



Q. Is Genesis 6:1-4 saying that angels married humans? Who are the "sons of God"?

A. Before studying into this question in depth, I assumed I knew the answer. So I surprised myself with what I found. I also found that the correct understanding of this passage is important because it serves as a lesson for us today. I will go through the common explanations of this passage, show from the Bible which is correct, and then discuss what we can learn from this lesson.

In the King James Version, Genesis 6:1-4 reads:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

Genesis 6:1-4

There are at least three explanations for what this passage means by the "sons of God."

1. The most commonly accepted explanation today of this verse is that the "sons of God" means the male descendants of Seth, and that the "daughters of men" refers to the female descendants of Cain. The adherents of this explanation say that the descendants of Seth are called the "sons of God" because they had preserved the worship of the true God, whereas the descendants of Cain had lost true worship and fallen into a corrupt religion. The problem, then, was that intermarriage between these two lines of people led to this corrupt religion spreading into the line of Seth.

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The appeal of this explanation is that it does not involve anything extraordinary. God was not pleased with the intermarriage of two lines of humans because it was spreading corrupt religion. It matches with such Scriptures as 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" But merely matching a biblical principle is not a compelling reason to accept this understanding. An explanation of a Scripture should be based on how the same words and phrases are used elsewhere in the Bible, and, if possible, on other Scriptures that speak of the same thing.

So there is a serious problem with this view. It is not at all based on Sola Scriptura, the Bible alone. It is not based on the Bible interpreting itself. It does not show us that the term "sons of God" is elsewhere used to mean "sons of Seth." It does not come from exegesis but from eisegesis. That is, aside from the general principle that God does not want us to marry outside of the true religion, there is nothing in the Bible that supports this explanation. It is out of the heads of men.

Nothing in the Bible says that, by this time, the sons of Seth were any more righteous than anyone else. Nothing in the Bible supports the idea that this is talking about the intermarriage between the sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain. Verse 1 is speaking of "when men began to multiply...and daughters were born unto them." There is absolutely no reason to assume that this is referring to anything other than all men. But the proponents of this explanation want us to believe that in verses 2 and 4, "the daughters of men" means the daughters of only the sons of Cain. Although this is the explanation I once believed, I now see that it is an absurd and baseless assumption. Most importantly, nothing in the Bible supports the interpretation of "sons of God" as "sons of Seth."

2. Another explanation, not widely accepted today, is that "sons of God" refers to "sons of judges" or "sons of magistrates." And it is true that it is possible to so translate the Hebrew. The Hebrew word '*'ělōhîm*', which is almost always translated "God," is translated "judges" in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9 and as "judge" in 1 Samuel 2:25 (although this latter instance is probably wrong, and should be "God"). But, aside from man trying to reason out this Scripture, there is no real cause to translate '*'ělōhîm*' as "judges" here. Also, this does not explain why it would be wrong for the "sons of judges" to marry the "daughters of men." And, finally, this explanation also is not based on any other biblical evidence; it is not based on sound exegesis.

3. The third explanation of this passage is that "sons of God" refers to angels, and that these angels left their spiritual abode manifesting themselves physically and having sexual relations with human women who are referred to as the "daughters of men." This explanation was held by Josephus, Philo, Eusebius, and many of the early "church fathers."

This explanation has several supports. Very importantly, a study of the term "sons of God" reveals that it always refers to rational beings directly created by God or, in the singular, to the Second Person of the Trinity. The reference to Adam as the "son of God" in Luke 3:38 is really only in the English. The Greek merely says, "of God." Nevertheless, it is perhaps implied that Adam was the son of God, but this still fits the explanation because Adam was a rational being directly created by God. Christians are also called "sons of God" because they are new creations, born again of God. They are His direct, spiritual offspring.

In the Old Testament, "sons of God" clearly refers to the angels. In Job 1:6, we read, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them." And Job 2:1 says, "Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD." Plainly, this was a meeting of angels before God. Job 38:4-7 says, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" This is referring to a time before the creation of man. Who else could "sons of God" be referring to but the angels?

Now, let's notice another Scripture—Jude 1:6-7: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." So we see here another reference to angels who kept not their first estate, who left their own habitation. But there is even more to this passage that is not presented clearly in the King James Version.

Notice the *American Standard Version* of these verses: "And angels that kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire." The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities gave themselves over to fornication "in like manner with these." In like manner with whom? The angels who left their proper habitation, of course.

Now read it in the *English Standard Version*: "And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities "likewise indulged in sexual immorality." Likewise to whom? Likewise to the angels who left their proper dwelling.

The *Revised English Bible* could hardly be clearer: "Remember too those angels who were not content to maintain the dominion assigned to them, but abandoned their proper dwelling-place; God is holding them, bound in darkness with everlasting chains, for judgement on the great day. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring towns; like the angels, they committed fornication and indulged in unnatural lusts; and in eternal fire they paid the penalty, a warning for all."

Some might argue that these translations are not literal enough, so I am going to quote from *The Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*: "And those angels not having kept their first place, but having deserted their dwelling-place, He has kept in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of a great Day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, in like manner to these, committing fornication, and going away after other flesh, laid down an example before-times, undergoing vengeance of everlasting fire." The Greek of the phrase "in like manner to these" is *homoion toutois tropon*. A very strict, literal translation is "similar to these in manner." The word "other" in "other flesh" is *heteras*. It means "different."

There can hardly be a doubt that Jude was saying that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah committed sexual immorality and went after different flesh in a manner similar to the angels who left their proper dwelling. We certainly know that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah committed fornication, including having homosexual relations. But how did they go after "different flesh"? Remember that in Genesis 19, the people of Sodom wanted to have sexual relations with the angels. Thus, Jude 1:6-7 strongly supports the explanation of Genesis 6 that the "sons of God" refers to angels who left their heavenly dwelling and their spiritual bodies, manifested themselves physically, and committed fornication with flesh that was different from their own—that is, they had sexual relations with humans.

Now that we know this, we see that this is also what Peter is writing of in 2 Peter 2:4-6: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly."

The Old Testament that was commonly known to and quoted by New Testament writers was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This Greek translation is known as the Septuagint or LXX. An English translation of the LXX appears in the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot*. It is a quite literal translation. Below is Genesis 6:1-9 in that translation (verses are numbered):

1 And it came to pass when many men began to become upon the earth, and daughters were born to them. 2 And the sons of God were beholding the daughters of men, that they are good, that they took to themselves women from all of whom they chose. 3 And the lord God said, No way should my spirit stay with these men, on account of their being flesh; and their days will be a hundred twenty years. 4 And the giants were upon the earth in those days. And after that, the sons of God continually entered to the daughters of men, and procreated for themselves. Those were the giants, the ones from the eon, the renowned men. 5 And the lord God beholding that the evils of men were multiplying upon the earth, and all that man considered in his heart was diligently upon the wicked things all the days, 6 and God pondered that he made the

man upon the earth, and he considered it. 7 And God said, I will wipe away the man, whom I made, from the face of the earth; from man unto beast, and from the reptiles unto the winged creatures of the heaven; for I repented that I made them. 8 But Noah found favor before the lord God. 9 And these are the origins of Noah. Noah was a just man being perfect in his generation; Noah was well-pleasing to God.

Notice once again that a natural reading of the text does not lead one to conclude that the men whose daughters are referred to are any but all men. If one absolutely had to limit these men to a particular genealogical line, then it would be to the line of Seth, not to the line of Cain as the adherents to explanation 1 would want. The reason for this is that Genesis 6 is immediately preceded in Genesis 5 by a genealogy that runs through the line of Seth, not Cain. But I believe that the language of Genesis 6 is too clearly referring to all men for there to be any possibility of it being limited to any particular line of descent.

I want to point out that in Genesis 6:2, the word that is translated as "wives" in most (but not all) other versions is translated here as "women." The Hebrew word in verse 2 is *'isšāh*. Its basic meaning is "women," and it should be translated as "wives" only when justified by the context. In the singular, it is what Adam called Eve: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). The Jews who translated the Hebrew into Greek chose a similar word for the LXX. It is *gunaikas*. It also means "women," and it can be translated as "wives" when that is obvious from the context. I do not believe "wives" is a justified translation in Genesis 6:2. This verse does not describe the orderly contracting of marriages. It relates the lusting after and taking of whatever women the "sons of God" chose.

The "giants" of verse 4 were apparently the result of the cross between angels and humans. There is no necessary reason to link these antediluvian giants with the giants after the Flood (e.g. Numbers 13:33), as the giants in Genesis 6 would have been among those destroyed by the Flood. Although the same Hebrew and Greek words are used, the giants after the Flood cannot have a direct link to these.

God chose to spare Noah and his family for more than one reason. Noah was a just man and he pleased God (Genesis 6:9), and he found favor before God (verse 8). The word "favor" is translated from the Hebrew *chēn* and, in the LXX, from the Greek word *charin*. Both of

these words mean "grace." But Noah is also described as "perfect in his generation." Yes, this can mean that he was the perfect or unblemished man among the people of his generation. But considering that the context is speaking of the corruption of all flesh (verse 12) because of the illicit mixing of angels with humans, I believe this may mean that Noah's ancestry was untainted. That is, Noah did not have fallen angels in his genealogy. His genealogical purity, having no angel genes in his ancestry, was thus a factor in God choosing him to survive the Flood and thereby begin again a pure race of humans (I suppose we can also assume that his wife and son's wives were also pure).

A passage of Scripture used by those who object to "sons of God" being angels is Matthew 22:23-30:

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

The objection does not hold up because Jesus gives two qualifiers here that make what He says not apply to the Genesis 6 passage. First, He refers to the "angels of God in heaven." The "sons of God" in Genesis 6 are fallen angels on earth. And Jesus is speaking of proper marriage, but the events in Genesis 6 describe illicit sex—fornication.

So I believe that the proper understanding of the Genesis 6 passage is that the "sons of men" are all men, and the "sons of God" are fallen angels who manifested themselves in the flesh. These fallen angels illicitly took human daughters and had sexual relations with them. This resulted in a genetic corruption of the human race manifesting itself in gigantism. God decided to destroy this corrupt seed.

Because the focus of the Bible is Jesus Christ, I think it is quite likely that the reason God decided to destroy the corrupt seed was to keep

the lineage of the Messiah pure from the corruption of these fallen angels. Of Jesus, we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:14-16). Jesus became a human so that He could die for humans. If He were also part fallen angel, there would have been confusion. So God purified the human race, including the line that Jesus would be born into, by killing the corrupt seed and saving pure Noah and his family.

Why is this story important for us today? Jude and Peter thought it important, and we can fully understand their warning only when we have a proper understanding of the Genesis 6 account. Now that we have that, let's look again at what Jude says. This time I'll quote *The Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*:

Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the ones called in God the Father, having been set apart, and having been kept to Jesus Christ: Mercy and peace, and love be multiplied to you. Having made all haste to write to you about the common salvation, beloved, I had need to write to you to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Jude here gives us his SPS—his specific purpose statement. He is writing to exhort his readers to contend for the original faith. As we continue, notice that to do this—to exhort us to contend for the faith—Jude is going to remind us of several things, including the Genesis 6 account of the fallen angels:

For certain men stole in, those of old having been written before to this judgment, ungodly ones perverting the grace of our God into unbridled lust, and denying the only Master, God, even our Lord Jesus Christ. But I intend to remind you, you once knowing these things, that the Lord having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, in the second place destroyed the ones not believing. And those angels not having kept their first place, but having deserted their dwelling-place, He has kept in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of a great Day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, in like

manner to these, committing fornication, and going away after other flesh, laid down an example before-times, undergoing vengeance of everlasting fire. Likewise, indeed, also these dreaming ones even defile flesh, and despise rulership, and speak evil of glories.

In other words, like the unbelievers who left Egypt and were destroyed, like the angels who left their proper place and are being held in chains until the judgment, and like Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them who like the angels committed fornication and went after strange flesh, these men who have crept in and teach a perversion of grace that by implication denies the Lord also defile the flesh and despise rulership and speak evil of glories.

But Michael the archangel, when contending with the Devil, he argued about the body of Moses; he dared not bring a judgment of blasphemy, but said, "Let the Lord rebuke you!" But what things they do not know, they speak evil of these. And what things they understand naturally, like the animals without reason, they are corrupted by these. Woe to them, because they went the way of Cain, and gave themselves up to the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the speaking against of Korah!

These men speak evil of what they do not understand (because they are not spiritually minded) but, like animals, they know only what comes naturally and are corrupted by it. Jude then likens them to even more bad examples. They went the way of Cain, who went the way of jealousy, rebellion, and murder. They gave themselves over to the error of Balaam, who was willing to curse Israel for a reward. It is as if they have perished with Korah, who spoke against Moses and Aaron.

These are sunken rocks in your love feasts, feasting together with you, feeding themselves without fear, waterless clouds being carried about by winds, fruitless autumn trees, having died twice, having been plucked up by the roots; wild waves of the sea foaming up their shames, wandering stars for whom blackness of darkness has been kept to the age.

Jude describes these men as empty, fruitless, and without hope. Jude then quotes from the apocryphal book, 1 Enoch:

And "the seventh from Adam," Enoch, also prophesied to these men, saying, Behold, "the Lord came with" myriads "of His saints," "to do judgment against all, and to rebuke all" the ungodly of them concerning all their ungodly works which they ungodly did, "and concerning all the hard things ungodly sinners spoke against Him."

This brings us back round to punishments. God punished the unbelievers who left Egypt. God punished the angels who left their proper place and committed gross sexual sin. God punished Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities around them for their fornication and desire for strange flesh. God punished Cain, Balaam, and Korah. And the Lord will come with His saints to punish these men. Why? We have already learned that they pervert grace and, though they may not say so outrightly, deny God and Jesus. Jude tells us more:

These are murmurers, complainers, going according to their lusts, and their mouth speaks proud things, admiring faces [i.e. flattering people] for the sake of gain. But you, beloved, remember the words spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, because they told you that at the last time there will be mockers following ungodlinesses according to their lusts. These are they setting themselves apart, animal-like ones, not having the Spirit.

In other words, the sin of those who are among us as Christians (even if they are preachers or politicians) who pervert grace as if it allows sexual sin, rebellion, evil doing for reward, flattery for gain, boastful speaking, murmuring, following one's animalistic lusts and doing what comes naturally will not go unpunished. They are in the same category as the wicked angels, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the unbelievers who left Egypt, and Cain, Balaam, and Korah. The Lord will come and He will judge and punish them. As Peter says, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned.... these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:4, 12-13).

The lesson is that we should see that fleshly corruption is a type of spiritual corruption, and God does not let wickedness go unpunished. He did punish it in the past and He will punish it in the future. We are to contend for the faith by rejecting those who pervert the Gospel of

grace. And, as Jude says, "you, beloved, building yourselves up by your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, eagerly awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to everlasting life. And pity some, making a distinction. But save others with fear, snatching them out of the fire, hating even the garment being stained from the flesh. Now to Him being able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you before His glory without blemish, with unspeakable joy; to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty and might and authority, even now and forever. Amen."

Peter Ditzel