

What is going on in Gen. 6:1-4? Who are “the sons of God” who have sex with “the daughters of men”?

The passage you refer to is one of the most difficult in the Bible. Who are “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men” whose sexual intercourse and begetting of children is so enormous a sin that it occasions the flood?

There have been basically two answers: 1) the “sons of God” are angels and the “daughters of men” are human women, and 2) the “sons of God” are male descendants of righteous Seth who was born to Adam and Eve to take the place of Abel after Cain murdered him and the “daughters of men” are female descendants of Cain.

The angelic interpretation is the older of the two, going back at least to the third century before Christ (the date of 1 Enoch 6-11), while the Cainite interpretation is first attested in the mid-second century after Christ (Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai). The angelic interpretation is found in many pre-Christian Jewish works (1 Enoch, Jubilees, Testament of Reuben, Testament of Naphtali and others), in the New Testament (Jude 6, 2 Pet. 2:4, 1 Pet. 3:19-20, perhaps 1 Cor. 11:10), and in

some early Christian literature (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and others), but it completely fell out of favor and was replaced by the Cainite interpretation in both Judaism and Christianity.

Why was the angelic interpretation rejected and replaced by the Cainite one?

I think because the idea of angels having sex with human beings came to be seen as intellectually difficult to accept. It seemed too much like Greek mythology, where gods are always having sex with humans. Angels having sex with humans struck people as mythological and fictitious—unbelievable. After all, are not angels pure spirit, so how could they have sexual intercourse with human beings if they have no physical bodies? The “sons of God” must therefore be human beings and not angels.

And yet before there was the Cainite interpretation there was the angelic.

We may have difficulty accepting that angels ever had sexual intercourse with human beings, but references to this angelic-human intercourse in Jewish and

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spiritual beings and therefore do not have bodies and cannot feel sexual attraction or have sexual intercourse?

Apparently not. Jews and Christians back then seem not to have had the idea that bodies are to be found only down on earth but not in heaven (or hell). They spoke of heaven and hell as places above and below where beings were not disembodied spirits but had a bodily existence of sorts. When people (like Ezekiel, for example) had visions of heaven, they saw angels and cherubim and seraphim and even God seated on a throne. We are given no indication when heavenly scenes are described in the Book of

Christian literature over a period of 500 years (roughly 250 BCE to 250 CE) show that back then, people did not find such a thing incredible or impossible.

Why not? Didn't they know that angels are

Revelation or in Daniel 7 or elsewhere that the person describing heaven thinks he is describing an unreal, merely imaginary scene. Later generations may come along and take those descriptions of heaven and God on His throne as products of the imagination, but there is no indication that the ancients saw them as anything but utterly real.

Likewise, they obviously had no difficulty with the idea of angelic-human intercourse, since from roughly 250 BCE (the date of 1 Enoch 6-11) to 140 CE (Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai) the angelic interpretation is the only attested understanding of Gen. 6:1-4.

We may have intellectual problems with angelic-human intercourse, but we must admit that it was not incredible in ancient times and may have indeed been what the authors of Genesis had in mind.

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