

## **Review Paper On Genesis 6:1-4 Evaluating The Following Articles:**

Kline, M. *"Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4."* Westminster Theological Journal 24 (1962): 187-204.

Murray, J. *"The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men"*, Principles of Conduct. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, 243-49.

VanGemeran, W.A. *"The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4."* Westminster Theological Journal 43 (1981): 320-348.

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### **Review And Comment On Murray, Kline, And Vangemeran Their Views On Genesis 6:1-4**

The Bible contains many controversial passages — Genesis 6:1-4 is certainly one of the more interesting of these. Although controversies are often fraught with danger for the believing community, for the most part, they are beneficial in advancing theological thought. Scripture is God-breathed and authoritative. Yet, by its very nature, it is not systematic; and it yields its precious truths only through Spirit-led study. There are no truths which are profitable only for "academic" reasons, but all of these truths are given to enhance our knowledge of God. This knowledge leads to a deeper relationship with God. Therefore, as we consider this passage, it is not simply for the sake of "being clever" — it is to grapple with God's Holy Word in order to be edified.

There are three articles for consideration in this paper. We will consider, first of all, John Murray's, "The Sons of God And The Daughters of Men," which is Appendix A of Principles of Conduct. This article represents the more widely accepted view of conservative scholarship. The second article is "Divine Kingship And Genesis 6:1-4" by Meredith G. Kline. This article advocates a more novel approach that was held by certain Jewish scholars in the past. The third article is "The Sons of God In Genesis 6:1-4" by Willem A. VanGemeran. This article gives analysis of the two previous articles and then

offers a brief argument for the view that the "sons of God" here are actually fallen angels. All three of these articles are written by brilliant scholars which, of course, adds to the intrigue of the passage. It is humbling to read them analytically and then decide which one best fits a truly Biblical interpretation. But, this is the task.

John Murray's article begins by ascertaining the intended teaching of the passage. It is his understanding that the key element is the sanctity of the institution of marriage — regardless of who the "sons of God" are. Before presenting an outline of the view he accepted, Murray does take a page to discuss the possibility that the sons of God here could be preternatural beings. He cites "The Book of Enoch" as an extra-canonical source which supports the view that Genesis 6:1-4 definitely refers to these beings as angelic. Also, he refers to 2 Peter 3:19 and comments that if there it could be shown that there is a link between the two passages, then the preternatural view would have the strongest case among the possible interpretations. However, he does not see this connection; and so he leans toward the view that the sons of God here are the descendants of Seth.

In presenting his view Dr. Murray refers to the works of C.F. Kiel, F. Delitzch and William Neary Greene. The body of Murray's work is comprised of his abbreviated summary of their works. Since he does lend his support (lend being an accurate term here) for the widely accepted view, it is necessary to give a one to two sentence description of each point:

The Hebrew phrase for "sons of God" does not have to be used in a generic sense and so, could refer to humans.

Distinctions in the previous genealogies in Genesis Chapter 4 prepare us for the difference between Seth's descendants and Cain's descendants. The judgement which follows is wholly upon the human race — there is no reference to the punishment of the fallen angels involved.

There is no suggestion in Scripture that angels are capable of sexual functions. In Matthew 22:30 Jesus seems to deny this possibility.

The phrase in verse 2, "And they took them wives," seems a very natural expression. It does not denote the kind of monstrous relationship of angels and human women.

There are other references in the Old Testament where men are referred to as the "sons of God."

The syntax of the text does not support the idea that the Nephilim were the offspring of angelic beings.

The last point is the only one which Murray belabors. Murray does not allow for a genetic connection between the marriages of "the sons of God and daughters of men" in the text. He sees the Nephilim as a warrior class that serves the function of spreading violence or guarding justice and order.

The bottom line for Murray is that Scripture does not support the view for "the sons of God" being angelic or any other preternatural beings. The lesson of the text is pertinent to the sanctity of marriage. The people of God should not marry the wicked is the underlying theme, according to this view.

By purposefully reserving VanGemerens article for the last to be evaluated, we will see many of the objections to Murray's view. The strengths of the view that the Sethites are referred to in Genesis 6:2 are not overwhelming as their popularity would insist. In favor of the view, there are distinctions in the genealogy of Genesis 4, the Hebrew phrase is certainly not a lock to be translated as angels; and in the immediate context, there is no mention of God's judgement upon the fallen angels who are involved here. These strengths do not present an insurmountable case, and Murray seems to concede this in his introduction. The whole tenor of the article is more of a "this is where I am until" statement than a "here I stand" statement. The seventh point, to which he spends the most time one, is the weakest of all. While it is true the text does not say outright the Nephilim were the offspring of "the sons of God," it certainly is implied.

The second article we will consider is Kline's article. Kline adds another complication to the matter by referring to the views of critical scholars. Most of these liberal exegetes see the Genesis 6:1-4 passage as being an example of a mythical source which was brought into this text and has somehow survived there. He then refers to the preternatural view and points out the difficulties of this view. He does admit that the Nephilim are clearly the offspring of the Genesis 6:2 marriages and that the term "sons of God" is commonly used in Old Testament literature to designate angels. He then looks at the "orthodox side" (i.e. sons of God are the Sethites) and finds that while they have some strengths on the whole, their view also falls short. At this point he expresses the need for a "more plausible explanation."

To provide this solution Kline goes back to the ancient Near Eastern understanding of culture and beliefs. It is abundantly clear that kings in those days were referred to as the "sons of God." He draws his primary example from a Ugaritic epic where King Krt is called "Krt bn il" or the equivalent to son of El. This interpretation is in agreement with many ancient Jewish scholars and is represented in the Aramaic Targums. It is important to understand how Kline ties this view to the text. He sees these ancient kings as evil tyrants going about establishing a name for themselves. In Genesis 4 Lamech sins by taking more than one wife which, according to Kline, became a characteristic institution of the ancient oriental despot's court. In bringing his thoughts to a conclusion, Kline explores the Sumero-Babylonian flood epics, as well as their antediluvian traditions. These beliefs included the view that the kings received their origin in the

heavens, and gods were numbered among their number. By comparing the Sumero-Babylonian materials to the Genesis material, Kline believes there is strong evidence to believe that the "sons of God" were the rulers of the antediluvian era. There is one tradition in which the Sumero-Babylonian kingship brought about the flood. This would enhance Kline's view, if the flood was indeed a judgement on the Nephilim.

In order to prove that his solution is the correct Biblical one, Kline now links the view from Adam to Abraham. His thesis centers on the issue of God-ordained rulership vs. Satanically-perverted rulership. God gave Adam kingly dominion over the earth. This kingdom was centered around marriage and labor. As a result of the fall and the wicked Cainite line, this did not take place. After the flood God once again placed Noah and his descendants in charge with the same commission. Once again man failed, and Nimrod becomes the personification here. As God had always and already ordained. He established a covenant with Abraham whose descendant would be a righteous King. Christ becomes the true Son of God as prophesied and typified in the Old Testament. Kline shows how Christ is the exact opposite of the tyrannical "sons of God" that we see in Genesis.

As an alternative this view has much appeal. It avoids the immediate textual problems of Murray's view, with regard to the Nephilim and of addressing more directly the obvious difference between "sons of God and daughters of men." The view that the practice of these ancient kings taking wives for themselves of whomever they chose also fits well with the text. However, there are significant problems with the view as well. To begin with, the continuity between the genealogy of Cain to chapter 6 is strained. Why, for instance, in the Sethite view, would sons be of Seth and daughters of Cain? Why in the kingship view would Cain be the father of the kingly line? Furthermore, according to Cassuto (from VanGemerens article), it is clear that the Hebrew usage of this phrase refers to those outside of the human race. And, finally, the text does not directly refer, nor indirectly imply, polygamy. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with these marriages since:

There is no stated prohibition of Sethites marrying Cainites.

There is no prohibition of women marrying kings. This, of course, removes the central lesson of the text from being the sanctity of marriage. It does not, however, say that marriage is not sacred and believers should marry unbelievers. There is more to this text than teaching about marriage.

This brings us to the final article for consideration, VanGemerens. VanGemerens subtitle, (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?), gives great insight to his view on the text (Genesis 6:1-4) and about exegesis. "Why," he ponders, "does the theology which accepts creation,

miracles, miraculous birth and the resurrection of Jesus insist on a rationale explanation of Genesis 6:1-4?" It seems to him that sound interpretation has taken a back seat to a more humanly reasonable interpretation in this case. Why do evangelists treat this passage as if it really doesn't matter if it is rightly exegeted? With this mindset, VanGemeran engages the text and its problematic nature. He then examines various explanations, and then he very graciously makes the point for the "sons of God" as being fallen angels.

The difficulty of the text is readily admitted by VanGemeran. The question of whether or not this is a prologue to the flood is extremely important. The wording is difficult, and there does not seem to be a link between verses 3 and 4. Finally, is the rise of the Nephilim a significant factor in causing the flood? One further question that is posed in this article is the question of literary genre. Is this section poetry, narration, saga, or myth? It is an error to oversimplify translating this text along natural lines. For example, to form an interpretation based solely on Jesus' words in Matthew 22:30 concerning angels not being given in marriage is not the proper approach. Jesus' words are certainly ultimate truth, but He was not commenting on Genesis 6:2 when He spoke those words.

So, VanGemeran spends a considerable portion of his article dealing with these textual questions. First of all, he turns to the question of mythology which is the view of higher criticism. Are verses 1-4 a fragment of a mythological story? VanGemeran examines the context and finds that there is a link between 5:29 and 6:1 in the idea of the "ground." He sees this passage as a new development and a transition to a new motif. The most significant tie is the four-fold visitations of God each time before sending judgement (Genesis 3:9, 11:7, 18:21, 6:2). VanGemeran builds a case from the text that the flood is the result of the circumstances described in Genesis 6:1-4.

The middle portion of VanGemeran's article deals with the articles by Murray and Kline and have already been dealt with by this paper.

This leads us to VanGemeran's conclusion. First of all, he insists that the mythological fragment view must be clearly set forth from the "angelic" interpretation. The other proposals (i.e. line of Seth for sons of God, kingship) have significant problems which lead us back to the angelic interpretation. The "angel" view solves more problems than the other views and also serves as a handle for understanding verse 3. As far as God's punishment on the angels, it is possible that Jude deals with these beings.

My own view would be parallel to VanGemenen' s. Genesis 6:1-4 seems to be a prologue to the flood. The creatures being brought forth by these preternatural marriages were a threat to mankind. God's plan for the promised Seed to be born from Eve's line was preserved by delivering Noah and his family from the evil race upon the earth. Certainly there is much to be worked out in the "angelic" view, but we evangelicals should not be reluctant to grapple with supernatural truths.