

Genesis 6:1-4 (and 5)

**Understanding the Passage In its
Ancient, Original Context**

Genesis 6:1-4

1 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, **2** the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. **3** Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” **4** The Nephilim

Genesis 6:1-4

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

Controversial passage

- **Fear (selective supernaturalism)**
 - **Virgin birth? Hypostatic union?**
- **Church tradition to explain away**
- **Unseen Realm I discuss other views and their failings**
- **Predominant view (Sethite)**

Genesis 6:1-4 – Sethite View

Peter and Jude clearly did not view the sons of God in this incident were mere humans.

2 Peter 2:4-5

4 For 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; **5** if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of

Genesis 6:1-4 – Sethite View

righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.

- **“angels that sinned”** (no other candidates)
- **“cast them into hell”**
- **“chains of gloomy darkness”**
 - **Peter drawing on something not in OT, something that gives original context to Gen 6**

Genesis 6:1-4 – Sethite View

Jude 6-7

6 And the **angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire...**

Genesis 6:1-4 – Sethite View

- Angels “left their proper dwelling”
- Their sin set in sexual context
 - **No other possible referent** than Gen 6:1-4
- “kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness”
 - Points to **original context**
 - This is the REAL deathblow to Sethite view
 - **Interpret Scripture in context or not?**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Back to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but **cast them into hell (ταρταρώω) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment**

“cast them into Tartarus”

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Tartarus = place in the Greek Titan story where the Titans (rebellious gods) were cast for their transgression.

- Clear, unmistakable reference to **divine** rebels.

2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 refer to the rebellious angels (sons of God) as being imprisoned / chained in darkness. **Comes from where?**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Short answer = **1 Enoch** and other 2nd Temple Jewish texts (Jubilees, Book of Giants)

- In 1 Enoch, the sons of God = **Watchers**
- Descend on **Mt Hermon** and make a vow to corrupt humanity
- Their sin **not** just transgression with the daughters of man
- Something worse in Jewish mind

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

- **Enoch says (and this will be critical for understanding connection to messiah) that the sons of God (Watchers) taught humans certain points of knowledge that led to self-destruction and idolatry.**
 - **For example**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

(All have **permissible** biblical counterparts)

- Observing stars (astrology)
- Warfare technology
- Roots & herbs for spells (drugs)
- Cosmetics (odd) – point = sexual immorality

This is the backdrop for Gen 6:5

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

- **Ever wondered** why this verse follows all that sons of God & nephilim stuff?
- **Enoch preserves why** – . . .

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Human depravity and self-destruction

- Yes, humans fallen (Gen 3), but 2nd temple Jews (incl. NT writers) believed that human **depravity amplified** by fallen sons of God (Watchers).

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Seems contrived

Where does Enoch get this stuff?

Mesopotamia

- **There's a Mesopotamian backstory to Gen 6:1-4 and the depravity of Gen 6:5**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Mesopotamian material – the story of the *apkallu* before and after the flood

- **THAT story = original context of Gen 6**
- **Preserved in 1 Enoch, from which Peter and Jude get the details.**
 - **Knowing the Mesopotamian material shows the illegitimacy of Sethite view.**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Sources for what follows:

- *Unseen Realm*, chs 12-13
- Much more detail in *Reversing Hermon*
- Amar Annus, “Origin of the Watchers”

The *apkallu* story from Mesopotamia establishes **context of Gen 6:1-4 at every point**

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

- No doubt sons of God = divine beings
- Utilize work of Amar Annus (2010)
- All **commentaries obsolete** without these data

Let's look at the *apkallu*

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Apkallu (DDD)

... are the **culture heroes** from before the Flood, in the service of Ea A variety of wisdom traditions from the antediluvian period were supposedly passed on by the apkallu [They were] seven sages were created in the river (Akk = watery Abyss) and served as “those

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Apkallu (DDD)

who ensured the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth.” Following the example of Ea, they taught mankind wisdom, social forms and craftsmanship.

Wisdom?

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The *apkallu*, then, were the wise divine beings from the watery Abyss, the Underworld – the place opposite the heavens.

In Mesopotamian religion they were responsible for maintaining the correct balance between heaven and earth that was the will of the greater gods.

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The *apkallu* possessed knowledge from the divine world that “made heaven and earth tick.”

Before the flood, they gave knowledge to humans to civilize them / their world.

This knowledge was important to The scribes of Babylon living after the flood

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Cuneiform scholars like Annus have shown:

- the “**wisdom**” taught by the *apkallu* to Babylonians **corresponds to the forbidden knowledge** that 1 Enoch says corrupted humanity and drove humanity away from Yahweh to idolatry
- Important (see why in a bit)

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Babylonians looked at this knowledge quite differently.

The scribes took great pains to establish the notion that **their knowledge**—and so the **greatness of Babylon** and the greatness of its king—**was directly inherited from the divine realm**. But how did they make that argument?

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The problem is that this knowledge was given before the flood ...

How did the later scribes get this knowledge?

How did the knowledge of the pre-flood *apkallu* survive the flood?

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Mesopotamian texts ...

- List seven pre-flood kings, each of them accompanied by an assisting *apkallu*, the divine sage who gave the king the knowledge necessary for civilization.
- After the flood, there are four post-flood *apkallu* mentioned
- Described as being “of human descent.”

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The fourth post-flood *apkallu* is further described as being only “two-thirds *apkallu*.”

These two elements (divine beings now of human descent and only two-thirds *apkallu* are important for specific reason we’ll get to in a moment.

For now ...

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The implication of these sources is that the post-flood *apkallu* were the result of interbreeding with human women – the same sort of description given in Gen 6:1-4.

Anne Kilmer article ...

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

“. . . [H]umans and *apkallu* could presumably mate since we have a description of the four post-flood *apkallu* as “of human descent,” the fourth being only “two-thirds *apkallu*” as opposed to pre-flood pure *apkallu* and subsequent human sages (*ummanu*).”

Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical Nephilim,” in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s 60th Birthday* (ed. E. W. Conrad and E. G. Newing; Eisenbrauns, 1987), 40.

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

Back to the fourth post-flood *apkallu* of human descent being only “two-thirds *apkallu*.”

- same description given to **Gilgamesh**, who is called “lord of the *apkallu*” in one text.
- Gilgamesh was a **giant** in Mesopotamian texts.
- Gilgamesh also mentioned by name in Qumran’s *Book of the Giants*.

Gen 6:1-4 – Original Context

The apparent mating with humans displeased Marduk.

In the Erra Epic he **judges the apkallu by sending them to the Abyss** “never to return.”

Summary next -- data and implications:

Summary & Implications

- Pre-flood apkallu were wholly divine
- Post flood apkallu are of human descent
- Dispensers of divine knowledge to humans
- Hybrid apkallu were giants
- The higher gods (Marduk) displeased
- Original offending apkallu sent to Abyss, out of council

Every element of Gen 6:1-4 accounted for

Summary & Implications

So what's the point?

- In Mesopotamian religion, *apkallu* viewed positively, reason for Babylon's greatness
- In Israel, negative, for two reasons
 - 1) Giant clans and demons
 - 2) Corruption of humanity (depravity)

Summary & Implications

5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

- **This verse follows all that sons of God & nephilim for a reason ...**
- **If we read Gen 6:1-4 as a theological and moral response to the Babylonian *apkallu*...**

Summary & Implications

Then Gen 6:5 makes sense where it is, and for what it says.

Genesis writer presumed original readers would know what he was responding to.

We've lost that, and can't recover it if make Gen 6:1-4 about human marriages.