

Identifying the “Sons of God” in Genesis 6:1–7

I. OUTLINE

- 1) The Actors and Their Actions (6:1–2)
- 2) The Consequences for Mankind (6:3)
- 3) An Elaboration of Actions and Judgment (6:4–7)

II. INTERPRETIVE TRANSLATION OF GENESIS 6:1–7

^{6.1} Now it came to pass that the man [i.e. ‘the race of mankind’] began to increase on the surface of the earth, and daughters were born to them. ^{6.2} Then the sons of God [*bene ha elohim*] saw the daughters of the man [i.e. “the race of mankind”], that they *were* beautiful, so they took wives for themselves from all whom they had chosen. ^{6.3} So He-who-is said, “My Spirit will not contend with the man [i.e. ‘the race of mankind’] forever, of whom indeed he is flesh. Thus his days will be 120 years.” ^{6.4} The fallen ones [not ‘giants’ and not *nephilim*] were on the earth in those days, and afterwards also, when the sons of God were going into the daughters of the man [i.e. ‘the race of mankind’] and sired *offspring* to them. They [i.e. ‘the sons of God’] were the powerful ones [*gibborim*] who were from eternity, males [not ‘men’!] of renown.

^{6.5} Now He-who-is saw that great was the wickedness of mankind on the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil, all the day *long*. ^{6.6} So He-who-is was grieved [not ‘repentant’!] that he had made the man [i.e. ‘the race of mankind’] on the earth, and he hurt to his heart. ^{6.7} Then He-who-is said, “I will wipe away the man [i.e. ‘the race of mankind’], whom I have created, from upon the surface of the ground: from mankind, to animal, to creeping thing, to bird of the sky, because I am grieved that I have made them.”

III. REASONS WHY “SONS OF GOD” ARE ANGELIC BEINGS, NOT THE LINE OF SETH:

1) The author delineates a complete contrast between “sons of God” and “daughters of mankind” right at the outset. Thus, those “of God” are an **entirely separate entity**. However, according to Genesis 4:25, Seth is seen as a direct descendant of “the man,” Adam. Moreover, both Cain and Seth came directly through Eve, the mother of all of the living among mankind. Thus their lineage is the same: directly from the man/Adam, so they both qualify as “sons of the man,” and the offspring of neither of them is known anywhere in Scripture as “sons of God.”

2) There is no sign whatsoever of Cain or his line throughout the narrative of Genesis 6, *per se*. In addition, there is no sign whatsoever of Seth or his line throughout the narrative of Genesis 6, *per se*. Why would an interpreter introduce a person (or his line) into the narrative of a text if the biblical author did not do this? This is crucial. Thus anyone reading either line of Adam’s sons into the text of Genesis 6 is standing on exceedingly shaky hermeneutical grounds.

3) The text of Genesis 6 begins with two statements about “the man” (אָדָם) whom God created. The first statement is that the man began to increase on the surface of the earth, implying the growth of mankind collectively. The second statement is that daughters were born to the line of mankind. This latter statement does not mean that sons were not born to men also. Instead, the author is using this

statement about daughters being born to mankind as a preface for the discussion about to ensue in the following verses. In light of this close connection between 6:1 and 6:2ff, the use of “the man” (הָאָדָם) in 6:2 must be the same as “the man” of 6:1.

Moreover, both 6:1 and 6:2 speak of “the daughters” of the man. Yet if this is true, then proponents of the Cain-Seth view must believe/teach that the entire section begins with the statement that Cain’s line began to increase on the earth (6:1). If this is so, what happened to Seth’s line? Did it grow extinct? Truly a singling out of Cain’s line as increasing makes no sense, especially if one is proposing that Seth’s line is in view in 6:2, and that the Sethites are numerous enough that they are populating the earth via relationships with female descendants of Cain. Both lines would need to increase, and thus both should be said to increase.

But also, if Cain is “the man” in the phrase “daughters of the man” in Genesis 6:1, then Cain alone is viewed in 6:1 (“ . . . that **Cain** began to multiply . . .”). However, a plural pronoun, whose antecedent is “the man,” is used at the end of 6:1 (“ . . . daughters were born to **them**.”). This would mean that there is no grammatical agreement between the (singular) noun (“man”) and the (plural) pronoun (“them”). So grammatically, Genesis 6:1 does not support the notion that “daughters of the man/mankind” refers to the female line of Cain in Genesis 6:2.

4) When the sons of God went into the daughters of men (Gen 6:2), God became angry. Yet God did not become angry with the sons of God, but only with “the man” (Gen 6:3), which proponents of the Cain-Seth view consider to be Cain’s ungodly line. If this is true, then the statement that the Spirit of God would not contend with “the man” forever, must apply strictly to Cain’s line. However, God’s subsequent judgment on “his” days was that they would be limited to 120 years. This statement that their lives will be limited to 120 years in length thus would apply only to Cain’s offspring. Seth’s future line thus would not be restricted to a lifespan of 120 years. Why, then, when the fulfillment of this promise was realized in the days of Moses—after whom no one lived over 120 years—did it go into effect at all, since the descendants of Noah came from Seth’s line, who clearly would not have been impacted by this predicted judgment?

5) In Genesis 11:5, He-who-is came and looked at the tower and city that the “sons of the man” built. This construction is similar to the one found in Genesis 6:1, except that here the sons are attributed to mankind, not to God. This is a normal reference to mankind as a whole, not to the line of Cain—or to the line of any other individual person—through alleged implication. Proponents of the Cain-Seth view in Genesis 6 must account for the attribution of Adam’s progeny as the “sons of mankind” here, while their supposed “godly line” was called the “sons of God” in Genesis 6.

6) Marriages between descendants of Cain and descendants of Seth are nothing abnormal, as they were all descendants of Adam. Why would God consider it strange in Genesis 6 if they were to intermarry? Why would Moses point this out as if it were abnormal? Moreover, there is no statement made in Genesis that every descendant of Cain is evil and godless, while every descendant of Seth is righteous, godly, and above the typical effects of sin. Often this is assumed presuppositionally, but such a notion is not founded on any statement in Scripture that proves the presupposition to be true.

7) In Genesis 6:3, God says that mankind is flesh. Yet if—in the context—mankind is interpreted as the line of Cain, as opposed to the line of Seth, it would mean that God is saying he does not want to strive with the line of Cain. Thus the line of Seth would be freed from God’s anger. This is problematic, as Seth’s line was not spared by the flood. Moreover, is the line of Seth not flesh, as well?

8) In Genesis 6:4, the “sons of God” are identified as being synonymous with the “fallen ones” (*nephilim*). In that same verse, the “fallen ones/sons of God” are said to have been “from eternity” (מֵעוֹלָם). This means that from the perspective of Moses, looking back in time, they existed before creation. Obviously it cannot be true—according to any view—that the “sons of God” existed before creation, whoever they are. From Moses’s retrospective perspective, these “sons of God” predated creation. They did not die, but continued to exist after creation. Had the line of Seth always existed? Were they present before creation? No, they were people who lived and died, lived and died, and lived and died. Therefore, the term “sons of God” *can* be used of angels, but it *cannot* be used of Seth’s line.

9) The technical term “sons of God” is never used of mankind in the Hebrew Bible, only of angels. A reference in Genesis 6 to mankind would be unique for the entire Hebrew Bible.

10) In Daniel 3:25, Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace where Daniel was walking around, and he beheld three Jewish men, along with a fourth person, whose presence was a surprise. He said that this fourth person looked like “a son of God,” implying that he had the appearance of an angel, and thus distinctly different in visual appearance from the other three, who were all men.

11) In the book of Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7), the term “sons of God” is used strictly of angels. These angels—not descendants of Seth—presented themselves to God along with Satan (Job 1:6), and Satan proceeded to speak to God about Job. At the creation of the earth, the “sons of God” shouted for joy as they beheld the beauty of God’s world (38:7). Thus the “sons of God” predated the creation of Adam and his race. So, how can a descendant of a man (Seth), who was created after the sons of God rejoiced at seeing the creation . . . and after all of creation itself, be counted among these spirit beings?

12) This interpretation fits perfectly with the spirits to whom Jesus—while “in spirit” himself—made a proclamation (1 Pet 3:19) while in the center of the earth after his death on the cross (Eph 4:8–10), spirits who were disobedient in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:20), when they attempted to corrupt the godly line that would lead to Jesus, which effectually would have prevented his sacrificial death for the redemption of mankind. The verb behind Jesus’s proclamation is κηρύσσω, which was used for the making of a public announcement, not εὐαγγελίζω, which was used for the preaching of the good news of the gospel and is the only one of the two verbs that was a call for the repentance of sinners.

Therefore, the purpose of Jesus’s proclamation was to announce to these evil angels from Noah’s day, who were held in special bondage, that their attempt to prevent Christ’s purely human lineage and his sacrificial death on the cross had failed completely. His just-completed death was the final nail that was driven into the coffin of their botched attempt to thwart the redemptive plan of God. Moreover, 2 Peter 2:4 clearly states that angels (i.e. these very evil angels who had attempted to prevent the purely-human line to extend from Adam to Jesus) were cast into *tartaros* (not hell, which is the lake of fire) and committed to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment. The act of committing these evil angels to pits of darkness within the earth was connected expressly to God’s preservation of Noah when the flood was used to judge all of humanity on earth (2 Pet 2:5), including Seth’s line.

13) One of the strongest objections to the evil-angels view is that angelical beings simply cannot take on flesh and cohabit with mankind. As Sproul Jr. stated, “Angels, whether fallen or not, and though I am happy to concede they can appear in human form, are spirit beings. They have no bodies. Most of the time most of us remember this, though here some seem to forget. Because angels are spirit beings they are not equipped to consummate a marriage and to sire offspring. Demons can do all sorts of shocking and even frightening things. This, however, is not one of them.”

Certainly Sproul Jr. is correct that angels can appear in human form, and that they are spirit beings. He also is correct that angels perform shocking and frightening things. Yet on what basis does he categorically state that they cannot cohabit with human women, *if* God so endowed some of them with this ability at some specific time for some specific purpose? The Bible simply does not indicate any such prohibition or stress such limitations placed on angelic beings.

In fact, Jude 6 clearly states that angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, have been placed in permanent bonds under darkness as they await the judgement of the great day. Does this passage not align perfectly with 2 Peter 2:4, where it says that angels who sinned were committed to pits of darkness, as they were reserved for judgment? If so, then Jude and Peter both were referring to evil acts committed by angelic beings. What then would be their failure to keep their own domain and their abandoning of their proper abode? Their native domain is the spiritual realm, and their abode is the immaterial world.

Sproul Jr. failed to declare the context in which these evil angels abandoned the spiritual realm, and to identify the realm into which they switched their presence. Yet what other realm is there apart from the realm of humanity on earth? The Bible certainly does not speak of a third realm, and especially one that would be an improper abode for angelic beings to inhabit. However, both of these passages make perfect sense if evil angelic beings of Noah's day took on human flesh, according to the foreordained plan and approval of God, and created a deviant line of offspring that was designed to stop the birth of Jesus from coming through a purely human line, which would invalidate any hope for redemption at Calvary.

Produced by Douglas Petrovich
dp@exegesisinternational