

Genesis 6:1-4.

My position: Genesis 6:1-4 is ultimately a case of human kingship having gone awry. More specifically, it is the dynasty of Cain that has given full vent to evil. So much so, that this evil generation of Cain has crowded out the line of Seth so that there is only one righteous man left, namely, Noah. Or said in terms of Genesis 3:15, the offspring of the Serpent have been triumphing over the offspring of the woman. This tyrannical rule by the dynasty of Cain gives rise to the circumstances described in Genesis 6:5, 6:11, and 6:12 and is why God sends the flood.

More detailed notes on Genesis 6:1-4

Genesis 6:1 – When man began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them,

The first observation is that in verse 1 we are clearly dealing with *the human sphere of life on earth*. This is important. The language and theme of Genesis 6:1-4 echo Genesis 1 and 2. The word “multiply” (*ravah* in the Hebrew) along with “daughters were born” brings us back to the divine mandate in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Genesis 1:28	Genesis 6:1
“And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply (<i>ravah</i>) and fill the earth...””	“When man began to multiply (<i>ravah</i>) on the face of the ground...”

There is also a word play in the Hebrew between the words “man” (*adam* in the Hebrew) and “ground” (*adamah* in the Hebrew). You can hear the similarity. *Adam* (man) was taken from the *adamah* (ground). I suggest this signals a relationship between the ground (i.e. creation) and the man that may be described as one of solidarity. The presence of this language in Genesis 6:1 reflects back to Genesis 2:5-7 when God forms the man, and again suggest we are dealing with human and earthly theatre.

Genesis 2:5-7	Genesis 6:1
“When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man (<i>adam</i>) to work the	“When man (<i>adam</i>) began to multiply on the face of the ground (<i>adamah</i>)...”

ground (*adamah*), 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground (*adamah*)— 7 then the LORD God formed the man (*adam*) of dust from the ground (*adamah*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man (*adam*) became a living creature.”

In fact, man’s (*adam*) relationship to the ground (*adamah*) has been of the utmost concern throughout the opening chapters of Genesis. Adam’s sin affects the ground and his relationship with it (Gen. 3:17, 19, 23):

“And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground (*adamah*) because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life”

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground (*adamah*), for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

“therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground (*adamah*) from which he was taken”

A similar situation occurs with Cain’s sin where once again man and his relationship to the ground is affected (Gen. 4:10-12, 14):

“And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground (*adamah*). And now you are cursed from the ground (*adamah*), which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground (*adamah*), it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

“Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground (*adamah*), and from your face I shall be hidden.”

And then of Noah, we read (Gen. 5:29):

“and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground (*adamah*), that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”

Because of this constant focus on man’s relationship with ground, by the time we arrive at Genesis 6:1 and read “When man (*adam*) began to multiply on the face of the ground (*adamah*) ...”, we should be asking, “*What is going to happen this time with the man and the ground?*”

Or let’s put it another way:

One of the principles of Bible interpretation we will come back to time and again is that when a biblical author (especially the apostle Paul in the New Testament) alludes to or quotes from another passage in Scripture, often times the author intends for us to have the entire context of that passage in mind. So when bits and pieces of a narrative are alluded to or quoted, we are to recall the entire narrative and its context.

So, what narrative does the author have in mind?

By stringing together Genesis 2:5-7 and Genesis 1:28, the author is refreshing our memories of God’s good purpose for mankind in the created order. In Genesis 2 man is made in relation to the ground to work and cultivate it. He enjoys an intimate relationship with his Creator who breathed into him the breath of life. And male and female are created in the image of God – they are His vice-regents meant to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and rule over it on God’s behalf reflecting His glory throughout. Genesis 6:1 serves to remind us of this and the “very good” God declared over it as the way life was supposed to be.

But already here in Genesis 6:1 the language looms ambiguously ominous in the text with the use of ground (*adamah*). From Genesis 3, up to this point in the story, man’s relationship with ground has not been good. If you’ll recall, Adam, who was made from the ground (*adamah*), was supposed to be a servant-worker (Hebrew: *avad*) of the ground (*adamah*; Gen. 2:5; cf. 2:15). But he disobeys God and the ground (*adamah*) becomes the arena of Adam’s chastisement (Gen. 3:17-18, 23). Adam’s son Cain is also a servant-worker (*avad*) of the ground (*adamah*; Gen. 4:2), just like his dad. And

just like his dad, Cain doesn't do so well either. We may even say he does worse. Because of him, the innocent ground (*adamah*) suffers and is forced to drink the blood (Gen. 6:10, 11) of Cain's brother. Here again the ground becomes the arena of Cain's chastisement (Gen. 6:12), just as with his father Adam.

Now we arrive in Genesis 6:1 and we are once more presented with an episode of man (*adam*) and the ground (*adamah*). The periscope opens:

“When man (*adam*) began to multiply on the face of the ground (*adamah*)...

As good readers of the text cooperating with the inspired authors careful choice of language and narrative flow, we must wonder: Will this episode of man (*adam*) and the ground (*adamah*) be different? Or, will we see the continued recapitulation of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4? Will man's corrupt heart result in disobedience eliciting a new occasion where the ground becomes the arena of man's chastisement, just as with Adam, and just as with Cain? Or will it finally be different this time around and the ground yield blessing and enjoyment (such as anticipated in Noah in Gen. 5:29)?

With these questions top of mind, we now we come to Genesis 6:2:

Genesis 6:2 – and the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took their wives any they chose.

Oh no! This isn't good! If Genesis 6:1 echoes Genesis 1 and 2, Genesis 6:2 takes us right back to Genesis 3 and 4 – right back to where we don't want to be.

Genesis 3:6	Genesis 6:2
“And the woman saw (<i>ra'ab</i>) that the tree was good/attractive (<i>tov</i>)”	“And the sons of God saw (<i>ra'ab</i>) that the daughters of men were good/attractive (<i>tov</i>)”

We have a problem! When the woman *saw* that the tree was *good*, she was on her way to a world of hurt and making a mess out of things (along with her husband, who was with her!) And now, whoever or whatever these “sons of God” are, they seem to be traversing the same path as Eve. Just as the man and woman declared what was good in their own eyes, versus the eyes of God, now so it is for these sons of God – they are grasping after the images taken in through their eyes. And just as the woman's poor exercise in judgement led her *to take* of the of the fruit, the sons of God now *take* of the women:

Genesis 3:6 (cont'd)	Genesis 6:2 (cont'd)
“and she took (<i>laqach</i>) of its fruit and ate”	“and they took (<i>laqach</i>) as their wives any they chose.”

Reading in the original language or listening with the ears of the original audience, one can hardly miss these parallels. But the travesty doesn't end here. Genesis 6:2 presents the sons of God as not only recapitulating the sin of the woman in Genesis 3, but also the sin of Cain's descendants in Genesis 4. They are committing polygamy, like Lamech's bigamy in Genesis 4:18! Their behavior shows that they are aligned with the Serpent and stand opposed to God's good created order (remember Genesis 3:15? These are the offspring of the serpent!).

Genesis 4:19	Genesis 6:2
“And Lamech took (<i>laqach</i>) two wives”	“and they took (<i>laqach</i>) as their wives any they chose.”

And now our question is sadly answered: Things aren't getting any better. The sin of Genesis 3 and Genesis 4 are repeated. We should expect God to once again act, and once again enlist creation in His righteous judgment upon man, just as with Adam, and just as with Cain. That will come in the following flood narrative.

Before getting further into the flood, we must explore in greater detail who or what these “son's of God” are in these opening verses of Genesis 6, as many different answers have been given.

Who or what, then, are these sons of God?

There have been different explanations for the identity of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2. The Hebrew reads, “*bene ha'elohim*,” which may be translated either as “the sons of gods” or “the sons of god.” Some have supposed these figures are angelic beings. This is based on a handful of Old Testament passages which refer to angels or heavenly beings as “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; Ps 89:6 [MT v7]). Under this interpretation, what we have is an account of some sort of intermarriage between non-terrestrial beings and human women.

The largest obstacle facing this interpretation, is that the punishment meted out in Genesis 6:3 doesn't fit the crime. Under this interpretation, whatever the transgression is in Genesis 6:2, it is being carried out by non-human creatures. Yet, the judgement in verse 3 falls squarely upon human men in the flesh. The word of YHWH even emphasizes their fleshy nature, “My *ruach* shall not abide in man

forever, *for he is flesh.*” If this is an episode of relations between heavenly beings and human women, then we should expect God’s judgment to pertain to either the heavenly beings or the human women. We should not expect God’s judgment to deal solely with an innocent third party, namely human men, who are not part of the account. My opinion is that the verdict of verse 3 precludes all likelihood that the author regarded the “sons of god” as preternatural beings. Furthermore, as shown above, the opening clause of the entire account in 6:1, “*When men began to multiply on the face of the earth...*” depicts the stage for the following drama to be firmly set on earth with human characters, not corporeal (fancy way of saying – “having material bodies”) angelic beings on earth.

A second alternative interpretation, then, takes Genesis 6:2 as an instance of religiously mixed marriages between men of the line of Seth and women from the line of Cain. While not completely outside the realm of possibilities, this requires a sudden shift in the meaning of “man” between Genesis 6:1 and 6:2. Under this scheme “man” in verse 1 must refer to “man” generically and then in verse 2 “man” as specifically the Cainite line. Strongly suggesting against this is that the “men” of verses 1 and 2 are the fathers of the “daughters” of verses 1 and 2. Since daughters of verse 2 are the same as the daughters of verse 1, the men of verses 1 and 2 should be understood as identical as well. Another obstacle facing this rendering is that one is at a loss to understand or explain why these interfaith marriages produced offspring described as the *Nephilim* and *Gibborim* (sometimes translated “giants” and “mighty men”, respectively) in verse 4.

A third option seems to do more justice to all the terms involved as well as the context of Genesis 1-4. While “sons of god” may refer to angelic beings, it is also a term used of human rulers. Referring to a king as a son of god is well documented in the ancient Near East. Kings in Egypt received such titles as “Son of Osiris” and “Son of Re” (Osiris and Re were both Egyptian gods).

These same royal overtones are present in Genesis. Adam and Eve are made as the image and likeness of God and given the divine commission to subdue and have dominion. Made in the image of God, Adam is set up as God’s royal vice-regent. Adam is also the son of God. In Genesis 5:1-3 Adam’s creation as the image and likeness of God is connected to sonship, so that being made in the image of God is akin to being the son of God. Luke makes the connection even more explicit for us in his genealogy: “the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke. 3:38).

Interpreting “sons of god” as human men, and particularly as royals, finds support in Jewish interpretive tradition which took them to be “men of the aristocracy, princes

and nobles.”¹ This then helps elucidate the nature of their offspring as the *Nephilim* and *gibborim*, to which we will now turn.

The root of the word *Nephilim* has military connotations and is used of Joshua’s warriors (Josh. 11:7) and of violent attackers who struck down Job’s servants (Job 1:15). If this is the proper background, then the idea being conveyed is that of attackers or violent men. The only other occurrence of the word *Nephilim* as it appears in Genesis 6:4 is in Numbers 13:33. This is also in a military context. In Numbers the Hebrew spies report that the land of Canaan is occupied by the *Nephilim*, and provide this an excuse as to why Israel will not be able to militarily possess the land. We may conclude then that the *Nephilim* are mighty warriors and perhaps in our context, mighty warriors who are bringing about violence (cf. Genesis 6:11).

Gibborim is often translated as “mighty men”. But this word also has royal overtones. In Genesis 10:8-9 it is used of the king Nimrod. Ultimately it is used of God (Deut. 10:17; Is. 42:13; Jer. 20:11; cf. Is. 9:3). In the book of Joshua it is often used of armed warriors (Josh. 1:14; 6:2; 8:3; 10:2, 7). We are once again firmly in the realm of kingship and government.

“*The men of renown* (more literally, *the men of name*) also lends itself to our case that we are dealing with the ruling and military class of society. In numbers 16:2 a similar designation (i.e. men of name) is used of the ruling chiefs of the Israelite congregation.

What I am proposing is that in Genesis 6:1-4 we are dealing with a tyrannical and oppressive ruling regime. Though there is also an intentional conflation of terms with the terminology “sons of god(s).” First, rulers are supposed to reflect the character and attitude of the one true God. The irony is that by referring to themselves as “sons of gods” these human rulers are indicting themselves as they are liable to God’s judgement, whom they are supposed to represent. These human rulers are no gods at all and are even somewhat mocked in the text for their carnal fleshly desires (Gen. 6:2) and are ultimately confronted with their own mortality (Gen. 6:3). But at the same time, by using the language of “sons of god”, with its angelic overtones, the text is pointing to a greater reality, which is this: these human rulers are not acting strictly on their own. They are offspring of the Serpent and instruments in the hands of the dark and demonic powers (i.e. fallen angels). To be even more blunt, these rulers are under the sway of Satan and his minions. We are witnessing the playing out of the

¹ Kline, Meredith, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4”, *WTJ*, 194

prophecy of Genesis 3:15: strife between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman.

I will later argue that this way of speaking of corrupt rulers is picked up by the Hebrew scribes in the intertestamental period in books like 1 Enoch to describe in somewhat veiled and cryptic terms wretched rulers outside and within Israel.

I'll conclude this section with the informative words of Hebraist Franz Delitzsch:

“This leads to something like possession, and here we must let the matter rest. They were daemons who accomplished what is here narrated, by means of men whom they made their instruments, i.e. through demoniacs, who with demoniacal violence drew women within the radius of their enchantments and made them subserve the purpose of their sensual lust....There is still no sufficient reason why the narrator of vi. 1-4 should not have regarded the disturbance of the boundary between the spiritual and human sphere as a portion of the general and deep corruption which brought about the deluge.”