

## The Sons of God

One of the reasons Genesis 6 gives for Yahweh's judging the world is that the "sons of God" were taking the "daughters of men" as their wives (Gen. 6:1-4). The problem with these titles is that it is not obvious to readers today to whom the author was referring. There are three major ways to understand these titles.

### View One: The Line of Seth and Cain

In this view, the "sons of God" refer to the godly line of Seth, and the "daughters of men" refer to the ungodly line of Cain. In Genesis 4 there is a contrast made between Cain as an ungodly son, who begets an ungodly line, and Seth as a godly son, who came at a time when people began to call upon Yahweh. Those who take this view see that contrast being continued into Genesis 6 and believe that one of the reasons for the flood was the mixing of the godly and ungodly lines in marriage.

Unfortunately, nowhere in Genesis is there any hint that the "sons of God" are to be seen as Seth's line and the "daughters of men" as Cain's line. In fact, the Hebrew word "men" is not talking about a specific group within humanity but about humanity as a whole. It would also be unnatural to restrict the title "daughters of men" to just Cain's line and ungodly women; it is better to instead see it as a designation for "womankind." It also does not seem natural to see godly men having sexual relations with ungodly women, for would that not make those men ungodly?

There is nothing in the text that states that Seth's line was godly—only a few in his line are said to be godly. In fact, the text makes the opposite point: that all of humanity was evil and that Noah was the only righteous one that Yahweh found on the whole earth (Gen. 6:5-8).

### View Two: The Polygamy of Kings

In this view, the "sons of God" refer to tyrant kings who seize the "daughters of men" in its basic meaning. The sin here is the polygamy of the kings in order to gain power.

There is no hint in the text to any idea of kings or political alliances. In fact, there is no concept of nations until Genesis 10, after the flood. The mention of kings does not appear until the story of Abraham. The sin of polygamy and marriage for political alliances was a common thing after the flood, even with David, a man after Yahweh's own heart. However, the text makes it clear that the evil of Genesis 6 was so exceptionally great that it deserved the earth being wiped out. This view, in fact, only came about as a *reaction* to the third view.

The first view did not come about until the fifth century A.D. when Augustine came up with a different explanation because this one made him uncomfortable. The second view came about after Augustine's time. It is the third view that has long been held by the majority of Jews and Christians alike throughout history.

## View Three: Fallen Angels

In this view, the “sons of God” refer to fallen angels and the “daughters of men” to the female descendants of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase “sons of God” is used in the Scriptures to refer always to angels—*bene elim* (1 Sam. 2:12; 25:17, 25; Ps. 29:1; 89:6; 103:20) and *bene elohim* (Deut. 14:1; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Hos. 1:10; 11:1). This is true of extra-biblical material as well (1 Enoch 6-7). Technically the “sons of God” title is used to refer to beings that are a direct creation of Yahweh. Only Adam and Eve and the angels fit this title since all other humans are an indirect creation of Yahweh through their parents. Since Adam and Eve are dead, this can only refer to the angels. Although believers are called “sons of God” in the Second Testament, this is because they are now a direct creation of Yahweh by being born again through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14).

There is the distinction between “sons” and “daughters” in each category. The phrasing is not the “daughters of God” and the “sons of men.” The distinction here imposes a *contrast* between the types of groups: those who are “of God” and “of men.” This seems to be the focus—those who belong in the category of the divine (*elohim*) and those who belong among humans (humanity). This contrast is lost with the first two views.

In Gen. 6:2 the taking of wives refers to the mutual consent of both groups in the unholy union. This was not a kidnapping and raping of women; rather, humanity was a willing participant. Gen. 6:1-4 present the angelic cause for the flood whereas Gen. 6:5-6 presents the human cause.

Those who disagree with this view often quote Matt. 22:29-30 as a rebuttal to the fact that angels, in Genesis 6, were able to have sex. The first problem is that this is not even the point of Matt. 22:29-30 (resurrection is the point). Second, in mentioning the angels, Jesus never said that angels were sexless; he said only that they are not given in marriage. We all know that one does not have to be married in order to have sex. Additionally, Jesus said that *holy* angels were not given in marriage in *heaven*; He never mentioned what *fallen* angels are capable of doing on *earth* outside the will of Yahweh.

There are places where the Scriptures describe angels who are able to take on human form and interact with humanity (Gen. 19:1-5; Heb. 13:2). Beyond this we do not know enough about angels to say of what they are and are not physically capable.

## The Imprisoned Angels

This understanding of Genesis 6 is supported by 2 Pet. 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7. These passages describe the punishment of a certain group of angels due to a sexual sin during the time of Noah

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<sup>1</sup> This third view is how the Jews of the ancient Near East understood this passage. In fact, they wrote a lot on it in the Jewish Apocrypha, which presents this as the major event that disrupted the world order, both spiritually and physically. 1 Enoch 6-12 tells the whole story of the angels taking women as wives and of the flood that followed. The language of Jude, in fact, parallels 1 Enoch (10:4-6, 12; 13:2; 14:5; 12:4; 15:3) and even quotes it. There is little doubt that Jude and Enoch share a common understanding of the angels of Genesis 6. Jude, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, apparently endorses Enoch’s interpretation of the identity of the sons of God in Genesis 6. It was also held by the early Church fathers (Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian). It was not until the third century with Augustine (354-430 AD) that the first view was proposed. Most First Testament scholars today take this view (see G. J. Wenham. *Genesis*. Word Biblical Commentary, p. 1:135).

and the flood. 2 Pet. 2:4-5 puts the event in the time of Noah and the flood, and 2 Pet. 2:6 and Jude 7 show that it preceded Sodom and Gomorrah. In the context here, Peter is talking about the immoral lifestyle of the false prophets (2 Pet. 2:2, 13-14, 18). His point is that these false prophets will be judged for their misdeeds just as the demonic angels and Sodom and Gomorrah were. The implication is that these two were judged for their sexual perversions. Jude 7 says explicitly that the sin of the angels was a sexual perversion just like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sin is also said to be sexual in 2 Peter and Jude, where it is compared to the sexual perversion of an unholy union as in Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 12-15, 18; Jude 7). The time sequence connects it to the time of the flood.

The event in 2 Peter and Jude cannot be referring to the original fall of the angels because then all the demonic angels would be imprisoned according to 2 Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6. Jude 6 also states that the angels did not keep their own domain (*archen*, a place of assigned authority and activity), but abandoned their proper abode (*idion oiketerion*, “peculiar place of residence”). The implication is that they took on a state that they were not supposed to. This also cannot mean that they were on earth and not in heaven because this is true of all demons—yet they have not experienced the same fate as these particular demons have. These are the angels that await the great judgment of the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:10).

## The Nephilim

Though it is not entirely clear, the context of Genesis 6 seems to indicate that the *nephilim* and the “mighty heroes of old” are the offspring of the unholy union. The meaning of the Hebrew word *nephilim* is uncertain, though the context suggests an understanding of great and mighty warriors who were famous throughout the world. The Greek equivalent in the LXX *gigantes* does not refer to monstrous size; rather, it means “fallen ones” and refers to the unusual offspring of an unholy union. This word was also used of the Titans, who were the offspring of male gods and human women.<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty is with Gen. 6:6, which states that the *nephilim* were on the earth *after* this event as well. If all humanity (except for Noah and his family) died in the flood, it is difficult to understand how the post-flood *nephilim* could be related to the pre-flood *nephilim* or how the Anakites of Canaan could be their descendants (Num. 13:33). This is a problem no matter which view one holds. A possible understanding is that in Num. 13:33 it is not the author who connects the Anakites to the *nephilim* but a misconception circulated by the people of Israel. Just because the people *believed* the Anakites to be *nephilim* does not mean they were actual *nephilim*. We should not trust the opinions of those who are not divinely inspired.

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<sup>2</sup> See C. Fred Dickason. *Angels: Elect and Evil*, pp. 244-45 and Merrill F. Unger. *Biblical Demonology*, pp. 45-52.