

**The Sons of God**  
**Genesis 6:1-5**  
By: Chad Knudson

Let me begin by making a few cursory statements:

1.) We have to remember that the point of the biblical storyline is the redemption found in the seed—Christ. Therefore, in this passage Satan (and evil men) attempt to destroy the possibility of the promised seed by having unholy sexual relations with women (cf., Gen 3:15). The sin was not having sexual relations, but the unholy union and the evil that came from such relations (Gen 6:5). God is going to wipe out the human race and continue the seed through Noah, a preacher of righteousness.

2.) There is support from Scripture to argue that “sons of God” can either be angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) or human men (Psa 82:6; Matt 5:9; Luke 6:35; 20:36; Rom 8:14, 19; Gal 3:26).

So who are the “sons of God?”

1.) The view that angels had relations with women is very popular in early Jewish writings as well as other Christian writings (e.g., Early Church Fathers). 1 Enoch 6:1-7 makes reference to angels taking human women and having sexual relations. Moreover, many Christians argue that 1 Peter 3:19-22, 2 Peter 2:4-7, and Jude 6 speak of the same event found in Genesis 6:1-4. I will address these passages later.

2.) God’s judgment in the Genesis passage is not against angels, but against men. The offenders of God are the flesh or mortals found on the earth (NIV). God is displeased with humanity, not angels. In the biblical text we find that angels are not able to marry or to be given in marriage (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:35; Luke 20:34-36). The sons of God took the daughters of men as wives, indicating that they were married, something angels are unable to do (Gen 6:2). Marriage is part of the creation ordinance given to Adam (and Noah) to accomplish the divine imperative of procreation (Gen 1:22; 9:7). Angels do not procreate, but are created to glorify God and serve as his messengers. Moreover, any definitive references we find identifying the sons of God with angels are from extra-biblical literature (e.g., 1 Enoch).

3.) A view held throughout church history, especially by John Calvin and Martin Luther, was that the sons of God were from the line of Seth and the daughters of men were from the line of Cain. The support for this view is fairly strong and shows the intermarriage of the two lines. First, the sons of Seth, or God were attracted to the women of Cain, or men (Gen 6:2), something that was the same for the descendants of Cain (Gen 4:17-24). Second, in Genesis 4:26 we find that the offspring of Seth begin to be called the “sons of God” (Gen 4:26). There is some controversy over the translation of this verse, but the idea is the same, namely that Seth’s line was identified with God. Finally, despite Seth’s line being identified with God, Satan seeks to destroy the line and, therefore, the seed by

producing unholy unions with a corrupt line. Consequently, the line is now wicked and desperately evil, except for Noah (cf., Deut 7:1-4). These men were Nephilim, which means “to fall.” In other words, these men were responsible in some sense for the downfall of the world. We find one other reference to them in Numbers 13:31-33. These men were giants and we can infer from Numbers along with Genesis that these men were great men, giants both physically and militarily.

I found an excellent article by Meredith Kline, a respected scholar who is an authority on Genesis. He adds another position and helps further clarify some issues.<sup>1</sup> Kline argues that sons of God should be translated “divine kings.” In this view, the divine kings came from Cain’s cursed line and were supposed to administer justice and order, but instead claimed themselves as deity (hence sons of God) and formed royal harems. These men were Nephilim heroes and were great in physical might and military/political dominance (cf., Gen 10:8-10). These men chose women and took whoever they wanted, whether righteous or unrighteous (Gen 6:2). We find this idea of “taking” women consistent in the OT. For example, in the OT we find that Pharaoh took whomever he wanted, as did David (Gen 12:10-20; 2 Sam 11). While Kline’s view fits well with the overall context of the OT world, some suppose that these human men were possessed by demons and then took women. I believe that regardless of whether these sons of God were men or men possessed by demons makes little difference. The point of the text is not to convey that angels came down to have sexual relations with human women, but to show the unholy unions that took place between the sons of God and the daughters of men, which grieved the Lord and incurred his wrath.

The view that angelic beings came down to have sexual relations with human women is also dependant on three NT texts: 1 Peter 3:19-22; 2 Peter 2:4-7; and Jude 6.

### **1 Peter 3:19-22**

The popular view is that Christ descended into Hades between His death and resurrection to proclaim the message of salvation. Others have suggested it was a not proclamation of salvation, but of victory over death and sin. Still others have used this passage to argue that the spirits in prison are those angels that had relations with human women in Genesis 6:1-5.

The entire theme of Peter’s book is righteous living in an unrighteous world. The NAS does an accurate job translating the word for spirit in lower case. The word “spirit” does not possess a definite article in the original Greek. The purpose of a definite article is to identify, to limit, and, as the name implies, to make something definite. Thus, when the article appears, it emphasizes identity, and when it is absent the emphasis is usually quality, not specificity. Thus, in this context Peter is not writing specifically about the raising of Christ from the dead by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11), but rather about the active spiritual realm of the Holy Spirit. Peter transitions with the word “also” because it explains that Christ will perform more acts in the spiritual realm, namely his spirit

---

<sup>1</sup> Meredith Kline, “Divine Kingship and Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,” *WTS* 24 (1962): 187-204.

preaching through Noah. The next question is, who are these spirits now in prison? In New Testament literature the word “spirit” refers both to human beings (Matt 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Acts 7:59; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:34; 14:14; Heb 12:23; Jas 2:26; cf. Eccl 12:7 LXX) and to angelic beings (Matt 8:16; 12:43, 45; Mark 1:23; Luke 10:20; Acts 23:8). However, Peter is quite distinct in his usage of the word “spirit.” Peter uses the word twelve times in both of his letters (excluding verse nineteen), all in reference to human beings, the Holy Spirit, or the spiritual realm (1 Pet 1:2, 11, 12; 3:4, 8, 18; 4:6-7, 14; 5:8; 2 Pet 1:21). When Peter wishes to make reference to angelic beings, whether good or evil, he explicitly uses the word “angelos” (angels), rather than “pneuma” (spirits). By weighing this evidence, it is safe to conclude that these spirits are humans and not demonic angels.

If Christ went to proclaim to human spirits, what exactly was his message? It is hard to distinguish exactly what Christ proclaims; however, the content of his message will become clearer as we unravel the rest of this passage. Who was Christ preaching to and when was he preaching? It was to those who were once disobedient in the days of Noah. Noah was confronted with unrighteous and evil people (Gen 6:1-8) and was a righteous preacher to them during the construction of the ark. Peter wrote this about Noah, “And did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet 2:5). The conclusion is that in the spiritual realm, in which Christ was made alive, he also preached through Noah in the ancient world during the construction of the ark. It is completely consistent with Peter’s theology to suppose that Christ was active spiritually in the ancient world (1 Pet 1:10-11). It is also apparent that the message Christ preached through Noah was the message of repentance toward God. Peter explains that Noah and his family were brought safely through the water. Peter is teaching that like Noah, God saves a righteous man through water. The water itself did not save Noah and his family, but it separated him from the perishing world. Peter was writing to believers that were facing numerous persecutions from an unrighteous world just as Noah did. Thus, in like manner baptism saves, not the removal of filth and dirt (thus, taking away any magical quality to the water), but portrays us leaving the old and entering the new (therefore, baptism is a very important part of Christian conversion and our doctrine of the church).

## **2 Peter 2:4-7**

Here in this passage Peter is discussing how God will surely judge the wicked as he did so in the past. This passage is often used to suggest that the angels who sinned (v. 4) are the angels who had relations with the daughters of men in Noah’s day (v. 5) and, consequently, God judged them and sent them to hell. Nowhere in this passage do we find any suggestion by Peter that angels came to have sexual relations with women. We would have to read into the text to get that idea. Moreover, the construction of the text does not tie verses four and five together, but presents them as two separate events. In the Greek NT verses four, five, six, and seven are separated by the word kai, which is the Greek word for “and.” Peter is showing five separate examples from the ancient world, three examples where God judged the wicked and two examples where he rescued the righteous.

God judged the angels (v. 4), he judged the ancient world (v. 5), and he judged Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6); however, he rescued Noah and Lot. It has been argued that the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot are related (which they are); therefore, the angels who sinned must be related to Noah. However, this is not the structure of the text. Peter first argues that God judged angels and at that time there was no one righteous, thus, the omission of any person rescued by God. However, he continues by stating that the ancient world or flood generation was judged and there was a righteous person, which God rescued—Noah. Finally, Sodom and Gomorrah were judged and there was a righteous person who was rescued—Lot.

We can look at these verses in this manner:

Wicked:	Righteous:
Angels (v. 4)	
Flood generation (v. 5)	Noah (v. 5)
Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 6)	Lot (v. 7-8)

While this structure does not argue decisively against angels having relations with women (for that could have happened at another time), it does not explicitly support it either. Rather, this passage shows that God will surely judge the wicked and save the righteous, just as he has done in the past.

## **Jude 6**

Jude six is often used by Christians to advocate that angels came down to have sexual relations with women. However, a brief reading of this passage makes that position problematic. First, nowhere in the passage are the angels spoken of tied to the Noah event. Second, the phrase “own domain” does not imply leaving heaven for earth, but more likely means that they did not keep their proper domain, which was the presence of God. Angels were created to worship God and be his ministers (Psa 104:4; 148:2; Heb 1:6). Angels or demons that left with Satan prior to human history left their proper function, abode, or domain (Rev 12:4). In other words, they disobeyed the Lord and, thus, are reserved for judgment. The demons in Jesus’ day understood that he was the one who would judge them for their rebellion against God (Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28). We find in the NT that judgment is reserved for Satan and those angels that rebelled against God (Rev 12:9); thus, I think it is a stretch to suggest that this text supports the idea that sons of God are angelic beings in Genesis 6:2.