



Daily Verse and Comment

Genesis 6:1-4

(1) When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, (2) the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. (3) Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal ; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." (4) The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

New International Version

Who were—and were not—these sons of [God](#)?

The exact phrase, “sons of God,” appears eleven times in the Bible. Of the other nine appearances of the phrase outside of the two in Genesis 6, angels are called “sons of God” three times in the [book of Job](#) ([Job 1:6](#); [2:1](#); [38:7](#)), and [Psalm 29:1](#); [89:6](#) are additional examples of this usage. In places like [Deuteronomy 14:1](#) and 32:8 (“sons of the LORD your God”), the phrase refers to the children of Israel. In the Greek New Testament, converted Christians are also called “sons of God” (see [Matthew 5:9](#); [Luke 20:36](#); [Romans 8:14](#), 19; [Galatians 3:26](#)).

Unconverted men are called “sons of God” as well, although, in some places, the exact phrasing is not used. For example, the idea of “sons of God” appears in [Malachi 2:10](#), speaking of the unfaithful Jews of the prophet's time: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” We can find a similar meaning in [Psalm 82:6-7](#): “I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men . . .’” In the New Testament, the evangelist Luke calls Adam “the son of God” in [Luke 3:38](#).

Yet there is another option, which is to read “sons of God” to refer to a particular physical line of descent. After Cain slew his brother, he “went out from the presence of the LORD” ([Genesis 4:16](#)). Although God punished Cain for his [sin](#), this verse demonstrates that he left God's presence willingly. He traveled to “the land of Nod on the east of Eden.” There he married a woman, had a son (and additional children), and founded a society in opposition to God. In any case, his actions show that he distanced himself from God as far as he could.

The rest of the passage, [Genesis 4:16-24](#), tells of an ungodly world that sprang from him and his turning his back on Eden. It is based on physical accomplishments, as exemplified by Cain's descendants. [Moses](#) relates the first example of polygamy when Lamech took two wives, and later, the same unrepentant descendant of Cain also commits murder, apparently in revenge. The verse ([Genesis 4:23](#)) could suggest that he may have committed at least two murders.

Lamech's sons were quite accomplished: Jabel originated nomadic herding of livestock. Jubal invented harp and flute music. Tubal-Cain instructed craftsmen in working with bronze and iron. In other words, they were their time's talented and famous men, but they rose to prominence in a godless and amoral society.

To close the chapter, in [Genesis 4:25-26](#), Moses contrasts Cain's line and its deeds with another line of descent. He writes that Eve bore another son after the murder of Abel, whom she named Seth, saying, “God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” *Seth* means “appointed.” He, then, essentially took the place of the self-exiled firstborn, Cain, and the dead second-born, Abel. He was the son who would become chief over Adam's family.

In the days of Enosh, Seth's son, “men began to call on the name of the LORD” ([Genesis 4:26](#)). Many commentators say that *Enosh* means “weak or frail man; mortal, sickly man,” but a related word in Arabic, *anas*, means “to be sociable and familiar . . . not only in civil but in religious things” (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*). Gill extrapolates that in Enosh's time, “the families of good men being larger, and more numerous, they joined together

in social and public worship” in contrast to the descendants of Cain. Their aims seem to have been for personal enrichment and empowerment. Gill proposes that, at this time, Seth's progeny began to identify themselves by or with the name of the Lord.

Considering it this way, these “sons of God,” the descendants of Seth, were distinct from the sons of men, the descendants of Cain. Through Seth's line, our Savior was born, as Noah and his family were among his descendants. It appears from what the Bible tells us that none of Cain's descendants, the sons of men, survived the Flood. It was their sinful lifestyle that God had to destroy to preserve the human race ([Genesis 6:5-7](#)).

— John Reiss

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