

The Sons of God

Who They Were and What They Did

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Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, ² that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. ⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. – *Gen.* 6:1-8

Introduction

A view that has had acceptance in the Christian world is to understand the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6:2 as fallen angelic beings who had unlawful sexual relations with beautiful women during Noah's generation.¹ This having happened, an unnatural and peculiar race of men were brought forth called the Nephilim, the 'mighty men of renown.'² The burden of this essay is to provide argumentation that leads to a dismissal of this view, followed by an explanation of the passage which aligns more properly with its context and the unfolding plan of redemption already begun in the initial chapters of Genesis.

¹ C. F. Keil acknowledged that what will hereafter be termed 'the angelic view' has been entertained 'from the very earliest times' (*Commentaries on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, p.128). Richard Bauckham notes that the view was how the account 'was universally understood...until the mid-second century A.D... though the tradition took several varying forms. From the time of R. Simeon b. Yohai in the mid-second century A.D., the traditional exegesis was replaced in Judaism by an insistence that the "sons of God" were not angels but men. In Christianity, however, the traditional exegesis had a longer life, questioned only in the third century and disappearing in the fifth century' (*Word Biblical Commentary: Jude and 2 Peter*, p.51). It has been advocated more heavily since Friedrich Spitta in 1890. The view has attracted many Evangelical advocates in more recent times, including such orthodox, capable, and reputable men as Dr. John F. MacArthur and the late Dr. James M. Boice.

² MacArthur correctly recognizes that the Nephilim were not the result of such unions, but instead were already in the earth (cf. *The MacArthur Study Bible*, p.24). Boice acknowledges that it is not a necessary reading of the text to hold that the Nephilim were the result of such unions. He does, however, believe it to be a natural and probable inference from the narrative (*Genesis*, p.310).

Argumentation

It would seem at first that the above view is a sound understanding of the passage. As commonly stated, it would appear to coincide with the immediate context. Additionally, the view appears to have support in light of the exact phrase 'sons of God' being used only three other times in the entire Old Testament, each time in reference to angels (*Job* 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Furthermore, the New Testament epistles of Peter and Jude (2 *Pet.* 2:4; *Jude* 6-7) would seem to confirm and shed bright light on this interpretation of Genesis 6:1-2.

However, there are several objections against the view.

A first set of objections pertains to the identity of the 'sons of God' as fallen angels. It should be noticed that Moses did not use the ordinary Hebrew word for angel (*malak*) at Genesis 6:2 as he commonly used it throughout the remainder of the Pentateuch. True, he does infrequently speak of angels as cherubim (*Gen.* 3:24; *Num.* 7:89), or in the case of one, the destroyer (*Exod.* 12:23). But the common term for angel is absent at Genesis 6:2,4.

More directly, the title 'sons of God' need not necessarily describe *angelic* beings, even at *Job* 1:6 and 2:1.³ Job's sons, as well as their assembling, already have been noted in the opening chapter of *Job* (1:2,4,5). This would allow (if not lead to) the recognition that the assembling of sons at v.6 would be the same sons and the same kind of assembly, although now described as having a more explicitly solemn and worshipful aspect alongside the celebratory (they 'present themselves *before the LORD*'). Thus, Satan may have been present during *human* acts of worship and celebration, and so required to give account before God of his activity and for his presence among worshipping *men*⁴ (1:6-7; 2:1-2). God's question to Satan, 'From where do you come?' (1:6; 2:1), then, exposes the impropriety of Satan's attendance, while at the same time approving the attendance of the 'sons of God.'

In regard to the *Job* passages, difficulties are raised whether the 'sons of God' are understood as godly men or holy angels. If they are understood as Job's sons, it is difficult to understand the assembly of like 'sons of God' at 2:1, since Job's sons were by this time killed in a windstorm (1:18-19). However, they could be a reference to Job and

³ It is relevant to notice that, in light of the argumentation provided, Scripture rarely (at least very sparingly) refers to angels as 'sons'. That angels are not referred to filially in relation to God (in a redemptive sense) is brought out by the writer to the Hebrews in his argument for Christ's superiority to angels (*Heb.* 1:4-5). This would lead us to proceed conservatively in understanding angels filially in relation to God, unless necessary (as in *Job* 38:7, and perhaps, 1:6; 2:1).

⁴ Scripture elsewhere places angels in connection with the assembly and worship of God's people (*Zech.* 3:1-5; *1 Cor.* 11:10; *Heb.* 12:22; cf. *1 Pet.* 1:12).

his own godly servants (1:3) gathered before the Lord after the death of Job's children. If the 'sons of God' are understood as angels, it is difficult to understand how holy angels 'come' before God on a specified 'day,' as Job mentioned (1:6; 2:1), for they *always* see the face of God and are *constantly* worshiping God (*Matt.* 18:10; *Rev.* 5:11). Both views not only contain difficulties, but have legitimacy.

But beginning now to state more conclusive arguments against the 'sons of God' as fallen angels, nowhere in Scripture are *fallen* angels ever called 'sons of God'. And if angels were in view at Job 1:6 and 2:1, they would be *holy* angels and not *fallen* angels. God's question to Satan when he came before God with the sons of God implies that Satan's presence and attendance is unfitting; he was distinctly recognized from the 'sons of God'. Satan must then have been among *holy* angels.

Moreover, to call *fallen* angels 'sons of God' poses obvious and insurmountable problems in itself both relationally (Does a holy God have a *filial* relationship with fallen angels?) and morally (Does a *holy* God have a filial relationship with *fallen* angels?). As man cannot be both outside of God's redemptive favor (i.e., fallen) and yet still be 'sons,' so angels cannot be called 'sons of God' under His favor and yet still be fallen. The passage requires them to be *holy* angels. There is otherwise a theological problem as well. Having shown that the 'sons of God' *must* refer to *holy* angels, and not *fallen* angels, the orthodox understanding and timing of the fall of angels otherwise becomes contorted in the alleged view in that it would place the fall of angels *long after* the fall of man, since they (including Satan) still access the presence of God.⁵

More conclusive, and contrary to the advocates of the alleged view, the title 'sons of God' does in fact refer to men (and not angels exclusively) in both the Old Testament (*Hos.* 1:10)⁶ and New Testament (*1 Pet.* 2:10 = *Hos.* 1:10; *Matt.* 5:9; *Luke* 3:38; *Gal.* 3:26).⁷ This is certainly tenable even though this phrase unquestionably refers to angels at *Job* 38:7, and as noted, perhaps also at 1:6; 2:1.

In this vein, it is fitting to note Jesus' reference to 'sons of God' at *Luke* 20:36. Here the 'sons of God' are 'sons of the resurrection' 'being *like* angels.' Clearly, Jesus Himself did not equate 'sons of God' exclusively with angelic beings, but used the expression to denote *human* partakers of redemption, i.e., believers (see also *Rom.* 8:14,19; *Gal.* 3:26). The comments of Jesus are relevant to a balanced understanding of

⁵ It should not go unnoticed by the reader that two classic texts used by the Christian Church to demonstrate the fall of angels from heaven (2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6-7) are reinterpreted to refer to the sin of alleged angels at Genesis 6.

⁶ Clearly the exact title 'sons of God' is not used at Hosea 1:10. However, it is obvious that the similar title is an essential equivalent; 'sons of God' is of the same essence as 'sons of the living God.' To deny this equivalence on the basis of the inclusion/exclusion of an adjective is simply absurd.

⁷ We should not be restricted to an interpretation of Old Testament texts – not excluding the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6 – without the New Testament, for even the advocates of the fallen angelic view of the 'sons of God' do the same with the help of the epistles of Peter and Jude (as we will take up momentarily).

the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6 as not an exclusive term marking angels, but equally, humans.

We have argued that fallen angels are not designated by the title 'sons of God,' as the alleged view holds. They may be holy angels, or they may be godly men. But they certainly are not *fallen* angels who had unlawful sexual unions with beautiful daughters of men at the time of Noah.

But there is further testimony that leads to a dismissal of the angelic view of Genesis 6:2, this time from the New Testament. Although there are plenty of examples that holy angels temporarily took the form of man throughout the history of redemption,⁸ there is no Bible example of fallen angels becoming incarnate or functioning as humans do. Certainly the Scripture demonstrates the reality of demon possession (cf. *Mark* 5:1ff.; 9:17; *Luke* 4:33; 8:27), but not to the extent of, say, carrying out sexual functions through/with those they possess, and even less, bringing forth offspring with others.⁹ It is apparent that whereas demons infested and controlled a person, they did not take the actual form or substance of the person himself.

In relation to this, Jesus' response to the resurrection-denying Sadducees' question reveals that angels (both holy and fallen) are not given the prerogative of marriage: 'In the resurrection [men] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven' (*Matt.* 22:30).¹⁰ And further, if angels are denied the *prerogative* of marriage, therefore the *possibility* of sexual activity is denied, for, one having the right of marriage also has the right of procreation in the purpose of God.

Advocates of the alleged view would be quick to respond that this is precisely the issue: the angels were not granted the prerogative of marriage, but they instead sinfully took it for themselves anyway. However, the force of Jesus' words are of the effect, 'This (viz. marriage, and the activity of sexual intercourse, per the Sadducees'

⁸ See the synonymous designation of 'angels' as 'men' at *Gen.* 18:2,16,22 with 19:1,5,8,10,12,15-16. See also *Matt.* 28:1-7 with *Mark* 16:1-7.

⁹ Advocates of the angelic view have yet to offer a coherent and cogent explanation as to: 1) how fallen angels, who as immaterial and invisible spirits, can not only copulate, but moreover bring forth offspring. Also, implications are left unexplained: a) the creation of the soul in the offspring; b) the possibility of such strange events recurring today, and, c) the biblical teaching of the solidarity of *all* mankind *with Adam*. Alleged support of the angelic view derived somehow by appeal to the conception and incarnation of the Son of God by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, and so an explanation of point 'c' above, is inadmissible in that the Scripture attributes the special creation of a man (in this case, the humanity of Jesus) to the *miraculous* working of *God Himself*, who *alone* does wonders (cf. *Psa.* 72:18; 136:4a; *Isa.* 7:14; *Luke* 1:31,34-35,37).

¹⁰ MacArthur claims, 'Matthew 22:30 does not necessarily negate the possibility that angels are capable of procreation, but just that they do not marry' (*Ibid.*, op. cit.) However, he seems to miss (at least he does not comment on) the phrase of the angels taking '*wives* to themselves.' Regardless, his comments are dubious in that he seeks unnecessarily to press a vague distinction between marriage and procreation, both of which are *still* before MacArthur to address on account of the text (*Gen.* 6:2,4).

inquiry) *does not happen*. It does not characterize sons of the resurrection in the heavenly state, even as it does not the angels.' Marriage and procreation not being for the sons of the resurrection (and so, kept from them) is based on the fact that it is already not for (and so, kept from) angels.¹¹ To believe otherwise is to be in error, even as the Sadducees were on the resurrection and life in the eternal realm.

Consider also the latter half of the Olivet Discourse (*Matt.* 24:36ff.), which Jesus has based on the historicity of the generation and times of Noah. He there makes clear that He Himself did not understand the event of the giving and receiving in marriage in the days of Noah as reflective of sexual unions between angels and humans (v.38). He refers to the judgment of the flood in Noah's day to underscore the judgment to come on *men*, and not angels. Even while *people* are going about their usual way of life ('eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage'), and that in sin and unbelief, the judgment will fall upon them, be they men (v.40) or women (v.41), as it did in Noah's day. The point is this: if Jesus applies the analogy He drew from Noah to *humans*, then it must have applied to *humans* (and not angels) originally.

In light of these points, then, it is not a sound view to regard the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6:2 as fallen angels.

¹¹ Cf. Keil, 'As man could indeed destroy by sin the nature which he had received from his Creator, but could not by his own power restore it when destroyed, to say nothing of implanting an organ or a power that was wanting before; so we cannot believe that angels, through apostasy from God, could acquire sexual power of which they had previously been destitute.' (*Commentary*, pp.133-134). Henry Morris' conviction is that 'When Jesus said that the angels *in heaven* do not marry, this does not necessarily mean that those who have been *cast out of heaven* were incapable of doing so' (cited in Boice, *Genesis*, p.310, emphases are Morris'). However, neither does it imply that they *were* capable of doing so. Additionally, those fallen angels who have been cast out of heaven are either 'cast into hell and committed to pits of darkness' (*2 Pet.* 2:4) and 'kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day' (*Jude* 6) or else still operative in the general sense of keeping mankind from the truth or aggravating toward sin (*1 Chr.* 21:1; *2 Cor.* 4:3-4; *Eph.* 6:10ff.; *1 Tim.* 4:1; *Rev.* 12:7-9).

A second set of objections pertains to the interpretation of the epistles of Peter and Jude as supportive of the angelic view. The primary passages offered in support are 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7. Both letters address the pending judgment of apostates and false teachers, and, in this, refer to Genesis 6:1ff by way of analogy or case study. They are here placed in parallel:

2 Peter 2:4-5

If God *did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;*⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly

Jude 6-7

And *angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,*⁷ 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, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

It is important to note that Jude 6-7 is not a commentary on Genesis 6:2. Jude's point is not to compare the sexual immorality of Sodom & Gomorrah with sexual immorality of so-called angelic 'sons of God.' Indeed it cannot be, since (following their line of argumentation) the alleged angelic sons of God 'indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh *in the same way as these*' (i.e., men of Sodom and Gomorrah), they then would have had illicit unions with *men*, and not the *daughters* of men.¹² So, if the comparative expression of v.7, 'likewise' or 'in the same way', is pressed according to the angelic view, it again fails on account of inconsistency in its analogy.

On the other hand, it might be tempting to see the comparison of v.7 ('in the same way') being between Sodom and Gomorrah *and their neighboring cities*,¹³ and *not* between Sodom and Gomorrah *and the angels* of v.6; that angels (on account of their rebellion in heaven), and the several cities of men (on account of their sexual

¹² As a further point of refutation, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah rejected the offer to commit sexual acts with Lot's *daughters*, and instead preferred the *men* who accompanied Lot (*Gen.* 19:4-9). Bauckham severely errs (p.54) when he allows his commitment to the angelic view to govern his interpretation of *Gen.* 19, and so regard the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah not as homosexuality, but the men's desire to have sex with angels. He believes the 'different/strange flesh' of Jude 7 requires something other than human flesh. Contrarily, the confession of the Sodomites was in fact, 'Where are the *men* who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them' (*Gen.* 19:5). Even though the men housed by Lot were truly angelic (see references at footnote #8, above), the men of Sodom did not recognize them as *angelic* men.

¹³ The neighboring cities would be Admah and Zeboiim, per *Gen.* 10:19; *Deut.* 29:23; *Hos.* 11:8.

perversion), are *both* 'examples of divine judgment.' However, this view does not align with the Greek text. A masculine referent to 'these' seems to be required. If demanded, it precludes seeing the comparison as being between the immoral cities.¹⁴

Obviously, advocates of the angelic view argue that the masculine demonstrative pronoun 'these' (v.7) must refer to its masculine antecedent, 'angels' (v.6). The passage is then read this way:

'...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these [angels] indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

However, such need not be the case, and is not the case, when we consider the theme of Jude's letter. He wrote to warn believers of apostates and false *men* (vv.3-4). These false men are specifically 'ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ' (v.4). They later are referred to as 'defiling the flesh' (v.8), and 'following after their lusts' (v.16).

It therefore more aligns with the general context of Jude, and does no violence to the grammatical rules of syntax (should the demand for a masculine referent be stringently upheld) to understand the expression 'in the same way as these' (v.5) as agreeing with the earlier referent to the 'certain men' Jude is exposing (v.4), and *not* to the angels (v.6). The masculine demonstrative pronoun 'these' of v.7 refers not to the 'angels' of v.6, but to the 'certain men' of v.4. Verses 6-7 should be read, then, in this way:

'...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these [viz., *men* who turn the grace of God into licentiousness] indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.'

This interpretation also recognizes the smooth flow into v.8, 'Nevertheless, in the same way, these men also, dreaming, defile the flesh...' In other words, in likeness to the examples given (vv.5-7), and yet in spite of the doom ahead of them (v.7), these 'certain men' persist in evil.

¹⁴ Sodom, Gomorrah, and its neighboring cities are all feminine in gender. Some, such as William Jenkyn (*An Exposition upon the Epistle of Jude*, [1652], p. 157), John Calvin (*Commentary*, op. cit.), and others, did not press the syntactical requirements stringently as most modern exegetes do.

In summary, then, what proponents of the angelic view apply to the *angels*, Jude clearly applies to the false *men* he is exposing. He has given three analogies to the apostasy and sin of these false men who have ‘crept in unnoticed’ (v.4); they are the unbelieving generation in the desert (v.5), the angels once in heaven (v.6), and the immoral men of Sodom, Gomorrah, and their neighboring cities (v.7). These ‘certain men’, like their analogies, face eternal judgment (v.7). Such is the sense of Jude’s words.¹⁵

2 Peter 2:4, being similar to Jude 6 only in acknowledging a judicial fall of angels on account of sin, cannot be considered relevant to the angelic sons of God view apart from Jude 6-7. Having now explained Jude 6-7 according to its contextual intent, and grammatical and syntactical features, we move on to the final Petrine text considered supportive by advocates of the angelic view. It is alleged that ‘the spirits now in prison’ (1 Pet. 3:19), in likeness to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, refers to the angels’ guilt through the sexual unions of Genesis 6:2.

However, the ‘spirits in prison’ (1 Pet. 3:19) are properly understood as the once disobedient, but now disembodied persons of Noah’s day; living men *then*, but imprisoned spirits *now*. Christ ‘preached to them’ – not after His resurrection – but when they were on earth, ‘while the patience of God kept waiting during the days of Noah’ (1 Pet. 3:19-20). This preaching was done by Christ through the Holy Spirit speaking through Noah, a preacher of righteousness (1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:5). Such is the proper correspondence to Genesis 6, and is bound up in the divine declaration ‘My Spirit (i.e., the One by whom Christ and Noah spoke) will not strive with man forever’ (Gen. 6:3). Because the corrupt people of Noah’s generation further resisted the righteousness of God preached by Christ through the Spirit in Noah, they subsequently were judged in the Flood.¹⁶

¹⁵ Those well versed in the collective thinking of commentators on this passage will notice a lack of treatment in this essay of the pseudepigraphal book *1 Enoch* (6-22), which is alleged to have been the basis for Jude’s statements. Although it is apparent that Jude was familiar with this book, and used similar language when writing of similar themes, it is not a necessary or correct deduction that Jude in fact has endorsed the angelic view presented in *1 Enoch*. Further, as *1 Enoch* is not canonical, it cannot be introduced as an authoritative, interpretive guide of biblical texts. Per John Murray, ‘However helpful extra-canonical literature may be in arriving at the sense of Scripture, extra-canonical considerations may never be pitted against the evidence which the Scripture itself determinatively provides.’ (*Principles of Conduct*, Appendix A: “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men”, p.244). It has been shown here that Jude is not relying on *1 Enoch* as an interpretive rule of Genesis 6. Momentarily, it will be shown that there is determinative evidence provided by the Scripture for the interpretation of Genesis 6.

¹⁶ The objection to this reading of the Petrine texts, on the ground that ‘spirits’ is never used to characterize men/people, but only angels, is refuted by the writer to Hebrews’ usage of the term (also in the plural) for ‘the spirits of righteous ones made perfect’ in the intermediate state (*Heb.* 12:23; cf. *Ecc.*

In light of these many points, then, to regard the ‘sons of God’ as fallen angels who impregnated the beautiful daughters of men, gives rise not only to a bizarre race of men (as some interpret the text), but a bizarre handling of the Scripture.¹⁷ It fosters more questions than it answers, and arguably, suffers from irremediable problems. The explanation of Genesis 6 below will bring all these arguments against the angelic view to their full force, and, the reader to fuller clarity of the Genesis 6 narrative.¹⁸

Explanation

As we come now to the explanation of a satisfactory alternative to the angelic view of Genesis 6, we are not out of the thick of debate. The account, apart from the angelic view, still has been understood variously. To some (i.e., Meredith Kline), the ‘sons of God’ are seen as kings or vassals who multiplied wives for themselves, perhaps to advance their dynastic status among men. For others (i.e., John Murray, W.H. Green), the ‘sons of God’ are the descendants of the chosen line of Seth who sinfully and freely intermarried with the beautiful daughters of men, daughters either of Cain’s lineage (outside the covenant) or polygamously contracted by Sethites within their own lineage, perhaps even a mixture of both.

Relevant to Genesis 6, everything from chapters 1-5 – together with its themes of creation, fall, and redemption – is geared toward unfolding the covenantal relationships God has with *mankind*. The context of Genesis 6:1-8 is the sinfulness of *man*, and not angels. The LORD’s Spirit ‘would not strive with *man* forever’ (v.3). ‘The LORD saw that the wickedness of *man* was great on the earth’ (v.5). ‘The LORD was sorry that He had made *man* on the earth’ (v.6). Thus He said, ‘I will blot out *man* whom I have created...from *man* to animals’ (v.7). Clearly, the sinfulness of *man* (and not angels) is the burden of the passage. The actions of the ‘sons of God’ should be seen against the backdrop of mankind’s fallen history in light of both the promise of redemption voiced to him in Eden (3:15), and his life after leaving Eden.

12:7). As creatures on earth, men are physical-spiritual in their constitution. But as a result of physical death, they are in the afterlife spirits.

¹⁷ Calvin, like Keil at the outset of this essay, acknowledged the long existence of the angelic view in his commentary on Genesis, but with obviously greater distaste: ‘That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious.’

¹⁸ Meredith Kline observes, ‘what has contributed most to the continuing dominance of the mythical (or at least angelic) interpretation of the passage has been the absence of a satisfactory alternative.’ (‘Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4’ in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 24 [1962], p. 190).

Meredith Kline ably demonstrates the kingly view as a coherent, legitimate, and biblically defensible interpretation. Some of the salient features of the view can be condensed as follows:¹⁹

1. Jewish authorities, dating back to the Aramaic Targums, have recognized the view.
2. The customs of the ancient Near East do provide a backdrop for understanding men in the capacity of official rulers or kings as ‘sons’ in relation to God, or at times ‘gods’ themselves (cf. *Exod.* 21:6; 22:8-9,28; *Psa.* 119:46 with 138:7; 82:1,6; see also 2 *Sam.* 7:13-14; *Psa.* 2:6-7).
3. There is specific biblical injunction against kings multiplying wives (cf. *Deut.* 17:14,17 with 2 *Sam.* 5:13; 1 *Kings* 11:1-9), perhaps to be seen in connection with the historic malpractice of such at Genesis 6:2,4.
4. The recapitulative structure of Genesis 1-12 may provide a framework for, and lend credence to, viewing the sons of God as kings who have abused their power for advancing their earthly dynasties:

<i>Gen.</i> 1:28; 2:15	Men commissioned to rule	<i>Gen.</i> 9:1-7
<i>Gen.</i> 4:15,24	Justice for unrighteous men	<i>Gen.</i> 9:5-6
<i>Gen.</i> 3:14; 4:11	God’s curse for sin	<i>Gen.</i> 9:25
<i>Gen.</i> 4:3ff.	Defiance against God’s rule	<i>Gen.</i> 9:20ff.
<i>Gen.</i> 6:4	Presence of renown, evil men	<i>Gen.</i> 10:8; 11:1-4
<i>Gen.</i> 6:5-7,11-13	Judgment on sin	<i>Gen.</i> 11:1-9
<i>Gen.</i> 6:8	God’s favor on the righteous	<i>Gen.</i> 12:1-3
<i>Gen.</i> 6:18; 9:9ff.	God’s covenant with the righteous	<i>Gen.</i> 15:1-21 (12:1-3)

The kingly view is a far more sound view of Genesis 6:1ff. than the angelic view. This essay, however, contends that Genesis 6:1ff. should still be explained in terms of the intermarriage of the Sethite line with the descendants of Cain. When it comes to Genesis 6, the kingly view does not adequately focus its attention on the announcement of Genesis 3:15 and its implication for understanding chapter 6, as well as the subsequent chapters of Genesis, as will be put forth hereafter.

The distinction between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (3:15) is seen immediately in the relation of Cain to Abel. Cain, although an obviously physical offspring of Eve, is nonetheless ‘of the evil one’ spiritually (1 *John* 3:12; cf. *Jude* 11). Clearly there is a spiritual aspect to the seeds announced at Genesis 3:15. This is seen further in that Cain himself, as well as his offering, was not acceptable to God (*Gen.*

¹⁹ The following is an expanded arrangement of Kline’s basic idea of a recapitulative phenomenon.

4:2-5), unlike Abel, who was accepted in terms of himself and his offering (v.4).²⁰ Cain, under the bondage of sin and the evil one, never did 'master sin' (4:7), but rather was mastered by it. His lack of brotherly love, a telling sign of spiritually descending from the seed of the serpent (*1 John* 3:11-12; 5:1-2) resulted in the murder of Abel (*Gen.* 4:8-10; *1 John* 3:11-12). Furthermore, his irresponsible self-concern for the consequences of his sin (*Gen.* 4:13), and going out wandering under judgment 'from the presence of the LORD' (4:16), indicate not only a physical demarcation, but moreover a spiritual rift between the two seeds.

The seed of the serpent is described further in chapter 4 in the character of Lamech, a fifth generation descendant of Cain (4:17-24). With Lamech there is an intensification of presumptuous sin and the justification of it. More relevant to the subject of this essay, with Lamech also comes the first instance of the multiplication of wives. It is only noted that Cain had *a* wife (4:17), whereas it is specifically noted that Lamech had '*two* wives', Adah and Zillah (4:19-23). Similarly, the murderous bent of Cain is multiplied in Lamech who, having murdered, presumptuously boasted before his two wives and arrogated to himself a divine protection of even greater proportion than Cain (4:23-24, 15).

The record of these immoral acts of Cain and Lamech,²¹ descriptive of the seed of the serpent, are immediately followed by the necessary birth of Seth (4:25-26). Over against Cain, and in place of righteous Abel, Seth would be the seed of the woman physically and with all its spiritual significance. With Seth and his early descendants, as one might expect, there was a manifestation of true piety and worship of the covenant God. And thus, with the birth of his son Enosh it is noted, 'Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD' (4:26).²² As Cain went *out* from the presence of the LORD (4:16), with Seth and his sons there is a drawing *near*. It is twice stated that Enoch, the sixth from Seth, 'walked with God' (5:22,24). Enoch's grandson Lamech, obviously believing in and looking for the redemption to come named Noah, saying, 'This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed' (5:28-29). And we read of Noah himself, in the main passage under consideration, that he 'found favor in the eyes of the LORD' (6:8). All this is to

²⁰ God disregarded Cain and his offering because Cain, unbelieving, did not follow the prescribed example of God Himself in shedding the blood of an animal (3:21). This is in obvious contrast to Abel (4:4), whom the NT confirms as righteous on account of faith (*Heb.* 11:4; 12:24). Instead, Cain brought from the fruit of the ground, which is not only cursed (3:17; cf. 5:29), but that which Adam and Eve once wrongly used as they were summoned before God (3:7). From the beginning, through the Mosaic covenant, and consummated in the death of Christ, blood atonement is the foundational component of all acceptance before God and worship brought to God.

²¹ The wicked propensity of Cain (*Gen.* 4:1-16) and Lamech (*Gen.* 4:17-24) before the Flood recapitulates and emerges later in Ham (*Gen.* 9:20-27) and Nimrod (*Gen.* 10:8-12) before the judgment of Babel.

²² The expression 'call upon (by) the name of the LORD' embodies conscientious acts of worship rendered to the covenant God of salvation (cf. *Psa.* 116:1-4,12-13, 16-17).

demonstrate the obvious disparity between the seeds of the woman and the serpent, and demonstration of original piety among the line of Seth.²³

It is therefore entirely appropriate to regard the descendants of Seth as the 'sons of God' at Genesis 6:2,4. It already has been shown that the expression itself can (and does) denote spiritual sonship.²⁴ Moreover, that Adam is himself acknowledged as 'son of God' (*Luke 3:38*) recognizes the covenantal nature of his relation to God. The line of Seth, here recognized by divine inspiration as being in covenantal solidarity with Adam, are truly sons of God by covenant then, unlike the line of Cain. Thus, the preceding context would point in the direction of seeing the Sethites as the 'sons of God' who 'took wives for themselves, whomever they chose,' and, as will be shown, from among the line of Cain.²⁵

Now beginning the direct explanation of Genesis 6, *these* sons of God, as men began to populate the earth, took wives for themselves,²⁶ whomever they chose (vv.1-2), meaning in disregard of God's ordinance and without discernment of the spiritual issues relative to marriage into the seed of the serpent. The Sethites are placed in stark contrast to Noah (cf. vv.2,8), although they are of the same covenantal heritage. Understandably, this manifestation of sin among what was to be the lineage to bring forth God's Messiah displeased God (v.3). His Spirit would not strive with men forever, but patiently wait for repentance while Noah preached righteousness to them for 120 years (*2 Pet. 2:5; Gen. 6:3*).²⁷

²³ An interesting feature surfaces upon comparison of the Sethites to the Cainites: the fifth from Seth is Enoch, who walked with God by faith like his father, whereas the fifth from Cain is evil Lamech, who murdered like his father.

²⁴ See passages cited earlier relating to footnotes 6-7, and again, *Luke 20:36*. Additionally, see *Exod. 4:22-23; Deut. 14:1*.

²⁵ Kline (*Divine Kingship*, p.196) unwittingly supports the thesis of this essay when he says that 'the dynastic genealogy of Cain breaks off so that the genealogy of Seth may be given (Gen. 4:25 – 5:32). But then Gen. 6:1-4 resumes the thread of the history where it was dropped at Gen. 4:24. Structurally, the accounts of Lamech (Gen. 4:19-24) and of the sons of God (Gen. 6:1ff) are much alike.' If such is a structural intent of the passage, it could easily be seen as revealing the apostasy of the Sethites in general; that, like later Israel in regard to the nations around them, the Sethites became like the line of Cain. Genesis 6:11-13, like its earlier verses, describes the apostate lifestyle of most Sethites: 'corrupt' and 'filled with violence.' Such words are descriptive of those who promiscuously 'take wives for themselves, whomever they chose' (v.2).

²⁶ Over against the angelic view, the expression 'they took wives for themselves' (*laqakh ish*) is a common Old Testament expression for earthly marriages, and not mere sexual acts (per *Gen. 4:19; 11:29; Judg. 3:6; Ruth 4:1*; cf. also *Gen. 12:19; 16:3; 21:21; 24:7,67; 25:1,20; 38:6*. In the New Testament, see *Luke 20:29-31; Matt. 1:24*).

²⁷ That Genesis 6 is recording the apostasy of Sethites becomes more clear when considering that Peter's call to repentance (*2 Pet. 3:9*), set against the backdrop of the Flood imagery (*2 Pet. 3:3-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-22*), is

Moses, the author of Genesis, inserted at v. 4 an historical, parenthetical reference to the Nephilim,²⁸ since they will contribute to the unfolding drama of redemptive history as developed later (viz. *Num.* 13:33). However, he makes clear that the Nephilim (whoever and whatever size they were) were not the *result* of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, but that they were *already* there ‘in those days’ at the time of Noah and obviously continued *after* the flood (v.4 with *Num.* 13:33). They therefore cannot be understood as the quirk result of sexual unions between angels and women.²⁹

So, sin being as extensive as it was – even among the messianic line of Seth! – God, grieved and sorry that He even made man (v.6) decided to judge the world in its entirety (v.7).³⁰ Men, always Cainites but now Sethites, were given to continual wickedness despite the striving of the Spirit with them for what by the time of the Flood would be 120 years (v.3). However, God spared one of Seth’s descendants – righteous Noah, and his family (v.8), since He is faithful to His covenant and would establish it with Noah (6:18).

The contrast between the immoral sons of God and the household of Noah becomes evident also when considering God’s statement, ‘You shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your *wife*, and *your sons’ wives* with you’ (*Gen.* 6:18). The marital integrity of those with whom God established His covenant is an evident contrast to the other sons of God, and Cain’s descendant Lamech. As the apostle Peter noted, ‘*eight*

addressed primarily (but not exclusively) to fellow Jews by covenant (*2 Pet.* 3:1 with *1 Pet.* 1:1). Likewise, Noah would have preached primarily (but not exclusively) to fellow Sethites by covenant (*2 Pet.* 2:5).

²⁸ The term is literally ‘ones who fall.’ Some have understood the Nephilim as otherwise ordinary men yet possessing great tyrannical, invading powers to conquer people (see verbal usage at *Job* 1:15; *Josh.* 8:25; 11:7). Others, more accurately, have understood the Nephilim as constitutionally large, intimidating men (cf. *Num.* 13:32-33). Similarly, the Anakim, Emim, and Rephaim are likewise notable in stature, size, and military strength (cf. *Deut.* 2:9-11,19-21 with *Gen.* 14:5). King Og of Bashan, of the remnant of the enormous Rephaim, had a bed of 14’ x 6’ (*Deut.* 3:11). Although the term ‘king-sized bed’ does not originate here, it seems plain that Og possessed this size bed out of necessity and not mere preference. We read also of Goliath the Philistine, whose height was approximately 9 ft. (*1 Sam.* 17:4). We also read of Goliath’s brother Lahmi (*1 Chr.* 20:5) and Goliath’s own three, giant, military sons Ishbi-benob, Saph, and the 24-digit son at *2 Sam.* 21:16-22; *1 Chr.* 20:4-8, all of whom displayed great physical size, strength, and military prowess. Such men are examples that the Nephilim should be construed as real men and not angels or angelic-human offspring. Additionally, the assumption that angels are much larger than humans, and so would produce Nephilim-sized offspring, cannot be substantiated from Scripture. (Reference to ‘the strong angel’ with his ‘right foot on the sea and his left on the land’, per *Rev.* 10:1-2,5, speaks more to the idea of total sovereignty than actual size.)

²⁹ If the Flood came for the purpose of destroying existing unions (and barring future ones), as the angelic view espouses, then the presence of Nephilim several generations later is difficult to explain, at best. Furthermore, and more directly, the Nephilim, as also the Anakim, Emim, and Rephaim, are acknowledged as *men* and *people* ‘of great size’ (*Num.* 13:32; *Deut.* 2:10-11,20-21), and not angels.

³⁰ God’s readiness later to destroy all Israel, excepting Moses (*Exod.* 32:7-10; *Num.* 14:11-12), mirrors what God actually did do with the Sethites, excepting Noah.

persons were saved' (1 Pet. 3:20), eight persons who properly exemplified the ordinance of marriage in its pure form of one man with one woman (Gen. 2:24-25; cf. Matt. 19:1-9; 1 Tim. 3:2,12). This contrast is further clarified in even the numbering and gathering of the animals that, like Noah's household, would be saved through the Flood: 'two of every kind' (Gen. 6:18-20; cf. 7:9,15).

Genesis later presents agreeing narrative to manifest its internal harmony and consistency. It supports the thesis of this essay by further displaying the subject of marriage within the Sethite line. After the account of the Flood (chs.7-9), Noah's children took up again the command to be fruitful and multiply on the face of the earth (9:1,18-19; ch.10). The lineage of Seth, traced from Adam to Noah (ch.5), and then from Noah to Terah (10:1,21-32; 11:10-27), finally comes to Abraham, the man chosen of God to be the means through which all the families of the earth would be truly united together again, not in themselves and apart from God, as at Babel (ch.11), but together under God (12:3; cf. Gal. 3:16,29). In introducing Abraham and his part in redemptive history, what is noted of Abraham is his wife (singular) Sarai (11:29).³¹

Since the calling of Abraham, it is more evident that the chosen line is *not* to take wives to themselves, whomever they choose (in the absolute sense). Abraham solemnly made his servant swear by the LORD that he would not take for Isaac a daughter from among the Canaanites, but instead to take one from among his people, the sons of Seth (Gen. 24:2-4). Isaac's son Esau married outside the bounds of the covenant to Judith the Hittite (Gen. 26:34-35). Rebekah raised concern that Jacob not marry a daughter of Heth (Gen. 27:46), thus Isaac's charge that Jacob 'not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan' (Gen. 28:1-6). We read again of Esau's marriage not only outside the covenant, but to multiple wives, and this willfully to incite his parents' displeasure (Gen. 28:6-9). Hamor the Hivite's plea to Jacob that he and his household intermarry with the Hivites (Gen. 34:9-10) in consequence of his son Shechem's lust and rape of Dinah (vv.1-4) further evidences the tension and real necessity for the sons of God to be characterized by marriages within the covenant line.³²

During the desert journey after departing from Egypt, the issue of (non-) intermarriage was a relevant issue, whether it was the flagrant adultery of one Israelite with one Midianite woman (Num. 25:1-8) or many Israelite men with many Midianite women (Num. 31:1-2,13-20), or simply the LORD's command to the earnest daughters of Zelophehad: 'Let them marry whom they wish; only they must marry within the family

³¹ Of more interest than the singularity of Abraham's wife is that Sarai, unlike the 'daughters of men' who brought forth many children to the 'sons of God', is barren, like other godly women of Seth's lineage (i.e., Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth). Sarai, on whom the continuation of the promised seed humanly depends, contrasts the 'daughters of men' who bore children to the sons of God (Gen. 6:4). Further, this is the first wife of the Sethite line who is mentioned by name in the genealogy.

³² The marital situation of Joseph, sold away from his ancestors to a foreign land under God's providence, is an obvious exception (cf. Gen. 48:3-5; 49:22,25; 50:20).

of the tribe of their father' (*Num.* 36:6)³³, marriage among the covenant people was the acceptable practice.

Even as the descendants of Jacob were on the verge of inheriting the land, their marital choices within the covenant was still of paramount concern:

You shall not intermarry with them [the nations already in Canaan, v.1]; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. (*Deut.* 7:3-4)

This language also, which notes the sin entailed and the judgment forewarned, is very similar to the language of Genesis 6. Echoing the seed theme of Genesis 3:15, there is a distinction between 'yours' and 'theirs', Israelite and Canaanite. 'Sons' were not to be given to just any 'daughters' in marriage, but to Israelite daughters in particular. The anger of God would destroy those who so intermarried. The Old Testament furnishes other examples of the dangers and inappropriateness of intermarriage with the unbelieving (cf. especially *Ezra* 9-10; *Mal.* 2:15).

In summary, as Genesis itself contrasts the marital practice of Seth's descendants with Noah's, and further highlights the importance and necessity of marriage within the covenantal people with Abraham and his sons, it provides the best interpretation of its sixth chapter.³⁴ This essay has posited that Genesis 6:1ff. be understood by the sons of God (Sethites) having taken wives for themselves, whomever they chose, not only in defiance of the God-ordained number of wives allowed to a man (one only), but moreover from among the unbelieving seed of the serpent (the descendants of Cain). What is at first obscurely stated at Genesis 6:2 is more clearly echoed in the New Testament: 'She is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord,' and 'Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?' (*1 Cor.* 7:39; *2 Cor.* 6:14).

³³ Notice again, like the sons of God at Genesis 6, the idea of 'whomever you choose', but it being within the bounds of the covenant people.

³⁴ Although the examples cited span a very lengthy period of time so as to appear irrelevant to the generation of Noah, the point is that it is the recurring motif developed by Moses in relation to the descendants of Seth, largely even in the book of Genesis itself. What makes it persuasive is the relatively high concentration in his historical accounts.