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Genesis 6.1-8 → *Sin Runs Amok*

<context>

²⁸ When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son ²⁹ and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”

³⁰ Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years and had other sons and daughters. ³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died. ³² After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

A The sons of God took wives of the daughters of man. (6.1-4)

6 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

Who were the sons of God?

B God regrets mankind, but Noah finds favor with Him. (6.5-7)

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

What was the sin that caused God to judge so harshly?

C Noah was righteous, walked with God, and had three sons. (6.8-10)

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

⁹ These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰ And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

What do we know about Noah’s faith?

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C God tells Noah that He will destroy mankind. (6.11-13)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

What were mankind's actions that brought the judgment?

D God instructs Noah on building an ark and gathering the animals. (6.14-22)

¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵ This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. ¹⁶ Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷ For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. ²⁰ Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. ²¹ Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." ²² Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

What provision did God make for future life?

WHAT DOES THE STORY OF NOAH'S FLOOD ADD TO GOD'S STORY?

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2. *The sons of God* are identified by some interpreters as the sons of Seth, over against those of Cain. By others, including early Jewish writers,¹⁹ they are taken to mean angels. If the second view defies the normalities of experience, the first defies those of language (and our task is to find the author's meaning); for while the Old Testament can declare God's people to be his sons, the normal meaning of the actual term 'sons of God' is 'angels', and nothing has prepared the reader to assume that 'men' now means Cainites only.²² Possible New Testament support for 'angels' may be seen in 1 Peter 3:19, 20; also in 2 Peter 2:4–6, where the fallen angels, the flood, and the doom of Sodom form a series that could be based on Genesis, and in Jude 6, where the angels' offence is that they 'left their proper habitation'. The craving of demons for a body, evident in the Gospels, offers at least some parallel to this hunger for sexual experience. But where Scripture is as reticent as here, both Peter and Jude warn us away. We have our proper place as well! More important than the detail of this episode is its indication that man is beyond self-help, whether the Seth-ites have betrayed their calling, or demonic powers have gained a stranglehold.¹

It seems, then, that God is concerned at this point not with depravity, which verse 5 will introduce, but with presumption. This was the theme of 3:5 ('as gods') and of 3:22b ('and live for ever'); it recurs in 11:4 ('reach unto heaven'), and the present episode could well belong to the series as an attempt, this time on angelic initiative, to bring supernatural power, or even immortality, illicitly to earth. Hence the contrast between *spirit* and *flesh*, in God's comment. Man is still a mere mortal, sustained by God's animating spirit (as in Ps. 104:29, 30) only at his good pleasure.

Three main kinds of interpretation are offered by modern exegetes. First, "the sons of the gods" are nonhuman, godlike beings such as angels, demons, or spirits. Second, "the sons of the gods" are superior men such as kings or other rulers. Third, "the sons of the gods" are godly men, the descendants of Seth as opposed to the godless descendants of Cain.

The "angel" interpretation is at once the oldest view and that of most modern commentators. It is assumed in the earliest Jewish exegesis (e.g., the books of 1 Enoch 6:2ff; Jubilees 5:1), LXX, Philo *De Gigant* 2:358), Josephus (*Ant.* 1.31) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QapGen 2:1; CD 2:17–19). The NT (2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6, 7) and the earliest Christian writers (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) also take this line.

Modern scholars who accept this view advance three main reasons for supporting it. First, elsewhere in the OT (e.g., **Ps 29:1, Job 1:6**) "sons of God" refers to heavenly, godlike creatures. Second, in 6:1–4 the contrast is between "the sons of the gods" on the one hand and "the daughters of man" on the other. The alternative interpretations presuppose that what Gen 6 really meant was that "the sons of some men" married "the daughters of other men." The present phrase "sons of God" is, to say the least, an obscure way of expressing such an idea. It is made the more implausible by 6:1 where "man" refers to all mankind. It is natural to assume that in v 2 "daughters of man" has an equally broad reference, not a specific section of the human race. Finally, it is pointed out that in Ugaritic literature "sons of God" refers to members of the divine pantheon, and it is likely that Genesis is using the phrase in a similar sense.²

The royal interpretation was introduced into Jewish exegesis about the middle of the second century A.D., partly, it seems, out of conviction that angels could not indulge in sexual intercourse and partly to suppress speculation about them (P. S. Alexander, *JJS* 23 [1972] 60–71.) It subsequently became the most usual rabbinic view and has a number of Christian advocates as well (e.g., F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Gottersöhne*; M. G. Kline, *WTJ* 24 [1963] 187–204). D. J. A. Clines (*JSOT* 13 [1979] 35) suggests a combination of the angelic and royal interpretations: the sons of God may be "both divine beings and antediluvian rulers." It is urged that only an interpretation which identifies "sons of God" with men as opposed to angels can explain why men are judged for the intermarriages that occurred.

The Sethite interpretation, for a long time the preferred Christian exegesis, again because it avoided the suggestion of carnal intercourse with angels, has few advocates today. In support of this view it was pointed out that the Sethites are the chosen line from whom Noah is descended, and that elsewhere in the Pentateuch the elect nation Israel is called God's son (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1).

Given the variety of ways in which "sons of the gods" has been understood, it is hard to know which sense is correct—angelic, royal or traditional Sethite. In the light of Canaanite usage and of passages such as Job 1:6, it seems most likely that the "angelic" interpretation is to be preferred. Much of the objection to this view would be eliminated if the term "angel" were avoided and a more ambivalent term such as "spirit" were used instead. In Job 1 and 2, "the Satan" appears as one of "the sons of God" and is a highly malevolent member of the heavenly court. This OT picture of the heavenly council, in which the LORD chairs a committee of "the sons of God" (cf. Ps 82), parallels Canaanite descriptions of the heavenly pantheon, whose gods often enjoy sexual intercourse. It seems likely, then, that Genesis believed the sons of God could have acted similarly. If the modern reader finds this story incredible, that reflects a materialism that tends to doubt the existence of spirits, good or ill. But

¹ Derek Kidner, [Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 89–90.

² Gordon J. Wenham, [Genesis 1–15](#), vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 139.

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those who believe that the creator could unite himself to human nature in the Virgin's womb will not find this story intrinsically beyond belief.

One must look behind the specific terms used to discover the reason for the condemnation in this case. The sequence of "saw ... good ... took" parallels most closely the terminology in 3:6 and suggests the sinfulness of the action of the sons of God. When the woman saw and took, she transgressed a boundary set by the Lord. The essence of Adam's sin was to acquiesce in his wife's transgression by eating the fruit she gave him. Here the fault of the daughters of man lies presumably in their consenting to intercourse with "the sons of the gods." It ought also to be borne in mind that the girls' fathers would also have been implicated, since, if there was no rape or seduction, their approval to these matches would have been required. The obvious avoidance of any terms suggesting lack of consent makes the girls and their parents culpable, the more so when the previous chapter has demonstrated that mankind was breeding very successfully on its own.

It is relevant to note first of all the similarity with 3:22, "[lest he] live for ever." This implies that the divine-human intercourse was, like eating the tree of life, intended to procure eternal life for man. This attempt to usurp what belongs to God alone is therefore condemned. Instead human life is limited to a maximum of 120 years.

"His days shall be one hundred and twenty years." In the immediate context of Gen 6:1–4 the meaning of this remark appears quite obvious: from now on nobody shall live to more than 120 years of age. However, within the wider setting of Genesis this interpretation is problematic, for Noah and many of his descendants live hundreds of years (Gen 11). Even Abraham lived to 175; Isaac, to 180; and Jacob, to 147 years. On the other hand, according to 5:32, Noah was 500 years old when he fathered Ham, Shem, and Japhet, and 600 years old when the flood began (7:6), so some commentators (e.g., Keil, König, Kidner) have suggested that 120 years represents a period of grace before the flood. It may be, however, that the author thought of the 120 years as a maximum life-span that was only gradually implemented; cf. the slow-acting curses of Eden 3:16–19. In the post-flood period, the recorded ages steadily decline (chap. 11), and later figures very rarely exceed 120. After the time of Jacob, the longest-lived include Joseph (110, Gen 50:26), Moses (120, Deut 34:7), and Joshua (110, Josh 24:29). Only Aaron (123, Num 33:39) exceeds 120.

As often in Scripture the punishment is made to fit the crime. Grasping at immortality through these liaisons, man is sentenced to live a maximum of 120 years, roughly a sevenfold reduction over the average lifespan of the antediluvians. Though some of Noah's immediate descendants live longer than this, their lives are much shorter than the pre-flood patriarchs. The Pentateuch shows that by the time of Moses one hundred and twenty was regarded as the greatest age a man could hope to reach.

Matt. 24:36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

The idea will then be that the mingling of the divine and human substances brought about by illicit sexual unions has introduced a disorder into the creation which Yahwe cannot suffer to 'abide' permanently, but resolves to end by an exercise of His supreme power.³

What was Satan's plan for defeating God's people in Noah's day? To entice the godly line of Seth ("the sons of God") to mix with the ungodly line of Cain ("the daughters of men") and thus abandon their devotion to the Lord. It was the same temptation that Christians face today: be friendly with the world (James 4:4), love the world (1 John 2:15–17), and conform to the world (Rom. 12:2), rather than be separated from the world (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1). Of course, this could lead to being "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). Lot is an example of this danger (Gen. 13; 19).

Some interpreters view 6:1–7 as an invasion of fallen angels who cohabited with women and produced a race of giants. But as interesting as the theory is, it creates more problems than it solves, not the least of which is the union of sexless spirit beings with flesh and blood humans. Even if such unions did occur, could there be offspring and why would they be giants? And how did these "giants" (Nephilim, "fallen ones") survive the Flood (v. 4; Num. 13:31–33), or was there a second invasion of fallen angels after the Flood?

The term "sons of God" does refer to angels in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; but these are *unfallen* angels faithfully serving God. Even if fallen angels could make themselves appear in human bodies, why would they want to marry women and settle down on earth? Certainly their wives and neighbors would detect something different about them and this would create problems. Furthermore, the emphasis in Genesis 6 is on the sin of *man* and not the rebellion of angels. The word "man" is used nine times in verses 1–7, and God states clearly that the judgment was coming because of what humans had done. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (v. 5).

³ John Skinner 1851-1925, [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 145.

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The 120-year limit expressed in verse 3 probably refers to the years until the Flood would come. God is long-suffering with lost sinners, but there comes a time when judgment must fall. During that “day of grace,” Noah prepared the ark and gave witness that judgment was coming (2 Peter 2:5), the same message Enoch had given during his lifetime (Jude 14–15). God gave His message in the mouth of two witnesses, but the people wouldn’t listen.

The most likely interpretation of Genesis 6:4 is that God saw the people of that day as “fallen ones,” while men saw these people as mighty leaders.

The corruption of mankind reached its highest point when even the difference between the Sethites and the Cainites became obliterated by intermarriages between the two parties, and that from sensual motives. We read that “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” At that time the earth must have been in a great measure peopled,⁴ and its state is thus described, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This means more than the total corruption of our nature, as we should now describe it, and refers to the universal prevalence of open, daring sin, and rebellion against God, brought about when the separation between the Sethites and the Cainites ceased. With the exception of Noah there was none in that generation “to call upon the name of Jehovah.” “In those days there were ‘giants’ (in Hebrew: *Nephilim*) in the earth ... the same were the mighty men (or heroes) which were of old, the men of renown.” Properly speaking, these *Nephilim* were “men of violence,” or tyrants, as Luther renders it, the root of the word meaning, “to fall upon.” In short, it was a period of violence, of might against right, of rapine, lust, and universal unbelief of the promise. With the virtual extinction of the Sethite faith and worship no further hope remained, and that generation required to be wholly swept away in judgment.⁴

1Pet. 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

2Pet. 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

2 Peter 3:5–6 ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Jude 6 And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—

6.9FF 6:9–13. In contrast with the reason for the Flood in the Babylonian account (the caprice of the gods because of man’s noise), the biblical record presents the Flood as a distinctly moral judgment. The human race had become so **corrupt** (vv. 11–12) and **full of violence** (vv. 11, 13) that God’s wrath would **destroy** all flesh, except **Noah**, who **walked with God** (v. 9), and his family (v. 18).⁵

6:14–18. The deliverance was to be by means of **an ark**, a flat-bottomed rectangular vessel **450 long, 75 wide, and 45 high**, with a displacement of some 43,300 tons and three **decks**...The ship in the Babylonian tradition was of cubical construction and was five times as big as Noah’s ark. Genesis alone preserves the description of a seaworthy vessel.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (v. 8) introduces the third of the “generation” statements in Genesis: “These are the generations of Noah” (v. 9). Noah wasn’t a minor character in the story of redemption; he’s mentioned fifty times in nine different books of the Bible.⁶

Noah was a righteous man (v. 9; 7:1). This is the first time the word “righteous” is used in the Bible, but Noah’s righteousness is also mentioned in other places (Ezek. 14:14, 20; Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5). Noah’s righteousness didn’t come from his good works; his good works came because of his righteousness. Like Abraham, his righteousness was God’s gift in response to his personal faith. Both Abraham and Noah believed God’s Word “and it was counted to [them] for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; see Heb. 11:7; Rom. 4:9ff; Gal. 3:1ff).

⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 39–40.

⁵ Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 38.

⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Basic*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1998), 93.

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Noah was a blameless man (v. 9). If “righteous” describes Noah’s standing before God, then “blameless” describes his conduct before people. “Blameless” doesn’t mean “sinless,” because nobody but Jesus Christ ever lived a sinless life on this earth (1 Peter 2:21–22). The word means “having integrity, whole, unblemished.” It was used to describe the animals acceptable to God for sacrifice (Ex. 12:5; Lev. 1:3, 10). Noah’s conduct was such that his neighbors couldn’t find fault with him (Phil. 2:12–16). Noah was a man who walked with God (Gen. 6:9). His great-grandfather Enoch had “walked with God” and was suddenly taken to heaven and rescued from the impending judgment of the Flood (5:24).

The life of faith and obedience is compared to a “walk” because this life begins with one step: trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This step of faith leads to a daily walk, a step at a time, as the Lord directs us. He commands us to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2), “walk as children of light” (v. 8), “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 25), and “walk circumspectly [carefully]” (Eph. 5:15). “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant” (Ps. 25:15). When you walk with God, He speaks to you through His Word and tells you what you need to know and to do. Christians are more than just servants who do His will; we’re also His friends who know His plans (John 15:14–15).

Dr. Henry Morris calculated that the ark was large enough to hold the contents of over 500 livestock railroad cars, providing space for about 125,000 animals.

Trusting God’s covenant (v. 18). This is the first use of the word “covenant” in the Bible.

18. This first mention of *covenant* in the Bible has salvation for its starting-point (like the Mosaic covenant, Exod. 19:4, 5, and the new covenant, Matt. 26:28), but assures Noah of much more than his escape with his life. He goes into the ark not as a mere survivor but as the bearer of God’s promise for the new age. The content of the covenant will be unfolded in chapter 9, and will embrace the whole company; but meanwhile it is directed to the one man through whom the many will be spared. God’s will to save the family with its head (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14) is evident here, yet it waits on response: the same saving will is seen rejected in 19:12–14.

19, 20. A pair of each kind was the norm; the further detail, that sacrificial animals went in by sevens (7:2), of which a pair was for preserving the species (7:8, 9), is not yet allowed to intrude. The concern is with the rule, not the exception.

22. Noah’s entire obedience expressed entirety of faith; it is this that Hebrews 11:7 finds significant. It is also significant that God gave so crucial a task not to an angel but to a man, and one man at that; it agrees with his greater deliverance ‘through the obedience of the one’ (Rom. 5:19, RV).⁷

9b–21 The first scene in the flood story matches the final scene (8:20–9:17) and is a divine monologue (6:13–21), preceded by reflections on Noah’s character (9b–10) and the corruption of the earth (11–12); cf. 8:20–22.⁸

In legal contexts, “righteous” means “innocent” or “acquitted” of specific offenses, e.g., Exod 23:7–8; Deut 25:1. More generally, a righteous person is one who keeps the moral law: Ezekiel defines the righteous man as one “who does what is lawful and right” and then goes on to give examples of sins he avoids and good acts he does, e.g., clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, 18:5–9. Ezekiel’s definition seems to fit very well the many references to the righteous in the Psalms. Negatively, a righteous man avoids sin; positively, he does good to his neighbors. In short, it is the most general Hebrew term to describe good people. טוב, which is usually translated “good” in the OT, is used relatively rarely of men, much more frequently of things and situations. Someone called “good” in English would be described as “righteous” in Hebrew. So in describing Noah as righteous, he is being pointed to as a good man who lived according to God’s standards of behavior (cf. EM 6, 678–79).

“Blameless,” תמים, is a term much more rarely applied to people than “righteous.” The root idea is that of wholeness or completeness. Most frequently it describes blemish-free sacrificial animals (e.g., Lev 1:3, 10, etc.). Probably the same idea is carried over into the human realm. According to Ps 15:1–2, only the blameless may dwell in God’s holy hill. The blameless are characterized by their abstaining from iniquity (2 Sam 22:24; Ezek 28:15) and walking in the law of the LORD (Ps 119:1). Job is described as being blameless (12:4; cf. the similar term תם in 1:2, 8; 2:3), and Abraham (Gen 17:1) and all Israel (Deut 18:13) were told to be blameless. Blamelessness is the prerequisite for close fellowship with God. Every Israelite was expected to be righteous. Though Deuteronomy encourages the whole people to be blameless, this was actually achieved by few.

“Walked with God.” This phrase puts Noah on a par with Enoch (5:22, 24), the only other named individual to have walked with (התהלך את) God. Abraham, Isaac and godly kings “walked before” God (17:1; 48:15; 2 Kgs 20:3).

12 “And God saw....” The last use of these exact words is found in 1:31 (but cf. 6:5) where “God saw all that he had made was very good.”

The flood is described as “ruining the earth” which earlier has been said to have ruined itself. This is a clear case of a punishment fitting the crime, a favorite principle of biblical law; cf. 9:6; Exod 21:23–25. It should also be noted how Ezek 7 echoes the terminology of this verse (“end,” “violence,” “coming,” “is full”) in announcing the fall of Jerusalem.

⁷ Derek Kidner, [Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 96–97.

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, [Genesis 1–15](#), vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 169.