

Sons of God— Fallen Angels or a Godly Lineage? A Fresh Look

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Key Words: fallen angels, Flood, marriage, Nephilim, Noah, rulers, Sethites

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Accepted for publication November 30, 2024

Abstract

Who are the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4? This question has intrigued many commentators throughout church history. Were they fallen angels? Mighty rulers and noblemen? According to the Biblical data, they were most likely a dwindling godly lineage of men from Adam to Noah who sinned against God by marrying whosoever they chose, regardless of whether they were in the faith or not. Noah was the last of this lineage, saved from the Flood. Important applications of this view are also discussed.

Simple Summary

The article explores the long-standing mystery of who the ‘sons of God’ mentioned in Genesis 6:1–4 really were, a question that has interested Bible experts for centuries. It explores three main ideas: that they were powerful kings or rulers, fallen angels (demons) who had children with human women, or a godly line of humans descended from Seth until Noah. The author argues that the idea of kings or rulers doesn’t fully explain why God would bring a global flood, and strongly rejects the popular ‘fallen angels’ view, stating that it contradicts what the Bible teaches about angels (that they don’t marry or have children) and how God generally interacts with His people. Instead, the article supports the view that the ‘sons of God’ were the godly descendants of Seth who chose to marry ungodly women based on their appearance rather than their faith. This choice, the author explains, led to widespread corruption and wickedness among humanity, which ultimately caused God to send the Flood. This interpretation, known as the Sethite view, is presented as the most consistent with the overall narrative of the Bible.

Introduction

Genesis 6 speaks about a peculiar group of people, namely the so-called ‘sons of God’:

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for

themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ There were giants 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.” (Genesis 6:1–4)

The sons of God have raised the interest of many people all throughout church history. A small group of theologians state that the sons of God refer to kings or rulers. According to a popular modern view, the sons of God are fallen angels who married women on Earth and had sexual relations with

them. Furthermore, some interpreters think that one of the reasons that God brought about the Flood, four verses later, was to eliminate the wicked offspring that originated from these sexual unions.

This popular view has been held by many different groups in modern times. In this paper, I will examine the merits and difficulties of this view in the light of Scripture and church history. Instead, another view with more currency shall be compared to the fallen angel view, which says that the sons of God were a godly lineage of men, leading from Seth to Noah, here referred to as the Sethite view.

Kings or Rulers?

According to some interpretations, the 'sons of God' may refer to rulers, judges, or other types of men in high positions who took women for themselves as they pleased, possibly even multiple wives. Sometimes mighty people are even called gods (Psalm 82:6). Exodus 4:16 says this about Aaron and Moses: "He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him." Exodus 21:6, 22:8, and 22:28 mention judges as gods. For example, Exodus 22:28 says this: "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people."

According to this interpretation, these kings or rulers may be what are known as the Nephilim and the Gibborim (the mighty men of renown) in Genesis 6:4. So, for example, Psalm 82 describes how God is chastising the rulers for neglecting the poor and oppressed (verses 2–4). In verse 6, God says "nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince" (Bastiaansen, 2012, p. 7).

Genesis 4:17–24 describes the ungodly line of Cain, ending with Lamech, who boasts that he will kill a man if he merely hurts him. Cain

built the city of Enoch, indicating that the human population could have increased dramatically by his time. According to one interpretation, these people could have brought forth these mighty kings, who sought renown instead of God's glory, which may have contributed to the growing levels of violence before the Flood (Kline, 1962).

This interpretation doesn't make the best sense of Genesis 6:1–4. The Bible never calls an unrighteous man a son of God. Even prominent figures in Israel's history practiced polygamy, such as Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon (Anderson, 2015). Nobles taking lower-class women is nothing out of the ordinary for men of high rank to do, especially during a time when the whole world was plunged into sin (May, 2015). Furthermore, 'the daughters of men' does not imply any class difference, nor is marriage between these two classes particularly forbidden. This would hardly be grounds for the destruction of the world by the Flood. The kings'/rulers' view is non-sequitur, so we shall look at other explanations.

The Fallen Angel View

Proponents of the fallen angel view claim that the 'sons of God' cannot refer to a lineage of men from Adam through Seth until Noah (known as the Sethite view). Rather, they could only refer to a group of angels who had fallen from heaven and then roamed the world (Petrovich, 2020). They say this for two reasons.

First, family heritage does not automatically guarantee piety, which sounds logical. Morris (1976) claims that some of the Sethite lineage perished in the Flood as a sign of unbelief, but this is not actually so. Lamech and Methuselah were the two Sethites closest to the Flood, yet Lamech died five years before, and Methuselah died just before the Flood began (Genesis 5:27).

Morris (1976) also claims that these two men also bore strong witness to the people of their day.

Second, according to Genesis 4:25, Seth was a descendant of Adam, שֵׁט, 'the man.' These men had begun to multiply on the face of the earth, according to Genesis 6:1. Since Seth and his descendants were men, they themselves could not be the sons of God who then went in to the daughters of men, including their own daughters. Seth and his descendants would have to be excluded from these 'sons of God,' named subsequently in Genesis 6:2.

Proponents of the fallen angel view claim that the sons of God refer to fallen angels (demons) who had coveted human daughters for their beauty. They then took human form and married these women, from which they had offspring. Their offspring were called the Nephilim, which, in some versions of this view, became giants before and after the Flood.

According to a variant of the fallen angel view, fallen angels took possession of the bodies of attractive-looking men. These demon-possessed men took for themselves women of equal attractiveness, who had made themselves beautiful using various cosmetics known by that time. The children born to them were also possessed by these demons and fully under their control. The offspring of these unions became giants in stature due to demonic influence on their genetics.

The fallen angels did this to produce a race of hybrid demonized humans who could then oppose the Seed of the woman and prevent their destruction as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. The Flood happened in part to wipe out this evil race of hybrid demonized humans. This view wishes to explain widespread occult phenomena and UFO sightings in the modern day (Morris, 1976).

The author finds fault with many aspects of this view. Therefore, it will

be compared with the Sethite view in the following sections.

The Fallen Angel View in Church History

Proponents of the fallen angel view claim their view is closest to the early church. Authors, such as Chaffey (2019) list several Jewish and early Christian authors in favor of the fallen angel view, starting from the third century BC: Philo of Alexandria (AD 50), Josephus (AD 37–100), Justin Martyr (100–165), Irenaeus of Lyon (115–202), Athenagoras (2nd century), Clement of Alexandria (150–215), Bardesane (154–222), Tertullian (160–225), Commodianus (c. 250), Lactantius (240–320), Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339), Ambrose of Milan (340–397), Jerome (345–420), and Sulpicius Severus (363–420).

Chaffey mentions that the first adherents of the Sethite view arose only later on, such as Rabbi Yochai and Rabbi Jose in the early 2nd century, Symmachus (late 2nd century), Julius Africanus (160–240), Ephrem the Syrian (306–373), John Chrysostom (374–407), John Cassian (360–435), and Augustine (354–430). Alexander, bishop of Constantinople (237/245–337), in his work, writes about the sons of God as being related to the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Schaff, 1910). Alexander of Lycopolis (409–448) writes in a treatise against the Manichaeans that the idea of the giants being the offspring of fallen angels and women is a Jewish fable (Schaff, 1910).

There is some evidence that the fallen angel view is derived from several pagan myths from the surrounding areas. For example, Greek and Canaanite mythology have legends describing how sexually motivated gods interbred with human women, such as the Greek myth of Zeus and Europa (van Gemeren, 1981). Some interpreters even believe that the author of Genesis referred to the ‘sons of

God’ as members of the divine council, the gods of the Near Eastern pantheon (Doedens, 2013). This viewpoint also has some parallels in Book 1 of Enoch, Chapters 3–4.

Afterward, the fallen angel view fell out of favor virtually all throughout the early Middle Ages until the modern era. What should we make of this historical data? Proponents of the fallen angel view say that since the Sethite view came only after the fallen angel view, then it is only a theological innovation. But is this really so clear-cut?

If we follow the logic of the proponents of the fallen angel view, we run into a problem. Their view fell out of favor for around 1,500 years of church history. John 14:16–17 says: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that *He may abide with you forever*—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” Surely the Spirit of truth would have been able to transmit the truth about Genesis 6:1–4 to His church, especially over a very long period of church history. This indicates that those who were taught by the Holy Spirit adhered to views different from the fallen angel view, such as the Sethite view.

Chaffey’s claims about some of these early theologians are debatable. For example, Chaffey quotes Clement of Alexandria, who wrote that “...the angels who had obtained the superior rank, having sunk into pleasures, told to the women the secrets which had come to their knowledge” (Chaffey, 2019). Genesis 6:1–4 states that the sons of God went into the daughters of men and had children by them, so this statement is ambiguous at best. While the Hebrew omits mentioning the specific word ‘children,’ in some cases the Bible speaks about men representing the entire nation of Israel (for an example, see

Numbers 1:1–4). Pseudo-Clementine is also cited by Chaffey: “...and the human race also having multiplied, in the eighth generation, righteous men, who had lived the life of angels, being allured by the beauty of women, fell into promiscuous and illicit connections with those” (Chaffey, 2019, p. 147) If we take Pseudo-Clementine at face value, he is literally talking about righteous men (the line of Seth?) had illicit connections with women. This is evidence contrary to the fallen angel view.

If we look at the history of some other doctrines during church history, we see that there was no clear teaching about them until later on, only after a formative early period when theologians teased out the details. One such important doctrine was the Trinity. It is well known that the church had to wait until the Council of Nicea in 325 AD and even later councils to lay to rest the Christological errors of subordinationism, modalism, Arianism, Eutychianism, Appollinarianism, and Nestorianism. Similarly, even the doctrine of justification was debated in the early centuries leading up to Augustine. According to Berkhof (1937), a form of legalistic moralism made itself known in the early church. Augustine himself also held to a form of justification in which God not only declares the sinner righteous but also makes him such, thereby blurring the lines between justification and sanctification (Berkhof, 1937).

Daniel 12:1–5 is a Biblical example of this. Here God tells Daniel to write down events concerning the end times. Verses 1–4 describe a time of great tribulation that will come upon God’s people, who will be protected by the archangel Michael. At the time of the Resurrection, all men, good and evil, will rise, some to everlasting life, but others to everlasting shame. Verse 5 tells us that these words will be sealed until the time of the end, so that those who read them at that time

may understand God's Word concerning them.

If such important doctrines as the Trinity and justification weren't clarified until later, what can we expect from comparatively minor issues, such as the identity of the sons of God in Genesis 6? Just because some of the earliest Jewish and Christian authors may have held to the fallen angel view, followed by a long period of silence, does not seal the argument for the superiority of that view due to proximity, but in some ways argues against it.

What Does the Term 'Son' Mean in the Biblical Languages?

In order to understand what a Biblical word or term means, we must look at all of its occurrences in the Bible. For example, when we look at the New Testament, we see that the term 'sons of God' never refers to angelic beings. Table I lists all the occurrences of the term 'sons of God' in both the Old and New Testaments outside Genesis 6, and whether they reference angels or humans.

The Hebrew word בֶּן (ben) occurs 4,850 times in the Hebrew Bible and has a variety of meanings, which makes it difficult to pinpoint how it is used in Genesis 6. In Hebrew, the context of a word many times determines its meaning. The most common meaning of the word 'ben' is to denote the male offspring of parents, but it can

denote any kind of descendant or even an ethnographic distinction, such as the "children of Israel" or the "children of Ammon" (Genesis 19:38).

It may also mean that the individual belongs to or is influenced by something or someone, just like how in English we may call someone a 'son of the South,' or the 'sons of Liberty.' Someone who is a son may be a student (a son of his teacher), a citizen of a city, or even an arrow (Psalm 127:3). To indicate age, Hebrew sometimes even says that someone is "the son of 950 years" (Genesis 5:32) (ISBE).

Similarly, in Greek, the word υἱός (*huios*, Strong's NT 5207) a male offspring, either of men or animals. It may also denote a descendant of a person, for example, Jesus was called the son of David, and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1; Matthew 9:27; Matthew 20:30; Mark 12:35; Luke 3:31; Luke 20:41). People can also be sons of a nation, or the followers of a teacher. Jesus is called the Son of God many times in the New Testament. In contrast, Paul calls Elymas the sorcerer a son of the devil in Acts 13:10 because of his wickedness.

The Greek word τέκνον (*teknon*) indicates a child who is physically born into a family. The word is neuter in gender, so only the context helps in elucidating the gender. It stems from the word for giving birth to. However, it may denote spiritual sonship as well. For example, Paul calls Titus his true son (Titus 1:4). The word παῖς (*pais*)

also denotes a child or servant, one who has no authority.

What Does the Term 'Sons of God' Really Mean?

In Job 38:7 we read: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" In this part of Scripture, we read about Job's debate with God. Job is silenced when God challenges him as to whether he was there to witness the foundations of the earth? Something that only the created stars and the angels were privy to. Here, the singing of the morning stars is merely a personification of the stars, who, by their very nature, glorify God. Here the term 'sons of God' refers to the angels, who were created good, not fallen ones (Genesis 1:31).

This verse is very important, because, far from supporting the fallen angel view, it contradicts it. Since *all* of the angels were present in heaven during creation, this means that they do not procreate; their number is fixed, and they do not have offspring. In contrast, humans form a race, and they procreate to continue the human kind. This is why Jesus refers to angels as neither marrying nor being given in marriage (Matthew 22:30), one of the goals of which is to procreate. If fallen angels really procreated with women, they would be doing something they were not created to be capable of. While this verse does not explicitly mention fallen angels, it is an argument from silence to suggest that they engage in sexual activity.

Daniel 3:25 describes a fourth being besides Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, who looked like 'the Son of God.' This being was obviously a benevolent being in that he was there to comfort Daniel's three friends in the midst of the flames. Some commentators say that this is even a reference to Jesus Christ in the flesh before the Incarnation.

Table I. Occurrences of the term 'sons of God' in the Old and New Testaments.

	Angels	Humans
Old Testament	Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Job 38:7, possibly Daniel 3:25	Hosea 1:10
New Testament	—	Matthew 5:9; Luke 3:38; 20:36; Romans 1:4, 8:14–21; Galatians 3:26, 4:4; Hebrews 1:2

Hosea 1:10 is another Old Testament verse that mentions the sons of God: "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, '*You are sons of the living God.*'" Here, the term 'sons of the living God' refers to humans: members of the nation of Israel, the people of God. This may be the only occurrence of the term 'sons of God' in the Old Testament that refers to humans. But this and similar terms definitely refer to humans in the New Testament, as we shall see in the next section.

Let us also remember that Abraham was the father of not only an ethnic people (the Jewish people), but also to all those who believe (Romans 4:11). John 1:12–13 says that "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become *children of God*, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Sons of God as Humans

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." In the genealogy of the Gospel of John, Adam is called a son of God (Luke 3:38). Just as angels are sons of God because they are directly created by God. So, Adam is also a son of God, because he was created by God. Luke 20:34–36: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels *and are sons of God*, being sons of the resurrection.'" Romans 8:14 says "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these are sons of God.*" Verse 19 of the same chapter also says: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly

waits for the revealing of *the sons of God.*" Lastly, Galatians 3:26 says, "For *you are all sons of God* through faith in Christ Jesus."

Since salvation is the same in both the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 17:7), this means someone can also trust in God and be called a son of God in the Old Testament as well. If we expand the term 'sons of God' to refer to godly men and women in general, we can include even more Bible verses that refer to the children of God, such as Psalm 82:6: "And all of you are *children of the Most High.*" In the New Testament, John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." Other New Testament verses include John 11:52; Romans 8:16, 17, 21, 9:8; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:1–2, 10, 5:2. Instead of woodenly equating the narrow term 'sons of God' to fallen angels, we can expand this term to refer to sons, or the children of (the living) God, or children of the Most High, thereby taking the context of the entire Bible into consideration.

Jesus Is the Son of God

Though the term 'sons of God' may refer to godly people who trust in God, it is very well known that the term 'Son of God' in the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ numerous times (Bavinck, 2004). For example, Matthew 14:33 says: "Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" Jesus is referred to either as the Son of God or in some other variants (i.e., "Son of the Most High God" in Luke 8:28, or "Son of the Living God" in John 6:69) 61 times in the New Testament. If the term 'sons of God' refers only to angelic beings and never to humans (as per the fallen angel view), this excludes the man Jesus Christ as the Son of God, even though His Spirit

may be considered as such. The logical outworking of the fallen angel is that Christ's humanity and His Spirit are separated, leading to the Christological heresy of Nestorianism and breaking the hypostatic union.

To take this a step further, the idea that the 'sons of God' refers only to angelic beings is contradicted by Hebrews 1:1–9. This passage of Scripture describes how the glory of Christ far surpasses that of the angels, since it was He who had accomplished the work of salvation. Christ alone made the worlds and is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person (verses 2–3). None is like Christ, and thus the author asks the rhetorical question, "*For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'?*" And again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son'?"

The New Testament (as referenced in Table I) refers to the sons of God exclusively as humans. This is strong evidence against the fallen angel view. Nevertheless, proponents of this view still look to three New Testament verses to support their theory. We will examine these verses now. As we shall see, the proponents of the fallen angel view are merely starting out from the vantage point of their theory and are collecting verses here and there that appear to support their view. This contradicts the principle of *Sola Scriptura* and is mere eisegesis.

1 Peter 3:18–20

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a

few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”

Proponents of the fallen angel view claim that the spirits mentioned in these verses refer to those fallen angels who were punished for their crimes of sexual intercourse with earthly women in the time of Noah. This passage does not describe the particular sin that these alleged fallen angels are being punished for (Kidner, 1967). Therefore, the fallen angel view is ambiguous at best.

Instead, let us look at a more obvious interpretation of these verses. Christ preached by His Holy Spirit to men before the Flood through Noah. The prison that these disobedient spirits are to whom Jesus preached in cannot be located in hell, because in Luke 23:46 Jesus commits His spirit into the Father’s hands. Furthermore, Jesus was sent “...to proclaim liberty to the *captives*...” (Luke 4:18) during His earthly ministry. “Spirits in prison” can also be viewed as captives who need to be evangelized. Only humans fit this description. If these spirits in prison were angelic beings, Peter would have described them as such, as he does in 2 Peter 2:4–5, which will also be discussed.

As to the concept that Christ preached through Noah, there are examples from the Old Testament where God is described as speaking through His spokesman. God tells Moses that “And I will be with your mouth” (Exodus 14:15). In Jeremiah 5:14 God makes His words in the prophet’s mouth a fire.

Furthermore, the term ‘spirit’ can also refer to human beings. Numbers 16:22 says “Then they fell on their faces, and said, ‘O God, the God of the *spirits of all flesh*, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?’” Numbers 27:16 says, “Let the Lord, the God of the *spirits of all flesh*, set a man over the congregation.” Proverbs 16:22 says “All the ways of a man are pure in his own

eyes, But the Lord weighs the *spirits*.” In English, we also talk about how hundreds of souls perished on the Titanic. It is very well possible that the spirits mentioned in these verses are humans and not fallen angels. Indeed, verse 20 refers to Noah and his family as eight *souls* who survived the Flood.

2 Peter 2:4–5

“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.”

To interpret this verse as referring to fallen angels going in to the daughters of men in Genesis 6 is rather ambiguous. It does not have any direct bearing on the context of Genesis 6:1–4. We know that Satan’s demonic host fell after Creation Week. Why would these fallen angels fall a second time? This makes no sense in the broader context of Genesis 1–11 (Leupold, 1942). The fall of Satan and his angels is mentioned in Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12:7–9. It would be mere speculation to assume multiple falls; once after Creation and then again, 1656 years after Creation just before the Flood. Where the Bible is silent, we should do the same.

Jude 1:6–7

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Again, the proponents of the fallen angel view somehow connect those angels who fell from their heavenly home to be kept in chains for eternal punishment. Just as with 2 Peter 2:4–5, why does the fallen angel theory imply a second falling away of these demons before the time of the Flood? This makes no sense. The fallen angel theory is arbitrarily associating the fall of these angels with the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6:1–4.

According to other variants of this view, these fallen angels then took wives from among the daughters of men for themselves and brought forth demon-possessed offspring, who became the Nephilim, who caused such evil in the world that God had to stop them by bringing the Flood upon the world. But this contradicts Genesis 6:7, which says that God had to destroy all *men and even all animals* on the face of the earth. The destruction of the devil (and apparently his demons) is being held up until Judgment (Revelation 20:10). God already punished the snake in Genesis 3 for tempting Adam and Eve (Major, 1990). Why would God punish men for sins instigated by demons? Such an idea violates divine justice (Binney, 1970). Furthermore, if God intended to wipe out the Nephilim with the Flood, He failed to do so, since the Nephilim remained on the Earth after the Flood (they were definitely not on the Ark), according to Genesis 6:4.

Sons of the Devil

Several verses describe how wicked people, such as the Pharisees were sons of the devil (John 8:44–45). 1 John 3:10 contrasts the children of God and the children of the devil. Judas was called the son of perdition (John 17:12). In Acts 13:10 Paul calls Elymas, the witch, a son of the devil. If there are clear descriptions of people called the sons of the devil, why doesn’t

Genesis 6:1–4 describe the fallen angels as such?

Angels and Humans Compared

After examining how the Bible talks about the sons of God, let us compare angels with humans from different aspects. By doing so, we shall see that the fallen angel view runs into even more problems. Seven differences are listed in Table II.

As we can see, angels are invisible spirit beings, although they may temporarily assume a fleshly body (Genesis 19:1–11). However, humans are made up of body and soul, since they stand between the animal world and the spirit world (Genesis 2:7). Angels are a host, whereas humans are a race and multiply by sexual reproduction. We know that angels do not procreate, since they were all present when the foundations of the earth were fastened (Job 38:6–7) during Creation Week. Since the very last angel was created during this time period, we know that their numbers are fixed. Thus, they do not procreate, neither do they marry, as mentioned in Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25.

This is especially so since apparently all angels are male. The angel Ga-

briel is mentioned in Luke 1:19 and 26, and the angel Michael is mentioned in Revelation 12:7. The angels in Genesis 19 who come to Sodom are male, and the angel in Revelation 20:1 with the key to the bottomless pit is also male.

From the individual creation of angels, it follows that their election (salvation) is also individual. Their election is due to God's preventing the majority of the angels from falling into sin. In contrast, a certain subgroup of humans is chosen for salvation; these are the elect (John 6:44; 15:16; 17:9). Each angel fell individually, as opposed to the whole human race, which fell in Adam. Angels fell irreversibly and cannot be redeemed, whereas a Savior was provided for the salvation of men. Jesus became a man, not an angel, and died for men, not for angels.

Lastly, the fall of Satan and his angels occurred sometime shortly after Creation. This is because God declared that all He had created was very good (Genesis 1:31). This would have included the angel Satan in his unfallen state (i.e., Lucifer—Isa. 14:12). However, according to Revelation 12:7–9, Satan was cast out of heaven together with his angels. This places Satan's fall at the latest to the beginning of Genesis 3 and not Genesis 6, which is over a thousand years later. Further-

more, God brought about the Flood, not because He wanted to wipe out the offspring of the union of fallen angels and women, but because "every intent of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5–7). Fallen angels are not mentioned in these verses; they are simply an unwarranted addition to the text.

The idea that the term 'sons of God' really refers to fallen angels relies on several cases of special pleading. The thrust of the early chapters of Genesis deals with human history, not with angelic beings. To suddenly turn the focus on alleged fallen angels who are sons of God takes Genesis 6:1–4 out of its broader context. For this view to be true, demonic spirits would have to acquire the biological bodies of men and then dupe unsuspecting women into marrying them, all the while keeping up this charade for years. This sounds very unusual at the very least. The goal of demonic spirits is not to have a family with women but rather to devour people like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8).

By examining the nature of angels and comparing them to humans, we see that angels cannot have been in view as the sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4. Another explanation must be sought.

Table II. Angels and humans compared.

	Angels	Humans	Bible Reference
<i>Created as</i>	a host	a race	Luke 2:13; Genesis 1:28
<i>Marry and reproduce</i>	no	yes	Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25
<i>Their number</i>	is fixed	increases through reproduction	Job 38:7; Genesis 1:28
<i>Their fall is</i>	individual, irreversible	as a race, redeemable	Ezekiel 28:13–16; Romans 5:18
<i>Substance</i>	spiritual	physical and spiritual	Job 2:2; Genesis 2:7
<i>Gender</i>	seemingly all male	male and female	Genesis 1:27, 19:1–11; Luke 1:19, 26; Revelation 12:7, 20:1
<i>Election</i>	to prevent fall into sin	elected to salvation	1 Timothy 5:21; Mark 13:27

The Sethite View

The third of the three views says that the ‘sons of God’ are humans, notably the godly lineage of Seth. Some theologians in the early church held this view, such as the historian Julius Africanus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine (Sarfati, 2015). Luther (Luther, 2018) and Calvin (1578) also held to this view, as well as some Middle Age Jewish scholars (Caputo, 2015) and some Puritan and modern authors (Henry, 2008).

To understand Genesis 6:1–4, we must place it in its wider context. For this, we have to examine the chapters preceding it. Some scholars go so far as to say that Genesis 6:1–4 is only loosely associated with the rest of Genesis 6 and that it is an intrusion into the order of things as God intended (Chaffey, 2019, p. 211). The reason that we do not understand some portions of Scripture has nothing to do with the defectiveness of the Bible, but rather with our own sinful, finite minds. If we take a closer look at the text, we may be able to resolve its seeming “awkwardness” to us.

In Genesis, the beginnings of some of the chapters summarize previous events, after which new material is introduced (Pipa, 2006). These include Genesis 2:1–4, which summarizes the creation narrative. Genesis 5:1–2 summarizes the life of Adam, and thus Genesis 6:1–4 can be tied to Genesis 5, which describes the descendants of Seth. In Genesis 4:26 we read, “To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.” This verse tells us that starting with Seth, people started invoking God’s name, something only believers would do. This would make them God’s children—sons of God! Especially at this early point in history, it would have been important to keep the godly seed intact, which started with Eve at the Curse. The purpose of

this godly seed was to bring forth the Messiah, who would save His people from sin (Genesis 3:15) (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961).

Some opponents of the Sethite view claim the word ‘call’ was mistranslated from the Hebrew, and that this word really means ‘to profane.’ This is unconvincing because even before the time of Seth, men had committed sins such as when Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4:23). The word for ‘call’ in the Hebrew is קָרָא, (*kara*) whereas the word for ‘profane’ is חָלַל (*challel*). The word קָרָא is simply not used in this manner in the Bible.

Let us now look at the line of Seth: Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and finally Noah. About Enoch, we read this: “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). About Lamech we read this: “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands’” (Genesis 5:28–29).

It is true that not every person listed in Seth’s lineage could have been truly regenerate. One of Noah’s own sons was unregenerate (Genesis 9:22–25). There was a traitor even amongst Christ’s disciples (Matthew 26:21). The author personally knows a devout Christian family where out of six children, three became missionaries, and only one did not remain in the faith. But God can still bless families in which some of the children continue the line of faith started by their parents.

Lamech’s cry could mean that he and his ancestors were waiting for someone who would bring them relief from the painful toil of their hands, which is part of the curse in Genesis 3:17–19. This indicates that the promise of a Savior who would crush the serpent’s head in Genesis 3:15 was kept alive all throughout the lineage of Seth.

This information could well have been taught to him by Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Seth could have taught this to his son, Enosh, as well and his descendants, including Lamech, who fathered Noah.

Judges 2:10 describes a generation that knew the Lord that came before a generation that did not. This indicates that large groups of people at once, a whole generation, or at least the great majority, can know God. Let us also consider that during the time of the patriarchs, multiple generations lived contemporaneously, so that the older generations would have been able to pass on their firsthand knowledge of God to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Are the sons of God (the Sethites) the offspring of men? Yes. They are men because they are the sons of Adam. Biologically, they are humans. But they are also the sons of God because they were godly by calling upon God’s name. But even though they were men, they didn’t belong to the big mass of sinful humanity that was multiplying in their time, but were distinguished from them. For example, in Judges 20:3, the sons of Benjamin are distinguished from the sons of Israel, yet they are still part of Israel (Clines, 1979). The wording itself, ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men,’ might be used in such a way as to contrast the divine and the profane.

To better understand this, we have to realize that when the Bible talks about the world, or ‘all men,’ it doesn’t always literally mean every single thing or person. For example, all the families of the Earth will be blessed in Abraham (Genesis 12:3), although not literally all. Cyrus, king of Persia, claims that all the kingdoms of the Earth have been given to him by the Lord God of heaven (Ezra 1:2). In Matthew 3:5, we read that Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to Jesus. Revelation

13:3 says: “One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.” In this verse, we read about how the whole world followed the beast, the ultimate epitome of evil.

What Genesis 6:2 likely means is a kind of distributive inclusiveness: a smaller subset of men, the sons of God (the Sethites), went into the daughters of men in general. Just because these sons of God themselves are men does not preclude them from going in to the daughters of men. Revelation 20:4 says this: “Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.” This second verse from Revelation tells us that even though ‘all of humanity’ was worshiping the beast, there was a small remnant who did not do so, and who kept themselves clean. Romans 11:5 says, “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.” There was a godly remnant in the New Testament and the Old Testament as well—these were the Sethites.

Who Were the Nephilim?

In Genesis 6:4, we read that ‘giants’ were around in the days of Noah (NKJV translation). The word translated as giant in this verse in Hebrew is נְפִלִים (*nephilim*). Several authors claim that the Nephilim were giants, and even extend this to large-sized animals before Noah’s Flood (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961). Numbers 13:33 describes the Nephilim as giants; however, this description is part of a false report to Joshua. Therefore, the term Nephilim does not necessarily refer to giants.

We know that height is a very variable trait, influenced by genetics, nutrition, and general health. It is polygenic, meaning that the result of

the expression of many genes (up to 700, according to one study) influences height (Zimmer, 2018). Height follows a bell curve, and in modern times at least, humans have never reached above nine feet in height. These people would not appear as giants to people who were up to a little over six feet tall.

In Hebrew, the word נָפַל (*naphal*) means to fall (Strong’s OT 5307). However, its Hiphil form means to cause to fall, as in felling a tree (2 Kings 3:19) or throwing down a wall (2 Samuel 20:15). From this, the word Nephilim is derived. The Nephilim can refer to people who cause others to fall, during military conquest.

The Nephilim of Genesis 6:4 were the named offspring of the sons of God, who became mighty men of old, men of renown. The greatness of these Nephilim may instead be due to their high position as kings or rulers of nations. One such mighty ruler was likely Nimrod, who was a mighty man on the earth (Genesis 10:8–9; 1 Chronicles 1:10). Scant mention is made of these rulers in Genesis, but various pagan legends of mighty rulers or warriors may have their origins in Genesis 6:4. One such pair of mighty men are Hunor and Magor from Hungarian mythology, who were the patriarchs of the Huns and the Magyars. These two mythological figures were hunters like their alleged father, Nimrod himself (Nemeskürty, 1991). These mighty men may well have been the cause of violence, having filled the Earth by the time of the Flood, according to Genesis 6:11, 13.

By this time, apostasy had become so general that the name of the Lord had been practically forgotten by this time. Therefore, Genesis 6:6–7 tells us that God repented of having made man and plans to destroy all mankind for their sin, save Noah and his family. However, these Nephilim were also around after the Flood. Their descendants included the sons of Anak (Num-

bers 13:33), the wicked inhabitants of Canaan who were to be exterminated by Israel during their conquest.

The Days of Man Reduced to 120 Years

Genesis 6:3 says, “Then the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.’” A long life is considered a blessing in the Bible (Proverbs 3:2). So, by shortening the lifespan of man, God could have punished mankind for their wickedness before the Flood. There are two ways of interpreting this span of 120 years.

In general, the lengthiest lifespan experienced today by humans is capped at no more than 120 years. However, Noah went on to live until he was 950 years old (Genesis 9:29). Other patriarchs, such as Terah, Abraham, and Jacob, who each lived after the Flood, died when they were well over 120.

The upper limit of human life could have commenced after the Flood. For example, in Genesis 2:17 God tells Adam that if he eats from the tree of knowledge, then on that day he shall surely die, but Adam only died several hundred years later. A similar verse is 1 Kings 2:37–46 where King Solomon tells Shimei that he will die if he crosses the brook at Kidron, but also only does so later. Notably, Moses lives to the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7), Joseph and Joshua both live to be 110 (Genesis 50:22; Joshua 24:29).

Verse 3 could also mean that God is giving mankind a deadline of 120 years to repent until he unleashes the Flood (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961; Waltke, 2001). When God withdraws his Spirit, then man dies. When God said that His Spirit would not abide with mankind could mean that God would no longer walk with men, as he did with Noah (Genesis 6:9). Romans 1:18–32 describes how God abandons people



Figure 1. Artistic depiction of the mixed marriages between the godly Sethite lineage and the daughters of men. Alamy picture #FJR4KF: 1852–60; illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld.

to the terrifying consequences of their sins. After the Flood, we read that God withdrew his presence from the Earth. Noah bore his three sons in the 500th year of his life (Genesis 5:32), and the Flood came in his 600th year, making 100 years (Genesis 7:6). Luther rejects the explanation that the remaining 20 years were cut off as a Jewish fable. It is not mentioned when God gave this decree to Noah, so Luther explains that it could have come when Noah was 480 years old and still unmarried and did not yet have children (Luther, 2018).

Godly and Ungodly Marriage

The godly lineage would have begun to wane with the generations after Seth. There were fewer and fewer people who believed in God and called upon His name. This also happened in the Middle Ages when true faith was almost extinguished. It could be that since the number of faithful people was getting so depleted, it was getting ever harder for them to find a godly wife. This is true nowadays in some parts of the church when a young man

or woman cannot wait for the right spouse and marries an unbeliever, thereby sinning against God. Thus, the godly Sethites may have sinned by taking for themselves the daughters of men without regard to marrying a godly woman only (Figure 1). Although the explicit command not to marry an unbeliever was not stated before Genesis 6, we may assume that since human nature was the same before the Flood as well as after, it would have been contrary to God's will for godly people to intermarry with the ungodly. Some argue that since the Gospel was first proclaimed in the Garden of Eden, Adam may have believed, and passed on his faith to his children, including his son Seth.

After Satan had successfully tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he wasn't finished, since the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). According to Genesis 3:15, there was to be enmity between the devil's offspring and the woman's [Eve's] offspring. Satan's second big strike against godly humanity was inspiring Cain to kill Abel (Genesis 4:8). Satan's next attempt to extinguish the godly line was to tempt the godly line into mixed marriages. This explanation also gives a natural flow to the storyline of Genesis 11 instead of invoking fallen angels having sexual intercourse with humans (Currid, 2003, pp. 174–175).

Genesis 6:1–4 is about human history, embedded into the wider context of Genesis 1–11. The sin mentioned in this passage of Scripture is a mixed interfaith marriage, something that God always warned His people against. Marriage between an angel and a human is impossible, since it crosses two kinds with one another.

The Lust of the Eyes

In Genesis 13:10 we read, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the

Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah)." Just as Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld the lush Jordan Valley, well-watered like the garden of the Lord, Lot did so because even though he was a godly man, he was focused on worldly advancement. But so also "...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful" (Genesis 6:2a). And so, sadly, they sinned against God by taking for themselves wives according to their own choosing, and not particularly in the Lord. Life went on without seeking God's will. This also makes sense of a verse from the New Testament, Matthew 24:38, where Jesus says: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark."

According to one contrary interpretation, the word for beautiful in Hebrew is טוֹב (*tov*), which could also mean morally good or virtuous (Grossman, 2018). This is one of the definitions of the word טוֹב in Hebrew, but טוֹב can mean a whole range of things. טוֹב may mean that something is pleasant to the sight, taste, or smell, or that it is of excellent quality, or that it is good, kind, appropriate, or benign. So also in Genesis 6:2, the sons of God saw (וַיִּרְאוּ: and they saw) that the daughters of men were good (טוֹבוֹת). The verb יָרָא has to do with sight. Just as in Genesis 3:6: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate." Here also Eve saw that the fruit was good (טוֹב). We might say that the sons of God fell into sin just as Eve did in the garden of Eden by taking a different kind of forbidden fruit—marrying whosoever they

pleased. Believers must marry only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39).

The Result of Bad Choices

A godly heritage does not equate with automatic regeneration. It only takes one single generation for a people to depart from the Lord (Judges 2:10). This happened many times during Israel's history, but it started early on in primeval history with the godly lineage of the Sethites, as well. The Israelites often sinned against God when they married women from pagan countries (Genesis 24:3; Ezra 9:1–2; Nehemiah 13:23–28). This also led to Solomon's apostasy (1 Kings 11:1–4). This way, apostasy from the true faith would have accelerated. Murray writes that with the breakdown of godly marriages, the gates are open to all sorts of vice (Murray, 1957, p. 246).

It is important to note that this apostasy did not happen overnight. But eventually, it got to the point where only Noah was found to be righteous before God (Genesis 6:18). Because of mixed marriage and subsequent apostasy, the ranks of the ungodly swelled up. Noah and his family were the only ones who walked with the Lord at his age. The world had to have been so full of violence and sin that even the longsuffering God decided that it was enough.

Why did God wait for so long before He unleashed the Flood? According to 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." God is a patient God who is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness (Numbers 14:18). This is why God waited 120 years until only Noah and his family were left. When Abraham intercedes for Sodom in Genesis 18:22–33, he keeps asking God how many right-

eous men must there be in the city for God to spare it? By verse 32, Abraham stops asking at ten. But in Genesis 19 we read that besides Lot and his family, no one righteous was left in Sodom, and therefore God destroyed the city because of its wickedness.

Therefore, God finally destroyed the world with the Flood. It was a sign of God's judgment on the Earth, because all flesh had become corrupt (Genesis 6:11–13). But the main goal of the Flood was to cleanse the Earth and save the righteous seed of the Sethites through Noah. Noah was the last of the Sethites.

Summary and Conclusion

Of the three views describing the identity of the sons of God, the view that they were rulers is underwhelming and has little explanatory power.

The currently popular view that the sons of God are fallen angels contradicts several parts of the Bible (Job 38:7; Hebrews 1:5) and its outworking leads to a denial of the hypostatic union. It breaks the main thrust of Genesis 1–11, which covers the unfolding of early human history. It needs several unusual circumstances to occur (demons taking the bodies of men for a long period of time to dupe women in marriage) for it to be viable. Though some early Jewish and Christian scholars held to this view (some held it to be a Jewish fable), the Holy Spirit did not teach it to the church for 1500 years.

Consequently, the sons of God must refer to a godly lineage of men, likely starting with Seth, who began to call upon the name of the Lord. The Old and New Testaments refer to godly men as sons of God. In the broader context of the early chapters of Genesis, we see that as evil spread, so the godly lineage of Seth began to wane, to the point that godly men no longer found godly women to marry or even cared

about this non-negotiable aspect of a godly marriage, as we unfortunately see in many places today.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Martin Emmrich for his helpful comments and advice in improving the text of the manuscript.

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