

Who or What Were the Nephilim?

BLOGCAST

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Who do you believe that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were? Do you believe that these were fallen angels who had sexual relations with human females?

There is no question that Genesis 6:1-4 is a controversial passage of Scripture, if for any other reason, because it is short and does not go into great detail regarding who or what the “sons of God” and the “Nephilim” were. This has given rise to some major, and notably differing, interpretations over many centuries. From such interpretations have arisen significant speculations involving a hybrid angelic-human race of people in the pre-Flood and even post-Flood periods, perhaps even to be joined with a reappearance of such entities at the End of the Age in conjunction with Yeshua the Messiah’s “days of Noah” (Matthew 24:37; Luke 17:26) reference.

Two principal views witnessed in contemporary examination of Genesis 6:1-4 are that (1) indeed, there were various fallen angels who had sexual relations with human females, producing a hybrid race that needed to be exterminated by the Flood. Or, (2) that there was a mixing between the godly or just line of Seth (Genesis 5) and various wicked daughters of humanity, which contributed to societal downfall. A variation of this view would be that relatively godly male aristocrats married female commoners, leading to societal downfall. Among conservative theological resources, one will find a strong preference demonstrated for the latter view(s), being widely dismissive of any angelic and human cross-breeding.¹

What does Genesis 6:1-4 fully say about the Nephilim?

“Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore *children* to them. Those were the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown” (Genesis 6:1-4, NASU).

Regardless of the conclusions drawn, all readers have to recognize how the joining of *b’nei haElohim* with *benot ha’adam*—the NRSV having, “the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans”—produced a group of entities known as *nefilim*.

Were the “sons of God” or *b’nei haElohim* (“divine beings,” NJPS) simply to be regarded as a godly or aristocratic line of human beings? Or, were they actually some sort of supernatural beings? The Common English Bible actually has, “divine beings and human daughters had sexual relations and gave birth to children.” Support for the *b’nei Elohim* being supernatural beings is seen in how the Hebrew *b’nei haElohim* is used in the Tanach to describe angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf. Psalm 29:1; 89:7). At the same time, it has to be fairly recognized how being sons/children of *Elohim* can regard important figures (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 82:6), or can refer to judges (Exodus 22:8-9). Regardless of who the *b’nei haElohim* were, these “sons of God” took wives from among “the daughters of humans” (Genesis 6:1, TNIV). It should also be deduced how as a negative consequence of these unions, the evil in the pre-Flood civilization rose to new heights (Genesis 6:5-6).

What was the group produced as a result of these unions, labeled as “Nephilim” (“fallen ones,” YLT)? The term *Nefilim* is derived from the verb *nafal*, “to fall.” The Hebrew *Nefilim* was notably rendered as *gigantes* or “giants” (NETS; also KJV/NKJV) in the Greek Septuagint. While examiners and interpreters of Genesis 6:1-4 and subsequent other passages may be disagreed as to who the “sons of God” were, who produced the Nephilim—literature from across the milieu of Second Temple Judaism does widely affirm that there was some kind of cross-breeding between angels and human beings. References to be considered include: *1 Enoch* 6:1-7:6; *2 Enoch* 18:4-5; *2 Baruch* 56:12-16; *Testament of Reuben* 5:6; *Jubilees* 4:15; 5:1-2; Philo *On the Giants* 6; Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.73.

There is little doubting that when reviewed, each of the referenced sources above from the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, and Josephus, as well as others, all offer some perspective difference on the “sons of God” having sexual relations with the “daughters of men,” and the subsequent actions that the Nephilim performed. While each source states something different, what is common throughout all of the quotations, though, is how **they each affirm that there were various angelic beings**

¹ H. Van Broekhoven, Jr. and R.K. Harrison, “Nephilim,” in *ISBE*, 3:518-519; Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Branch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), pp 106-108.

who had sexual relations with human females, and as a result produced a race called the Nephilim. Their presence on the scene doubtlessly contributed to the evil which followed, and the subsequent need for the Flood.

The main opposition that tends to be presented against the idea that supernatural beings or fallen angels cannot have sexual relations with human females, comes from Yeshua's assertion, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30, NASU; also Mark 12:25). It is true that in their resurrected state, righteous men and women will not have sexual relations, and be like God's angels in Heaven. Yet, the *b'nei haElohim* of Genesis 6:1-4, if they were indeed fallen angels, **were precisely not the angels of the Holy One of Israel.**

Moving forward to the present, many are of the conviction that given Yeshua's statement, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37, NASU), that there will be some kind of a reappearance of the Nephilim in the time leading up to His Second Coming. The specific emphasis in the Olivet Discourse is notably on how humanity at large will be conducting its regular business, not realizing that the return of the Messiah is nigh, until it is too late (Matthew 24:38-39). Just as violence filled the Earth, requiring the Flood, so will lawlessness multiply (Matthew 24:12). *The end-time emphasis of the Olivet Discourse is on the rejection of the Creator God and His ways more than anything else.* This does not totally exclude, however, some kind of reappearance of the Nephilim as a component of the end-time scenario, albeit as a "wild card" which is not directly required but could still appear.

If the Nephilim are to return some time in a future end-time scenario, the most probable way that this will take place, is in association with modern-day UFO sightings, presumed alien abductions, and a possible impending "first contact" between humankind and extraterrestrials. There are certainly many evangelical Christians who believe that much of the supposed UFO sightings, alien appearances, and alien abductions—if not the misinterpreted presence of a weather balloon, military aircraft, or actual hallucination or fabrication—are most probably demonic in origin. And most especially to be considered, if extraterrestrials appeared on the scene—in probability demonic forces posing as extraterrestrials—is how it would, for many, give strong credence to the theory of evolution, that human beings are not unique creations of a Supreme Being, and how the Holy Bible is just a collection of mythological and philosophical writings subject to extreme error.

Beyond this, taking various conclusions about the Nephilim of Genesis 6 being a hybrid race produced by fallen angels and female humans having sexual relations, have been various books and publications addressing the relatively modern phenomenon of trans-humanism—and with it the grafting together of both human and animal DNA, as well as various forms of genetic manipulation, technological engrafting, and artificial intelligence. Surely, many of these things should concern each and every person—religious or otherwise! But it can be questioned whether the employment of shark skin to help a burn victim, or even various forms of gene therapy, classify as something resultant of the arrival of a new race of Nephilim, **or** instead should be evaluated along the lines of Biblical prohibitions against crossing different types of seed (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9). Much of the discussion of trans-humanism has little to actually do with the Nephilim of Genesis 6, and more to do with ethical discussions and debates over bioethics, among other things. This is a broad subject matter which goes well beyond the scope of this blogcast, but which will without question be something we each need to be informed about as history moves steadily toward the return of the Lord.