

Narrative Experience and Intergenerational Aggression in Genesis 6:1-9

Taylor Drake

Agnes Scott College

Abstract:

The ambiguity of Genesis 6:1-4, from the potentiality that angels took human wives, to the Nephilim, to the uncertain connection between the sin of Gen. 6:2 and the Deluge, the complexities of this little paragraph have stumbled scholars for centuries. What is lost in these narrower exegetical debates, however, is a concern for the resultant narrative changes and how said changes ripple throughout the story and into the rest of the Primeval History (Gen. 1-11). Although the question of whether the “sons of God” (*benei ‘elohim*) are despot princes, angels, or (im)pious men may seem to only affect the opening segment, I instead propose that the entire Flood story, from the marriages of “sons of God” to Ham’s betrayal of his father Noah, is an ouroboros of not only sexual sin, but intergenerational aggression which begins with miscegenation and ends with an incestuous slight. While this symbolic reading could arguably hold true of any meaning of the *benei ‘elohim*, the precise details render wholly different narrative experiences with separate structural, thematic, and to a lesser degree pedagogical goals, all with varying levels of success. Ultimately, the more popular reading of the “sons of God” as deviant angels results in a more satisfying cascade down the cosmological hierarchy, a chiasmus of rebellion that reveals itself in its transition from macro to micro levels of interaction.

When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,²the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.³Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

...²⁰Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard.²¹He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent.²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.²³Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders,

and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness.²⁴When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him,²⁵he said,

“Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” (New Revised Standard Version, Gen. 6:1-4, 9:20-25)

“The critical question [of the Deluge myth] is,” as Alan Dundes once wrote, “or ought to be, why are flood myths told at all?” (78) Unfortunately, it is rather difficult for biblical readers to begin parsing that question when the opening four verses of Genesis 6 are almost as complicated as God’s destruction is total. The ambiguity of Genesis 6:1-4, from the potential that angels could have taken human wives, to the Nephilim who somehow survived the

Flood to reappear in Numbers and Deuteronomy, to the uncertain connection between the sin of Gen. 6:2 and the Deluge, the complexities of this little paragraph have stumbled scholars for centuries. One concern, however, that is lost in these narrower exegetical debates is the resultant narrative changes that ripple throughout the story and beyond into the rest of the Primeval History (Gen. 1-11). While reading the “sons of God” (*benei ‘elohim*) as human men may ameliorate ethical concerns over God punishing humans for a sin that angels instigated, as well as fall more in line with later New Testament statements about angels’ asexuality, is there, perhaps, something else lost in the transition?

Although the question of whether the “sons of God” are despot princes, angels, or (im)pious men may seem to only affect the opening segment, I instead

propose that the entire Flood story, from the sons of Gods’ marriages with human women to Ham’s betrayal of his father Noah, is an ouroboros of not only sexual sin, but intergenerational aggression which begins with miscegenation and ends with an incestuous slight. Within the Primeval History, children’s rebellions are acted out through sexuality and even violence, from the overt murder of Abel to the covert indiscretion against Noah. While this symbolic reading could apply to any meaning of the *benei ‘elohim*, the precise details render wholly different narrative experiences with separate structural, thematic, and to a lesser degree pedagogical goals, all with varying levels of success. Ultimately, the more popular reading of the “sons of God” as deviant angels results in a more satisfying cascade down the cosmological hierarchy, a chiasmus of rebellion that

reveals itself in its transition from macro to micro levels of interaction.

First, however, an overview of some of the Deluge story's controversies is in order. As Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch write in their commentary on the Old Testament, "Three different views have been entertained from the very earliest times: the "sons of God" being regarded as (a) the sons of princes, (b) angels, (c) the Sethites or godly men" (128). While the first view was "the traditional one in orthodox rabbinical Judaism [in 1866]," and still persists to a lesser extent with arguments that the princes were guilty of various sins from despotism to polygamy, Keil and Delitzsch quickly dismiss this as "not warranted" and "unscriptural" (128). Undoubtedly, the second reading is and has remained the most popular—as Archie T. Wright notes, the Scripture's obtuseness "became the basis for the later

emergence of an etiology of evil spirits" and thus Gen. 6:1-4 "played an important part in the development of demonology during the [Second Temple period]" (1). See for but one example the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, wherein one rabbi states that the angels who fell from their holy place in heaven saw the daughters of the generations of Cain walking about naked, with their eyes painted like harlots, and they went astray after them and took wives from amongst them, as it is said, "And the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose." (160)

That is to say nothing of 1 Enoch 6-16, which elaborates greatly on the sinful angels' identities, plans, and punishments – punishments later confirmed in the Epistle of Jude, which both cites 1 Enoch directly and reminds readers of "the angels who did not keep their own

position but left their proper dwelling”
(Jude 1:6).¹

Despite its sustained influence, however, even rabbis prior to the first century BCE had begun to question the angel reading’s legitimacy. Philo of Alexandria (20-50 BCE), for instance, describes “what Moses calls angels [and] other philosophers call demons” as “souls flying about in the air” which have descended into human bodies... some of them are able to resist the current of human life and fly up again: these are the souls of true philosophers... There are bad angels also, of whom the many speak as bad demons or souls, and it is they who descended to converse with the daughters of men. (Hart 95).

While this view is not upheld by later commenters such as Keil, Delitzsch, and Thomas Keiser, they nevertheless also find themselves unable to believe that angels could hastily throw on some corporeality and “sexual power” in the seconds before the curtains rose (Keil & Delitzsch 134). As Keil and Delitzsch write,

אִשָּׁה לְקַח (to take a wife) is a standing expression throughout the whole of the Old Testament for the marriage relation established by God at the creation... This is quite sufficient of itself to exclude any reference to angels. For Christ Himself distinctly states [in Matthew 22:30] that the angels cannot marry” (131).

More importantly, however, reading the “sons of God” as humans

¹ Jude 1:14-16, “It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “See, the Lord is coming

with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all...” is citing 1 Enoch 1:9.

rectifies a glaring ethical issue within the angel interpretation: namely, why God decides to punish humans rather than the active perpetrators of sin. Victor P. Hamilton suggests that the destruction of animals in the Flood serves as a retroactive example of one group suffering for another, but this view is still problematized by the fact that angels had not been given dominion over humanity in the way that God had given humans dominion over animals in the Garden (Hamilton 262; Gen. 1:26). 1 Enoch attempts to ameliorate this by placing the blame on the orchestrating angel: “And the whole earth has been corrupted⁹through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin” (10:8-9). The Flood is thus not to punish mankind insomuch as it to “Heal the earth which the angels have corrupted... And destroy all the spirits of the reprobate and the children of the Watchers, because¹⁶ *they*

have wronged mankind” (1 Enoch 10:7, 15-16, emphasis mine).

Some, such as Gordon J. Wenham, have argued that humanity is still at fault because the daughters of men agreed to marry the angels, despite not only the lack of explicit consent within the text, but said consent historically mattering little. “Once the *mohar* [bride price] had been paid and the gifts accepted, the marriage was legally binding and the bride effectively belonged to her husband, even if they did not live together,” so Marilyn Yalom writes of biblical marriage; “...After all, wives were considered a husband’s “property,” alongside his cattle and slaves” (4). Even within the text of the Flood cycle, women are but objects mentioned only when necessitated, and none of them are even named. Furthermore, as Keiser argues, previous sin-judgment cycles within Genesis have

had their sins explicitly articulated—if women *were* the ones at fault, why would the narrator not simply say so (108)?

Reading the “sons of God” as human males, however, does not make the transgressive nature of their relationships any more explicit. Keil and Delitzsch not only assume that they are Sethites and the daughters Cainites, but that the epithet “sons of God” can be applied retroactively to men such as Noah and Enoch, despite the mass of humanity being largely undifferentiated at this time (129-130). Keil, Delitzsch, and other scholars like John H. Walton deflect the epithet’s usage as an unambiguous reference to angels—or “heavenly beings,” as per the NRSV—elsewhere in

the Old Testament, such as Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7, by claiming it is still used too infrequently to make any “sweeping statements” about its meaning (Walton 190-191). Thomas Keiser, on the other hand, argues the epithet is an ironic reference to human hubris, and that the sin of Gen. 6:2 is “taking,” or dominating one’s wife rather than “clinging” to her as described in Gen. 2:24 – a corruption of the harmonious image of marriage as becoming “one flesh” (Keiser 111).² Given that the Flood’s parallel unit, the Fall, sees God tell Eve, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you,” one cannot hold blame for remaining skeptical (Gen. 3:16).

² Keiser also notes that several other instances of “taking” a wife are largely negative – Gen. 4:19 with Lamech, descendant of Cain, taking two wives; Gen. 12:19 with the Pharaoh describing his marriage to Sarai, etc. — which would make

one wonder if this is “something other than simply a neutral reference to marriage” (118). The implications of this, however, are not further explored.

Closest to our purposes is Philo of Alexandria, who argues that “bad angels” are men “who [are] so devoid of reason or soul” that they are “flesh...But the Law, in the ordinance against unlawful unions, commands us to despise the flesh” (Hart 96). This ordinance is Leviticus 18, which in verse six commands that, “None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness” – read: flesh. Therefore, the sexual relationships described in Genesis are not literally between angels and humans, but between family members (Hart 96). Philo’s reading, however speculative, allows us to begin reconsidering the ending of Genesis 9 as an integral part of the Flood story, rather than a vestigial chunk hanging off God’s covenant with Noah that can be so easily cut away.

The reason that Gen. 9:18-29 has been trimmed like excess fat may be similar to why Gen. 6:1-4 is so needlessly

ambiguous. As E.A. Speiser writes, “The received biblical account of the Flood is beyond reasonable doubt a composite narrative, reflecting more than one separate source...the two strands have become intertwined, the end result being a skillful and intricate patchwork” (52). Gary A. Rendsburg lists the following evidence of duplications: “1) 6:19-21 and 7:1-3 both tell of the food and animals which are to be brought aboard the ark; 2) 6:22 and 7:5 both state that Noah did everything he was commanded; 3) 6:17-18 and 7:4 both give us God’s warning that he will destroy the earth...” and so on (12). Rendsburg here builds off the work of Jack M. Sasson, who pairs up the ten major units in the Primeval History into parallel columns—Creation with the Flood (1:1-3:24; 6:9-9:17), Adam’s sons with Noah’s (4:1-16; 9:18-29), technological with ethnic development of mankind (4:17-26; 10:1-32), ten

generations from Adam to Noah with ten from Noah to Terah (5:1-32; 11:10-26), and finally, the Nephilim with the Tower of Babel (6:1-8; 11:1-9). As one can plainly see, Noah's fallout with his sons is considered a distinct episode that parallels the epilogue of Eden rather than Eden proper, as the "main" Flood story does.

The evidence of this patchworking, however, does not stop within the main Flood account. Speiser refers to Gen. 9:18-29 as "the disturbed text" and proposes that it is "a splinter from a more substantial narrative...either accidentally lost or deliberately suppressed" (62). Many have noted the textual inconsistencies, especially over the genealogical positions of Noah's sons. Seth Daniel Kunin, for instance,

notices confusion with both the characters' ages and birth orders—most interestingly, for our purposes, raising the possibility that Ham rather than Shem could be Noah's oldest son.³ Furthermore, in Gen. 9:24-25, Noah awakens and knows immediately what "his youngest son" has done, at which point he curses Canaan, who only three verses prior had been declared *Ham's* son. Noah then curses Canaan to be "[the] lowest of slaves" to his "brothers," Shem and Japheth. Thus, Speiser wonders if "two divergent traditions been fused, or was Canaan the original offender" (62)? Regardless, given the confusion over the Flood story's opening four lines, it is all too tempting to excise the equally

³ Not only is Shem's age two years off from the age the text earlier states Noah's oldest to be, but "one other indication in Genesis itself that this may be the case is found in Gen. 10...the

descendants of Shem rather than being enumerated first are listed after those of Yapheth and Ham" (Kunin 110).

complex Ham incident to prevent any more hair loss from the stress.

But if two different Flood stories were combined, the obvious question is then ‘Why?’. For Rendsburg, the answer is to provide symmetry with the Flood’s parallel unit: “Given the redactional structuring of Genesis 1-11 and more specifically the analogy of 1:1-3:24 and 6:9-9:17, our compiler needed two Flood stories because he had two Creations stories” (13). Merely placing both Floods abreast would have “confused matters too much,” and disrupted the flow of the narrative (13). Thus, the compiler settled on mashing the two stories together, perfecting them into one seamless whole a lower priority to showcasing the thematic and structural similarities to the rest of the Primeval History.

And so we are left in what Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch call

an “interpretive fog,” which “demonstrates one of the Bible’s fundamental principles of not always limiting readers to one interpretative channel” (136). Indeed, Alan Dundes outlines in his own psychoanalytic interpretation the various meanings scholars have pulled from deluge myths (including but not limited to the biblical account):

The flood story has been variously interpreted as a lunar myth (Boklen 1903), a solar myth (Frazer 1918:342, nn.1-3; Berge 1951), or a vegetation or fertility ritual (Follansbee 1939). The floodwaters have also been regarded as a celestial cleansing agent to punish mankind for a blood spilling transgression which “polluted” the antediluvial earth (Frymer-Kensky 1978). Both Freudians (Rank 1912) and Jungians (Kluger 1968) see a dreamlike quality or origin to flood stories. Rheim

expanded Rank's notion that the origin of the flood myth might be sought in vesical dreams in which the urge to urinate during the night was expressed in dream format. (80)

Interpretations such as these, however, sometimes fail to account for the creative minutia of the myths. "Why is the flood so often used as a means of punishing mankind for various sins?" Dundes asks. "How is the flood myth to be explained as a re-creation myth...?" (81). Dundes then answers these questions by proposing that flood myths are a fantasy of male creation, born from an envy of women's procreative powers. Rather than a conflict between man and his feelings for women, however, I will instead start from Dundes's foundation that "that the relationship of God to man is essentially that of parent to child" (an insight taken from Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*) to contend that the biblical

flood myth aims to reinforce a hierarchal family structure (81). After all, Freud's applicability to Judeo-Christianity is rather self-evident: "Honor your father and your mother, so the Lord your God commanded you"; "Pray then in this way: Our Father in Heaven..." (Deut. 5:16; Matt. 6:9). Dundes's assumption, however, that (male) readers are meant to identify themselves in God has repeatedly proven disastrous in the rest of the Bible.

Yet to demonstrate how the Deluge story is one of intergenerational aggression, one must work backward. When the flood is over,

the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. (Gen. 8:21)

Effectively, God has admitted that this whole gambit was for naught. Further, his comment that “the inclination of the human heart is evil from *youth*,” is especially interesting given what is about to befall his favored servant at the hands of his own son. As with the sin of Genesis 6:2, the sin Ham commits against his father in Gen. 9:22 is still hotly debated: is it simple voyeurism, the literal reading; castration, as proposed in the *midrash*; or rape, as suggested by later readers? Here again, where previous sin-judgment cycles are explicit in enumerating humanity’s offenses, the Flood cycle is strikingly vague. As with those who read the “sons of God” as humans, there is little consensus over the precise details of Ham’s transgression, even amongst scholars who agree on its overall sexual nature. C.M. Carmichael, for instance, considers the violation simply “*suggestive of ...sexual encroachment,*”

and could take the form of Ham merely seeing his father naked, which is still a “disrespect of a progenitor’s status” (16, emphasis original).

In fact, when prohibiting incest between father and son, Leviticus 18:7 assumes the actant to be the son— when the actant is the father, the desired party becomes “your son’s daughter” or “your son’s wife” rather than the son himself (Lev. 18:10-15). To Carmichael, this is Leviticus’s commentary on the incident between Ham and Noah; whatever sexual offense occurred, it would seem the son was the instigator. Indeed, despite the text omitting what Ham said to his brothers after the act, it is easy to assume he was bragging, especially given how Shem and Japheth respond by covering Noah and averting their gazes to protect what remains of their father’s dignity. Rendsburg’s comparison of this passage

to Cain's murder of Abel solidifies what Johanna Steibert calls

the implication...that sex with a close relative higher in the social hierarchy can be an effective way of asserting dominance and seizing authority. Ham is depicted as doing something sexually inappropriate to his father and telling his brothers because he is hoping to gain an advantage over his father ...This is a story of inter-generational [sic] power struggle not of sexual longings (Steibert 105).

Whatever the rationale for incest taboos in ancient Hebrew society, Genesis 9 and Leviticus 18:7 recognize in incestuous acts a way to undermine those with greater social power.

A similar interpretation appears in Rabbinic literature. Speiser's thought that Canaan might have been the original youngest son of Noah has been taken up

before in the *Midrash ha-Gadol*: "[God] meant to issue four sons from Noah who would inherit the four winds of the earth. Ham said: I will castrate my father so that he will not produce a fourth son, in order that [this fourth son] will not share the world with us" (to Gen. 9:25, qt. in Shinan & Zakovitch 135). Most interestingly, this idea of the now-impotent man cursing the progeny of his assailant appears explicitly in the *Genesis Rabbah*: "You prevented me from producing a youngest son who would serve me; consequently, the same man will be his brother's slave.... You prevented me from producing a fourth son, consequently I curse your fourth son" (36:7). Shinan and Zakovitch claim the Pentateuch retreats from castration because Noah "did not deserve such a fate," yet is the lingering possibility we are left with that Noah has been sexually

assaulted by his own son truly much of an improvement (136)?

Admittedly, any answer for why the narrator would obscure the assault on Noah and yet clearly articulate the assault on Lot by his daughters in Genesis 19:30-38 is speculative—there is truly nothing better to overcome this difficulty than to propose it was simply one taboo too many. After all, if K. Renato Lings is right in his reading that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 apply technical expressions (similar to “uncovering nakedness”) to forbid male-male incest rather than male homosexuality *in and of itself*, we are nonetheless left with Ham’s actions described as “an abomination” that deserves execution.⁴ Regardless of the

precise nature of the act, Noah curses Canaan instead, likely intending that doing so would wound Ham worse than a direct assault. Can we not see here a similar tactic in God punishing humans for angels’ folly—displacing corporeal punishment onto a proxy to enact emotional vengeance on the true transgressor?

With all of the Flood’s textual murk now illuminated, we can begin fully unpacking how the angel reading of Genesis 6 offers more than merely fitting into popular scholastic thought. While the angel reading may make the transgressive nature of the sin much more apparent, its potentiality to undermine God’s authority is admittedly capitalized on most

⁴ To briefly summarize Ling’s long and complex linguistic argument, I will refer to his alternate translations: “(a) You shall not lie with close relatives, whether male or female. (b) With a male relative you shall not engage in sexual

relationships prohibited with female relatives,” which he acknowledges “may require future refinement” and that his inclusion of the word ‘relative’ is “tantamount to amplifying the text” (246).

successfully in 1 Enoch, wherein not only do the angels take human wives as a conscious rebellion, but teach mankind things forbidden to them by God:

and they taught [humans] charms ² and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants...[God,] Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, which ⁷ men were striving to learn. (7:1-2; 9:6-7).

Despite 1 Enoch's apocryphal status, the Epistle of Jude nevertheless presumes its validity by describing angels who "left their proper dwelling," much as Ham has left his proper position as subordinate to his father by going into Noah's tent (Jude 1:6). The connection between Jude and Genesis 6 is strengthened by the immediate reference

thereafter to "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust" (1:7). Keiser argues that Jude is not *necessarily* validating 1 Enoch's perspective of Genesis 6, but utilizing 1 Enoch, a well-respected text amongst his readers, to bolster his own argument as if he were taking an AP English exam (109-110). Nonetheless, the subversive power of the human/divine marriages so common to surrounding religions was recognized by biblical writers. Psalm 82, in fact, directly acknowledges the power of the "children of the Most High" to undermine God, even if only to then dismiss them: "I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince" (82:6-7).

The angel reading may also better integrate the story into its

surrounding text than the human reading would, despite their involvement breaking an otherwise human-centric narrative. As David Clines writes, the Nephilim, translated literally as “men of name,” are products of the same “dynastic ambitions” that plague other biblical rulers before and after the Flood:

Earlier in the ‘Primeval History’, Cain, in a sense the spiritual though not the physical ancestor of the heroes of 6:4... strives to perpetuate a family name, calling the name of his city by the name of his son Enoch (4:17)... Similarly, the self-sufficient builders of Babel set about building their city and tower with the explicit purpose of making a ‘name’ for themselves. (37)

This would not only link the angels’ miscegenation with the first murder, one done in direct defiance of God’s favoritism between siblings but is a better

inversion of the Tower of Babel incident than the human reading alone provides.

“The Nephilim story relates how the gods came down to the human realm,” as Rendsburg writes, “and the Tower of Babel story tells of man’s efforts to reach the divine realm” (21). This is not merely arrogance, as Keiser argues, but “an attack on the prerogative of God, who himself makes his own name great or glorious (2 Sam. 7:23; Jer. 32:20; Isa. 63:12,14) and who is the true source of ‘name’” (Rendsburg 37-38). Placed as it is between these two other major attempts to undermine God’s authority, the Nephilim fragment loses potency when rendered as merely a polemic against human racial intermixing (although it functions as that as well). With the angel reading, one now can see a progression from the dominating, separate place God held above humanity in the opening Genesis stories, to an open transgression

and muddying of the human/divine boundary that required omnicide to reinstate, finally culminating in humanity's attempt to climb back up and make said boundary physically permeable once again.

Furthermore, the specific reading of the "sons of God" casts both the Ham incident and the Tower of Babel into different lights. For a human reading, the covenant with Noah is the set-up for some poignant dramatic irony: if one assumes the sin is racial intermixing, the most likely culprit, then the Lord promises not to destroy humanity again only for Ham to immediately commit a far worse act. The Tower of Babel, then, is not an inversion but an *escalation* of humanity's egregious behavior. The angel reading, however, contains not only the inversion of the Babel but of Sodom and Gomorrah, as again presupposed by Jude. Within the angel reading, the

destruction of the two cities mirrors Gen. 6:2 and Gen. 9:21-22 with humans now the active instigators of the divine relationships, and a rape by the daughters now textually realized upon the drunken father.

Thus, a new symbolic schema of the Flood story emerges, one which gains clarity and power the deeper a reader goes. Sexuality, incestuous or otherwise, exists with the Flood less as a means of reproduction or pleasure than as a tool with which to undermine, if not actively harm, one's father figure—be him the literal father or God Almighty. Given the Primeval History's obsession with the cosmological hierarchy between humans and deity, it is rather fitting to not only include an instance of the median term, angels, perforating this boundary, but to parallel this betrayal with an abomination so unthinkable the narrator cannot bear to describe it. Thus, not only

is the subservient role of *all* beings under God reinforced, but the subservient role of even adult children to parents is as well. The Flood story, including the entirety of Genesis 9, is a scathing polemic on disrespecting one's elders and the far-reaching, multi-generational consequences of disrupting the strict hierarchy of the patriarchal family unit.

Furthermore, similarities between Lot's daughters and Ham also expose the final place where the angel reading is stronger, albeit in the worst way: xenophobia. As Randall Bailey writes, incest here "by either innuendo or graphical detail [functions] literally as part of an agenda of discrediting...[foreign] individuals and nations and thereby sanctioning, or sanctifying, Israelite hatred and oppression of these people" (124). Ham's story not only echoes the prohibitions in Leviticus, but "serves as the narrative

backdrop that grounds [the Leviticus] laws," as evidenced by Leviticus 18:3's reference to the deplored practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites (136). As Shinan and Zakovitch write, Israel was surrounded by similar stories of divine/human miscegenation that biblical writers "felt unable to ignore...since doing so would allow them to continue to circulate unhindered" (29). Rather, the Bible tightrope-walks "an intermediary path by telling the story in such a way that, while preserving most of the elements of the ancient tale, allowed a believer in one god to feel comfortable" (29). Thus, while the human reading only succeeds in condemning a vague type of inter-hierarchical mixing, the angel reading condemns miscegenation more directly with its clarity and inference that the surrounding enemy religions were once cause for the destruction of almost all humanity. This xenophobia, however,

could be considered a boon only insofar as it better fits the apparent intentionality of the Genesis compiler—and, perhaps, provides a challenge to modern readers who would try and distance themselves from the Bible’s less savory ideologies, as is otherwise so easily done by cutting off the Ham incident and expelling it from Sunday School.

Despite all I have said, it is impossible to wholly dismiss the appeal of the human reading, born as it was out of ethical and narratological concerns, in contrast to the many proponents of the angel reading who seem to defend it still merely because of its historical dominance. Ultimately, although both angel and human readings are roughly symbolically equivalent within this schema of intergenerational conflict, the differences nevertheless split the rest of the Deluge into two distinct experiences with radically different emotional and

structural appeals. The angel reading throws the Deluge story back into its history—its interpretation in 1 Enoch and Rabbinic literature, its place in Israel surrounded by enemy religions whose pantheons often blurred or broke the human/divine boundary—and offers a satisfying cascade down the cosmological hierarchy that ends just short of Sheol, playing out family melodrama on large and small scales. The human reading, although lacking in some of the stronger parallelisms to incidents such as the Tower of Babel and Sodom and Gomorrah, nevertheless more easily sets the story in its immediately surrounding narrative tissue as yet another example of humans attempting to undermine God and facing the consequences, only to have their learning swiftly nullified by their children. Furthermore, it is hard to deny the appeal of its cynicism and dramatic irony in

Ham's assault on his father after the covenant. Reading the entire Deluge story together and probing its symbolic value unveils a family psychosexual melodrama that has been lost in the narrow exegetical complaints that treat both the Deluge's opening and denouement as foundlings crudely stapled onto the text. If the relationship of God to man is that of parent to child, the Deluge is the Bible story for those whose children are at their most hateful, rebellious stages —the human heart is, after all, only evil from youth.

- Bibliography pp. 33–46.,
doi:10.1177/030908927900401304.
- Bailey, Randall C. “They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives.” *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, edited by Mary Ann Tolbert and Fernando F. Segovia, vol. 1, Fortress Press, 1995, pp. 121–138.
- Carmichael, Calum M. *Law, Legend, and Incest in the Bible: Leviticus 18-20*. Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Charles, Robert Henry. “The Book of Enoch.” *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2, Clarendon Press, 1983, pp. 163-281.
- Clines, David J.A. “The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1-11).” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, no. 13, 1979, pp. 571–574.
- Dundes, Alan. "The Flood as Male Myth of Creation." *From Game To War and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1997, pp. 78-91.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995.
- Hart, J. H. A. “Philo of Alexandria.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1905, pp. 78–122., doi:10.2307/1451047.
- Hundley, Michael B. “The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature.” *Review of Biblical Literature*, vol. 20, Jan. 2018, pp. 571–574.
- Hyrceanus, Eliezer ben, and Gerald Friedlander. *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer: (the Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to*

- the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna.* Hermon Press, 1916.
- Speiser, E. A. *Genesis: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*. Doubleday, 1964.
- Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Translated by James Martin, vol. 1, T. & T. Clark, 1866.
- Stiebert, Johanna. *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family*. T & T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018.
- Keiser, Thomas. "THE 'SONS OF GOD' IN GENESIS 6:14-: A RHETORICAL CHARACTERIZATION." *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 80, 2018, pp. 103–20.
- Stuckenbruck, Loren. "The 'Angels' And 'Giants' Of Genesis 6:1-4 In Second And Third Century Bce Jewish Interpretation: Reflections On The Posture Of Early Apocalyptic Traditions." *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2000, pp. 354–377., doi:10.1163/156851700509995.
- Lings, K. "The 'Lyings' of a Woman: Male-Male Incest in Leviticus 18.22?" *Theology & Sexuality*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2009, pp. 231–250., doi:10.1558/tse.v15i2.231.
- Van Gemeren, Willem A. "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4 (an Example of Evangelical Demythologization)." *The Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2, Spr 1981, pp. 320–348.
- Rendsburg, Gary. *Redaction of Genesis*. Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- Walton, John H. "Are the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6 Angels? No." *The Genesis*

Debate: Persistent Questions about

Creation and the Flood, by Ronald F.

Youngblood, Wipf and Stock, 1999, pp.

190–191.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Word Biblical*

Commentary: Genesis 1-15. Word

Books, 1987.

Yalom, Marilyn. *A History of the Wife*.

Pandora, 2004.

Zakovitch, Yair, et al. *From Gods to God : How
the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or*

Changed Ancient Myths and Legends.

The Jewish Publication Society, 2012.

Wright, Archie T. *The Origin of Evil Spirits: the*

Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early

Jewish Literature. Fortress Press, 2015.