

1

The Opening of the Words

(Preached October 27, 1650)

“And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.’” Genesis 6:3

This chapter contains two parts: (1) God’s determination to destroy the world by a deluge, and (2) God’s provision that He made in this general judgment to save Noah and his family by preparing an ark.

The text is under the first heading, God’s determination to destroy the world by a flood, touching which judgment the procuring cause is here laid down. When men began to increase in number (by reason of polygamy first practiced by Lamech), they increased in sin; and therefore God decreased the number of the world that He might decrease the sins of the world. The particular sin here specified, why God would destroy the world, is laid down in the second verse, where it is said that “the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.” The sons of God here spoken of cannot mean the angels, as Tertullian and some other of the ancients thought (though it is true elsewhere they are called by this name). Christ, speaking of angels, says of them that the angels of God neither marry nor are given in marriage.

QUESTION. But whom shall we understand by the sons of God in this place?

ANSWER. Good interpreters conceive that hereby was meant the posterity of godly Seth who, because they had the true worship of God among them, are called the sons of God, and these sons of God saw the daughters of men. That is, the posterity of godly Seth joined in marriage with the posterity of wicked Cain; and so, by these marriages and mixtures between the wicked Cainites and those who professed to worship the true God, religion began to decay and wickedness to abound in the world, for which God resolved to destroy the world.

In the whole verse you have three parts: (1) a general judgment and grievous punishment threatened, "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man." (2) The reason of this assigned: "For he also is flesh." (3) A mitigation and respiting of this punishment: "Yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

There are these difficulties in the text to be explained: (1) What is meant by this: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." (2) What is meant by the reason assigned: "for he also is flesh." One would think it should be a reason on the contrary to this one asserted, that therefore God should indulge man; yet here it is a reason of the punishment, though in other places it is a reason of a mercy. (3) What is meant by this: "Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."

QUESTION. What is meant by this, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man"?

ANSWER. By "spirit" some understand the soul of man, and so the vulgar Latin renders this phrase, understanding it of man's soul. And it is called "My Spirit," say they, because God infused the soul into man. They would have the sense to be "my spirit," i.e., the soul of man shall not always abide in man, but he shall die. But our best interpreters reject this interpretation. Not to trouble you with other opinions about this text,