GENESIS 6:1-6

Who Are the “Sons of God” and the Nephalim?



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
is from the *King James Version*.

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CHAPTER 1

Genesis 6:1-6

Genesis 6 has been the subject of much debate, confusion, and controversy. This arises primarily from the phrase the "sons of God" translated from the two Hebrew words *benei haelohim* in verse 2 and the Hebrew word *Nephalim* almost universally interpreted as "giants" in verse 4:

> GENESIS 6:1-6 Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2 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. 3 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." 4 There were **giants *[Nephalim]*** on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown. 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Popular Views of the "sons of God"

Generally speaking, the *Nephalim* of verse four is thought to be dependent upon *benei haelohim* in verse two; therefore, to understand the former means first investigating the latter. To that end, there are three primary views on the meaning of the phrase "sons of God". The first is that it refers to men of the line of Seth taking "wives" of the line of Cain; the second is they were human men described as dynastic rulers that lived pre-flood; and the third is it describes spiritual beings, usually ascribed to be fallen angels.

The idea that the "sons of God" refer to the line of Seth and the "daughters of men" being of the line of Cain was first recorded in the writings of Julius Africanus, a second and third century A.D.

historian. While he was reported to be a Christian, he was heavily influenced by Greek and Roman traditions. Whether or not his was an original idea is unknown but his general thesis is that the "sons of God" has the sense of a group of people that were just before God and the Bible specifically mentions the lineage of Seth as those that "call on the name of the LORD" in Genesis 4:26. His idea was later adopted by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, eventually becoming the dominant view in Protestantism. Perhaps one of the reasons for the popularity of this idea is that it satisfies the modern propensity to avoid the supernatural.

Dynastic rulers are another, although less popular, interpretation of the "sons of God". The logic behind this is that the phrase suggests these men were 'closer' to God by reason of their position and power, supposedly supported by the fact that they "they took wives for themselves of all whom **they chose**."

By far, the most popular view of Genesis 6:2 is that the "sons of God" are spirit beings. Modern scholars primarily take the position that the four other uses of this exact phrase in the Bible always denote angels. However, this view has been around for millennia. It began with the idea that there were two separate creations of a woman for Adam. The first Eve was created in Genesis 1:27 where it states, "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male **and female** He created them." The claim is that both Adam and First Eve were created from dust at the same time. Problems arose because First Eve refused to submit to Adam and left Eden. Later, after naming the animals, God saw that Adam was alone and without a fitting mate (Gen. 2:20). This lead to the creation of the second Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:21-22. Second Eve then joined Adam in the Garden of Eden.

The legend of First Eve was then mixed into pagan religion when she was asserted to be Lilith, a sexually promiscuous demon goddess that spent her nights engaging with human men. Stories of Lilith are recorded in the Babylonian Talmud that had its origins around 300 A.D. But that was based upon Jewish mysticism that grew out of the syncretism that began during the reign of Solomon

who built pagan temples for his wives, which was later heavily influenced when the Jews were captives in Babylon.

NOTE: The main construct of rabbinical works include the:

- TORAH = First five books of the Bible.
- TANAKH = Equivalent to the Old Testament.
- MISHNAH = Explanations and commentaries on the Torah.
- MIDRASH = Explanations and commentaries on the Tanakh.
- GEMARA = Explanations and commentaries on the Mishnah.
- TALMUD = Explanations and commentaries on the Mishnah and the Gemara. It usually infers the two most widely accepted Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.

The mythology of the demon goddess Lilith as First Eve and a demon goddess that engaged in sexual intercourse with human men was the inspiration for later mystics who claim spirit beings could have sexual relations with humans. Coupled with the several obvious biblical references to spirit beings, it was concluded that the "sons of God" could not refer to humans, an idea that was encapsulated in the apocalyptic Book of Enoch and Jubilees. Other mentions include Antiquities of the Jews by the Jewish historian Josephus and the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo. It later found its way into the Septuagint (LXX) and Codex Alexandrinus and thus became a very popular interpretation of Genesis 6:2.

Facts Regarding the Phrase "sons of God"

There are four other places in the Bible where the phrase "sons of God" is used. They are found in Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; and Daniel 3:25:

> JOB 1:6 Now there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and **Satan also came among them**.

> JOB 2:1 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.
>
> JOB 38:7 When the **morning stars** sang together, and all the **sons of God** shouted for joy?
>
> DANIEL 3:25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the **Son of God**."

Each occurrence clearly refers to spirit beings. Note also that each reference is used in a setting that is pleasing to God; that is, the "sons of God" were never accused of doing evil. Therefore, all four scriptures refer to holy spirit beings that were doing what was agreeable to God. A similar phrase "mighty ones" is used in Psalm 29:1 and 89:6 but these, too, signify holy spirit beings.

> FACT #1: The phrase the "sons of God" in Job and Daniel refer to holy spirit beings.

Notice that Satan is not included as one of the "sons of God" in Job 1:6 and 2:1. If he were, then the scriptures would not say that Satan "Satan **also** came among them *[the sons of God]*." The wording suggests that Satan was not, at least at that time, one of the "sons of God".

What about demons (other than Satan)? It is likely, although not conclusive, that they are not the "sons of God" either. There are three reasons for this. First, there is no case in the Old Testament where God speaks directly with any evil spirit beings (demons) other than Satan. Second, the four scriptures in Job and Daniel contain no evidence that God was displeased with the "sons of God". Finally, the New Testament is consistent in distinguishing holy spirit beings (angels) from Satan (Adversary) and the demons (devils). This is also true of the phrases the "sons of God" and the "children of God" when used in the New Testament. These are always a reference to physical mankind and, in particular, to those

that are converted believers. Non-believers are never included in these phrases.

> FACT #2: The phrase "sons of God" in Job and Daniel is not a reference to Satan or (almost certainly) the demons.

On the other hand, the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 are clearly wicked beings. Regardless of who the "sons of God" refer to, they are participants in evil acts with the "daughters of men" because God is clearly displeased with them:

> GENESIS 6: 3, 5-6 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." … 5 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**. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Physical mankind is obviously striving against God so the "sons of God" are committing sin and doing evil. The "wickedness of man" was so great that God regretted of creating them. Holy beings would never participate in such evil.

> FACT #3: The phrase the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 refers to wicked beings (whether spiritual or physical).

Obviously, this contradicts Job and Daniel in which the "sons of God" refers to holy spirit beings. Therefore, the phrase the "sons of God" in Job and Daniel cannot be used to conclusively determine the meaning of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6.

> FACT #4: The phrase the "sons of God" in Job and Daniel refers to holy spirit beings whereas Genesis 6 refers to wicked beings; therefore, the scriptures in Job and Daniel cannot be used to

establish the meaning of the phrase the "sons of God" in Genesis 6.

However, the fact that the "sons of God" describes **wicked** beings eliminates the possibility that it refers to the descendants of Seth because the 'line of Seth' continued in obedience to God, especially as compared to the line of Cain.

Human or Spirit?

Are the "sons of God" are in Genesis 6 human or spirit? Read the next few verses where God is quoted as saying:

> GENESIS 6:3-6 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**." 4 There were **giants *[Nephalim]*** on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of **men** and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty **men** who *were* of old, men of renown. 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Verse 3 quotes God as saying, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." It is significant that God never mentions the "sons of God" Himself. This was added by the author of Genesis. If the "sons of God" are spirit beings, then why does God never mention them?

These verses also mention physical mankind five times: *man* (three times), *flesh,* and beings of a *limited lifetime* (120 years). If the phrase "sons of God" is replaced with "sons of men", no one would ever question that God is talking about physical mankind. If the "sons of God" refers to spirit beings, then why does God only talk about man being made of *flesh* with a limited lifetime? If the "sons of God" are spirit beings, then He should also be displeased with their participation and include them in His condemnation.

> FACT #5: God never uses the phrase the "sons of God"; instead, He only talks about physical mankind.

Is there any biblical evidence that the phrase the "sons of God" refers to physical mankind? Yes, as mentioned above, "sons of God" and "children of God" are used in the New Testament to exclusively refer to physical mankind and, in particular, to those that are converted believers.

Another example is the Hebrew word *elohiym*, which is a plural noun most often translated 'God'; however, it is also correctly translated *judges* three times in Exodus 21:6, 22:8, and 22:9 when referring to physical, human judges.

> FACT #6: It is impossible to exclude physical mankind as the intended subject of the phrase the "sons of God".

Finally, the author of Genesis very clearly tells us who the "sons of God" are:

> GENESIS 6:4 There were **giants *[Nephalim]*** on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of **men *[Heb. = adam = human]*** and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty **men *[Heb. = enowsh = mortal]*** who *were* of old, men of renown.

The KJV says, "they bare *children* to them, the same ***became*** mighty men" but the word *became* was added text. The Hebrew (BibleHub.com[1]) reads:

> GENESIS 6:4 The **Nephilim** were on the earth in those days, and also after that when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them *[the sons of*

[1] https://biblehub.com/text/genesis/6-4.htm.

God]. **Those *[the sons of God] were*** the mighty **men** who *were* of old, **men** of renown.

This clearly says that "mighty men" refers to the "sons of God" instead of their children. Moreover, the last reference to *men* is from the Hebrew *enowsh* meaning *mortal*. Unquestionably, the "sons of God" are physical human men.

FACT #7: The "sons of God" in Genesis 6 are unambiguously nothing more than physical human men.

CHAPTER 2

Are Spirit Beings Capable of Sexual Relations?

All the factual evidence proves that the "sons of God" are physical humans. However, is it even possible that spirit beings are capable of sexual relations? This will be first addressed according to the Law of God, which applies on earth AND in ***heaven***. This is confirmed by the fact that Satan and the demons sinned:

> 1 JOHN 3:8 He who sins is of the devil, for **the devil has sinned from the beginning**. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

What is sin? "Sin is the transgression of the Law" of God (1 John 3:8). God obviously keeps His own Law so He would require all heavenly beings to keep it as well. Now read:

> MATTHEW 5:18 "For assuredly, I say to you, **till heaven** and earth **pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law** till all is fulfilled.

If the Law of God did not apply in heaven then why would Jesus Christ also include "heaven" in this statement? While some might argue that this is an assumption, the Bible clearly states that the angels sinned:

> 2 PETER 2:4 For if God did not spare the **angels who sinned**, but cast *them* down to hell *[Gk.* tartaroo*]* and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

What is sin? **Sin is lawlessness (KJV = transgression or violation of the Law)** (1 JOHN 3:4). Sin is simply a violation of the Law of God. If the angels sinned, they violated the Law of God. Therefore:

FACT #8: The Law of God applies both in HEAVEN and on earth.

To answer the question about spirit beings being capable of having sexual relations, first notice what the Law of God says about marriage in Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable among all, and **the *[marital]* bed undefiled**; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Marriage is an honorable union that is to be esteemed precious. Furthermore, the marital union is to be undefiled by fornicators and adulterers.

Does this Law exist in heaven? Yes, but does it apply to angels? Are angels capable of sexual relations and, therefore, able to marry? Jesus Christ said the heavenly angels "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30). Think about this. If the angels are capable of having sexual relations, then why is there no marriage among angels? It would be absolutely cruel of God not to allow them to enjoy the marriage union if they are capable of sexual relations. Another possibility is that the angels are allowed sexual relations outside of marriage; however, that means heaven is a place adulterous liaisons since the Law of God applies in heaven. The only other possibility is the angels have enormous pent up frustration and are continuously tested by their lusts. Perhaps this drove some angels to resort to mating with human women. But that would be a sign that there is a problem with lust in heaven. Given all this, Matthew 22:29-30, for all practical purposes, can only mean that angels are INCAPABLE of having sexual relations.

However, this is not necessarily proof that angels are incapable of sexual relations. So, look at this from another angle. The main reason for sexual relations is to procreate. Is it possible that God created angels to reproduce much the same way He created physical mankind; that is, from one male and one female angel? If that were the case, then Satan and the demons would continue producing wicked offspring. This would be absolutely cruel of God if demons were able to give birth to eternal offspring that become more wicked beings.

Taking this argument further, giving angels sexual ability would mean that God had to create both male and female angels. If that were true, then why are there no "**daughters** of God" (female

angels) in Genesis 6 who took for themselves "**husbands**" and "came in to the **sons** of men"? Is it because the female angels are to submit to their 'husbands' while the male angels run around engaging in adulterous relationships? Ridiculous.

Is it even possible that spirit beings could find human women even remotely attractive? For instance, cherubim, seraphim, and "living creatures" look nothing like physical mankind. At least some of the heavenly beings are completely different from humans, having multiple faces and wings among other features. Would such beings be attracted to human women? Possibly, but unlikely. Marriage among people is usually to those that are similar in race and culture. While many people marry interracially, it is not as common as marrying into one's own race. So, aside from the cherubim, seraphim, and "living creatures", do other angels even look like physical mankind? Unlikely. Notice:

> GENESIS 1:26-27 Then God said, "**Let Us make man in Our image**, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His *own* image; **in the image of God He created him**; male and female He created them.

Physical mankind is made in the image of God. While the Bible does not specify that the angels were *not* created in His image, why would God make a point of specifically saying He created mankind in His image if they are not unique from all those in the heavenly realm? If the heavenly beings do not look at all like physical mankind, how could they find human women attractive?

Moreover, how can human women ever be as beautiful as spirit beings? Flesh and blood are imperfect. Think of all the things that are pushed on women to look more attractive and cover imperfections. There is a plethora of makeup, hair products, cosmetic surgery, etc. How could any spirit being find imperfect human women more attractive than a spiritual mate?

Finally, those that believe angels are capable of sexual relations must believe that there is nothing more desirable. In other words, there is nothing more pleasing than the sexual act, even for spirit beings. Is that possible? The following scriptures show that there is something much more desirable than the momentary gratification of sex:

> MATTHEW 25:21 "His lord said to him, 'Well *done,* good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. **Enter into the joy of your lord.**'
>
> 1 PETER 4:13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that **when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy**.
>
> JUDE 1:24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to **present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy**,
>
> 1 PETER 1:8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him,* yet believing, you **rejoice with joy inexpressible *[unutterable]*** and full of glory,
>
> JOHN 16:20, 22 "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. … 22 "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and **your joy no one will take from you**.

At the time of our resurrection, God promises that we will "enter into" joy that is **unspeakable** and **indescribable**. This is a joy that is eternal and no one can take from us. While we have no way to even relate to this kind of joy, imagine having utter joy for all eternity! How can sex even compare? Sex is nothing more than a temporary pleasure:

> HEBREWS 11:25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to **enjoy the passing pleasures of sin**,

The word *pleasure* is only used to describe things that produce physical enjoyment. The word used most often for the *joy* that will be given to His children at the resurrection means to exult and be

exuberant. This joy is so wondrous that it produces a climax of emotional, mental, and spiritual delight. There is nothing comparable for physical beings to comprehend the joy of God but it is unquestionably much more desirable than sex AND it is eternal.

CHAPTER 3

Nephalim

The biblical facts clearly exclude any notion that the "sons of God" are spirit beings. The right translation of the Hebrew actually proves they are physical humans. Furthermore, "rightly dividing the Word of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) eliminates the possibility that spirit beings are even capable of sexual relations.

Now, what about *Nephalim* in Genesis 6? The same word is used twice in Numbers 13:33 to describe the sons of Anak:

> NUMBERS 13:33 "There we saw the giants (the descendants of **Anak came from the giants**); and **we were like grasshoppers** in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Clearly, the Israelites felt small and weak compared to the sons of Anak so it makes sense that this word is translated *giants*. However, in the Hebrew, *Nephalim* means *bully* or *tyrant*. In the case of the sons of Anak, translating it as *giants* satisfies the context of the scripture because they were not only large physically, as the scripture indicates, but also an aggressive people.

The use in Genesis 6:4 is different because there is no inference of physical stature. Therefore, translating it as *giants*, as originated with the Greek Septuagint (third century B.C.), is not consistent. Verses 3-6 clearly show the *Nephalim* have fallen from God's favor so rendering the English translation as *bully* or *tyrant*, not *giants*, is the most accurate:

> GENESIS 6:1-6 Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2 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. 3 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." 4 There were **[*bullies* or *tyrants*]** on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of

> men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown. 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Another common mistake is assuming the *Nephalim* are the offspring of the "sons of God" and "the daughters of men" in the previous two scriptures. Once again, the problem lies with translations like the KJV that was covered previously. However, notice that the correct Hebrew of verse 4 clearly indicates that the *Nephalim* came **before** the "sons of God":

> GENESIS 6:4 The **Nephilim** *[bullies or tyrants]* were on the earth in those days, **and also after that *[the presence of the Nephilim]*** 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.

While some scholars have rightly concluded the *Nephalim* and the "sons of God" are not connected, it is not the popular view but one that is clear in the Hebrew.

CONCLUSION

Many are fascinated with Genesis 6, partly because they want to believe that mankind could achieve a half-spirit, half-human form as demigods with eternal life. Mankind has always wanted to attain unto eternal life in this physical body because that does not require obedience to God and His Law. However, facts show that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 refers to physical mankind. Moreover, no rational argument that can be made to support spirit beings are capable of sexual relations. There are a few instances of heavenly beings (other than God) interacting with physical people but they are very few and are either messengers from God to His people, armies fighting on behalf of God's people, or demons causing evil. There are no biblical descriptions of spirit beings ever physically engaging with humans (Jacob wrestled with God, not an angel, and Isaiah was touched by a live coal). The idea that angels are capable of sexual relations or procreation is irrational and unsupported in the Bible.

Likewise, the *Nephalim* of Genesis 6 are nothing more than a distinct group of physical humans that are abusive, oppressive, and rebellious people best called *bullies* or *tyrants*. Whether or not they were physically large is not hinted at in context of scripture unlike the case in Numbers 13:33.

So what is the purpose of Genesis 6? The Bible is focused on God's plan for physical mankind and not the heavenly realm. Once we put aside all the irrational notions about the phrase "sons of God," giants, and spiritual beings it becomes clear. It is simply a record from the earliest days of physical mankind engaged in practicing evil, especially disobedience, rebellion, fornication and adultery. As Solomon said, "there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl. 1:9). As a result, God greatly reduced the life expectancy. That's it; nothing more.