

# THE SONS OF GOD

## Genesis 6:1-7

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. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." (NKJV)

### Sons of God

#### Evil Angels?

Most conservative scholars of the Bible interpret the "sons of God" as angels, whom they say married human women and were then punished by being confined to hell in chains (see II Peter 2:4-5; Jude 6). This view is supported partly by the evidence that the term "sons of God" often refers to angels. Indeed, this seems to be the case in Job 1:6; 2:1; and 38:7. Furthermore, the literal Hebrew of Psalms 29:1 reads "sons of the Mighty [or "Almighty"]", as does Psalms 89:6, where the context strongly suggests angels in heaven. Finally, in Daniel 3:25, Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar called the fourth being in the fiery furnace literally "a son of the gods" and an "angel" (verse 28). Although that was probably Jesus Himself, it is significant that an expression so similar to "sons of God" is associated with the word for "angel". Despite this Biblical evidence that the term "sons of God" often refers to angels, it is of great significance that it is never used to describe *evil* angels.

As for II Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, they do not state outright that the evil angels spoken of there were the "sons of God" who allegedly married human wives in Genesis 6; they are simply interpreted in this way. However, the Greek word often translated as "hell" in II Peter 2:4 (*tartaroo* or *tartarus*) refers in Greek mythology to the abode of the dead as a dark abyss: "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..."

Three facts in the context indicate that *tartaroo* is being used in a figurative sense here. First, fallen angels are not now literally dead. Second, the reference to *chains of darkness* is obviously a

metaphor because there can be no such literal things as chains of darkness. And third, Revelation 12:7-9 says that the fallen angels were cast to the Earth. Therefore, *tartaroo* is used here figuratively to represent the entire world, which undoubtedly is a place of darkness in contrast to the glorious light of heaven, from which they had been cast. The context further demonstrates that *tartaroo* is being used here as the place where the fallen angels are being held in a state of condemnation while they are waiting for the day of judgment. In other words, the evil angels are confined to the Earth and cannot tempt any intelligent creatures who may exist elsewhere in the universe, including heaven.

The argument that the reference to angels sinning in II Peter is given immediately prior to a reference to the global Flood means that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 are evil angels does not have any merit because the parallel passage in Jude does not mention the Flood at all. The attempt to find a connection between II Peter 2:4 to Genesis 6 is speculative in nature. And the argument that Jude 6-7 connect the sexual perversions of Sodom and Gomorrah to the angels paralleled in II Peter 2:4 also lacks merit. The argument revolves around the expression, “as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality...” (Jude 7). It is alleged that “in a similar manner to these” refers to the evil angels in verse 6 and thus to Genesis 6. However, this interpretation is an unwarranted stretch when it is easier to understand this expression as referring to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, as in “the cities around Sodom and Gomorrah in a similar manner to them [Sodom & Gomorrah]” (my own paraphrase).

Therefore, when all the relevant evidence concerning II Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7 has been examined, there is no compelling reason to link the wicked angels there with the events of Genesis 6:1-7. And because the expression “sons of God” are never used to describe evil angels, this particular interpretation must be rejected.

### Have Evil Angels Lost their Physical Bodies?

Some Bible scholars have interpreted the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2, 4 as good angels, partly because they reject the “evil angels” thesis on the grounds that evil angels have lost their physical bodies and thus cannot produce children with human women. Under this idea, evil angels can be of no use to Satan unless they actually possess a person. Demon possession so common in the days of Jesus in the New Testament gospels is seen as strong evidence that demons are required to possess people in order to further Satan’s cause.

This entire argument should be rejected for a number of important reasons. First, angel nature is angel nature, so how would an evil character in an angel result in a loss of angel nature? To insist on this idea requires the conclusion that evil angels are no longer angels. But because the New Testament clearly and plainly calls evil angels wicked or demons, they are still angels. Furthermore, if this idea were true, why would it not also be true that when man sinned, he lost his human nature and become something other than human? In a sense, of course, sinful people are less than fully human *as God intended for them to be*. But that primarily concerns character rather than nature; we are still human.

Second, only God is inherently immaterial and thus eternal. That is to say, only God's essential nature lies outside of time and space because He had to create time and space and everything in it. Thus, He is unaffected by either time or space, and is therefore eternal—without beginning, not subject to change, and without end. This means that *all* of God's creatures, including angels, must have an essential physical nature. This precludes the understanding that, as spirit beings, angels have no essential physical nature because otherwise they would be gods. Therefore, if evil angels lost any part of their essential nature, it would not be their physical or material substance.

Third, II Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Because this means that he can still change his form, there is no compelling reason to conclude that he could not assume a physical form, such as the appearance of a human being, with the ability to touch and be touched, and so forth.

Finally, demon possession gives evil angels total, smothering control of a being, which is the nature of Satan's character. But that does not necessarily imply an inability to be useful to Satan if they are not possessing someone's body. For example, Satan himself tempted Jesus without using another creature's body to do so. And he certainly tempts us without possessing us. Furthermore, Revelation 16:14 describes demons who will "go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Note also that they are spoken of as "spirits of demons" in this text, underlying the reality that they will not be possessing anyone else's bodies. Yet they will most assuredly be useful to Satan at that time.

The story of the demoniac or demoniacs in Matthew 8, Mark 5, and Luke 8 is often used to support the proposition that demons, or evil angels, cannot be of useful service to Satan unless they possess another creature's body. In support of this theory, it is pointed out that the demons there, when they realize that Jesus is going to cast them out of the man or men, ask Him for permission to be able to possess a herd of swine. Although Luke has them asking not to be sent to the "abyss" (Luke 8:31), Mark says "out of the country" (Mark 5:10), and Matthew says nothing about a negative request. Therefore, the *abyss* in Luke 8:31 must be an uninhabited area where there are no people to harass or possess. The context suggests they asked permission to enter the herd of swine in order to then get the people to blame Jesus for their loss of business so they wouldn't listen to His message. Indeed, when Jesus allowed them to enter the swine, the demons drove the swine over a cliff to their (swines') death. Although the people of that area were initially furious with Jesus over the destruction of some of their property and livelihood, the testimony of the demoniac or demoniacs eventually allowed Jesus to return and do a great work there. Therefore, the fact that the demons in the story requested permission to possess some swine in no way suggests that they are of no use to Satan's cause unless they are possessing living creatures of some kind. It was simply a request that would allow them to work effectively against Jesus. But while Jesus allowed His cause to be set back initially, in the end He used the events there to reach those very same people in overruling Satan in the long run.

## Good Angels or Men Gone Bad?

As we saw above, it is certainly true that the term “sons of God” is often used in reference to angels. However, it may also refer to people who profess to belong to God. For example, God said “Israel is My son, My firstborn” in Exodus 4:22. In Deuteronomy 14:1 Israel is called “the children of the Lord your God.” The Lord called the people of Judah “My sons” and “My daughters” in Isaiah 43:6 and “sons of the living God” in Hosea 1:10.

In the New Testament, Christian believers are called “children of God” (John 1:12; Philippians 2:15; I John 3:1-2), “sons of God” (Romans 8:14, 19), “son” and “sons” (Galatians 4:5-7), “sons” and “My son” (Hebrews 12:5-8), and “My sons and daughters” (II Corinthians 6:18). Moreover, there is some legitimate reason, albeit not conclusive, that Job 1:6 and 2:1 may refer to intelligent beings from other planets in the universe gathering periodically in some type of Universal Nations meeting, just as Satan was the prince of this world, albeit temporarily.

While it is true that the exact term “sons of God” is only clearly and explicitly used of God’s people twice (Romans 8:14 & 19), the numerous similar expressions in both the Old and New Testaments definitely allow for the possibility that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2, 4 are males who professed God but were guilty of taking the wrong women for wives, in addition to the possible interpretation that each took more than one wife in a sinful, polygamous practice. Note the clause in Genesis 6:2 that “they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.” Although not conclusive, it is possible to interpret this as at least partly the sin of polygamy.

While the Biblical evidence allows for the view that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2, 4 are good men gone bad, the following additional evidence actually requires that conclusion:

- Angels do not marry at all (note Gen. 6:2 uses “wives”) according to Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:36, yet Genesis 6:2 says “they took wives.” The suggestion by some scholars that the alleged angels in Genesis 6 did so despite the admission that Jesus seems to exclude that possibility in the above texts represents a failure on the part of those scholars to rethink their interpretation of the “sons of God” in this particular passage.
- Even though angels can change into human form according to Genesis 19:1-16 and Acts 12:5-7, that does not mean they can actually procreate with human women because there are no known examples of two very different living creatures who can produce offspring. And surely angels and human beings are very different creatures. NOTES: (1) Many, though not all, references to the “Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament are to the Lord Himself (cf. Genesis 16:7-13), so these expressions cannot be used to demonstrate that angels can change into human form; and (2) A horse and a donkey can produce a mule, but horses and donkeys are closely related to each other. We never find a horse and a pig mating to produce offspring.

- Gen. 6:3, 5 state clearly that God’s anger was because of *man*’s wickedness, without any reference to angels. Yet if angels had taken human women for wives and had children with them, that would have been a sexual perversion because each creature is to produce after its own kind (see Genesis 1). In that wicked scenario, the angels would have been at least as guilty as the human women.

So the “sons of God” were God-fearing men, which would make the “daughters of men” women who were among the wicked. Genesis 4:25-26 tells the story of the birth of Seth as the replacement son for Abel, whom Cain had killed. After Abel came on the scene, verse 26 declares that “then men began to call on the name of the Lord.” Given the Biblical genealogy in Genesis, the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 must be the male descendants of Seth and the “daughters of men” the female descendants of Cain. And the great sin between these two groups was that the Godly descendants of Seth gave into their lusts and took wives among the wicked (and perhaps each one took more than one wife as well). There is a real spiritual lesson for us today, that God’s faithful people should avoid getting romantically involved with those who are not spiritually of the same religious faith. This spiritual command was given to the Jews after the end of the Babylonian Captivity by Ezra in Ezra 10. And in a different context, the apostle Paul admonished Christians, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (II Corinthians 6:14).

## **Giants**

Genesis 6:4 declares that there “were giants on the earth in those days...” The Hebrew word translated as “giants” is *nephilim*, which is derived from a root word meaning “to fall”. So these were people who fell upon others in violent ways; we might call them terrorists today. The only other occurrence of this Hebrew word in Scripture is in Numbers 13:33, where it is also usually translated as *giants*. This is an accurate translation because Numbers 13:32 refers to the large “stature” of the *nephilim*, while verse 33 says they made the Israelites look like “grasshoppers” by contrast. Moreover, Deuteronomy 1:28 and 2:10-11 refer to extra tall people like the Anakim, the descendants of Anak, from whom Numbers 13:33 says the *nephilim* descended. Also, the Septuagint (LXX) translates *nephilim* with a Greek word meaning “giants”. Interestingly, Anak comes from a root word meaning “to choke” (or “neck” or “necklace”). Therefore, it is almost certain that the *nephilim* (or “giants”) were a combination of both meanings, i.e., they were extra tall, or large, terrorists.

## **Relationship of *Nephilim* and Mighty Men**

Genesis 6:4 says there were *nephilim* on the Earth “in those days...”, which would refer to pre-Flood times. But it adds that they existed “also afterward...” This shows that the *nephilim* did not originate with the wicked marriages spoken about here.

Some have assumed that “afterward” must refer to the post-Flood era since it is used in sharp

contrast to the phrase “in those days,” which refers to the pre-Flood era. But verse 4 supplies us with the meaning of “afterward” by stating, “afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them.” Since the birth of these children occurred before the Flood (and was a reason for the general wickedness that resulted in the global Flood), the period of time designated by the word *afterward* must at least begin in the pre-Flood era. The fact that the Old Testament refers to Rephaim (or “giants”) *after* the Flood (see Genesis 14:5; 15:20; Deuteronomy 2:10-11; 3:13; Joshua 12:4-5; 13:12; 17:15; II Sam. 21:15-17) does not mean that *afterward* in Genesis 6:4 precludes more warrior-giants after the appearance of the original pre-Flood *nephilim*.

Genesis 6:4 clearly means that “mighty men...” were born to the sons of God and the daughters of men. The Hebrew word for “mighty” means “brave,” “powerful,” or “strong,” and “mighty men” usually refers to warriors or even giants. Then the end of that verse (4) says they were “renown,” which means they were famous or infamous. Thus we see that the terms *nephilim* and *mighty men* allude to the same basic characteristics even though they are different words. Therefore, part of verse 4 could be paraphrased as follows: “There were giants on the earth before the Flood and before the sons of God married the daughters of men and had children who themselves became infamous warrior-giants like the original giants (*nephilim*).”

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