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WHO ARE "THE SONS OF GOD"?

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we find references to "**the sons of God**". To whom do these statements refer? Do all the references refer to the same individuals? Or is this expression applied to different individuals in different contexts? **If** that is the case, **then why** is this expression applied to different individuals? **How** can completely different groups of individuals all be identified as "sons of God"?

To be clear: in this article we are not concerned with the singular expression "Son of God", referring to only one individual. Whenever this singular expression "**Son of God**" is used (one time in the Old Testament, and over 20 times in the New Testament) it is **always a reference to Jesus Christ**. That should be easy to understand.

Rather, here we are concerned with identifying references to any individuals, other than to Jesus Christ, who are referred to as "sons of God".

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The expression "sons of God" is used five times in the Old Testament, two times in Genesis chapter 6, and three times in the Book of Job. In all five places the Hebrew word translated "sons" is the word "**ben**". And in all five places it is the expression "sons of Elohim" and **never** "sons of YHVH".

Whereas the name YHVH refers to one individual at a time (i.e. almost always to Jesus Christ, and only rarely to God the Father), the name Elohim refers to God the Father and to Jesus Christ collectively, somewhat like the Family name for God. So "sons of Elohim" refers to a joint venture in which both God the Father and Jesus Christ have a part.

THE MEANING OF "BEN"

The Hebrew noun "ben" has been derived from the Hebrew verb "banah", which means "to build". Now "to build" something is somewhat like creating something. And so to more clearly understand the distinctions between creating, doing and making in the Hebrew text, it is helpful to briefly examine **four different Hebrew verbs** that deal with the actions of creating, making, building and forming something. That will illustrate the meaning of "banah" more fully. All four of these Hebrew verbs are used for God in the first two chapters of Genesis.

The reason I want to look at all four of these verbs is because the verb "banah" is in Genesis 2:22

mistranslated by one of the other three verbs. The mistranslation itself may seem slight, but it hides the correct meaning of “banah” to some degree.

Let’s consider these four Hebrew verbs in the sequence in which they first appear in Genesis chapters 1-2.

TO CREATE

In a beginning God **created** (Hebrew “**bara**”) the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The Hebrew verb “bara” refers to creating something without using any physical matter. Hebrew scholars refer to this as “creating something **from nothing**”. But that is **not correct**, and scholars don’t understand how God creates.

God never creates anything from nothing. Everything that is created is, and has to be, created from something, even if that something is invisible to human eyes. And the building block of all of God’s creation is **the holy spirit**. All physical matter was created by God from spirit. Genesis 1:1 refers to God creating the original universe from spirit essence.

The Apostle Paul explained creation as follows:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that **things which are seen** (i.e. physical matter) were **not made of things which do appear**. (Hebrews 11:3)

Matter was created **from something**! That invisible “something” is the holy spirit, which is elsewhere in analogy compared to water. The holy spirit is the building block of all physical matter.

The Hebrew verb “bara” refers to creating something from spirit essence. And that action is something that **only God** can do. We human beings are not able to use God’s spirit to bring anything new into existence. So the Hebrew verb “bara” with the qal stem is never used for anything done by human beings. With this qal stem (used for direct actions) this verb is only used for what God does.

[Comment: **Some technical information**. While a verb “bara” (but used with the piel or hiphil stem) is used for human beings in five verses, those verses have nothing at all in common with creating anything. Here are these five references. In Joshua 17:15,18 the verb “bara” is translated as “cut down”. In 1 Samuel 2:29 the verb “bara” is used for Eli’s evil sons, and it is translated as “to make yourself fat”. In Ezekiel 21:19 the verb “bara” is twice translated as “to choose” a place or location. And in Ezekiel 23:47 “bara” is translated as “to dispatch” some people with swords. None of these uses of “bara” for human beings have anything at all to do with creating anything. Scholars recognize these vastly different meanings, and that is why The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament states for these specific uses of “bara”: “**it is possible that the Piel form may represent an entirely different root**”. They mean that these uses of “bara” are not related to the verb “bara” that means “to create”. When “bara”

means “to create”, then scholars agree that it is only used for God.]

TO MAKE or DO

And God **made** (Hebrew “**asah**”) the firmament (i.e. the sky), and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so. (Genesis 1:7)

The Hebrew verb “asah” is the common verb for doing and making something, by employing things that already exist, by using things that have already been created by God. Specifically, “asah” does not refer to “creating” something. This verb “asah” also describes activities that we human beings can perform. It describes all the things we human beings produce. It also describes the things God does, when God uses something that already exists to produce something new.

Using this verb “asah” in Genesis 1:7 tells us that **in this verse God was not creating anything new**. Rather God was working with the physical matter (including air) to make the sky, by dividing the water in gaseous form (clouds, vapors, etc.) from the water in liquid form, so that the two locations for water from then on were: 1) **water** on the earth and 2) **clouds** in the sky.

“Asah” always involves things that are already in existence to make something new.

TO FORM

And the LORD God **formed** (Hebrew “**yatsar**”) man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

The Hebrew verb “yatsar” means “to form” or “to fashion” something. It implies craftsmanship and designing something. It is used for the potter, who fashions the clay into specific shapes and designs. It is a more specialized verb than “asah”. And in addition to God, the verb “yatsar” also applies to things we human beings form and fashion.

Genesis 2:7 tells us that God used common soil to form Adam’s body into an intentional design, i.e. to look like God.

TO BUILD

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, **made** (Hebrew “**banah**”) He a woman, and brought her unto the man. (Genesis 2:22)

This is the mistranslation, albeit a small one. Looking at our English text, one could assume that the Hebrew verb used in this verse is “asah”, the verb used in Genesis 1:7, the common verb that means

“to make”. But that would not be correct.

The verb “banah” used here means “**to build**”. Yes, “making” can also include “building” something. But “to build” is a **specialized form of “making”**. It implies putting parts together. This verb “banah” refers to building cities and temples, etc. “Banah” is something we human beings can also do, and it does not refer to creating something out of spirit essence.

Now with God **these four activities** (to create, to make, to form, to build) **commonly overlap**. Thus when God “creates” something new, then that commonly also involves God making, forming or building something new.

We see this overlap in God’s activities in the summary statement at the end of the recreation week, in Genesis chapter 2.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God **created** (“bara”) and **made** (“asah”). (Genesis 2:3)

So here God uses the verbs for “creating” and “making” in a complementary way. Between them the four verbs we have looked at cover everything God did during the recreation week.

Let’s go back to the verb “banah”.

Genesis 2:22 really says that **God “built” a woman** from Adam’s rib. And the word “ben” (a son) is formed from this verb “banah”. So in Hebrew “a son” is someone who was “built” by the father. The expression “sons of God” refers to individuals who have been “built” by God, i.e. individuals who were created or built by God. So “sons of God” can refer to **any group of individuals who have been “built” by God**.

Specifically, the meaning of “ben” (i.e. “son”) is not restricted to any specific method by which that “son”came into existence. The meaning of “son” in Hebrew does not require a specific “birth process”. **How** an individual was “built” by God **is immaterial** for eligibility for the designation “son”. If an individual was indeed “built” by God, then that individual qualifies for being “a son” of God.

Now for us human beings, on the other hand, this overlap between “creating” and “making, forming, building” does not exist. We can build and make and form something, but we cannot really create something.

When we in common speech say that someone “created” something new, then we don’t mean making something new by using nothing except holy spirit, which is the intended meaning of the Hebrew verb “bara”. Rather, we really mean that someone “made” something new by utilizing some physical material that is already in existence.

Our casual use of the verb “create” really refers to activities covered by the Hebrew verb “asah”. That is, we used physical materials and electricity and perhaps heat and specific equipment for making whatever it is that we “created”. We use paint to “create” a work of art, etc. But that process is not really “creating” anything. And **strictly speaking** we are misusing the verb “to create” when we apply it to any human achievements.

Now before creating this universe, God had already created and “built” all **the angels**. The angels are beings who have been “built by God”. And therefore **in one particular sense** the angels are “the sons” (Hebrew “ben”) of God. Angels are spirit beings, and so God “built” the angels from spirit essence.

We human beings are physical beings, and so God “built” us (i.e. Adam and Eve) from physical matter, from the dust of the ground (see Genesis 2:7). And so **in this sense** all human beings are also “the sons” of God, because God “built” us. We are all “the products” that God has built, though we would not commonly refer to ourselves in such terms.

Now here is how we commonly view the word “sons”.

We today spontaneously think of **a birth process** when we think of the word “sons”. To us “a son” is someone who has come into existence through a birth process, which process followed a begettal. And with this picture in our minds neither the angels nor any human beings would qualify for the expression “sons of God”, simply because neither creation involved a birthing process in which God was involved. But that is just how we, in contrast to God, view the word “sons”.

There are in fact two distinct ways in which the expression “sons of God” is applied by God in the Bible.

1) **Category #1**: A reference to **individuals who were “built” by “the Builder”** without having undergone any begettal or period of gestation. Importantly, this group has **not “inherited” any specific attributes** from the “Builder”. And neither does this group require a period of growth before full maturity is attained. Rather, upon coming into existence (i.e. upon having been “built”) these individuals are automatically identified as mature (or fully developed) “sons of God”.

2) **Category #2**: A reference to **individuals** who will come into existence **through a specific birth process**, which birth process is preceded by a begettal and a period of gestation. All those people who have God’s spirit are engaged in this specific process towards eventually being born as “sons of God”.

Now we are familiar with the physical process of human babies being born. Babies experience a literal physical birth and they are the literal offspring of their parents. When they are born, babies have inherited certain attributes from their parents. And then their birth is followed by a period of growth before full maturity (i.e. adulthood) is achieved.

This is the process we think of when we hear the word “sons”. While this is a physical process on the human level, becoming born “sons of God” involves a similar process, but on the spirit level. On the spirit level there is “a begettal” (i.e. when we first receive God’s holy spirit), followed by a period of development (i.e. the rest of our mortal lives), followed by a birth into God’s Family (i.e. at the first

resurrection).

More on this later when we examine the New Testament.

Now whereas the Hebrew text only has this one word “ben” for “sons”, the New Testament Greek text in fact has **two distinct Greek words**, which both refer to “sons”. We will examine those two Greek words later, and we’ll see how **these two Greek words** in fact **identify a major distinction** between how the term “sons of God” in the New Testament is to be understood.

Here is the point:

In the **Old Testament** none of the five occurrences of the expression “sons of God” refer to “Category #2". **None** of those references involve individuals who went through a birthing process. **All** five occurrences refer to “**Category #1**", to individuals who were “built” by God, and who did **not** “inherit” any attributes from their “Builder”, neither did they require a period of growth after having been built, before they were fully developed.

In the **New Testament**, on the other hand, **all** of the occurrences of the expression “sons of God” refer to “**Category #2**", to individuals who will go through a very specific birthing process, starting with a begettal and followed by a period of growth, before being fully developed sons of God; and who will “inherit” specific attributes from their Father. **None** of the references to “sons of God” in the New Testament refer to “**Category #1**", to individuals who were “built” by “the Builder” without involving some kind of birthing process.

So the expression “sons of God” in the Old Testament and the expression “sons of God” in the New Testament refer to **different groups of individuals**. In the Old Testament the expression “sons of God” refers only to “Category #1" individuals. And in the New Testament “sons of God” refers only to “Category #2" individuals.

God’s **first** method of creating “sons of God” was “**Category #1**". That involved first “building” the angels and then “building” Adam and Eve, and through them humanity. In the **New Testament** the only method of creating “sons of God” is “**Category #2**". By the time of the New Testament God had phased out the Category #1 process.

Now let’s examine the actual uses of “sons of God” in the Old Testament.

“SONS OF GOD” IN GENESIS 6

And it came to pass, when men (Hebrew “**Adam**”) 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 (Hebrew “**Adam**”) that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. (Genesis 6:1-2)

In both places where our text reads “men” the Hebrew text actually reads “**Adam**”. I have included that information in the above quotation.

What we have in verse 1 is a description of **something that happened with the very first generation of Adam’s sons and daughters**. The daughters that were born are in verse 2 identified as Adam’s own daughters.

These two verses should read:

“... when Adam began to multiply ... and daughters were born unto them (i.e. to Adam and Eve), that **the sons of God saw the daughters of Adam** that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.” (Genesis 6:1-2)

The next verse reads:

And the LORD said, **My spirit shall not always judge man** (Hebrew once again “Adam”), for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. (Genesis 6:3)

The Hebrew text should correctly be translated as “... shall not always **judge** man”, as I have indicated above. Our common rendering of “shall not always **strive with** man” **is a mistranslation**, which hides that all people before the flood **were being judged by God** for the opportunity to be in God’s Kingdom.

This means that nobody from before the flood will be in the 2nd resurrection. Abel, Enoch and Noah, who lived before the flood, will be in the 1st resurrection. But nobody from before the flood will be in the 2nd resurrection. The option of the 2nd resurrection simply didn’t exist before the flood. So the people before the flood were judged by God, according to God’s original plan, and then they were destroyed in the flood.

Yes, the Hebrew word “Adam” can at times also be translated as “men”. But using the word “**Adam”** in this passage is meant to tell us that this is speaking about something that applied to the very first generation of Adam’s own daughters. Translating the word “Adam” as “men” in this passage also hides the fact that Adam and Eve really had **a very large number of children** over a period of perhaps 800 years or more (Adam lived for 930 years).

Further, God’s statement that He “would **not always** judge man” reveals that after the flood God was not going to continue judging all men. This statement signaled **a change** in God’s way of dealing with human beings after the flood.

After the flood God would not judge all men. Instead, God would delay judging all men, by giving most human beings after the flood the opportunity to live again in the 2nd resurrection period, to then be judged. The only ones God would still judge after the flood would be those people who would be given the opportunity to be in the first resurrection. The Apostle Peter referred to this restricted judging as

“judgment **must begin** at the house of God” (see 1 Peter 4:17), i.e. it must begin with the people in God’s Church. For all other people judgment will come later.

Now looking at Genesis 6:3 should tell us that God was angry with humanity. But **the only thing** we have been told about human conduct thus far is that “they (Adam’s sons) took them wives (i.e. sisters) **of all which they chose**”. In other words, the very first generation of Adam’s sons did not marry the sisters that God intended those sons to marry. Their choices for wives were contrary to instructions that God must have given to them at that time. This statement in verse 2 is intended to express **God’s disapproval** with how Adam’s own sons chose their wives.

Verse 4 is the other reference to “sons of God” in this chapter.

There were **fallen ones** (Hebrew “nephilim”) in the earth in those days; and also after that, when **the sons of God** came in unto **the daughters of men** (Hebrew “**Adam**”), and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* **mighty men** (Hebrew “**gibborim**”) which *were* of old, men (Hebrew “**enosh**”) of renown. (Genesis 6:4)

“Giants” is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word “nephilim”, which mistranslation can be traced back to the Latin Vulgate translation. This Hebrew word really refers to “those who have fallen”, or “fallen away” from God’s instructions. In other words, those sons of Adam who married the wrong sisters had become “nephilim”, fallen ones, and their children in turn fell away from God to an even greater degree. In the above verse I have corrected the mistranslation of “nephilim”.

In addition to the mistranslation of “nephilim”, in this verse three different Hebrew words are all translated as “men” or as “mighty men”. First it is the Hebrew word “**Adam**”, then it is the word “**gibborim**”, and lastly it is the word “**enosh**”.

So both references to “sons of God” in these two verses refer to “sons of God” marrying daughters of Adam, and then having children. In verse 4 the translators correctly provided the word “children”, which is not in the Hebrew text, but they provided it based on the verb “yalad” in verse 4, which verb refers to the childbearing process.

The picture is one of “**those who were built by God**” (i.e. sons of God) marrying “**those who were built by Adam**” (i.e. daughters). It is another way of saying that “**Adam’s sons married Adam’s daughters**”. As far as daughters being “built” by Adam, keep in mind that the original woman (Eve) was “built” from one of Adam’s ribs. It was **Adam’s genetic material** that God used to create women.

Question:

So **why** did God refer to the male descendants of Adam as “**sons of God**”, when all of them were later destroyed in the flood? Apart from Abel, Enoch and Noah (and perhaps, though unlikely, a small handful of others?) all of the people who lived before the flood will never be in God’s Kingdom. So **why** refer to that first generation of Adam’s sons as “**sons of God**”?

Adam was God's "son" because **Adam had been "built" by God** from the dust of the ground. God then created Eve with Adam's DNA, since God "built" Eve from Adam's rib. But God had also created both of them with the genetic potential to have very many children, including children who would be racially different from Adam and Eve themselves.

God intended to use Adam and Eve to produce all of **the different races** amongst humanity. God wanted to establish a racially diverse humanity. But the potential, to have children who would be racially different from their own parents, diminished with each successive generation.

Now in order to develop a racially diverse humanity, God saw to it that **for each son** that Adam and Eve had, **a racially compatible sister** was born. And God intended for all of Adam's sons to each marry a racially compatible sister. In that way different races amongst human beings would have been established fairly quickly.

So God intended Adam's own sons to become the progenitors for all of the races amongst human beings. Sons of Adam marrying sisters, who had the same racial features as they themselves, would very quickly establish distinct racial groupings.

This intention on God's part was hijacked when Adam's sons married sisters "of all whom **they** themselves **chose**", in opposition to the sisters God intended them to marry.

That first generation of Adam's sons was **specifically "built by God"** for the express purpose of establishing different races. Their physical features and characteristics were **not "time and chance"**. And likewise, God exercised control over the racial features Adam's daughters would have.

That first generation of Adam's sons and daughters was intended to be the most important generation in all of human history. It was the one that would establish all the racial groups that God intended to establish for human beings. So those sons of Adam were also "sons of God" because God had specifically "built" them to have very specific racial traits, to further God's intentions for mankind.

But that process was hijacked!

And that rebellion on the part of Adam's sons made God angry.

In this regard we might also consider Adam's son Seth, who was born when Adam and Eve were 130 years old. Notice what Eve said when Seth was born.

And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For **God**, *said she*, **has appointed me another seed** instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. (Genesis 4:25)

Note the expression “God has appointed”. This indicates God’s involvement in the physical makeup of the children that were born to Adam and Eve.

By the way, Seth most assuredly was **not** Adam’s “**third son**”, a stupid statement you can find in many commentaries. Adam and Eve were both 130 years old when Seth was born.

And a year or two earlier Cain had been afraid that **other men would kill him** for having killed Abel (Genesis 4:14). There were thousands of people by the time that Cain killed Abel. And Seth was more likely to be Adam’s 23rd son, rather than his 3rd son. Don’t forget about the very first recorded instruction that God gave Adam and Eve. When God instructed them to “be fruitful and multiply”, God was saying: **I want you two to have lots of children**!

And God **blessed** them, and God said unto them, **be fruitful**, and **multiply**, and **replenish** the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

In this instruction “replenish” means “**to fill the earth with human beings**”. The three verbs “to be fruitful”, “to multiply” and “to fill the earth”, coupled with **a specific blessing** from God, make clear that God was going to “bless” Adam and Eve with very, very many children. God wanted humanity **initially** to multiply very rapidly.

But none of those other sons of Adam are identified, because they don’t feature in the story. But they in turn also all had children, and by the time when Cain killed Abel humanity had already multiplied greatly.

The point is this:

Eve was having children all the time. So **why** did Eve at age 130 years say that God had appointed **a replacement for Abel**? And **how** did Eve know that Seth was the replacement? And **why** was a replacement even needed or wanted?

Seth had **the same racial features** that Abel had possessed. That is what made Seth “the replacement” for Abel. And Eve knew that specific daughters “were appointed” to be the wives for specific sons. And so Eve knew that the racial line God had started through Abel needed to be continued. Abel had been one of the few men who had apparently not yet married a sister, perhaps because Abel was different? “Walking with God” certainly made Abel different from all his siblings. They all universally rejected walking with God.

So back to the expression “sons of God”. What does that expression tell us? How can we define it?

The expression “sons of God” throughout the Bible refers to those who have been “**built**” by God. And one attribute shared by all those “built” by God is that **all of them have access to God**!

Anyone who has access to God is a son (or daughter) of God. And anyone who does not have access to God is not a son of God. It is impossible to be a son of God without having access to God.

In plain language: With the expression “sons of God” one focus is on access to God, **independent of how those individuals were “built” by God**. The premise is that **a son has access to his father**. And that access identifies a specific relationship with the father, i.e. the father-son relationship.

In the human sphere, the son is assumed to be a natural born son, but he could also be an adopted son. But being a son gives him access to his father. **An adopted son** has not gone through the birth process with his adoptive father, but he has been given the privilege to have **the same access** to the father that a natural born son has. So an adopted son has the same access, but **not necessarily the same inheritance**, as the natural born son.

Applied to specific human beings, the expression “sons of God” indicates that they all have **the opportunity** to have access to God. For the (human) sons of God in Category #1 that access was to Jesus Christ. And for the sons of God in Category #2 that access is to God the Father, as a result of Christ’s ministry. One of the things Jesus Christ did during His ministry was to make available **access to God the Father** for all those who would repent. So Christ taught us to pray to God the Father. And when we pray we are making use of that access to God the Father.

Giving repentant human beings that opportunity of access to the Father is sufficient for them to qualify for being identified as “sons of God”. That’s God calling those things which are not yet as though they were, i.e. God anticipating the best outcome. That’s the principle of Romans 4:17.

When we look at sons of God in the New Testament, we’ll see a similarity to (human) “sons of God” in the Old Testament in one specific respect.

Being identified as “sons of God” in the Old Testament did not guarantee that those people would eventually become a part of God’s Family. In fact, almost all of those “sons of God” before the flood will never be in God’s Kingdom. But they had been given access to walk with God, and that access allowed them to be known as “sons of God”.

Likewise, those who submit their lives to God in New Testament times, and who receive God’s holy spirit are **already** identified as “**sons of God**”, even though we are still mortal human beings. And the indications are that some of those in this New Testament era who **already** qualify for the designation “sons of God” will not endure to the end, and therefore they will never become spirit beings in the Family of God.

So men being identified as “sons of God” is not a guarantee that those people will eventually be in God’s Kingdom. That really depends on how they conduct their human lives once they have been

identified as “sons of God”.

The expression “sons of God” in Genesis 6 refers primarily to **all the first generation male offspring of Adam**. Their “access” was not to God the Father, but to the God who became Jesus Christ, the God who walked amongst them. But that was the only access to God that was available to human beings during Old Testament times.

God had created Adam from the soil, and all of Adam’s male descendants followed in Adam’s rebellious footsteps. Furthermore, it was a case of **men** “taking wives for themselves”; it was not that women “took husbands for themselves”. So the sins that God implies in verse 2 were totally the responsibility of the men.

Now back to the expression “when **Adam began to multiply** on the face of the earth” in verse 1. That statement shows that Adam and Eve were indeed fulfilling the instruction God had given them in Genesis 1:28. And that statement tells us that it was **the very first generation** of Adam’s sons, dozens of them, that **started the process** of marrying sisters other than the ones God intended them to marry.

It refers to the men whose father, not grandfather or great-grandfather, was Adam. At that point it was God’s intention that “a father” would select a wife for each of his sons, even as God had selected the wife for Adam. And so it was that **God** intended to select the wives for all of Adam’s sons, by providing a racially compatible wife (who was a sister) for each son.

That intention for a father to select wives for his sons was in fact carried over into many ancient societies. It goes back to God providing a specific wife for each of Adam’s sons, but where those sons regrettably married sisters other than the ones God intended them to marry.

Anyway, once that process of marrying sisters other than the ones God wanted them to marry had started with the very first generation, from then onwards this rebellion against God’s intentions only snowballed. All subsequent generations before the flood followed the same rebellious pattern, of not marrying the women God wanted them to marry, though there very likely were some exceptions to this general state of affairs.

Those men before the flood are identified as “sons of God” because **they had access to God**. Jesus Christ was on earth for the entire period before the flood, and **anyone** could have chosen “to walk with God”. But in addition to Abel, only Enoch (Genesis 5:22,24) and Noah (Genesis 6:9) are identified as walking with God. All other people did not make use of that access to walk with Jesus Christ. But **that potential access**, though not used by almost all other people, nevertheless **was sufficient to identify those men as “sons of God”**. And that applied especially to the first generation of Adam’s sons.

Let’s move on.

“SONS OF GOD” IN THE BOOK OF JOB

We are familiar with the story of Job.

Now there was a day when **the sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and **Satan came** also among them. (Job 1:6)

(Comment: With Satan attending a meeting arranged for “the sons of God”, it shows that before his rebellion Satan himself had also been classified as “a son of God”. He was coming to a meeting arranged for his former peers. Jesus Christ had commanded Satan’s presence for that specific occasion.)

Let’s also look at the other two verses that mention “sons of God”.

Again there was a day when **the sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and **Satan came** also among them to present himself before the LORD. (Job 2:1)

When the morning stars sang together, and **all the sons of God** shouted for joy? (Job 38:7)

All three of these references to “sons of God” in the Book of Job refer to one and the same group of individuals. And these references have nothing to do with “the sons of God” in Genesis 6. Now the context for all three references here makes quite clear that here the expression “sons of God” refers to **the holy angels of God**. This is information that God gave to Moses (who most likely was the author of the Book of Job) to record, and no human being witnessed these interactions between God (in the person of Jesus Christ) and Satan.

The question is: **why are the angels here referred to as “sons of God”**, since Paul tells us in Hebrews:

For unto which of **the angels** said He **at any time**, **you are My son**, this day have I **begotten you**? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son? (Hebrews 1:5)

Paul is saying that God never at any time referred to any angel as “My son”.

(Comment: As an aside, this statement also makes clear that Jesus Christ could not possibly have originally been “one of the angels”, and then (supposedly) been promoted to the status of “Son of God”, as some people believe. No angel, no created spirit being has ever been told by God “you are My son”. Therefore Christ could not originally have been an angel.)

So the Book of Job refers to angels as “sons of God”, and Paul tells us that no angel has ever been called “a son of God”. How can both statements be correct?

In Hebrews 1:5 Paul is in fact quoting Psalm 2:7. And in Acts 13:33 Paul plainly states that Psalm 2:7 is speaking about Jesus Christ. So in Hebrews 1:5 Paul is saying that none of the angels of God are “sons of God” in the same way that Jesus Christ is the “Son of God”.

This takes us back to the “two categories” for “sons of God”.

In Hebrews 1:5 Paul is referring to “**Category #2**", those who become sons through **a birthing process**. Paul identifies this category with the expression “this day have I **begotten you**”. None of the angels became “sons of God” through a begettal and birth process. But it was a birth process by which Jesus Christ became “the Son of God”, when God the Father resurrected Jesus Christ after He had been dead for three full days.

That birth process (i.e. being resurrected by God the Father) inducted Jesus Christ into **a new and different relationship** with the Father, from the relationship Christ had with the Father during Old Testament times. Christ’s new relationship with the Father is one of being “the firstborn Son among many brethren” (see Romans 8:29). See also Hebrews 2:10.

So in Hebrews 1:5 Paul is saying that no angel is a “son of God” **as a result of a begettal and birth process**. The references to “sons of God” in Genesis 6 and in the Book of Job are in a completely different category of “sons of God” from the category to which Paul refers in Hebrews. They in fact have nothing to do with Paul’s quotation in Hebrews 1:5. Paul was only referring to “Category #2", sons who will go through a birth process.

So to summarize the Old Testament references to “sons of God”:

1) In Genesis 6 God referred to **Adam’s own sons** as “sons of God”. They were all “built by God” with specific racial features, so that all the races of mankind that God wanted to have, would be established relatively quickly. God also saw to it that for each of Adam’s sons there was a sister with racial features compatible with a specific brother. And it was God’s intention that each son of Adam would marry a compatible sister. That first generation of Adam’s children was intended by God to establish all the human races. And all of the people back then had free access to Jesus Christ, who was walking amongst them.

2) In the Book of Job God referred to all **the holy angels** as “sons of God”. All of them had been “built by God”, without having gone through a specific birthing process. But all the holy angels have regular access to God.

So none of the “sons of God” referred to in the Old Testament had gone through a birth process. And none of them had inherited any attributes from God, their “Builder”.

Recall Romans 8:29.

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be **the firstborn among many brethren**. (Romans 8:29)

The process of becoming a “son of God” **by a birth** was started by Jesus Christ. Before Christ’s resurrection nobody, no angel and no human being, had ever become “a son of God” by means of “a birth into God’s Family”. That route for becoming “a son of God” was established by Jesus Christ. And so Jesus Christ is our “forerunner” (see Hebrews 6:20) and also “the captain of our salvation” (see Hebrews 2:10), the first one to become a Son of God by means of being born as a Son.

Now let’s look at “sons of God” in the New Testament.

“SONS OF GOD” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Let’s look at a few statements in the New Testament.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become **the sons** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God**, *even* to them that believe on His name: (John 1:12)

And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one **the children** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God** that were scattered abroad. (John 11:52)

That you may be blameless and harmless, **the sons** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God**, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world; (Philippians 2:15)

Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called **the sons** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God**: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. (1 John 3:1)

Beloved, **now are we the sons** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God**, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)

In this **the children** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God** are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother. (1 John 3:10)

By this we know that we love **the children** (Greek “**teknon**”) **of God**, when we love God, and keep His commandments. (1 John 5:2)

In all of these expressions it is the plural of the Greek word “teknon” that refers to “sons”.

Now let’s look first at one reference to Jesus Christ, and then at a few other verses with “sons of God”.

And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If You be **the Son** (Greek "**huios**") **of God**, command that these stones be made bread. (Matthew 4:3, see also verse 6)

Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall (i.e. in the future) be called **the children** (Greek "**huios**") **of God**. (Matthew 5:9)

In answering a trick question from the Sadducees about people in the resurrection, Jesus Christ said the following:

Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are **the children** (Greek "**huios**") **of God**, being the children (Greek "**huios**") of the resurrection. (Luke 20:36)

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are **the sons** (Greek "**huios**") **of God**. (Romans 8:14)

For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for (i.e. in the future) the manifestation of **the sons** (Greek "**huios**") **of God**. (Romans 8:19)

For you are all **the children** (Greek "**huios**") **of God** by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

And because **you are sons** (Greek "**huios**"), God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, **crying, Abba, Father**. (Galatians 4:6)

If you endure chastening, **God deals with you as with sons** (Greek "**huios**"); for what son is he whom the father chastens not? (Hebrews 12:7)

So we see that the expression "sons of God" in the New Testament uses two different Greek words for "sons", those words in the singular being "**teknon**" and "**huios**".

We might note that for **Jesus Christ** the expression "Son of God" is **always** "the **huios** of God". Christ is **never** referred to as "the **teknon** of God".

So we human beings who submit our lives to God are identified as both, "**huios of God**" and also as "**teknon of God**". But Jesus Christ is identified only as "Huios of God". The Greek word "teknon" does not apply to Jesus Christ; it only applies to us human beings.

THE TWO GREEK WORDS

So what are the distinctions between these Greek words "teknon" and "huios"?

“Teknon” emphasizes origin and line of descent. It refers to the natural relationship with the parents, and the affection of the parents for a son (or a daughter).

“Huios” emphasizes likeness in character, legal recognition, maturity and inheritance.

Since Jesus Christ does not have an origin, because He has always existed with God the Father, therefore the word “teknon” cannot really be used for Jesus Christ. While Jesus Christ did go through a birth process when the Father resurrected Him, that birth process did not bring Jesus Christ into existence; it only established for Christ **a new relationship** with God the Father. But Christ had always existed with the Father for past eternity.

And the attributes of “huios” (likeness in character, legal recognition as the Son of God, inheritance, etc.) all apply to Jesus Christ. In Hebrews the Apostle Paul tells us about Jesus Christ:

Who **being** the brightness of *His* glory, and **the express image** (Greek = charakter) of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Hebrews 1:3)

Jesus Christ has the same character as God the Father. And sitting down at the right hand of God the Father shows that Christ has inherited all things.

So only the word “huios” applies to Jesus Christ. But what about us? As we have seen above, both “huios” and “teknon” apply to those who will in due time be a part of God’s Family.

Here is the key to identifying these expressions correctly.

When the expression “sons of God” is “**the teknon of God**”, then it refers to us who have God’s spirit in our present existence. “The teknon of God” refers to **mortal human beings** who have been begotten by God’s spirit. But this expression does not refer to any human beings after we have been resurrected to spirit life.

When the expression “sons of God” is “**the huios of God**”, then it refers primarily to those people who have been resurrected to spirit life in the Family of God. The “huios of God” in most cases refers to **spirit beings**. The destiny of the “teknon of God” is to become the “huios of God”.

Luke 20:36, quoted above, spells out part of this distinction. Here is this verse once more.

Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children (Greek “**huios**”) **of God**, being the children (Greek “**huios**”) **of the resurrection**. (Luke 20:36)

It is the resurrection that changes a “teknon of God” into a “huios of God”. Before the resurrection

“teknon” applies, and from the resurrection onwards “huios” will apply.

In a few instances the expression “the huios of God” is applied to Christians in this present life, and those are instances of looking ahead and anticipating a positive outcome, the principle of Romans 4:17 ... “calling those things which be not as though they were”. But **in general terms** the expression “the **teknon** of God” refers to the begettal and gestation part of the birth process. And the expression “the **huios** of God” refers to the actual birth and beyond.

The first part of becoming a part of God’s Family is identified as us being “the teknon of God”. This covers the time from our repentance to the end of our physical lives. At the resurrection we become “the huios of God”, and that will then express **our permanent relationship to God the Father**. Think of “the teknon of God” as the initial transitional phase towards the ultimate goal.

(Comment: the plural of “huios” is “huioi”, but to keep it simple I’m just staying with the singular term which you can easily find in your dictionary. Likewise, the plural form of “teknon” is “tekna”.)

Here is the point: When a statement refers to Christians in our present physical circumstances, then it primarily uses the expression “the teknon of God”. And when a statement refers to the future, to things that lie ahead for God’s people **after** the resurrection, then it uses the expression “the huios of God”.

This ties in with **the actual birth process**, which is identified by two distinct points in time.

First comes the point in time when the birth process is initiated, when it is set in motion, when it is started. We refer to that point as “**the begettal**” and as “**conception**”. The begettal is followed by a period of growth and development. This entire period applies to “the teknon of God”.

Then comes the point when the necessary development has been completed, and the being is ready to become a fully-fledged individual entity. That is the point of “**birth**”, the time of the resurrection. At that point the individual becomes “**a born son**”. From then onwards the term “the huios of God” applies.

This information is hidden to some degree by translating both Greek expressions as “the sons of God”. It would have been helpful if the “teknon of God” was always translated as the “begotten sons of God”, and if the “huios of God” was always translated as the “born sons of God”. But none of the translators had this understanding.

Thus in the New Testament we have “sons of God” references that apply to us right now. And we also have other references to what things will be like for us after the resurrection.

So, for example, “the teknon” of God are **still quite capable of sinning**, and **even falling away** from the truth altogether. But once we actually become “the huios of God”, then it will be impossible for us to sin. This is what the Apostle John explained.

As long as we are “**the teknon of God**”:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

But once we have become “**the huios of God**”:

Whosoever is **born of God** does not commit sin; for His seed remains in him: and **he cannot sin**, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

In 1 John 1:8 John is referring to our state right now, while we are “the teknon of God”. As “the teknon of God” we are still very much capable of sinning.

And two chapters later, in 1 John 3:9, John is speaking about the time when we have transitioned to becoming “the huios of God”. That will be after the resurrection. Then it will be impossible for us to sin.

IN SUMMARY

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word for “son” (i.e. “ben”) is “something that has been built by the father”. The only process for “building a son” we human beings are familiar with is by means of a begettal and subsequent birth. But God can also “build sons” without employing a begettal and birth process. Think of what John the Baptist said.

And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that **God is able of these stones to raise up children** (Greek “**teknon**”) **unto Abraham**. (Matthew 3:9)

Now while John the Baptist is obviously presenting a totally theoretical situation, he is showing that God can create sons **without a birth process** being involved. God can build “sons” instantaneously. But this different process will result in **a different category of “sons”** from those sons who went through a birth process.

When we talk about salvation and God building the Family of God, then this is restricted to sons that have undergone a begettal and birth process. The begettal and birth process establishes **a closer relationship with God** than the instantaneous process of “building sons”. The begettal and birth process also makes it possible for those sons **to inherit certain godly attributes** from the Father.

Let’s look again at 1 John 3:2.

Beloved, **now** are we the sons (“**teknon**”) of God, and it does not yet appear **what we shall be** (i.e. when we become the “**huios** of God”): but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him (i.e. we will have inherited certain godly attributes); for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)

So in the **Old Testament** the expression “sons of God” refers to two different groups of individuals. In Genesis 6 it refers to mortal human beings, sons of Adam. And in the Book of Job this expression refers to the holy righteous angels.

These two uses of the expression “sons of God” simply tell us that the individuals thus identified were “built” by God. God “built” these two groups without employing a birthing process.

In the **New Testament** the expression “sons of God” refers to members of God’s Church. But it refers to two different phases of the Christian life. The expression “the teknon of God” refers to the period from our repentance to the end of our physical lives. And the expression “the huios of God” refers primarily to Christians from the time of the first resurrection onwards, i.e. to the time when God will have changed us into immortal spirit beings.

The reason the expression “sons of God” can refer to different groups of individuals is because with God the meaning of the Hebrew word for “sons” is not limited to individuals who have experienced a birthing process.

It is only from New Testament times onwards that the application of the expression “sons of God” is restricted to human beings who **either** are in the process of begettal and subsequent birth into God’s Family (i.e. “teknon of God”), **or** who have already completed that birth process (i.e. “huios of God”), and who will have been resurrected into God’s Family.

And that about covers what the Bible tells us about “the sons of God”.

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