



▼ HOME

▼ APOLOGETICS

▼ HISTORY

▼ SOCIAL TEACHING

THEOLOGY

▼ LITURGY

SPIRITUALITY

▼ FUN STUFF

Watchers and Nephilim



In our [previous article on the Nephilim](#), we have examined the various places in the Scripture in which the Nephilim are mentioned and sketched out some very rudimentary ideas about their identity. This was all by way or preparation for this article, which will take a much more in depth look at the Nephilim and the Watchers, the mysterious fathers of the Nephilim. These "Watchers", known as the *Grigori* in Hebrew, the "sons of God" who went in to the daughters of men in Genesis 6. Who are these Grigori? Are they fallen angels? Or, as some assert, are they merely the human descendants of Seth? The answer is relevant not only to the identity of the Nephilim but to the very interpretive lens with which we view the entire Old Testament. This whole debate hinges on the interpretation of Genesis 6, in which the Watchers and the Nephilim are first introduced.

Let us begin by looking at Genesis 6:1-8 (RSV), the famous episode where the Nephilim are introduced. Genesis tells us that:

"When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the **sons of God** saw that the **daughters of men** were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a 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. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." (Gen 6:1-8)

The passage introduces three groups of individuals: the 'sons of God', the 'daughters of men', and the 'Nephilim', who are their offspring, also known as 'the mighty men' or 'men of renown.' Who are these groups and what is their exact relationship?

Daughters of Men and the Sons of God

Let us begin with the identity of the "daughters of men." In Hebrew this phrase is *benot' ha adam*. *Adam*, of course, is the most common biblical phrase denoting "mankind" or human beings as such. Thus the *benot' ha adam* are simply the daughters of mankind. No tradition, whether Jewish or Christian, has ever understood the daughters of men to be anything other than literal, biological offspring of the earliest generations of human beings. They are human women, and this view is even agreed upon by modern Biblical scholars as well as by Semitologists who are intimately familiar with Hebrew and Aramaic expressions.

It is when we turn to identifying the second group, the 'sons of God', that things become more problematic. In Hebrew this phrase is *bene'ha elohim*. Most readers will recognize *elohim* as the generic Hebrew name for divinity. Thus, a literal reading would translate this as "sons of God", "sons of divinity", or "sons of the gods." Multiple translations are possible; whichever is chosen, on its face, the phrase denotes a divine or immortal being.

This seems pretty straightforward. If, however, this is the case, it means that our Bible teaches that angelic, immortal beings had sexual intercourse with human women and bore children by them, something very distasteful to modern theological sensibilities. |

In researching this question, it is interesting that there is virtual unanimity among Hebrew scholars about what this passage means. Even secular Hebrew scholars who do not believe the truth of the Scriptures tend to admit that this is at least the meaning the sacred writer *meant* to convey - immortal, heavenly beings having sexual intercourse with women. It is among biblical scholars and theologians only that the question is controversial, and this due to an unfortunate anti-supernatural bias that mars biblical theology. They have decided *a priori* that modern theology cannot take accounts of angelic-human intercourse seriously and have thus sought about for other explanations. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

So, the entire focus of this discussion will be on the identity of the 'sons of God' and the Nephilim who are the offspring of the union between these 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men.'

The Nachash

But let us back up a few chapters to Genesis 3. Can the incident related in Genesis 6 have anything in common with the account of the Fall of Man in Genesis 3?

In Genesis 3, the "serpent" in Hebrew is a being known as the *nachash*. After the Fall, God says that there will be perpetual enmity between the offspring of the *nachash* and the offspring of the woman. The word for 'offspring' is literally "your seed." We understand from Christian tradition what the "seed" of the woman is; it is variously described as both Christ (Gal. 3:16) in the singular sense and to the Church in the plural (Rom. 16:20). This is because the Hebrew word "seed" can have singular or plural connotations, just like in English. We also should note the strong pietistical and artistic tradition of associating the seed with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The *nachash* is a very interesting being; of course, later Scriptural books and Catholic Tradition have identified the *nachash* with Lucifer. This is not just an external imposition on the text of Genesis without foundation in the text of Genesis 3 itself. The word *nachash* can have multiple forms. From the text of Genesis, it is unclear whether it is used as a noun, a verb or an adjective. It's meaning changes subtly depending on which form is preferred.

For example, if *nachash* is a noun, then "serpent" is a reasonable translation. If, however, it is a verb, then "to nachash" means "to deceive", specifically with the connotation of deceiving through divination. If it is neither a noun or a verb but an adjective, the translation is "shining"; as an adjectival noun, "something that shines" or "the shining one."

Which form does the sacred author mean for us to understand in Genesis 3? Interestingly enough, if we cross-reference Genesis 3 with two other Old Testament passages that refer to the Garden of Eden, we see that the *nachash* in the garden is described as a luminous being. In Ezekiel 28, the lamentation of the prophet over the King of Tyre has always been interpreted to apply to Lucifer typologically:

“You were the signet of perfection,
 full of wisdom
 and perfect in beauty.
 You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 every precious stone was your covering,
 carnelian, topaz, and jasper,
 chrysolite, beryl, and onyx,
 sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald;
 and wrought in gold were your settings
 and your engravings.
 On the day that you were created

they were prepared.
 With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you;
 you were on the holy mountain of God;
 in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.
 You were blameless in your ways
 from the day you were created,
 till iniquity was found in you.
 In the abundance of your trade
 you were filled with violence, and you sinned;
 so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
 and the guardian cherub drove you out
 from the midst of the stones of fire.
 Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
 you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
 I cast you to the ground (Ezk. 28:12-17).

Similarly, the prophecy of Isaiah 14 against the King of Babylon, "Son of the Dawn" has always been applied typologically to Lucifer:

"How you are fallen from heaven,
 O Day Star, son of Dawn!
 How you are cut down to the ground,
 you who laid the nations low!
 You said in your heart,
 'I will ascend to heaven;
 above the stars of God
 I will set my throne on high;
 I will sit on the mount of assembly
 in the far north;
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
 I will make myself like the Most High.'
 But you are brought down to Sheol,
 to the depths of the Pit. (Isa. 14:12-15)

Note that both passages describe a luminous being - the first because of the multitude of jewels that serve as a covering, the latter because of his association with the stars. Neither is described as a serpent.

Given this, it might be that "shining one" is the most appropriate understanding of *nachash* in Genesis 3, especially given the Latin etymology for the name Lucifer, "Light Bearer." That being said, there is no reason why cannot allow for all three meanings; it could be referring to a deceiving, luminous serpentine creature. This would also explain why the Hebrew author says the nachash will "lick dust on his belly. The word is a triple-entendre, a play on the words "serpent" and

"shining."

The Seed of the Nachash

We have identified the seed of the woman as Christ (singular) and the Church (plural). But who or what are the seed of the nachash mentioned in Genesis 3:15? There appears to be only two possibilities:

- a) The seed of the *nachash* are literal, biological offspring of the *nachash* who oppose humanity
- b) The seed of the *nachash* are anybody "like" the *nachash* who has evil intent towards humanity; they are those who follow the *nachash's* example

The first option actually has a small amount of supporters in Second Temple era rabbinic tradition; some rabbis had Satan fathering children with Eve. In the modern period this view is proposed by author Laurence Gardner, a chap best known for his book *Bloodline of the Holy Grail* and his assertion that the Ark of the Covenant was actually a device used for producing an 'Elixir of Life.' Most regard Gardner as a pseudo-scientist and a quack.

View two, that the seed of the *nachash* are those who follow the *nachash's* example, has more historical support and biblical precedents. For example, Isaiah 14:29 describes the Philistines as serpents from a viper's root; in John 8:44 Jesus says the Pharisees come from their "father, the devil", and in Matthew 3:7 John the Baptist called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers." In no case is physical descent asserted. Similarly, the seed of the *nachash* are human adversaries to the plans of God, including His plan to bring forth the Messiah. Will see relevant to episode in Genesis 6.

The Sons of God and the Sethite Hypothesis

As mentioned above, there is a consensus that the daughters of men are simply human beings. Does this phrase refer to human offspring of Seth, as many modern critics propose? The 'sons of God', in our opinion, refers to lesser divine beings, not fallen angels or humans, due to several lines of evidence, as well as the obvious absurdity of the alternatives. Let us examine this question of the identity of the sons of God.

First, it is necessary to understand that the Nephilim are distinct from the 'sons of God.' Immediate context easily shows they are different groups. The text tells us Nephilim were not divine, but mortal. But what of the 'sons of God?'

The phrase takes several forms in the Old Testament: *bene'ha elohim*, *bene elim* and the parallel from Psalm 82:6, "sons of the Most High", *bene elyon*. These phrases occurs in many places throughout the Scriptures and, biblically speaking, *never denote human beings*. Examples are Job 1:6, Job 2:1, and Job 38:1-7, *all of which refer to angels*; Job 38 is more ambiguous, but since it implies that these sons of God existed before the creation of the world, they must be supernatural beings. Ps. 29:1, Ps. 89:6-7, Ps. 82:1, and Ps. 82:6 all use versions of this phrase and in each case without exception it refers to heavenly beings. If we set aside the question of Genesis 6 for a moment, this means that there is no place in the Bible where *bene'ha elohim*, *bene elim* or *bene elyon* mean anything other than heavenly beings. In no place does it refer to human beings. Thus, from a purely linguistic-biblical standpoint, there is *no* justification for asserting that the sons of

God of Genesis 6 are human descendants of Seth.

Jewish tradition has never seen the sons of God as human sons of Seth, either. In rabbinical intertestamental writing, the sons of God are called *Grigori*, which is translated as "Watchers." A classic example is the Damascus Document found at Qumran, which when speaking of the sins of the ancient world, notes matter of factly that:

"Because of the stubbornness of their hearts, the Watchers of heaven fell; yea, they were caught thereby because they kept not the commandments of God. So too their sons, whose height was like the lofty cedars and whose bodies were as mountains. They also fell." [col. II.14-III.12]

Similar examples can be found in the Book of Enoch 1:5, 7:2, 10:11 and many other places. Christian tradition until the time of Augustine tended to agree with the Jewish interpretation.

What are we left with? Jewish and early Christian tradition unanimously affirm that the sons of God are the Watchers, angelic, immortal beings. Linguistically, there is a very clear delineation in Genesis 6 between who is divine and who is human. The argument that the sons of God as sons of Seth is *untenable*.

To make this case stronger, let us look at what absurd alternatives the Sethite view forces us to conclude: To argue the sons of God are sons of Seth means you must do the following:

- ▶ Completely ignore the use of the phrase elsewhere in the Bible.
- ▶ And consequently argue, against context, that the "sons of the Most High" in Psalm 82 are humans.
- ▶ Ignore the use of the term in all the other Semitic manuscripts, like the *Book of Enoch*, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, *Book of Jubilees*, etc.
- ▶ Ignore that the Sethites are *never* described as sons of God anywhere else in the Bible.
- ▶ Give the Hebrew word *Adam* in verses 6:1 and 6:2 two entirely different meanings. According to the Sethite view, the "daughters of men" in 6:2 are the daughters of the house of Cain. So in 6:1 - "when men began to multiply" - the word *Adam* must mean humankind, while in 6:2 *Adam* must mean house of Cain. This is extraordinarily inconsistent.
- ▶ But if so, you must also explain why the Bible would use the phrase "daughters of men" to simply denote the descendants of Cain.
- ▶ Explain how the *Sethites* and the daughters of men produced giants, the Nephilim; how and why would mere human-human copulation produce giant offspring?
- ▶ Assert that the Books of Peter and Jude erred in their interpretation of this passage, as 2 Pet. 2 and Jude 6 both assert that the 'sons of God' were angelic beings and that the sin of the Watchers is linked to sexual sin.

The absurdity of the above alternatives makes it not only unlikely, but nigh *impossible* that the Sethite hypothesis could be true, unless we are going to ignore the textual and historical evidence to the contrary. Tradition and the Bible itself make it clear that Genesis 6 tells the story of the *Grigori*, the Watchers, entering into carnal unions with human females. The

offspring of these unions between the *Grigori* and their human consorts were the Nephilim, a race of people who, though truly human, were of extraordinary stature and strength - hence the meaning of the word *Nephilim*, "giants." Neither the immediate textual context, nor rabbinic or early Christian tradition, nor the use of the the same phrases elsewhere in the Bible permit any other interpretation.

Presence of the Nephilim after the Flood

This naturally leads to the question of how the Nephilim were present on the earth after the Flood. If the Flood wiped out everybody except the household of Noah, how are we to account for the presence of the Nephilim after the Flood? After all, as the Bible and our previous article noted, the various sub-tribes of the Nephilim were present on the earth as late as Joshua's conquest and even the time of David.

The first thing to note is that Genesis 6:2 says that the Watchers "took wives" from among the daughters of men. This does not refer to forcible rape; "took wives" or "took to wife" is a very common Hebrew phrase that denotes legitimate, respectable marriage. What a 'marriage' between a Watcher and a human woman would look like is beyond our ability to speculate, but we can draw the conclusion that the use of this phrase means that these relations were consensual and presumably ongoing. Furthermore, in Hebrew the verb "went in" is in the imperfect form, which denotes ongoing, completed action. The ensuing verb, "bore children", is in something called the 'narrative sequence', which carries the same action as the preceding verb. We do not need to get too lost in the weeds with the Hebraic grammar; the point is that this carnal activity was not an isolated incident. It was ongoing and in the context of (presumably) stable, though illicit, unions.

This appears to have happened both before and after the Flood. Consider Genesis 6:4:

*"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. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown."*

The phrase "in those days, and also afterward" means prior to the Flood and also after the Flood. This is relevant to the question of how we get Nephilim after the Flood, as well as hints at the relation of these unions and the sending of the Flood.

The account of the Flood in Genesis seems to blame humanity for the judgment (Gen 6:5). Jewish tradition, however, is unanimous in placing blame at least equally on the Watchers. As we noted above, the sexual relations were voluntary, and thus the women who entered into these marriages, the fathers who gave them in marriage, and the Watchers themselves were all equally guilty.

This question of the women of those days being given in marriage to the Watchers sheds light on a particularly enigmatic statement of our Lord. In Matthew 24:37-39, our Lord is comparing the time of His own return with that of the world before the Flood. Our Lord notes:

"As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were

eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man."

Note Jesus' words "marrying and giving in marriage." Now, it could be that our Lord is here simply denoting regular human activity; 'eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage' is just another way of saying life will go on as usual. But it is interesting that He specifically mentioned marrying and giving in marriage, since the only thing we know about marriage before the Flood is in relation to the illicit unions of the Watchers, as well as that the sins of the Watchers cohabiting with women is one of the preeminent sins which brought the wrath of God upon the ancient world.

The Nephilim

We mentioned above that the Nephilim are distinct from the Watchers. The *Grigori* ("Watchers") are angelic beings who entered into illicit carnal unions with human women. The offspring of these unions were the Nephilim. Nephilim refers to the entire race of people who are descended from these unions; at a later time they divided up into distinct tribes. The Scriptures mention the Anakim, the Enim, the Zamzummin, the Rephaim and various other tribes that are reckoned among the Nephilim; we recommend [our previous article](#) in this series for all the places in the Bible where the Nephilim and their descendants appear.

Just as some have tried to explain away the 'sons of God' as human descendants of Seth, so there have been attempts to explain away the Nephilim as merely opponents of the Israelites. The Nephilim certainly did oppose the Israelites - and in that sense they are the metaphorical "seed" of the *nachash* - but to stop there is to dismiss the biblical evidence and exegetical tradition that the Nephilim were not only opponents of Israel, but persons of physical gigantic stature. The Nephilim as "giants" is very well attested in extra-Biblical literature of the period. The Book of Enoch 6-7, Enoch 9, the *Book of the Giants* (2-3rd century BC, discovered only at Qumran), the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Genesis Apocryphon* and rabbinic texts all teach unanimously that the 'sons of God' are the Watchers, their offspring are the Nephilim, and that the Nephilim were giants.

The *Genesis Apocryphon* has a particularly interesting story. In column 2, line 1, a conversation is recorded between Lamech, father of Noah, and his wife. Lamech is depicted questioning his wife as to whether the child she is carrying in her womb was conceived by the Watchers. Indeed, there was a minority position within the Jewish exegetical tradition that asserted Noah was a Nephilim!

As mentioned in our previous article, some dictionaries translate Nephilim as "fallen ones"; this is problematic. The reason is the morphology of the word, that is, its "shape" in Hebrew. "Fallen ones" in Hebrew would be *Nephulim*; it is missing a *yod*, a tiny accent mark. But scribes clearly unanimously transcribed it as Nephilim, a distinct, different word. It does not mean "fallen ones." The vowel sound "i" is the determining factor; "fallen ones" lacks this sound.

Is there a root word that does include this "i" sound? In fact there is - the Aramaic word *Nephila*, which means "giant." There word *Nephilim* means "giants." Alternative theories do violence to the Hebrew. All Jewish and Christian exegesis well into the Middle Ages assumes the Nephilim are giants. St. Jerome translated this word as *gigantes* or *titanes*.

The Nephilim in relation to Joshua's Conquest

Nephilim certainly did exist after the Flood; the first to be mentioned is Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-10. Nimrod is referred to as a *gibbor*; in fact, he is the first of the "gibbor" (plural "gibborim" *mighty men*). Does this mean he was of the Nephilim? Yes, for if we read back to Gen. 6:4, we see that the Nephilim are linked to the *gibborim*:

"Now giants were upon the earth in those days. For after the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, and they brought forth children; these are the mighty men of old, men of renown" (Douay).

The Nephilim are the mighty men of renown. Hence, Nimrod must be a Nephilim. By the way, it is noteworthy that the Septuagint translates "gibbor" as "giant" in Gen. 10, as the Douay translates Nephilim as "giants", as you can see in the passage cited above.

Nimrod, however, was a descendant of Noah. Barring the hypothesis that Noah himself was a Nephilim - something all traditions except a tiny minority reject - we are left with two explanations of how the Nephilim existed on the earth after the Flood:

- a) Some Nephilim simply survived the Flood.
- b) There was recurring activity of the Watchers consummating sexual unions with women after the Flood.

Option A requires we deny that the Flood was anthropologically universal - that is destroyed all men - which I think is **untenable** biblically and according to tradition. The best alternative, as we have already hinted at above, is that the sexual activity of the Watchers continued after the Flood for some time.

The Watchers, the Nephilim and the Nations

The Nephilim are never presented positively in Scripture or Tradition. In the sense that they always oppose the designs of God's people, they are very rightly called seed of the *nachash*. In our first article in this series, we demonstrated how all of the various tribes of Nephilim mentioned in the Bible are always lumped in with the opponents of the Israelites, either the Philistines, Amorites or whomever. There seems to be a continuous adversarial relationship between the house of Israel and the line descended from the Watchers.

At this point I will propose something that may be new to many Catholic readers but which has a good foundation in the Scriptures and ancient Jewish tradition and is implicitly assumed in the Church Fathers - that the partition of the nations upon the earth is somehow related to the Watchers and their sin.

For example, Deuteronomy 32:8-9 tells us that:

"When the Most High divided the nations: when he separated the sons of Adam, he appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord's portion is his people: Jacob the lot of his inheritance."

This is the translation found in the Septuagint, the Masoretic text, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Other translations replace "sons of God" with "children of Israel." Given Jewish tradition, "sons of God" makes more sense; the Book of Enoch states that the Watchers agreed to give the nations of the earth knowledge in exchange for divine worship. The pagan nations chose the Watchers as their deities in exchange for access to their knowledge.

Therefore, God decides to "divide up" the earth according to number of sons of God. The punishment of the nations for consorting with the Watchers is that now they will be dominated by them; each geographical region gets to be ruled by one of the Watchers. Every place but Israel is under dominion of a Watcher; Israel is God's region. "But the Lord's portion is his people: Jacob the lot of his inheritance." It is no coincidence that the call of Abraham happens right after episode at Babel; as soon as the nations are divided according to their tongues, God begins cultivating his inheritance in opposition to the lines that derive from the Watchers.

In Deuteronomy 4:19, God warns Israel:

"And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven."

God again reminds Israel that they are his "portion", specifically in the context of not worshiping the heavenly luminaries. To do so would be to assign themselves to another "portion" or allotment. The nations worship the heavenly powers; but because Israel has been reserved to God as His portion, they must not put themselves under the power of the Watchers by worshiping the heavenly bodies. Remember the connection between Lucifer and the heavenly bodies in Isaiah 14. The message is clear: Israel, you belong to Yahweh. The nations belong to the Watchers.

In Deuteronomy 29:24-27, another hint is given. Speaking of the judgment that will fall on Israel if they abandon worship of God for the pagan deities, the Lord says that all the nations will ask:

*"Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, **gods he had not given them.** Therefore the Lord's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book."*

The Hebrew phrase for "given them" is literally "allotted" - again we see that the nations of the earth are divided up in different "allotments." Israel is the Lord's; the other nations have been "allotted" or "given" other gods. This verse is an explanation for the existence of the pantheons of the nations - because God sentenced them to that status in punishment for their preferring the Watchers to Himself.

What this means essentially is that **the contest between Yahweh and gods of the nations is a divine turf war.** The nations have been allotted the Watchers, in punishment for their compliance in the carnal sins of the Grigori. The Watchers usurp the divine worship rightfully due to God and their offspring, the Nephilim, thrive in these lands. The

episode of Naaman and Elisha in the book of 2 Kings underscores the territorial nature of the conflict between Yahweh and the gods of the nations. After Naaman is healed of his leprosy, he returns to Elisha and we read the following:

*"Then [Naaman] returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. **Then Naaman said, "If not, I pray you, let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord. In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter."** He said to him, "Go in peace" (2 Kings 5:15-19).*

It is not enough that Naaman worships the Yahweh; if in a foreign land, it is to be done on the soil of Israel.

God sentences the nations to be under the Watchers as punishment. The conflict of Israel and the nations is a turf war in which God's "portion" gradually dispossesses those nations who are under the Watchers. The initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:17-21:

*"When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, **the Rephaim**, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*

Note mention of the Rephaim. The Rephaim are a tribe of the Nephilim; the Vulgate translates their name as gigantes and the Targums call them gibborim, "mighty men", the same phrase Genesis 6 equates with the Nephilim. Jewish tradition **affirms** that the Rephaim are Nephilim.

When we get to the time of Joshua, the places where Joshua is ordered to implement *herem* warfare are all associated with Nephilim. In other words, the places where a command was given to exterminate the entire population overlap with areas populated by Nephilim, suggesting a connection between the two.

In Deuteronom 2:16-24, we see that the land the Israelites were first commanded to invade was at one time thoroughly populated with subtribes of the Nephilim, some of which were destroyed prior to the Israelite conquest:

*"So when all the men of war had perished and were dead from among the people, the Lord said to me, 'This day you are to pass over the boundary of Moab at Ar; and when you approach the frontier of the sons of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession.' (That also is known as a land of **Rephaim**; Rephaim formerly lived there, but the Ammonites call them **Zamzummim**, a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim; but the Lord destroyed them before them; and they dispossessed them, and settled in their stead; as he did for the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites before them, and they dispossessed them, and settled in their stead even to this day. As for the **Avvim** ["Avvim" in Hebrew = "serpent worshipers"], who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from*

Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their stead. 'Rise up, take your journey, and go over the valley of the Arnon; behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land; begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle."

Many of these tribes had already been dispossessed; such a campaign is recorded as far back as Genesis 14, when the Chedorlaomer and his alliance made war on the Rephaim, the Zuzim and Emim, all Nephilim. Israel was to do battle with Sihon, king of Hesbon and Og, king of Bashan. Og is described specifically as a Nephilim; Deuteronomy 3:11 states:

*"For only Og the king of Bashan was left **of the remnant of the Rephaim**; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron; is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? **Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common cubit."***

This means the bed of Og was approximately thirteen feet long. Clearly, Og was a giant and of the Nephilim, as the text clearly states. As an aside, Bashan, the city of Og, means "place of the serpent" in Hebrew.

Numbers 13:22 mentions another tribes of the Nephilim, the 'sons of Anak' or 'Anakim', dwelling near Hebron: "They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahi'man, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were there." This is why a few passages down in the same chapter, the spies consequently report:

*"We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we." So they brought to the people of Israel an evil report of the land which 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 men of great stature. 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" (Num. 13:31-33).*

In Joshua 10, Hebron is put under the ban and its population destroyed. According to Joshua 15:13, Hebron was populated by Anakim; the evil report brought by the twelve spies cited above concerned the lands around Hebron. These cities, all populated by Nephilim, were wiped out in Joshua 10.

Joshua 11:22 records that after the Conquest "None of the descendants of Anak were left in all the land of Israel, though some still remained in Gaza, **Gath**, and Ashdod." Astute Bible students will immediately note that Goliath came from Gath (1 Sam. 17:4) and that Goliath is recorded as being "six cubits", about nine feet tall. Is it a coincidence that the giant Goliath comes from Gath, a city specified as being populated by Nephilim, which in Hebrew means "giants"? It is evident that Goliath, too, was among the Nephilim. 1 Chronicles 20:6-8 confirms this hypothesis:

*"And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; and **he also was descended from the giants**. And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, slew him. **These were descended from the giants in Gath**; and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants."*

Conclusion

Judging from contextual evidence, tradition and the absurdity of the alternatives, it is clear that the "sons of God" of Genesis 6 are nothing other than angelic beings, known in tradition as the *Grigori*, or 'Watchers.' These Watchers sinned by entering into illicit sexual unions with human women. These illicit unions were presumably part of Satan's plan for making war on the seed of the woman. The Watchers, true "seed of the *nachash*", were eventually punished by God for their sin. The offspring of these unions were the Nephilim, "giants", human offspring who were "mighty men" of great physical stature. God punishes mankind by sending a Flood to wipe out the wicked, corrupted race of men. Further sexual unions occur after the Flood and the nations begin to adore the Watchers as gods in exchange for their knowledge. God punishes these nations by "handing them over" to the Watchers, who become the gods of the nations. God takes one tribe for Himself, Israel, to be His special portion. The subsequent history of Israel is nothing other than a cosmic turf war between the people of God and the seed of the *nachash*. Joshua's conquest is specifically bound up with the destruction of the remaining Nephilim, which continues down to David's time. The Old Testament is a cosmic territorial struggle, opposition between one blood line and another that goes back to Genesis 3.

In this article we have sketched out a coherent theory of who the Nephilim are, where they came from, and their relation to Israel. It remains but a theory, and a theory dependent upon assumptions borrowed from extra-Biblical Jewish traditions. But it is a theory in keeping with the thinking of the Church Fathers - Tertullian, for example, assumed the literal truth of the entire episode, and it **informed his thinking** on why women should veil their heads in church. In our next installment, we will examine theological theories of how an angelic being can enter into physical intercourse with a human woman.

I am particularly indebted to the work of Semitologist Dr. Michael Heiser, whose research into the meanings of these Hebrew phrases was instrumental in the construction of this hypothesis, which owes more to his insights than my own.