

The Nephilim

Genesis 6 begins with a tale of intermarriage between the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men”. This union created giants, or “nephilim” in Hebrew. The intermarriage was so evil that it prompted a terrible punishment from the Lord and led to the great Flood. The question is, who were these giants? This topic isn't discussed very often but I believe it's worth investigating.

Let's start by taking a look at the passage itself:

Genesis 6:1-4: “And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. There were giants⁵³⁰³ in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men¹³⁶⁸ which were of old, men of renown.”

There are a few interesting things about this passage. First of all, no “daughters of God” married “sons of men” – it only went the other way. Second, this union resulted only in *sons*. None of the children became “mighty women” and there's no evidence that any *daughters* were born to these couples. That's a bit strange and hints that something unusual is going on.

Some people claim that the “sons of God” were godly men and the “daughters of men” were sinful women, and the passage is speaking about the dangers of marrying unbelievers. But if

that's the case then why weren't any daughters born to these couples and why did their offspring become giants? Verse 4 clearly says that each one of these children became “mighty men” of extraordinary ability. These facts make it unlikely that this is a simple case of believers marrying unbelievers. I think something else is going on – something unusual and disturbing.

We can learn a bit more by examining the passage's key words. In Hebrew they are:

Mighty men: 1368. Powerful, warrior, tyrant, champion, chief, giant, mighty, strong.

Giants: 5303. Hebrew: “nephil”. “It means a bully, a tyrant, a giant. It appears three times in the OT (Gen 6:4, Num 13:33). Since the etymology is uncertain, there is much speculation among reputable scholars concerning the nature of these individuals. Until more evidence becomes available, perhaps it is wise to do as the RSV and NIV translations did: render it “Nephilim”.

Right away we can see that we've stumbled across a mystery. The very definition of the Hebrew word “nephil” is so fraught with uncertainty that scholars recommend the world *remain untranslated!* If these people are human beings then why is there all this mystery? If the author wanted to describe sinful people then there are a lot of clear and well-understood Hebrew words he could have used, but instead he chose a word that's cloaked in uncertainty. There's something significant going on here.

The only other use of the word “nephilim” (giants) in the Bible can be found here:

Numbers 13:33: “And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and

we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”

Notice the description of these beings. The Israelite spies reported that the nephilim were giants of extraordinary size, which matches the description in Genesis 6. These *clearly* weren't normal people and the Israelites were terrified at the sight of them! This deepens the mystery. What's going on here?

I believe the key to understanding this passage can be found in the use of the phrase “sons of God”. Each one of the nephilim had two parents: a “son of God” and a “daughter of man”. The phrase “daughter of man” literally means “female” so that's easy enough to understand. But who were the sons of God?

That phrase is used in exactly three other places in the Old Testament. All three occur in the book of Job, and in each case the phrase refers to *angels*:

Job 1:6: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.”

Job 2:1: “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.”

Job 38:4-7: “Where was thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

In each case the beings known as the “sons of God” are angels, not men. It's true that in the New Testament believers are called the “sons of God” (John 1:12) but when Genesis 6:1-4 was written that wasn't the case. Nowhere in the entire Old Testament are human beings ever referred to as “sons of God”. Job is one of the oldest books of the Bible and it's not a stretch to imagine that the Hebrew phrase “sons of God” carries the same meaning in both Job and Genesis. If “sons of God” means “angels” in Job then it also means “angels” in Genesis 6.

In this case it refers to *fallen* angels, or demons. If the nephilim were the product of a demonic father and a human mother then that means they would be half-demon and half-human. It's no wonder they were beings of terrible power and breathtaking evil!

The difference between a “son of man” and a “son of God” is that sons of men are *born* while sons of God are *created*. A son of God refers to a being which was created directly by God Himself, which includes Adam and the angels. Once Christ appeared He made it possible for others to become “sons of God” through Him, but that wasn't an option in the Old Testament. Many Old Testament people were saved but none of them were ever called the sons of God. That only started happening in the New Testament after the appearance of Christ. Aside from Adam and Eve, all humans were born from human parents and weren't created by a direct act of divine will.

All angels, however, were created directly by God Himself. Angels don't have other angels as parents, nor do they bear offspring. They were all divinely created and therefore they are all the “sons of God”.

Some people have objected to this interpretation by pointing out that in the New Testament Jesus taught that angels aren't given in marriage:

Mark 12:25: “For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in

heaven.”

It is indeed true that the angels *which are in Heaven* don't marry. However, the Bible never says that angels are *incapable* of intermarrying with humans, nor does it say that fallen angels never marry *on Earth*. What *is* clear is that angels aren't allowed to marry humans, and doing so is a great sin which condemns the angel for all of eternity. It's not surprising that angels don't marry in Heaven because in Heaven the Lord's will is done. *Demons, however, have no interest in doing the Lord's will.*

Genesis 6 is telling us that in the days before the Flood, demons intermarried with humans and produced a new race of powerful and evil beings. This race (which was composed entirely of men) was destroyed by the Flood, which wiped out everyone except for the line of Noah.

What's particularly important about this is that Noah's genealogy didn't include any of these “sons of God”. This is critical because *the Messiah had to be a pure human*. No Messiah could be part human, part God, and part demon! This is what the Bible means when it says that Noah was perfect in his generations:

Genesis 6:9: “These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”

This verse says that Noah was both “just” and “perfect in his generations”. That means he was an upright man *and he had a pure generic lineage*. Noah was a purebred human and had no demons in his ancestry. That's one of the reasons why the lineage that's recorded in Genesis 5 is so important! It clearly demonstrates that Noah (and therefore the Messiah) didn't have any demonic ancestors.

The nephilim were a clever plan by the devil. They were his attempt to corrupt mankind's genetic line so that the Messiah couldn't come. God solved that problem by wiping out the

nephilim in the Flood. In this context the Flood makes a lot of sense: it was *vital* for everything which was tainted by demonic DNA to be wiped out. Of course, Satan wasn't content with attempting this just once; he later tried it again in the land of Canaan to stop the Israelites from entering the Promised Land. This could be another reason why God ordered every last Canaanite destroyed – He wanted the nephilim to be wiped out.

There are a couple other passages that seem to be related to the nephilim. The first one can be found in 2 Peter:

2 Peter 2:4-5: “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell⁵⁰²⁰, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;”

The word that's used for “hell” in this passage is a special one that's used *only in this one passage*. This is its definition:

Hell: 5020. “Found only in its verbal form in 2 Peter 2:4, meaning to consign to Tartarus (which is neither Sheol of the OT, nor Hades of the NT, nor Gehenna, nor hell, but the place where certain angels are confined, reserved unto judgment). This punishment for these angels is because of their special sin.”

Notice what this says here. These fallen angels (or demons) are confined to a special place called Tartarus. This is actually *not* the same “hell” that we're familiar with. When people die in their sins they go to hell, not Tartarus. Tartarus is a special place that's only populated by demons who committed a specific sin. In other words there are actually *two* Hells – the normal one and Tartarus. Humans can't be sent to Tartarus. It's reserved for a

special class of demons.

The Bible teaches that there are many demons who aren't bound in Tartarus. Quite a few of them wander over the surface of the Earth and cause all sorts of horrors. Yet there are some demons who committed a sin so terrible that they're no longer permitted to wander the Earth. If this is an accurate reading of the text then what sin did they commit? Isn't it possible that the demons which that are spoken of here are the "sons of God" who created the nephilim in Genesis 6, and their sin was intermarrying with humans?

It's worth noting that in the *very next verse* Peter speaks of Noah and the Flood. Isn't it possible that those verses are related – that the great sin these demons committed had something to do with the Flood which destroyed the old world? If fallen angels did intermarry with humans and produced a race of evil offspring then it would make sense that the Lord would judge it, and it would also make sense to mention the Flood when referring to this event. It's easy to understand why God imprisoned these demons: He didn't want them to do it again.

There's another passage which may be referring to this event. It can be found in Jude:

Jude 1:6-7: “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation³⁶¹³, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Here we have another mention of angels that are “reserved in everlasting chains” and waiting for the final judgment. The very next verse speaks of Sodom and Gomorrha and highlights it as a *second* example of what happens to those who engage in

fornication and immorality. Note the use of the phrase “even as”, which indicates that both the angels *and* Sodom were guilty of the same type of sin. If Jude is speaking of fallen angels that intermarried with humans then this makes a lot of sense, because both the demons and the residents of Sodom were guilty of fornication and gross sexual misconduct.

The Bible teaches that one day the nephilim will return. In the book of Daniel we find this passage:

Daniel 2:43: “And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.”

Notice the underlined part. Daniel said that “they” would “mingle themselves with the seed of men”. That’s a rather odd phrase, isn’t it? Who is “they”? What’s this verse talking about?

If you look up this verse in other translations you’ll get mixed results. Some translations preserve this odd phrase (which is a direct translation of the original Aramaic), while others mangle it beyond recognition. The Geneva Bible preserves it, as does the ASV and the NAS. The ESV and the NIV butcher it, though: instead of translating it they offer their own interpretation of it (although the ESV adds a footnote which points out what the original Aramaic actually says).

The original Aramaic really does say “they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men”. This implies that something unusual is going on. If “they” are going to mingle with the “seed of men” then that must mean “they” *are not part of mankind!* Daniel explains that this mingling doesn’t work out very well. The iron and the clay just don’t mix. Human beings are clearly the clay; we were made from dust and we return back to dust when we die. These others, though, are depicted as being iron which indicates a much stronger and more powerful race of beings. “They” are trying to mix with the clay but the result is

very brittle.

I think this is a reference to the nephilim. Before the Flood some of the demons intermarried with humans and produced a race that was neither human nor demon – it was a mixture of “iron” and “clay”. When Daniel gave this prophecy he was speaking about things that would take place in the end-times. What happened before was going to happen again: the nephilim are going to come back (presumably through demons who aren't currently imprisoned in Tartarus).

Christ told us that just before the Second Coming things would be like they were in the days of Noah:

Matthew 24:37-39: “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Just as people were going about their lives right up until the Flood came and killed them all, so people will be going about their lives right up until Jesus returns. But there are other parallels as well. Just as the Flood was God’s judgment upon a wicked world, so the seven-year tribulation will be God’s judgment on a wicked world. Just as Enoch was taken from Earth and spared having to endure the Flood, so the church will be taken from the Earth and be spared having to live through the tribulation. Finally, in the days before the Flood demons intermingled themselves with the seed of men – and in the last days “they” will intermingle themselves with the seed of men once again.

Some people have speculated that this might tie into the Mark of the Beast. One of the puzzling things about the Mark is that whoever takes it can't be saved. They are lost forever because there's no way to repent of it. The Bible is clear that taking the

Mark is unforgivable:

Revelation 14:9-11: “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

Whoever takes the Mark *will* face the eternal and unending wrath of God. There's no forgiveness for this sin – only the certainty of unending fiery judgment. But why would taking the Mark condemn someone for all of eternity? After all, isn't the blood of Jesus sufficient to cover all of our sins? Why would this sin be any different?

Here's something to think about. The reason the blood of Jesus can save us is because Jesus became *a man*. Jesus had to become a man in order to die in our place and take upon Himself the penalty that our sin deserved. His sacrifice only works because He was fully man and fully God. However, His sacrifice is only good *for mankind*. The death of Christ *cannot* provide atonement for fallen angels because Jesus didn't become one of them and die in their place. Since the nephilim aren't human, Christ's atoning sacrifice wouldn't work for them. Someone who's partly demonic (not demon-possessed but *actually demonic*) wouldn't be eligible for salvation.

In our day there's a great deal of research going on in a field called transhumanism. The purpose of this research is to

alter the human genetic code to create people who are “trans-human” – in other words, to create people who are no longer human beings. Transhumanists believe that mankind can perfect itself and attain both godhood and immortality by altering its DNA. They teach that if people combine their DNA with genetic material from other sources then people can make themselves smarter, faster, stronger, and ultimately immortal.

Scientists have made progress toward this goal. Not only have they learned how to create purely synthetic DNA, but they've also started experimenting with combining animal DNA with human DNA to create something that's neither animal nor human. They've even found a mechanism which can be used to alter the DNA of living human beings. Some people are very serious about this:

The ability to tinker with our genes offers the astounding promise – and peril – of immortality, which mythically has been the defining difference between gods and mortals. It also offers the possibility of an even greater variety of breeds of humans than there is of dogs. (Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution*)

The prospect of building godlike creatures fills me with a sense of religious awe that goes to the very depth of my soul and motivates me powerfully to continue, despite the possible horrible negative consequences. (Prof. Hugo de Garis, artificial brain designer)

There are groups of people who are committed to making this a reality. Imagine if halfway through the tribulation, an announcement is made that science has had a tremendous breakthrough. Immortality is now possible! All you need to do is take the Mark, which will rewrite your DNA. You'll then become a superhuman – a new race of being.

If this comes to pass then Satan will have invented a new sin – one that can't be forgiven. Your sins can only be covered *if you're a human being*. If the devil can trick people into altering themselves on a DNA level so that they're no longer human then the sacrifice of Christ would no longer apply. Those people would be beyond redemption. Once a person crossed that line (and some scientists are working day and night to cross it!) he would be permanently lost.

I believe that Genesis 6 teaches that before the Flood, demons took human women as wives and had children with them. The result was a powerful but evil race of giants which the Bible calls the nephilim. The Lord judged this act of wickedness by destroying that race in the Flood and imprisoning the demons who committed this sin in Tartarus, where they await their judgment.