

Commentary Highlights

Genesis 6:1-22

NAC	New American Commentary
PTW	Preaching the Word
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
GIG	Gleanings in Genesis
CAL	Genesis: Calvin's Commentary
SOG	The Story of God Bible Commentary
BKW	Genesis by Bruce K Waltke
KUR	Genesis by Abraham Kuruvilla
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary

****The views presented in these commentary excerpts may not reflect the general understanding of these passages as expressed by Faith Bible Church, but are presented to help us better understand the Scriptures and how various scholars have interpreted them****

Genesis 6:1-4

The first four verses of Genesis present a large interpretative problem as we must try to decipher who the author of Genesis is referring to when he says, “sons of God” and “Nephilim.” Traditionally there have been three main views on this debate, all of which present intriguing evidence but all of which also come with their own hermeneutical baggage.

The first opinion is a relatively newer interpretation (which doesn't necessarily mean worse) that believes that the “sons of God” referred to in Genesis 6:1 are kings and rulers who misused their power and exercised extreme lust, as they took for themselves many different wives. This view relies on the fact that in the OT that the Hebrew word **הַאֱלֹהִים** (Elohim) can sometimes refer to “judges.” These individuals, according to the biblical record, were tyrants who “were supposed to administer justice, but instead they claimed for themselves deity, violated the divine order by forming royal harems, and perverted their mandate to rule the earth under God. Their offspring were the Nephilim-heroes characterized by physical might and military-political dominance.” (BKW). These faux divine-kings were descendants from Cain's line.

The problem with this view is several. To identify these judges or faux divine-kings as “sons of God” is not something the Hebrew text does elsewhere. Kenneth Matthews suggests that while in the ancient near east a king would be known as a “son of god,” there is no evidence with the OT or outside in similar histories of ancient cultures to refer to a plural group of kings as “sons of god.” With this objection and with the relatively scant historical support for this view, I believe it is safe to disregard this hypothesis.

The second opinion on this interpretive problem suggests that the term “sons of God” refers to various godly men within the Sethite lineage while the term “daughters of men”

refers to various women within the Cainite lineage. In this view, the godly men of Seth's line foolishly fell for the beauty of the women in Cain's line. If you remember, in Genesis 4 we see that the Cainite line is full of evil, while the Sethite line is modeled by godliness, therefore to yoke the two together would be an evil. While it may seem unfounded for God to punish mankind for marrying out of a godly lineage, you will remember that several books later as the Israelites are entering into the Promised Land, God tells them to only marry other Israelites lest they become tempted to forsake their God. The best example of this is Solomon, who was the wisest man alive in his day, yet it was his taking of many wives, most of whom were from other nations, that eventually led to his downfall. This type of desire from God can be further seen in the New Testament when through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul tells the Corinthian Church not to be "unequally yoked" in their marriages (2 Cor 6:14). Therefore, as some contend, God's condemnation of these marriages were on the basis of their potential to lead the godly in Seth's line astray.

The phrase "sons of God," in this interpretation is taken as a genitive of quality which renders the translation of בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים to mean "godly sons." "Humanity is divided into those who follow God and those who do not (two lines)" (KUR).

This particular view has a lot going for it, as it seems to flow naturally from the narrative's context in chapter 4 and 5. Genesis showed the evil of Cain's line and eventually pitted it against Seth's godly line in chapter five. Therefore, it flows naturally from chapter 4 and 5 that God would condemn the mixing of these lines to preserve the faithfulness of those who feared God. "Under this view, the lesson of Genesis 6:1-2 teaches the importance of godly marriages to preserve faith, calling men to prioritize faithfulness over the outward sensual appeal of women" (REC). Another positive stemming from this hypothesis is that since it was mankind who was held accountable by God verse 3, it stems that it was mankind who actually committed these godless acts. If this is the case, the Nephilim are simply offspring of these godly marriages. These offspring further rebelled against faithfulness to God and continued to lead humanity astray to the point where God "regretted" that he had created mankind. John Calvin suggests that these individuals were "stronger than the rest and relied on their own might and power, exalting themselves without restraint" (CAL).

As implied from the previous quote, this particular hypothesis is given weight by the many great Christian leaders who backed this interpretation. Men like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin are all heavy-hitters who adhered to this understanding. After the 3rd century this was the primary position in Christian tradition.

The third view suggests that the sons of God are fallen angels who have had sexual intercourse with the daughters of men. Upon first glance this interpretation seems out of the blue and impractical, but as we study scripture as a whole and the history of interpretation of this scripture, we will see that in reality this interpretation has the most evidence backing it.

This view suggests that fallen angels rebelled against God by removing themselves from their proper heavenly realm and had sexual relations with human women. The offspring of these affairs then are the Nephilim recording in 6:4. This view is consistent with early Jewish interpretation, as seen in the Apocryphal book 1 Enoch 6-11. As Matthews points out, “the strength of this traditional opinion lies in the use of this phrase (“sons of God”) elsewhere in referring to angelic hosts in God’s heavenly court.” Similarly, the New Testament also supports this particular view (see 1 Peter 3:19; 2 Peter 2:4; & Jude 6). Not only does early Judaism and the NT support this view, but this was the interpretation of the early church as well.

Opponents of this view raise the following objections to this interpretation. First, contextually this seems out of place for Genesis 6. Up to this point, there has been no direct indication that God even created spiritual beings known as angels, let alone that there were a host of fallen angels who could cohabit with mankind. The only indirect evidence of this is the serpent in Genesis 3. Second, opponents are quick to suggest that this interpretation sounds like similar myths in other ancient near eastern writings (see the *Epic of Gilgamesh*). Third, those who reject this view use Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25 to support their view. “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30).

However, these objections can be easily refuted. To rebut the first objection, we must first concede that it does contextually seem out of place, but just because the context has yet to introduce a topic like this does not mean that the author is unable to introduce it here. Even still, to interpret Scripture faithfully we must seek to understand the individual scripture in light of the whole narrative of the Bible. If, as it is contended here, that Peter and Jude both refer to this incident as a feature of antediluvian history, then we must contend that their records are correct, since, as evangelicals, we believe in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

Addressing the second objection, Christian philosopher and academic Francis Schaeffer once wrote, “More and more we are finding that mythology in general...very often has some historic base. And the interesting thing is that one myth which occurs over and over again in many parts of the world is that somewhere a long time ago supernatural beings had sexual intercourse with natural women and produced a special breed of people.” His point being, every myth (however distorted the myth is) finds its source in a historical event. In this view of Genesis 6, the angel’s intercourse with human women is the beginning historical event which has spun off various cultural interpretations.

The third objection seems airtight, but as we compare Genesis 6 with Matthew 22 we can note two important features. In Matthew 22 Jesus describes the intended purpose of unfallen angels to never marry. However, Genesis 6 is not describing unfallen angels, but rebellious angels who are purposefully rejecting their intended purpose. Secondly, Matthew 22 does not say that angels are unable have sexual relations through the

indwelling of a human male. In this view, fallen angels with possessed human men or veiled themselves as human men in order to marry and have sexual relations with women.

As we look at the support for this interpretation and its objections (which in my view can be easily dismissed), the best interpretation of this passage is to understand the “sons of God” as fallen angels who rejected God’s design for them and lusted after the daughters of men, producing an offspring known as the Nephilim. The corresponding flood, then, was a means of judging mankind and ridding the world of the Nephilim.

Genesis 6:5-6

(NAC) – This passage contrasts with the depiction of creation in chapter one where God saw that his creation was very good, but now God saw his creation was full of evil continually.

(NAC) – The term “wickedness is an inner compulsion that dominates [one’s] thought and is not just over action; they plot evil as a matter of lifestyle.” The evil and wickedness is said to originate from the hearts of mankind. The heart, for Hebrews, is the “center of a human’s cognitive processes.”

(NAC) – In understanding God’s “regret” (ESV) and his “grief,” Mathews says, “God’s response of grief over the making of humanity, however, is not remorse in the sense of sorrow over a mistaken creation; our verse shows that God’s pain has its source in the perversion of human sin. The making of “man” is no error; it is what “man” has made of himself...Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner’s rebellion. Acknowledging the possibility (emotions) of God does not diminish the immutability of his promissory purposes...God is not a dispassionate accountant overseeing the books of human endeavor; rather he makes a personal decision out of sorrowful loss to judge Noah’s wicked generation.”

Genesis 6:7-8

(NAC) – “The language of destruction in the flood narrative, such as the eruption of the “great deep” and the “floodgates of the heavens,” shows a reversal of creation days one through three. It is the uncreation of Adam’s old world. Persistent mention of the animals by creation’s categories and their divine provision point to the air and land creatures created on days five and six.”

(NAC) – “Noah is depicted as Adam *redivivus* (revived). He is the sole survivor and successor to Adam.”

(PTW) – The flood account can be neatly organized into a chiasm:

A – God resolves to destroy the corrupt race (6:11-13)

B – Noah builds an ark according to God’s instructions (6:14-22)

C – The Lord commands the remnant to enter the ark (7:1-9)

D – The flood begins (7:10-16)
E – The flood prevails 150 days, and the mountains are covered (7:17-24)
F – God remembers Noah (8:1a)
E' – The flood recedes 150 days, and the mountains are visible (8:1b-5)
D' – The earth dries (8:6-14)
C' – God commands the remnant to leave the ark (8:15-19)
B' – Noah builds an altar (8:20)
A' – The Lord resolves not to destroy humankind (8:21-22)

Genesis 6:9-10

(NAC) – “Noah is distinguished from the “people of his time” by his upright character. His piety and righteous courage became renowned in later times (Ezek. 14:14, 20; Isa. 54:9-10), and he was commonly associated with the virtue of godliness (Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20), receiving the unique appellation “preacher of righteousness (1 Pet. 2:5).”

(NAC) – Noah serves as an example of a man who through the grace of God bestowed upon him, stood out in a culture of unrestrained evil as a visible picture of righteousness, blamelessness, and what it looked like to walk with God. Noah’s description that he “walked with God” points back to his ancestor Enoch, thusly connecting Noah with the faithful line of the coming redeemer.

(PTW) – “The demonized culture did not divert or pervert him, nor could it indict him. He was the one bright spot among the numberless darkened souls of the primeval world.”

(BKW) – Noah’s righteous nature connects him with the promised seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. “Blameless literally means whole, complete, signifying wholehearted commitment and wholeness of relationship...Blameless denotes to abstain from sin, not to be without sin.”

Genesis 6:11-12

(NAC) – The corruption of the earth is repeated three times in these two verses, highlighting the severe moral decline of mankind. Man was supposed to fill the earth with faithful progeny, but instead mankind filled the world with violence and evil. The phrase “their ways” shows that mankind’s sin was not isolated, but instead it was all-encompassing.

(BKW) – “The expression (earth was corrupt) occurs seven times in the narrative [and] signifies “to spoil or disfigure.” Violence (*hamas*) is the cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal right of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality.”

Genesis 6:13-16

(NAC) – God determines to wipe the entire world. The phrase “all flesh” indicates that the sinful/evil actions of mankind have had a profound effect on the natural world around mankind, “for the earth is filled with violence through them.”

(BKW) – Waltke compares the Genesis account of the flood with the Babylonian flood account by showing that in the Babylonian the gods keep their decisions secret, but God stoops down to righteous Noah to reveal his plans. Secondly, in the Babylonian narrative the flood hero is accompanied onboard with his family, a craftsman, and a boat master, as compared to the Genesis narrative that shows only Noah's family on board, trusting the navigation to God. Third, in the Babylonian narrative the flood gets out of control of the gods and they become frightened and cower like dogs, as opposed to the Genesis narrative which shows God in control of the waters the entire time. Fourth, the Babylonian narrative lists the ark as a 180ft cube, which would not last in the chaotic waters of a flood. The description of the ark in Genesis is of a seaworthy ship, able to be stable amidst the flood waters. Fifth, the Babylonian story "focuses on the flood hero's actions, Genesis, on God's activity and Noah's obedience."

(NAC) – The dimensions of the ark, as compared to a similar account in the ancient near eastern work *Gilgamesh*, are seaworthy and remarkable precise. The ark is made of "gopher wood," which is a wood unknown to modern readers and is covered in pitch, allowing the vessel to be watertight. The dimensions of the ark are approximately 450ft long, 75ft wide, and 45 ft high (if a cubit is 18 inches). There is no rudder or directional system described in its construction, highlighting the fact that Moses was totally dependent upon God.

Genesis 6:17-21

(NAC) – The continual use of "all" and "every" in this text helps us to see that this was a world-wide cataclysm, not a regional flood.

(NAC) – There is a connection to chapter one in verse 19-21 when God lists all the animals that will be brought onto the flood signifying that God is saving a piece of all creation to repopulate the earth after the flood subsides. The animals are said to have "come" to Noah, which suggests that God divinely propels each of these pairs of animals to board the ship. Noah is not rounding them up, but they are brought to him through God's omnipotence.

(PTW) – "The only thing that Noah had to sustain him was the bare word of God, God's promise."

Genesis 6:22

(NAC) – Noah is told to have done everything that was commanded of him. "Noah's actions model for later generations the obedience and the efficacy of faith when it is placed in the veracity of God's word."

(PTW) – The record of Noah's obedience is listed four times in the flood narrative to highlight that Noah was indeed righteous, he trusted in God, and he did everything that was commanded of him (6:22, 7:5, 9, 16).

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