

“WHO ARE THE ‘SONS OF GOD’ IN GENESIS 6?”

Part 3: The Origin of the Sons of Seth Theory

By Steve Schmutzer

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In Part 2 of this article series, I looked at the meaning of the Hebrew term, *b'nai Elohim* as it relates to the account of Genesis 6:1-4. I paid particular attention to the original construct of this term, to its use and derivatives in other parts of Scripture, and to its consistent application and meaning.

I noted it is only *after* the death and resurrection of Christ that believers are similarly defined. No humans are given this distinction before this point, with the sole exception of Adam who was uniquely created by God apart from any human constituent. This limits the meaning of any Old Testament uses of *b'nai Elohim* to angelic beings – both fallen and righteous.

Furthermore, angels were created with the ability to manifest in *physical* form and to interact with mankind and with earthly elements (Gen. 3:24; Gen. 6:1-4; Gen. 18:8; Heb. 13:2). Righteous angels stay within the boundaries of divine laws (Matt. 22:30), but it's pretty clear unrighteous angels have violated those terms (Gen. 6:1-4; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6).

Considering the consistency of the arguments, Part 2 concluded it is irresponsible to force the *b'nai Elohim* of Genesis 6:1-4 into a human classification. The protocols of proper Biblical interpretation do not support this choice.

It is why the apostles interpreted Genesis 6:1-4 literally (2 Peter 2:4-7; Jude 1:6-7). It is also why Christian leaders from the very start of church history believed that fallen angels engaged in illicit sexual relations with human women who then gave birth to hybrid “Nephilim” giants. Early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, Lactantius, and Ambrose were proponents of these specific views in their own writings.

The historical record is clear enough to suggest that a straightforward reading and interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 was the official position of the early church up through the fourth century. This is even recorded in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8*.

However, in dispute to a literal and responsible assessment of Genesis 6:1-4, an alternative theory began which has been propagated for much of church history. It continues to be advanced now, with notably strong support for it in the Reformed and Catholic denominations.

This theory springs from a rejection of those practices that humbly seek out and conform to Biblical truth. It is called the “sons of Seth” theory, though it is also known by other names, including the more expansive, “sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain” interpretation.

Its premise rests on the claim that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4 were ordinary men from the “godly line of Seth,” and the “daughters of men” were ordinary women from the “ungodly line of Cain.” In other words, the first gender group was righteous and the second gender group

was unrighteous. The assumption is they were alike in their physical nature though different in their spiritual one.

This theory argues that the joining of these two genetically homogenous groups of humans produced offspring of such deviant character and unnatural physical proportions that God was compelled to wipe the slate clean.

That's like saying Sally Jones is a God-fearing young lady and she marries Mike Smith who doesn't believe in God. They have a baby who breaks all birth weight records at the local hospital. The event makes the evening news, and Coleman Tents volunteers to design some custom diapers.

The kid grows up to be the height of a house and the weight of a bus, and he's so misbehaved he makes Attila the Hun look like a choirboy. God's grinding His teeth because He can't stand it. He decides to abandon His unchangeable nature (Heb. 13:8), and in a spasm of rage He exterminates the whole family.

I know - it makes no sense, even in a make-believe tale. It also makes us wince if we couch God this way. So why do some people insist this is the position of the inspired Holy Scriptures?

I've noted in my own research that various scholars support this "sons of Seth" theory at the same time as they declare that they adhere to the full Hebrew interpretation of *b'nai Elohim*. They cannot have it both ways since these two positions are saying very different things. It's like traveling north while arguing you're headed south. That's being delusional.

Unfortunately, this double-minded posture appears far too frequently within Christian circles. Since it emerges from an absence of logic and a presence of pride, I believe it disqualifies the credibility of anyone who adopts it.

While it is already self-evident that I do not hold this "sons of Seth" theory in high regard, I understand others may disagree with my stance. I will share why I do not subscribe to it and why I feel it's challenging to do so.

A question presses here, "Where did this theory come from?" Most records claim that the first *official* denial that the Genesis 6 *b'nai Elohim* were fallen angels came from St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD). While some evidence suggests Sextus Julius Africanus (200-275 AD) considered this same position before Augustine's time, it was Augustine who formalized this theory and publicly launched it roughly 75 years after The First Council of Nicaea (325 AD).

Many church leaders which followed Augustine fell into step with his point of view. It's reasonable to assume they were persuaded by Augustine's influence and legacy because human nature was then as it is now. Many pastors today mimic the irresponsible methods and beliefs of prominent emergent church leaders they admire; the situation's no different.

Because Augustine did much to allegorize the content of the Bible, others in his wake did the same thing. He was not the first to treat the Scriptures this way, but he mainstreamed this approach. Where certain passages had previously been handled with a straightforward reading

and understanding, Augustine touted non-literal interpretations instead. It's no surprise to me that he supported the errant "sons of Seth" theory.

It is important to underscore the perils of abandoning responsible Biblical interpretation and subordinating the counsel of God's Word to man's preferences. There are always consequences to doing this.

A sobering illustration of this specific danger is also lifted from Augustine's life. Augustine was a passionate promoter of Replacement Theology, a profane dissent from sound doctrine that flies in the face of the clear Biblical message.

The irony of Replacement Theology is it has indeed *replaced* true Biblical theology. Its central conviction is that God has *replaced* Israel with the church – in other words, He moved to "Plan B." This heresy contends that God has abandoned His unilateral, irrevocable, and unconditional promises to the Jewish nation, which by virtue of God's character is not even possible. It further argues that these same promises will now see fulfillment within the church.

Augustine upheld these fallacies by "spiritualizing" key passages of Scripture. He insisted the true gist of certain passages was veiled. He felt the text meant something other than what it was saying - for example, "Israel" means "the church." This departure from common sense and responsible Biblical interpretation permitted Augustine to support whatever alternate explanation his biases preferred.

Replacement Theology became the official position of the church during Augustine's time. His publications on the matter, including his books "*The City of God*", and his corrosive "*Tract Against the Jews*," aided this development to no small degree.

Replacement Theology drove many early church leaders in Augustine's wake like Martin Luther and John Calvin to cultivate and publish virulent anti-semitic attitudes. Hitler even claimed he'd found personal inspiration in the views of Martin Luther. History underscores the dangers of reading into God's Word what's not there in the first place.

Replacement Theology provides a reality check to the present "sons of Seth" discussion. To suggest it's not a bad thing to spiritualize "this or that" passage as many proponents of the "sons of Seth" theory admit they're doing, is to display arrogance within the very act of altering Biblical intent.

There are consequences to distorting the meaning of Scripture and the results are predictable: where truth is suppressed deception is elevated - and where deception is elevated, division and destruction follow. While few such choices go so far as to endorse the horrors of a holocaust as many German churches did in Hitler's time, most of these choices simply expose the immaturity of the individuals behind them.

We must consider **2 Timothy 2:15**, where the distinction of being "*approved*" is measured by the accuracy with which one studies and declares the Scriptures. A decision to refute their divine intentions shows a lack of good judgment and in turn suggests one is "*not approved*."

D. L Cooper said, *"If the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense lest it result in nonsense."* He's right, and with respect to the "sons of Seth" theory, the application of his quote is on full display.

This theory's adherents believe the "sons of God" were good people – that they had some sort of amended constitution which quarantined them from suffering the full effect of universal depravity (Romans 3:23; 5:12). They conclude this from Genesis 4:25-26, where Seth first appears along with the statement, *"At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord."*

Basically, they think Seth got everything back onto spiritual track. This is a wobbly assumption since chapters 5 and 6 of Genesis indicate the contrary. The genealogical record from Adam to Noah - which includes Seth and his descendants - is a detailed account which features the effects of sin. As the result of sin's curse people continued to die, and over time, corruption increased. It's the same dynamics we see today.

At no point does any Biblical text make the case that Seth's descendants were recipients of God's unusual favor, and that shouldn't be hard for us to accept. Romans 5:12 reminds us that sin entered the world through Adam, and everyone since has inherited the scourge of death because "all have sinned." That includes Seth and his lineage.

Moreover, the word *"began"* in Genesis 4:26 comes from the Hebrew word *"châlal."* *"Châlal"* can also mean *"to profane, defile, pollute, or desecrate,"* and some translations go with this latter definition at this part of the story. I think it's a matter of rigid personal agenda to insist on the *"begin"* interpretation when the larger account which follows Genesis 4:25-26 suggests that *"profane"* or *"defile"* is the better fit. I think it's more accurate to see humanity's relationship with God eroding rather than they suddenly began worshiping Him.

And just as they see the situation with the good guys, the "sons of Seth" advocates maintain that the "daughters of men" also incurred a nature that was exceptionally marked. But they feel this second group was inclined in the opposite direction – they were bad. Again, the assumption here is that the condition of these "daughters of men" was somehow distinguished as being uniquely depraved, something much worse than mankind's baseline sin nature.

They construct this "good guys and bad girls" position by spiritualizing the facts. Remember, that's insisting something's there in the Biblical text when it's really not. The assumption of the "sons of Seth" proponents is that the "daughters of men" was a special group which was genetically confined to having sprung from the "ungodly lineage of Cain." Given Cain's distinction as the first murderer in human history, it justifies their view to regard him and his offspring with a keen distaste.

John Calvin, through irresponsible spiritualization choices like those he demonstrated with Replacement Theology, makes these assumptions clear. In his commentary, he writes on this issue, *"The principle is to be kept in memory, that the world was then as if divided into two parts; because the family of Seth cherished the pure and lawful worship of God, from which the rest had fallen. It was, therefore, base ingratitude in the posterity of Seth, to mingle themselves with the children of Cain, and with other profane races; because they voluntarily deprived themselves of the inestimable grace of God."*

This is a bunch of nonsense. It forces the rational mind to ask, *“Where in Scripture does it say anything like that?”* The truth is, nowhere. No text in the Bible identifies Seth’s lineage as being special or extra-dimensional in moral clarity and character insofar as events of this time are concerned.

But – just for the sake of argument – let’s run down Calvin’s train of thought for a moment. If the *“...family of Seth cherished the pure and lawful worship of God”* as Calvin purports they did, then why did they make such a horrible decision as he insists they made? It doesn’t add up.

Furthermore, if “sons of God” is really a reference to men who descended from Seth, then why doesn’t the Bible state it that way? Why doesn’t the Bible call them “sons of Seth” rather than “sons of God” (*b’nai Elohim*) which is clearly a reference to angels? After all, Seth is plainly introduced in the story as a human baby just two chapters prior, and his lineage is outlined in very human parameters from that point onwards.

Moreover, Augustine and Calvin made the claim - as plenty more since them have done - that the Bible designates the “daughters of men” as coming from the family tree of Cain, but where do we see that the Bible even remotely suggests that? We don’t! It’s not there.

Let this fact land with a thud: Augustine and Calvin - and others like them - have not supported their “sons of Seth” view with *any* responsible treatment of the Biblical text.

They have not validated their view by filtering it through the original Biblical meaning. They have not affirmed their choice by questioning whether it’s in harmony with other passages on the same subject, and they haven’t substantiated their position by evaluating its compliance with the development of the context.

The reason they haven’t done any of these things that responsible Biblical interpreters do is they cannot do them and still remain where they want to stay. Their decisions steer clear of the enduring proofs of Scripture and are instead marinated with presumption, pride, and prejudice. They want to believe their position is true.

I’ve thought about this long and hard. This is a strange posture that seems to reside somewhere between ignorance and arrogance, perhaps more the latter as evidenced again by Calvin’s commentary in which he further states, *“That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious.”*

Really? Is he serious here?

Was Calvin so blinded by his own biases that he failed to see that every supernatural event of the Scriptures conforms at one level or another to being *“...abundantly refuted by its own absurdity?”* Apparently so.

Let me put Calvin’s partialities another way. John Calvin approached God’s Word like it was a buffet. He found something there that God had placed there, but Calvin didn’t like it. He thought the idea of fallen angels mating with human women was ridiculous, and so he exclaimed, *“Yuck! What’s this? I don’t want any of it. I can’t believe they put that there!”*

Rather than humbly submitting himself to the inerrant Word of God, Calvin – like Augustine and so many others - soothed his intolerances by choosing to believe, *“It means something other than what it is actually saying.”* As he’d already done elsewhere, he spiritualized the text so he could disregard the plain truth that was staring him in the face.

When one becomes convinced the Bible does not mean what it says, they sacrifice what is most important to believe in order to protect what they most *want* to believe. As stated earlier, there is always an agenda behind the refusal to accept the truths of Scripture.

It is of particular concern to me that this “sons of Seth” theory continues to be taught in many seminaries today. While it may seem more comfortable and less controversial than wrestling with the accountabilities of Biblical truth, the subsequent unbiblical assertions of these institution’s graduates have introduced a great deal of confusion and division concerning what the Bible truly teaches. I know - I have sat under pastors which have sown this discord.

In Part 4 of this series, we will examine the underlying story within the Bible that Genesis 6:1-4 is a part of. We will see how a proper interpretation of this particular text exposes the greater agenda of these fallen *b’nai Elohim* of ancient times. We’ll see how that agenda played out beyond that point and why it will manifest again in times future to you and I.