

***The Theology of the Unseen Realm:  
How God Uses Angels, Demons and the Holy Assembly***

“The Case for the Supernatural View in Genesis 6:1-4” – Part A

I. Review of Historical Development – Non-Support and Support.

A. The Supernatural View is the Earliest. (Previous lesson intro: I John 2:15-16)

1. Being the earliest does not make this view correct, but it does demonstrate that it is not a heretical “Johnny come lately.”

a. Genesis 6:1-4

“<sup>1</sup> Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ <sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.”

**2. Prior to Christ until well after the close of the New Testament canon and destruction of the Temple (AD 70), this was the only attested Jewish view.**

3. Davidson writes (Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary: Genesis*, pg. 69):

By all Old Testament analogy *the sons of gods* can only mean one thing, divine beings. In Job 1:6 and 2:1 the same phrase is translated by the N.E.B. *the members of the court of heaven*. This meaning was recognized in early Jewish tradition in Jubilees 5:1 and Enoch 6:3 and probably in the New Testament in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Further, *the daughters of men* cannot mean anything other than mortal women. Such stories of sexual intercourse between gods and mortal women are common enough in religious mythology. In Canaanite mythology, as it is known to us from the Ugaritic texts, EL, the supreme god, seduces two women and begets the twin gods Dawn and Evening. Nor is it strange that such a story should be used to explain the existence on earth of a race of supermen, the Nephilim (verse 4). [Emphasis Mine]




Wehman adds (Wehman, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, p. 139):

The “angel” interpretation is at once the oldest view and that of most modern commentators. It is assumed in the earliest Jewish exegesis (e.g., the books of 1 Enoch 6:2ff; Jubilees 5:1), LXX, Philo (De Gigant 2:358), Josephus (Ant. 1:31) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QapGen 2:1; CD 2:17-19). The NT (2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6,7) and the earliest Christian writers (e.g. Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) also take this line. [Emphasis Mine]

#### 4. Ancient Jewish Support


a. Septuagint – LXX (Jewish translation of Hebrew into Greek) – Translated in Alexandria as early as the third century B.C. (Translation of the Pentateuch).



There are copy variations regarding Genesis 6:1-4. “While the majority of known copies have ‘sons; instead of ‘angels’, the earliest copies have ‘angels’ instead of ‘sons’.” Tim Chaffey, *Fallen*, p. 122.


b. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – AD 50)

1. He quoted from the LXX version known to him including the phrase “angels of God”. He is known negatively for his allegorized hermeneutic, but he agreed with the fallen angel view. In *On the Giants*, He wrote:



“And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful, they took unto themselves wives of all of them whom they chose.” Those beings, whom other philosophers call demons, Moses usually calls angels. – Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo*, p. 152.

c. Flavius Josephus (37 – 100 AD, former fighter for Israel, then defected to Rome. He later became a Jewish/Roman historian.) He identified “the bene ha’ elohim” as fallen angels. He writes:



But for what degree of zeal they had formerly shown for virtue, they now showed 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 [*sic* – “thus it is written”] these men did what resembled the actions of those whom the Grecians call giants. – Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus, Antiquities*, 1.72-73. [Emphasis mine].

1. Note “accompanied with women” can mean “to be with”, “to be joined with” or “to have intercourse with”. Intercourse is likely because of “begat sons.”



d. Pseudepigrapha (Latin for false writings)

1. Book of Enoch, Jubilees, Jasher, etc. will be examined in a later lesson. Do not be quick to write these works off. They are cited or alluded to by biblical authors. While not canonical, they did help to shape New Testament authors’ thinking.

5. Beginning with the Targums (composed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, also known as the Rabbinic period), Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Old Testament similar to the Living Bible, began to eradicate any supernatural interpretation. This was done in no small part due to the rise of Christianity.



- a. Keep in mind that the central Christian belief is that the second person of the Trinity came down out of heaven in the flesh through a woman. “... **something similar – and yet not so similar to the angelic procreation view of Genesis 6:1-4,**” VanDorn, *Giants*, p. 6. [**Emphasis mine**]

1. Luke 1:35

“<sup>35</sup> The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.’”

- b. For more on why the Jews changed their earlier supernatural theology after the first coming of Christ, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*, pg. 73-96.

B. The Christian shift from adherence to rejection.

1. The earliest date and Christian who did not hold to the supernatural view was Julius Africanus (160-240 AD).

a. Julius Africanus, *History of the World* [fragment]:

“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 Savior, Himself; but that the descendants of Cain are named the seed of man, as having nothing divine in them.”

2. Ephrem the Syrian (around 325 AD) wrote in dogmatic fashion his rejection of the supernatural view.

a. From Catholic University of America. *Fathers of the Church*, a translation, pg 91:134-135.

“[Moses] called the “sons of God”, those who, like the sons of Seth, had been called the righteous people of God. The beautiful daughters of men whom they saw were the daughters of Cain....”

3. After Ephrem, only John Chrysostom (349-407 AD) in his homily on Genesis 22:6-8 holds to the Sethite view until Augustine wrote *City of God* some time after 410 AD. This means that no known Christian theologian until the 5<sup>th</sup> century held any other view than the supernatural perspective. Africanus and Ephrem were not widely known theologians. They had little theological rank. Chrysostom was known for his preaching ability and was of a higher theological rank but did not extensively examine Genesis 6:1-4.

Augustine has a higher theological ranking and among his pedigree is the earliest to hold a naturalist (Sethite) view of Genesis 6:1-4. “There is no record of any church father who denied the Fallen Angel view until the third century AD.” – Tim Chaffey, *Fallen: The Sons of God and the Nephilim*, p. 151.

a. Introduction to Allegory – “hidden meaning” and used extensively by church theologians until the Reformation period. When applied to the Bible the assumption is that the text has various levels of meaning. Note Pastor Don’s experience and early education regarding David’s use of five smooth stones which represented the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:4), Song of Solomon, also. This led to the development of hermeneutics (The Science of Interpretation or Principles of Exegesis).

1. The word “hermeneutics” means “to interpret” and is thought to have been derived from the Greek god Hermes who interpreted as a messenger between gods and mortals.

2. Allegory should not be confused with New Testament Correspondence.

One example of this would be the “Rock” that followed Israel (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11). Paul says the Rock was Christ (I Cor. 10:3-4). Paul, under inspiration, can say this, but I, Don Galardi, cannot read this into the text.

b. Note Chaffey’s remark regarding allegory and its impact upon Africanus and Augustine:

As far as we know, it was not until Julius Africanus in the third century that a Christian writer promoted a different view. As might be expected at this point, Julius studied in Alexandria sometime around AD 215, and he apparently knew the influential Origen since he wrote a letter to him and called him his “dear brother.”

The influence of the allegorist from Alexandria eventually spread throughout the Roman Empire and impacted key church fathers like Ambrose of Milan, who in turn taught it to Augustine. Augustine popularized the Sethite view of Genesis 6, and his allegorical approach to Scripture remained prominent for more than a millennium. The Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century started directing the church back to a plain reading of the text, at least in regard to salvation and most historical passages. However, Augustine’s allegorical approach remained popular when it came to eschatology (end times) and issues related to Genesis 6:1-4. – IBID, 202



c. Additional notations on Augustine. Manichaeism (a dualistic religious system with Christian, Gnostic, and pagan elements, founded in Persia in the third century by Manes, 216-276) quickly grew to become one of the dominant religions within the Roman Empire. A common argument used by the Manichees against Christianity was to hold to a ridged literal view of Genesis without allowing for figures of speech and then pointing out apparent contradictions and difficulties within the text. See Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, I 2.3. This tactic was very effective in swaying the young Augustine to accept Manichaeism. He briefly followed in these beliefs. See John J. O. Meaka, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind Up to His Conversion*, p. 163. He did not seriously consider Christianity until he learned the allegorized method from Ambrose.

Augustine writes:



“For first, these things also had begun to appear to me to be defensible; and the Catholic faith, for which I had fancied nothing could be said against the attacks of the Manichaeans, I now conceived might be maintained without presumption; especially after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained, and often allegorically – which when I accepted literally, I was ‘killed’ spiritually.” – Augustine: *The Confessions in Early Church Fathers*, Part 2, Book 5, Chapter 14.24.

d. For additional analysis on this point, see Robert C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2”, *Grace Theological Journal*, Vol. 5.1 (1984): 13-36.

e. The bottom line in regard to Augustine is that he allegorized Genesis 6:1-4 because he could not accept the clear reading of the text. The same problem exists for some evangelical scholars.



4. John Chrysostom (347-407) asserted: “Let them demonstrate firstly where angels are called ‘Sons of God’; they would not however, be able to show this anywhere. While human beings are called sons of God, angels are nowhere called.”

(Chrysostom, “Homiletics on Genesis: Genesis 18-25.” *The Fathers of the Church*, pg 71-72.) It is easy to refute this claim.

a. In response, see the chart below.



<u>Sons of God Passages</u>	<u>Hebraic Phrase</u>
Genesis 6:2	beney ha-'elohim
Genesis 6:4	beney ha-'elohim
Job 1:6	beney ha-'elohim
Job 2:1	beney ha-'elohim
Job 38:7	beney ha-'elohim
Psalms 29:1	Beney 'elim
Psalms 89:6	beney 'elim
Psalms 82:6	beney 'elyon
Deuteronomy 32:8	aggelon theou *
Deuteronomy 32:43	uioi theou *
* Only found in LXX	

Chart excerpted from VanDorn, *Giants: Sons of God*, p. 30.

1. Some may have differing opinions as to the identity of the “sons of God”.

Yet, every phrase fits supernatural beings and some texts cannot be understood any other way than supernatural – i.e. Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7.

Keep in mind that Job is widely held to be the first biblical book written.



a. Job 1:6

“<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.”



b. Job 2:1

“<sup>1</sup> Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.”



c. Job 38:7

“<sup>7</sup> When the morning stars sang together  
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

## II. Ancient Near East Correspondence for the Supernatural View of Genesis 6:1-4

### A. Introduction to archeology and the Bible.

1. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. All seminary students take courses in hermeneutics.

a. Principles of interpretation.

2. Biblical archeology is important to hermeneutics.

a. Keith Mathison (“The Purpose of Biblical Archeology” *Tabletalk Magazine*, Sept. 2023, p. 6):


“[Archeology] provides important information for biblical hermeneutics. In other words, it provides contextual information that helps us better interpret the Bible. In the twenty-first century, we are removed from the biblical cultures by thousands of years. Things that would have been second nature to an original hearer or reader are often completely foreign to our experience and knowledge.”

### B. UGARIT: Its Divine Council and number of members.

1. The ancient Canaanite city state known as Ugarit (see map) supplies more information on how these Hebrew phrases should be interpreted. Ugarit is about 45 miles southwest of Antioch in Syria and situated near the coast. It was a vassal state of Egypt during the time of the Exodus. Moses, having been trained by the best schools of Egypt, would have been familiar with this city and its culture. See Gordon Douglas Young, *Ugarit in Retrospect*, p 16.







The language of Ugarit and Hebrew are very similar. In fact, the Ugarit language is closer to biblical Hebrew than any other dialect. One of the archeological finds was a library containing around 1400 clay tablets. The god of Ugarit was “El” who had a divine council whose members were known as “Sons of El”. The Hebrew and Ugarit renderings of the phrase “Assembly of the gods” are similar. All scholars agree that the Ugarit phrasing refers to heavenly beings. The findings at ancient Ugarit provide compelling evidence that the phrase “Sons of God” in the biblical context probably refers to heavenly beings. Meredith Kline (former RTS and Westminster West Seminary professor, ordained in the OPC) disagrees by noting that “Sons of God” may refer to kings. However, note that Ugarit’s heavenly council was seventy in number which is in parallel to Christian and Jewish interpretations of “the Sons of God”. “El” fathered seventy sons. See Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God”. See also Exodus 15:27 which notes the seventy palm trees of Elim (Elim means gods).

2. Consider the number 70 as it relates to our study. The number 70 occurs often in the Bible and provides an interesting connection between Ancient Israel and the divine council’s 70 members of the Ugarit. **1)** Note Jethro’s counsel to Moses to select 70 elders who are also affirmed by God (Num. 11:1b; Ex. 24:9-10). **2)** The Sanhedrin, “council” or “assembly” (Earliest dating 76 BC), by the time of Christ consisted of 70 men plus the high priest, located in Jerusalem. Also known as “The Great Sanhedrin” as opposed to the lesser Sanhedrin which only had 23 judges. **3)** According to tradition, the Septuagint was translated by 70 scholars (some versions have 72) in the third century B.C, hence the abbreviation, LXX. Apparently, the Jews valued the number which had a connection to the divine council. **4)** Note further Genesis 10 and the listing of the nations. If every name is counted, the total number is 80. However, if duplicate names are deleted (for example, there is no need to count Japheth since his 14 descendants are listed)


the total is reduced to 70 people groups. 5) Further note, Israel's trek in the wilderness and finding water at Elim with its 70 date palm trees (Exodus 15:27). This may connect to the divine council, but even if not it does demonstrate the significance of this number to Israel. The number 7 represents perfection and the number 10 represents completion within Scripture.  $7 \times 10 = 70$ . God's divine council would naturally be indicative of completion and perfection.

### 3. Further notations on the number "70".



#### a. Exodus 15:27

<sup>27</sup> Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters."



#### b. Also Targum Pseudo Johnathan, Deuteronomy 32:8-9

"When the Most High made allotment of the world unto the nations which proceeded from the sons of Noah, in the separation of writings and languages of the children of men at the time of the division. He cast the lot among the seventy angels, the princes of the nations ..."

[Emphasis mine].

(Sefaria.org/Targum\_Johnathan\_onDeuteronomy.32.8?Lang=bi)


#### 1. This passage notes seventy angels and princes of the nations as does I

Enoch 89:59-77; 90:22-27. For further information see Heiser,

"Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629,


Jan-Mar 2001: 52-74.

### C. Conclusions





#### 1. If someone, including Chrysostom, is going to argue against "the Sons of God"

being heavenly entities, he or she must show why Israel's close neighbor to the North with all of the linguistic similarities, including the name of God and number of the sons of God (70), overlap.

- a. In my studies to date, I have not found a proponent of the Sethite viewpoint who deals with the Ugarit connection.
-  2. The concern is not that Ugarit religion influenced Judaism. On the contrary, the arrangement of a heavenly council within Ugarit is because the deities over this land imposed their past experience when they had been in service to Yahweh, over the region. These powers inspired what they remembered, but always in a distorted way and always hostile to the “Most High God.”

### III. Scholarly Support for the Supernatural View

-  A. The following list of scholars, most Evangelical and some Reformed, support the supernatural view of Genesis 6:1-4.
1. James Montgomery Boice. *Genesis, Vol. I.* p. 244-249.
  2. F.F. Bruce. *The New International Commentary.* p. 120
  3. Tim Chaffey. *Fallen: The Sons of God and the Nephilim.*
  4. Robert Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary, Genesis 1-11.*, p. 69.
  5. Arnold G. Fruchtebaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 143-144.
  6. John Goldingay. *Genesis (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch.)*  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p. 121-125.
  -  7. Gene L. Green. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Jude and II Peter*, p. 66-67.
  8. Herman Gunkel. *Genesis.* Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997, p. 56-59.
  9. Victor P. Hamilton. *New International Commentary of the Old Testament*, p. 271-272.
  10. Michael S. Heiser. *The Unseen Realm.* Bellingham. Entire book.
  11. R. Kent Hughes. *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing.* p. 123-227.
  12. Derek Kidner. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, Genesis.* p. 83-84.

13. John MacArthur. See *MacArthur Study Bible* notation on Genesis 6:1-4. Adheres to the supernatural view but not Nephilim as progeny. For his sermon on the topic see <http://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-254>.



14. Henry M. Morrice. *The Genesis Record*, p. 164-174.

15. R. C. Newman. “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4” *Grace Theological Journal* 5 (1): 13-36. 1984.

16. A. W. Pink. *Gleanings in Genesis*, p. 93-95.

17. Jonathan D. Sarfati. *The Genesis Account, Genesis 1-11*, p. 473-487.



18. Francis Schaeffer. *Genesis in Time and Space*, p. 125-126.

“The passage seems to say that there are angels who left their own proper place and are specifically under judgment because they acted like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is, as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah sought “other flesh” ... More and more we are finding that mythology in general though greatly contorted very often has some historic base. And the interesting thing is that one myth that one finds over and over again in many parts of the world is that somewhere a long time ago supernatural beings had sexual intercourse with natural women and produced a special breed of people.”



19. Douglas VanDorn. *Giants: The Sons of God*. Erie, Colorado: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2013. Entire book.

20. Gordon J. Wenham. *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 135-141.

[Rest of this Page Intentionally Left Blank.]