God is diminishing the life-span of humankind to 120 years. His Spirit, the life-force, is not to abide in humans forever. The other model is that the 120 years refer to a period of grace prior to the deluge. The deluge is connected to the narrative in our pericope in all of the examined Jewish sources.

The answer to the question of the main theological message of Gen 6:1–4 depends above all on how the 'sons of God' are identified. In the interpretations where they are denoted as angels, their intermingling with human women is described as a sin of cosmic dimensions; the whole natural order became disturbed and corrupted. The fallen angels and their hybrid offspring are connected to the entering of evil into the world, an interpretation found in, for example, *1 Enoch*.

If we chose the identification of the 'sons of God' and their children as immoral men, but nevertheless mere humans, we receive another answer to the question of the text's main message. In the Jewish interpretations of this model, the marriages in Gen 6:1–4 are seen as one example of the sins of the flood–generation, but without cosmic dimensions. However, the wickedness of Noah's generation is still perceived as the reason for the deluge.