Were the Nephilim half-angel/half-human?

Key Scriptures: Genesis 6:1–8; Numbers 13:26–33; Deuteronomy 2:10–11, 20–21; 9:1–2; Joshua 11:21–22; 2 Samuel 21:15–22; 1 Chronicles 20:4–8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; 2 Peter 2:4–9; Jude 6–7, 14–15.

WHO WERE THE NEPHILIM?

The Bible Verses

"The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men (gibborim) who were of old, the men of renown." — ***Genesis 6:4 (ESV)***

'Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." [32] *So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height.* [33] *And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."'* – ***Numbers 13:31-33 (ESV)***

What Does Nephilim Mean?

The Hebrew word is נְפִילִים (*nephilim*). The exact meaning of the word is uncertain. It is sometimes connected with the Hebrew root *n-p-l*, "to fall," leading to translations or interpretations such as "fallen ones." However, the meaning is debated.

The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), translated *Nephilim* as gigantes, from which English gets "giants." This is why "giants" became the traditional translation in many English Bibles, including the KJV.

Modern translations often simply transliterate the Hebrew Nephilim.

Are the Nephilim the same as the gibborim?

The Hebrew word gibborim – translated "mighty men" can mean "mighty ones," "mighty men," "heroes," "warriors," or "powerful men."

Maybe or maybe not – the text says in Genesis 6:4 "*and also afterward",* so it is possible the two are different from each other. This would mean that the Nephilim lived at the same time as the gibborim

Who are the "sons of God"?

Genesis 6:2 says:

"The sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose." – ***Genesis 6:2 (ESV)***

There are 3 views

View #1 - The Angelic/Supernatural View

Sons of God = supernatural beings

The Hebrew expression is bene elohim, "sons of God."

This interpretation says that supernatural beings rebelled against God, took human women, and produced offspring associated with the Nephilim.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, similar language clearly refers to supernatural beings.

- *"Now there was a day when the* ***sons of God*** *came to present themselves before the LORD…"* – ***Job 1:6 (ESV)***
- *"Again, the* ***sons of God*** *appear before God."* - ***Job 2:1 (ESV)***
- *when the morning stars sang together and all the* ***sons of God*** *shouted for joy?* - ***Job 38:7 (ESV)*** *– at creation*

Apochryphal books claimed they were angels

1 Enoch is the most well-known book that talks about the fallen angels interacting with humans. The book develops the Genesis 6 account into the story of the Watchers.

The Septuagint's translation of Nephilim as **gigantes** also helped establish the "giants" tradition.

New Testament books may suggest that they were fallen angels

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; [5] *if he did not spare the*

ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;" - ***2 Peter 2:4-5 (ESV)***

The passage seems to link the fallen angels closely to Noah's flood.

"And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— 7 ***just as Sodom and Gomorrah*** *and the surrounding cities,* ***which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire****, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." –* ***Jude 6-7 (ESV)***

This verse seems to link these fallen angels to sexual immorality.

The Earliest Church Fathers thought they were angels

The earliest church fathers - Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–165), Irenaeus of Lyons (c. AD 130–202), Tertullian (c. AD 155–220), Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–215), and Origen (c. AD 185–254) all took the view that the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6 were angels.

Strengths

- Fits the supernatural use of "sons of God" in Job.
- Fits the ancient Jewish interpretation.
- Fits the language of Jude concerning angels who abandoned their proper dwelling.
- Fits the sequence in 2 Peter involving sinful angels and the Flood.

Weakness

Genesis 6 never explicitly says: "The Nephilim were the children of angels." The passage places the Nephilim in this context but does not explain their biology in detail.

And the obvious question – how can a spiritual being and human have a child together?

View #2 - The Sethite View

This interpretation identifies: **sons of God = descendants of Seth** and **daughters of man = descendants of Cain.**

The idea is that the godly line of Seth intermarried with the ungodly line of Cain. The Nephilim were therefore human beings-possibly unusually large or powerful warriors. Later church fathers and the medieval age church favored this view.

Strengths

- Genesis 4–5 has just introduced Cain and Seth.
- Genesis emphasizes increasing human wickedness before the Flood.
- It avoids the difficulty of angels having sexual relationships with humans.
- It became influential among later Christian theologians.

Weakness

Genesis never explicitly says: “The sons of God were Seth's descendants.” That is an interpretation based on the surrounding genealogies.

View #3 - Kings, Rulers, or Tyrants

Sons of God = Kings, Rulers or Tyrants

Another interpretation identifies the sons of God as powerful human rulers. Ancient Near Eastern kings sometimes claimed divine or semi-divine status and called themselves sons of god. On this interpretation, Genesis 6 describes powerful rulers who took women as they pleased.

The emphasis would be on:

- sexual abuse,
- polygamy,
- royal power,
- violence,
- and human tyranny.

The Nephilim would then be mighty human warriors or legendary heroes.

Strengths

This interpretation fits Genesis' emphasis on increasing human wickedness.

Weakness

It has difficulty explaining why “sons of God” so closely resembles the supernatural language found in Job.

What do we Know about Nephilim?

- Nephilim existed in Genesis 6.
- They existed before the Flood.
- Genesis says they were present “in those days, and afterward.”
- They were associated with the sons of God and daughters of men.
- Genesis associates them with “mighty men” (*gibborim*).
- They were famous/renowned.
- Numbers 13 associates them with the sons of Anak. While it mentions Nephilim it isn’t clear if they really existed then or if this was just the story that the 10 spies were telling to get people to not go into Canaan
- Numbers describes the people of Canaan as being of great height. The Bible contains a broader tradition concerning giants and unusually large warriors, including the Anakim and Rephaim.
- Scripture never explicitly tells us exactly what the Nephilim were biologically.
- Scripture never explicitly says that Goliath was a Nephilim. Some have made the link between Anakites (or Anakim) dwelling in Gath (**Joshua 11:21–22**) and Goliath and his giant brothers coming from Gath (**1 Samuel 17:4; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8**) but this is just speculation.
- The Bible gives doesn’t spend a lot of time on who they were.

But How Could a Spirit Being Father a Human Child?

An objection often raised is “didn’t Jesus say that angels don’t get married?” The actual quote from the bible is

*“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like **angels in heaven**.” — **Matthew 22:30 (ESV)***

Or

*“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels **in heaven**.” — **Mark 12:25 (ESV)***

A key phrase being "in heaven". Those who support the sons of God being fallen angels stress that in heaven angels don't marry or have sex, but may have on earth. They point out that angels always appear in human form before people.

Others have suggested that the fallen angels – like Satan's angels:

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for ***the devil and his angels****.'" —* ***Matthew 25:41 (ESV)***

Are demons and may have just simply possessed men and then had sex with women who bore children.

The bible does not explain the process to us, or even if this is the right conclusion to reach.

Don't Spend too Much Time Worrying About This

While it is interesting topic and someone could have genuine questions about the issue, it isn't recommended to spend too much time on the issue. Why not? The bible says:

"But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." — ***Titus 3:9 (ESV)***

Because Nephilim aren't really a main focus of the Bible, even in the sections where they are mentioned the focus is elsewhere. There is lot we don't know about them. We can speculate – but we must admit it is just speculation.