

## GENESIS 6:4

- 1 Worldview confusion.
- 2 Identifying the “sons of God.”
- 3 Orthodox options for interpretation.

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

The notion of ancient extraterrestrial astronauts, allegedly mentioned in the Bible, is popular today.<sup>1</sup> Many UFO cults, and New Age adherents claiming to receive messages from extraterrestrials, believe Gen. 6:4 teaches that a superior race of aliens (“sons of God”) were sexually involved with human women producing hybrid giants. This article will respond to these claims based upon an obscure text that has produced a wide variety of interpretations in church history.

### EXPLANATION

**1. The text in its biblical worldview.** The Bible, like any piece of literature, must be interpreted within the intellectual framework of reality, or worldview, of the authors. One of the problems New Age adherents bring to their understanding of this passage is worldview confusion.<sup>2</sup> A New Age or occultic worldview includes a myriad of spiritual entities, and for UFO cults, these entities include extraterrestrials. By contrast, the Judeo-Christian worldview of the Bible teaches that God’s creation includes the angelic, the demonic and the human. The Bible is silent on the question of extraterrestrial life, but careful reflection mitigates against it.<sup>3</sup> Identifying the “sons of God” as aliens within a New Age worldview is excluded by placing the passage in its proper worldview context.

**2. Possibilities in identifying the “sons of God.”** One of the difficulties in understanding this passage is the identification of the “sons of God.” Having excluded identifying them as aliens by placing it in a Judeo-Christian context, we now turn to other interpretive options. Many interpreters see this phrase as a reference to angels. This is a possibility, and while this term is used for angels in Job 1:6, 2:1 and 38:7, it is also “an early, but typical, reference to the titularies for kings, nobles and aristocrats in the ancient Near Eastern setting.”<sup>4</sup> As we will see below, understanding the “sons of God” as human rulers rather than as angelic beings provides us with another interpretive option for understanding the meaning of the text.

**3. Three possible interpretations.** The proper understanding of this obscure text has long been debated in church history. There have been three major interpretations of this passage. The first may be called the angel theory. This view sees the “giants” (“Nephilim,” a transliteration from the Hebrew) as a result of sexual union between fallen angels (the “sons of God”) and human women. While the “sons of God” may refer to angels, as we have seen above, it can also refer to human rulers. In addition, this view is difficult to harmonize with biblical teaching. Angels are immaterial beings (Heb. 1:14 ) with no procreative ability, and Jesus stated that they do not marry (Mark 12:25). The second view understands the “sons of God” to be the godly line of Seth intermarrying with the ungodly line of Cain. Although this is a popular view, it too has its difficulties. It is difficult to understand why the sexual union of the godly with the pagan would produce genetic abnormalities in the form of gigantism. This leads to our third possibility for understanding this narrative. This view sees the “sons of God” as ruthless despots seeking power and reputation (“men of renown”). In their thirst for ungodly acquisition, they also became polygamous (Gen. 6:2). According to this view, “Genesis 6:1-4, therefore, is best understood as depicting ambitious, despotic and autocratic rulers seizing both women and power in an attempt to gain all the authority and notoriety they could from those within their reach.”<sup>5</sup> This interpretation fits the immediate context, and the continuing development of Genesis in the rise of human evil leading up to God’s judgment in the Flood.

<sup>1</sup> Zecharia Sitchin, *Divine Encounters: A Guide to Visions, Angels and Other Emissaries* (New York, NY: Avon, 1996); G. Cope Schellhorn, *Extraterrestrials in Biblical Prophecy and the Great New Age Experiment* (Madison, WI: Horus House, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> See James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1993), 131, 145.

<sup>4</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

### KEY TO USING THIS PAGE

The biblical passage is highlighted in blue to indicate that this is a passage for which alternative religions ignore the context. The notes to the left of the passage can be written in the margins of a Bible to help explain the passage (however, do not write the numbers). The numbers correspond with the detailed explanations at the bottom of the page. These explanations help readers to fully understand the meaning of each marginal note.