

# Genesis 6.1-8 Questions Sermon / FBC / 09.13.20

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## Introduction

- † **[1: Shaq]** Any of you ever wish you were taller? It seems to me there are some advantages. Certainly a tall pastor is more imposing behind the pulpit than a shorter one. And shorter people often are convinced that taller people are looking down on them, figuratively as well as literally.
- The Bible mentions very large people now and then, including at the start of Genesis 6. That's where we will be today, if you want to open your Bible.
  - This is a strange passage which raises many questions. Even after hours of study, I still cannot definitively answer some of the questions raised by this text. Thus it is even more interesting!
  - Next week, we will look at all of Genesis 6-7, including this passage in that context, but today I want to focus on the questions in the text, so this will be a different sort of sermon than usual.
- † In the second half of Genesis 4, we learned the family of Cain was utterly corrupt; in Genesis 5, we learned Seth's descendants had at least some righteous people walking with God. Following this, the narrator introduces us to the Noah's Ark / flood narrative with the following eight verse bridge.
- **[2: 6.1-4]** Genesis 6.1-8 NASB: Now it came about, when *men* began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup>that the sons of God saw that the daughters of *men* were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with *man* forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." <sup>4</sup>The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of *men*, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.
  - **[3: 6.5-8]** <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of *man* was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>The LORD was sorry that He had made *man* on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said, "I will blot out *man* whom I have created from the face of the land, from *man* to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.
  - **[4: terms]** Because of its placement, we know this section is important: it somehow helps explain God's wrath at all mankind such that he would destroy almost all people in the flood.
  - But there are multiple terms which are a challenge to understand, including "sons of God," "daughters of men," "Nephilim," and "the mighty men who were of old, men of renown." We will try to figure all this out and make sense of our passage.
  - As we explore these concepts today, however, let's not miss the main point: people were walking apart from God and this angered God, so he set a time limit after which he would withdraw his Spirit and bring a terrible judgment on the Earth.

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## Exposition

- † **[5: Grammar]** Let's start with a little Hebrew lesson. In Hebrew narrative, each action of the plot usually starts with a certain kind of verb – my professor called it a "[ ]-consecutive-imperfect" –

which is followed by the subject of the verb, and then the rest of the sentence. Thus without English style or interpretive connections, our passage says...

- **[6: plot sequence]** v.1: ʾ-came to be, it / mankind began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them.
  - v.2: ʾ-saw, the sons of God / that the daughters of men were beautiful.
  - v.2: ʾ-took, they / wives for themselves, whomever they chose.
  - v.3: ʾ-said, Yahweh / “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”
  - Have you ever noticed when you read in the Old Testament, a lot of sentences begin with “and”? That’s one way to translate the [ʾ] connected to the verbs at the start of the sentences.
  - In our passage, most English translations try to make more thoughtful connections. Instead of ignoring the [ʾ] or using “and,” they insert words like “now,” “then,” “so,” or “thus.” That helps you see the connections the translators think the Hebrew author was making.
  - But the [ʾ] is more than a translatable word, it also is a signaling device: it says, this sentence is part of the plot of in this scene.
- † **[7: Grammar]** Interestingly, v.4 does not begin with a [ʾ]-consecutive-imperfect verb. It begins with the noun “Nephilim,” followed by a perfect tense verb, not an imperfect as in the other verses.
- In Hebrew narrative, such a change signals this is background information, not part of the plot. So we know the Nephilim are a separate question, not part of our explanation of God’s anger, and thus not necessarily related to the question about the sons of God and daughters of man.
- † So we have a plot sequence here which results in v.3 with God deciding to destroy humanity after 120 years. That suggests we should try to understand what is going on in vv.1-2. I will give you several theories and you can decide for yourself what to believe. Then we will come back to the question of the Nephilim and the mighty men.
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- † **[8: demons]** Theory 1: The Sons of God are fallen angels/demons; the daughters of men are human.
- This was the theory of many Jewish apocalyptic writers during the centuries before Christ came. In the early church, Clement of Alexandria proposed this [*Christ the Educator* 3.2.14], as did Ambrose after him [*On Noah* 4.8].
- † Since it says “sons of *God*” and “daughters of *men*,” does the text imply a distinction in that the sons are not of men? If you do a search through the Bible for the term “sons of God,” you will find that it does sometimes appear to refer to angels such as in Job and Psalms.
- **[9: Job 2.1]** For example: **Job 2.1 NASB: Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.**
  - **Psalm 29.1 ESV: Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.** The “heavenly beings” in the Hebrew text are literally “sons of God,” but the translators thought that would be confusing, so they made it clear angels were in view.

- So that is interesting, but on the other hand, the term seems to refer to loyal angels in these passages, not the fallen angels we call demons.
  - **[10: Matthew 5.9]** Furthermore, in the New Testament Jesus and Paul referred to God's people as sons of God. For example, Jesus said in **Matthew 5.9 NASB: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."**
  - **Romans 8.14 NASB: For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** So we do not have support in the rest of the Bible for considering "sons of God" to be demons.
- † **[11: 2 Peter 2]** There are some New Testament passages which are confusing in their own right, but seem to be connected to the start of Genesis 6.
- Let's turn to 2 Peter 2. You will want your Bible open, because I did not put all this text on the slide. **[give them time]** Peter is saying that God will bring judgment against false teachers who are leading others into depraved lifestyles. Then he says in **2 Peter 2.1-9 NET: But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves.<sup>2</sup> And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.<sup>3</sup> And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep.<sup>4</sup> For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but threw them into hell and locked them up in chains in utter darkness, to be kept until the judgment,<sup>5</sup> and if he did not spare the ancient world, but did protect Noah, a herald of righteousness, along with seven others, when God brought a flood on an ungodly world,<sup>6</sup> and if he turned to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah when he condemned them to destruction, having appointed them to serve as an example to future generations of the ungodly,<sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man in anguish over the debauched lifestyle of lawless men,<sup>8</sup> (for while he lived among them day after day, that righteous man was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)<sup>9</sup>— if so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for punishment at the day of judgment...**
  - So here is the question: if sexual sin and fallen angels and the flood of Noah are all connected in Peter's mind, could this text support the idea that fallen angels were involved in Genesis 6?
  - **[12: Jude]** Turn to Jude 1.6-7. **[give them time]** **Jude 1.6-7 NET: You also know that the angels who did not keep within their proper domain but abandoned their own place of residence, he has kept in eternal chains in utter darkness, locked up for the judgment of the great Day. So also Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring towns, since they indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire in a way similar to these angels, are now displayed as an example by suffering the punishment of eternal fire.**
  - How would angels pursue unnatural sexual desire like what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah? In the cities, the issue was homosexuality; with angels could it have been sex with people? Like with 2 Peter, this passage makes us wonder about what happened in Genesis 6.
- † **[13: marry]** As an argument against this theory, some scholars mention that Jesus implied angels do not marry [Matthew 22.30; Mark 12.25].

- It's true that the phrase [תָּקַח] [אִשָּׁה] in Genesis 6.2 always seems to mean "take a wife" in scripture, but it literally could mean "take a woman."
- Also, what Jesus said was in reference to angels in Heaven, marrying each other. We know angels and demons [fallen angels] can appear as people, even eat and drink, so could angels have sex with people? If so, could they procreate, could women have children, as it says in Genesis 6.4, having been impregnated by a demon? That seems far-fetched to me, but I don't know for sure.
- **[14: judgement]** A strong argument against this theory is that this whole passage is about the flood punishment of people with no mention of punishing angels. Our context is people going astray from God, people showing enough evil to anger God. God's punishment in Genesis 6 strongly indicates the culprits are mortals, not angels. That seems conclusive to me.

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† **[15: theory 2]** Let's move on. Theory 2: The sons of God were descendants in Seth's righteous line, while the daughters of men were of Cain's line or at least not worshippers of God.

- This was the theory in the fourth century of Ephrem the Syrian [*Commentary on Genesis* 6.3.1]. It has been the most prominent theory in the church since that time; both Luther and Calvin thought the sons of Seth marrying daughters of Cain defiled the seed line with corruption.

† This makes good sense of the context, right? We know there were a few righteous people in Seth's family and everyone else was astray, so if the sons in the righteous family married pagan wives, who led them astray and raised their children up as pagans, then it would result in very few righteous people, as was the case when God spoke to Noah. So this makes good sense of the context.

† One argument against this has to do with the consistency of the terminology in our passage.

- **[16: mankind]** In vv.1, 2, and 4 [בְּנֵי אָדָם], meaning man or mankind, multiplies and has daughters who are taken. In vv.3, 5, 6, 7 God judges [בְּנֵי אָדָם] and will blot them out because they are wicked.
- In that latter set of verses, [בְּנֵי אָדָם] refers to all people; can [בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים] then refer only to a subgroup like Seth's family in the first set of verses? It seems like [בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים] has to refer to all people or all men, not just Seth's or Cain's men. On the other hand, the Old Testament does sometimes shift meaning of a word from a generic group to specific subset.
- Another consideration is that nowhere else in scripture is the term "sons of God" used in reference to Sethites only. We did see that Paul and Jesus used the term to refer to righteous believers; but then here the sons of God are acting unrighteously, which ticks God off.
- So even though this theory makes sense of the context, there are some arguments against it.

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† **[17: theory 3]** Theory 3: the sons of God are a dynasty of tyrants [perhaps even of line of Cain/Lamech], while the daughters of men are daughters of Seth's descendants.

- The theory is that tyrants were forming harems and perverting both righteousness and justice.
- It is true that Genesis chapters 4 and 5 mention daughters being born to Seth's descendants, not so much to Cain's. On the other hand, we surmise there were daughters in both families, and in the families of Seth and Cain's other siblings too.
- And, really, why would the evil men be the ones called the sons of God?

- Political leaders are sometimes themselves called “gods” in the Old Testament [Exodus 21.6; 22.8-9], but there is no textual evidence that groups of kings [particularly evil kings] were called “sons of God.”
- And we still have the problem with terminology we just discussed with the previous theory.

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† **[18: theory 4]** Theory 4: the sons of God were some sort of political leaders possessed by demons.

- This is the theory of many modern scholars, including two I respect, Bruce Waltke and Alan Ross. It keeps procreation between humans, but it brings demons back into the picture. So it is sort of a mitigating position.
- † Ross notes that scripture [Daniel 10.13, 20; Ezekiel 28.11-19] multiple times implies that demons have been the real power behind evil rulers, and we see in the gospels that demons can possess non-believers.
- He thinks God would use this passage to provide argument against ancient myths in the polytheistic cultures surrounding Israel. Those cultures thought great men were lesser gods, but this passage would say that great men were men, but possessed by demons, and their famous and powerful offspring were not god-kings but flesh who would die like everyone else.
  - Scholar C. John Collins thinks the function of this passage is to show that after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, humankind now was susceptible to demonic interference and – apart from divine protection – now were helpless. The Israelite audience and our churches today should grasp, however, that even the most powerful are subject to God’s judgment and thus the faithful should not fear them.
- † Many people like this view, because it keeps fallen angels [demons] involved, which seems to relate the passage to Jude and 2 Peter, but it does not imply that angels [demons] could have children with human partners, and it helps explain God’s anger being mostly against people in our passage.
- On the other hand, it does not really explain any of our textual questions: why use the terms “sons of God” and “daughters of man” were used? why did what was happening then make God so much more angry at people than before or since? if there is a connection to 2 Peter and Jude, why did God imprison some demons but not others, and so on.
  - I am sure some of you have come up with a fifth theory. Let me know, we will write an article!

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† **[19: Matthew 24]** Whatever the truth, we need to keep the Big Picture in view.

- Turn to Matthew 24.37 **[give them time]** **Matthew 24.37-39 NET:** [Jesus says nobody knows when he will return] **For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.**
- Jesus’ reference to marrying and giving in marriage could refer to the sons and daughters in Genesis 6. According to Jesus, they were living merry, sinful lives, away from God – as **Genesis 6.5** says, **“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”** – but then God’s judgment struck.

- That's the point we need to take from this; whatever theory we hold about the sons of God and daughters of man, we need to remember that life apart from God – walking on what we call the bottom line, doing our own things in our own ways instead of trusting and obeying God's revelation – will bring judgment. Jesus is coming back, and he is coming back to judge, first through the Great Tribulation and then with the final judgment. We need to be ready.

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† **[20: Genesis 6.4]** After all that, we still have two remaining questions: who were the Nephilim? and who were the mighty men of old? and as a related thought, might they be the same people?

- When I was a candidate for the pastorate in Pennsylvania, LeeAnn and I were up there for a four-day weekend to get to know everyone in various social contexts and to answer all their questions. On the fourth day, one of the former elders jokingly asked me "Who were the Nephilim." At that point, I was happy I could remember the reference was to Genesis 6. Let's look at it again.

† **Genesis 6.4 NASB: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.**

- The mighty men could be the Nephilim or the children of the sons of God with the daughters of men.
- Some say the mighty men were the Nephilim who were the children of the sons of God with the daughters of men; most of these people, such as Ambrose [*On Noah* 4.8], believe the sons of God were demons, and they think that explains why the offspring were so mighty.
- The argument against that is the Hebrew grammar we discussed earlier: this is a background statement, an aside, not part of the plot, so it is doubtful that the Nephilim are associated with the sons of God and the daughters of men or their children.

† **[21: Nephilim]** [נְפִלִים] is a plural noun, but we are not totally sure what it means.

- The associated verb [נָפַל] can mean "to fall," "to collapse," "to die in battle," "to be inferior," "to fall upon or raid," even "to be born."
- If they were the mighty men, perhaps they were those who fell upon or raided others in war.
- The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, which was written in the inter-testamental period before Jesus was born, translates [נְפִלִים] as γίγαντες, meaning mighty ones or giants. So obviously the Greek speaking Jews of that period identified the mighty men with the Nephilim.
- **[22: Shaq]** Augustine [*City of God* 15.23] and Basil the Great [*Homily 20, Of Humility*] were two early church scholars who thought these must be what we would call giants. Before the flood, there might have been some massive people, who gained renown for their physical stature and capabilities, especially if they were raiders.
- Scholar C. John Collins thinks saying the mighty men were of old and men of renown implies the audience was to employ their background knowledge of such stories. If stories about these mighty men were told by Noah and his family, over time they might have become the basis for pagan mythical semi-divine heroes. So God might have included this aside to point out they were just mighty men, and other mighty men would come later.

- The biblical text says that, actually. There were Nephilim again later, after the flood. Does that affect our view of what they could be? If they were something specific to that period, they all would have died in the flood and there would not have been any more.
- Think of Goliath: 1 Samuel 17 says his height was somewhere between six-foot-nine and nine-foot-nine [there is some question as to the text], and his armor weighed between 125 and 220 pounds. His spear weighed 15 pounds. A baseball bat is about two pounds; a two handed sword from the sixteenth century weighed five to eight pounds. Goliath was big and strong.
- Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal is 7-1 and 324 pounds, and super athletic. NFL players are not usually that tall, but often as weighty, and show incredible dexterity and strength.
- So I think the Nephilim were huge men, who were mighty warriors. Just as Cain's family does not deserve our admiration even though they developed culture, so the mighty men of old were not worthy of idolization, they were just men. Even biblical heroes, like Noah, Abraham, David, Paul, and Peter – overall good men of God – had serious flaws and made sinful mistakes.

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## Conclusion

- † **[23: 6.5-8]** Whatever is going on in the first four verses, the second four are very clear. Let's read those again. **Genesis 6.5-8 NASB: Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.**
- It is interesting that God was sorry to have made the animals too; perhaps the corruption of mankind and the curse of God on the Earth had led to animal violence and other problems. Maybe disgust with his image bearers ruined God's taste for the whole enterprise.
  - What is clear is that people had become almost universally sinful, wicked, evil. That's the result we expect when we see people taking the bottom line, doing their own thing in their own way, rather than trusting and obeying God's revelation.
  - So God decided to blot them out with a terrible judgment: a flood that would destroy all life, except those who could survive in the sea or those God would choose to deliver, such as Noah.
  - The original audience believed a time of judgment would come, and so do we. God promised not to flood the Earth again, but the Great Tribulation does not sound like a picnic in the park to me, and the judgement of all people at the end will result in permanent condemnation for the many who have lived a life apart from faith in the promise of the savior seed.
  - Let's allow this text to provoke us to intentional effort to choose God and his ways! **[pray]**