

Ask Away – January 3

1) What is Genesis 6:1–4 talking about? Who were the Nephilim?

This passage is both fascinating and puzzling, and there are three main views:¹

- Angel View: interprets the “sons of God” as angels who lusted after the beautiful women of those days. The “Nephilim” were the children of these illicit marriages, described in 1 Enoch as being giants that reached three hundred cubits. While it is true that the phrase “sons of God” can refer to angels (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), it does not fit Genesis well for several reasons. First, how can angels marry women? Jesus said that angels do not marry (Mark 12:25). Second, how can spiritual beings sire children with physical beings? The power to procreate appears to be given by God only to men and animals (cf. Gen 1:22, 24, 28). Third, why should God’s judgment immediately follow this story if the main fault lies with the angels? Finally, how could the children be giants with a height of 300 cubits? This seems very unlikely indeed!
- Godly Men View: interprets the “sons of God” as referring to the godly line of Seth (Gen 4:26) who married the worldly daughters of Cain. The “Nephilim,” their children, were exceptionally large men who used their size and power to accomplish great deeds (cf. Num 13:33). This mixing of the godly with the ungodly led to the corruption of mankind.
- King View: interprets the “sons of God” as referring to kings or aristocrats who married beautiful female commoners. Their children, the “Nephilim,” were also men of exceptional size who seized power over the earth and ruled as despots.

Personally, I tend to favor the Godly Men View at this time, but I’m not dogmatic on the subject.

2) What does it mean when it says God “repented” that he had made man? (Gen 6:6 KJV).

The KJV says, “repented,” but the NASB (“was sorry”) and the ESV (“regretted”) give the better sense. God was not repenting of some mistake he had made or changing some aspect of His character. Rather, God’s feelings, emotions and plans toward mankind had changed. They had become so wicked and evil, that God was forced to bring terrible judgment on them. Jeremiah 18:1–11 is the classic passage that explains how God’s plans and intentions toward a group of people can change based on *their* behavior.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 106–108. See also Mathews, “Genesis 1–11:26” 323–332.