

# Sons of God Marrying Daughters of Man: An Exercise in Integrated Theology.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the issues of spiritual spouses and identify possibly ways in which the church can respond to this phenomenon. The study conducted was a biblical, historical, and systematic enquiry into this phenomenon, with relationship between the ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughter of man’ in Genesis 6:2 as the point of departure. The study revealed that the scriptures and both past and present church leaders taught that spiritual beings can be involved in sexual activities with human beings. The paper concluded by proposing practical ways in which the church should respond to this phenomenon.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Gifford (2004:97) described cases in the ministry of the Ghanaian prophet, Elisha Salifu Amoako, where spirit beings were said to have had sexual intercourse with human beings. One woman was said to have married a marine spirit. He explains: ‘a man involved in witchcraft

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

was said to have eight wives pregnant in the spirit realm, who included crocodile spirits and spirits of rats ... One really forlorn pregnant woman who admitted she had no husband was told she had been impregnated by a spirit taking the form of a man' (p. 97).

The phenomenon of claiming human beings having sexual intercourse with spirits are not limited in Africa to Ghana alone. In my country of origin, the republic of Suriname, spirit beings play a critical role in the life of the Afro-Surinamese people. Many have claimed possession by different kinds of spirits, some of which may have even force some into prostitution or illegitimate sexual relationships. For example, a woman with a male Apuku spirit would claim having sexual relationships with that spirit in her dreams. Understandably, it is difficult for such a woman to develop and maintain a permanent relationship with a man. Social scientist, Gloria Wekker (1994:83–84), and the Roman Catholic priest, Karel Choennie (1997:55), have both discussed this phenomenon in their works.

Having studied various African Christian television broadcasting networks over the past five years, some episodes stand out. For example, during the services of the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN), broadcasted on Emmanuel TV, deliverance from 'spiritual husbands' and 'spiritual wives' are not uncommon. These spiritual spouses are described as evil spirits that come in the night, in the form of human beings, to have intercourse with their human 'spouses'. In extreme cases, the spiritual spouses seem to appear not only in night dreams, but also, during the day. In the case of a 'spiritual spouse', the normal marital life of that person is often in disarray. In the examples from Ghana and Suriname, the spiritual spouses were limited to black Africans. In the case of SCOAN, there were a number of white people involved. The issue of spirits having sexual intercourse with human beings seems to be a serious problem in contemporary Christianity.

People witnessed to the impact that these so-called spiritual spouses have on their personal and marital life. Marriages of such people often end in divorce. At the deliverance services, these spirits claimed to have destroyed the lives of husbands and wives, including their businesses.

This phenomenon did not start with contemporary Christianity. In the history of Christianity, these so-called spiritual spouses were known by their Latin names, namely, *incubus* (male) and *succubus* (female).

The Church Father Augustine wrote: “‘incubi’, had often made wicked assaults upon women, and satisfied their lust upon them’ (*City of God*, 15.23.1). More than a millennium later, Martin Luther also wrote about this issue: ‘I do not deny, but believe, that the devil may happen to be either a succubus or an incubus’ (Luther 1960:11).

It seems that claims of spirits having intercourse with people was a familiar phenomenon to Christians, both past and present.

In his book, *A Way to Escape*, Neil Anderson made the point that a unique situation appeared in Genesis 6. According to him, the ‘sons of God’, who were apparently fallen angels, ‘cohabited with human women to produce human offspring’ (1997:70). The reference to Genesis 6 is interesting, because some theologians believe that the passage refers to angels who left their place, came to the earth, and married women. The second-century church leader, Justin Martyr (AD 100–160), was of a similar opinion. According to him, the offspring of the angels and the women ‘are those who are called demons’ (*Second Apology*, 5). Is Genesis 6, then, speaking about spiritual beings having sexual relationship with human beings?

## 1.2. The research problem

Is there biblical evidence for the idea that spirits (angelic or demonic) can have sexual relationships with human beings? And, what should be the church's response to the claims of members who claim that they have spiritual spouses?

## 1.3. Methodology

The paper will conduct an integrated theological inquiry into the possibility of spirits having sexual relationships with human beings. Smith (ch. 6) said the following about the integrated theological inquiry as proposed by the South African Theological Seminary: 'We are committed to the belief that holistic theological reflection ought to integrate perspectives from biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology.'

The idea for such an approach is the belief that 'theology is fundamentally a single discipline; therefore, we need a model of theology that integrates insights from various sub-disciplines' (Smith, ch. 6). This paper is an attempt to apply this holistic theological reflection to the above-mentioned problem. Following the introduction, this study is divided into the following four sections:

- (1) A historical study of the interpretation of the phrase 'sons of God' in Genesis 6 in the works of selected theologians and their views on the role of spirits in having sexual relationships with human beings.
- (2) An exegetical study of the phrase 'sons of God' in Genesis 6 and the rest of the Old Testament, and a biblical theological study of the relationship between 'angels/spirits' and women in the New Testament.

- (3) A systematic formulation of the findings addressing questions concerning the influences of spirit beings in the sexual life of human beings.
- (4) A pastoral approach is suggested for handling these cases.

## 2. A Historical Perspective

This section of the study is concerned with the history of the interpretation of the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:2 from a thematic perspective, with special focus on the possibility of spiritual beings having sexual relationships with human beings. A review of the literature revealed four major views on the identity of the ‘sons of God’, namely, (a) the godly-line of Seth view, (b) the dynastic rulers view, (c) the assembly of the gods view, and (d) and the view that the sons of God refer to angels. The first two views advocate that the sons of God are human beings, whereas the third and fourth views identify them with spiritual (supernatural) beings.

### 2.1. The godly line of Seth theory

#### 2.1.1. Biblical evidence for this the godly line of Seth theory

According to this view, Seth’s descendants, who were godly people, intermarried with the ungodly line of Cain. In the book of Genesis, we find many examples of such intermarriages (cf. Gen 26:34–35; 27:46). The Hebrew phrase, *benê-hā’elōhîm*, translated ‘sons of God’, is used to express the relationship between God and the believers.

Keil and Delitzsch (vol. 1, book 1, 1996:128) gives further scriptural evidence for this view in his commentary on Genesis 6, and argues as follows:

For it is not to angels only that the term 'sons of Elohim', or 'sons of Elim', is applied; but in Psalms 73:15, in an address to Elohim, the godly are called 'the generation of Thy sons', i.e. sons of Elohim. In Deut. 32:5 the Israelites are called His (God's) sons, and in Hos. 1:10, 'sons of the living God', and in Psalms 80:17, Israel is spoken of as the son, whom Elohim has made strong. These passages show that the expression 'sons of God' cannot be elucidated by philological means, but must be interpreted by theology alone.

Livingston (1969:53) supports Keil, and quotes some New Testament passages where believers (human beings) are clearly called sons of God (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:14; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1; Rev 21:7). It is important to note that Adam is called the son of God in Luke 3:38. Augustine (*City of God* 15.23.1) argues that godly men, such as John the Baptist (Mark 1:2) and Malachi (Mal 2:7), were called 'angels' in scripture. Therefore, even if the phrase 'sons of God' was identified to mean 'angels', it could be referring to righteous people.

Examples of several Christian scholars who have supported this view follows.

### ***2.1.2. Sextus Julius Africanus (c.160–c. 240)***

Sextus Julius Africanus, a late second-century and early third-century AD African Christian writer, wrote 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 Saviour Himself' (Africanus, 1997:131). In his view, the daughters of men were the 'the descendants of Cain', who have 'nothing divine in them'.

### 2.1.3. Ephrem the Syrian (c.AD 306–373)

Ephrem, a fourth-century Christian from the city Nisibis (present-day Turkey), argued that ‘Noah overcame the waves of lust, which had drowned in his generation the sons of Seth. Because his flesh revolted against the daughters of Cain’ (*Nisibene Hymns* 1.4). He made the same remark in his commentary on Genesis.

### 2.1.4. Augustine (AD 354–430)

The church father, Augustine of Hippo, also supported this view (*City of God* 15.22.1). He wrote: ‘Giants therefore might well be born, even before the sons of God, who are also called angels of God, formed a connection with the daughters of men, or of those living according to men, that is to say, before the sons of Seth formed a connection with the daughters of Cain’ (*City of God* 15.23.2).

### 2.1.5. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

The thirteenth-century Italian church leader, Thomas Aquinas, quoted Augustine verbatim in his *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas agreed that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were the descendants of Seth. Concerning the role of incubi in procreation, he wrote (vol. I, Question 53, Article 3, *Reply to Objection* 6):

Still if some are occasionally begotten from demons, it is not from the seed of such demons, nor from their assumed bodies, but from the seed of men taken for the purpose; as when the demon assumes first the form of a woman, and afterwards of a man; just as they take the seed of other things for other generating purposes ... so that the person born is not the child of a demon, but of a man.

Even though he was not of the opinion that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were angelic beings, he believed that (demonic) spirits could have sexual relationships with human beings and even play a role in procreation.

### *2.1.6. Martin Luther (1483–1546)*

The German Reformer, Martin Luther, identified the sons of God with what he called 'those who had the promise of the blessed Seed and belonged to the blessed Seed' (Luther 1960:10). They are, according to him, 'the true church'. He continued to write: 'When they yielded to the seductions of the Cainite church, they also proceeded to gratify the desires of the flesh and to take wives from the Cainite race, likewise concubines, as many as they wanted and whomever they chose' (p. 10).

Luther disagreed with those who identified the sons of God with 'incubi' or 'the sons of the mighty'. Even though he does not deny the existence of incubi, he does not believe that they were involved in Genesis 6. Luther denied 'that anything can be born from the union of a devil and a human' (p. 11). He explained that 'the true meaning of the passage is that Moses designates as sons of God those people who had the promise of the blessed Seed. It is a term of the New Testament and designates the believers, who call God Father and whom God, in turn, calls sons' (p. 12).

Even though he does not mention the name of Seth, it can be gathered from his description that he is referring to Seth's offspring as the people who had the promise of the 'blessed seed'.



### 2.1.7. *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

According to the French Reformer John Calvin, it is clear from the context that the sons of God are the sons of Seth. The distinction between ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’ is one of ‘godliness’ and ‘godlessness’. He says the following in his commentary of Genesis 6:1 (2002:n.p.): ‘It was, therefore, base ingratitude in the posterity of Seth, to mingle themselves with the children of Cain, and with other profane races; because they voluntarily deprived themselves of the inestimable grace of God.’

### 2.1.8. *Scholars from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries*

The godly line of Seth theory was supported and defended by the following scholars in their commentaries from the seventeenth-century forwards: Albert Barnes (1798–1870), Adam Clarke (1762–1832), Burton Coffman (1905–2006), Thomas Cooke (1747–1814), John Gill (1697–1771), Matthew Henry (1662–1714), John Peter Lange (1802–1884), Herbert Carl Leupold (1891–1972), Matthew Poole (1624–1679), Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921) and John Wesley (1703–1791).

The well-known *Commentary critical and explanatory on the whole Bible*, by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (1871), and *The pulpit commentary*, edited by Spence and Exell (c. 1890), also supported this view.

Therefore, it seems that from Augustine onwards, a number of respected scholars supported and defended the godly line of Seth view.

## 2.2. The dynastic-ruler theory

American theologian, Meredith Kline, wrote an article entitled 'Divine Kingship and Gen. 6:1–4', in which he defended the dynastic-ruler theory. According to him, the phrase 'sons of God' refers to kings or dynastic rulers. He argues (pp. 191–192):

From the several great kingdoms which formed the setting of Old Testament history the evidence has been amassed, showing that kings were often regarded as in one sense or another divine and that they were indeed called sons of the various gods... From the titulary of this pagan ideology of divine kingship the term *benê-hā'elōhîm* was appropriated in Genesis 6:1–4 as a designation for the antediluvian kings.

In Romans 13:6, Paul calls the dignitaries 'servants of God'. He could have used the phrase 'sons of God' (p. 193), since the Old Testament called rulers *'ēlōhîm* ('God' or 'gods'). The word *'ēlōhîm* is used in the sense of 'judges' in Exodus (21:6; 22:8–9, 28). The Targum Onkelos translated this last verse as follow: 'Thou shalt not revile the judges, nor curse the ruler of My people' (Exod 22:27), and the Targum Pseudo Jonathan reads in the first part: 'Sons of Israel My people, ye shall not revile your judges'. Contrary to the Targumim, the English translations normally translate *'ēlōhîm* in the first part of the verse as 'God', as in the NET: 'You must not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people'.

Kline shows further support for this view in the translation of *benê-hā'elōhîm* in the Targumim and the Greek translation of Symmachus (p. 194), explaining that Onkelos translated it as 'the sons of the mighty' and Pseudo Jonathan as 'the sons of the great'. Symmachus translated it as 'sons of the *dunasteuontōn*', 'sons of the powerful'.

Kline continues (1962:195–196):

The sin was that of Cainite Lamech, the sin of polygamy, particularly as it came to expression in the harem, characteristic institution of the ancient oriental despot's court. In this transgression the benê-hā'elōhîm flagrantly violated the sacred trust of their office as guardians of the general ordinances of God for human conduct.

Kline provided further support for this view from extra-biblical sources. The idea of dynastic rulers before the flood is found in sources such as the old Babylonian flood epic (p. 197–198) and the Sumerian King List (p. 198 ff.).

Kaiser (1996:108), in his discussion on the dynastic-ruler theory, draws the following conclusions:

‘Sons of God’ is an early, but typical, reference to the titularies for kings, nobles and aristocrats in the ancient Near Eastern setting. These power-hungry despots not only lusted after power but also were powerfully driven to become ‘men of a name’ (or ‘men of renown’—Gen 6.4). ... They also became polygamous, taking and marrying ‘any of [the women] they chose’ (Gen 6.2).

Kline (pp. 203–204) concluded his article on a Christocentric note. According to him, none of the rulers in ancient Israel ruled in perfect righteousness (p. 203). It was necessary to warn them that they would die like men (Ps 82:7).

But it is the confession of the church that the king-ideal has found embodiment in the seed of David whom David called ‘my Lord’; to whom God declared, ‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee’; who was a priest-king after the order of Melchizedek,

'without father, without mother'; the righteous Servant who was the King of kings and the Gibbor of Gibborim, for he was, the mighty One who is God (Isa. 9:6); who lusted not after a name but humbled himself in obedience unto the death of the cross, and therefore has been given a name which is above every name, that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9–11).

### 2.3. Assembly of the gods

In recent years, much attention was given to the possibility that the 'sons of God' may have been 'the sons of the gods' or 'the assembly of the gods'. Different arguments are presented in favour of this view. In Hebrew, the word *ben* may have the meaning of 'belonging to a group or category'. Therefore, the phrase, 'sons of God', may be interpreted to mean, 'beings belonging to the divine category or group'.

According to Brendan Bynre (1992:156), there was a time when there was room for a plurality of divine beings in Israel's history. The sons of God refer to these divine beings, who were members of the 'assembly of the gods'. This view was also known among the Canaanites, and it was allegedly reflected in the Psalms. In the Bible, however, these gods are subject to the authority of Yahweh (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:6; cf. Deut 32:43, LXX). Some of the alleged conversations that took place in the assembly of the gods are still found in the mysterious plural passages in Genesis (cf. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). Bynre is not alone in holding this view.

In extra-biblical sources from Mesopotamia, during the period of the Old Testament, the phrase *puḫur ilāni*, 'assembly of gods', was not uncommon. In Ugarit, the phrase 'assembly of the gods' was also recognised. The sons of El, who were all members of the assembly of the gods, were called '*ilm*, 'gods'. The Ugaritic phrase, *phr bn `ilm*, was

used for the ‘assembly of the gods’. This idea is also known in a Hittite myth. These gods were able to eat, drink, and procreate (Beyerlin 1978:158).

According to Mullen (1992:215), the Old Testament referred to these gods, who were members of the assembly of the gods, in passages such as Psalms 82:6. They were called *bēnē ’elyôn*, ‘sons of the most High’, and in Psalms 29:1 and 89:7, *benē ’ēlīm*, ‘sons of Gods’. ‘A more general designation of the members of Yahweh’s court is *qēdōšīm*, “holy ones” (Deut 33:2–3; Job 5:1, 15:15[Q]; Pss 16:3; 89:6, 8; Zech 14:5; Prov 9:10; 30:3), or the collective meaning of *qōdeš* (Exod 15:11; Pss 77:14; 93:5; cf. Ugarit *bn qdš*)’ (p. 215).

Genesis 6:2 is also considered to be a reference to the members of the divine assembly.

## 2.4. The sons of God are angels

The oldest theory about the identity of the sons of God is that they were angels. The earliest Jewish and Christian writers supported this view.

### 2.4.1. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 40)

Philo of Alexandria was an Egyptian Hellenistic Jewish Bible expositor. He wrote very detailed expositions on the Pentateuch. In his exposition *On the Giants* (§6), he made the following comments: ‘And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men ... Those beings, whom other philosophers call demons, Moses usually calls angels; and they are souls hovering in the air.’

The Greek translation of the text on which Philo based his exposition translated the phrase as ‘the angels of God’. It is rather remarkable that

he does not accept them to be demons, but angels, souls that hover in the air.

#### *2.4.2. Flavius Josephus (AD 37–110)*

Josephus, a Jewish historian from Jerusalem, seemed to have used a Greek text that supported the angelic theory. He wrote (*Antiquities* I, iii 1): '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.'

He seems to support the idea that these spirit beings were able to procreate and produce sons that were unjust.

#### *2.4.3. The Book of Enoch*

The pseudo-epigraphic book of Enoch is a collection of writings that were allegedly composed between the third-century BC and the first-century AD. The Ethiopian Church considered this book to be part of the canon of the church. The book gave a detailed description of the events discussed in Genesis 6. Fragments of this book were found in the Qumran documents, making it an old work. 'And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after ... the beautiful and comely daughters of men'. The leader of the group was Semjaza. Other angels who were chiefs of tens supported him (1 Enoch 6:1–8).

In chapter 9, the angel Uriel was sent to warn Noah about the flood that was to come. Gabriel was sent to destroy the giants and Raphael to take charge of Azazel, who was to be covered with darkness until the great day of judgment when 'he shall be cast into the fire' (1 Enoch 10:4–6). Michael was given the responsibility to deal with Semjaza and his associates. They were also given a temporary judgment 'till the

judgment that is for ever and ever is consummated' (1 Enoch 10:11–12). This book is not recognized as canonical by the rest of the church, but Jude and 2 Peter used it in their canonical letters in the New Testament. Enoch also supported the notion that the angels were able to procreate with human beings and that the offspring of those union were giants.

#### *2.4.4. The Book of Jubilees*

The pseudo-epigraphic book of Jubilees is probably older than the LXX, Josephus, and Philo. It is also considered to be canonical by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. According to Charles (1913:163), this book should be dated before the Maccabean era. It is an extended paraphrase of Genesis and parts of Exodus. According to this book, the angels were sent to the earth to teach the people 'that they should do judgment and uprightness on the earth' (Jub 4:15). After that, they saw the beautiful daughters that were born to mankind on earth and they took them as wives. 'They bear unto them sons and they were giants' (Jub 5:1–2). Jubilees not only supported the angelic view, it also supported the idea of angelic procreation with human beings.

#### *2.4.5. Other Jewish writings*

The *Genesis Apocryphon* that was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls also seemed to support the angelic theory (*1QapGen2*). One of the fragments described Lamech's doubt about the child that was born to him and his wife Batenosh. He asked his wife whether the child was from the 'Watchers' (the word used in Jubilees 4:15 for the sons of God). Batenosh denied it and assured Lamech that this child was of his seed.

Even though the *Targum Pseudo Jonathan* translated *benê-hā'elōhîm* as the 'sons of the great' in verse 2, it referred to angelic leaders in verse 4. It says the following: 'Schamchazai and Uzziel, who fell from heaven, were on the earth in those days'. The reference to Schamchazai and Uzziel's fall from heaven seems to indicate support for the angelic theory. The children who were born to the daughters of men, however, were from the sons of the great, human leaders (Gen 6:4).

#### 2.4.6. *The Church Fathers*

The early Church Fathers supported the angelic view. Justin Martyr (AD 100–160) referred to this view in his *Second Apology* (5), writing the following: 'But the angels transgressed this appointment, and were captivated by love of women, and begat children who are those that are called demons'. He referred to the children, who came out of these unions, as demons.

Athenagoras of Athens (c. AD 133–190) followed Justin. He wrote: 'but some [angels] outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them ... these fell into impure love of virgins'. These angles procreated with these women and giants were born to them (Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 24).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215) referred to the angelic view when he wrote that 'the angels who had obtained the superior rank, having sunk into pleasures, told to the women the secrets which had come to their knowledge' (*Stromata* 5.1). Origen of Alexandria (AD 184–253) probably supported this view (*Against Celsus* 5.54).

Tertullian (AD 160–220) from Carthage called the sons of God 'those angels, the deserters from God, the lovers of women' (*On Idolatry* 9; see also his *Against Marcion* 5.18). In his *On the Veiling of Virgins* (7),



he gave an exposition of 1 Corinthians 11, explaining why women and, in particular virgins, ‘ought to be veiled’. In his exposition of verse 10, he referred to the event in Genesis 6. He wrote the following: ‘For if (it is) on account of the angels—those, to wit, whom we read of as having fallen from God and heaven on account of concupiscence after females.’ If these angels lusted after older women, will they not ‘be inflamed for virgins’? He continued to argue that it is ‘the duty of virgins to be veiled’, because it is ‘more possible for virgins to have been the cause of the angels’ sinning’ than the older women. He clearly supports the angelic view.

#### *2.4.7. Scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*

Even though the godly line of Seth theory was the predominant view from the Reformation onwards, some scholars continued to support the angelic view (e.g. Umberto Cassuto 1961; Samuel Rolles Driver 1909; Derek Kidner 1967; John Skinner 1910; George James Spurrell 1887; Merrill Unger 1981). In 1981, Willem VanGemeren wrote a detailed exegetical study, in which he defended the angelic view.

### **3. A Biblical Perspective**

What is the biblical view on the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:2? Is there any biblical support for the notion that angels procreated with human beings?

#### **3.1. The text**

The Hebrew phrase translated as ‘sons of God’ in the Masoretic Text is *benê-hā’elōhîm*. It presents translation challenges, and older

translations and versions also seem to have problems translating and understanding it.

### 3.2. The translations

How did the older translators deal with this passage? The Latin Vulgate translated the single words as *filius Dei*, 'sons of God', but according to George James Spurrell (1887:66), the *Vetus Itala*, the old Latin translation, translated *angeli Dei* as 'angels of God'. The Syriac Peshitta transliterated the Hebrew phrase as 'sons of God'. Some manuscripts of the LXX rendered this phrase as *huioi tou theou* ('sons of God') or *angeloi tou theou* ('angels of God'). The Aramaic versions of the Old Testament (Targumim) have different readings as well. The *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* reads: 'that the sons of the great ones (Onkelos, 'mighty') saw that the daughters of men'.

A majority of English Bibles translate the phrase as 'sons of God' (e.g. ESV; KJV; NASB; NET; NIV; NJB; NKJV; NLT). A few translate it differently:

- Today's English Version (TEV): 'some of the heavenly beings' or 'sons of the gods' or 'sons of God'.
- Revised English Bible (REB): 'The sons of the gods'.
- Contemporary English Version (CEV): 'supernatural beings'.
- Jewish Publication Society (JPS): 'the divine beings'.

Why do the translations differ, if the Hebrew text does not have variant readings? The differences are 'translational', that is, different ways of translating the same word(s). This will become clearer in the later grammatical and lexical segments of the study.

### 3.3. Lexical interpretation

According to Gesenius (1857, s.v. *'elōhîm*) the phrase *benê-hā'elōhîm* is used for three groups in the Old Testament, namely: 'angels, kings ... and men who piously worship God'. According to him, the phrase in Genesis 6:2 refers to angels.

The dictionary of Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1906, s.v. *'elōhîm*), which is largely based on the work of Gesenius, identifies four possible meanings for the phrase: 'a. rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power; b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels; c. angels; d. gods.'

*Bēnê hā'ēlōhîm* ('sons of God') is given the following explanation: 'the sons of God' or 'sons of gods' are equivalent to 'angels' in the following passages: Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Genesis 6:2, 6:4. It indicated that other usages of the phrase include 'sons of princes, mighty men'.

HALOT (Koehler et al s.v. *'elōhîm*) followed BDB, giving the same definitions for *'ēlōhîm*: 'a. rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power; b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels; c. angels; d. gods, the (true) God.'

Haag (1975:157ff.) seems to favour the idea of divine beings, who are members of 'a pantheon under the leadership of a supreme god'. This idea is supported by Near Eastern documents. Caragounis (1996:676) disputed this idea, since Israel's monotheism did not leave room for 'gods in a pantheon'. He argued for 'heavenly beings'.

The lexica (Gesenius; BDB; HALOT) support the idea of 'angels' in Genesis 6, whereas the theological dictionaries (Haag 1975; Caragounis 1996) argued for either divine or heavenly beings, even though Caragounis supported an angelic interpretation of the phrase in Job.

### 3.4. Grammatical interpretation

According to Gesenius (§ 128v) *běné* ('sons of') denotes 'membership of a guild or society (or of a tribe, or, any definite class)'. The phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm* means 'beings of the class of 'ēlōhîm'.

Joüon and Muraoka's (§ 129j) advanced grammar stands in agreement with Gesenius. "Sons of", *běné*, "is also used to indicate that an individual belongs to a class of beings". The phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm* then refers to individuals belonging to the class of *ēlōhîm*, therefore "divine beings".

The lexica and grammars provide various translational options for the phrase *běné hā'ēlōhîm*. The grammars favours 'divine beings'. The lexical options are much more diverse, including 'sons of gods', 'sons of God', 'angels', and 'sons of the rulers or judges'. Therefore, the differences in the translations are based on the possible meanings of the phrase in Hebrew. Does the context and historical setting of the passage provide further details?

### 3.5. Historical and Literary Context

Newman (1984:14–15) states that 'Gen 6:1–4 seems to be something of an "erratic boulder" for all interpreters, standing apart to some extent from its context' (p. 14). Some exegetes discussed the passage within the whole of Genesis 1–11. Houtman (1976:72) argued that the passage should be seen as a paragraph within a broader context.

Ross (1988:180) drew attention to the literary allusions that resemble the fall of Eve. In Genesis 6:2, the sons of God ‘saw’ and ‘took’. That resembles what Eve did in Genesis 3:6. Eve also ‘saw’ and ‘took’. Furthermore, Ross treated Genesis 6:1–8 as a whole, and discovered the following structural indicators: ‘the sons of God saw’ (v. 2) and the Lord saw’ (v. 5). The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were ‘beautiful’, whereas God saw that the ‘wickedness’ of man was great. Ross (p. 180) summarized the message of Gen 6:1–8 as follows: ‘In response to the wickedness on the earth, in which superhuman beings overstepped their bounds and mankind’s thoughts and deeds were completely evil, the Lord God determined to destroy all living creatures except the recipients of grace.’

Furthermore, the context seems to suggest that the daughters of men (v. 2) were the offspring of humankind that began to multiply itself (v. 1). Verse 1 focused specifically on the fact that ‘daughters’ were born to humankind. They appear in verse 2 as offsprings of humankind. ‘Sons of God’ in verse 2 seem to indicate *beings belonging to another class* (that was not mentioned before), rather than simply referring to humankind. The passage seems to focus on the fact that the sons of God ‘took wives’ (v. 2) and were having ‘sexual relations’ with them (v. 4). If this is correct, as the lexical and grammatical interpretation suggests (i.e. the sons of God are divine beings or angels), then, this passage may be referring to ‘spirits’ that had sexual relations with human beings. Does the broader biblical context of the phrase provide further information?

### 3.6. Biblical Context

Are there other biblical passages in the Old and New Testament that refer to the events in Genesis 6:2, 4? In addition, how is the phrase *bēnē*

*hā'ēlōhîm* translated in other Old Testament passages? This section is an analysis of all the appearances of the phrase in the Old Testament and how scholars have interpreted it. The following section is a closer look at New Testament passages that seem to refer to the Genesis 6 event.

### *3.6.1. Bēnē hā'ēlōhîm and related phrases in the Old Testament*

*Bēnē hā'ēlōhîm* appears in a few Old Testament passages (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7). Psalms 29:1 and 89:7 spelled 'God' as *'ēlîm* instead of *'ēlōhîm* (see Gesenius GKC § 124 q). In Daniel 3:25, we have the Aramaic phrase *bar 'ēlāhîn*, which is similar to *bēnē hā'ēlōhîm*. How were these phrases translated and interpreted?

The LXX translated the phrase as 'the angels of God' in the book of Job. Hartley (1988:71) calls them 'the celestial beings or angels whom God created as his servants'. Clines (2002:18) says they are God's 'courtiers, other heavenly beings neither human nor divine in the full sense, but 'sons of God', their being derivative from his, and their rank superhuman'. Pope (1965:9) translated the phrase as 'the gods'. According to him, they are 'lesser members of the ancient pagan pantheon who are retained in later monotheistic theology as angels'. He argued that they are simply called 'gods' in Psalm 82:1. Interpreters tend to favour the supernatural identity of the sons of God in Job. Liberal interpreters, such as Pope, see them as celestial beings, whereas evangelical scholars, who do not believe in the pantheon theory, call them angels.

In his explanation of the phrase in the Psalms, Dahood (1966:175) argued that, in the Old Testament, the sons of God 'refer to the angels or spiritual beings who are members of Yahweh's court and do his biddings'. Goldingay (2006:416) agrees, suggesting that the Middle

Eastern use of the word ‘god’ seems to refer to ‘anything that is not regular humanity’.<sup>2</sup> Broyles (1999:152) captured the Old Testament understanding of the concept well, when he wrote: ‘What their neighbours regarded as gods serving their kings, Israel regarded as heavenly beings that do Yahweh’s bidding.’ The sons of God in the Psalms are angels or spiritual beings.

Scholars seem to understand the phrase *bar ’ēlāhîn* in Daniel 3:25 in the same way as they do with *bēnē hā’ēlōhîm*. The Greek translations rendered this phrase in two different ways. One translated it as ‘angel of God’, and the other ‘son of g(G)od’. The English translations also handle the phrase in different ways:

- a son of the gods (Dan 3:25, ESV)
- the Son of God (Dan 3:25, KJV)
- a god (Dan 3:25, NET)

The reading of the KJV, which capitalizes ‘Son’, seems to refer to the second person of the trinity, the pre-incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how some Church Fathers identify the mysterious fourth person in this event (see Montgomery 1926:215). Young also seems to adopt this view (1949:94–95). He refers to Isaiah 43:1–3, where God promises that he himself will be with his people in time of difficulties. Verse 2: ‘When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you’ (NET).

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this is seen in the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 28:13, where Saul said he saw ‘*ēlōhîm* coming up from the ground’. In this verse, *ēlōhîm* refers to a deceased person.

'A god' or 'a son of the gods' in the sense of a being belonging to the 'race of the gods' may be a better way of translating the phrase (Keil and Delitzsch 1996:575). According to Aalders (1962:83), this is more in agreement with the general Semitic understanding. The king who spoke was not a Jew, and he seemed to have a different explanation for this person (v. 28). According to him, God sent *mal'akēh* 'his angel, messenger' to deliver his servants. He identified the divine being with an angel. The angelic view is also supported by Jewish expositors (see also Aalders p. 83). Miller (1994:123) quoted Slotki, who said that the Talmud identified this angel as with Gabriel.

### *3.6.2. The New Testament and the events of Genesis 6:2, 4*

A number of New Testament passages are relevant for the understanding of the Genesis 6 account. The first passage is Matthew 22:30, where Christ spoke about the angels of heaven that do not marry. Both Peter (2 Pet 2:4) and Jude (Jude 6) seem to refer to angels who have sinned. Some scholars (e.g. Bauckham 1998:51) refer to the passages in 1 Corinthians 11:10, 1 Timothy 2:9, and 1 Peter 3:19–20.

In Matthew 22:30, the Lord Jesus said, 'angels do not marrying'. This, to some, is a clear indication that the 'sons of God' who married the daughters of men were not angels (e.g. Livingston 1969:52).

It seems that 2 Peter 2:4–6 refers to three events in the book of Genesis, in successive order. Peter spoke about angels who sinned (v. 4), the ancient world to which Noah preached (v. 5), and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6). These events are described respectively in Genesis 6:1–4, 7–9, and 18:16–19:29. By making that connection, Peter accepted the idea that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were angels. A number of major commentaries confirm that Peter is referring to the sons of God in Genesis 6 (Bauckham 1998:248; Davids 2006:225;



Kelly 1969:331; Reike 1964:164; Schneider 2003:336). Peter does not specify the sin of the angels. His emphasis is on the certainty of God's judgement for sinners. These angels were thrown 'into hell and locked ... up in chains in utter darkness', and are 'kept until the judgment' (2 Peter 2:4).<sup>3</sup>

Jude 6–7 is similar to 2 Peter 2:4–6. Jude, however, provides more details about the nature of the sin that the angels have committed. Two issues are mentioned, namely, 'position' (v. 6), and the kind of sin that they have committed (v. 7).

The NIV translation articulates it as follows: they did not keep their positions of authority, but abandoned their own home (see also ESV). In other words, the angels *left* their own homes. Bauckham (1998:52) notes that ἀρχήν, here, means a position of heavenly power or sphere of dominion which the angels exercised over the world in the service of God.

These angels left their place of authority that they had and came down to the daughters of men. This led to their consequent sin, sexual immorality (v. 7). The NET translates this verse as follows: 'So also Sodom and Gomorrah ... since they indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire in a way similar to these angels.'

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the same as that of the angels. They have given themselves to fornication. The NIV translates it as

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine argued that the passage of 2 Peter does not refer to the angels of Genesis 6. According to him, Peter 'speaks of these who first apostatized from God, along with their chief the devil, who enviously deceived the first man under the form of a serpent' (*City of God* 15.23.1). Angels, in his view, could not have fallen to the level that is described in Genesis 6.

follows: 'In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah ... gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.' The sin of the angels, then, clearly was sexual sin. This corresponds with the account of Genesis 6:1–4.

## 4. A Systematic Perspective on the Sons of God

The previous sections revealed several characteristics about the identity of the sons of God. The biblical perspective indicated that the phrase, *benê-hā'elōhîm*, can be translated and interpreted in various ways. The view that had most support among the early Jewish and Christian writers was the angelic view. From Augustine onwards, however, there seemed to have been a move away from the angelic view, in favour of the godly line of Seth theory. These two views represent a supernatural versus a human theory respectively. Remarkably, these two opposing views reappear under two different views, namely, the divine assembly (supernatural) versus the dynastic-ruler (human) respectively. This section presents a systematic perspective on the identity of the sons of God and the problem of spiritual spouses as a conclusion of the biblical and historical perspectives.

### 4.1. The sons of God in the Old Testament are angels

All references to the phrase *benê-hā'elōhîm* in the Old Testament seem to refer to heavenly or divine beings (see 3.4). In the context of scripture, these beings should be identified as angels, since the Old Testament's monotheistic view does not support the notion of 'gods' under a major God (see 3.3; 3.6.1). Therefore, in this paper, I accept that the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:2 are angels, who left their place of origin and came down to marry human beings.

The godly line of Seth theory argues, that the contrast in Genesis 6:2 between the ‘daughters of men’ and ‘sons of God’, is religious (i.e. the unbelieving daughters of Cain versus the believing sons of Seth). ‘Men/humankind’ (*hā’ādām*) in Genesis 6:1 refers to the human race in general, and not to the line of Cain. ‘Men’ (*hā’ādām*) in verse 2, in the same context, should be interpreted in the same way. ‘Daughters of men’ (*běnôt hā’ādām*) are daughters born into the human race. They are clearly contrasted with ‘sons of God’. In other words, the ‘earthly’ is contrasted with the ‘heavenly/divine’. It is also not certain that all the people in the line of Seth were godly people, and that those of Cain were ungodly. For that reason, the two lines (i.e. Cain and Seth) cannot be exhaustively separated based on ungodliness and godliness.

Also, it is often advocated that the phrase, ‘sons of God’, is likewise used to refer to human beings in the Old Testament. Lange’s commentary (1869) provides an important argument in favour of the Genesis 6 passage to be interpreted as a reference to human beings. In it, he concludes that the angelic meaning of the phrase only appears in ‘a few poetical places, and in one nominally prophetic’, and ‘in the pure historical pieces the angels are never styled sons of God’. There can be little doubt, that in the Old Testament, the word *ben*, ‘son’, sometimes referred to human beings. But in all its appearances, the complete phrase ‘sons of God’ refers to supernatural beings. Contrary to Lange’s observation, the phrase does appear in Job 1, which is not poetry, but prose.

#### **4.2. The New Testament addresses sexual sin of angels in Genesis 6**

The New Testament references to this passage favour the angelic view (see 3.6.2). Both Jude and 2 Peter called the sons of God, *angels*.

Livingston (1969:52) refers to the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:30, in which he explained that the angels of God do not marry (Mark 12:25). Therefore, according to him, it is not scriptural to speak about 'marriage between the angels and human beings'. Angels are spirits, but when they are on earth, they are referred to as men (See Dan 10:5, 16; Gen 18:1–8) and as performing 'human duties' (e.g. they ate with both Abraham and Lot [Gen 19:3]). When the angels came from heaven to destroy Sodom, the people of Sodom wanted to have 'sex' with them (cf. Gen 19:5). If this is related to the good and faithful angels, what about angels who disobeyed their creator? A proper reading of Matthew 22:30 reveals that the Lord is speaking about the angels in heaven. Both Matthew and Mark make use of the phrase, 'in heaven'. The parallel passage in Luke 20:36 omits it, but reads, 'they are equal to angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection'. This, however, is not true for angels who left their original place and came to live with women on earth. The angels in Genesis 6 left their dwelling place in heaven (see Jude 6). When they were here on earth, they married, which has caused their fall.

These angels were not originally servants of Satan originally (e.g. demons, as some have argued). They were servants of God, but when they sinned, they became servants of the devil. It appears that in the gospels, and subsequently, demons are still able to carry out evil attacks on human beings. The 'fallen angels' in this passage, however, were thrown 'into hell and locked them up in chains' (2 Pet 2:4).

Jude clearly refers to the fact that the sin that these angels have committed was sexual. Church leaders from different generations seemed to share the opinion that spirits (in particular demons) can have intercourse with human beings. They differ in their views about procreation.

### 4.3. Church leaders supported the angelic theory

The predominant view in the early Jewish and church writings was the angelic theory. Church leaders also seemed to support the idea that ‘spirits’ could have sexual relations with women. This view, however, has been challenged from various sides, both Jewish and Christian.<sup>4</sup>

### 4.4. ‘Evil’ spirit can have sexual intercourse with human beings

Church historians give several examples of alleged sexual unions, and sometimes, procreating between spirit beings and human beings. Leaders who did not accept the angelic theory in Genesis were still of the opinion that evil spirits could have sexual affairs with human beings (e.g. Augustine; Luther). Some would even argue that these spirits can procreate with human beings. Schaff gave several examples of the work of *incubi* during the Middle Ages in his *History of the Christian church* (vol. 5 § 136; vol. 6 § 59). A well-known example was that of Merlin, the son of an *incubus* and a British nun. Eleanor, wife of Louis VII, and then of Henry II of England, was reported to be the child of an *incubus* and a woman. An *incubus* also prevented the parents of Guibert of Nogent from having sexual intercourse for three years, until the *incubus* was driven out. The theory of how *incubi* procreating are explained in detail in the works of Thomas Aquinas. The spiritual beings are identified as evil spirits, demons.

Scripture, however, does not teach that this was the work of the good angels of God. If the passage in Genesis 6, as understood in this paper (see also the New Testament passages) can be used as a biblical example of spirit beings having intercourse with human beings, it must

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these arguments were discussed briefly in section 4.1 and 4.2.

be emphasised that it was the disobedient angels that did this. Furthermore, this action was met with divine judgement. Genesis 6 and the New Testament references speak about the judgement that followed the sin of the angels. The human beings involved in the sexual activity with the angels died during the flood. God kept the disobedient angels 'in eternal chains in utter darkness, locked up for the judgment of the great Day (Jude 6). If church leaders, past and present, know about sexual activities between spirit beings and human beings, these can only be demonic activities and never the work of good angels. The good angels are 'all ministering spirits, sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation' (Heb 1:14).

A critical question in this regard is the role of human beings in such a relationship. Neither the references in Genesis 6, nor the New Testament references seem to give any indication as to the role that the women played. Finally, the comments made by Newman (1984:36) in his exegetical article on this passage are an appropriate conclusion to this systematic perspective:

May it not be possible that we enlightened, twentieth-century Christians can learn something positive from the ancient exegetes? Perhaps they were right in seeing an angelic incursion in Genesis 6:1–4 and we are wrong in denying it. Perhaps with a great interest in the supernatural and angels some ancient interpreters scoured the Scriptures to locate any hints it might contain on this subject. In such a case, they might well have reached some valid insights which God preserved by inscription in the NT.

## 5. A practical perspective

Is there a relationship between spirits having sexual relationships with human beings, and the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6? What should be the

church's response to those members who claim to have spiritual husbands and wives? The conclusion drawn in the previous section was that spirit beings, namely, disobedient spirits and demons, can have sexual intercourse with human beings. Spiritual husbands and wives should therefore be seen as demons that have sexual relationships with human beings. What should the church do about this specifically, and demonic activities in the lives of believers generally. Some possible applications from different practical theological perspectives follow.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.1. Pastoral

The presence of demonic activities in the life of a believer calls for a pastoral response. Heitink (2000:256) describes this kind of pastoral response as developing a 'helping relationship' with a person, in the light of the gospel and in unity with the church of Christ.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of such a relationship is to find a way to answer questions relating to faith and life. The issue of demonic attacks or spiritual spouses is one such question. The Lord Jesus Christ made a case for this kind of pastoral care when he set a woman free, who had a disabling spirit (Luke 13:11). She was a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years. Deliverance from the bondage of evil spirits was a major activity of Christ during his earthly ministry, and the early church followed his example.

The church's pastoral response should also focus on 'false alarms'. Some believers tend to perceive demonic activities where there is in

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<sup>5</sup> Within the context of this paper, demonic activity is not synonymous with demon possession.

<sup>6</sup> Heitink studied this aspect of the practical theology under what he calls 'poimenics', the academic study of individual and group pastoral care. The word is derived from the Greek *poimainō*, which means 'to shepherd'.

fact none. This function of pastoral care is what Heitink (p. 257) called 'guiding'. The purpose of 'guiding' is to help people make sound decisions based on their convictions. Sometimes, pastoral care can help bring these convictions in line with an evangelical Christian worldview. In the light of our topic, the counsellor could guide the person, who is of the opinion, for example, that he/she is tormented by an evil spirit (as a result of, for example, erotic dreams). There may be various explanations for such dreams, including watching pornographic movies, or reading erotic literature.

## 5.2. Ethical

The presence of demonic activities in the life of believers raised the following ethical question: has the believer played a role in this activity? Douma (1999:23) sees ethics as a reflection on the moral actions. If demonic activities manifest in the life of a believer, is there a connection between that particular manifestation, and the life-choices that that person has made? Also, who is responsible for such actions? From my own ministry experience, I have come to realise that believers can and do open themselves up to demonic influences by participating in satanic or demonic activities. The church father Tertullian gave a few examples of this in his *The Shows* 26: 'We have the case of the woman—the Lord Himself is witness—who went to the theatre, and came back possessed. In the outcasting, accordingly, when the unclean creature was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, "And in truth I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain."'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See also his *Apology* 1:37; *Idolatry* 2:11; *The Shows* 29; *Scapula* 5:2. See also *The Clementine Homilies* 7:3 'As, then, when you partook of meat offered to idols, you became servants to the prince of evil'.



In Acts 5, we have an example of a believer who opened himself to Satan. Peter said to Ananias: ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?’ (Acts 5:3), and in verse 4, he said ‘How have you thought up this deed in your heart?’ (Acts 5:4). Even though the devil filled his heart, Peter held Ananias responsible for his own action. Believers cannot blame evil spirits for their deeds (e.g. ‘I cannot help that I am having extra-marital affairs; it is because of an evil spirit’). Christian leaders seem to blame ‘spiritual spouses’ for their sexual sins and those of their congregants. One Ghanaian pastor, when asked who is responsible for sexual offences among pastors, is reported to have said: ‘My arithmetical estimates are that 10 percent of the blame should go to the pastors who have inborn habitual lust, and 40 percent to Eve-like tempting women, and 50 percent to Satan’ (Gifford 2004:110).

It is true that evil spirits can control people, so that they lose control of themselves (e.g. Luke 5). The New Testament, however, does not give any example of such control over believers.

There are cases, in which parents of children forced them into participating in demonic activities and practices. Sometimes, these children were even ‘sold’ or ‘given’ to demons by their parents before these children became Christian believers. Some of these will continue to feel the burden of that connection even after they become a Christian, and may require deliverance. Honesty, therefore, is important in this matter.

### **5.3. Spiritual, didactical, and homiletical**

Genesis 6:5 displays a low level of spiritual life among humankind: ‘But the LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was

only evil all the time'. A context like this, where the Lord is not at the centre, is the breeding ground of satanic activities. It is critical for God's people to maintain fellowship with him, through prayers, meditating on the Word, and participating in the meetings with God's people (see Firet, in Heitink 2000:259). However, a context like this requires more than the activities of the individual believer. The teaching ministry of the church should also play a role. Heitink called these tasks the *koinonia*, a Greek word meaning 'fellowship'. He lists four tasks that are important in this respect: (a) building up the structures of the church, (b) educating the people in the church (catechesis), (c) liturgy, and (d) homiletics (p. 271).

In the face of spiritual attacks, the church should teach and preach to its members about their place of victory in Christ. Sermons and Bible studies should regularly emphasise the fact that believers were taken out of the kingdom of darkness and were brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:12–13). Christ triumphed over the power of darkness by 'disarming the rulers and authorities' and making 'a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col 2:15). Therefore, the kingdom of darkness does not have any right over a son or daughter of light. Believers should fear God and give *him* glory through their lives.

Teaching and preaching should also focus on passages of scripture that teach us to 'flee from idolatry' (1 Cor 10:14), and guard ourselves 'from idols' (1 John 5:21), and not 'give the devil an opportunity' (Eph 4:27). Believers cannot flirt with the demonic world without being influenced by it.

It is important for the church to have structures in place that will accommodate the spiritual growth of all the believers, young and old.

## 5.4. Missional and evangelistic

The church's response to this problem will not be limited to those within. Heitink (2000:287) sees three situations through which the church can engage the public square: evangelism, social welfare work, and through the ministry of the individual believers. Christ's mandate to his disciples was to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20). This message also includes deliverance from demonic activities. Acts 8:5, Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, and as a result of his preaching, 'unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed' (Acts 8:7).

Personally, it has always been a joy for me to see how the glorified Christ works through his church's missions and evangelistic activities in bringing deliverance to those who are oppressed by demons. 'Most missionaries from the West have not received training in this practice. Some have been previously led to view the entire concept as a superstition or as an action limited to the first-century' (Terry, Smith, and Anderson 1998:627). The other extreme is the unhealthy interest in, and overemphasis on, demonic activities. Terry, Smith, and Anderson (1998:636), quoted Wakely, wrote the following:

Satan and his demonic assistants must never be allowed to take centre stage in our theology or our practice. It is Jesus who has 'all authority on ... earth' (Matt. 28:18). He reigns 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come' (Eph. 1:21).

Our evangelistic and missional activities should lead people to grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ, not Satan and his demons. To him be the honour both now and on that eternal day (2 Peter 3:18).

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