

WHO WERE “THE SONS OF GOD” IN GENESIS SIX?

The Scriptures clearly use the term “sons of God” in the NT in reference to Christians (Matt. 5:9, Rom 8:14, Gal. 3:26). However, the purpose of this study is to show that the term is used in the OT in reference to angels and in particular to “the sons of God” mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4 as angels who sinned at that time. The further purpose of this study is to show that the alternative understanding of these “sons of God” as being humans of the tribe of Seth, as has been proposed mainly in the past, is incorrect. The passage describes:

- “When **man** began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, **the sons of God** saw that **the daughters of man** were attractive. And they took as their wives [Heb. *nashim* “women”] any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in **man** forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The **Nephilim** 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” (**Gen. 6:1-4** ESV).

NOTE: The Hebrew interlinear gives **man** as the translation here as demonstrating that **mankind** is being spoken of. The Greek which translates from the Hebrew as “these men” in the LXX in verse 3 is incorrect.

COULD THEY HAVE BEEN FALLEN ANGELS?

“SONS OF GOD” ARE ALSO ANGELS

This Hebrew expression, with one exception (Ps. 82:6) always means angelic beings rather than humans:

- “Now there was a day when **the sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them ... Again there was a day when **the sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD” (**Job 1:6, 2:1**).

Satan’s reply to God’s question of: “from where have you come?” is “from going to and fro **on the earth**.” This strongly indicates that the location of this meeting was ‘heaven’ and therefore concerned angels. Furthermore, “sons of God” clearly existed before humans existed:

- “To what were its [*the Earth’s*] foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all **the sons of God** shouted for joy?” (**Job 38:6, 7**).

When one version of the Septuagint (LXX) was produced during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.) the phrase “**the sons of God**” in these three verses was translated as “the angels” or “my angels.” Because the Hebrew Masoretic text is based on much older Hebrew texts as was the LXX, the indication is that the LXX translators saw the phrase “**the sons of God**” as meaning ‘angels.’

NOTE: Some have produced the faulty argument that because the LXX is older than the Masoretic text that Job never spoke of “**the sons of God**” but only of ‘angels.’ This argument fails to understand that other very old documents indicate that the pre-LXX Hebrew Bibles contained the original phrase —“**the sons of God**.” Please see commentary below.

“SONS OF GOD” ARE ALSO HEAVENLY BEINGS

- “Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings (Lit: “sons of God” as in NJB), ascribe to the LORD glory and strength” (**Ps. 29:1**).

Although a few translations give “mighty ones,” the majority demonstrate that the translators had reasons to understand these “sons of God” as angels i.e. **“heavenly beings”** in NRSV, NAB, S&G and NLT; **“angels”** in Moffatt; and **“angelic powers”** in REB. The interpretive Aramaic Targums give *“you bands of angels, the sons of God.”*

NOTE: Although the currently available LXX has “sons of God” it translates the rest of Psalm 29:1 incorrectly as indicating human activities of “sons of God.”

THE ANGELS WHO “WENT AFTER DIFFERENT FLESH”

- “For if God did not spare **angels when they sinned**, but cast them into hell (Gk. *tartarus*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...” (**2 Pet. 2:4**).
- “And angels who did not keep their own domain (*“position of authority”* ESV), but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, **since they in the same way as these** indulged in gross immorality and went after **strange flesh** (Lit. *“different flesh”* UBS), are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire” (**Jude 6, 7** NASB).

The Unvarnished NT renders it as:

“And how, **no different from them**, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns, where they unleashed their lust and **went in pursuit of alien flesh...**”

The footnote says: “Angel flesh, as angels (or “sons of God”) in Genesis 6:1 had lusted after mortal flesh”.

The NAB notes state:

6: This second example draws on Gn 6,1-4...

7: Practiced unnatural vice: literally, **“went after alien flesh.”** This example derives from Gn,19, 1-25 ... this refers to the desire for **intimacies by human beings with angels** (the reverse of the example in Jude 6).

The Expositors Bible Commentary states:

7 The key factors are “these” (*toitois*-masculine, referring to “angels” [v.6], not cities [feminine], and the words “different flesh” (*sarkos heteras*). Thus the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was seeking union with “different flesh” in a way similar to the “sons of God” (angels?) did (Gen 6:2) when they mingled with the daughters of men” (humans),

p.390.

Certainly “angels” (Gk. *aggelos*) in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 is not a reference to humans as messengers (Gk. *aggelos*). This is because *Tartarus* seems not to be a location for the punishment of humans, but rather for the detention of very long-living beings who are awaiting their judgement on the great day. Clearly these were spirit beings who sinned when they *“went after alien flesh.”* as did those humans in Sodom and Gomorrah. This links these angels to the Genesis 6 account concerning “the sons of God” who contravened God’s laws against the cross-breeding of species.

HUMANS ARE ONLY CALLED “SONS OF GOD” AFTER PENTECOST

This is because of Jesus’ death and resurrection and applies only to those who accept him i.e. to Christians as those who have received God’s spirit and the prospect of immortal life.

COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 6:2-4

The *Word Biblical Commentary* has the following to say concerning Genesis 6:2-4:

2. “The sons of the gods” or **“the sons of God”** could be translated either way. Job 1:6; 2:1 lend support to the latter, while Ps 29:1; 89:7 make the former possible. However, it is the nature of “the sons of the gods/God,” that has perplexed commentators.

Three main kinds of interpretation are offered by modern exegetes. First, “the sons of the gods” are nonhuman, godlike beings such as angels, demons, or spirits. Second, “the sons of the gods” are superior men such as kings or other rulers. Third, “the sons of the gods” are godly men, the descendants of Seth as opposed to the godless descendants of Cain. **The “angel” interpretation is at once the oldest view** and that of most modern commentators. It is assumed in the earliest Jewish exegesis (e.g., the books of 1 Enoch 6:2ff; Jubilees 5:1), LXX, Philo *De Gigant* 2:358), Josephus (*Ant.* 1.31) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QapGen 2:1; CD 2:17–19). The NT (2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6, 7) and the earliest Christian writers (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) also take this line. Modern scholars who accept this view advance three main reasons for supporting it. First, elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Ps 29:1, Job 1:6) “sons of God” refers to heavenly, godlike creatures. Second, in 6:1–4 **the contrast is between “the sons of the gods” on the one hand and “the daughters of man”** on the other. The alternative interpretations presuppose that what Gen 6 really meant was that “the sons of some men” married “the daughters of other men.” The present phrase “sons of God” is, to say the least, an obscure way of expressing such an idea. It is made the more implausible by 6:1 where **“man” refers to all mankind**. It is *natural to assume that in v 2 “daughters of man” has an equally broad reference*, not a specific section of the human race. Finally, it is pointed out that in Ugaritic literature “sons of God” refers to members of the divine pantheon, and it is likely that Genesis is using the phrase in a similar sense...

The Sethite interpretation, for a long time the preferred Christian exegesis, again because it avoided the suggestion of carnal intercourse with angels, has few advocates today. In support of this view it was pointed out that the Sethites are the chosen line from whom Noah is descended, and that elsewhere in the Pentateuch the elect nation Israel is called God’s son (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1)...

In the light of Canaanite usage and of passages such as Job 1:6, it seems most likely that the “angelic” interpretation is to be preferred. Much of the objection to this view would be **eliminated if the term “angel” were avoided and a more ambivalent term such as “spirit” were used instead**. In Job 1 and 2, “the Satan” appears as one of “the sons of God” and is a highly malevolent member of the heavenly court. This OT picture of the heavenly council, in which the LORD chairs a committee of “the sons of God” (cf. Ps 82), parallels Canaanite descriptions of the heavenly pantheon, whose gods often enjoy sexual intercourse. It seems likely, then, that Genesis believed the sons of God could have acted similarly...

“Saw that the daughters of man were good and they took wives for themselves from any they chose.” Some commentators have argued that the very phraseology used to describe these unions condemns them. It is suggested that rape or polygamy is implied by this description. However, this cannot be sustained. Cassuto correctly insists that these words can apply to perfectly proper marriages: “The passage contains not a single word ... alluding to rape or adultery or any act against the LORD’s will” (1:294). Westermann argues that the parallels in 12:10–20 and 2 Sam 11 show that seeing and taking a woman is automatically condemned, and such a condemnation may be inferred here. But again his conclusion is unjustified. The Pharaoh and David were condemned because they committed adultery with other men’s wives; there is no hint of that here.

One must look behind the specific terms used to discover the reason for the condemnation in this case. The sequence of “saw ... good ... took” parallels most closely the terminology in 3:6 and suggests the sinfulness of the action of the sons of God. When the woman saw and took, she transgressed a boundary set by the LORD. The essence of Adam’s sin was to acquiesce in his wife’s transgression by eating the fruit she gave him. **Here the fault of the daughters of man lies presumably in their consenting to intercourse with “the sons of the gods.”** It ought also to be borne in mind that ***the girls’ fathers would also have been implicated***, since, if there was no rape or seduction, their approval to these matches would have been required. The obvious avoidance of any terms suggesting lack of consent makes the girls and their parents culpable, the more so when the previous chapter has demonstrated that mankind was breeding very successfully on its own.

This story may also be, as Drewermann (181–83) suggests, a polemic against the fertility cults which often included sacred marriages between the gods and men. Certainly, the OT **law strongly condemns all attempts at crossbreeding of species**. Mixed crops are prohibited, and mixed clothing (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9–11). Copulating with animals is a capital offense (Lev 20:16) and marrying non-Israelites is also outlawed (Deut 7:3). It therefore follows that unions between the “sons of the gods” and human women must be at least as reprehensible, for in this case both parties must know it is against the will of the creator who made the world so that everything should reproduce **“according to its kind”** (1:11–12, 21, 24–25).

3 “Then the LORD said,” as in v 7 and 3:22, introduces God’s thoughts to himself. **“My spirit shall not remain in man for ever.”** Almost every word in this statement has been the subject of controversy, though there are signs of an emerging consensus among recent commentators.

It is relevant to note first of all the similarity with 3:22, “[lest he] live for ever.” This implies that **the divine-human intercourse was**, like eating the tree of life, **intended to procure eternal life for man**. This attempt to usurp what belongs to God alone is therefore condemned. Instead human life is limited to a maximum of 120 years...

4 “The Nephilim were in the earth in those days.” The only other biblical reference to the Nephilim is Num 13:33. The Israelite spies said they saw the Nephilim, who were so tall that they felt as small as grasshoppers. LXX and Vg also understand them to be giants. Indeed their term, *gigantes*, suggests they understood the Nephilim to be **the offspring of the “angel” marriages**, for in Greek mythology the *gigantes* were the product of the union of earth and heaven. And this is the way most modern commentators understand the term.

The etymology of “Nephilim” is obscure. If Ezek 32:20–28 is alluding to Gen 6:1–4, it seems likely that he connected the Nephilim with **lp** “to fall.” There he repeatedly speaks of “the warriors,” the same term as here, who have fallen in battle and who now inhabit Sheol. Similarly the *gigantes* of Greek mythology were defeated and imprisoned in the earth.

“In those days” refers to the pre-flood period when the events described in vv 1–3 took place. **“And also afterwards”** is a parenthetical comment **reminding the reader that giants were still around in the post-diluvian period** (Num 13:33). However, to avoid the implication that the race of giants survived the flood, or that “angel” marriages continued after it, rabbinic commentators preferred to suppose that “and also afterwards” refers to the period of grace before the flood. But this seems strained, as the following sentence implies **continued visits by “angels to mortal wives”** (Skinner, 147).

“Whenever the sons of the gods went in to the daughters of men, they bore them children.” Though it is not impossible to translate this as a simple past event “When they went in ...” etc., it is more natural (with Skinner, König, Gispén) to take the imperfect “went”

and perfect preceded by *waw* (“bore ... children”) **as frequentative**. To “go in to” is a frequent euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. 30:16; 38:16).

“They are the warriors from olden times.” “They” refers to the Nephilim. “Warriors”: cf. the same term in 10:8–9; Ezek 32:21, 27. “From olden days” defines long periods of time past or future. When such times are of unlimited duration, “eternity” may be an appropriate translation; cf. “forever.” But here the reference is simply to remote antiquity; cf. Josh 24:2; 1 Sam 27:8; Isa 63:16.

Word Biblical Explanation

...Stories of superhuman demigods like Gilgamesh were a commonplace, and intercourse with the divine was regularly sought in the fertility cults of Canaan and the sacred marriage rites of Mesopotamia. Through such procedures men sought to achieve enhanced earthly life and even eternal life. But to Hebrew thinking such ideas were utterly abhorrent. Within the earthly realm the creator’s categories must not be transgressed. Each species had been created to propagate itself **“according to its type.”** Thus crossbreeding of cattle, intermarriage with foreigners, even plowing with teams of different types of animals or wearing garments of mixed cloth was forbidden by the law. How much worse was this breach of the boundary between the earthly and heavenly realms. It seems that the sons of the gods must be understood as spiritual beings akin to angels or demons. Though some have regarded it as unfair that mankind should have been punished for this transgression which was provoked by the initiative of spirits, the narrative gives no hint that seduction or rape was involved. These unions are described in terms befitting perfectly normal marriages, which presupposes that the fathers of the girls gave their free assent to the arrangements. In biblical times a man might propose, but it was certainly the girl’s father who disposed when it came to matrimony. The narrator evidently pictures the girls’ fathers encouraging these unions, just as it was presumably fathers who pushed their daughters to participate in the fertility cults. So, as in Gen 3, we have the temptation to sin coming from outside man, but his freely given consent brings him under judgment.

As often in Scripture the punishment is made to fit the crime. **Grasping at immortality through these liaisons**, man is sentenced to live a maximum of 120 years, roughly a sevenfold reduction over the average lifespan of the antediluvians. Though some of Noah’s immediate descendants live longer than this, their lives are much shorter than the pre-flood patriarchs. The Pentateuch shows that by the time of Moses one hundred and twenty was regarded as the greatest age a man could hope to reach. But this sentence did not deter some from continuing to ignore divine displeasure by perpetuating these strange unions: “Also afterwards ... the sons of the gods went into the daughters of man.”

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO “SONS OF GOD” AS BEING FALLEN ANGELS

OBJECTION 1: IF ANGELS CAN NEVER DIE THEN DEMONS CANNOT BE ANGELS

Because Luke 20:36 shows that angels cannot die, it is objected that if demons are angels they, too, cannot die and therefore evil supernatural persons will trouble mankind forever.

REPLY: Not all statements concerning angels refer to both good and bad angels simultaneously. There is a clear difference between bad angels **“who sinned,”** (2 Pet. 2:4) and *good angels*—**“the elect angels”** (1 Tim. 5:21). So the “all ministering spirits” of Hebrews 1:14 is only within the range of “the elect angels.” It may be to these only that Jesus’ words in Luke 20:36 apply so that only “the elect angels” cannot die. This means that demons

were not necessarily granted immortality. Apart from the statement that there were angels “**who sinned**,” (2 Pet. 2:4) evidently some angels must have fallen into error:

➤ “If He charges his **angels with error**, how much more those who dwell in houses of clay...” (Job 4:18, 19).

Although Eliphaz may have presented incorrect theological arguments to Job this does not mean that he presented Job with incorrect facts. Job did not correct Eliphaz concerning this statement. So these angels must have been ones who had fallen into sin. Holy angels do not have a pre-disposition to sin. Yet to say that it was impossible for them to sin would be a denial of their God-given free will. If, however, the angels who became demons did originally have immortality does this mean that they are indestructible and so will trouble mankind forever? No. The term ‘immortal’ does not mean indestructible in the absolute sense. To explain: Man was created as a ‘mortal being.’ This means that he was perishable/corruptible i.e. under normal circumstances his body would wear down until it ceased to function and die.

So ‘immortal’ simply means the negating of this process. So even the “indestructible life” (Heb 7:16) that Jesus now has is in respect to a negating of his original mortality. Because God is “the Almighty One” he clearly has the power to end the life of even an immortal person.

OBJECTION 2: THE ANGELS WHO FELL INTO SIN WERE HUMAN MESSENGERS

➤ “If God did not spare *the angels* **when they sinned**, but condemned them to the chains of Tartarus and handed them over to be kept *for judgement...*” (2 Pet. 2:4 NAB).

REPLY: To say that these “angels” were simply human messengers is an interpretation which is out of the broad contextual usage of the word ‘angels’ as understood by the apostles who presented them as supernatural ‘messengers’ from God, and as ones who carry out His will. On only a few occasions in the NT does the Greek word *aggelos* apply to humans according to the context (e.g. John’s messengers in Luke 7:24). Furthermore, these “angels *who sinned*” are chained in Tartarus, a place mentioned only once in the Scriptures and specifically as an incarceration for these “angels *who sinned*.” So they are kept in this condition for eons of time until the time of judgment. This fact excludes them from being human messengers.

OBJECTION 3: THE ORIGIN OF DEMONS IS UNKNOWN

REPLY: Even though it is difficult to be certain about the origin of demons it is not logical to refuse to recognize their reality as persons, just as one would not refuse to recognize the reality of angels as persons just because there are only few details concerning their origin.

OBJECTION 4: AN ANGEL CANNOT BE “THE SON OF GOD”

➤ “For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”?” (Heb. 1:5).

This fact has been used by some to prove that angels are never called “sons of God.” Certainly no angel is ever spoken of individually as ‘a son of God’ but rather they are spoken of in the plural as “sons of God.”

REPLY: Hebrews 1:5, in fact, concerns a single individual and it is quoted from Psalm 2—a specific Messianic prophecy which applies only to the one who would become Messiah—one who was “begotten” by God. It proves only that no angel would ever become the Messiah rather than meaning that angels are not called “sons of God.”

OBJECTION 5: THE STORY OF JOB WRITTEN TOO LATE TO INTERPRET GENESIS

REPLY: The *New International Bible Commentary* states on p.521:

We know of a number of literary parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature to Job or at least to the theme of a righteous sufferer, going back to the **early second millennium B.C.** There is every likelihood, then, that the story of Job was told for many centuries before the present book of Job was composed, probably somewhere between the seventh and the third centuries B.C.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes that:

Numerous details bear witness to **the patriarchal age** and suggest the antiquity of the prose account...The Sabbeans and the Chaldeans are still marauding tribes, rather than settled city dwellers. The unit of money appears elsewhere only in Gen. 33:19 and Josh. 24:32. The description of Job's blessing contains ancient features...The final form of the book was certainly reached by the 3rd cent. B.C., for it was known to Ben Sira and fragments of a manuscript from Qumran are written in paleo-Hebrew script, suggesting further evidence that the work was viewed as coming from the patriarchal period. Volume 2, p. 1065.

So there is no proven reason why the readers of Genesis 6 would not have been aware of the understanding from the story of Job that the "sons of God" were angels either by oral tradition or by early writings of the account.

OBJECTION 6: IT WAS AN APOCRYPHAL SOURCE FOR THE 'FALLEN ANGEL' INTERPRETATION

Some biblical commentators refer to 1 Enoch as the original Jewish interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. Their assumption is that Jude quoted from 1 Enoch in Jude 14, 15 and so because 1 Enoch describes the fallen angels procreating with women then Jude must have acquired this idea from 1 Enoch. The words common to 1 Enoch and **Jude 14, 15** are:

- "It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'"

REPLY: Although these same words are in the earlier book of 1 Enoch (200-100 B.C), it is not proven that Jude quoted from 1 Enoch. This is because 1 Enoch contains many pagan, unbiblical and outlandish concepts. However, it is perfectly feasible that both Jude and the writer of Enoch quoted the above passage from general oral tradition. So, when the earlier points from Job are taken into account, it can be seen that 1 Enoch is not the original interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. Its value is only in showing that "sons of God" as angels was the commonly accepted interpretation in those days.

OBJECTION 7: WHY PUNISH MANKIND FOR THE SINS OF ANGELS?

REPLY: Really, Genesis 6:2-4 is a parenthesis within a much bigger event. Its purpose is to show part of the wickedness of the time, but the reason for the punishment of mankind was for its own wickedness:

- "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (**Gen. 6:5**).

Evidently the flood wasn't for the sole purpose of judging the wicked angels for their sin because they and the Nephilim were not entirely responsible for man's wickedness.

OBJECTION 8: THE ISSUE OF ANGELS AS HAVING PROCREATIVE POWERS

REPLY: However one views the bodily constitution of angels, the Scriptures show that they could perform many or most normal human functions i.e. walking, talking, eating, and drinking. So there is no stated reason for them not to have procreative powers. Nevertheless, don't the following words of Jesus exclude them from anything to do with sex:

- “For in the resurrection they **neither marry** nor are given in marriage, but are **like angels** in heaven” (**Matt. 22:30** also Mark 12:25).

This passage gives the impression that angels are asexual. However, the parallel passage in Luke somewhat clarifies matters:

- “And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead **neither marry** nor are given in marriage, for they **cannot die anymore**, because they are **equal to angels** and are sons of God, *being sons of the resurrection*”
(**Luke 20:34-36**).

The Expositors Bible Commentary notes that: “The Greek syntax, however, places the comment about angels nearer to “*no longer die*” than to “*neither marry*” and the *Word Biblical Commentary* explains that:

36 The logic of resurrection is taken by Luke to imply not only an escape from the arms of death at the point of resurrection but also a permanent invulnerability to death thereafter. In this new situation there can, therefore, be **no place for taking steps to provide sons to carry on the family name** ... Perhaps more helpfully Wiles (*Theol* 60 [1957] 500–502) suggests that the unitive function of marriage whereby it “represents the deepest form of personal relationship, the highest form of social experience” does **not in resurrection require the exclusivity that is proper for the present age** (presumably it will still not be good for man to be alone!).

“*Equal to angels*” is in support of “not able to die,” **not of the abandonment of marriage**.

The *Word Biblical Explanation*:

Levirate marriage (based on Deut 25:5–10; cf. Gen 38:8–10) was a way of keeping a man's name from dying out. Its provisions seemed to the Sadducees to make it obvious that to think of a resurrection future only landed one in tangles that proved the idea a nonsense. According to their logic there would not be rules like this for the present life, if that life were to go on after death through resurrection.

Jesus has an answer ready for their riddle. **Their focus on marriage involved a perspective bounded by the horizons of this world**. Marriage is an institution for this world, but for those whom God deems worthy of the resurrection life, there is **a glorious new mode of existence. Resurrection existence is in a deathless realm**. So there can be no place for taking steps to provide sons to carry on the family name. It would be quite out of place to think in terms of a cycle of the generations. (It is perhaps best to think of **the relational function of marriage, removed in the life of the age to come from connection with procreation and eroticism, as no longer needing the exclusivity that is now proper to marriage**).

Evidently, in imitation of the holy immortal angels (Mark 8:38), Christians, after resurrection, will not marry or have any need to procreate in the kingdom. Although it is certainly true that no other Scripture speaks of angels as having sexual capacity and powers of procreation there also are no Scriptures which can legitimately be used to show that angels of the long distant past did not have such capacity and powers in accord with the “fallen angel” interpretation of

the Genesis 6:4 account. One speculative answer to this issue is given by Hugh Ross:

It seems reasonable that angels living in God's presence and experiencing His love have neither need nor desire for our earthly kind of marriage and the physical union that belongs to it.

Angels who have broken their relationship with God through rebellion and who follow Satan instead of God have lost that unity, that oneness, and all the pleasures and joys of heaven. Their loss of place and purpose, and, more importantly, of relationship with God possibly might tempt these angels-turned-demons to seek the kind of union they observe among humans. *The Genesis Question*, p. 134.

Ross then notes the possibility that Paul hinted at this reason when he instructed women to wear a sign of authority over their heads "*because of the angels*" (1 Cor.11:10) so that angels would not be influenced by any wrong conduct by women. And certainly people engaging in the occult i.e. operating under the influence of demons often seem to be obsessed with sex (please see on the internet Spiritual Counterfeits Projects). So, it seems likely that angels can have their interest in sex stimulated and so this objection to "the Sons of God" as being fallen angels is not necessarily a valid one.

WHY DO DEMONS NOT USE PROCREATIVE POWERS TODAY?

It seems from the Bible record that these "Sons of God" used procreative powers on at least one other occasion after the Flood because the Genesis account notes that the Nephilim were on the earth "also afterward":

- "The **Nephilim** were on the earth in those days [*of Noah*], **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" (**Gen. 6:4** ESV).

This time "afterward" seems to have been before or in Moses' time so that these Nephilim were observed when the Israelite spies were sent to spy out the land of Canaan:

- "There we saw the giants (Heb. *Nephilim*) (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." (**Num. 13:33** NKJV).

Also note that they were also called Rephaim (Deut 3:11) and they were still evident in Philistia in the form of their ancestors Goliath and other giants. After the slaughter of these last giants there is no further mention of any giants. Perhaps after this time God made the punishment for this tampering with the human genetic pool so extremely severe that it did indeed scare the demons off from further sexual liaison with any "daughters of men." Certainly, in Jesus' time the legion of demons that were finally cast into the herd of pigs appear to fear what Jesus might do to them:

- "And suddenly they cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here **to torment us before the time?**'" (**Matt. 8:29**).
- "And he [*Legion*] cried out with a loud voice and said, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I **implore You** by God that You do not **torment me**'" (**Mark 5:7**).

Evidently Jesus complied with their plea, although he did expel them from their victim. Nevertheless, it could be just that kind of fear that holds the demons back from engaging in sexual activity with humans since the time of the last Rephaim. As Peter says, God has "committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept **until the judgment...**" (**2 Pet.**

2:4) and Jude adds that these fallen angels have been “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for **the judgment of the great day**, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, **since they in the same way as these** indulged in gross immorality and went after **strange flesh** (*Lit. “different flesh”* UBS), are exhibited as an example in undergoing **the punishment of eternal fire”** (Jude 6, 7 NASB).

REASONS WHY THE TERM “SONS OF GOD” DOES NOT REFER TO THE SONS OF SETH

“DAUGHTERS OF MAN”

Because in Genesis 6:1 “man” refers to all **mankind** then “*daughters of man*” must have the same broad reference. So the phrase “*the daughters of man*” evidently means women born of mankind. To say that “*the daughters of man*” are some specific section of the human race—namely, only daughters in the family line from Cain would be a strained and unnatural reading. Clearly Genesis 6 is giving a contrast between angelic beings and human females.

THE TERM “SONS OF GOD” IS NEVER USED ELSEWHERE IN THE SCRIPTURES AS APPLYING TO THE SONS OF SETH.

There is no Bible basis for the Sethite explanation. The term *sons of God* applies primarily to those who are in the invisible heavens i.e. heavenly beings. Although the term “**the sons of God**” can also apply to *humans who represent heaven* as in Psalm 82:6: “I said, you are gods, sons of the Most High...” including the pre-fall Adam, Jesus the Messiah and all kings and judges appointed to rule Israel, it is never applied to Seth's descendants.

THERE IS NO BIBLICAL EVIDENCE THAT SETH’S AND CAIN’S LINES ARE KEPT SEPARATE FROM EACH OTHER.

There is no mention in the Genesis account of God’s imposing a sexual restriction between the line of Seth and the line of Cain.

GOD DID NOT BEGIN WORKING THROUGH A SINGLE LINE UNTIL ABRAM’S TIME

NOAH WAS THE ONLY ONE NOTED TO BE GODLY AT THAT TIME

THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE FOR AN ANGEL REFERENCE

Angelic sons of God are described in Job Chapters 1, 2 and 38 as beings who literally enter before God’s presence and who were overjoyed to be observers of His creation of the universe.

- Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7 and Psalm 29:1 along with the LXX reading show that “sons of God” does refer to angels generally.
- 2 Peter 2:4 speaks of the “**angels when they sinned**” and Jude 6, 7 compares “the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority”, with “Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, **since they in the same way as these** indulged in gross immorality and went after **alien flesh.**” These are strong links to Genesis 6:1-4.
- It was only because a minority of Jewish rabbis in the mid-second century A.D. would not accept that angels have the powers of procreation that they looked for an alternative interpretation to the ancient one.

THEIR OFFSPRING, THE NEPHILIM WERE POWERFUL GIANTS

The cross-references to the later Nephilim reveal that they were also called Rephaim

(descendants of Rapha) and Anakim (descendants of Anak). The giants Ishi-benob, Saph, Goliath and his brother Lahmi were of the Rephaim (1 Sam. 21 and 1 Chron. 20) with Goliath being 9 feet, 9 inches tall (even the very tall King Saul was terrified of Goliath). Also an unnamed giant of the time had the genetic abnormality of 6 fingers on each hand and 6 toes on each foot. Additionally, Og, the king of Bashan was “of the remnant of the Rephaim” (Deut. 3:11) and needed a bed measuring 13½ feet by 6 feet. However, these giants were not simply like those people today who have growth hormone malfunction and whose excessive height makes them lack stamina and find mobility very difficult and exhausting. Of these there are 13 who have grown to above 8 feet (the tallest was 8 feet 11 inches and he died at 22 years of age); yet their average age was only 37 years. In contrast Goliath was extremely strong and able to wear a coat of mail weighing 126 lb (1 Sam. 17:5) and to hurl a spear the shaft of which was “like a weaver’s beam” (1 Chron. 20:5) and having a blade weighing 15 lb — all such factors showing that the Nephilim’s stature exceeded the limits of biological engineering. This background appears to account for the Greek, Roman, Phoenician, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian legends of heroes of supernatural strength — all such heroes being born as the result of sexual union between humans and the ‘immortal gods.’ All of these facts strongly indicate that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were superhuman — a fact which fits with them as having been the children of “fallen angels” rather than normal humans of the line of Seth.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE FOR “THE SONS OF GOD” AS BEING ANGELS

- The term “sons of God” refers almost entirely to angels in the Hebrew Scriptures. (Job 1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 89:7).
- The Septuagint in Job 1 reads “angels of God” and contextually must mean angels.
- The offspring of this sexual liaison were giants beyond what is purely human.
- Jude 6, 7 most likely refers to the Genesis 6 incident. Also note 2 Peter 2:4.
- Christ says angels do not marry; he doesn’t say they are incapable of procreation.

The only evidence against “the sons of God” as being angels is that angels were not previously mentioned in Genesis.

CONCLUSION

The term “*sons of God*” in the OT evidently applies primarily to those who are in the invisible heavens i.e. heavenly beings. These angelic sons of God are described in Job Chapters 1, 2 and 38 as beings who literally enter before God's presence and who were overjoyed to be observers of His creation of the universe. Although the term “**the sons of God**” also applies to a few *humans who represent heaven* as for example Psalm 82:6: “I said, you are gods, sons of the Most High...” including the pre-fall Adam, all kings and judges appointed to rule Israel, Jesus the Messiah and Christians there is no real reason to apply the term “sons of God” to Seth's descendants. His own daughters would be called “*the daughters of man*” just as were Cain’s daughters because it was a reference to mankind and not to a specific group selected out of mankind.

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