

Trouble in Paradise

Think about the setting in Eden. Adam and Eve aren't alone. God is there with his council. Eden is the divine/human headquarters for "subduing" the rest of the earth (Gen. 1:26–28)—spreading the life of Eden to the rest of the planet. But one member of the council isn't happy with God's plans.

Just as we saw in Genesis 1, there are hints in Genesis 3 that Eden is home to other divine beings. In verse 22, after Adam and Eve have sinned, God says: "Behold, the man has become like *one of us* in knowing good and evil" (emphasis added). That phrase is the same sort of signpost we saw in Genesis 1:26 ("our image").

We know the main character of Genesis 3, the Serpent, was not really a snake. He wasn't actually an animal. No effort to put him behind glass in a zoo would have been effective, and he would not have been amused. He was a divine being. Revelation 12:9 identifies him as the Devil, Satan.

Some Christians presume, based on Revelation 12:7–12, that there was an angelic rebellion shortly after creation:

And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. And they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them any longer in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev. 12:7–9 LEB)

But the war in heaven described there is associated with the birth of the messiah (Rev. 12:4–5, 10 LEB):

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, in order that whenever she gave birth to her child he could devour it. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is going to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod, and her child was snatched away to God and to his throne....

And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

"Now the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ have come,
because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down,
the one who accuses them before our God day and night.

The Bible gives no indication that, before the events in Eden, any of his imagers—human or divine—were opposed to God's will or were in rebellion. Circumstances changed dramatically in Genesis 3.

The Serpent's crime was that he freely chose to reject God's authority. God had determined that Adam and Eve would join the family business, so to speak. They would extend Eden on earth. But the enemy didn't want them there. He put himself in the place of God. He said in his heart, "I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods" (Isa. 14:13 NLT).

He got a rude awakening. Since the Serpent's deception led to Adam and Eve's sin, he was expelled from God's home (Ezek. 28:14–16) and banished to earth—"cut [or cast] down to the ground" in biblical language (Isa. 14:12)—the place where death reigns, where life is not everlasting. Instead of being lord of life, he became lord of the dead, which meant that the great enemy now had claim over all humans since the events in Eden meant the loss of earthly immortality. Humanity would now need to be redeemed to have eternal life with God in a new Eden.

The fallout (pun intended) was a series of curses. The curse upon the Serpent included a bit of prophecy. God said Eve's offspring and that of the Serpent would be at odds: "Then Yahweh God said to the serpent ... I will put hostility between you and between the woman, and between your offspring and between her offspring" (Gen. 3:14–15 LEB). Who are Eve's offspring? Humanity. And who are the Serpent's offspring? Well, that's more abstract. The apostle John gives us examples—like the Jewish leaders who hated Jesus. "You are of your father the devil," Jesus told them (John 8:44). Jesus called his betrayer, Judas, a devil (John 6:70). The Serpent's offspring is anyone who stands against God's plan, just as he did.

Michael S. Heiser, *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World—And Why It Matters*, ed. David Lambert (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015). 36-41

The Bad Seed

It didn't take long for more trouble to arise. One of Adam and Eve's children became a murderer. Cain killed Abel, showing that he was "of the evil one" (1 John 3:12). As the human population grew in the biblical story, so did evil (Gen. 6:5).

Now comes another supernatural transgression that, although it may not be much discussed in Sunday morning sermons, had great impact on the expansion of wickedness on earth. This time there was more than one rebel. The evil contagion spreading through humanity in Genesis 6:5 is linked to the story in Genesis 6:1–4 about the sons of God fathering their own earthly children known as Nephilim.

The Bible doesn't say much else in Genesis about what happened, but pieces of the story show up elsewhere in the Bible, and in Jewish traditions outside the Bible the New Testament authors knew well and quoted in their writings.

For example, Peter and Jude write about the angels who sinned before the flood (2 Pet. 2:4–6 GNT; see also Jude 5–6). Some of what they say comes from Jewish sources outside the Bible. Peter and Jude say that the sons of God who committed this transgression were imprisoned under the earth—in other words, they're doing time in hell—until the last days. They'll be part of God's final judgment, something the Bible calls the "Day of the Lord."

Peter and Jude's sources are well-known to Bible scholars. One of them was a book called 1 Enoch. It was popular with Jews of Jesus' day and with Christians in the early church, even though it wasn't considered sacred and inspired. But Peter and Jude thought some of that content was important enough to include in the letters they wrote.

These sources speculate that the sons of God either wanted to "help" humanity by giving them divine knowledge, and then got sidetracked, or that they wanted to imitate God by creating their own imagers. They also include an explanation for where demons come from. Demons are the departed spirits of dead Nephilim killed before and during the flood. They roam the earth harassing humans and seeking re-embodiment. In books of the Bible that follow Genesis, descendants of the Nephilim of Genesis 6:1–4 are called Anakim and Rephaim (Num. 13:32–33; Deut. 2:10–11). Some of these Rephaim show up in the underworld realm of the dead (Isa. 14:9–11) where the Serpent was cast down. New Testament writers would later call that place hell.

These ideas show us that early Jewish writers understood the threat of Genesis 6:1–4. The sons of God were trying to reformulate Eden, where the divine and the human coexisted, in their own way. They presumed to know better than God what should be happening on earth, just like the original enemy had. Alteration of God's plan to restore his rule ends up making a bad situation worse.

Not only was the episode of Genesis 6:1–4 a terrible echo of the seed of the Serpent—deliberate opposition to God—it was a prelude to worse things to come. During the days of Moses and Joshua, some of the opponents they run into when trying to claim the Promised Land were scattered giant clans (Deut. 2–3). These giants went by various names. In Numbers 13:32–33 they are called the Anakim. They are specifically said to be living descendants of the Nephilim—the offspring of the sons of God back in Genesis 6:1–4. The Old Testament tells us Israelites were fighting these oversized enemies until David's time. He took out Goliath (1 Sam. 17), and some of his men killed Goliath's brothers to finally end the threat (2 Sam. 21:15–22).