

Bible Survey: Section 6: Wisdom & Poetry

Supplement: Who Were the “Sons of God”?

1 of 2

Much debate has centered on the identity of the “sons of God” in Job 1:6. A common theory proposes that this referred to some kind of heavenly scene in which the angels approached God for worship. I disagree with that interpretation.

Objection 1: Nothing of angels or heaven has been introduced in the context, so the interjection of such a scene with no explanation seems out of place.

Objection 2: Satan would not be among the angels in heaven. He would, however, be among human worshipers to try to lead them astray. In fact, that’s precisely what he tried to do to Job. (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:3)

Objection 3: The main argument proposed for the angelic interpretation of “sons of God” here is the other occurrence of the phrase in Job 38:7, where most people assume angels are meant. In this verse, the natural creation is personified in a poetic discourse. Such a figurative text cannot be used to establish a universal definition for the whole book. Besides, terms can vary in meaning depending on the context. The Hebrew parallelism in Job 38:7 argues against the angelic interpretation. The synonymous term corresponding to “sons of God” is “morning stars.” The morning star, which is actually Venus, appears as the brightest light in the early dawn sky. Given that the whole context deals with the natural creation and includes other personifications, it is most reasonable to interpret this the same way. God portrays the celestial luminaries as celebrating the completion of Earth.

Objection 4: “Son/children/daughter of” was a common Hebrew idiom indicating a shared trait or nature (see examples in Acts 4:36 and John 17:12). Godly men, human leaders, Israel, Christians, Adam, and humanity are all called “son(s) of God” (Matt. 5:9; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26; Gen. 6:1-4; Psalms 82:6-7; Deut. 14:1; 32:8; Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1; Luke 3:38). In most cases, this idiom refers to people who were made in God’s image, chosen to be his people, or faithful to him.

Objection 5: In Job 1:6 and 2:2, the verb “present” is translated from the Hebrew verb *yatsab*. In the Bible, this verb is normally used for humans (about forty-three times). The few angelic references do not refer to worship (Num. 22:22; Zech. 6:5). *yatsab* most often means to take a stand or to present oneself before authority figures (God or human) for various reasons, such as receiving a law (Exo. 19:17), making a covenant (Josh. 24:1), or appointing someone to an office (Deut. 31:14; 1 Sam. 10:19). The most natural understanding of the verses in Job is that faithful men had come to a designated place to present their offerings to God. There is a reference to Job offering sacrifices in the preceding context (Job 1:5). People presenting themselves before God for worship is a familiar scene in the early Biblical narratives; angels presenting themselves for worship in heaven is not. Further, God’s challenge for Satan to consider Job may suggest that Job was present (Job 1:8; 2:3). While we would not expect Satan to appear in heaven among the angels in some scene of ethereal worship, we certainly expect him to appear among faithful men on earth to attempt to make them stumble, as he did by his attacks on Job.

Conclusion: For these reasons, I believe the setting of Job 1-2 is earthly, and the “sons of God” are godly human worshipers, probably including Job. I find no contextual reason to interject a heavenly setting or angels into this text, and to place Satan in heaven among angels worshipping before God seems unreasonable. This is not a crucial topic upon which we must agree. I simply wanted to share my reasons for rejecting the popular interpretation.