

Genesis 5:1-6:8

Lesson 2

Some want to end this section at verse 32 but it really extends to 6:8 as the family history of Adam. The phrase that this is the family history of Noah does not occur until 6:9, therefore this is the beginning of the next section. The account of the creation of Adam is used as a preface for the genealogy of Noah.¹

Having disposed of the line of Cain this section presents a vertical genealogy that covers ten generations that span the period from the creation of mankind through to the advent of Noah, who witnessed the destruction of the world. This type of genealogy is paralleled in pagan sources by a list of Sumerian Kings who reigned before the flood as recorded by Berossus, who was a Babylonian priest from the

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, in the Word Biblical Commentary Series (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), p. 121.

third century B. C. He wrote a history of Babylonia in Greek and he too details ten antediluvians, with the last also being the hero of the flood account.²

It has been conjectured that Western Semites favored the convention of the ten-generation pattern for genealogies in general and that this tradition left its mark on the historiography of Israel. This same phenomenon occurs again in the genealogy of David from Perez as recorded in Ruth 4:18-22 and 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9-15. Such a pattern is utilized for theological purposes and not for historical accuracy. After the flood ten more generations separate Noah from Abraham. The birth of Abraham is seen as another climactic turning point in human history. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is a deliberate symmetrical schematization of

² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, in The JPS Torah Commentary series (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 40.

history. The idea behind this is to demonstrate that history is meaningful and not simply a haphazard series of events, but the unfolding of a divinely ordained, meaningful design. This conveys the message that all human behavior lies under the continual scrutiny of God.³

It must be emphasized that Moses does not seek to present a comprehensive history. This account is highly selective and episodic in alignment with its theological purpose. Writing in this fashion allows the author to bring together occurrences that otherwise seem disconnected. Simultaneously, the divine blessing of 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply,” is shown to be in the process of being fulfilled. This section also demonstrates the great teaching of the first two chapters that proclaim that the entire human race is descended from a common ancestry and therefore constitutes a

³ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 40.

unity.⁴

The remarkably long lives of the antediluvians in Genesis is in some senses mirrored in the accounts of Mesopotamian heroes. The combined lifespan of the antediluvian kings list of Berossus comes to 432,000 years; that of the Sumerian list adds up to 242,200 years. By way of contrast to these two lists the Genesis list from Adam to the flood is 1,656 years: remarkably short by comparison with these other ancient accounts.⁵

5¹ This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God.

“This is the list of the descendants of Adam,” was likely the title of an ancient genealogical work that served as a written source for the present chapter and also for 11:10-27. The Hebrew term *sefer* (סֵפֶר), that is translated

⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 40.

⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, pp. 40-41.

here as “record” specifically denotes a written record and not an oral composition.⁶ The usage of these written sources, which were possibly familiar to the audience, add a point of connection between this new composition (Genesis) and the original audience’s knowledge of history.

The notion that all humanity is descended from a single ancestor lays the foundation for much that is taught in the Bible and indicates that all are connected in some way. In “Adam” all human beings have their origin and this origin is connected in Judaism to the “Golden Rule” (Leviticus 19:18), which then means the unity and the equality of the human race links back to this original act of God and not some arbitrary standard set up by mankind. Once again the notation that humankind is made in the “likeness” of God is noted.⁷ This is a critical point throughout the Bible and carries with it responsibility and expectation. God expects mankind to fulfill his destiny of being God’s “image” and representing God on earth.

⁶ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 41.

⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 41.

The godly line of Seth is linked with this original intention that God had for humanity. God's original intent of creation will be carried out through this line and not through that of Cain.⁸

² Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind" (Adam) when they were created.

It is interesting to note that in this context the name for both "male" and "female" was *Adam* and probably here carries a meaning of something like "humankind."

³ When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.

Seth will be the child of destiny and so he bears the likeness of his father, who bore the likeness of God to all future generations.⁹ Verse 3 begins without any further reference to the female aspect of humanity and the genealogy will be reckoned through the male.

⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis A Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 113.

⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 42.

⁴The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters.

The purpose of this genealogy is not to be historic in nature but to demonstrate a theological message through a recitation of certain historical information, but there is no attempt to be exhaustive in this. Seth will be the line of Noah and from this line Abraham will come.

⁵Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.

Note that Adam dies at a very old age but is not the longest living human recorded here.

⁶When Seth had lived one hundred five years, he became the father of Enosh.

⁷Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

⁸Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; and he died.

⁹ When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan.

¹⁰ Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹¹ Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.

¹² When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel.

¹³ Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴ Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

¹⁵ When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he became

the father of Jared.

¹⁶ Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁷ Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; and he died.

¹⁸ When Jared had lived one hundred sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch.

¹⁹ Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

²⁰ Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.

²¹ When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah.

22 Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

The seventh in the line is singled out for special attention. In the later writing of the Jews, Enoch would become the focus of a great many legends that connected him with secret knowledge of the heavens, with mathematics, astronomy and especially with devising the solar calendar. The life of Enoch is described with the phrase “walked with God” instead of the standard phrase “he lived.” This idiom is used only again in the description of Noah at 6:9 and in a slightly varied form to describe the ideal priest in Malachi 2:6.¹⁰

23 Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years.

24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

The phrase “walked with God” is repeated here perhaps to note that the life of Enoch on earth was not cut

¹⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 43.

short due to sin. It is then followed by the curious phrase “God took him,” which is used as a euphemism for death at Ezekiel 24:16, 18, and Jonah 4:3. Whether it is strictly speaking of “death” here seems unlikely, at least in the same way as the others in the list died. The account of Elijah at 2 Kings 2 gave rise to the idea that Enoch underwent the experience of apotheosis the same as Elijah.¹¹ Whether they achieved divine status is open to interpretation within Judaism, but there were certainly traditions within Judaism that exalt Enoch to the position of being ruler of the angels and at the very least he nor Elijah faced death in the normal fashion.

²⁵ When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech.

The man who had the shortest life, fathers the antediluvian that had the longest life.

²⁶ Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 43.

27 Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died.

Methuselah has the accolade of being the person with the longest lifespan recorded in scripture.

28 When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son;

29 he named him Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.”

The arrival of the tenth generation marks a crucial turning point in the history of humankind and brings this list to its completion. The name Noah literally means “rest” and he is thought to be the first human being born after the death of Adam. His arrival was thought to signify some easing of the curse laid upon the soil because of Adam’s sin.¹²

30 Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred

¹² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 44.

ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters.

³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; and he died.

³² After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Because of the extraordinarily advanced age of Noah, when he began having sons, there would be no grandchildren to be taken into the ark. It is also noteworthy that he has no daughters, which may be connected with 6:1-2 which tells of the corruption associated with the “daughters of men.” This in some sense conveys that his immediate family was not corrupted by the sin that befell others. The name “Shem” means “name, fame or renown” the name Ham is obscure in meaning but is synonymous with “Egypt” in Psalms 78:51; 105: 23, 27; and 106: 22. The meaning of the name Japheth is unknown.¹³ These three men would become the progenitors of the three branches

¹³ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, pp. 44-45.

that encompass all of humanity.

6 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,

This section begins perhaps one of the most interesting and at least in some circles one of the most controversial in the Old Testament.

² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.

The phrase (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים) “sons of God” has been at the center of this controversy, as it seems to some to be reminiscent of the legends of the intercourse between the gods and human beings with the resulting progeny being demigods in pagan traditions. At first glance this text may appear to be of the same genre as those texts, but upon closer examination there are some major differences: the offspring of these humans are not demigods they are mortal. The actual function of this text may have been intended to counter polytheistic mythology. The picture here may partake of the mythical ideas, but it does not overstep the bounds of monotheism. There is one God and he metes out

judgment and even shortens the lifespan of these “mighty men” for despite their might they remain mortal.¹⁴

There are a number of different attempts to interpret the “sons of God” as something other than spiritual beings such as what we might term as “angels.” Some interpretations would take the “sons of God” to be in the line of Seth while the “daughters of men” would be taken as being descendants of Cain. There are a number of problems with this interpretation. One problem is that it is not known from antiquity; another is that it gives no reason that the offspring of such a union would produce “heroes” (or if you follow the Septuagint these offspring were giants (γίγαντες)). Additionally, this interpretation gives very little reason for the tremendous response that follows from God whereby he shortens the life of humanity and ultimately will destroy the earth.

The interpretation of this text as designating a union between human women and angelic beings is the most ancient view and also the view held by most modern

¹⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 45.

scholars. This interpretation is assumed in the earliest Jewish exegesis of this text for example *1 Enoch 6:2ff.*; *Jubilees 5:1*, the Septuagint, Philo *De Gigant 2:266*; Josephus *Antiquities 1:73* and the Qumran Scrolls (*1 QapGen 2:1*; *CD 2:17-19* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. The New Testament (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6, 7) and the earliest Christian writers (Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen) also take this same line of interpretation.¹⁵

Modern scholars that support this same view put forward three main suppositions for supporting it. First, in other verses of the Old Testament (Psalms 29:1, Job 1:6) the phrase “sons of God” refers to heavenly beings. Second, in 6:1-4 the contrast is between the “sons of the gods” on the one side and the “daughters of man” on the other. The alternative interpretations take the line that the “sons of some men” marry the “daughters of other men.” It should be noted that in this discussion “man” seems to be used to refer to all mankind at 6:1 and not to one part as opposed to another part. It would seem natural then that the term

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 139.

“daughters of men” would have an equally broad interpretation that included all of mankind and does not refer to some segment of the whole. Finally, in Ugaritic literature “sons of God” refers to members of the divine pantheon and it is likely that here the author of Genesis is using the phrase in a similar fashion.¹⁶

In later Judaism a royal interpretation of this text was introduced that identified the “sons of God” with nobles in the second century A.D. This interpretation seems to have been intended to counter what was deemed as an unhealthy interest in angelic beings that rose to prominence during this time. From this time forward this royal interpretation became the dominant view amongst Jewish rabbis.¹⁷

It should also be noted that this union of spiritual beings with human beings is closely associated with one class of demons, with a special notoriety for possessing people. In Judaism there were thought to be three classes of demon: 1. The disembodied spirits of men. 2. A

¹⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 139.

¹⁷ Philip S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of “Sons of God” in Genesis 6”, in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 23 [1972], pp. 60-71.

supernatural being whom never was earthly. 3. Those that were half human and half spirit like the spirits released from the bodies of the Nephilim by the destruction of the flood.¹⁸

³ Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide in mankind forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”

This verse demonstrates that God is the source of life in human beings and as such he limits the length of the life of human beings as a result of either this last event or the accumulation of what has gone before. The proximity of this declaration to the events regarding the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” would suggest a connection between the two events, especially with the verse that follows mentioning the “Nephilim.”

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

¹⁸ R. Campbell Thompson, *Semitic Magic Its Origins and Development* (York Beach ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 2000), pp. 2-3.

The term Nephilim is one of those that strikes the imagination of many. Perhaps it is the sparsity of information that makes the mysterious term so mesmerizing. Amongst the Qumran scrolls a work entitled “The Book of Giants” has been found amongst the fragments. It is based largely upon these few verses from Genesis. Ginzberg lists details of other legends amongst the Jews that refer to the Nephilim.¹⁹ Whatever occurred here it seems to be at least a major part of the motivation for the flood. Some of the legends refer to the Nephilim as giants and the story is that God destroyed the earth in order to save mankind and the animals from these giants who not only developed an appetite for animal flesh, but for human flesh as well.

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

The evil continued to grow from generation to generation until the description given in this verse becomes

¹⁹ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 126 ff.

the norm. The creation that God had declared “very good” in chapter 1 has reached this point where humanity is characterized by evil thoughts continually. The judicial aspect of God’s personality has declared that it is no longer “good” but now is described as “evil.” The evil came to dominate because of the negative influence of humanity.

⁶And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

The decision that follows is not motivated by anger or any other emotion other than sorrow and grief. This aspect of God would certainly have been in sharp contrast to the easily angered and disinterested gods of Egypt and Mesopotamia. God is grieved to his heart, which is expressed in human terms so that his audience can comprehend the nature of God and how evil affects the heart of God.

⁷So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

The moral corruption of humanity has now polluted all of creation and God expresses sorrow directed primarily at humanity, but there is a clear indication that not only has humankind been corrupted, but that man's corruption has spilled over onto the animal kingdom. The ground had borne the consequences of mankind's sins earlier and now so do the animals.

⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.²⁰

The one bright spot in this section is that through all of the darkness and evil, one man found favor in God's sight. At this point in the narrative we are not given any reason for Noah to have found favor with God when all others have not. There are several things of note here. One is that the all-encompassing words regarding humankind do not seem to include Noah. Note it does not say "one man" was righteous or that he was "good," but that he "found favor" with God. The verses that follow will indicate clearly that God's selection of Noah is neither arbitrary nor capricious. This

²⁰ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ge 5:1–6:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

verse ends one section and leaves an enticement to read further leaving open the question of why Noah?

Summary

This section serves as a central connecting point to demonstrate the common ancestry of humanity and to demonstrate the continual rise of evil from within humanity. That evil reaches a climax when the “sons of God” have children with the “daughters of men” and give rise to the “Nephilim”. It is likely that the information given here fits in well with a common mythological understanding that was known to the Israelites. The text strips the myth from the stories that they were familiar with and at the same time imbues this God that leads them in the desert with compassion and concern for His creation.

This section leads us to the point where Noah is introduced and his story is crucial to understanding what God expects of mankind and what He will not tolerate. We are left hanging at the end of this section as to what qualities or attributes God expects at this point in the

history of humanity. The author wants to lead the readers to enter in the story by leaving them hanging at the end of this section.

Main Points

- **God is creator and as such has endowed mankind with His image.**
- **Every inclination of the heart of man is toward evil.**
- **There is a hint of hope introduced as Noah finds favor with God.**