

Noah: A Prequel (Genesis 6:1-8)

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[0 : 00] Hello, hi, PCBC English. Thanks for having me. And it's lovely to be here to worship with all of you again.

Last time I speak was in December, I think. So thank you, Pastor William, for trusting me to deliver another sermon.

And right, so let me bring you a little update. So right now I'm studying the graduate diploma in applied theology in Cary Baptist College.

And also at the same time, I'm doing a pastor leadership diploma. So yeah, life is totally full on. And I'm also working full time. So if you can, pray for me.

It hasn't been easy, but I'm really thankful for the journey. Okay, right. So yeah, let's move on to the first slide here. Okay, do you guys still have a faint memory of what happened the Monday before?

[1 : 06] Yeah, I mean Monday last week, right? Yeah. Do you recognize where it is? It's Green Lane. It was flooding everywhere.

I mean it was raining so loud in the morning. Did it wake you up? Do you still have a faint memory of that? Like, it was like the sky was collapsing, right? We can probably say the rain was truly biblical, wasn't it?

Yeah? But do you remember what happened in the afternoon though? The sun was shining. It's like you experience Genesis chapter 6 to 8 in a single day.

Isn't it amazing? So when people read Genesis chapter 6, most of them just glance through the first several verses. You want to get straight to the interesting bit, which is the Noah's Ark.

From children's book to movies to theme parks, we've seen animals like giraffes, lions, you know, sheep walking in pairs, you know, as they march into the ark.

[2 : 09] The ark is gigantic. It's like a modern day cruise ship. We see Noah with his, you know, white beard. Noah, are you there? Where are you? Have you got it? Holding his staff, you know, standing on the front deck, right?

Ready to take on the mission impossible. Most people find this story very exciting and fascinating. But today we won't be talking about that side of the story.

Instead, we'll do a Noah's prequel. What really happened before the Noah's Ark? What gave God no choice but to use a great flood to wipe out the land?

Genesis 6, verse 1 to 8 is a history of unspoken legends and mysteries. The story has some characters that will blow your mind.

If you've been in church for ages, you may not have heard of them. So sit tight, buckle up, and yeah, make sure you don't drop to the floor.

[3 : 13] Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, as we open up your word, may the Spirit enlighten us and lead us to a fuller truth, so that we may come to know you as the God of justice and grace.

In your Son, Jesus' name we pray. Amen. All right, so shall we read Genesis 6, 1 to 8 together? One, two, three, go.

When human beings began to increase to enumber on the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

Then the Lord said, My spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal. Their days will be 120 years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward.

When the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them, they were the heroes of old, men of renown. The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of human heart was only evil all the time.

[4 : 34] The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I've created, and with them the animals, the birds, and the creatures that move along the ground, for I regret that I have made them.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. So the story followed from chapter 5, where we've seen the genealogy of Adam.

There's a list of people who have unbelievably long lifespan, usually in the range of several hundred years. But the situation is going to change dramatically.

The passage we study today can be split into three parts. So from verse 1 to 4, tell us the humankind multiplies on earth, something has gone terribly wrong, so that God has to limit their lifespan.

Verses 5 to 7 mention when the humankind fills the earth with evil, God is heartbroken, and has got no choice but to do something about it. In verse 8, we see a man whose life is so different from the people around him, and therefore he receives favor from God.

[5 : 56] Today, the sermon has two purposes. First, I hope it helps us make sense of other difficult passages in the Bible. We can achieve this together by understanding a supernatural worldview that the Bible has presented to us.

Second, I hope we can study this mind-boggling story so that we can gain insights to our own spiritual journey. During the process, we'll run into some pretty controversial topics.

If you've never heard of them, it may be a shock to you. So, as you have read the scripture, you may already notice some pretty eye-catching questions, like, who are the sons of God?

Why is there a problem when they marry the daughters of humans? And what are the narrative?

So, when we try to understand any story, we look into the main characters.

Imagine, in Three Little Pigs, the main characters are not pigs, but are, in fact, three little wolves.

Or, the ugly duckling is actually not as one.

[7 : 02] The story development would have been totally different, wouldn't it? Likewise, if we don't fully grasp the main characters of Genesis 6, we'll run into difficulties to understand the passage.

So, who are the sons of God? So, let's go back to verse 1. There it says, when human beings began to increase in number on the earth.

So, first off, we have humans multiplying on earth, which fulfills God's commandments for humanity. Genesis 1.28 tells us, be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. That's a good thing, isn't it? So, there should be no big deal about, you know, people getting married, you know, as verse 2 has said.

But, if we look closely, we can see the scripture makes this contrast between sons of God and daughters of humans. Obviously, they belong to two different tribes or peoples.

[8 : 06] Otherwise, the scripture could have just told us, you know, the human kind multiplies.

Simple as that. No big deal, isn't it? But the scripture intentionally highlights the word of God and of humans.

It seems to make a clear distinction to the readers that they are two different peoples and or two categories of beings. So, what are the sons of God?

A few thousand years ago, the Israelites have always thought of them as angelic beings. But from the second and third centuries onwards, the Jewish rabbis and the Christians started to debate from this view.

The Jewish people think they are merely kings and rulers on earth. On the other hand, you know, Christians reckon the sons of God are the descendants of Seth, which are the good seeds, and the daughters of humans as the descendants of Cain, which are the bad seeds.

As a result, the theory that the sons of God are human beings have been circulating for centuries, even up to today. So, are they angelic or human beings?

[9 : 15] The rest of the Bible has given us some clues because of time I can only share two related passages with you. Well, it seems like the New Testament writers are very familiar with the history of Genesis 6.

In 2 Peter, it says, Look, it sounds like Peter is retelling the Genesis 6 story, right?

He links angels' sinning and their judgment and the story of Noah's Ark together. In another book, Jude says, And the angels who did not keep the position of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling, these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great

day.

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Here, Jude tells us some angels have crossed the line and done something condemnable. The conjunction here, have a look, is particularly telling.

[11:00] It says, In a similar way, human beings engaged in sexual sins. The scripture here seems to suggest some angelic beings have similarly committed transgression related to sex.

Now, back to Genesis 6. If we understand the sons of God as angelic beings, it helps us unlock these difficult passages passages in the Bible. Well, in fact, there are much more evidence throughout the Bible to suggest that those are angelic beings.

This understanding comes from a solid biblical studies, you know, from recent decades. Pastors and scholars repaint a picture of supernatural world view for us.

and it is entirely consistent with what the Bible says. You can see the understanding has run its full circle from angel to human and now back to angel, which is how the earliest Jews or Israelites understand the sons of God.

Look at verse 2 now. The sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful and they married any of them they chose. So whether we see the sons of God as fallen angels, kings or rulers or descendants of Seth, the scripture tells us that they mixed with people that they shouldn't have mixed.

[12:29] They've crossed the line. They've transgressed the boundary. Some fallen sons of God have used their superior status to satisfy their own desire.

That's an abuse of power. Verse 2 says, they saw the daughters of humans were beautiful and they married any of them they chose. There are three action verbs there.

They look, they choose, and they take. They willfully defy the natural order of things. They don't ask for permission and just do it as they please.

Many powerful people commit the same fatal mistake. They abuse the power bestowed on them and they cross the line as they please. Well, one of the most famous or infamous case is the US President Bill Clinton.

He had an appropriate relationship with a White House intern. That nearly cost him the job. In New Zealand, we have heard about sexual harassment and assault in workplace.

[13:36] Even lawyers have black sheep among them. they're supposed to be custodians of law and what is right. Yet, they would abuse their power and take advantage of the intern.

Besides these serious cases, everyday people like us can also cross the line intentionally or inadvertently. We all have our smartphone, don't we?

We flick through our news feed, ads, press here, press there. Sometimes we don't even realize we have crossed the line and start looking at things that we shouldn't have.

That could be the first step of our downfall if we are not careful. Now, back to the scripture. The sons of God have crossed the line and that kickstart a series of chaos which is the rise of Nephilim. Nephilim means the fallen ones or giants. verse 4 says, the Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them.

[14:48] They were the heroes of old men of renown. The scripture seems to highlight that Nephilim were not merely human beings.

They belonged to another category of beings. The word Nephilim also appears in Numbers chapter 13 verse 33.

There it says, we saw the Nephilim there, the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we looked the same to them.

Here the book of Numbers tells us Israelites prepare to invade Canaan and they've sent some spies to scout the land. They bring back a very grim report.

They've seen the giants walking in the land. Their size and power are beyond question and the Israelites were scared. They see themselves as tiny as grasshoppers.

[15:47] Another verse from Deuteronomy this time. So here it says, Og, king of Bashan was the last of the Rephites.

His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits long and four cubits wide. It is still in rubber of the Ammonites. So the Rephites or Rephimes they are also a clan of giants. This particular king called Og has a gigantic bed as you can see. If we convert the cubits units to meter nowadays, this guy has a bed about four meters long and 1.8 meters wide. It is like a double super king size bed. How tall does a person require a bed of four meters long? So are the giants in Genesis 6 about the same height as well? We're talking about a height that can easily dwarf Yao Ming and Shaq O'Neal. Besides having a towering presence, the Bible says they are heroes of old men of renown.

[17 : 03] The Bible doesn't say much beyond that but beyond the Bible there's a wealth of ancient documents about giants and demigods especially in the Mesopotamia area.

For example, the Epic of Gilgamesh tells us that the Gilgamesh is a brutal giant who is half good and half bad. The clay tablets describe him as two-thirds of a god and one-third of a human. Can you see what he's holding in his arm? That's a lion. So anyway, demigods are common across cultures like Greek and Chinese as well. Anyways, humankind has always longed for the existence of demigods. In fact, nowadays, humankind wants to transform ourselves into demigods. We crave so much for superpowers and cutting-edge technologies, right? Like augmented reality so that we can become transhumans and cyborgs.

[18 : 11] This way, we can evolve with technology to become the master of the universe. We also look into gene editing like CRISPR technique to refine and upgrade our humanness so that we can be stronger, faster, and live a longer life.

In essence, we want to become like God through our own means, but this is not the path God has intended for us. Now, back to the scripture. These giants and heroes in Genesis 6 probably have great strengths and even supernatural powers. The presence naturally lures people to worship them. That's the problem rather than worshipping the creator God. Since they came into the scene, humankind was pushed further and further away from God's intention. Now, let's pause and think for a moment. Do we have any heroes that we worship today? Maybe in reality, we can't find heroes like those in the Marvel Universe.

[19 : 21] Who do we naturally follow? Do we take artists, singers, KOLs, who have supernatural talents and beauty, that we keep watching them day in day out? do we follow professional gamers and watch them play all day? Do we follow investors, famous investors like Elon Musk, people like that? Or, even worse, do we admire those who claim they are connected to the spiritual world like sidekicks and mediums? Look, brothers and sisters, we've got to be very careful so that we don't go astray. We don't want to let anything distract us to worship our God in a wholehearted way. So, the transgression of the sons of God and the emergence of Nephilim impels God into action. Verse 3 says, Then the Lord said, My spirits will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal. Their days will be a hundred and twenty years.

[20 : 31] God's action is to limit the lifespan of humans from easily several hundred years, as we know it, you know, from chapter 5 to now, merely a hundred and twenty years.

Even though every now and then, God would show extra grace to people like Noah and Abraham and let them live well beyond one hundred and twenty years. Most people rarely make it to one hundred and twenty. Well, you can have a look at the table that shows the most recent teen oldest person that lives like nearly a hundred and twenty years. Only one of them actually go beyond one hundred and twenty. So, even though Nephilim were walking on earth, luring people from worshipping the creator, God still acts very patiently and even let them exist in a somewhat limited way. The real reason that God had to send flood to completely wipe out the land is more than the Nephilim. It's about humankind maxing out evil.

[21 : 45] Verse five tells us, the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts and of the human heart was only evil all the time.

Here it says, humankind's wickedness was great. What does it include? First, there are idol worship triggered by the Nephilim.

Humans worship things that are not internal and not morally pure. The sin of idol worship is there. And earlier, we've seen the sons of God crossing the line.

They abuse their power as rulers and take women as well. The sin of adultery is there. Remember in Genesis chapter four, Cain killed Abel, and also later Lamech killed those who harmed him.

The tit-for-tat violence has become the new norm in human society. The sin of murder and mass killing is there. We can imagine the giants are the ruling party of the earth.

[22 : 56] Those who are physically weak are resigned to slavery. Whereas those who have supernatural strengths can do whatever they please. Violence, sexual assault, murder, even genocide fill every corner of the land.

There's no justice, no equality, no mercy in the society. community. Some parts of the earth, our current world, unfortunately, still live in such a nightmare.

Look at Mexico. Some of their communities are completely controlled by drug cartels. Whoever holds the gun holds the power over everybody else.

Every day, there are countless murder cases. the cops can't even do anything about it. They're all bribed and they are part of the corrupted system. The Lord saw how grace the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth.

And that every inclination of the thoughts of the human hearts was only evil all the time. If we look at the second half of the verse, there are two key phrases that stand out.

[24 : 13] First, it says every inclination, every thought are evil and corrupted. And second, it says all the time. People are thinking about evil constantly, 24-7.

In other words, they are maxing out their evil. As we live in a rather stable society, it's difficult for us to imagine how evil things can be.

But if you've got a chance to chat with some of the older folks, maybe even in PCBC, especially those who escaped the Cultural Revolution in China, they can tell you about crazy things that happened.

Terrible things, absolutely horrid. If you don't toe the line, you're not loyal to the party, and people can find excuses to arrest you and kill you. Some says at least half a million to two million people were killed back then.

Now, even in a relatively stable society like us, people can still engage in everything evil all the time. Here, we can quickly come up with a few common sources of addiction, right?

[25 : 28] Pornography, illicit sex, gambling, and drugs. We've heard about common stories where someone gets addicted to gambling, loses all his money, and even the wife and children leave him.

Some people get their hands on drugs and eventually get hooked. They lie, they steal, they rob, do whatever they can to grab the money so that they can carry on with their addiction.

Some people are hooked to pornography and sex. The bad habit is destroying them. The insatiable desire leads them further and further into darkness and away from God and from the people around them.

Well, sometimes things aren't necessarily evil, right? You may say, hey, I'm not a shopaholic, I'm just helping the economy. Now, besides shopping, things like games, like drinking, they're not essentially bad thing, okay?

But once they turn into addiction, it's bad, it's evil. So once the addiction get hold of us, we lose control over ourselves.

[26 : 48] That's a terrible thing. Look, this society is rife with all forms of addictions and they're so contagious. They're everywhere all the time, waiting for us to take the bait.

So, brothers and sisters, are we being hooked? Have we laid down traps for ourselves? Have we filled ourselves with unwholesome or ungodly habits?

Have we lost our grip? maybe it's time to get the monkey off our backs? Now, let's think about how the creator God feels about the situation.

How does he feel when he sees his, you know, created humans and nature spiral out of control and maxing out evil? trouble. Verse 6 says, the Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled.

This is a very difficult verse. The immediate question is, if God knows everything in advance, why does he allow the situation to develop in such a way that he grieves and regrets?

[28 : 06] The short answer is love. God loves humans so much that he's given us free will. We can choose love or hate, justice or evil, self-discipline or self-indulgence.

In Genesis 6, humankind has chosen the slippery slope. They become addicted to evil. God foresaw it, but since now the situation finally unfolds before his eyes, his heart is aching. sin. The original word for regret is the verb *liham*. It is a special word in the Bible where no single English word can translate its multi-layered meaning.

means something miserable happens and then someone counteracts the situation. A biblical scholar understands the term in accounting terms.

Look, we have plenty of professionals here. So, in accounting or in a ledger, we have debits and credits. the two sides must be in check, must be in balance.

[29 : 24] Now, have you seen a balance scale before? Maybe that can help us to visualize. You can see this kind of statue in high courts around the world. world. So, she holds a balance scale on one hand and a sword on the other, signifying justice as well as the power to carry out justice.

In the same way, our God is a God of justice and power. He carries out justice according to his time, not our time. If a scale needs to be balanced, doesn't the moral mess humans created need to be balanced as well?

Maybe we can understand the verse like this. The Lord intended to redress the human atrocity on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled.

So, what's his plan? Let's look at verse 7. So, the Lord said, I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I've created and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground.

For I regretted that I have made them. Simply, God's plan is to hit the reset button, like the one on your computer or my cell phone, because it stopped working like it should be.

[30 : 45] It needs to go through a reboot. The atrocity humankind creates has far reaching consequences beyond society. It upsets the land and the ecosystem as well.

they rapaciously gather resources to satisfy their own desire. They chop down woods, mine metals to create weapons. The land and ecosystem needs a reset too.

So God uses the flood to stop all human activities, including those that disrupt the harmonious relationship with the land and creatures. God gives the land a timely respite and recovery and provides a temporary relief to the harrowing pain humanity has been suffering for ages.

Because humanity falls into a total corruption, God in return responds with a total corrective. But we need to understand God's heart.

He doesn't like to see anyone die. The scripture tells us God is grieving, his heart is aching. Have a look at Ezekiel. Here it says, For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord.

[32 : 04] Repent and live. God would rather see everyone live and flourish. Brothers and sisters, are we on a slippery slope?

Are we hooked on something less than godly? Let us not grieve God's heart. He's willing to discipline us because he loves us so much. We've got to remember, the more rebellious we become, the tougher the discipline we receive.

Yes, judgment and discipline can be great and hard to take, but let's not forget God's grace is even greater. Psalm 103 says, the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us like our sins deserve, or pay us according to our iniquities.

When the entire sinful generation needs to be eradicated, God gracefully protects those belong to him. and not only that, he let Noah preserve the animals and birds and let the whole nature reboot and let the humankind relaunch its Edenic mission.

[33 : 29] This is the prequel of Noah. Verse 8, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Now, how do we survive in an evil world? We've got two choices. We can play along with the same tune. We wallow in what the world has to offer, or we stay pure and hold to our values.

We keep the world at bay. What kind of person is Noah? Verse 9 says he's righteous and a blameless man.

He walks with God. Verse 22 says he does everything God asks him to do. He's always there ready for God. Noah lives in the dark era.

If you were him, what would you pray? Lord, come save this world. I can't take it anymore. I'm always fighting along. I try to play nice with others, but they think I'm an idiot.

[34 : 34] They always want to take my life and my family. Here is something from the news. This photo is taken by someone who lives next to a gangster neighbor in New Zealand.

So one day there was a guy who was on drug, holding a knife and trying to break into their home. But the person who lives inside the home was brave enough to resist and the intruder ran off and dropping the knife on the ground.

this is probably the kind of daily ordeal Noah has to endure. Noah faces an evil and hostile community not for a few years but decades or even centuries.

Can you imagine how great the willpower Noah possesses in order to keep the aggressors at bay and stand on God's side at all time? Therefore verse 8 says but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Noah and his family are precious in God's sight. As God plans to use an unprecedented flood to wipe out everything, he also teach Noah to build a huge escape port that is so big without precedent.

[35 : 53] God is determined to let them live because Noah doesn't compromise his holy living. What do you think about today's world?

Is it dark? Is it crazy? When the society becomes corrupted, things can go south so quickly it leaves everyone flabbergasted.

Take the Nazi Germany as an example. In the 1930s, the society falls from a democracy to a cold-blooded killing machine.

Millions of Jews were killed. Look at today. I suppose we all follow the news on Ukraine. It's heart-wrenching to see the pictures and videos of people dying in buildings being bombarded. Our father drove his wife and children to the Polish border, kissed them goodbye, and they had to drive back to join the defense. Look at Maripol.

[36 : 58] People are starving. Children are being killed. The atrocity is so unthinkable. It's unbearable. All because of one man's madness. this is the world we're living in.

Isn't it dark? Isn't it crazy? According to a Swedish research team in 2020, which is 10 years ago, the world used to have 42 democratic countries.

Today, in 2022, only 34 are left. Merely 13% of the world population get to live in a relatively stable and free environment.

Do we know how blessed we are as Kiwis? But can anyone guarantee a democratic country like New Zealand won't lapse into chaos?

Are we ready for a darker and crazier world, brothers and sisters? Do we have the same determination like Noah? Are we willing to pay the price to stand on God's side?

[38 : 06] Our God is full of justice. Did he ignore the dark and crazy world in Genesis 6? No. Will he ignore the chaotic and evil world that we are living in the 21st century?

Absolutely not. He sees it. He's aching in his heart. But he chooses to wait because he wants to see more people come to know his son, Jesus.

This is why he delays the judgment day. But bear in mind, he didn't cancel that day. That day will eventually come. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

In Genesis 6, Noah became a savior so that humankind and nature can undergo a reboot. But Noah foreshadowed the ultimate savior, who would come some thousands years later.

The ultimate savior, Jesus, also has given humanity a new beginning. The salvation of Jesus is on Noah's ark today.

[39 : 17] He invites everyone who believes in him to be spared from the disasters that is yet to come. God, are we willing to accept Jesus?

He loves us so much that he died for our sin and paid a price for us. All you need to do is to say yes. When we receive him into our hearts, we become righteous like Noah so that we can find favor in God's eyes.

let us pray. Dear Lord, you are full of justice, yet full of mercy and grace.

Your word, let us reflect how evil the world is and how fickle our faith is. We pray that you forgive our sins, whether it's big or small, deliberate or unintentional.

we set our hearts before you, Lord, that we be watchful and not cross the line. Help us to fight against addictions. Help us to leave behind all the habits that are unwholesome and ungodly so that

we can walk with you like Noah.

[40 : 35] We ask that you fill our lives with the grace of Jesus. In his powerful name we pray.
Amen.