

Fallen Angels: free or confined?

1. The Bible mentions that there are at least three heavens. What and where are they? Consult Genesis 1:1, 6-8, Jeremiah 4:25, Revelation 19:17, Genesis 1:14-18; 22:17, 2 Corinthians 12:1-6, Revelation 2:7, Psalms 11:4, Deuteronomy 10:14 and Job 22:12.

One definition of heaven is found in Genesis 1:6-8, Jer 4:25, and Revelation 19:17 which refers to heaven as the atmosphere of earth.

A second definition of heaven occurs in Genesis 1:14-18 and 22:17 which refers to heaven as the universe including the sun, moon, and stars.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-6, Paul reveals that there are three heavens. This passage in 2 Corinthians was in response to a group of Corinthians who were following other religious leaders who claimed higher knowledge or experiences and who doubted Paul's authority. Instead of boasting about his witness and experience, Paul referred to his experience, while on his trip to Damascus, in the third person to establish his authority. And in doing so, he reveals a "third heaven" which he synonymously associates with "paradise."

Revelation 2:7 associates "paradise" with the "paradise of God" and with references to the Garden of Eden and utopia.

Psalms 11:4 establishes that the Lord's throne is in heaven. But since God does not live on earth, the reference to heaven cannot be the first heaven.

Deuteronomy 10:14 and Job 22:12 refer to a "highest of heavens" with the inference that God is beyond the highest star. This would suggest that God is beyond the second heaven.

The third heaven, which the Bible reveals little about, seems to be where God resides, where Jesus ascended upon His resurrection (Heb 9:24), and where the Holy Spirit resides (1 Pet 1:12). It appears that it will also be the eternal dwelling for Christians in the future (Heb 11:13-16, 2 Cor 5:1-2) and possibly the "new earth" mentioned in Revelation 21:1-4.

2. The Bible speaks of 2 types of fallen angels: 1) free and 2) confined. Because the Bible mentions three heavens, where do the fallen free angels reside? Read Revelation 12:7-10 and Ephesians 2:1-3.

As a consequence of their rebellion, Satan and his followers were removed from their dwelling in God's presence (third heaven) to reside within the atmosphere of earth (first heaven). In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul reminds the Ephesians what they were like before they became Christians walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air." The "prince of the power of the air" is a reference to Satan and his dominion of the first heaven.

3. What are confined fallen angels? Where are they confined? Study 2 Peter 2:4-5, Luke 8:26-31, Matthew 8:31-32, and Revelation 20:1-3.

In 2 Peter 2:4-5, the term "hell" is the Greek word "tartarosas" which is a hapax legomena. Because it is a term used only once in the Bible, one must consult extrabiblical references to understand the meaning and context of its time. Greek literature of the time use the term to describe the deepest and darkest pit of gloom, worse than hell, but not a fiery pit. It appears that confined fallen angels are held here temporarily until final judgment and ultimate consignment to the eternal lake of fire that will occur later.

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Luke 8:26-31 supports the concept of tartarosas. The demons possessing the man implored Jesus not to command them into the “abyss”, which the Greek term “abussos” means the “bottomless pit.” This not only confirms the notion of a deep pit, like tartarosas, but also shows that these free fallen angels were aware of the deep pit (and perhaps the plight of their colleagues!) and desired to avoid that place by seeking permission to go into pigs!

In another account of the demon possessed man, found in Matthew 8:29-32, the demons ask, “have You come here to torment us before the time?” This was in reference to the “abyss” as the place of torment until final judgment.

“Abusso” is used nine times in the New Testament, and in most cases, appears to refer to “tartarosas,” a deep gloomy pit that confines fallen angels. It also serves as a place for Satan’s confinement as seen in Revelation 20:1-3.

4. Given that Satan and demons commit numerous sins, what sin would cause God to confine fallen angels? Read Jude 1:6-7 and Genesis 6:2-4.

Jude 1:6-7 provides three reasons for confining fallen angels “in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day”:

- 1) They left their “domain” which in Greek refers to their positions of authority.
- 2) They left their own abode or home to live in another.
- 3) They indulged in gross immorality with strange flesh that God never intended. As an illustration of the consequences of disavowing God and following one’s grossly immoral lustful nature, Jude uses a comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah and its homosexuality.

The Bible is not clear about the sin that caused God to bind angels in the abyss. Some scholars point to Genesis 6:2-4 as the incident which Jude is referring to. However, there is considerable debate as to “who the sons of God” are. There are three interpretations to this passage of Genesis 6:2-4.

Interpretation #1: The “sons of God” refer to angels.

Pros

1. It is the view of greatest antiquity including early church fathers and the Jewish historian Josephus. The extrabiblical noncanonical text 1 Enoch, written in 200 BC, takes this view.
2. Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7 use the term “sons of God” to refer to angels.

Cons

1. Nowhere in the Bible is it stated that angels marry humans. In Mark 12:25, Jesus says that angels do not marry.
2. Why does God flood the earth to punish humans if angels are the cause of this problem?
3. Jude 1:6-7 does not refer to marriage between angels and humans and the comparison to the sin of sodomy in Sodom and Gomorrah “and the cities around them” is difficult to follow. Sodom and Gomorrah was judged for their apostasy (Deut 29:23-25).
4. Because angels are spirit beings, a fair amount of speculation is required to understand how they were able to procreate with humans.

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Interpretation #2: The “sons of God” refer to the godly line of Seth and the “daughters of men” refer to the ungodly line of Cain.

Cons

1. This interpretation requires an inconsistent understanding of the term “men.” In Gen 6:1, the term means “humanity”, but in Gen 6:2, this interpretation requires the meaning to specifically refer to “men of the Cainite line.”
2. Why would the offspring of believers and non-believers be giants?

Interpretation #3: The “sons of God” refer to human kings, nobles, and aristocrats of the Ancient Near East and the “daughters of men” refer to the women of lower socioeconomic classes.

Pros

1. Ancient Near Eastern archeology indicates that Mesopotamian kings and rulers strove for power and desired to be “men of renown.” Divine titles of deity or son of a deity were common ways to establish and validate their rule. The acquisition of power, money, and women or tyranny, corruption, and polygamy was typical.
2. The ancient Aramaic Targums render “sons of God” as “sons of nobles.” The Greek translation of Symmachus renders “sons of God” as “sons of the kings or nobles.”
3. In Gen 6:4, the Hebrew term “Nephilīm” is associated with the Hebrew term “gibbōrīm”, which adds the following context to the term “Nephilīm”: princes, aristocrats, or great men.

Genesis 6:1-4, instead of referring to angels or men of the Cainite line, has more contextual evidence to support the interpretation of despotic and autocratic kings and nobility. The increasing wickedness of subsequent, and likely nepotistic, generations is what grieved God and caused His judgment.

Thus, while Jude 1:6-7 tells us about confined angels, we do not know exactly why God confined them other than they pursued their lusts in a similar fashion as “Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them”. It is important to note the context of this passage; Jude is warning about early forms of Gnosticism and apostasy and is using rebellious angels as a warning of consequences. Gnosticism, emphasizing the goodness of one’s spirit and the evil of one’s physical body, promoted the pursuit of one’s immoral lust and mocked the grace of God. Jude’s comment on gross immorality was to confront Gnosticism’s sinful license, arrogance towards church leaders, pursuit of other spiritual beings, and divisiveness.

And Satan is still free to tempt man to follow him or turn man away from God.

References:

1. Kaiser WC, Davids PH, Bruce FF, Brauch MT, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Chicago, IL: Inter-Varsity Press (1996).

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