

The Days of Noah

by G.H. Pember

The sermon explores the moral corruption during the days of Noah and its parallels to contemporary society, emphasizing the need for vigilance and faithfulness among believers.

Scripture: Genesis 6:5-22, Job 38:7, Luke 3:38, John 1:12, 2 Peter 2:4, Revelation 12:9

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Biblical Prophecy"

Description

G.H. Pember preaches on the account of Noah in Genesis 6 and the impending judgment of God on the world due to increasing wickedness, corruption, and intermarriage between the 'sons of God' (interpreted as fallen angels) and human women. The narrative highlights the rapid increase in population, industry, and culture leading to a society filled with corruption, violence, and immorality. Despite warnings, only Noah and his family found grace in God's sight, leading to the construction of the ark and the eventual global flood as a means of judgment and salvation.

Transcript

Genesis 6; Matthew 24:37

The sixth chapter of Genesis contains an account of the days of Noah; it is a description of momentous interest to us. Our Lord has declared that a similar epoch of worldliness will at length exhaust the forbearance of God towards the present dwellers upon earth and cause Him to come with fire and with His chariots like a whirlwind. He will come to render His anger with fury and His rebuke with flames of fire, to plead with all flesh by fire and by His sword (Isaiah 66:15-16).

It becomes, therefore, an obvious duty to consider the progress of wickedness and corruption among the antediluvians, so far as it has pleased God to inform us of it. We must acquaint ourselves not merely with the sowing but also with the watering, the growth, and the ripening of that hideous crop against which the gleaming sickle of the Almighty at length flashed forth from heaven. It will be profitable to note the various incentives to evil as they successively appeared and to observe the particular influence of each upon the rapidly decomposing masses of society. By so doing, we shall arm ourselves against the errors and temptations that are daily multiplying around us, and we will be enabled to discern the threatening signs of our own times.

An Increase In Population, Industry, And Culture

Now the first-mentioned characteristic of those former days of wickedness and peril is the rapid increase of population (Genesis 6:1). This is a circumstance which in itself has ever tended not merely to diffuse but at the same time to intensify sin. For every form of evil that exists in thinly populated countries will also be found where men have multiplied; while there are countless additional vices peculiar to crowded districts. If they are numerous, men support each other in rebellion and are prone to become far more daring and defiant of God. Among ourselves, the strongholds of rationalism and atheism are always to be found in large cities.

But while the families of the earth were thus increasing in number, they were at the same time making vast progress in civilisation and knowledge. Cain had taught them to settle in communities and build cities (Genesis 4:7), and the sons of Lamech - speedily followed, no doubt, by many others - had introduced the mechanical and fine arts, and had devised unlawful means of evading the labour imposed by the curse (Gen. 4:20-22). In that age when, instead of being cut off at 70 or 80 years, men lived on for nearly a thousand years, their immense accumulation of knowledge, experience, and skill must have advanced science, art, and the invention and manufacture of all the appliances of a luxurious civilisation with a rapidity to us almost inconceivable.

The one recorded specimen of antediluvian industry, the ark, was built by a Sethite, and yet it equalled in size the "Great Eastern" - the ship which but a few years ago afforded such marvel to ourselves.

Doubtless many of the mighty labours accomplished by the earlier descendants of Noah may be considered to have sprung from reminiscences of pristine grandeur and fragments of lore, handed down by forefathers who had passed a portion of their existence in the previous age of human glory and depravity. Such may have been the daring conception of a literally cloud-capped tower, the stupendous and splendidly decorated edifices of Babylon and Nineveh, and the wondrous structure of the first pyramid, involving, as it apparently does, an accurate knowledge of astronomical truth which would seem to have been at least on a level with the vaunted advances of modern science. For all these great efforts, be it remembered, were in progress during the lifetime of Shem, and probably in that of his brothers also.

Nor must we forget recent discoveries in regard to the primeval civilisation of the Accadians, "the stunted and oblique-eyed people of ancient Babylonia," whose very existence was unknown to us 50 years ago. Their language was dying out and had become a learned dialect, like the Latin of the Middle Ages, in the 27th century before Christ. Yet so great had been their intellectual power that the famous library of Agade, founded by Sargon I [2650 B.C.] was stocked with books "which were either translated from Accadian originals or else based on Accadian texts, and filled with technical words which belonged to the old language."

A catalogue of the astronomical department, which has been preserved, contains a direction to the reader to write down the number of the tablet or book that he requires and apply for it to the librarian. "The arrangement," says Sayce, "adopted by Sargon's librarians must have been the product of generations of former experience."

Could we have a stronger proof "of the development of literature and education, and of the existence of a considerable number of reading people in this remote antiquity"?

According to Berosus, there was an antediluvian "Town of Books" in Babylonia. Sisuthrus, the Chaldean Noah, "is made to bury his books at Sippara before the Deluge, and to disentomb them after the descent from the Ark." But, apart from tradition, we have evidence that in very early times there were well-known

libraries at Erech, Ur, Cutha, and Larsa, to which observatories and universities were attached (from Sayce's Babylonian Literature).

If, then, we give but fair weight to these considerations, we seem compelled to admit that the antediluvians may have attained to a perfection in civilisation and high culture which has scarcely yet been recovered, much as we pride ourselves upon our own times.

Since we have no further mention of the Cainites as a separate tribe, and since of the Sethites - who must also have increased in numbers - only one person was translated to God from the evil to come, and only eight were saved through that evil, it is clear that the two families had at length mingled and intermarried. Seduced, probably, by the intellectual pursuits, the gay society, and the easy life of the wicked, the Sethites first found a pleasure in their company, their luxuries, and their many skilful and ingenious inventions. They were then enticed to yoke themselves unequally with unbelievers, and so, being drawn into the vortex of sin, disappeared as a separate people.

Sad and instructive was the result of this amalgamation; for when the time of dividing came, no true worshipers of Jehovah were to be found save in the single family of Noah. Men seem to have so prized their own wisdom and to have thought so little of God, that their religion had dwindled to a mere hero-worship of their own famous leaders (Genesis 6:4). These heroes were those who, Prometheus-like, brought to them by their inventions the necessaries and comforts of life, and so enabled them for the time to foil the purposes of the Supreme Power.

The Sons Of God Upon The Earth

Then a new and startling event burst upon the world and fearfully accelerated the already rapid progress of evil. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. 6:2). These words are often explained to signify nothing more than the intermarriage of the descendants of Cain and Seth, but a careful examination of the passage will elicit a far deeper meaning.

When men, we are told, began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, the sons of God saw the daughters of men (Gen. 6:1-2). Now by "men" in each case the whole human race is evidently signified - the descendants of Cain and Seth alike. Hence the "sons of God" are plainly distinguished from the generation of Adam.

Again, the expression "sons of God (Elohim)" occurs but four times in other parts of the Old Testament, and is in each of these cases indisputably used for angelic beings.

Twice in the beginning of the Book of Job, we read of the sons of God presenting themselves before Him at stated times. Satan also comes with them as being himself a son of God, though a fallen and rebellious one (Job 1:6; 2:1).

The term sons of Elohim, the mighty Creator, seems to be confined to those who were directly created by the Divine hand and not born of other beings of their own order. Hence, in Luke's genealogy of our Lord, Adam is called a son of God (Luke 3:38). And so also Christ is said to give to them that receive Him power to become the sons of God (John 1:12). For these are born again of the Spirit of God as to their inner man even in the present life. And at the resurrection, they will be clothed with a spiritual body, a building of God (2 Cor. 5:1). They will then be in every respect equal to the angels, being altogether a new creation (Luke

20:36).

The third repetition of the phrase occurs in a later chapter of Job, where the morning stars are represented as singing together, and the sons of God as shouting for joy, over the creation of our earth (Job 38:7).

Lastly, the same expression is found in the Book of Daniel (3:25), but it is in the singular number and with the necessary difference that bar is the word used for son instead of ben, the singular of the latter being unknown in Chaldee. Nebuchadnezzar exclaims that he sees four men walking in the midst of the fire and that the form of the fourth is like a son of God (there is no definite article "the" in the original), by which he evidently means a supernatural or angelic being, distinct as such from the others.

It appears, therefore, that in the Old Testament the title "sons of God" is restricted to angels. (This is the view taken by Josephus, Philo Judaeus, and other authors. It was generally accepted by learned Jews in the early centuries of the Christian era.)

Several passages are indeed adduced to prove its application to men, but upon examination they will all be found wide of the mark, the words of the original being in every case different, and sometimes signifying sons of Jehovah. This last is a very different expression and would probably have been used by the inspired historian in the verse under our consideration if he had wished to distinguish the godly descendants of Seth from the Cainites. For, while it forms a true description of all saints upon earth, it would have been in this place peculiarly appropriate to the Sethites just after the mention of the fact that they had begun, from the birth of Enosh, to call upon the name of Jehovah (Genesis 4:26).

It thus appears that the sons of God are angelic beings, and the mysterious statement respecting them in the sixth chapter of Genesis seems to refer to a second and deeper apostasy on the part of some of the High Ones on high. But these more daring rebels are not found among the spirits of darkness which now haunt the air. They no longer retain their position as principalities and powers of the world, or even their liberty.

They may be identified with the imprisoned criminals of whom Peter tells us that, after they had sinned, God spared them not "but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). Jude also mentions their present condition in similar terms (Jude 6), and the context of either passage indicates with sufficient clearness the nature of their sin. They chose to leave their own world and, having broken through God's limits into another, to go after strange flesh. Therefore He dashed them down at once to His lowest dungeons as an instant punishment of their impious outrage, and to deprive them forever of the power of producing further confusion.

The verse following the announcement of the angels' sin is a parenthesis of solemn import (Gen. 6:3). The scene is for a moment shifted from the fearfully increasing wickedness of earth and transferred to the Heaven of heavens. There the invisible God sits enthroned and, looking down upon the rebellion and sin beneath Him, pronounces sentence of doom upon the unconscious world. The end must come. His spirit shall not always strive with men, seeing that they are irrecoverably overpowered by the desires of the flesh; yet they shall have a further respite of 120 years.

Then the history is resumed with a brief hint at the cause that led to intermarriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men, both before and after the flood (Gen. 6:4). Our translators have again omitted a definite article in the beginning of this verse which should be rendered, "The Nephilim - or fallen ones - were on the earth in those days, and also afterwards, when the sons of God came in unto the

daughters of men."

Through a misapprehension of the Septuagint, which we will presently explain, the English version renders Nephilim by "giants." But the form of the Hebrew word indicates a verbal adjective or noun, of passive or neuter signification, from Naphal - to fall. Hence, it must mean "the fallen ones," that is, probably, the fallen angels. Afterwards, however, the term seems to have been transferred to their offspring, as we may gather from the only other passage in which it occurs.

In the evil report that the ten spies give of the land of Canaan, we find them saying, "All the people that we saw in it were men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, descended from the Nephilim. We seemed to ourselves as grasshoppers, and so we did to them" (Number 13:32-33).

It was doubtless the mention of the great stature of these men, together with the Septuagint rendering gigantes that suggested our translation "giants." The roots of the Greek gigas have, however, no reference to great stature but point to something very different. The word is merely another form of geegenees. It signifies "earth-born" and was used of the Titans, or sons of Heaven and Earth - Coelus and Terra - because, though superior to the human race, they were, nevertheless, of partly terrestrial origin. The meaning of "giants" in our sense of the term, is altogether secondary and arose from the fact that these beings of mixed birth were said to have displayed a monstrous growth and strength of body. It will, therefore, be apparent that the rendering of the Septuagint correctly expresses the idea which was in the mind of the translator, since he appears to have taken Nephilim in each case to signify the offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men. We, however, as we have explained above, prefer understanding the word primarily of the fallen angels themselves.

Now, in speaking of the sin of some of these, Jude (Jude 6) tells us that, despising the position of dignity and responsibility in which God had placed them, they voluntarily left their own home in the Kingdom of the Air. (The Greek could also mean that they disrobed themselves of the spiritual body proper to them as beings of heaven and materialised for themselves an earth-body, because in the only other place that this word is used in the New Testament, it means the heavenly body with which the believer longs to be clothed - 2 Corinthians 5:2.) They were prompted it would seem by earthward desires and began to exercise an unlawful influence over the human race. Perhaps, as a punishment, their return was prohibited; they were banished altogether from heaven and confined to the limits of earth, just as Satan and the remainder of his angels will be hereafter (Revelation 12:9,13), a short time before the appearing of Christ to cast them into the still lower abyss.

But, however this may be, they were from some cause dwelling upon earth at the time, and the fact is apparently mentioned to account for their inter-marriages with the daughters of men. If, then, their continued residence below was voluntary, they soon passed on to a far more frightful sin. If, on the contrary, it was penal, instead of humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God and patiently enduring until He remitted His just punishment, they did not hesitate to defy Him still more daringly, and to violate the law of their being.

The assertion of a similar occurrence after the Deluge agrees with the passage in Numbers where the sons of Anak are said to have been Nephilim, or of the Nephilim (Numbers 13:33). This seems also to account for God's command that the whole race of the Canaanites should be extirpated. For immediately after the commission of the antediluvian sin, the doom of the world was pronounced. Prophecy intimates that the future confinement of the angels of darkness to earth will be the proximate cause of the great

rebellion that will call forth the Lord Jesus in flaming fire to take vengeance (Revelation 12,13).

The children of these unlawful connections before the flood were the renowned heroes of old. The subsequent repetition of the crime doubtless gave rise to the countless legends of the loves of the gods, and explains the numerous passages in the Classics, as well as in the ancient literature of other languages, in which human families are traced to a half Divine origin.

Before passing on, we should, perhaps, notice the most common objection to our interpretation, which is that angels, as spiritual beings, could not take wives of the daughters of men. We are, however, unable to recognise the cogency of such an argument, because those who advance it lay claim to a more intimate acquaintance with angelic nature than we can concede as possible. Absurd as this whole idea may have seemed to ourselves some years ago, it is now rendered more probable by the disclosures of modern Spiritualism.

[The reader may also wish to note the increasing appearance of Hollywood films that depict "angels" coming to earth, falling in love with women, and choosing to stay on the earth rather than returning to heaven. This, along with the continual fascination with the appearance of aliens on the earth, may be paving the way for a much more powerful phase of the great satanic deception. - Editor]

The Fullness Of Corruption

The foundations of established order being thus destroyed by the irruption of the fallen angels, the whole world became corrupt, and its morals were inverted. Men no longer recognized a God to Whom personally all obedience and worship is first due, and Whose equal relation to all men as their Creator imperatively demands from each a love for his neighbour as great as that which he bears to himself.

But they judged that whatsoever was pleasant to any man was also right for him. After thus bursting the bands of God asunder and casting His cords from them, it was not long before they went on to believe that the attainment of a desired end justified every means, that the coveted possession must be secured even if it were necessary to use deceit or violence. Blinded by the selfishness of the flesh, which can see nothing beyond itself, they pursued their several objects without consideration or even thought of their fellows, except when any either stood in the way or might be made subservient. And hence there sprang up a thick crop of frauds and assassinations, of open quarrels and violence, till the whole earth was filled with corruption and bloodshed.

And yet all this seems to have existed side by side with luxury, a refined culture, and a love of art and music. Such mingling of things apparently incongruous have not been infrequent in postdiluvial times. The profligacy, immorality, and sensuous intellectuality of Athens is an example.

A parallel might also be sought in the descriptions given by Tacitus, Juvenal, and others, of the times of the Caesars. For then the whole body of society was corrupted, and even the streets of Rome were accustomed to violence. Yet the worst of vices, the most absolute immorality, the most profligate gluttony, the most wanton cruelty, prevailed in company with a splendid magnificence - a high appreciation of music, sculpture, and art generally, and a taste for literature, and especially for poetry, so great that recitations and readings were a common amusement.

Such, though on a far greater scale, was the wickedness of the antediluvian world. But the end was approaching. God looked down a second time upon the spreading demoralisation beneath Him (Gen.

6:5-7) and saw that it would be necessary, at the close of the years of respite, to sweep man and beast, creeping thing and fowl, from the face of the earth.

Yet a third time the Creator beheld, and lo! evil had made such fearful progress that all flesh had corrupted its way upon earth (Gen. 6:12-21). Then He foretold the impending ruin to Noah, who alone found grace in His sight, and instructed him how he might avoid the universal doom. The commands laid upon the patriarch were a strong trial of his faith. He was to proclaim the speedy coming of a catastrophe which to unbelievers would appear simply irrational, of an overwhelming flood that should sweep away all life from the face of the whole earth.

It may be that men felt a momentary uneasiness at the first utterance of this prophecy of woe. Discussion may have taken place similar to those among ourselves, when the conjectured possibility of a collision between the earth and Donati's comet caused a brief anxiety to those who believed in it. But, this qualm over, we can readily picture to ourselves the contempt and derision that must have been poured upon the prophet. Our own times will teach us how the men of science soon proved that such a thing as a universal flood was an absolute impossibility, contrary to all the known laws of nature. And since Noah persisted, the world doubtless settled down into a belief that he was a weak-minded fanatic, void of intellect, and altogether unworthy of notice.

But Noah was not only directed to foretell the approaching doom; he was also bidden to make open preparations for avoiding it. They were preparations of vast magnitude, and such as must have attracted general attention. It was undoubtedly a grievous burden to endure the scoffs and derision with which he must have been continually assailed while building his immense ship on the dry land. Far it may have been from any water, but by faith he persevered. At last the days of his trial drew on to their close.

None had listened to his warnings; not one beyond the inner circle of his own family was accounted worthy to be saved. But the ark was now completed, and he was instructed to enter it with his wife, his sons and their wives, and all the creatures that were impelled by God to go with him. He was at no loss to understand the significance of the command. He knew well that the wrath of God was being restrained only till those who should be saved had been taken out of the way. We can imagine his feelings as he watched the long procession slowly filing into the ark, and at length followed in its rear, leaving the unconscious world, friends and foes alike, in the inexorable grasp of destruction....

And yet, as our Lord Himself tells us, the doomed multitudes knew it not. They had often heard, but had refused to listen; the voice of the prophet had seemed to them as the voice of one that mocked. Even on the morning of the fatal day, earth resounded with the noise of revelry and merriment. Men were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. They were absorbed in the pleasures of the moment and discerned not the slowly rising spectre of Death amid the gathering clouds - the destroyer, with uplifted scythe, about to mow down all flesh at one fell stroke.

But their dream of security was at length rudely dispelled. On the day in which Noah entered into the ark the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters that were above the firmament began to descend. The world wondered; and then, remembering the words of Noah, trembled at the fast falling raindrops, the first they had ever beheld.

Nor was this all. A fearful roaring from the sea announced that some mighty convulsion, equally beyond the calculation of the scientific men of the day, had commenced in the great deep. All its sealed fountains were bursting up. God had removed the bounds of ocean. Its proud waves were no longer stayed but were

rising with prodigious tumult and beginning to advance again upon the dry land.

What scenes of horror must have been presented beneath the dismal rainfall at this awful time! What frightened groups! What countenances of dismay! What shrieks of terror! What fainting for fear! What headlong flights to any place which appeared to offer safety for the moment!

Yet the mercy of God seems even then to have been mingled with His judgment. His mercy devised a doom which, though inexorable and complete, was, nevertheless, not instantaneous but gave time for repentance before death, that by the destruction of the flesh the spirits of many might be saved.

The waters continued to increase. The ark was borne upon them ... and earth was again almost as it had been before the six days of restoration, covered above its highest mountain-tops with a shoreless ocean.

Woeful was the proof that man, if unrestrained, if left to his own devices, is not merely incapable of recovering his innocence, but will rush madly down the steep of sensuousness and impious self-will until he finds himself engulfed in the abyss of perdition. The trial of freedom had failed; the second of the ages was ended.

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