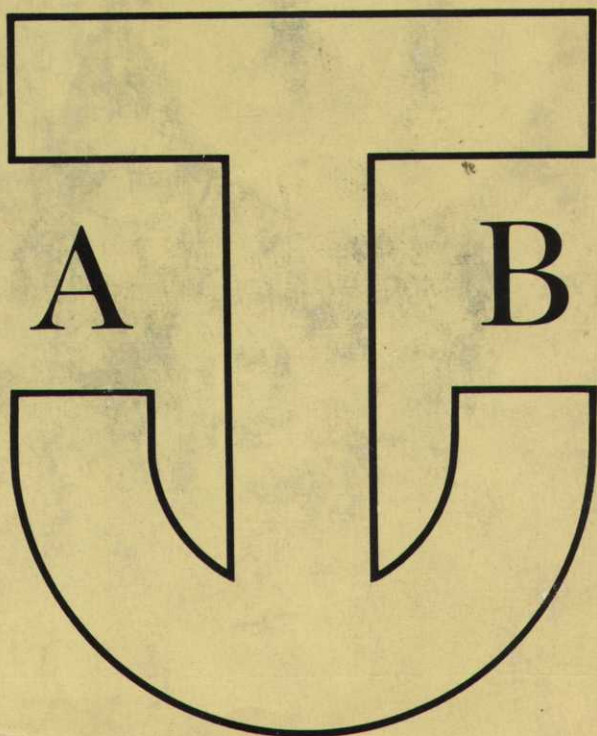


THE ANCHOR BIBLE

GENESIS

translated with an introduction and notes by

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7. PRELUDE TO DISASTER

(vi 1-4: J)

VI ¹ Now when men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, ² the divine beings saw how beautiful were the human daughters and took as their wives any of them they liked. ³ Then Yahweh said, "My spirit shall not shield man forever, since he is but flesh; let the time allowed him be one hundred and twenty years."

⁴ It was then that the Nephilim appeared on earth—as well as later—after the divine beings had united with human daughters. Those were the heroes of old, men of renown.

NOTES

vi 2. *divine beings*. Literally "sons of God/gods." The term 'elōhīm is here clearly differentiated from Yahweh (vs. 3). Elsewhere *J* employs the former in the sense of "Fate, Providence," and the like (see NOTE on xx 13). Here, however, the main stress is on "immortals" as opposed to "mortals."

human daughters. Literally "the daughters of man," in balanced contrast to the above.

3. *shield*. The traditional "abide in" is a guess lacking any linguistic support. For this interpretation, based on Akk. *dinānu* "substitute, surrogate," see JBL 75 (1956), 126 ff.

since he is but flesh. This clause stands for Heb. *bēšaggam*, which is obscure except for the preposition *bē*. A different analysis of the components yields "by reason of their going astray [he is but flesh]." But the first interpretation is superior, though still highly uncertain.

4. *Nephilim*. Named also as a giant race in Num xiii 33. There, however, the context implies that the people found by the spies were like the very Nephilim of old.

united with. Literally "came to," in the idiomatic sense of "cohabited with." This idiom appears to match the circumlocution used in iv 1.

Actually, however, there is one outstanding difference. Whereas "to have experience of" can be applied to either sex, "to come to" refers in this connection only to the male who visits a woman's quarters; cf. xxx 16, xxxviii 16.

men of renown. Literally "men with a name"; cf. Gilg., Yale Tablet, column v, line 7: "a name that endures will I make for myself."

COMMENT

The undisguised mythology of this isolated fragment makes it not only atypical of the Bible as a whole but also puzzling and controversial in the extreme. Its problems are legion: Is what we have here an excerpt from a fuller account? Why was such a stark piece included altogether? Does its present place in the book imply a specific connection with the Flood? Is the stated period of 120 years meant as a deadline for mankind to mend its ways? On these and many similar points arising from the all too laconic passage before us there have been innumerable conflicting opinions, with few if any concrete gains. Of late, however, thanks mainly to the discovery of pertinent literary links, some of the scattered pieces of the puzzle have begun to fall into place. To be sure, the nature of the fragment is such as to discourage confident interpretation. But a semblance of an intelligible pattern appears to be indicated at long last.

The passage is dated explicitly to the time of the initial appearance of the Nephilim, who are described as "the heroes of old"; the LXX version translates the noun as "giants." Now Greek mythology (Hesiod, Pseudo-Apollodorus) recalls an unsavory stage in the history of the gods, which involves the leading triad of the pantheon: Uranus (Sky) wars against his children, but is defeated and emasculated by his son Cronus, who is vanquished in turn by his own son Zeus. The latter, however, must then do battle with a group of giants known as Titans, and subsequently with a particularly menacing monster named Typhon.

A closely related Phoenician tradition is reported by Philo of Byblos, in the name of a much older author, a certain Sanchunyathon. This relationship is so prominent that ultimate derivation of the Phoenician material from Greek sources has been suggested more than once (cf. E. G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1-4," JNES 6 [1947], 193 ff., especially 205). It was further assumed that the biblical account under discussion may allude to a