

Commentary on Genesis (4)

The History of and Genealogy of Noah (Genesis 5.1a - 6.9) (TABLET III)

This section commences with a list of ten patriarchs from Adam to Noah, and is followed by a passage where God makes a covenant with man after a particularly devastating example of man's downward slide. As always in Genesis this covenant is the central point around which the passage is built. The passage ends with the colophon 'these are the histories of Noah'. This mixture of genealogy and history is a commonplace in ancient Near Eastern literature.

The list of ten patriarchs can be compared with the [Sumerian king lists](#) which delineate 'kingship' in Sumer, and it is especially interesting that the latter lists the kings 'before the Flood'. Thus this list in Genesis may well be patterned on similar ideas. Among other things it underlines the importance the compiler of the Genesis list placed on the patriarchs.

It is probable that the Genesis list has selected ten patriarchs to represent the whole line and is not all-inclusive. Notice that there are also ten patriarchs listed from Noah to Abraham after the flood. Other ancient Near Eastern lists also have ten kings named before the flood, and in some cases the seventh in line is seen as having heavenly connections, so that this is a recognised ancient pattern. The deliberate omission of names from genealogies is witnessed to throughout the Bible, with 'begat' simply portraying descent. We notice, for example, that Matthew deliberately does this with the genealogy of Jesus to make a series of fourteen (twice seven) generations. The number ten suggests a complete series (thus Jacob could say 'your father has changed my wages ten times' (Genesis 31.7) meaning many times).

The Sumerian King Lists

The reigns (and therefore the ages) of the Sumerian kings before the flood were excessively large, even by patriarchal standards (e.g. ten sars = 36,000 years for a sar was $60 \times 60 = 3,600$). This may be due to an ancient memory of long-lived kings, with the numbers invented because no actual numbers were known.

However it is an interesting possibility that this has arisen because when the number system was being developed the sexagesimal system, which finally prevailed, was in competition with decimal systems (to put the matter simply). Thus if a sar at the time when these numbers were first postulated represented 10×10 to the compiler, rather than 60×60 , the 36,000 years becomes 1,000 years which is more in line with the patriarchal ages.

Then we could suggest that in the course of time these sars became interpreted as meaning 3,600, the system which finally prevailed, producing these excessively larger numbers. However, either way, the ages suggest extraordinarily long lives and it would seem that the purpose was to show recognition that long periods of time, disappearing into the distant past, had occurred before the flood. Unlike the patriarchs these periods are consecutive in total thus numbering either 241,200 years or at minimum 6,700 years.

The numbers for these earlier kings were all round numbers, in contrast with later reigns of the kings, which in itself indicates they are not to be taken literally.

The Ages of the Patriarchs

In the same way it is doubtful if we should take the ages given for the patriarchs as literal, although they are clearly intended to convey the fact of longevity, and the passage of a long period of time. Let us tabulate them.

Patriarchs Begets at Remainder Dies at

Adam	130	800	930
Seth	105	807	912
Enos	90	815	905
Cainan	70	840	910
Mahaleel	65	830	895
Jared	162	800	962
Enoch	65	300	365
Methuselah	187	782	969
Lamech	182	595	777
Noah	500	450	950

There were a hundred years from the birth of Noah’s sons to the Flood. Thus if the numbers are taken literally and it is accepted that no names are omitted Methuselah died in the year of the flood, Lamech five years before, and Noah lived until the time of Abraham, while his son Shem actually outlived Abraham and would still be the head of the family when Isaac took over. This must seem unlikely in view of the silence of the narratives.

The Ages of the Later Patriarchs

We can compare these with ages in the remainder of Genesis.

- .
- Isaac is born when Abraham is one hundred
- Abraham dies at one hundred and seventy five
- The promise of Isaac comes when he is ninety nine, but this is clearly due to being one year before the birth at 100
- Abraham is eighty six when Hagar bears Ishmael. This is ten years after entry into the promised land at seventy five plus the year required for birth
- Sara dies at one hundred and twenty seven
- Ishmael dies at one hundred and thirty seven
- Isaac marries at forty and has his first child at sixty
- Isaac dies at one hundred and eighty
- Esau marries at forty
- Jacob meets Pharaoh when one hundred and thirty
- Jacob is seventeen years in Egypt
- Jacob dies at one hundred and forty seven
- Joseph is seventeen when sold into captivity
- Joseph is thirty when released from prison
- Joseph dies at one hundred and ten

The only one that does not end in nought or seven is at the birth of Ishmael and that is 14 years (7 + 7) short of the birth of the son of promise, and is ten years, plus one for birth, after entry into Canaan (see Genesis 16.3).

Are The Numbers Intended To Be Taken Literally?

Notice how many of the numbers in all cases end in nought or five, which were probably both

seen as 'round numbers', and how many of the remainder end in seven. This is hardly likely on genuine ages (even if, in the days before numbers were invented or prominent, men could have kept such records, or even wanted to). The account has all the signs of being an ancient record, and while God could no doubt have revealed the ages, (although this would be unlike His usual method of inspiration), the above fact tends to nullify the idea that He did so.

In the first list only three in the first list, two in the second and four in the third do not end in nought or five. Thirteen of the thirty end in nought and eight end in five, that is over two thirds. Of the nine that end in another number, three end in seven, the divine number, and another three arise because of the seven endings. Two of the three remaining arise in Jared's age, and therefore count as one (the one causes the other), the other is in the age of Methuselah who cannot be alive when the flood comes, yet, as the son of Enoch, needs to live as long as possible to demonstrate God's blessing on Enoch in view of Enoch's own 'short' life. This would appear conclusive evidence that the numbers are not intended literally.

Furthermore the age of Methuselah may intend to show him as falling short of 1000 less thirty years (compare Adam 1000 less seventy) directly because of the flood.

What Significance Could They Have?

Let us, however consider another fact. Adam is depicted as dying at 930, seventy short of one thousand. Certainly in later times a thousand years depicts the perfect time span. Thus Adam is shown to die seventy years (seven x ten = a divine period) short of the perfect life span. This can be seen as demonstrating that his death is God's punishment for his sin.

Enoch is 'taken' at 365. This was at that time the recognised number of days in a year, and the year was connected with the heavenly bodies. 365 was thus the heavenly number, and his age thus reveals him as the heavenly man. He is the seventh in the list, the 'perfect' man. Significantly in the lists of other nations the seventh man is also often seen as especially connected with the heavens.

Lamech dies at 777. If 'seventy and seven' previously intensified the figure seven for the Lamech of the line of Cain (4.24), how much more 'seven hundred and seventy and seven' demonstrates the godliness of the Lamech of the line of Seth. The two are clearly seen in contrast. One uses the divine number for his own benefit, the other is benefited by God to an even greater extent. He is of the chosen line.

As suggested above Methuselah's age may have been based on one thousand less thirty falling short by one.

With regard to the remaining names there is uniformity as regards the ages after begetting. Following Adam's 800 the next five are 800 or 800 plus a number which is significant elsewhere - seven, fifteen, forty and thirty. Note also that Noah has 500 years before he begets, in total contrast with the others. If we take the numbers literally it would mean that Noah is still alive when Abraham is born and Shem outlives Abraham and is alive when Jacob and Esau are born! Would God really have called Abraham to leave such worthy company?

I will not pretend to be able to solve the riddle of the numbers which have exercised the minds of many. Suffice to say that they are lost in the mists of time, (and the Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint have different numbers), but certainly we can see the high numbers, signifying longevity, as intended to get over the message that the line of Seth was blessed with long life. When we consider the mystical value put on numbers in those days, it is not surprising that they should be utilised to give divine messages. (The time of Abraham was the period when mathematics reached its highest point among the Sumerians and Old Babylonians, only to

rapidly decline and not revive again for a thousand years).

What is interesting, however, is the fact that the message was put over by adding and taking away, and not by multiplying. This again is an indication of the age of the narrative.

Thus it seems to us that the list is intended to convey longevity, and that is also intended, through a representative selection of ten which deliberately makes Enoch the seventh in line, to cover all generations who lived before the flood. This is sufficient for the writers purpose in accordance with ancient methodology. The overall impression intended is to convey the idea of a very long period of time.

We will now consider the narrative.

From Adam to Noah

5.1b - 2 'In the day that God created man he made him in the likeness of God, male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them man when they were created.'

The passage reflects a knowledge of the traditions behind Genesis 1. The word 'created' is used three times to stress that man was a perfectly created being, as in Genesis 1.

'In the likeness of God.' This also parallels Genesis 1. But as Genesis 1 also reminds us (v.26) this means that man is made 'like us' i.e. the heavenly court. Thus the likeness refers to man's 'otherness'. He shares the 'nature' of the angelic realm with a moral awareness (3.22).

'And he blessed them.' Man is said to have been 'named' and 'blessed' by God the Creator (Elohim) (1.26, 28). This blessing is to be demonstrated in future fruitfulness. God as Creator is again here in mind as compared with the covenant God i.e. Yahweh, who is mentioned in verse 29. (Compare 4.25-26).

'And named them man.' The 'naming' shows that man owes submission to God, the 'blessing' demonstrates that God has purposed that man should be fruitful. Thus he created them male and female to be His appointees and to be fruitful. We can compare how in the Sumerian king lists 'kingship came down from heaven'. The passage will now go on to demonstrate man's fruitfulness. All these references demonstrate that the writer is familiar with the story of creation, (compare also 5.29).

Yet even while man's fruitfulness is declared we come again and again across that ominous phrase 'and he died'. The whole passage is a declaration that, although God's promise of fruitfulness is being fulfilled, the sentence threatened in Eden is also being carried out, for all, even the best of men, die.

At the same time therefore it is both a message of mercy and life, and of ageing and death. Thus life and death are contrasted together. In contrast, in the genealogy after the flood the phrase 'and he died' is dropped (see Genesis 11). This demonstrates that it is pointedly significant here. After the flood there is a new beginning, but death is then no longer 'unusual'. It is seen as the norm.

5.3 'When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.'

This is the pattern for the whole genealogy with the partial exception of Enoch. We have here,

repeated again and again, the formula 'became the father of, lived after, had other sons and daughters, total number of years, died'. So each is fruitful, each lives a long life, and each dies.

It is stressed that Seth is in the image and likeness of Adam. Thus he shares the likeness with the heavenly court (see on 5.1b). He too is more than just an earthly creature. Yet because man is now a fallen creature the writer deliberately does not say he is in the image and likeness of God. He is in the image and likeness of Adam, for like Adam he must die. (In Genesis 9.6, however, God can still describe man as made in His image).

Adam's death at nine hundred and thirty years, which is seventy short of a thousand is significant. Certainly in later times a thousand years represented a full and perfect period, the ideal. But Adam does not reach the ideal for he has sinned. Thus he is a God appointed time short of it, seventy years (intensified seven). The message is that God controls all things, even this.

We note again that the list does not necessarily list the first born. In Genesis 11.12 Arpachshad is mentioned, but he is probably only the third son (10.22).

The names of the patriarchs are interesting, although it is too easy to translate them to suit a theory and we must beware of doing so. The present names are Hebrew renderings of an unknown primitive original and are probably renderings on the basis of sound rather than meaning. 'Seth' means 'the appointer', or, if a substantive, 'foundation'. Enosh means 'man' in his frailty, no longer the strong 'adam' but the weak 'enosh'. Kenan (qaynan) is closely related to the name Cain (qayin). Attempts have therefore been made to suggest that this is a duplicate line to that of Cain. But far more likely does it bring out the primitive nature of the names and that there was a tendency to keep to familiar names with familiar ideas. We would not expect great inventiveness in the early use of names. The point is that they are different names but similar in meaning and idea. There may well also have been the deliberate intention of demonstrating that Seth's line have replaced that of Adam-Cain.

Mahalal-el means 'praise of God'. Yared means 'descent'. Enoch means 'dedication' or 'beginning'.

5.21 'When Enoch had lived sixty five years he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty five years, and Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.'

Like Noah (6.9), Enoch is said to have 'walked with God'. This is clearly an indication of extreme godliness, and of a close relationship with God. We can compare Malachi 2.6 - (spoken of Levi) 'he walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from iniquity'. In contrast Abraham only walked 'before God' (17.1; 24.40). There is a possible deliberate contrast between Enoch's walk with God and the activities of Lamech and his sons, seventh in the line of Cain.

His walk with God is mentioned as occurring 'after the birth of Methuselah'. This may just arise from following the regular pattern of the descriptions or may signify a deep spiritual experience some time following that event. The name of his son may mean 'man of Lach (a god)' indicating idolatry. This is in interesting contrast with Methusha-el (4.18) 'who is of El'. Enoch seemingly began his walk with God after the birth of Methuselah.

But of Enoch alone is it said that 'he was not, for God took him', rather than that he died. The phrase is enigmatic. While as a result of later revelation we may see in this phrase the thought that he was taken up to God the Pentateuch mentions nothing of an afterlife. A man was seen

as living on in his sons. Yet it was clearly felt that Enoch's demise was somehow different.

This may not, however, mean that he did not die. If we take his age even partly literally Enoch, in fact, departed this life relatively young, and we have to consider the possibility that what happened to him was that he met a violent end, a martyrdom (the earth was filled with violence - 6.11). As one who walked with God he may well have been the target of evil men. Perhaps one day he left his family home and was never heard of again. As time passed and he did not return, his family recognised that he was no longer on earth and they therefore thought in terms of God having 'taken him', how they knew not. One moment he was there, the next he was gone. And they would find comfort in the thought that he was 'taken'.

It may be said, on the other hand, that Hebrews 11.5 does say 'by faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and he was not found, for God translated him'. But this may only be signifying his unique departure in the context. It may be saying that he was not one of those who died a lingering death and of whom it was said, 'and he died'. Was he also there seen as 'translated' through martyrdom which was seen as God taking him? The context is one of martyrdom.

However, if we see the ten patriarchs as representative of a whole line stretching over thousands of years, with the specific ages being symbolic, then the deliberate positioning of Enoch as seventh (the number of divine perfection) in contrast with the sons of Lamech (who were also placed seventh) may be seen as contrasting the holiness and godliness of Enoch with the 'worldliness of either Lamech (the seventh from Adam) or the sons of Lamech (the seventh in their genealogy), and show him uniquely as 'the heavenly man'.

The age of Enoch, 365 years, was the number of days in a year, almost certainly intended (if not literal) to indicate his connection with the heavens through his especially godly life. Once we see Enoch like this the phrase 'he was not, because God took him' may be seen as taking on a new meaning. It may now become a positive affirmation of a unique experience, a claim that for those very few who 'walk with God' a further life awaits with God in contrast with the shadowy world of the grave, because they are so special. Of all the other patriarchs it is said, ominously, that they died. Is there here the suggestion that death may be counteracted? If so it is only a hint not taken up further until much later on. Nor was it seen to contradict the standard belief in Sheol.

But the fact is that his 'early' cessation could be seen as indicating a short life, which might have suggested the displeasure of God. To speak of an early death could point to failure and weakness on his part. Thus the description may be deliberately counteracting that idea. The extreme age given for Methuselah might then also have arisen because the writer is seeking to make up for this by making his son 'live' the maximum age possible (up to the flood) so that he is the longest living man. It may be that this, at least partly, was seen as counteracting the 'shortness' of Enoch's life.

5.28 'When Lamech had lived one hundred and eighty two years he became the father of a son, and called his name Noah (noach = to rest), saying, "Out of the ground which Yahweh has cursed this one shall bring us relief (nacham) from our work, and from the toil of our hands". Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety five years, and had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy seven years, and he died.'

Lamech lives for seven hundred and seventy seven years. This threefold seven must be seen as in indication of the 'perfect' life and contrasts with the seventy and seven of Lamech in 4.24, showing the superiority of the line of Seth both in holiness and prestige.

Lamech's statement about his son demonstrates a knowledge of the fall, and the curse and covenant which ensued. The ground is cursed by Yahweh and yields its fruits reluctantly. Noah will thus be a comfort to them because he can help with the work of survival. The birth of a man child is always looked on as a special blessing in the East because he will be a major producer. Note the play on words of two similar roots, which is typical of namings as we have seen (when looking at the roots it is the consonants that we must consider. The vowels were mainly not part of the text).

It is possibly noteworthy that just as the son of Lamech the Cainite reintroduced domestication of animals among the Cainites (see on 4.20), a sign of a new beginning and a claim that the curse on Cain was over, so the son of Lamech of the line of Seth is indicated to have similar potential with regard to the curse on the ground. After the flood God will promise the reliability of the seasons in order to take away the uncertainties of agriculture. So Lamech's words can be seen as prophetic.

Some see in the words a reference to the fact that Noah would become a vine dresser and wine producer (9.20).

Some try to suggest that verse 29 is an interpolation. This is solely in the interests of the Documentary Theory (making the verse so-called J rather than so-called P). But similar brief comments in a genealogy were commonplace where they were an integral part of the narrative (see the king lists) and there are no grounds for the suggestion apart from the interests of a Theory. The suggestion must therefore be rejected.

5.32 'And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth'.

As with Lamech at the end of Cain's line, Noah begets three sons, a sign of complete fulfilment.

We notice that while Noah's end is later mentioned (9.28-29) no mention is made of 'sons and daughters'. It is, of course, possible that he had no other sons and daughters, but in view of what has preceded it seems very unlikely. Thus the omission of a mention of sons and daughters is probably so that no suggestion might be seen in 6.1 that the daughters there might include Noah's. The writer wishes him to be kept free from the disgrace that would come with such an idea. Only the sons who were faithful and came through the flood are mentioned.

Note that what might be described as the 'usual' ending comes in 9.28-29, and also refers back to the flood. Both these factors demonstrate the interconnection of the stories and genealogies so that all are part of one whole.

The unusual age of begetting must have some significance. Five is the number of the covenant, thus five hundred is five intensified, and it may be that this is stressing that these sons will all participate in the coming covenant.

6.1 'And when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them.'

This is the connecting link with chapter 5. It assumes a gradual growth in the human race, and thus connects back directly to the descriptions of the growth of mankind there, and especially to the references to daughters. That is the only place, with the exception of Naamah (4.22), that we have learned of daughters being born to men.

Furthermore the suggestion of daughters to Noah has probably been deliberately excluded precisely because of the connection with these next verses. So this section is an integral part of the covenant record commencing in chapter 5.1b and contains the covenant which is central to

this particular record, in a passage that is leading up to the flood. It is not a very pleasant conclusion. It suggests that what is to follow was largely the result of the activities of women, although probably encouraged by their menfolk, which occurred almost right from the beginning, including at some stage the daughters of the line of Seth.

6.2 ‘And the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair, and took to wife such of them as they chose.’

In the Old Testament the term the ‘sons of God’ (bene haelohim) always refers to heavenly beings (Job 1.6 and context; 38.7; Psalm 29.1; 89.7; Daniel 3.25; Deuteronomy 32.8 in the LXX; see also Jude 6-7, 1 Peter 3:19-20, and 2 Peter 2:4-6).

But if we take that meaning here we need not think of it as a crude representation of heavenly beings becoming men to slake their desires. It is true that they thought these women were ‘desirable’, but it could have been for another reason, and that was because they were seen as presenting a means by which these evil ‘angels’ could interfere directly in the affairs of men, take over human bodies and possibly even regain acceptability. The thought would thus be more of occult practises, and especially demonic marriages rather than of sex. The Bible regularly covers up gross sin by euphemisms, and this is one such case. The writer is describing it in folksy terms as though it were normal marriage. But it is describing demon possession of a most dreadful kind.

‘Saw that the daughters of men were fair.’ The word for ‘fair’ means more literally ‘good, useful’ for some purpose. Thus they saw them as suitable for their purposes.

We cannot, however, avoid the thought that the women were very willing. They were not just helpless tools. This interest in the occult was clearly rampant almost right from the beginning (so verse 1 suggests), with the result that the evil angels were able to take their pick. Thus by opening themselves to occult practises of an extreme kind, and especially to voluntary demon possession, these women, presumably the large majority, were being ‘bound’ to these ‘fallen angels’. Whereas Eve had unknowingly succumbed to temptation by the powers of evil, these women glory in it and throw themselves fully into it.

There are a number of other alternatives suggested for the significance of the term ‘the sons of God’ which we will now consider.

- 1). That ‘the sons of God’ represent the so-called godly line of Seth and ‘the daughters of men’ represent the cursed line of Cain, (or indeed the daughters of other sons of Adam). In favour of this is that it directly follows the genealogies of Cain and from Adam to Noah.**

But there is no reason why we should think that all the line of Seth were godly. Certainly, many of their ‘sons and daughters’ must have had descendants who perished in the flood. Nor is there any reason why they would be seen above all as especially producing ‘mighty men’ and ‘men of renown’. Indeed Lamech appears to be a simple son of the soil (5.28). Nor does it explain why they should be called ‘nephilim’ (compare Numbers 13.33), nor why such men should be able to have their pick of women anywhere. The fact is that by the time of the Flood the vast majority of the line of Seth were anything but godly and were also destroyed in the Flood. Nor is this concept of a ‘godly’ line being called the ‘sons of God’ (bene ha elohim) found in the Old Testament, whereas the phrase *is* used otherwise.

In favour could be said to be the fact that God calls Israel ‘my firstborn son’ (Exodus 4.22). But this rather contrasts Israel as a whole, as adopted by God, with the ‘divine’

Pharaoh's son and is not really parallel with this.

A better parallel is perhaps 'you are the sons of Yahweh your God' (Deuteronomy 14.1). But again this refers to the special position of the children of Israel as those who have been delivered from Egypt, demonstrating their unique position with God. They are adopted by Him as His own.

Both these phrases are very different from the phrase the 'sons of the elohim' where the very nature of elohim, heavenly beings, is usually in mind. Besides why are they not called the 'sons of Yahweh' here, as Moses does, if the godly line were meant? It was Yahweh they worshipped (4.26). It is Yahweh which is the name connected with the covenant, not Elohim, and the name Yahweh is used in the passage.

And if the line of Seth were godly enough to be called 'the sons of God', why did they marry the daughters of men, deluded by their charms? Surely if the writer had this in mind he would have included a reference to them as 'sons of God' somewhere in the genealogy. Yet Seth was specifically described as being the image and likeness of Adam, not the image and likeness of God.

- **2). That 'the sons of God' are Neanderthals, or a similar species, appearing as from nowhere and being seen as supernatural beings because of their size and therefore being given this name in popular parlance, and they, or their children, being also called Nephilim. It is possible to imagine the effect produced on the population if a considerable group of these huge beings arrived and forced themselves on the 'daughters of men', with no one daring to offer resistance.**

The daughters of men are then seen as intermarrying with them, producing huge offspring. This is feasible and would tie in with Numbers 13.33, the point being that the huge men there were seen as somehow connected with a similar situation. Nephilim might be thus seen as a term for the progeny of such alliances.

Such alliances might well have been seen by the people and the writer as unholy alliances bringing God's anger down on the them. One of the points later brought out is the violence which preceded the flood which might well have resulted from such an 'invasion'.

- **3). That the sons of God (sons of the gods) represent royal personages. These often set themselves up as being divine or semi-divine, seeing themselves as sons of their gods. Thus the idea may be that they exalted themselves and set up their harems, and took whom they would, whether willing or not. The rare word Nephilim is then accepted as meaning powerful men, then men of renown. The idea is then that the writer sees this as resulting in multiple marriages, a further downward step in man's behaviour.**

All these theories, except perhaps 2 where they were thought to be heavenly beings, founder on the fact that the 'sons of elohim' (those of the nature of the elohim) is a recognised form for supernatural beings and suggests exactly that, but some nevertheless prefer them to our suggested interpretation.

6.3 'Then Yahweh said, "My Spirit (ruach) will not strive with (or abide in, or plead the cause with) man for ever, in that he also is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.'

Either translation is possible, (given emendation of the text), and whichever we select the general idea can be seen as the same, that God's activity within man would cease.

The verb *yathon* (from *thyn*) - which in the *qal* as here means 'judge' or possibly 'rule' - is difficult, but it could mean here 'plead the cause with' (the 'with', present in the Hebrew, prevents it simply meaning 'judge'). 'Strive' would be expected to be the *niphal yathin*. 'Abide' is found in the versions, which might suggest they read (or changed it to) *yathor* or *yalun*.

Some see the use of 'spirit' as spirit with a small 's' and as basically meaning man's life through God's breath will not abide for ever, thus referring to the fact that after one hundred and twenty years they will die (compare 6.17; 7.22 where *ruach* is again used with this meaning of breath). This would point to the unity of the passage with the Flood narrative.

However here 'spirit' is qualified by 'My' and thus is far more likely to mean God's Spirit, as this is the usual meaning of *ruach* when so closely connected with God. God has seen how they have revealed their fleshliness and unworthiness. They have chosen to respond to evil powers and He will therefore withdraw from them His activity in them through His Spirit, His Power.

The table of the patriarchs has already emphasised that life is withdrawn so that man will not live for ever ('and he died'), so that if verse 3 means only that it is somewhat innocuous. No one thought now that man would live for ever. But as a statement that God's dealings with man will finalise it is powerful.

'In that he also is flesh' or 'in their going astray'. Either is possible depending on the vowels, which are not in the original. The former, which is more probable, would mean that man has by his behaviour revealed his basic fleshly nature and that he was not worthy of life from God. The latter would signify that their behaviour has brought God's judgment on them.

In context the one hundred and twenty years refers to the length of time until God sends the flood. Here God is, by covenant, giving man one last chance to change. He has to give time for Noah to make his preparations, and He wishes to give men time to reconsider.

Alternately it might be seen as signifying an intended reduction in life span. But if the latter is the case it is clear that this does not happen for some considerable time, see the genealogy in Genesis 11, (although the slow reduction in life spans might be seen as a gradual introduction of the limit). Besides there is nowhere else any suggestion of a length of one hundred and twenty years for human life span, even though Moses was 120 years old when he died (Deuteronomy 34.7). Thus the former suggestion that it referred to the period up to the flood would seem much more likely and be more meaningful in context, and that would suggest the verb be translated as 'plead the cause with' or 'strive' on the basis that God covenants to put a limit on how long He will seek to bring men to repentance.

So God through a theophany warns man of the danger of His judgment to come, and yet gives the suggestion that mercy is yet available.

6.4 'The Nephilim were on the earth (or 'in the land') in those days, and also afterwards, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, men of renown.'

The position of this verse in the narrative (we might expect it before verse 3), and the fact that it is not connected by the usual 'waw' ('and') to the previous verse, suggests that this may be a word of explanation put in by the compiler (compare the explanatory note in Numbers 13.33). He knows his readers may be puzzled by the reference to the 'sons of God' so he explains, 'the nephilim were on the earth in those days'. He is thus connecting what is happening with the 'nephilim', a term which he knows his readers will recognise. The nephilim might mean 'the fallen ones' (from *naphal* - to fall), which would tie in with seeing the sons of God as 'fallen angels'.

'In those days' refers to the time of the demonic 'marriages' and to God's severe warning to mankind.

But worse is to follow, for 'afterwards', i.e. after God's warning, the position deteriorated and these nephilim, these 'sons of God', with the connivance of the daughters of men, continued their unholy alliances and this resulted in children being born with special 'fallen' powers which enabled them to become famous. These also were seen as 'nephilim' (compare Numbers 13.33 'the nephilim which come of the nephilim').

The idea here is probably that the women were married to humans, but that their occult practises resulted in the children born of these human marriages being somehow 'infected' by their demonic partners. The phrase 'came into -' regularly refers to intercourse, and this stresses the deeply personal depth of demonic experience into which these women threw themselves. It further explains why the destruction of all living beings was required.

Some who have connected with the occult in depth in modern days can testify to those who have gone through such experiences with their demon 'lovers'. This was evil of an extreme kind and demonstrates why the flood was necessary. Indeed without this explanation we might have questioned whether it was not rather severe, given God's earlier mercy to Cain. But the fact is that mankind, at least in this part of the world, had freely and willingly sunk to a depth of evil beyond our wildest imaginations.

As referred to already there is a further reference to the nephilim in Numbers 13.33, which demonstrates the awe with which the term was then viewed. This suggests that the word had by then gained the meaning of 'mighty men' or 'giants' and was thus applied to any excessively huge men (not necessarily connected with the original 'nephilim), especially the sons of Anak, who clearly had gained a reputation and were seen as the product of special descent. We may surmise that by that time the word 'nephilim' had become a word which expressed superstitious fear, whereby any huge men were connected with other worldly powers, especially when they were opponents. The Genesis story was known to them and they assumed that something similar had caused these men to be 'gigantic', i.e. larger than normal, which increased their fear of them.

6.5 'Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the world (or 'in the land'), and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.'

The occult activity, which had clearly become commonplace, emphasised the depths to which man had sunk, and it is quite clear that the menfolk had connived in it. Indeed without the illustration of verses 1-4 this description and what follows would be inexplicable.

In the past men have murdered their kinsmen, and others, and have been spared, revealing God's compassion and mercy. Thus something particularly awful was required to bring about what was to happen. These humans are judged to have become totally caught up in evil, and that includes the surviving sons and daughters of Lamech, and possibly even of Methuselah. Indeed he might himself have died in the flood. The description is very emphatic. Every imagination of the thought of the heart continually evil. This is not just man sinning, it is a great deal more than that. There is no goodness, no compassion, no altruism, no thoughtfulness, no unselfishness, no genuine love, nothing that makes life wholesome. Satanic possession has indeed gripped the land.

Notice the contrast between Genesis 1.31 where 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good' with these verses 'Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth --- and was sorry that he had made man on the earth'. The creation was good, but once man took over it sank to this.

6.6 'And Yahweh regretted that he had made man on the earth (or 'the men in the land') and it grieved him to his heart.'

This anthropomorphism is a way of demonstrating God's regret at the situation. It is because man has altered the situation that it arises. It is not that God is changing His mind because He thinks He has made a mistake. The change of mind comes because man has drastically changed, and He is grieved by it. He would have wished for anything but this. But having given man the freedom to sin the consequences have to be dealt with.

'It grieved him to his heart.' He was sad at what man had become. Thus unlike the gods of other nations he is concerned about man's condition.

There is an interesting parallel between this verse and 5.29. It was said of Noah 'this one shall bring us relief (nchm) from our work ('sh) and from the toil ('tsb) of our hands'. Here we have 'it grieved (nchm) him that he had made ('sh) man and it pained ('tsb) him to his heart'. How different was the immediate fruit from the promise. But it also reminds us that the world is divided into two. Those who are blessed by God because they are His and those who break His heart and face judgment.

6.7 'So Yahweh said, "I will blot out these men (or mankind) whom I have created from the face of the ground, men (mankind) and beasts and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them".'

So God determines to blot out all who have been infected by this evil.

The question that arises, however, is as to who is involved. Is it the whole of mankind? Or is it the people who are living in the area where Noah lives, the people 'in his world'. If we see this as happening in the very distant past before men had spread widely we may argue that it means all mankind. But the Hebrew does not require this because of the number of nuances of the word eretz.

The word translated 'earth' (eretz) in verses 5-7 even more often means 'land' and it is quite in accordance with the Hebrew that this situation described occurred in just one part of the earth, 'Noah's earth', where Noah was living with his family. This is not just a matter of choosing between two alternative translations. The reason eretz could be so used was because of how the ancients saw things. To them there was their own world (their 'eretz' - compare Genesis 12.1), then a wider 'eretz' which included the surrounding peoples, and then the rather hazy world on the fringes, and then beyond that who knew what? Thus 'the earth' even in its wider meaning could mean a fairly large, and yet from our viewpoint localised, area, and their 'whole earth' was what to us would be to fairly limited horizons (compare how the Roman world and its fringes were 'the world' in the New Testament (Luke 2.1; Acts 24.5; Romans 1.8; Colossians 1.6)).

There are thus three possibilities, all possible from the Hebrew.

- 1). That all mankind is involved and that the flood was global. (It could not strictly mean this to the writer, or to Noah, for both were unaware of such an idea. All they could think of, and mean, was 'the world' according to their conception of it).
- 2). That all mankind was involved but that they had not moved out of a certain large area and therefore were all destroyed in a huge flood, which was not, however, necessarily global, as it would not need to involve lands which were uninhabited.

The fact of the worldwide prevalence of flood myths might be seen as supporting one of these two views, as would the argument that had the area been limited Noah could have

moved with his family outside the area, however large. (Against this it could be argued that God had a lesson to teach to future generations, and that He had in view the preservation of animal life).

- 3). That it was only mankind in the large area affected by the demonic activity ('Noah's world') that were to be destroyed, and that the flood was therefore vast, but not destroying those of mankind unaffected by the situation described, if there were such.

What cannot be avoided is the fact that the flood was huge beyond anything known since. It was remembered in Mesopotamia, an area which had known great floods, as '*the Flood*', which divided all that came before it from all that followed, as for example in [the Sumerian king lists](#).

The term 'the face of the ground' (compare 2.6; 4.14; 6.1; 7.23; 8.8; 8.13), used here and never outside Genesis 1-11, may have a specialist meaning, for Cain was driven 'from the face of the ground' while he was hardly driven from the earth. It could therefore perhaps refer to that area of land 'given' to Adam when they were driven from the Garden (thus Mesopotamia and its surrounds), or possibly to ground as a whole wherever men cultivate it (thus to all integrated mankind). Now He will not just drive men out of it as He did Cain, He will blot them out.

6.8-9a 'But Noah found favour in the eyes of Yahweh. These are the histories of Noah.'

Among all who are committing such evil there is one who, with his close family, has remained pure. He alone of his world is worthy to be spared. And with this sentence the record called 'these are the histories of Noah' ends.