

Genesis, Session 6, The Sethite Genealogy and the Increase of Human Depravity

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Source: Biblelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

sethite genealogy, sons of God, daughters of men, Enoch, Nephilim, Noah, lifespans, Sumerian king list, biblical boundaries, human depravity

Abstract

This source features a lecture by Dr. Kenneth Mathews exploring the theological and narrative significance of the Sethite genealogy and the subsequent rise of human depravity in Genesis 5:1–6:8. Mathews analyzes the role of genealogies in demonstrating God's historical superintendence and highlights key figures like Enoch, who walked with God, and Noah, who offered hope as a new Adam. The lecture addresses the challenging interpretations of the "sons of God," the Nephilim as ancient warriors of renown, and the dramatic lifespans contrasted with the Sumerian King List. Ultimately, the narrative of intermarriage and unchecked corruption serves as a bridge to God's eventual judgment and reversal of creation through the Noahic flood.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genesis 5:1–6:8

- Covers the genealogy of the Sethites, trace of sin, and the intermarriage narrative
- Genesis 6:1–8 serves as a narrative bridge between the genealogy and the Noahic flood account (Genesis 6:9)
- Value and often-overlooked nature of biblical genealogies in contemporary reading

II. The Importance and Structure of Genealogies

- Superintendence of God: Tracking how God superintends and directs the outworking of His promissory blessings for the human family from Adam to Noah and eventually to Abraham (Genesis 11)
- Unity of the human family: Represented positively through the Sethites (Genesis 5) and negatively through the Cainites (Genesis 4)
- Genealogical forms in Scripture:
 - Linear genealogies: Naming a single descendant per father (e.g., Genesis 5)

- Segmented/branched genealogies: Branching out to name multiple descendants (e.g., Noah's sons in Gen 5:32, and the Table of Nations in Gen 10)

III. Significant Figures in the Sethite Lineage and Divine Grace

- Enoch: The theological deviation from the standard pattern of death
 - Walked with God: Portrayed as a righteous and holy lifestyle that found favor with God
 - Lifespan: Lived 365 years, a number reminiscent of a complete year/life
 - Translation: Distinct from others who "died"—he "was no more" because God took him, illustrating a destiny beyond death and the hope of resurrected/translated life
- Noah: The anticipation of comfort and a new beginning
 - Epithet and sound play: Naming of Noah by Lamech is linked phonetically to the Hebrew word for "comfort"
 - Hope of relief: Expected to bring comfort from the painful toil and sweat of working a ground cursed by God
 - The "New Adam": Through his preserved family on the floating ark, Noah acts as a fresh starting point for humanity in the face of absolute depravity

IV. The Problem of Long Lifespans

- Theoretical explanations: Attempts to understand the long ages, including figurative meanings or clan lineage representations
- Ancient Near Eastern Parallel: The Sumerian King List
 - Documents long royal reigns (reaching up to 72,000 years in some additions)
 - Provides historical precedent and non-biblical memory of humanity's long lifespans in the ancient world
- Theological explanation of the reduction in lifespans:
 - A gradual reduction is documented: Methuselah (969 years) to Shem's genealogy (average 344), Abraham (175), Joseph (110), and Moses (120)
 - Ideal lifespan is framed as 70 to 80 years in Psalm 90 (authored by Moses)
 - The downward trajectory testifies to the physical consequences of the sinful human condition and nature's corruption due to sin in a post-fallen world

V. The Narrative of the Intermarriage (Genesis 6:1–4)

- Concept of Boundaries: Crossing boundaries results in complicating and corrupting what the boundaries separated
 - Application to Israel's identity: Warnings against intermarriage with idolatrous neighbors and Canaanite polytheism
- Interpretations of the "Sons of God":
 - Angelic/Demonic View: Traditional view identifying them as fallen angels or demons who left their heavenly domain due to sexual obsession with daughters of men (supported by Job 1-2)

- Sethite/Godly Lineage View: Identifies the "sons of God" as the godly descendants of Seth. Their sin was indiscriminate intermarriage with the Cainites, breaking their holy boundaries. This view is preferred by Mathews due to the structure of Chapters 4 and 5
- Allurement and garden echoes: The phrasing "sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful" and "married any of them they chose" mirrors Eve seeing the fruit and taking it in the Garden of Eden

VI. Divine Response, Nephilim, and Impending Judgment (Genesis 6:3–8)

- God's restriction of the life force: "My spirit will not contend with humanity forever... his days will be 120 years"
 - Spirit/breath: A reference to the divine life-giving breath (Gen 2:7) or the Holy Spirit restricting chaos
 - The 120 years: Interpreted either as a reduction of human lifespan or a 120-year window of delay allowing for repentance before the flood
- The Nephilim:
 - Transliterated Hebrew plural word
 - Associated with giants/strong warriors (as in Numbers 13-14)
 - Mathews argues they were contemporary, mighty warriors of renown (literally "men of name") and icons of violence, rather than a giant race
- God's Grief and Judgment:
 - Highly anthropomorphic description of God grieving and feeling heart-filled pain over what His creatures had become
 - Decision to wipe out mankind and the animal world (as representatives and co-creatures of the earth)
 - Flood as the reversal of creation: Returning the habitable world to the dark, unproductive, water-covered state of Gen 1:2
- Noah finds favor/grace: A righteous and upright man who walked with God like Enoch, standing as the sole exception of hope