

WHO ARE THE SONS OF GOD IN GENESIS 6?
Part 2: The Tyrants View

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Introduction

Part 1 of this series was primarily a response to Chuck Missler’s arguments about the identify of the sons of God. Along with this, we included a section critiquing the Angels view. Part 2 will be a critique of the Tyrants view. Of course, one problem we immediately face is that the context is perhaps just as controversial as the statement itself. Verses 6 and 7 of Genesis 6 follow upon one of the most debated passages in the Old Testament, Gen. 6:1-2: “Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.” There is no question that the identity of the “sons of God” in Gen. 6:2 has been a point of controversy for many years. The controversy over the identity of the “sons of God” and “the daughters of men” has implications for understanding the significance of these verses at this point in the Genesis record. To whom the expression “sons of God” refers determines why it occurs here.

The identify of the sons of God is not only an interesting question. It is also important to understand the spiritual lesson that is being taught here. This is a lesson that Israel failed to learn, even though this is at least the third time this same lesson has appeared in the first six chapters of Genesis. It is a lesson that we, as Christians, must learn, or we will surely suffer for not learning it. But, it is not enough, I think, merely to present my position. I think it is critical to the lesson to understand why the competing views are inadequate.

What Does the Text Say?

The first issue we face in trying to understand this phrase is to discover what were the exact terms in the original text of Gen. 6:2.¹ Before we can attempt to understand what the text means, we must settle on what the text says. This step is called textual criticism. Now we are not going to delve into the technical aspects of textual criticism, but we do have to establish what the text originally said simply because there are some who raise the question. Genesis was originally written in the Hebrew language.² But the original documents, called the autographs (meaning “the writings themselves”), have long sense been destroyed. Over the centuries copies were made to preserve the biblical text. Also, the Hebrew text was translated into other languages, including Greek, Latin, and Syriac. These ancient versions along with the existing Hebrew manuscripts provide evidence for what words were actually used by Moses. The Greek translation is called the Septuagint and is often referred to by the Roman numerals LXX. The Latin is called the Vulgate indicate that it was written in the vulgar or common Latin tongue. The Syriac is called the Peshitta, which means “straight” and was so named because it was held to be a straight-forward translation of the Hebrew. The importance

¹Our present Hebrew text reads בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, *benê hāʾelōhîm*, “sons of the God.”

²The script that the author used may have been an ancient form of Hebrew called Paleo Hebrew script. The phrase may have looked something like this: **בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים**

of this question, what does the text say, is seen in a comment by Chuck Missler and others who claim, “The Septuagint clearly translates this term ‘angels.’”³ He is referring to the fact that although the Hebrew word is “sons,” *bēnê*, which is usually translated “sons of,” the Greek version has word “angels” (ἄγγελοι, *aggeloi*). We have dealt at length with this question in Part 1 of this series and have shown that the reading “sons of God” is supported by the LXX and the Syriac Bible.⁴ So, there is no convincing evidence that the Hebrew text, from the pen of Moses, had anything other than the words “sons of God.”

Who are These “sons of God”?

Having demonstrated that the inspired Hebrew text has the words “sons of God,” our next task is to understand to whom this refers. There are three main views that have been proposed over the years: 1) The “Angels” view, in which the “sons of God” are held to be angels. There are two versions of this perspective. 1a) The first version argues that these angels are fallen angels who cohabited with human females. 1b) The second version argues that these angels were unfallen angels who fell because they had sexual relations with human women. We have dealt with these views in Part 1. 2) The second main view is that the term “sons of” actually refers to human males, “nobles, aristocrats, and princes,” who were possessed by demons whose “perverted psyches allowed this entrance of the demonic.”⁵ We will call this the “Tyrants” view. 3) The third view is the view that the expression “sons of God” refers to the line of Seth. In this view, the godly line of Seth corrupted themselves by indiscriminately taking the daughters of men.

The Tyrants View

The evidence does not seem to support the view that “sons of God” refers either to heavenly angels or to fallen angels. The unproven assumptions seems to be fatal to these views. More and more contemporary commentators are conceding this point and are turning to an different interpretation, what has come to be called the Tyrants view. This view is the up-and-coming view of commentators. The overwhelming problems with the Angels view has convinced many commentators to mediate the traditional view with some sort of notion that “sons of God,” though referring to humans, involves angelic or demonic powers. Bruce Waltke is a proponent of this view. After briefly considering the Angels view and the Sethite view, he declares, “The best solution is to combine the ‘angelic’ interpretation with the ‘divine king’ view. The tyrants were demon

³Chuck Missler, *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 26.

⁴The Syriac reads *بنو الله*, “sons of God,” and the Latin reads, “*fili Dei*,” also translated “sons of God.”

⁵Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 116-17.

possessed.”⁶ Allen Ross, also a proponent of the Tyrant view says, “I find most attractive a combination of the ‘angel’ view and the ‘despot’ view. Fallen angels left their habitation and indwelt human despots and warriors, the great ones of the earth.”⁷

In his criticism of the Angels view, Waltke says, “This interpretation, however, does not fit the context of the Flood, since the flood judgment is against humanity (Gen. 6:3-5) and not against the heavenly realm.”⁸ But, Waltke’s criticism against the Angels view is equally effective against the Tyrants view since the tyrants were controlled by demons. Waltke’s quote from W. H. Gispen makes this point: “The text presents us with men who are controlled by fallen angels.”⁹ Not only is the flood judgment is against humanity and not the heavenly realm, is not against the demonic realm either. In what appears to be an attempt to head off this criticism, Waltke says, “Their perverted psyches allowed this entrance of the demonic.”¹⁰ But there is no indication in the text that the “sons of God” had perverted psyches, and how appropriate would it be to identify men with perverted psyches as “sons of God.”

Additionally, why should we conclude that the sexual relation between demon possessed men and women would necessarily produce evil offspring? The Bible has plenty of instances in which the sons of evil men were themselves righteous. A prime example of this is Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul was condemned by God because of his evil. Yet Jonathan, his son, was a righteous man who trusted God and befriended David. Just because their fathers were demon possessed does not mean that the children were necessarily evil. That being the case, why even bring up the relations between demon possessed men and women? It doesn’t account for the evil of the children.

In defense of this view, Allen Ross asserts, “The view that interprets the ‘sons of God’ solely as powerful rulers does not, in my opinion, make enough use of the literary connections with pagan literature.”¹¹ But why assume that the Word of God must be connected with pagan literature? In fact, would not a view that the judgment upon mankind was due to mankind’s own rebellion against God and not due to some superhuman interference be a fitting polemic against the pagan literature of the day? Already the text of Genesis has reported facts that were contrary to the generally accepted pagan views. As Cassuto observes,

⁶Ibid., 117.

⁷Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 181-82.

⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, 116.

⁹W. H. Gispen, *Genesis I: Kommentaar op het Oude Testament* (Kapen: J. H. Kok), 221; quoted in Waltke, *Genesis*, 117.

¹⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, 117.

¹¹Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 182.

All kinds of wondrous stories about the creation of the world were wide-spread throughout the lands of the East. . . . Then came the Torah and soared aloft, as on eagles' wings, above all these notions. Not many gods but One God; not theogony, for a god has no family tree; not wars nor strife nor the clash of wills, but only One Will, which rules over everything, without the slightest let or hindrance; not a deity associated with nature and identified with it wholly or in part, but a God who stands absolutely above nature, and outside of it, and nature and all its constituent elements, even the sun and all the other entities, be they never so exalted, are only His creatures, made according to His will.¹²

The unproven assumption made by Ross is that the only way one can understand the “literary connections with pagan literature” is if the text makes assertions that are similar to or reminiscent of the assertions made in these pagan texts. However, the literary connection, as seems to be the precedent set forth in the biblical account of creation, is a view of the facts that is contrary to and often contradictory of the view set forth in pagan literature. An understanding of the flood as a judgment brought on solely by the sinful actions of men, not brought on by angels, fallen or otherwise, or by the control of demons, serves to contrast the truth with the fiction. The evil is from men who are evil—not from Satan, or demons, or fallen angels. As a preview and type of the final judgment, understanding the judgment as the fault of mankind fits not only the context, but the flow of biblical theology.

But, there is yet another fatal flaw in the Tyrants View that no one has addressed. Remember, the Tyrants View rejects the notion that the term “sons of God” refers to angels or demons. They hold that the sons of God are human beings who are possessed by demons. But, if the term “sons of God” refers to humans, then where is there any reference in the text to demons? Once you eliminate this reference as a reference to angels or demons, suddenly there is no term or statement in the text that even hints at the presence or activity of demons. Likewise, if you take the term “sons of God” to refer to angels or demons, then where is the reference to the men? What the proponents of the Tyrants View have done is assume the conclusion of the Angels view, and then rejected any biblical basis for it, imported these conclusions into the text, and used this imposition as an explanatory paradigm. But, this just cannot be supported by the text.

Conclusion to the Critique of the Principal Views

There are just too many inconsistencies and faulty assumptions associated with the Angels View and the Tyrants View. Besides these internal problems, there is the primary shortcoming of these two views—they do not give any reason for the existence of this account. Why does Moses even include this material in the narrative? Some will say that Moses includes it because it happened that way. I believe these events certainly happened exactly as Moses reports them. But there are a multitude of other historical events that must have happened that Moses does not include. For example, the first 40 years of Moses life are briefly presented in ten verses in Exodus. I seriously

¹²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, *From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 7-8.

doubt that every historical event that occurred in these 40 years is included in these ten verses. There is no doubt that Moses excluded much historical material.

This raises the question, “Why did he include some events and exclude others?” Moses must have had a reason for including this material, and it seems very likely that he did not include it simply because it happened. For some reason, this material must be relevant to understanding the passage. But, neither the Angels View nor the Tyrants View offers any reason. It’s not simply the case that the proponents did not bother to offer a reason. The fact is, neither one of these views seems to provide any reason for this account being here. What difference does it make if fallen angels had sexual relations with human females to produce evil offspring? Is the evil that brings on the flood the result of the overpowering of men by evil spirits? Then it would seem to be their fault, not the fault of mankind, and the Flood seems to be unconnected to these events.

The same problem faces the Tyrants View. If these men were possessed by demons who forced them to do what they did, then the fault lies with the demons, not mankind. The same problem faces the couple in the fall. Eve was not overpowered by the Satan and forced to take the fruit, and Adam was not overpowered by Eve and forced to eat the fruit. Eve was deceived, but the text indicates that the choice was her’s: “She saw that it was good . . .” Also, if either Eve or Adam were forced to eat, then why does God judge them for their sin? With the Angels View and the Tyrants View, we are left with the question, why is this account even included here? What does it contribute to the text? I think the only way to make sense of this account is the Sethite View, that the sons of God are the descendants of Seth, and we will argue for this in the subsequent installations of this series.

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