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*Why Genesis 6:1-4
Puzzles Modern Readers*

For many, one of the most debated and puzzling passages of Scripture in our Bible is Genesis 6:1-4. Yet, despite the seeming uncertainty about the meaning of this passage in our own day, in this chapter we will see how Judaism and Christianity before AD 70, were unanimous in their thinking about this passage. Both groups affirmed an understanding of Genesis 6:1-4 which was in agreement with the message of Enoch's book. The fact that this understanding was so prevalent may indicate the worldview of the *Book of Enoch* had been influencing both Jews and Christians from the earliest times. If so, that would be another indicator pointing to the great antiquity and influence of the book.

In Genesis 6, we read:

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown, (Genesis 6:1-4).⁶²⁹

Modern interpretations of Genesis 6:1-4, abound. One of the most common explanations is that the term "sons of God" in the passage refers to the righteous family line descending from the patriarch Seth. "The daughters of man", in the passage is then understood to be women who were of an unbelieving family line, perhaps that of Cain. In this view the sin of the sons of God is seen as intermarriage of God's people with unbelievers, leading to a spiritual decline among humanity.

This view, however, did not become widespread until long after AD 70, when the *Book of Enoch* began to be forbidden, first by the spiritual leaders of the Jews, then by the Christians.

Before the time of Christ, when the Jews who wrote and preserved the Old Testament Scriptures were the only interpreters of those Scriptures,

⁶²⁹ The Septuagint Codex Vaticanus, reads, "And it happened, when humans began to become numerous upon the land, and [they had daughters], the angels of God, having seen the daughters of humans, that they were beautiful, took for themselves women from all whom they picked out."

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the commonly held interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, was as follows: the angels, the heavenly sons of God, also known as Watchers, lusted after the daughters of mankind and conspired to break God's law. They left their assigned abode in heaven, to take human wives and have children. They defiled themselves by sexual relations with women in order to give birth to children who turned out to be gigantic and monstrous. This was the unified Jewish/Christian understanding from the period when the Jewish temple was still standing and prior.

One is stricken with the sheer lack of controversy among early Jewish writers on this point. In fact, I have not yet found an example from the writings of the period of Second-Temple Judaism in which some writer disagrees with the Watcher/Nephilim saga, though many controversies can be noted in the writings of the period concerning other matters. In chapter 11, we will produce a list of the passages in ancient Jewish literature which touch on this subject.

The View during the Apostolic Era

This common view of early Judaism prevailed among New Testament writers too. Notice how the following quotes from the New Testament dovetail with the story we have earlier outlined from the *Book of Enoch*,

If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:4-10)

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they *in the same way as these* indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 1:6-7 NASB)

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When these two passages in Peter and Jude are explained by many today *without* reference to the *Book of Enoch*, they raise many unanswerable questions. However, when these are placed in the context of the Enochan storyline, they are easily explained. Here again we see an example of the *Book of Enoch*, helping to clarify two passages of Scripture which are hard to otherwise understand. Notice also, how both the passage in Peter and the one in Jude connect the sin of the angels with the sexual perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah. Once one realizes the *Book of Enoch* was known and read in Israel in the time of Christ, it seems almost impossible, to explain the Peter and Jude passages any other way than that laid out in Enoch's book.

Unfortunately, once the *Book of Enoch* became a forbidden text to Christians in the Greek and Latin worlds, the Enochan context of Peter and Jude was lost for many generations.

Certainly the idea that angels could interbreed with human women seems repugnant to our modern sensibilities, as it was also to the leaders of Greek and Latin Christianity from the end of the fourth century forward. This offense to our sensibilities and those of the Church fathers of the fifth century has more to do with our Greek philosophical assumptions about the nature of angels than it does with Scripture.

There are several areas in which the Church's ideas concerning angels are at major variance with the dominant view during the time of Christ and the Apostles.

Angelic Carnality

According to the prevailing ideas about angels among Christians of various stripes, angels are viewed as spirits, without materiality. Western ideas about the differences between human carnality and angelic spirituality make the idea of angelic-human copulation seem impossible. In all Jewish writings from the period of Second-Temple Judaism⁶³⁰ no such problem can be detected. There is a consensus among Jewish writers from that period that angelic spirituality as well as angelic carnality were both possible, and not mutually exclusive. The writer of the *Book of Jubilees*, (another book from that period) even speaks of angels having been created in a circumcised state from the beginning. (This is mentioned here only as it reveals how Jews felt at the time on this subject).

⁶³⁰ **2nd-Temple Judaism** generally refers to the period of history in Israel between the return from Babylon, and the destruction of the 2nd temple by the Romans in 70 AD. For simplicity however, the term can also be applied to all of the Jewish literature which survives from before the destruction of the temple. This would include the writings of Moses, David and Solomon and others written even earlier.

Angelic Fallibility

According to the current dominant thinking among Christians there seems to be somewhat of a consensus that long ago there occurred a rebellion among the members of the heavenly angelic hosts. Whatever the reasons for this rebellion, the result was certain angels aligned themselves with Lucifer, rebelled against God, sinned and fell. A seemingly assumed corollary to this view is the idea commonly held among Christians that those angels who did not fall, stood the test and are immune to further testing, temptation and the possibility of sinning. No such assumptions can be detected amongst Jewish writers from the period of Second-Temple Judaism. Not only did they believe angels fell during the time of Jared the father of Enoch, they also believed in previous fallings and allowed for the possibility of future fallings of angels as well.

An Angelic Learning Curve

There seems to be a rather pervasive idea among we Christians that angels are so aware of God's doings that they are fully informed of His plan for the ages. The prevailing view among the Jews and Christians in the first century and in earlier times seems to be different.

For instance, in Enoch we are given a picture that the angels, though they are in the presence of God, are *not* aware of the entire unfolding plan of God and are learners in much the same way as mankind though on a higher level. There is much they do not know. To certain angels who fell God says,

You have been in heaven, but all the mysteries had not yet been revealed to you, and you knew worthless ones, and these in the hardness of your hearts you have made known to the women, and through these mysteries women and men work much evil on earth (Enoch 16:3).

In this passage, the sphere of angelic knowledge is seen as both incomplete as well as flawed.

In another passage we are given a picture of unfallen angels who are to read heavenly books so as to learn from them,

For some of them [books] are written and inscribed above in the heaven, in order that the angels may read them and know that which shall befall the sinners. (Enoch 108:7)

According to Enoch, angels, like humans, are finite, growing, and capable of errors of thought and deed.

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Isn't this the picture painted by certain parts of the New Testament too? That angels are learning is implied in the New Testament when we read,

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, *things into which angels long to look*. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

Peter tells us the prophets who wrote about Jesus before the first advent wanted to know more about these things but were made aware the information they desired would be for a future generation yet to come. Then Peter says the prophets were not alone in their desire to know, and their intense interest about Christ. The angels *also* want to know!

These then are three ways in which our thinking about angels has drifted since the time of the Jews and Christians in the first centuries. Taken together the ancients had a very different angelology than that of which St. Augustine would have likely approved.

Does Jesus Contradict Enoch's View of Angels?

In the gospels there are a couple of passages which are often appealed to as apparent proof that angels could not commit the kind of sin the *Book of Enoch* mentions.

In Matthew 22:30, Jesus gives information about the relations of men and women in the world to come. He says, "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

A parallel passage is found in Luke 20:34-36:

The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

What is interesting about Christ's words in this passage is that they actually seem to allude to a relevant passage in the *Book of Enoch* in which God instructs Enoch what to say to reprimand the angels who

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sinned. Enoch is instructed to tell the Watchers,

Wherefore have ye left the high, holy, and eternal heaven, and lain with women, and defiled yourselves with the daughters of men and taken to yourselves wives, and done like the children of earth, and begotten giants as your sons? And though ye were holy, spiritual, living the eternal life, you have defiled yourselves with the blood of women, and have begotten children with the blood of flesh, and, as the children of men, have lusted after flesh and blood as those also do who die and perish. Therefore have I given them wives also that they might impregnate them, and beget children by them, that thus nothing might be wanting to them on earth. But you were formerly spiritual, living the eternal life, and immortal for all generations of the world. And therefore I have not appointed wives for you; for as for the spiritual ones of the heaven, in heaven is their dwelling. (Enoch 15:5-7).

In the passages from Matthew and Luke, was Jesus alluding to this passage in Enoch? In Matthew's passage the emphasis is about there being no marriage in heaven. This is not instruction about whether angels can or cannot be carnal. Jesus' comment is concerning the normal state of affairs in heaven --in heaven angels are not given in marriage. The *Book of Enoch* does not state otherwise. In the Luke passage, it states that resurrected people "cannot die anymore" and this is tied to the end of the need for marriage. Enoch's passage also ties the need for marriage to human mortality. Therefore marriage is not for angels. Luke's passage does not invalidate the passage from Enoch. In fact, it seems as if Jesus is simply reiterating the point made in the passage from Enoch 15.

So, the quote from Jesus which some feel invalidates an aspect of the *Book of Enoch*, instead seems to allude to ideas in the book, which were current among the Jews of Jesus' day. Jesus goes on to say the Sadducees know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God and are thus wrong about the resurrection. In Jesus' view, was Enoch among the many books of Scripture which the Sadducees rejected and of which they were thus ignorant?

Contrasting Ideas

In ancient times Christian and Jewish thinking allowed that angels are individually capable of falling from grace, are capable of carnality, and are limited in their knowledge of God's plan. In a later era, the influence of Greek thinking and of Augustine on Christianity crystallized concepts that God's angels are pure spirit, impeccable and all-wise. The Bible neither supports this theology of angels which developed centuries after Christ, nor does the Bible contradict the views held in an earlier time which we find in the *Book of Enoch*.

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To the Jews were given the lively oracles of God. Those oracles were in a language whose meanings were more immediate to them than to the Greeks or to us. The Jewish believers of the first century, living closer to the times of the actual composition of the books of the Bible, were thus more likely to be the inheritors of original traditions related to understanding, expounding upon, and interpreting their books.

When we consider the unanimous agreement among Jews in ancient times which held that Genesis 6:1-4 described the sin of angels, as well as the early agreement within the Church on this subject, we see one more fact pointing to the widespread influence the *Book of Enoch* once had. This is exactly what we would expect if the *Book of Enoch* had been around a long time and had been handed down for many generations.

But as we shall see in a moment, not only did Jews long ago believe angels could and had fallen into sin, they also expected it could happen and would happen again.