

JESUS AND GENESIS 6:1-4: THE INCARNATION AS PARODIC REVERSAL OF THE בני האלהים REBELLION

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I. ORIENTATION

1. *Thesis and objections.*¹

2. *The angelic view concerning Gen 6:1-4 was predominant in Second Temple texts and early Christianity, largely displaced in the Western church by Augustine's Sethite interpretation for over a millennium, and significantly recovered in modern scholarship as the most historically coherent interpretation.*²

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¹ G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 401; E. Earle Ellis, "Foreword," in *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, by Leonhard Goppelt, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), x. And so, James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 19-20. See also Warren Austin Gage, *Gospel Typology in Joshua and Revelation: A Whore and Her Scarlet, Seven Trumpets Sound, A Great City Falls* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: St. Andrews House, 2013); G. K. Beale, *Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom*, ed. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 22.

² The following early church fathers held to the angels view and seem to constitute a consensus: Justin Martyr (c. 110-165); Athenagoras (c. 133-c. 190); Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 202); Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215); Bardaisan of Edessa (c. 154-c. 222); The Pseudo-Clementine Literature, The Homilies (c. 200-c. 400, attributed to Clement I, bishop of Rome); Tertullian (c. 145-c. 220); Origen (c. 185-c. 254); Cyprian (c. 200-c. 258); Commodian (c. 240, probably bishop of North Africa); Methodius (c. 260-c.312); Lactantius (c. 260-c. 312); Eusebius (c. 260-c. 340); Ambrosius (c. 340-c. 397); Sulpicius Severus (c. 363-c. 420); Didymus the Blind (c. 310-c. 398). See Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: Analysis and History of Exegesis*, OtSt 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 124-63. And so, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 139; Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 90-96; *DDD*, 794; *ABD*, 156; *DOTP*, 797; *DNTB*, 29, 153; *DLNT*, 44, 716; James Crichton, "Sons of God (OI)," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915) 2835; Ryan E. Stokes, "Sons of God," *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 1251; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1961), 110; Duane Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: B & H Books, 1995), 47; Matthew James Hamilton, "Sons of God," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 167; Gene M. Tucker and Mark Allan Powell, "Sons of God, Children of God," *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 985; Francis Kimmitt, "Sons of God," *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1520; Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 6:2; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 49; Norman R. Ericson, "Spirits in Prison," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 745; Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 191-192; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 45-46; Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter & Jude*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, vol. 18 of *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 191-192; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 50-51; Robert C. Newman, "The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4," *Grace Theological Journal* 05:1

Angelic Manifestation as Human (“Man”) in Canonical Narrative³

Passage	Context	Original Term	English Rendering	Narrative Presentation	Ontological Identity
Genesis 18:2, 16, 22	Three visitors to Abraham	אֲנָשִׁים (’ānāšîm)	men	men	YHWH + angels
Genesis 19:5, 8, 10, 12, 16	Angels in Sodom	אֲנָשִׁים (’ānāšîm)	men	men	angels
Ezekiel 9:2, 3, 11	Judgment executioners	אִישׁ (’îš) אֲנָשִׁים (’ānāšîm)	man / men	men	angels
Daniel 10:5, 18	Radiant heavenly figure	אִישׁ (’îš)	man	man	angelic being
Daniel 12:5, 6	Two heavenly figures	אִישׁ (’îš)	men	men	angelic beings

(Spring 1984): 13-36; Frank Jabini, “Sons Of God Marrying Daughters Of Man: An Exercise In Integrated Theology,” *Conspectus* 14:1 (Sep 2012): 81-121; Walter M. Dunnnett, “The Hermeneutics Of Jude And 2 Peter: The Use Of Ancient Jewish Traditions,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31:3 (Sep 1988): 287-292; I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 1 Pet 3:19-20; Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1946), 315; Bo Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Peter 3:19 and Its Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1946), 90-91, 131-32; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 139-140; Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004); Amy Elizabeth Richter, “The Enochic Watchers’ Template and the Gospel of Matthew” (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2010); Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 255; John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 702; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37 of The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 451.

Contra to these scholars, Green claims, “the apostasy of the angels to which Jude refers is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures” and explains that Jude is referring to “a very well-known Jewish interpretation of Gen. 6:1–4 that understood the passage as a reference to angelic sin.” See Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 66. But he does not corroborate the claim nor consider how the phrase בני האלהים is also used in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 and related to Num 13:33.

The Sethite view is contrived for the following reasons: (1) the line of Seth is never referred to as the “sons of God,” Godliness is not based upon bloodline, (2) Genesis 4:26 does not say all Sethites called upon the Lord, (3) the daughters of men are not identified as being from Cain, (4) is it equitable that all the “daughters of men” should be considered sinful? (5) there is no command to prohibit intermarriage of any human lines at the time, and (6) the Sethite view fails to explain the Nephilim. If both lines are human, why the abnormal offspring? See also Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19, no. 4 (May 2010), 280. Annus’s work was followed by David Melvin, “The Gilgamesh Traditions and the Pre-history of Genesis 6:1-4,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011); Ida Fröhlich, “Mesopotamian Elements and the Watchers Traditions,” in *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Angela Kim Hawkins, Kelley Coblenz Bautch, and John C. Endres (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014); Henryk Drawnel, “The Mesopotamian Background of the Enochic Giants and Evil Spirits,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 21, no. 1 (2014).

³ See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), s.v. אִישׁ; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB), s.v. אִישׁ; Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), s.v. ἀνὴρ. The consistent use of ordinary human terminology in narrative contexts indicates that divine beings are presented as men and thus possess the capacity to assume physical human form.

Angelic Manifestation as Human (“Man”) in Canonical Narrative

Passage	Context	Original Term	English Rendering	Narrative Presentation	Ontological Identity
Luke 24:4	At the empty tomb	ἄνθρω (anēr)	men	men	angels
Acts 1:10–11	Ascension scene	ἄνθρω (anēr)	men	men	angels
Hebrews 13:2	Exhortation about hospitality	ἁγγέλους (angelous)	angels	men (implicit)	angels

II. CANONICAL FRAMEWORK

1. *Retributive irony in the Old Testament: YWHW vs. the gods.*⁴
2. *Patristic principle of analogical reversal.*⁵

III. ARGUMENTATION: CANONICAL CORROBORATIONS⁶

⁴ Patrick D. Miller, “God the Warrior: A Problem in Biblical Interpretation and Apologetics,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, vol. 267 of *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 356; Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology Series, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010); Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. by Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 10; Hoffmeier emphasizes how many of the plagues are in correlation to Egyptian gods. See James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 149–53. And, so *ABD*, 374–377; John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 25; *DLNT*, 1146–1147; *DNTB*, 526–529. See also Daniel Bodi, “Ezekiel’s *gillûlim* and Ritual Defecation in Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Between a Metaphor and a Symbolic Act (NB Akkadian, OB Mari, Greek, Aramaic, Talmudic Texts, and the Ugaritic *marzeah* Feast)” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society Special Supplement*, Studies in Honor of David Marcus, Edward L. Greenstein, ed. (New York: JTS, 2022): 97. H. W. Wolff suggests that the Hebrew term *gillûlim* should best be translated with *Scheißgötter*, or “shit-gods.” See Hans Wolff Walter, “Jahwe und die Götter in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Wirklichkeit Gottes und der Wirklichkeit der Welt” *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 29, no. 8, (1969): 397-416. See also Z.C. Hill, *The Scatological Scriptures: A Biblical Theology of Dung* (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2024); M. I. Gruber, “Gillulim,” *DDD*, 346; J.F. Fealey, *DDD*, 598-599; Graham S. Ogden and Jan Sterk, *A Handbook on Isaiah*, ed. Paul Clarke et al., vol. 1 & 2 of *United Bible Societies’ Handbooks* (Reading, UK: United Bible Societies, 2011), 665.

⁵ Justin Martyr, *ANF*, vol. 1, 249; Irenaeus of Lyons, *ANF*, vol. 1, 455; Tertullian, *ANF*, vol. 3, 536; Athanasius of Alexandria, *NPNF²*, vol. 4, 47; and Augustine, *NPNF¹*, vol. 3, 180.

⁶ See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1–17, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 272; Jörg Frey, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, THKNT 15.2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 77; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 71-72; J. M. Sprinkle, “Sexuality, Sexual Ethics,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 748; Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 16–50, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 55, 63; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 135; Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), at Gen 19:4–10; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 1:26–28; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 46; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Lk 1:38; P. W. Coxon, “Nephilim,” *DDD* 619, “Gibborim,” *DDD*, 345; J. M. Sasson, “Gilgamesh Epic,” *ABD*, 1027; James Swanson, in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997); The *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*; Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Ge 6:4.

Parodic Reversal		The Triune God vs. the Rebellious בני האלהים
Desire (Love vs Lust)	Gen 6:2a	"...saw (ראה) that the daughters of men were beautiful (טוב);"
	Lk 1:30	"Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God."
Took Wives (Consensual vs Non-consensual)	Gen 6:2b	"...they took (לקח) wives for themselves, whomever they chose."
	Lk 1:26-27; 38	"the angel Gabriel was sent from God...to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph...Mary." "And Mary said, 'Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."
Sexual Union (Non-physical vs Physical)	Gen 6:4c	"...the sons of God came in to the daughters of men..."
	Lk 1:35	"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."
Nature (Same vs Mixed)	Gen 6:4a-d	"The Nephilim were on the earth...when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them."
	Lk 1:32a; 35c	"He...will be called the Son of the Most High;" "...the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."
Military Conquests (Spirits of Giants Exorcized)	Gen 6:4e	"Those were the mighty men (הגברים) who were of old..."
	Lk 1:31b	"...and you shall name Him Jesus."
Fame (Global restoration vs Global corruption)	Gen 6:4f	"...men of renown."
	Lk 1:32a	"He will be great..."
Kingdom(s) (Everlasting vs Temporary)	Gen 6:4e	"Those were the mighty men (הגברים) who were of old..."
	Lk 1:33b	"...His kingdom will have no end."
Violence/ Bloodshed (His own vs Others')	Gen 6:4e	"Those were the mighty men (הגברים) who were of old..."
	Matt 1:21; Rom 5:9	"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

1. *The use of women.*
2. *The nature and legacy of offspring.*

SUMMARY			
<i>Parodic Reversal</i>	<i>The sons of God</i>	↔	<i>The Triune Godhead</i>
Use of Women	Genesis 6:1-4	Historical Correspondence	Luke 1:30-35
• Desire	Lust		Love
• Took wives	Unlawfully, coerced		Took a willing betrothed virgin
• Sexual union	Physical in nature		No sexual union
Offspring			
• Nature	Giants; Hybrid beings		Shared essence with his Father
• Military conquests	Physical giants defeated		Spirits of giants exorcised
• Fame	Global corruption		Global redemption
• Kingdom(s)	Temporary		Everlasting
• Violence/Bloodshed	Shed others' blood		Allows his blood to be shed

Note: I will soon launch the beta version of a web-based preaching tool grounded in a canonical view of the gospel shaped by Genesis 1–11. If you would like to participate, please contact me at markrichardson@msn.com or use the QR code to sign up for the beta test:

