

God's Judgment and Grace

(Genesis 6:1-8)

I. The Wicked World (6:1-7)

When you live as long as they were living, you can get really good at being bad.

2 primary interpretations of this wickedness:

1) The “sons of the gods” are men from the line of Seth (ch. 5) who have taken daughters of men (ungodly women from the line of Cain (ch. 4).

The interpretation of Genesis 6 that takes “the sons of God” as referring to the godly line of Seth is most natural since it avoids the obvious problem of how spirit beings could copulate with humans. Moreover, it has weighty support in that it is the view of many theological giants of church history. It is not an early view—we will come back to that later—but it appears in such thinkers as Chrysostom and Augustine in the early church, and is adopted by reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and their followers.¹

Proponents cite Jesus’ explicit teaching that angels “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt. 22:30) as evidence.

2) The “sons of the gods” are fallen angels (demons) who cohabit with women.

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 [or, Septuagint], Philo *De Gigant* 2:358), Josephus (*Antiquities* 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 (Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) also take this line.²

“sons of God” (Job 1:6, 2:1) – angelic beings

Jude 6–7 (NKJV) - ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ⁷ as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 306.

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

2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9 (NKJV) - ⁴ For if God did not spare **the angels who sinned**, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly... ⁹ *then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

Old Testament scholar **Gordon Wenham** asserts, "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. ... If the modern reader finds this story incredible, that reflects a materialism that tends to doubt the existence of spirits, good or ill. But 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."³

Who are the "Nephilim"? Probably the offspring of the wicked cohabitation described in ch. 4.

May/June 2022 edition of *Christianity Today* writes, "The word Nephilim has an obscure meaning. It can mean **"fallen ones,"** but the early Greek Septuagint translates it as "giants." Even more mysteriously, it doesn't appear that the Genesis flood wiped them off the face of the earth. As **Genesis 6:4 says**, "**The Nephilim were on the earth both in those days and afterward.**" And they show up elsewhere in the story of Israel, such as when the spies sent to explore Canaan returned to give a pessimistic report to Moses: "**We even saw the Nephilim there—the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim! To ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and we must have seemed the same to them.**" (Num. 13:33). In Deuteronomy, Moses confirmed the existence of these rather large creatures (1:28; 2:10). And as a 2019 article in the online journal *Knowing Scripture* explains, some have linked the Nephilim to the giants driven out of the land by Joshua, or even to Goliath."⁴

II. God's Grace (6:3, 7-8)

Exodus 34:6 - ⁶ ... "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,"

Commentator Victor Hamilton: Is this an age limit, or is it a period of grace prior to the Flood (i.e., his [remaining] days shall be 120 years)? The first alternative faces the difficulty that most of the people in the rest of Genesis lived well beyond 120 years. It is possible to interpret the longer life spans of the patriarchs as mitigation or suspension of the divine penalty, just as an earlier announced divine penalty ("**on the day you eat of it you shall surely die**") was not immediately implemented. But the (imminent) withdrawal of the divine Spirit as a means of lowering the life span of humanity does not make a great deal of sense. Rather, it seems to presage some event that is about to occur. Accordingly, we prefer to see in this phrase a reference to a period of time that prefaces the Flood's beginning. It is parallel to **Jonah 3:4**, "**Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.**" God's hand of judgment is put on hold.⁵

Four applications:

- 1. Satan always attempts to pervert God's plans. (Genesis 3:15)**
- 2. When the godly intermingle with the ungodly, it always causes problems. (2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 7:39)**
- 3. God's judgment is always certain.**

Matt. 24:37–39 - ³⁷ But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- 4. God has always provided a way of salvation. (Acts 4:12)**

³ Wenham, 140.

⁴ Daniel Darling, "Nebulous Nephilim" *Christianity Today*, May/June 2022 edition, 65.

⁵ Hamilton, Victor, *The Book of Genesis, chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 269.