

In the Beginning

Message 8

The Beginning of Judgment

Genesis 6:1-7:24; Psalm 32:1-11

Introduction

We live in a messed up world. Actually, messed up is too mild to describe the sick condition of our world. Every day we hear of murders, rapes, assassinations, fraud, theft, etc. We have corporate crime and individual crime, organized crime and unorganized crime, sexual crime and crime within families. The latest trend is such a large surge in the amount and the violence of juvenile crime that judges are more frequently trying children as adults. Just yesterday Israel assassinated Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the leader of Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist organization. The news agencies are all predicting a huge increase in attacks against Israel, and there are rumors that Israel may now go after Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader. No sane person would say we have achieved peace on earth, or are even close.

When people turn to God regarding the wrenching problems in our world, they either cry out for God to act to bring peace and prosperity, or they cry out to blame Him for allowing the human race to get into such a sad state of affairs. Ironically, in this regard believers and unbelievers generally have the same root conviction about God's role in the world – both act as though God is able to do something about our situation. But what can God do? What do you *want* Him to do? Wipe out the bad guys? Which bad guys? Who's to decide who out to be eliminated? As someone recently said, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Should God take out all the murderers? What about all those doctors who have aborted babies? What about their mothers? And if we ask God to enforce the sixth commandment, what about the seventh? Should God wipe out all adulterers? What about the fornicators – those who engage in what we euphemistically call pre-marital sex? How can you justify enforcing one commandment and not another? And as soon as you begin to ask questions like this, you run into the problem of the innocent. Is it just to punish the woman who allowed her baby to be killed if her father forced her into it? You see, when we try to identify just what we want God to do about evil, we cannot agree on even the most basic approach we wish Him to take.

And now we face this case where God *did* take action against evil, and the results are so devastating, we stagger at the thought. The whole human race was exterminated except eight people – men and boys, women and girls, old people, even the babies. And all the animals, too – except those in the ark. Why were the animals drowned in the flood? What did they do? Surely this is a case where God lost control of Himself. God must have lost His temper and let His rage overcome sound judgment. Surely this is God run amok. Let's look more closely at this passage and see if we can make sense of it.

Man's condition

At the outset this is a puzzling story. The first thing God brings to our attention is the marriage between “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men”. I doubt that most of us would suspect that marriage would be a major issue, but the particular problem is quite murky. Who exactly are the sons of God, and who are the daughters of men? One thing is clear, whoever they are, this union is a very bad thing. This is another one of those questions that begs you to consult a commentary, and again you find opinions solidly divided.

One explanation is that the sons of God were demons and the daughters of men were female human beings. At first this might seem like spiritual science fiction, but there is good biblical support for this idea. The term “sons of God” is found only three times elsewhere in the Old Testament, all in the book of Job. Job is generally considered to be an old book, possibly written shortly before or after Genesis – so it's vocabulary and ideas should be very close to those of Genesis. In Job 1:6 we read, “Now there was a day

when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” Then in Job 2:1 we find, “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.” The most natural way to read these verses is to take them as a heavenly council meeting, with all the angels reporting to God on their activities, and Satan, the rebellious angel, also showing up. Later when God spoke to Job of the creation He said,

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job 38:4-7

Again, the most natural way to take these verses is to see them as referring to angelic beings. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that there is no evidence anywhere in scripture that angels or demons can engage in sexual activity. The book of Hebrews tells us they are spiritual beings, and they seem to take bodily form simply to become visible to the people with whom they speak. Jesus made a comment in the gospels that seems to confirm this view. Speaking of human beings He said, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” (Matthew 22:30) This suggests a sexless existence in heaven for men and women, and a sexless nature for angels.

An alternative explanation to this problem is that the sons of God are the descendants of Seth and the daughters of men are the offspring of Cain. The people of God are called God’s sons later in scripture. Moses recorded in Exodus 4:22-23 the message God gave him to pass on to Pharaoh.

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.”’ Exodus 4:22-23

In 2 Samuel we find God using this term for David’s child.

But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying...“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you.” 2 Samuel 7:4, 13-15

And Hosea also called God’s people His son. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.” (Hosea 11:1)

When we get to the New Testament, the idea of God’s people as His children is quite common. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9) Paul said in Romans 8:14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” And in Galatians 3:26 he said, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

But even with all these references to God’s people as His son, still the phrase “sons of God” resonates so strongly with the reference to angels in Job, it’s hard to decide exactly what this means. In weighing the biblical evidence we need to remember two things. First, just because we cannot understand how demons could copulate with women does not mean they do not do so. It is the arrogance of man that

he declares anything outside of his understanding to be impossible. Second, just because a phrase is used one way in one place does not mean it is used the same way in every place. Context is always what determines meaning. People frequently make the mistake of assuming that biblical symbols are codes for only one meaning and fail to take context into account. One excellent example of this is the use of leaven in the Bible. It is often used in situations dealing with the pervasiveness of sin, and people conclude that leaven stands for sin. But Jesus also used leaven as a symbol for the Kingdom of God! You must always interpret scripture in light of the context.

On balance, I am inclined to see this passage referring to intermarriage between the Sethites and the Cainites. The dominant issue in these chapters is the expectation of the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent and provide eternal life for Adam. The corruption of Cain and the death of Abel were devastating setbacks, but God graciously provided another child, Seth. Seth was the true image of Adam, the promised seed. But Seth was not the final seed. Generation after generation the godly descendants of Adam had children, and although some turned to sin, some remained faithful. Then in the year 930 Adam died. What happened to the promise of eternal life? Where was the seed who would deliver man from death? I think at this time many of Adam's godly descendants lost hope. They saw the failure of the promise and stopped worshipping God. Enoch tried to turn them back to following God, but with little effect. Having abandoned hope in God, these godly men began to live for pleasure, and they saw great pleasure in the ungodly but beautiful women of Cain. The Sethites forsook worship of God for lust after women, and they created giants.

Remember that Cain was cursed. Although his descendants produced amazing advances in agriculture, industry, and the arts, their life was hard due to the curse. Seth was not cursed, however. We get the picture here of a line of people with almost super-human strength and intelligence. And when they intermarried with the wicked Cainites, they produced giants – monsters – men of immense strength and intelligence, but with horrible desires. Their offspring were creatures of such power no one could successfully oppose them. They were the real Godzillas who terrorized the whole earth. Men and women, if you are ever tempted to look longingly at an unbeliever or an ungodly man or woman, remember the ancient world. Remember the disastrous consequences of intermarriage and flee from even dating someone who is not wholeheartedly following God.

Man's wickedness

When godly people were almost gone from the earth, it turned into a hellish place. These verses describe four characteristics of the ancient world. First, it was filled with wicked acts (6:5). "The wickedness of man was great in the earth." Apparently they were entirely unrestrained in pursuing their evil desires. We saw in chapter four that Lamech committed bigamy, killed a boy merely for insulting him, and then made up a song to celebrate his murder. No deed was too evil to hold back these people.

Second, their thoughts were completely evil. Verse five continues, "...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Notice the modifiers here: *every* intent, *continually* evil. They were totally devoted to evil thoughts. They got to the point where they *never* had good thoughts. This led, third, to a corrupt culture. The whole society degenerated into a morass of horrible sin. And fourth, the culture was characterized by violence.

Have you ever lived in a violent society? Can you imagine what it is like to live in a place where giants force themselves upon you at will? Where you can be enslaved to the whims of the strong? Where your neighbors are frequently killed for crossing the strong? It's true that Lehigh is not a perfectly safe campus. There are occasional robberies and sexual assaults. These are terrible, but relatively rare. If you lived in some neighborhoods in our cities, you would be surrounded by theft, murder, and sexual assault *every day*. Ruth and I lived in a poor section of Philadelphia for six years. During that time every white

person in our neighborhood was robbed, and once Ruth was accosted. I worked at Temple University. Three blocks from campus was a neighborhood so violent, the mailman told me he would fear for his life if he entered that street at night. When I lived in Baltimore I was attacked once, and in Philadelphia I escaped only because a big black man warned off the thugs who tried to get me. Now can you imagine living under those conditions *constantly*? Folks, the pre-flood culture was wicked to a degree we can scarcely imagine.

God's response

Conditions finally got so bad, God stepped in and intervened. The text tells us God was sorry He had made man. Thoughtless people twist this verse to mean that God was taken by surprise at the turn of events, and that He was forced to devise a new plan for His failed attempt to populate the earth. Nonsense. This simply means that God was brokenhearted at the state of mankind. Be assured, God knows what will come to pass and God is not surprised by man's sin. But He is not impassive about it. God is a person, and He has real feelings. God was deeply grieved when the wonderful earth He had made came to a deplorable condition. Things were so bad, God planned to destroy the earth and start over. But verse eight interrupts this sad description with a ray of hope. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

Here we wish to note three aspects to God's dealing with Noah. First, Noah did nothing to get God's attention. The text does not say, "Noah did things that pleased God", or "Noah obeyed God", but "Noah found grace." Noah was in the line of Seth, and Noah was part of the ancient church, but Noah's salvation was not due to any work of his own – it was by God's grace. God looked upon the earth and found it worthy of destruction. Noah was not sinless himself. God found ample reason to destroy Noah also. But God chose not to. God chose to save Noah because God is a gracious God who loves to save His people, even when they sin.

Second, we notice that Noah obeyed God *after* God called him. Salvation is not a matter of God's grace without a response on our part. God's grace to Noah resulted in action by Noah. Noah responded to God's love by obeying Him. Third, Noah obeyed God in spite of great opposition. We have already noted the terminal wickedness of this world. Think how difficult it was for Noah to survive in it. And think how much he was mocked by the people for his ridiculous building project. Can't you just picture them ridiculing him for building a vast boat far from water? I'm sure he was the butt of jokes in every household and on every street corner. Furthermore, 2 Peter tells us that Noah preached to the people of his day (2:5). I suppose that Noah was brutally oppressed by his neighbors. Nevertheless he persevered – for 100 years! Think if it – he preached and worked and worshiped God and endured persecution for 100 years. I think many of us would struggle to persevere for one year.

The Flood of Judgment

Noah labored for 100 years building his ark, and finally it was finished. Noah's family entered along with the animals God brought to him. Then God Himself came down and secured Noah and his family in the ark. Finally, it rained. The rain accomplished three things. First, God judged the earth by the rain. The wickedness of man was punished by water. The evil, corrupt, violent culture was drowned in the flood. Second, that same flood saved the righteous. When it was all over, Noah's antagonists were gone. Noah built an altar and worshiped God without opposition, because his enemies were all dead. Third, the earth was cleansed by the flood. The filth of sin was washed away by all that water.

But what about the universal destruction of the flood? What about the innocent? What about those who were the victims of violence? Here we must remember that although people are not equally sinful, there are in fact no innocent. Scripture tells us that everyone is sinful. Everyone disobeys God. Everyone is guilty of rebellion against their Creator, Lord, and Father. In Romans 3 we read,

“There is none righteous, no, not one;

There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”
“Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;
“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”
“Their feet *are* swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery *are* in their ways;
And the way of peace they have not known.”
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:10-18

This is true of all of us. None are righteous. No one understands. No one seeks for God. If they say they are, they are lying. No one really seeks peace. That means you and me, your parents and siblings, your friends and roommates – even children. Sin is more advanced in some of us, but all are guilty of sin. Consequently all deserve to die. This is God’s penalty for sin. Therefore, salvation is only by grace. The only reason any of us escape God’s punishment is because He calls us to Him, like He called Noah. The question at the flood is not why did all except Noah’s family die, but why did Noah’s family live? For Noah sinned, too.

But why about the animals? Why drown all those animals? Here we see another dimension of sin’s destructiveness. Man was given authority over the earth. He was in charge. The whole earth was under his care. God did not make man a puppet. Man’s authority over the earth was not a pretend authority. It was real. And when man sinned, all those under him suffered as well. Think of it this way. If your father commits a crime and goes to jail, your whole family suffers, even if you didn’t do anything wrong yourself. That’s because your family is bound together under your father’s authority. Likewise, when man sinned, the whole earth suffered the consequences.

Lessons of the Flood

God judges in history
 Egypt
 Babylonian captivity
 Jesus’ comments
 Jesus’ prophecy of judgment
salvation of God’s people goes with destruction of the wicked – grace and justice
there is a final judgment
judgment is by race
 the wicked race is destroyed
 the righteous race is saved
salvation is by grace

Application

be cleansed by baptism

“...by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience

toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,..."

1 Peter 3:19-21

live a righteous life

Psalm 32

- 1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, *
Whose sin is covered.
- 2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, *
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old *
Through my groaning all the day long.
- 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; *
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah
- 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, *
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," *
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; *
Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him.
- 7 You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; *
You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; *
I will guide you with My eye.
- 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, *
Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.
- 10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; *
But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him.
- 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; *
And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

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March 23, 2004