

nephilim

Mischievous Angels or Sethites?

by Chuck Missler

Why did God send the judgment of the Flood in the days of Noah? Far more than simply a historical issue, the unique events leading to the Flood are a prerequisite to understanding the prophetic implications of our Lord's predictions regarding His Second Coming.¹

The strange events recorded in Genesis 6 were understood by the ancient rabbinical sources, as well as the Septuagint translators, as referring to *fallen angels* procreating weird hybrid offspring with human women-known as the "*Nephilim*." So it was also understood by the early church fathers. These bizarre events are also echoed in the legends and myths of every ancient culture upon the earth: the ancient Greeks, the Egyptians, the Hindus, the South Sea Islanders, the American Indians, and virtually all the others.

However, many students of the Bible have been taught that this passage in Genesis 6 actually refers to a failure to keep the "faithful" lines of Seth *separate* from the "worldly" line of Cain. The idea has been advanced that after Cain killed Abel, the line of Seth remained separate and faithful, but the line of Cain turned ungodly and rebellious. The "Sons of God" are deemed to refer to leadership in the line of Seth; the "daughters of men" is deemed restricted to the line of Cain. The resulting marriages ostensibly blurred an inferred separation between them. (Why the resulting offspring are called the "*Nephilim*" remains without any clear explanation.)

Since Jesus prophesied, "As the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be,"² it becomes essential to understand what these days included.

Origin of the Sethite View

It was in the 5th century a.d. that the "angel" interpretation of Genesis 6 was increasingly viewed as an embarrassment when attacked by critics. (Furthermore, the worship of angels had begun within the church. Also, celibacy had also become an institution of the church. The "angel" view of Genesis 6 was feared as impacting these views.)

Celsus and Julian the Apostate used the traditional "angel" belief to attack Christianity. Julius Africanus resorted to the Sethite interpretation as a more comfortable ground. Cyril of Alexandria also repudiated the orthodox "angel" position with the "line of Seth" interpretation. Augustine also embraced the Sethite theory and thus it prevailed into the Middle Ages. It is still widely taught today among many churches who find the literal "angel" view a bit disturbing. There are many outstanding Bible teachers who still defend this view.

Problems with the Sethite View

Beyond obscuring a full understanding of the events in the early chapters of Genesis, this view also clouds any opportunity to apprehend the *prophetic* implications of the Scriptural allusions to the "Days of Noah."³ Some of the many problems with the "Sethite View" include the following:

1. The Text Itself

Substantial liberties must be taken with the literal text to propose the "Sethite" view. (In data analysis, it is often said that "if you torture the data severely enough it will confess to anything.")

The term translated "the Sons of God" is, in the Hebrew, *B'nai HaElohim*, "Sons of Elohim," which is a term *consistently* used in the Old Testament for *angels*,⁴ and it is *never* used of believers in the Old Testament. It was so understood by the ancient rabbinical sources, by the Septuagint translators in the 3rd century before Christ, and by the early church fathers. Attempts to apply this term to "godly leadership" is without Scriptural foundation.⁵

The "Sons of Seth and daughters of Cain" interpretation strains and obscures the intended grammatical antithesis between the *Sons of God* and the *daughters of Adam*. Attempting to impute any other view to the text flies in the face of the earlier centuries of understanding of the Hebrew text among both rabbinical and early church scholarship. The lexicographical antithesis clearly intends to establish a contrast between the "angels" and the women of the Earth.

If the text was intended to contrast the "sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain," why didn't it say so? Seth was not God, and Cain was not Adam. (Why not the "sons of Cain" and the "daughters of Seth?" There is no basis for restricting the text to either subset of Adam's descendants. Further, there exists no mention of *daughters of Elohim*.)

And how does the "Sethite" interpretation contribute to the ostensible cause for the Flood, which is the primary thrust of the text? The entire view is contrived on a series of assumptions without Scriptural support.

The Biblical term "Sons of Elohim" (that is, of the Creator Himself), is confined to the direct creation by the divine hand and not to those born to those of their own order.⁶ In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, only Adam is called a "son of God."⁷ The entire Biblical drama deals with the tragedy that humankind is a fallen race, with Adam's initial immortality forfeited. Christ uniquely gives them that receive Him the power to become the sons of God.⁸ Being born again of the Spirit of God, as an entirely new creation,⁹ at their resurrection they alone will be clothed with a building of God¹⁰ and in every respect equal to the angels.¹¹ The very term *oiketerion*, alluding to the heavenly body with which the believer longs to be clothed, is the precise term used for the heavenly bodies from which the fallen angels had disrobed.¹²

The attempt to apply the term "Sons of Elohim" in a broader sense has no textual basis and obscures the precision of its denotative usage. This proves to be an assumption which is antagonistic to the uniform Biblical usage of the term.

2. The Daughters of Cain

The "Daughters of Adam" also does not denote a restriction to the descendants of Cain, but rather the whole human race is clearly intended. These daughters were the daughters born to the men with which this very sentence opens:

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. Genesis 6:1,2

It is clear from the text that these daughters were not limited a particular family or subset, but were, indeed, from (all) the Benoth Adam, "the daughters of Adam." There is no apparent exclusion of the daughters of Seth. Or were they so without charms in contrast with the daughters of Cain? All of Adam's female descendants seem to have been involved. (And what about the "sons of Adam?" Where do they, using this contrived dichotomy, fit in?)

Furthermore, the line of Cain was not necessarily known for its ungodliness. From a study of the naming of Cain's children, many of which included the name of God,¹³ it is not clear that they were all necessarily unfaithful.

3. The Inferred Lines of Separation

The concept of separate "lines" itself is suspect and contrary to Scripture.¹⁴ National and racial distinctions were plainly the result of the subsequent intervention of God in Genesis 11, five chapters later. There is no intimation that the lines of Seth and Cain kept themselves separate nor were even instructed to. The injunction to remain separate was given much later.¹⁵ Genesis 6:12 confirms that all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth.

4. The Inferred Godliness of Seth

There is no evidence, stated or implied, that the line of Seth was godly. Only one person was translated from the judgment to come (Enoch) and only eight were given the protection of the ark. No one beyond Noah's immediate family was accounted worthy to be saved. In fact, the text implies that these were distinct from all others. (There is no evidence that the wives of Noah's sons were from the line of Seth.) Even so, Gaebelstein observes, "The designation 'Sons of God' is never applied in the Old Testament to believers," whose sonship is "distinctly a New Testament revelation."¹⁶

The "Sons of Elohim" saw the daughters of men that they were fair and took them wives of all that they chose. It appears that the women had little say in the matter. The domineering implication hardly suggests a godly approach to the union. Even the mention that they saw that they were attractive seems out of place if only normal biology was involved. (And were the daughters of Seth so unattractive?)

It should also be pointed out that the son of Seth himself was Enosh, and there is textual evidence that, rather than a reputation for piety, he seems to have initiated the profaning of the name of God.¹⁷

If the lines of Seth were so faithful, why did they perish in the flood?

5. The Unnatural Offspring

The most fatal flaw in the specious "Sethite" view is the emergence of the Nephilim as a result of the unions. (Bending the translation to "giants" does not resolve the difficulties.) It is the offspring of these peculiar unions in Genesis 6:4 which seems to be cited as a primary cause for the Flood.

Procreation by parents of differing religious views do not produce unnatural offspring. Believers marrying unbelievers may produce "monsters," but hardly superhuman, or unnatural, children! It was this unnatural procreation and the resulting abnormal creatures that were designated as a principal reason for the judgment of the Flood.

The very absence of any such adulteration of the human genealogy in Noah's case is also documented in Genesis 6:9: Noah's family tree was distinctively unblemished. The term used, *tamiym*, is used for *physical* blemishes.¹⁸

Why were the offspring uniquely designated "mighty" and "men of renown?" This description characterizing the children is not accounted for if the fathers were merely men, even if godly.

A further difficulty seems to be that the offspring were only *men*; no "women of renown" are mentioned. (Was there a chromosome deficiency among the Sethites? Were there *only* "Y" chromosomes available in this line?)¹⁹

6. New Testament Confirmations

"In the mouths of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."²⁰ In Biblical matters, it is essential to always compare Scripture with Scripture. The New Testament confirmations in Jude and 2 Peter are impossible to ignore.²¹

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [Tartarus], 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; 2 Peter 2:4-5

Peter's comments even establishes the time of the fall of these angels to the days of the Flood of Noah.

Even Peter's vocabulary is provocative. Peter uses the term Tartarus, here translated "hell." This is the only place that this Greek term appears in the Bible. Tartarus is a Greek term for "dark abode of woe"; "the pit of darkness in the unseen world." As used in Homer's Iliad, it is "...as far beneath hades as the earth is below heaven`."²² In Greek mythology, some of the demigods, Chronos and the rebel Titans, were said to have rebelled against their father, Uranus, and after a prolonged contest they were defeated by Zeus and were condemned into Tartarus.

The Epistle of Jude²³ also alludes to the strange episodes when these "alien" creatures intruded themselves into the human reproductive process:

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 Gomorrah, 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. Jude 6,7

The allusions to "going after strange flesh," keeping "not their first estate," having "left their own habitation," and "giving themselves over to fornication," seem to clearly fit the alien intrusions of Genesis 6. (The term for habitation, *oivkhth,rion*, refers to their heavenly bodies from which they had disobeyed.²⁴)

These allusions from the New Testament would seem to be fatal to the "Sethite" alternative in interpreting Genesis 6. If the intercourse between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" were merely marriage between Sethites and Cainites, it seems impossible to explain these passages, and the reason why some fallen angels are imprisoned and others are free to roam the heavenlies.

7. Post-Flood Implications

The strange offspring also continued after the flood: "There were Nephilim in the earth in those days, and also after that..."²⁵ The "Sethite" view fails to meaningfully address the prevailing conditions "also after that." It offers no insight into the presence of the subsequent "giants" in the land of Canaan.

One of the disturbing aspects of the Old Testament record was God's instructions, upon entering the land of Canaan, to wipe out every man, woman, and child of certain tribes

inhabiting the land. This is difficult to justify without the insight of a "gene pool problem" from the remaining Nephilim, Rephaim, et al., which seems to illuminate the difficulty.

8. Prophetic Implications

Another reason that an understanding of Genesis 6 is so essential is that it also is a prerequisite to understanding (and anticipating) Satan's devices²⁶ and, in particular, the specific delusions to come upon the whole earth as a major feature of end-time prophecy.²⁷ We will take up these topics in Part 2, "[The Return Of The Nephilim.](#)")

In Summary

If one takes an integrated view of the Scripture, then everything in it should "tie together." It is the author's view that the "Angel View," however disturbing, is the clear, direct presentation of the Biblical text, corroborated by multiple New Testament references and was so understood by both early Jewish and Christian scholarship; the "Sethite View" is a contrivance of convenience from a network of unjustified assumptions antagonistic to the remainder of the Biblical record.

It should also be pointed out that most conservative Bible scholars accept the "angel" view.²⁸ Among those supporting the "angel" view are: G. H. Pember, M. R. DeHaan, C. H. McIntosh, F. Delitzsch, A. C. Gaebelein, A. W. Pink, Donald Grey Barnhouse, Henry Morris, Merrill F. Unger, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Hal Lindsey, and Chuck Smith, being among the best known.

For those who take the Bible seriously, the arguments supporting the "Angel View" appear compelling. For those who indulge in a willingness to take liberties with the straightforward presentation of the text, no defense can prove final. (And greater dangers than the implications attending these issues await them!)

For further exploration of this critical topic, see the following:

- George Hawkins Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages*, first published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1875, and presently available by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids MI, 1975.
- John Fleming, *The Fallen Angels and the Heroes of Mythology*, Hodges, Foster, and Figgis, Dublin, 1879.
- Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1976.
- Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, Scripture Press, Chicago IL, 1952.
- Clarence Larkin, *Spirit World*, Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, Philadelphia PA, 1921.