

# Nephilim

## Slide 1

## Introduction

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Today we're going to cover something that has been called one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the entire Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible), and isn't taught very often.

Today we're going to talk about the **nephilim**.

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**Question:** How many of you have ever heard of the nephilim?

## Slide 3

We're going to ask 2 simple questions:

1. Who are the nephilim?
2. So what?

**Disclaimer:** As we cover the views regarding who the nephilim are, some of the information may seem strange or even fantastical if this is the first time you've encountered it.

Because of the nature of this topic, we'll try to approach it with two major concepts in mind:

1. Things which the Bible directly discusses
2. Theoretical conclusions we draw from what the Bible discusses

**Clarity:** Note that I said what the Bible discusses, not what Bible "clarifies".

- Some of the things we'll cover today are mentioned in the Scriptures but aren't 100% clear what they mean from the text.
- Because of that, we will be referencing various other Scripture as well as some extra-Biblical sources to see if we can gain some clarity.

With that said, let's get started.

## Historical Background

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- Graph: <https://viz.bible/visualizing-the-genesis-timeline-from-adam-to-abraham>

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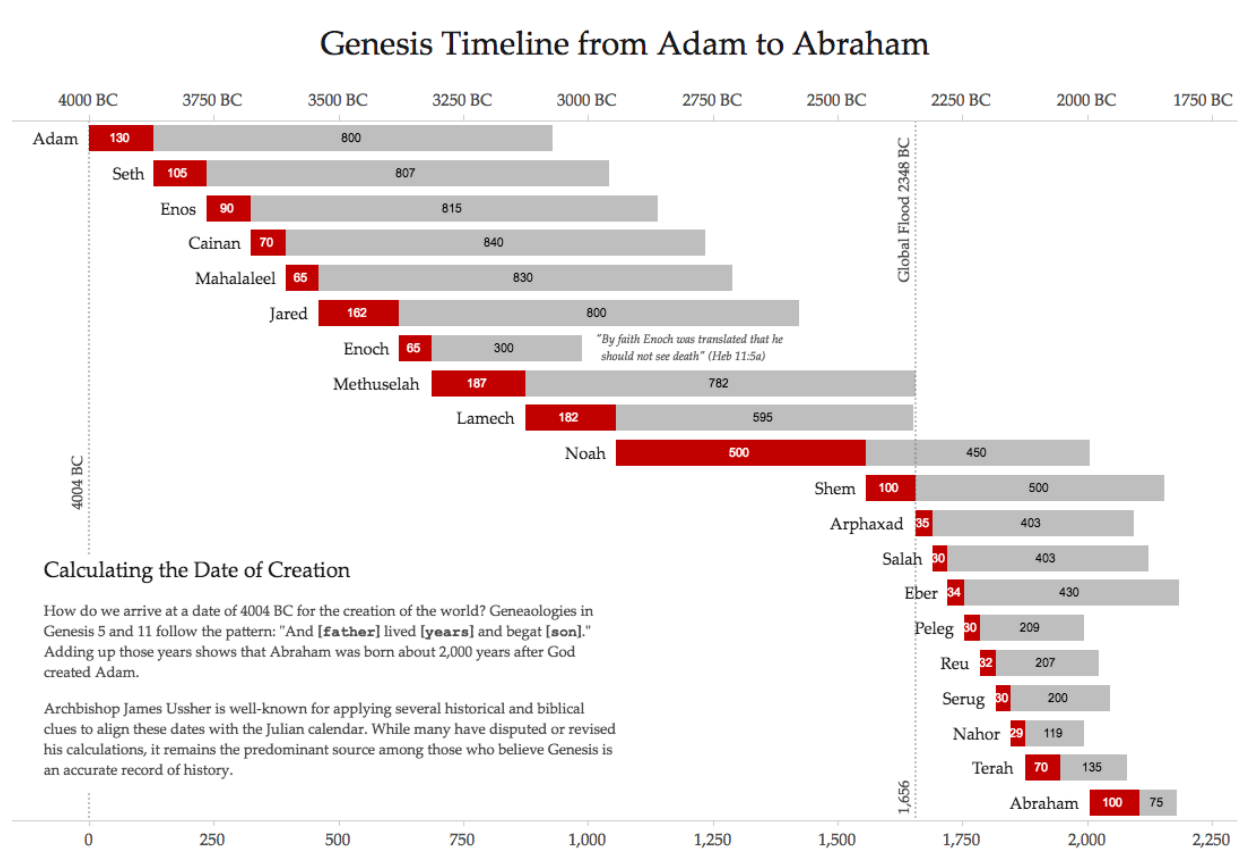
### Brief History up to this point:

- Creation of the Universe and Adam/Eve
- Fall of mankind
- Adam/Eve have a family and start populating the earth
- Cain murders Abel and then flees
- Early civilization
- Time of Noah (the Flood)

This puts us roughly at **~2470 BC** in the timeline (based on Biblical genealogies):

- ~1,650 years after Creation
- ~120 years before the Flood

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**Context:** Think about this for a moment; 5 chapters in Genesis cover 1,600 years of human history. To give you perspective, the time from Abraham (Gen. 11) to the end of the NT (literally

the rest of the Bible) is approximately 1,900 years (Abraham living around 1800 BC and the NT finished around 90 AD).

Keep that context in mind as we read Genesis 6:1-13.

## Text: Genesis 6:1-13

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- <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/who-were-the-nephilim>
- “Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Realm of the Bible”, Michael Heiser

Genesis 6:1-13	
1	When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them,
2	the <u>sons of God</u> saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.
3	Then the Lord said, “ <u>My Spirit will not contend with</u> [My Spirit will not remain in] humans forever, for they are <u>mortal</u> [corrupt]; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”
4	The <u>Nephilim</u> [giants] were on the earth <u>in those days</u> —and <u>also afterward</u> —when the <u>sons of God</u> went to the <u>daughters of humans</u> and <u>had children by them</u> . They were the <u>heroes of old, men of renown</u> [reputation for being mighty].
5	The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination [purpose or desire] of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.
6	The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.
7	So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”
8	But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.
9	This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless [unscathed, intact] among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.
10	Noah had three sons: Shem, <u>Ham</u> [father of Canaan] and Japheth.
11	Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence.

12	God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.
13	So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the <u>earth is filled with violence because of them</u> . I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth."

A lot of questions come to mind when we read this passage, but here are a few to focus our thinking.

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#### Questions:

- Who are the sons of God and the daughters of men, and why do we care if they're getting married and having babies?
- Who are these nephilim/giants that are the offspring of these unions?
- Was mankind truly so violent and evil that God decided to wipe them out and start over?
- Is there any other Scripture or sources that could help us understand this?

**Three Groups:** There are three major groups in this story:

- Sons of God
- Daughters of Man
- Nephilim

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Sons of God (elohim) (Gen. 6:2)	
Hebrew	bēn ( <a href="#">Str. H#1121</a> ) ha el·ō·hēm ( <a href="#">Str. H#430</a> )
English	Sons (direct male descendants) of/the God (general deity)
Daughters of man (Gen. 6:2)	
Hebrew	bath ( <a href="#">Str. H#1323</a> ) ha ä·dām' ( <a href="#">Str. H#120</a> )
English	Daughters (direct female descendants) of/the humanity
Nephilim (Gen. 6:4)	
Hebrew	nēphiyl ( <a href="#">Str. H#5303</a> )
English	Translation unknown: theorized as fallen (root word), referenced as humans ("men of renown"), physically strong, giants (theological interpretation)

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**Daughters of man:** The text is clearly talking about normal, human women.

- Unified consensus of the text, history, and scholars.

**Sons of God:** The difficulty is specifically who are the “sons of God”? There are three major views regarding who these individuals are:

1. **Rulers:** Evil human rulers who forcefully kidnapped women as spouses or took marital “rights” to brides (wedding rape).
2. **Sethites:** Inter-marriage between the Godly lines of Seth (sons of God) and the evil lines of Cain (daughters of men), thus “corrupting” the good lineage of Seth (moral/theological differences)
3. **Angels:** Supernatural beings somehow became sexually involved with women either through taking on physical forms, possessing human males, or supernaturally causing the births to occur (spiritual/physical interbreeding).

**Nephilim:** How we interpret the sons of God really determines who we understand the nephilim to be.

Is it getting strange yet?

If the participants are just humans, then it’s a natural but unfortunate set of events, and there’s no weird stuff to explain.

However, if one of the participants is a supernatural being, we start having a lot of questions and more than a few eyebrows are raised.

## Additional Information

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- <http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/monotheism/context-elohim.html>
- <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/giants-in-the-old-testament>

We might ask at this point, is there any other Scripture that can shed some light on this topic? And the answer is **yes**.

If we read Genesis 6 by itself, we’re left trying to solve a puzzle without all the pieces.

## “Sons of God” in OT

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The first piece of information we'll look at is the phrase "sons of God" in the OT.

Remember the Hebrew is bēn ha el-ō·hēm, which literally translates as "sons of elohim (deity)".

**Exact Phrase:** The exact Hebrew phrase used in Genesis 6:2,4 is only used 3 other times in the OT, all in the book of Job, and they all refer to supernatural beings.

- **Job 1:6** - One day the angels [sons of God] came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.
- **Job 2:1** - On another day the angel [sons of God] came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him.
- **Job 38:7** - 4 Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?... 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels [sons of God] shouted for joy?

Those are the only exact matches of the phrase used in Genesis.

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**Elohim:** But remember the phrase is "sons of elohim (deity)", so let's expand our investigation to include passages that reference humans as "elohim" in any fashion.

- "Elohim" occurs roughly 2,600+ times in the OT, and they almost all refer to deity or the supernatural of one kind or another. The exceptions would be:
  - **Genesis 23:5-6** - The Hittites replied to Abraham, "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince [elohim] among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."
  - **Exodus 7:1 (4:16)** - Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God [elohim] to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.
  - **Exodus 21:5-6** - "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges [elohim]. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.
- In the ANE Mesopotamian literature we have, kings and rulers are sometimes referenced as the son of their deity, using similar phrasing.
- We find in the OT there are a variety of passages that reference Israel as children of God, sons of God, God's first-born

We see that there is some precedence for referring to humans as elohim in a few verses, but overwhelmingly it refers to deity or supernatural.

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**Question:** We also note that about 250x, elohim refers to beings that are not God. How can that be? Are there other gods besides Yahweh God?

To answer that, we need to briefly examine the supernatural realm.

## Divine Counsel of God

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**Supernatural Beings:** God created a group of beings that assist Him with ruling our realm and enacting His will, and these include more than just what we call angels.

- **Malak:** The problem is today most think “angel” is synonymous with “supernatural being” and they label the entire heavenly host as “angels”.
  - Hebrew Mal·āk' ([Str. H#4397](#)) - messenger, ambassador, one given a duty.
  - Used 214x in the OT and about 1/3 of the uses refer to human ambassadors or messengers, not supernatural beings.
  - When we encounter some reference to deity that is clearly not God or an angel (malak), often we assume it's talking about idols or fake gods.
  - However, many of these instances refer to this higher level of supernatural being that is not just a messenger (malak).
- There is a hierarchy or ranking of supernatural Beings:
  - **God** is at the top.
  - **Divine Counsel** (or household) of supernatural beings that administer God's creation.
  - **Angels** are supernatural beings who specifically relay messages or execute the will of God and the Divine Counsel.

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**Divine Counsel:** What do we know about this group of beings?

- Created by God (Ps. 33:6, 148:1-5)
- Present with God at Creation (Job 38:4-7)
  - Possible that they are the ones God addresses in the plural statements “let us”, “we”, “our”, etc...
- Comprise an assembly or court that God leads in heaven (Ps. 82, 89:5-7 / Is. 14:13 / Dan. 7:10)
- Meet with God to discuss humanity (Job 1:6, 2:1)
  - Note that “the satan” is general term for “adversary, accuser”, not “Satan” the proper noun (Devil)

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- Recommend plans to God (1 Kings 22:19-23 / Dan. 4:17)
- The Devil most likely led the Divine Counsel before he fell (Is. 14:12-13 / Ez. 28)
- Oversee the nations (Deut. 4:19-20, 32:8 / Dan. 7, 10 / Ps. 82)

- DSS "...number of the sons of God" (references Gen. 10-11)
- God (Yahweh) is unique among these supernatural beings (Ps. 86:8)
- Given several names:
  - Morning Stars (Sons of the Dawn) (Job 38:4-7)
  - "gods" (elohim)
  - Sons of God (Hebrew phrase only used in Gen. 6:4 and Job)
  - Heavenly beings
  - Watchers (Aramaic, Dan. 4:17)
  - Sons of the Most High
  - Princes of Nations (Dan. 7, 10)

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**Angels (malak, 214x in OT):** By contrast, when we encounter the supernatural being called "angel" (malak) in the OT, we find them executing God's will, not devising God's plans:

- Led Lot and his family out of Sodom (Gen. 19:1)
- Helped Abraham's servant find Isaac a wife (Gen. 24:7)
- Gave vision to Jacob (Gen. 31:11)
- Led Israel from Mt. Sinai to land of Canaan (Ex. 23:20)
- Talked to Gideon (Jdg. 6:12)
- Punishes Israel for David's sin in counting fighting men (2 Sam. 24:17, 1 Chr. 21:15)
- Slew the Assyrian army (2 Chr. 32:21)
- Protect God's people (Ps. 91:11)
- Obey God's commands (Ps. 103:20)
- Angel of the Lord throughout OT (multiple; Christ theophany)

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**Counsel meetings in OT:** In addition, we are given an audience to this Divine Counsel a few times in the OT.

- **1 Kings 22:19-23** - The prophet Micaiah was permitted to observe the heavenly court where God allows this counsel to give suggestions for how to best deal with the wicked King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom.
  - Result was a deceiving spirit was given to Ahab's prophets and they spoke false claims of victory.
- **Daniel 4:13-17** - Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in which a watcher (Holy One) announces/decrees the judgment
  - Note passage is in Aramaic, and "watcher" was a term they would have used for supernatural being
  - Holy One seems to be giving the sentence, but the decision is from God (Daniel 4:24)
- **Job 1-2** - God and his Divine Counsel assemble and discuss Job



- May not necessarily be “Satan” the devil present, but may be a member of the Divine Counsel whose job is to check up on the humans
- Satan (or council member) makes suggestions and God approves them

## Nephilim/Giants in Canaan

So we’ve examined the OT for insight into the phrase “sons of God”, let’s also do that for the word “nephilim” to see what the OT tells us.

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**Nephilim:** The word “nephilim” is only used in two places: once in Genesis 6:4 which we already read, and twice in Numbers 13:33 when the 12 Israelite spies are sent into Canaan.

- **Numbers 13:33** - We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”
- We don’t know 100% what the word means.
  - Has a similar root to “fall upon”, which is why some suggest it be translated “fallen”, or “to fall upon”, but not certain.
- Associated to giants that are clearly mentioned as descendants of the nephilim, which can only be referring to Genesis 6:4 (only other place word occurs).

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**Giants Clans:** We know there were several giant clans in the land of Canaan when Israel invaded.

- Known as mighty warriors and very violent
- Ranged somewhere between 7-13 feet in height.
  - Noting that the average Israelite was probably around 5 feet.
- Some had 6 fingers/toes (possible link to genetic alteration?).
- Known by several names:
  - Anakim (Numbers 13:33)
    - Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi are specifically mentioned as children (Numbers 13:22)
    - Arba mentioned as the greatest among them (Joshua 14:15)
  - Amorites (Amos 2:9-10)
  - Emim (Deuteronomy 2:10-11)
  - Zuzim (Zamzummim) (Genesis 14:5, Deuteronomy 2:20-21)
  - Rephaim (Deuteronomy 3:11,13)
    - Og, king of Bashan
    - Goliath, probably most famous (1 Samuel 17:4-7)
      - From town of Gath, origin unknown but most likely an Anakim
      - Had 4 relatives who were also giants (2 Samuel 21:15-22)

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**Canaanite Invasion:** You cannot read the Israelite invasion of Canaan without noticing that the giants are mentioned over and over in Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

- Don't have time to cover this in detail today, but there is strong correlation between the places Israel was told to completely destroy and where the giant clans were.
  - Contrary to common belief, Israel didn't destroy everyone they came across, but God only permitted them to attack and destroy 7 groups of people.

## What we “Know”

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So let's summarize what we covered so far.

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**Facts to account for:** An explanation of this passage in Genesis should account for several things:

- Support for interpreting “sons of God” or applying “elohim” generally to their interpretation.
- Some noted sexual union takes place.
- The offspring of this union are ancestors of the giants of Canaan.
- In the same context, God decrees the reset of humanity.
- The earth becomes so wicked that God feels regret for even making mankind.

Let's examine each of these views and see which one best explains the information.

Keep in mind that all three views are held by Christian leaders today, and are all valid.

## View #1: Evil Rulers and Human Females

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The first view we'll examine is that the “sons of God” are human rulers who forcefully took women as their wives (or multiple, polygamy), or enacted “wedding rape”.

Let's read Genesis 6:1-4 with that context.

**Genesis 6:1-4 (context)**

- 1 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them,
- 2 the human rulers [sons of God] saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.
- 3 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”
- 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the human rulers [sons of God] went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

#### Pros:

- Notes references in OT and ANE culture where human rulers are called “sons of elohim”
- Interpret Psalm 82 as applying to human rulers who abused their people instead of protecting them
  - **Psalm 82:6-7** - “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.”

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#### Cons:

- Psalm 82 contextually is God’s assembly or Divine Counsel, not humans.
- Marriages are never presented as polygamous, just that one plural group of is doing something to another plural group.
- Concept of divine kings was restricted to the kings; thus the idea of a “group” of rulers doesn’t have strong cultural support.
  - Thus, if “sons of God” does refer to human rulers, it would be a small subset.
- Does not explain who the nephilim are.
- Is this “end of the world” worthy?

## View #2: Lines of Cain/Seth Intermarrying

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#### Slide 23

The second view we’ll look at is that the “sons of God” were the godly line of Seth intermarrying with the evil line of Cain (daughters of men).

Let’s read Genesis 6:1-4 with that context.

#### Genesis 6:1-4 (context)

- 1 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them,
- 2 the sons of Seth [God] saw that the daughters of Cain [humans] were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.
- 3 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”
- 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of Seth [God] went to the daughters of Cain [humans] and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

#### Pros:

- This has been the prominent Christian view since the 400s AD when Augustine helped make it popular.
- Genesis 4 ends with Seth having a son and states that at that time people began calling on the name of the Lord (4:26), and then covers Seth’s lineage in chapter 5, claiming the context in Genesis 6 is the lineage of Seth.
- Israel is called the children of God in Deut. 14:1, ANE references to rulers being called “sons of elohim” in an attempt to link the “sons of God” with the line of Seth.

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#### Cons:

- Genesis 4:26 never says the only people calling on the name of the Lord were Seth’s descendants; it says people did, which could include Cain’s descendants.
- What evidence is there that Seth’s line is “godly” and Cain’s is “evil”?
  - If Seth’s line were Godly, why were they also wiped out in the flood?
- There is no link to Cain in the Genesis 6 passage; it clearly states daughters of **men**, not daughters of Cain.
- There was no command against intermarriage at this time; that did not happen until much later when Israel was a nation and commanded to separate from others.
- Nowhere is the phrase “sons of God” used to reference Seth or his lineage.
- Was it just Seth’s male descendants who were intermarrying?
  - Text presents a contrast between male sons and female daughters.
- Does not explain who the nephilim are.
- Is this “end of the world” worthy?

## View #3: Angelic Beings with Human Females

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The final view is that fallen members of the Divine Counsel somehow became involved with human women, either through physical forms, possessing human males, or some other supernatural means.

### Genesis 6:1-4 (context)

- 1 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them,
- 2 the divine beings [sons of God] saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.
- 3 Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years."
- 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the divine beings [sons of God] went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

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#### Pros:

- Oldest view with the earliest line of support, including Josephus, early Jewish rabbis, and early church fathers.
  - Flavius Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews (1:3:1)
  - Jewish rabbis and inter-testamental apocrypha literature (Book of Enoch, Genesis Apocryphon)
  - Church fathers Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose.
  - Eusebius (church historian) even presents this as the basis for Greek titan mythology (Preparations for the Gospel, book 5).
- Doesn't have to explain who "sons of God" are, because divine beings is the native usage.
- Accounts for the offspring being noteworthy and giants later found in Canaan.
  - Note we aren't sure how the giants are descendants from the nephilim (if global flood wiped everyone out), just that Numbers 13:33 tells us they are.
- Presents an event significant enough for God to wipe out humanity.
- **Slide 27**
- NT allusions to angels locked up right now:
  - **2 Peter 2:4-5** - For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.
  - **Jude 6-7** - And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality

and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

- Some sin committed contextually around the flood, possibly involving sexual immorality.
  - Have to be careful, because these passages are not 100% clear on what they're referring to.
    - Genesis 6 seems to be the only OT event that fits.
    - Angelic view was the common one at this time (Jude event quotes from the Book of Enoch).

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### Cons:

- The biggest objection most Christians have against this view is the passage in Matthew 22 where Christ states that angels are not given in marriage.
  - **Matthew 22:23-33**
    - Verse 30 (Jesus): At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.
  - Christ is referencing the resurrection time in heaven, not the fallen physical world.
  - Angels are not given in marriage, is not the same thing as can't have sex or procreate.
  - Could simply be that spiritual beings do not need to reproduce through physical intercourse.
  - Genesis 6 context is not the same as Matthew 22.
- If the flood wiped everyone out, how did the nephilim survive or how did their descendants get to Canaan?
  - Don't know, it's just what the text says; not knowing "how" something happened doesn't mean it "didn't" happen.

## Application: So What?

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So why do we care about this and what's the application for us as Christians today?

No matter which of the views you personally agree with, I think there are some common applications we can draw.

- Context for studying OT passages about supernatural beings
- God will punish evil in His time and in His way, whether you are mortal or supernatural

- (theoretical) If the giants of Canaan are indeed descendants of the nephilim (via supernatural means), then it provides context and understanding for the destruction of several entire people groups
- Gives insight into God's character: He does not need us or the Divine Council, but He wants us to work with Him in ruling and administering.