

APOSTATE SETHITES. Although this view generally identifies "the sons of God" as the godly line of Seth, it seems more appropriate to refer to these individuals as apostate Sethites, considering their unusual sin and their unprecedented judgment.

In contrast to the first view, the "sons of God" are identified as men and the "daughters of men" are women. Usually (although some avoid this distinction) the "sons of God" are specifically identified as the godly descendants of Seth and the "daughters of men" are the ungodly line of Cain. The sin involved is thus that of "mixed marriage," that is, believer married to unbeliever:

Impressive support may be arrayed in favor of this position. The immediate context certainly speaks of men: "Men began to multiply" (v. 1); "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (v. 5); therefore, God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man" (v. 3). If the angel hypothesis is right, why should the Spirit of God strive with men rather than angels? It is quite beyond comprehension that the Spirit should strive with men for a sin which the angels committed.

Another strong argument is based on the general context. It is argued that the context preceding Genesis 6 favored this view. Specifically, the descendants and achievements of Cain are listed in 4:1-24, while those of Seth appear in 4:25—5:32. Without question, two lines are contrasted here and they are distinct. Cain and his descendants were ungodly. Cain's line begins with improper worship and murder and ends in polygamy and an arrogant boast of self-defense. That the "daughters of men... were fair" (6:2) is in keeping with the meaning of the names of the women in the line of Cain: Adah means "ornament" or "beauty," Zillah means "shade" and Naamah means "pleasant."

In connection with Seth's line it is said, "... Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD" (4:26). Enoch, of this line, "walked with God" (5:24); Noah was "perfect in his generations" and also "walked with God" (6:9). Those in the Seth line were true worshipers of God and the title "sons of God" befitted them.

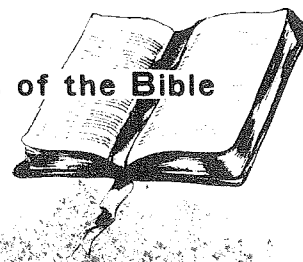
Furthermore, the understanding of "sons of God" to refer to the godly line

... is consistent with the Biblical concept that Israel is the son of God, and the chosen people are His children. This concept occurs in Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5, 6, 18, 19; Hosea 1:10; Isaiah 1:2; 11:1; 43:6; 45:11; Jeremiah 31:20; Psalm 73:15.¹⁴

Another argument for this view comes from the Lord Himself. On the

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Difficult Passages of the Bible



The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men

Part 2
of this suggested interpretation

By Manfred Kober

basis of Matthew and Luke the marriages of Genesis 6 must be of the same nature as those among the ungodly in the future. The Genesis marriages must be the same as those of Matthew 24:37, 38 and Luke 17:26, 27. In these New Testament passages there is nothing to suggest that Christ had anything more than human marriages in mind. If Genesis 6 records what angels did, there is no parallel at all between the antediluvian age and the days of the end of the age.

The view that the "sons of God" are the godly line fits in well with the pronounced aversion of the Book of Genesis to marriage between the godly and the ungodly as seen in the cases of Isaac (24:3, 4), Jacob (27:46—28:1-3), Esau (26:34, 35; 28:6-8) and Dinah (chap. 34). "In this context, Genesis 6:1-4 furthers the practical aim of preventing indiscriminate marriage without regard to spiritual status."¹⁵

In summary, the view that the "sons of God" were men of the godly line of Seth is tenable because the group is already distinguished from the ungodly line of Cain in the context. Also, the designation is consistent with the Biblical concept of spiritual sonship; it fits the theme of Genesis which warns the godly against intermarriage with the ungodly; and it is consonant with the context which demonstrates the progressive corruption and ultimate destruction of the human race.

While the view has much to commend itself, it should be noted that it is also beset by certain difficulties. Unger, interestingly, calls it "naive and perfectly orthodox."¹⁶ If the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" represent respectively the godly Sethite and ungodly

Cainite lines which intermarried, with the result that the godly line was broken down, then serious textual objections may be raised. This view takes the term "men" in two different senses in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 the "men" are understood as mankind generically ("When men began to multiply... daughters were born unto them"). In verse 2 the "men" are taken to be specifically of the Cainite line ("The sons of God saw the daughters of men"). That such a sudden shift in meaning is not intended is evident from the fact that the "men" of both verses are the fathers of the "daughters" of the two verses. And the "daughters" of both verses are certainly identical. In verse 1, daughters were born to men in general. In verse 2, the "daughters of men" must also be of mankind rather than specifically of the Cainite line.

To overcome the difficulty it has been suggested that "men" in verse 2, as in verse 1, is to be understood as generic. There would then be no specific reference to women of the Cainite line. The sin of the "sons of God" of the Sethite line would be an indiscriminate choice of marriage partners out of women in general, both Cainite and Sethite, to satisfy their own unbridled desire. They selected mates out "of all which they chose" (v. 2). The Sethites were characterized by careless regard of the holy principles governing the selection of a mate.

Several glaring difficulties beset the position which makes the "sons of God" Sethites. One such problem is the untenable assumption that the "sons of God" must mean the godly line of Seth. This would be in variance with the general use of that expression in the Old Testament

where it appears to be restricted to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Gaebelein rightly notes the designation is *never* applied in the Old Testament to believers, whose sonship he rightly observes as distinctly a New Testament revelation.¹⁷ While some Old Testament passages indicate that Israelites are God's sons (Deut. 14:1; 32:5; Ps. 82:6; etc.), the exact term "sons of God" is never once used for believers. To see a reference to individual spiritual sonship in Genesis 6 would be anachronistic. It would ignore the fact of progressive revelation.

A more serious problem for this prevalent view is posed by verse 4. From all appearances, the giants (*nephilim*) and mighty men (*gibborim*) are the offspring of the marriages of the "sons of God" and

the "daughters of men." As Kline says:

It is not at all clear why the offspring of religiously mixed marriages should be understood within the range of feasible interpretation. . . . But his [the Biblical author's] reference to the conjugal act and to childbearing finds justification only if he is describing the origin of the *nephilim-gibborim*. Unless the difficulty which follows from this conclusion can be overcome, the religiously mixed marriage interpretation of the passage ought to be definitely abandoned.¹⁸

To summarize the problem: Why does one find the kind of offspring mentioned in verse 4 if these are just religiously mixed marriages?

The difficulties of this view have

driven many to adopt the angelic interpretation. And, as Kline suspects, the continuing dominance of the angelic interpretation of the passage has been due to the absence of a satisfactory alternative.¹⁹ Kline forcefully and cogently suggests such a satisfactory alternative interpretation, based primarily on findings in ancient Near Eastern literature and studies of the term "sons of God" in cognate languages.

(concluded next month)

¹⁴Birney, p. 46

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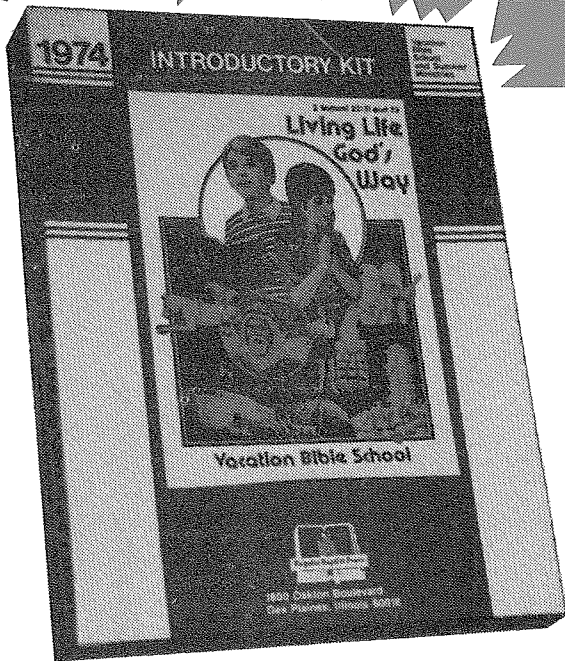
¹⁶Unger, p. 47

¹⁷Quoted by Unger, p. 47.

¹⁸Meredith G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXIV, Nov. 1961—May 1962, p. 190.

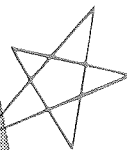
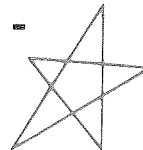
¹⁹Kline, pp. 188-89.

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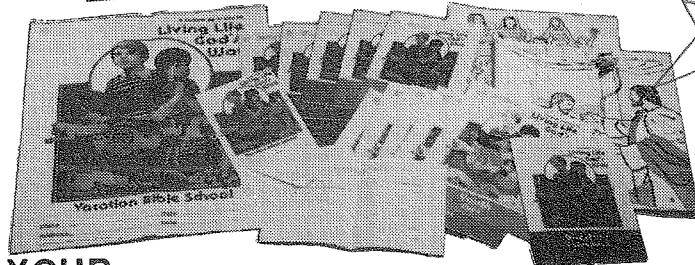
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