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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Preface

The cryptic passage in Gen 6:1–4 concerning the matrimonial unions of the 'sons of God' with the 'daughters of men' has always fascinated me. Each time I have read the text it has puzzled me, and this is the reason for the choice of this pericope as the focus of my paper. I wish to explore the meaning of this enigmatic text.[1] The aim of the present study is to investigate how the pericope is understood and interpreted, mainly in early Jewish exegesis. This paper is of course not a complete examination of all the materials and interpretations related to the pericope. From considerations of space, I have refrained from discussing the Apocrypha, the Qumran Documents, Philo's and Josephus' writings and the early Rabbinic Midrashim (e.g., *Genesis Rabbah*). However, this material will be included in my planned article on this topic.

In my paper, I have chosen to concentrate on the Pseudepigrapha[2] and the targums.[3] As a background, I will also briefly discuss how the text is interpreted in a sample of modern scholarly commentaries. My paper is mainly focused on the theological message of Gen 6:1–4. Thus, text critical questions, source-criticism, etc., are not the primary focus in this paper.

A common way of interpreting the Bible in Jewish exegesis is to put questions to the texts, and this is the method applied in the present study.

[1] Besides the myths based on this text and the vast material dedicated to these four ambiguous verses in Genesis 6 throughout the history of biblical interpretation, it may be added that the mystery of this narrative and the legends surrounding it has recently inspired a new thriller entitled *Angelology* written by Danielle Trussoni, 2010.

[2] The expansion in *Jubilees* on the Genesis text is very similar to the one found in *1 Enoch*, because of this fact, and the general acknowledgement of the priority of the Enoch version, I do not here discuss *Jubilees* in detail.

[3] The interpretation of the text in *Genesis Rabbah* is very similar to that of the targums, targum *Onqelos* in particular.

During my work with the passage, I have discovered many exegetical problems; the main issues are listed below. I am looking forward to discuss those problems and the various proposed solutions presented in my paper during my session.

One of the most obvious mysteries in the text is the identity of the 'sons of God' in vv. 2 and 4. Important to note is the fact that they are called the sons of אלהים and not יהוה. On the other hand, in verse 3 it is stated that "The Lord/יהוה said ..." This verse contains some philological problems: What is the meaning of the Hebrew verb ידון and the term בשגם? Also, it is not quite clear how to interpret the significance of the 120 years in this verse, and how are we to understand the reference to "רוחי/my (God's) Spirit"?

The peculiar Hebrew verb ידון in verse 3 is difficult to translate and is a *hapax legomenon*, there is a variety of suggestions. The oldest variant, attested in the Septuagint and the Vulgate is the translation 'to abide/remain', and this is also the rendering chosen in the New Revised Standard Version. Another suggested interpretation of the possible root, דון is the meaning 'to be mighty, rule'. Other suggestions are that the word is a derivation from דין 'to judge/contend with'. The New King James Version and the New International Version have chosen the translations 'strive' and 'contend' respectively.

A key-problem is how to identify the נפלים and the גבורים in verse 4, a problem related to the question of the identity of the 'sons of God' (vv. 2 and 4). Does the designation נפלים signify the same beings as the גבורים, or does the first mentioned term refer to the 'sons of God'?

A more general question is how the pericope relates to its textual context; is there any connection to the deluge or to previous events in the Bible? What is the main message of Gen 6:1–4?

After the investigation of the divergent kinds of material, I have in my paper tried to make a comparison between the various interpretations. Thus, the second focal point I would like to discuss is which main models of interpretation we can find in the material.

I look forward to meet you all at the conference,

Yours sincerely,

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