

## WHO 'FELL DOWN' TO OUR EARTH?

|| A Different light on Genesis 6:1-4

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## Introduction

Recent articles dealing with the issue of "The sons of God<sup>1</sup> - BNEI-HaELOHIM" present a variety of opinions on this complicated mini-narrative in Genesis. In regard to content, interpretations seem to succumb to, or be influenced by, commentators' perceptions of the first eleven chapters as one unit and what is regarded as their main theme. Thus, if 'crime and punishment' is the gospel, then the "BNEI-HaELOHIM" event is but another narrative on the venue of morality or rather lack of it - as a prelude to, and justification for, the flood. The contradicting perception suggests the story to be, among other things, a *comment on immortality* rather than on *morality*. In regard to the fundamental question "who are the sons of God?", opinions vacillate between mere humans and members of God's *entourage*. Purely monotheistic perceptions support the former (Bereshit Raba: 26,8; St. Augustin, Rashi; Ibn Ezra<sup>2</sup>), either as rulers or as the contradicting dynasties of Seth vs. Cain. Later interpretations, leaning on the later books of Job, Psalms and Enoch, support the concept of members of God's entourage (Cassuto, Westermann<sup>3</sup>). This perception, tacitly, regards the episode as representing a mythological universe where "once upon a time" divine male beings had intercourse with female human beings, and Biblical research points to the influence of, or reduction from, other mythologies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Titles in Italics in the following notes indicate publications in Hebrew.

A Concise but comprehensive summary of mainly German bibliography up to 1999 may be found in M.& R. Zimmermann, ">Heilige Hochzeit< der Gottersöhne und Menschentöchter?", ZAW (cxi,3,1999,327-352) 327-8. Also consulted: the special issue for the subject - JSOT, xiii, July 1979 - which includes the articles by: D.J.Clines, "The Significance of the Sons of God Episode (Gen 6:1-4) in the Context of Primeval History" (33-46), D.L.Petersen, "Genesis 6:1-4, Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos"(47-64), L.Eslinger, "A contextual Identification of the Bnei Ha'Elohim and Benot ha'Adam in Genesis 6:1-4" (65-73). Recent pub.: F.Bruckelman, "The Story of the Sons of God Who Took the Daughters of Humans as Wives", Voices from Amsterdam, (Atlanta, 1994, 83-94); M.Vervenne, "All They Need Is Love: Once More Genesis 6:1-4", in G.Harvey & W.G.E.Watson, (ed.), Words Remembered, Texts Remembered: Essays in Honor of J.F.A.Sawyer (Sheffield 1995), 19-40; J.A.Soggin, "Heroes and Nephilim: Remarks on Genesis 6:1-4", in M.V.Fox & all, Texts, Temples and Traditions (Winona Lake, 1996), 135-136; Ilan Kofman, "The Sons of God Affair and Bible's attitude to Myths", Kinusim, A, 1998, 15-22. More - in the following notes.

<sup>2</sup> Basically, traditional Jewish interpretations, early Christian and philosophical notions since the second century. See: P.S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6", JSS, xxiii (1972) 60-71; A.Van der Kooij, "Peshita Genesis 6: 'Sons of God' - Angels or Judges?" INSL, xxiii (1997), 43-51.

<sup>3</sup> U.Cassuto, The Book of Genesis (A commentary on...), I (Jerusalem,1978), 200-206; C.Westermann, Genesis 1-11 (London, 1984), 363-383. Westermann rightfully points to the fact that Cassuto perhaps "is not conscious of how deeply he has plunged into mythological thinking" (372).

<sup>4</sup> M.& R. Zimmermann (">Heilige Hochzeit< der Gottersöhne und Menschentöchter?", 351-2) relate Gen 6:1-4 to the concept of "holy matrimony" (marriage between gods and humans) which , according to C.L.Straus' structuralistic interpretation, is part of the ancient-oriental Mythologic world. On a similar venue is H.R.Page Jr. (The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and biblical Literature (Leiden, VT supp.lxv, 1996, 112). M.Vervenne (note 1: Ibid, 38) suggests this enigmatic text to derive from a "post-

The point of view suggested here does not *a priori* apply a moral judgement to the event, and its perception<sup>5</sup> is based on the following parameters:

- Writers - even minor ones - are usually credited, more or less, of knowing what they are doing. But such does not seem to be the case toward the 'author' of Genesis who, tacitly, is claimed as unable to compose a coherent text.<sup>6</sup> The first parameter, therefore, is a respect for the 'author' of Genesis, that is: for "the creative writer, responsible for the final version of the text" (Fokkelman's definition of him).<sup>7</sup> The author, in spite of our shortcomings in interpreting his text, deserves the credit of being looked upon as someone who was conscious of what he was doing while compiling his sources into one volume. Furthermore, we should respect his literary sense of exposition, juxtaposition, continuity of plot, structure, and his calculated use of words and expressions.
- The assumption is that in the first chapter of Genesis the assumed conscious author provided, what may be defined as, a 'history of our earth' *in logical terms*. His presentation, surprisingly enough, is "more evolutionary in some respects than anything published before early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe"<sup>8</sup>. His text boasts neither a claim for Ultimate Knowledge nor pretensions to provide *all* the answers to every quandary of creation, but rather chooses to present specific facts and natural phenomena *as he was able to perceive and verbalize them*. The same logical attitude, therefore, has to be expected also in the continuation of his text.
- An understanding that in a monotheistic text (that manifests, in its first chapter, a conscious attempt to avoid the unnatural and to reject pagan concepts such as 'Gods, and wars between their courts in the process of creation of a world') there is no room, in the following chapters included by the same conscious author, for concepts such as 'God's entourage'.

In light of the above parameters, I intend to examine the story in context, that is - its external organization within the text of the first eleven chapters, to present the text and discuss its vocabulary; to look at the internal organization of the story and thereby - to suggest an interpretation of the episode's *explicit meaning*, namely: what is written, and also its *implicit* one, namely: what is conveyed.

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reductional" stage in the formation of Genesis, reflecting the use of material of other canonical books as well as of non-canonical I Enoch 6-11. As one of my parameters requires a respect to the author's work, the question of sources that may have influenced the final formation of the Biblical paragraph seem to be less relevant than the obvious differences from these sources.

<sup>5</sup> The philosophical attitude, the literary approach and the semiotical analysis are fully explained in R.Gilboa, Intercourses in the Book of Genesis; Mythic motifs in Creator-Created Relationships (Lewis, 1998), 3-29.

<sup>6</sup> Speiser (Genesis, Anchor Bible 1964, p.13) kindly remarks that "the Biblical writer repeats the Babylonian formulation, *perhaps without full awareness* of the theological implications"; but this is very subtle in comparison with H.Creager who states that "The writer of Genesis *Probably did not completely comprehend the idea embodied in the words he used*", thus enabling the interpreter [Creager] not to be "*restricted by the limited insights which he [the Genesis author] had*" ("The divine Image", in N.H.Brean & all, Light Unto My Path, Philadelphia 1974, 105). On a similar venue, and for the purpose of our discussion: J.A.Soggin, after stating "the present function of the [Sons of God] text", says: "therefore the exact text seem *not even to have been important to the author(s)*" ("Heroes and Nephilim: Remarks on Genesis 6:1-4", in Fox & all, Temples and Traditions, Winona Lake 1996, 135-136).

<sup>7</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, "Genesis", in R.Alter & F.Kermode, The Literary Guide to the Bible (London, 1987), 36.

<sup>8</sup> W.F.Albright, New Horizons in Biblical Research (London, Oxford, 1966), 8.

### The story in context

The exposition of the primeval story within the first eleven chapters shows a recurring alternating pattern of narratives in, what may be termed: "general, particular and an episode":

1. A general phenomena - Creation (1);
2. A particular case of creation - Adam and Eve (2-3);
- 2a. A related episode (Cain and Abel, 4:1-16);
3. A general list of descendants (Cain's - 4:16-26; Seth's - 5);
- 3a. A related episode (the 'sons of God' - 6:1-4);
4. A particular case (Noah - 6:5-9:17);
- 4a. A related episode (Cannan - 9:18-29);
5. A general list of Noah's descendants (10)
- 5a. A related episode (the tower of Babel - 11:1-9);
6. A general list of Seth's descendants (11:10-32)  
until chapter 12, where Abraham's story begins.

The above juxtaposition of units, therefore, presents the following (and literary calculated) pattern of narrative layout:

*general events,*

*particular + an episode, general list + an episode, particular + an episode, general list + an episode;  
general list.*

The linear description of the genesis (תולדות) of the *general* story is cut by detailed *particular* issues within them and by explanatory episodes. These literary interruptions, evidently, are juxtaposed in their very place in order to explain or to expand the scope of the presented theme. With regard to our discussed issue of the BNEI HaELOHIM - when the text states a list of nations and peoples (No.3, which ends with the mention of Noah), the relating episode is logically juxtaposed at the very end of the general counting of peoples because it points to a special group of people (NEPHILIM) that existed, was not a direct part of the described chain of the counted male descendants<sup>9</sup> but connected to it via the "daughters of Adam". Thus, according to the pattern stated above, this general list (of which Noah is but a part) and its related episode of BNEI HaELOHIM, is followed by the particular story of Noah. Another point worth noticing in the above list: No.2, 3a, 4, 5a are narratives tainted with mythological essence.

A possible deduction of the author's use of mythological elements may derive from his difficulty in providing logical explanations to known phenomena: the human acquirement of a kind of consciousness which differentiates humans from other living beings (No.2)<sup>10</sup>; nature's catastrophe - the deluge (No.4); the tower of Babel - the diversity of languages (No.5a). What kind of phenomenon is described in No.3a?

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<sup>9</sup> Cassuto, *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>10</sup> R.Gilboa, *Intercourses in the Book of Genesis*, 114,132-138.

## The internal organization of the story

### A. Presentation of the text and its suggested translation:<sup>11</sup>

(punctuated and spaced in accordance with its Massoretic TEAMIM)

א	ויהי כִּי-החל האדם לרב, על-פני האדמה ובנות, יולדו להם
ב	ויראו בני-האלהים את בנות האדם כי טובות, הנה ויקחו להם נשים מכל, אשר בחרו
ג	ויאמר יהוה, לא ידון רוּחִי בְאָדָם לְעוֹלָם בשגם, הוא בשר והיו ימיו מאה ועשרים, שנה
ד	הנפילים היו בארץ בימים ההם וגם אחרי-כן, אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל-בנות האדם וילדו להם המה הגיבורים אשר מְעוֹלָם, אנשי השם

- 1a) And when Man had begun to multiply, on the face of the earth  
1b) and daughters, were born unto them  
2a) And BNEI-HaELOHIM saw the daughters of Men that good, they are  
2b) and they took themselves women from all, whom they chose  
3a) And Yhwh said, my spirit shall not exist<sup>12</sup> in Man forever BESAGAM, flesh he is  
3b) and his days shall be a hundred and twenty, years.  
4a) The NEPHILIM had been on the land on those days  
4b) and also after that, when mated with the daughters of Man and they  
bore children, to them  
4c) these were the mighty men ever since, men of renown.

First, let us discuss the Hebrew expressions (in capital letters). The difficulties emanate from their rare appearance in Genesis or in the Bible as a whole:

**BNEI-HaELOHIM:** the author's use of 'Elohim' in Genesis is not only as a noun, standing by itself and referring to the almighty, but also as an adjectival suffix that has two meanings: the common one - 'belonging to God', and the more intricate one that serves as a coinage for the

<sup>11</sup> The translation is based, mainly, on Isaac Leeser's Holy Bible which retains much of the poetics of the King James version (Hebrew Publishing Co. New York), while incorporating later linguistic findings. In my translation, I have tried to follow the Hebrew syntax at the expense of idiomatic English, and retain the use of similar words (underlined). The Hebrew presentation is based on the traditional punctuation –TEAMIM (marked in the Hebrew text and expressed in the English translation by a comma, space and new lines). For detailed explanation of the method, see: Gilboa (note 5), Ibid., 35.

<sup>12</sup> YADON appears only this once in the Bible. The root is not clear and suggestions vary: The Hebrew and English Lexicon of the O.T. (Oxford; based on Gesenius) regards it as Imperfect+Kal and cites the Aramaic Unkelos and the Greek as – YADUR from the root י.ד.ר ; it agrees with findings of the Qumran texts (G.Brook, "4Q252 and the text of Genesis", TEXTUS xix, Jerusalem 1998, 6). However, as the use of this root is rare in the Bible, most commentators regard it as the intransitive form of the root י.ד.ר (strive; in Leeser's Holy Bible). Speiser (Genesis) suggests "shield" (based on comparisons with AKK. *Dinanu* which means: substitute, surrogate), and rejects the traditional י.ד.ר "abide" as a guess lacking any linguistic support. As I have no intention to plunge into unsolved linguistic disputes, I chose a neutral term - exist - that conveys the essence of these suggestions and suits the context.

superlative, thus forming an extraordinary entity<sup>13</sup>; which interpretation to apply is determined by our understanding of the context. The much argued expression RUAH-ELOHIM literally - God's wind (Gen,1:2) is interpreted as "an awesome wind"<sup>14</sup> - not mere wind (mentioned as an element within natural elements) or as a superlative - THE strongest wind, but an extraordinary wind that is a category in itself. On the same venue, BNEI-ELOHIM may be interpreted as a group of extraordinary people, a special entity (like BNEI-BLIYAAL - Jud. 19:22).

But the text states BNEI-HaELOHIM and not BNEI-ELOHIM. The "Ha" is commonly interpreted as either an article or as a shortened form for "YHWH-ELOHIM"<sup>15</sup> and, like so many ambiguous expressions in the Bible, its interpretation is determined by the context. In this episode, I suggest, the "Ha" is but an article that linguistically settles the equilibrium of the sentence with בנות האדם in 2a and 4b:

ויראו בני-האלהים את בנות האדם  
וגם אחרי-כן, אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל-בנות האדם

Both sentences, where the *entity* of humans is concerned, could do with or without the article and still retain the same meaning (e.g. PS. 89:48b- על מה שוא בראת כי-בני-אדם and PS. 33:13b- ראה את-כל-בני האדם). The use of the article in 'BNEI-HaELOHIM, thereby, may be interpreted as the author's prerogative of stylistic pattern that *accentuates* an entity against the human one: *the* extraordinary males against *the* human females.

But extraordinary and unusual, in what sense?

■ We are told (3a) that their offspring with human females are "BESHAGAM<sup>16</sup> flesh – "because *also*, flesh he is". This is a gross irregularity in the perception of the creation chapters (1-11) in Genesis, where living creatures are regarded *mere* flesh. Thus, in the Noah affair - 'Flesh-BASAR' refers to **all** living creatures destined for annihilation. The same perception of wholeness toward living beings is evident in the creation story, where no distinction is made between creatures who are "NEPHESH HAYA-חיה-נפש" (1:24) and humans who are also "NEPHESH HAYA-חיה-נפש" (2:7). In either case, the Biblical expressions of BASAR and NEPHESH do not relate to 'spirit' nor project the much later philosophical notion of 'flesh vs. spirit'. 'Flesh' in the creation narratives, therefore, presents a living entity as a whole. But the entity 'flesh' is but one factor in the nature of the offspring of BNEI-HaELOHIM, as accentuated in the Hebrew text with the preceding comma: "BESHAGAM, he is flesh - because **also**, he is flesh". The 'flesh' part points, no doubt, to the human mothers who are **all flesh**. It leaves room to suggest that the fathers, BNEI-HaELOHIM are not. As we comprehend the living entities of our world as 'organic' (a concept for which there are the *indirect* Biblical expressions such as: נפש חיה, נפש), the phenomenon of creatures who are *non-organic*, for which there is no Biblical word, justifies the adjective that accentuates this irregularity - 'Elohim'. Hence: BNEI-HaELOHIM.

<sup>13</sup> D.Winton Thomas ("A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing The Superlative in Hebrew" VT III, 1953, 209-224) mentions that this was fairly a common interpretation by several mediaeval Jewish commentators, and applied also into the English translation of the Authorized Version.

Thomas argument is 'the superlative'; mine - although accepting it - is that a **compound** forms an entity, thus exceeding its etymological origins (Cassuto, 11) and in this case: its adjectival-superlative one.

<sup>14</sup> For more recent research, see: Speiser's Genesis and H.M.Orlinsky, "Enigmatic Bible Passages: The Plain Meaning of Genesis 1:1-3", Biblical archaeologist (XLVI, 1983) 237.

<sup>15</sup> Koler, Y., "HA'Elohim - a Definite Article or Elonged Name of God", Beit Mikra, XXII, 1977, 477-82. For the extend of the issue: Lerner, Y., "The Forms Ha'Elohim' and 'Elohim' in the pentateuch and Prophets", Leshonenu, XLVII-IX, 1985, 195-8.

<sup>16</sup> BESHAGAM: again, a word which appears only this instance in the Bible. Usually is regarded as a merger of three hebrew parts BaASHER+GAM (the preposition "in-ב"; "אשר - that which is", and "גם -also" (Rashi; Cassuto, Ibid.,203).

- This non-organic nature of living creatures (still yet unknown to us) points to the phenomenon by which the non-organic differentiates from the mortal organic: Life. The text presents an imposed limitation in regard to the mortal existence of creatures of the dual nature (one hundred and twenty years), via the persona God: God's spirit, the conceiving *eternal* power of Life,<sup>17</sup> is not to exist forever in mortal 'flesh'.

The expression "BNEI-HAELOHIM", thus, manifests an enigmatic *nature* with, apparently, an inhuman span of life. But what was their *generic* name?

Verse 4a (via its problematic juxtaposition in the middle of the episode), leads us to regard the generic name given to their offspring of dual nature as - NEPHILIM. But, I suggest, a generic name of the offspring reflects that of the progenitors, as is the case of nations in the Bible named after their first progenitor. Therefore, it may be applied also to our case: the families of the NEPHILIM emanated from the NEPHILIM progenitors. A note on these families, mentioning progenitors and descendants, appears again in the Bible when the Israelites are sent to investigate the land of Canaan and its inhabitants and meet them (Numbers, 13:33a):

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה וְעֹשֶׂה בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן־הַנְּפִלִים

33a And there we saw, the NEPHILIM ( נְפִילִים ) sons of ANAK, of the NEPHILIM ( נְפִילִים )

In a close examination of verse 33a, the first mentioned NEPHILIM (with the letter YOD) are the sons of someone called ANAK who, in his turn, emanates from an entity called THE NEPHILIM (without YOD, like in the Genesis text). Taking in account that vowels were added to the text much later, there is no doubt that the spelling with the YOD was, and is, read "N'PHILIM". Regardless of whatever was the vowel and the reading of the NUN without the YOD, it allows us to regard נְפִילִים, both in Genesis and Numbers, as the same entity, that is - *The beings juxtaposed by the Genesis author in the BNEI-HAELOHIM affair*<sup>18</sup>. We, therefore, may conclude that NEPHILIM is the generic name of the offspring of dual nature and, as the custom goes, also of their progenitors - the unusual beings BNEI-HAELOHIM. Their distant descendants, whom the Israelites met, are thus called NEPHILIM (but with YOD), but we are not told what was their nature.

As names in the Bible do have meanings, what is meant by NEPHILIM? All commentators seem to agree that the root of the word NEPHILIM is 'N.PH.L- 7.9.J', and its meaning, in all the Hebrew 'buildings', is always concerned with a 'fall' - a movement with a direction: *from up above -downwards*. The perception when one tackles an irregularity of any kind is the linguistic idiom of "it fell down on me".

So if, as argued above, we respect the literary merits of the author, then we have to accept that he carefully chose and used words which conveyed his intentions. NEPHILIM, therefore, is a generic name of known people (who lived long ago - 6:4a), and of their progenitors BNEI-

<sup>17</sup> אֱלֹהִים as God's spirit, may be described as: the "transcendental power that manifests itself only in its actions and results in the existing world"... "that conceiving eternal power" (Y.Steinberg, The Bible Dictionary, Tel-Aviv 1977: 775, 566, respectively).

<sup>18</sup> This is not to claim that Numbers and Genesis have one author/redactor. The similar spelling, however, indicates that this word and its spelling in Genesis probably was known to the Numbers author, and a variant has been purposely made by him in order to distinguish between two entities: without the YOD (and alluding to Genesis) describes the origin, with it - the descendants. Further on, Joshua, 15:13, we are told that ANAK is the son of ARBA the founder of the city of Hebron. The equation of the private name ANAK with the common adjective 'ANAK=giant' is probably based on a description of some of the inhabitants of Canaan, in another verse (Deut. 2:10): "The EMIM in times past dwelt there, a people great and numerous and tall as the ANAKIM". BERESHIT RABA (6:4) mentions seven names for giant beings: *rephaim, giborim, zamzanim, anakim, avim, nephilim, imim*.

HaELOHIM - the ones who "fell down" and astonished society. The text, however, does not indicate any derogative implication or moral judgement of their "fall"<sup>19</sup>, only stresses the irregular phenomenon.

What are we to make of this word-analysis?

### B. The explicit meaning of the story.

The episode tells that after people multiplied, BNEI-HAELOHIM saw the daughters of Adam and took themselves wives. When God saw it (6:3), he did not scorn them for their supposed immoral act<sup>20</sup>; hence - no 'sin' has been committed.<sup>21</sup> The copulation does not carry God's remark against it, but only his warning regarding the limited life-span of 120 years for their prospective offspring. If, for the time being, we ignore verse 4a, then the wording of the narrative continues the subject-matter of God's warning: "and also afterwards", that is- after God's warning, BNEI-HAELOHIM were not deterred by the outcome, limitation put on life-span, and continued their relationship with human females who bore them offspring. But the author divides this continuing narrative by the intrusion of a remark about the NEPHILIM (6:4a) juxtaposed as if out of the blue within a different context. Moreover - the successive actions in 6:1-3 are in the *wayiqtol* form, whereas in verse 4a the verb is in the *qatal* form and the verb-subject order is reversed, indicating the past perfect: הנפילים היו בארץ בימים ההם - The NEPHILIM had been on the land on those days.

*Contextually*, I suggest, the same does 1a: And when Men had began - יהיה כי החל האדם לרב - is a report of events that happened in the distant past. Verse 4a, thus, is not a remark out of the blue but rather another reference to the distance past: 1a is the temporal clause of the episode while the intrusive 4a relates to its protagonists.

An intrusion of past events into the narrative in 4a is a literary device<sup>22</sup> already used by the author twice before in his report on the primeval history:

- In the first chapter, the second verse presents the same pattern: "והארץ היתה – and earth had been", thus presenting the state of earth *prior* to God's first action<sup>23</sup>.
- When Adam's "TOLEDOT-genesis" are told in the conclusion of his story, 5:1b is an intrusion of past events, achieved by an explicit temporal clause followed by an infinitive: "ביום ברא אלוהים אדם – When God had created humankind"

These two verses (6:1a, 4a), I suggest, connect the episode to the distant past that developed *parallel* to the list of descendants mentioned in the previous verses, prior to Noah's family.

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<sup>19</sup> The literary use of נפל in the Bible, though, suggests also the meaning of "lesser", as in Job 12:3 - "I do not fall short compared to you - לֹא נֹפֵל אֲנִי כִּתְּכֶם". Referring to an expression of a much later book enables Ramban to interpret in Genesis the *nature* of the offspring: as NEPHILIM (in verse 4a) they do *fall short* in comparison with BNEI-ELOHIM but, in other mentioning in the Bible, they are stronger and bigger than other human beings. Although, as he says, he offers a "decent" literary (PSHAT) interpretation, the name NEPHILIM becomes a somewhat derogatory title which does not apply to other instances, even metaphoric, of the root in Genesis (to fall asleep - 15:12, a fallen face - 4:6, etc.). As I examine the use of words in Genesis and, in accordance with the interpretation I suggest further on, I do not agree with Ramban's interpretation which is based on the equation of BNEI-ELOHIM=the Seth dynasty.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Rashi: their choice of also married women and even animals. Modern commentators: Speiser (Genesis) on unlimited choice: "any of them they liked"; Clines (1979,36) stresses "lust polygamous".

<sup>21</sup> H.R.Page Jr. The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion (Ibid., 112) questions this point of assumed 'sin'. Although not frequent, the copulation in M.E. ancient mythologies is mainly between gods and distinguished people.

<sup>22</sup> Discussion on the literary phenomenon, see: N.Tocker, "The Voice of the Narrator in Genesis", Criticism and Interpretation, xvi, 1981 (33-69), 33.

<sup>23</sup> E.Rubinstein, Contemporary Hebrew and Ancient Hebrew (Tel-Aviv, 1980), 23-4. This is also Rashi's approach, and he systematically interprets such grammatical occurrences as past perfect.

However, if we look carefully at the traditional “punctuation” (Teamim) of 6:4a, we notice the three-dotted triangle above the last letter: this is an indication that the traditional reading of the event regarded 4a as part of the *previous* issue, after which starts a new one in 4b.<sup>24</sup> The traditional punctuation, therefore, points to a division of the episode into two parts. The first one is concluded by the author’s explanation (in 4a) that once upon a time (past perfect) there had been NEPHILIM and, thus, summing up the issue of “beforehand”: the coming of the BNEI-HaELOHIM, the attraction that the human female posed for them, God’s warning regarding the life-span of their prospective offspring and the generic name ‘NEPHILIM’ for this family of beings/people. The second part describes the “aftermath”: in 4b - the procreation proper, and in 4c - the vocation of the offspring.

The BNEI-HaELOHIM episode, as discussed before, is juxtaposed between two elaborated issues: the presentation of a long line of Seth’s descendants until Noah (up to 5:32) and the catastrophe of the flood, following the remark (6:5-7) that God saw Man’s vices, regretted his creation and decided to annihilate “all flesh”. This remark is the reason for the ‘crime and punishment’ notion of so many commentators regarding the episode, because no explanation is given in this very text as to what were *Man’s* actual vices that caused God to inflict such a harsh punishment. The vice generally suggested is ‘promiscuity’,<sup>25</sup> namely - the lustful behaviour of BNEI-HaELOHIM who took, perhaps forcibly, whoever they wanted, and their unwelcome intercourse with mortal women. These arguments, as several commentators have pointed out,<sup>26</sup> do not hold because ‘promiscuity’ as a vice seems to be irrelevant in regard to Middle East polygamous societies and the text, as will be discussed later on, does not indicate that force had been used. If any ‘sin’ has been committed, it is the blurring of the borders between the mortal and the immortal, and BNEI-HaELOHIM committed it - not Man.<sup>27</sup> The obvious reason for bringing in this episode at this very point of the text seems to be contextual: after a long list of nations and peoples, known to the audiences of the time, there had to be a mentioning relating to the kind of people, NEPHILIM, whose origin (fallen- from where?) and nature (not flesh) may seem quite dubious. Moreover, many aspects of these beings constitute an enigma: we know the happenings of their dual-nature offspring, but we are left in the dark in regard to what happened with the BNEI-HaELOHIM who are not ‘flesh’. As we do not have them amongst us - where, when and how did they disappear? The text is mute about details that may intrigue us, but it is clear about its *explicit* message: **verse 6:3 is the only one in which the persona God makes his remark and, thus, mortality is its theme.** This demarcation between the mortal and the immortal echoes a previous affair included in the text by the author: ‘life-span’ is the reason given for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, where immortality (3:22 - and live for ever-לעולם חיים) was presented in the text as an essential factor distinguishing God from God-like humans who acquired a certain kind of godly knowledge (As one of us-אחד מנון).

In both cases humans are distinguished as “flesh”, and the message is conveyed via a myth-like narrative (as suggested in the above-suggested list-pattern of the exposition of primeval history). The BNEI-HaELOHIM story, thus, touches on **two explicit elements: legendary union**

<sup>24</sup> This approach differs from interpretations which regard 6:3-4a as an author’s remark that interrupts the continuity of the story; I argue for it as an integral part.

<sup>25</sup> See note 20.

<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Cassuto seems to be among the first, and the most convincing one (*Ibid.*, 202).

<sup>27</sup> H.R. Page Jr, (*Ibid.*, 114): “It is disconcerting that punishment is directed against humanity for activity which is initiated by the gods. The relationship of the punishment to the crime is also unclear...The question of guilt is unresolved”.



with the unnatural and immortality. There is no dispute that mythologies, like the Akkadian precedent<sup>28</sup> discussed further on, influenced to some extent the legendary elements in Genesis. The issue to explore is - by how much and *why* they do differ.

### C. The implicit meanings of the story

The BNEI-HaELOHIM episode shares similar literary features with the Akkadian (or old Babylonian) myth of Gilgamesh, and it is commonly agreed that it influenced the Genesis author. His presentation of the narrative, however, suggests subtle differences that by far exceed their sources:

The most identical feature is the definition of Gilgamesh as renowned hero; it corresponds to the description of the NEPHILIM and their reputation: (4c) "these were the mighty men ever since, men of renown".

Less similar, however, is the godly origin assigned to them: Gilgamesh, like the NEPHILIM, is of dual nature- "two-thirds of him is god"<sup>29</sup>. The Genesis text, on the other hand, points to an unfamiliar nature by using the adjectival suffix ELOHIM to define a being which is not 'flesh'. Although we are not acquainted with such phenomenon (nor do we have all the answers in regard to creation), the adjectival suffix ELOHIM that points to a *natural irregularity* still retains the phenomenon within the frame of the natural, and distances the text and its readers from the mythological world. This, I believe, was the intention of the logical author who, thus, continues the logical presentation of creation in his first chapter of the book. **Logic and the natural**, although amidst of a tale, and although details are somehow inexplicable, **seem to be his first implicit meaning** in his presentation of the episode. These qualities had to be constantly stressed in order to confront the human psyche which longed for immortality, amidst a civilization that quite often succumbed to the supernatural.

But there is another facet to Gilgamesh's manhood: his brutal attitude to women:

"Gilgamesh leaves not the maid to [her mother] / The warrior's daughter, the noble's spouse!"<sup>30</sup>

The reckless behaviour of such a "hero" may have induced modern commentators to give the same negative interpretation to verse 2b. But the Genesis text presents on this issue a different concept, a positive one<sup>31</sup>, which throws a fundamentally different light on the nature of male-female relationships. Its uniqueness as a narrative, I suggest, is expressed by subtle details and their affiliation with perceptions already expressed by the author in previous chapters of Genesis, in regard to the *female essence, the choice made, and the continuity decided upon*:

Exceptional living-creatures 'fall down' among inhabitants, and see the daughters of Eve, namely: female humans. The verse does not talk about 'looking at' but rather "seeing that"- (2a): And saw the daughters of Men that good, they are

It is not a look at appearances<sup>32</sup> but rather a realization of a quality: "good". The equivalent previous mentioning of "good" as a concept appears in the Garden of Eden: the female is introduced into the place because "it is not good that the man should be alone" (2:18). In both instances, Eden and BNEI-HaELOHIM, the problem of loneliness is solved by the female presence. The second instance of the use of 'good', where it clearly refers to quality rather than

<sup>28</sup> If indeed it was: "There is as yet no general agreement as regards the date of composition. None of the extant texts antedates the first millenium B.C. On internal evidence, however...the majority of scholars assign the epic to...the early part of the second millenium B.C." (ANET, foreward).

<sup>29</sup> J.B.Pritchard (ed.), ANET, Tab.I,ii, line 1(p.73).

<sup>30</sup> ANET, Tbl. I, ii, 27-8. Further on (Tbl. II, iv, 29-36), the text declares Gilgamesh's right, ordained by the gods, to precede the husband.

<sup>31</sup> Also Cassuto (202), although on a different path.

<sup>32</sup> Suggested by Speiser, Genesis; Cassuto, 202, and most of the Jewish traditional commentators,

appearances, is at work in the use made by adjectives to describe the fruit of the forbidden tree and the reason for the eating (3:6):

And the woman saw that the tree is good as food and lustful to the eye, and desirable for knowledge  
ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאווה הוא לעיניים ונחמד העץ להשכיל

The wording in the text, as can be seen, distinguishes between "good" as a practical quality, "lust" related to appearance and "desire" as means for an end. The same careful wording, I suggest, is at work also in the BNEI-HaELOHIM affair: 'lust' emanating from beauty and mentioned by most commentators is somewhat questionable in light of available and more suitable phrasing for it; "good", on the other hand, is what the text stresses in regard to the daughters of Eve.

But unlike the events in the garden, where Adam is *given* a woman, BNEI-HaELOHIM take themselves women: (6:2b) and they took themselves women from all, *whom they chose*. The accentuation in the text is made with the comma: it is a *choice made*, from among all that existed.<sup>33</sup>; it is not just a grabbing of quantity, as Gilgamesh is characterized, but rather a process of conscious choice of quality.<sup>34</sup>

There is more to it: even when BNEI-HaELOHIM are told that their offspring will lose their godly faculty of immortality (and also after that - 4b), they nevertheless continue their relationship with the females in order to procreate. But procreation *per-se* seems to be a somewhat questionable sole purpose, and I speculate on a more emotional involvement. There is a conscious free choice, like Eve's - although for different ends. The text tells of Eve's considerations; it is mute in regard to BNEI-HaELOHIM. But in the aftermath of these relationships, they produced heroic sons (GIBORIM - mighty men).

The calculating and thoughtful hand of the author is felt throughout the episode, its wording and allusions refer to previous parts of Genesis. The BNEI-HaELOHIM episode, thus, seems to be a literary expression of a unique love story, where **'free choice' is its second implicit meaning**. It is manifested threefold by BNEI-HaELOHIM: a choice of quality, of women, and of mortality for their offspring.

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<sup>33</sup> This interpretation follows Cassuto's path (202), insofar as these specific words are interpreted.

<sup>34</sup> This paragraph, as we may deduce, has no common ground with the kidnapping of the Sabines (Greek Mythology) or the women taken by the Benjamin tribe (Judges 23,23)