

Questions about Genesis 6

1. Who are the sons of God?
2. Who are the Nephilim?

Question 1: Who are the sons of God?

Genesis 6:1–5 (NET)

¹ When humankind began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of humankind were beautiful. Thus they took wives for themselves from any they chose. ³ So the LORD said, “My Spirit will not remain in humankind indefinitely, since they are mortal. They will remain for 120 more years.”

⁴ The **Nephilim** were on the earth in those days (and also after this) when the sons of God would sleep with the daughters of humankind, who gave birth to their children. They were the mighty heroes of old, the famous men.

⁵ But the LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time.

We will study the verses in two parts:

- Verses 1–4 are God’s commentary on a very unusual event in history involving the spirit realm, which leads to the worldwide judgment of the global flood.
- Verse 5 and following are God’s commentary on mankind’s behaviour as a whole, which leads to the worldwide judgment of the global flood.

Let’s take a closer look at Genesis 6:1–4 first.

Who are the “sons of God”?

One of the key issues is to identify who the “sons of God” are. Some bible scholars think that the “sons of God” is a reference to the godly line of men coming from Seth’s family (often called the “Sethites”). And the “daughters of men” is a reference to the ungodly line of women coming from Cain (often called the “Cainites”).

Unfortunately, these two definitions are unwarranted and have no biblical evidence to support them.

Rather, the careful thing to do is to trace how the phrase “sons of God” (plural) is used first throughout the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament.

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Messianic Jew, and head of Ariel Ministries explains the significance of the term “sons of God”.

Verse 2 describes an intermarriage. The first key phrase is “sons of God,” which is a general term meaning “to be brought into existence by God’s creative act.” Because the term carries this meaning, it is used very selectively, and throughout the Tanach, it always refers to angels (see, for example, Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). No one debates this. Still,

some want to make Genesis 6:1–4 the one exception, and there is simply no warrant for this. In the New Testament, the term “sons of God” is expanded. Adam is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38) because he was brought into existence by creation. Believers are called “sons of God” (John 1:12) because they are considered to be a new creation (Galatians 6:15). But in Genesis, the text is dealing with a specific Hebrew expression, *bnei ha-Elohim*. As it is used in the Hebrew Old Testament, it is a term that always refers to angels. The distinction in this passage, then, is not between Sethites and Cainites, but between humanity and angels. The word “men” here emphasizes humanity. The term “sons of God” emphasizes angels.

The second key expression in verse 2 is “daughters of men.” This is again a generic term for women, which includes female descendants of both Sethites and Cainites. What the verse is saying is, “the sons of God saw the daughters of men.” There is no justification for this verse to be interpreted to mean “godly males” intermarried with “ungodly females.” Would truly godly men marry ungodly females? The expression “daughters of men” simply means womankind, and the term “sons of God” refers to angels. If the meaning is kept consistent with its usage elsewhere in the Tanach, the passage is clearly speaking of fallen angels intermarrying with human women. This is obvious in two ways. First, the verse speaks of a one-way intermarriage; the sons of God married the daughters of men. There is no record of daughters of God marrying sons of men. If the distinction was between Sethites and Cainites, it simply would not happen this way. In human society, intermarriage occurs both ways. Today, saved males sometimes marry unsaved females, and sometimes saved females marry unsaved males. If the other claim was true, it would mean that male Sethites married female Cainites, but male Cainites never married female Sethites, which is entirely unlikely. Intermarriage would thus be confined to godly men with ungodly women, but not godly women with ungodly men. In Genesis 6, however, there is only a one-way intermarriage, the sons of God intermarrying with the daughters of men. Second, the context clearly speaks of a cohabitation that is unusual and unnatural and causes the worldwide Flood. Verses 1-4 deal with the angelic cause of the worldwide Flood, while verses 5-6 deal with the human cause. Cohabitation between Sethites and Cainites would not be unusual or unnatural, while cohabitation between angels and humans would be.¹

What Dr. Fruchtenbaum is saying is that evil angels were forcefully violating God’s design for mankind and the angelic realm by having sexual relations with human women. Why would they do this?

It is probably related to the promise of the Saviour that God gave in the garden of Eden.

<p>Genesis 3:15 (NIV) And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”</p>	<p>Genesis 3:15 (NKJV) And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”</p>
---	--

¹ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *Ha-Mashiach: The Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Ariel Ministries, 1998. E-Book. Location 2316.

At this early stage in history, God already declares that His salvation plan will involve the offspring or seed of the woman. (The Hebrew word for seed literally means “sperm”.) No human man would be involved in providing the Saviour. Mankind from that point onwards, was on the look out for this “seed of the woman”, a human Saviour with only a human mother, but no human father.

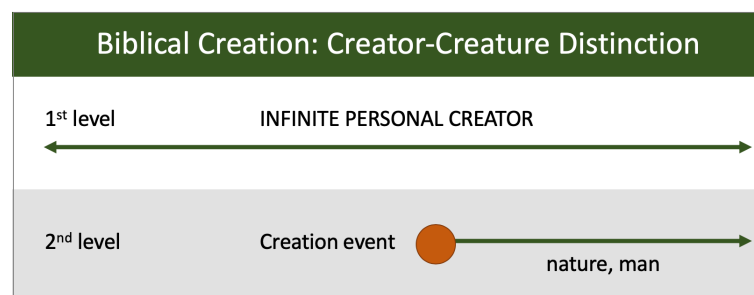
It would then be reasonable to speculate that Satan, in an effort to thwart God, would encourage the fallen angels who rebelled with him to have sexual relations with as many women as possible to disrupt God’s plan to send the “seed of the woman”.

This would explain the actions of the “sons of God” and cause God to put a stop to this in the form of the worldwide flood judgment. We therefore see the angelic perspective of why God sent a global judgment.

The result of this unholy union with fallen angels and women are the Nephilim.

Question 2: Who are the Nephilim?

First, we note that in the Creator-creature distinction, there are only two categories: The Creator at the first level, and creation at the second level.



Creation contains all that God made including the universe, angelic beings, humans, plants and animals. No matter what “mixing” goes on at the creature level (like the Nephilim), the result still remains at the creature level. So there are two, and only two, levels of being: the Creator on one hand, and the creature level on the other.

Second, the term Nephilim (Hebrew: N’filim) is found only in two places in the Old Testament: Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33.

Again, it will be helpful to hear from Dr. Fruchtenbaum on this matter.

First is the name Nephilim. In some translations, this Hebrew word has been translated by the word “giant.” People reading it picture huge human beings. But Nephilim does not mean “giants”; rather, it means “fallen ones.” The reason it was translated as “giants” is because in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tanach made around 250 B.C., the Jewish scholars translated verse 4 by the Greek word gigantes. This term was used in Greek mythology to describe the Titans, and our English word “giant” comes from it. The Titans were part man and part god, because they were products of gods and men. When the Jewish scholars translated the word Nephilim, they used the Greek word for Titans because they recognized Genesis 6:4 to be a union not of two human beings, but of angels and humans which produced a being

that was neither angelic nor human. So at least the Jewish scholars of 250 B.C., who lived much closer to the time when Moses originally wrote this passage, clearly understood this to be a marriage between angels and human women. This union resulted in a new race of creatures called the Nephilim. It was a race of fallen ones. They were gigantes, they were superhuman, but not necessarily in size. They had human characteristics, but at the same time, they had mental and physical capacities that superseded those of regular men and women. Still, they may not have been any larger than normal human beings.

The second word to note in this verse is giborim, which is translated as “the mighty men,” “the men of renown.” Again, because this was a product of fallen angels and human women, they were unique. They were the giborim. Notice that there is no mention of mighty women, which would be strange if this were a product of a normal union. After all, a normal union produces both males and females. If this were a natural union, then the product should have been mighty men and mighty women. But there are only mighty men because this is a new race of beings that is neither human nor angelic. The only way to explain the origin of the giborim is that they were the product of this unholy union, the point of verse 4.²

What Dr. Fruchtenbaum is suggesting as the best way to understand the Nephilim is that they are the product of the unholy union between fallen angels and human women.

In Numbers 13:33, the ten faithless spies are reporting what they saw in the Promised Land, based on their own perspective.

Numbers 13:33 (NIV)

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.”

From their faithless perspective, the Canaanites looked huge and terrifying. The Israelite spies felt like grasshoppers and they reported that the Canaanites also saw them as grasshoppers! How would they know what the Canaanites thought? They were merely projecting their thinking unto the Canaanites.

We see then that the report given by the ten, faithless and fearful spies are coming from their own personal perspective. It is doubtful if there were more Nephilim remaining after the flood.

It is more likely that at the global flood judgment, God captured and bound the rebellious angels who had violated the natural order of creation. The apostle Peter describes this twice.

1 Peter 3:18–20 (NIV)

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits — ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

² Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. Ha-Mashiach: The Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures. Ariel Ministries, 1998. E-Book. Location: 2365

2 Peter 2:4–5 (NIV)

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [the Greek term here is “Tartarus”], putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵ 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;

Peter alludes twice to something that happened to a group of rebellious angels that God bound up in a special area of hell known as “Tartarus”. This Greek word is only used once in the New Testament. It refers to the deepest part of hell. (Note: hell is not the lake of fire. Hell is a temporary holding area. We will explore this further in the series.)

Peter is saying that in connection with the global flood, God chained up a group of rebellious angels and there they await the final judgment. Who are these angels? We don't know for sure, but if they were chained up in relation to the global flood, it's possible that these are the ones who violated God's design for mankind and spirit beings. They are the ones who had impregnated human women.

Jude also mentions this group of angels.

Jude 6 (NIV)

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.

If this view is accurate, then it explains why Jesus would go down to hell after His death to preach to these imprisoned spirit beings (1 Peter 3:19). What was He saying to them? Probably that they lost! Their attempt to disrupt the human race to prevent God from putting Jesus into a human female had failed. Jesus was successfully born of a woman alone, with no human man involved. He is the “seed of the woman”. He lived sinlessly and then died for mankind. So the preaching was probably a victory message to the rebellious angels.

Note: this is not to say that this view is problem-free. The Bible does say angels do not procreate (Mark 12:25) and there is the additional barrier that God put in place where every creature reproduces only after their own kind. However, what these fallen angels have appeared to do is to purposely violate God's order of nature in order to produce unnatural offspring to stop God's salvation plan. If anyone can violate God's order for nature, it would be angels.

But we have no other Scripture passages to explore on this topic and so we simply have to leave it there. This line of thinking best fits together all the passages regarding this incident and makes the most sense. However, we cannot be dogmatic about it. Scripture does not allow us to be dogmatic about it when there is no more Scripture to better clarify beyond what has been shared.

What we will see through the lessons is that Satan and the rebellious angels with him are still active in their attempts to thwart God's plans for history. We will see how the battle between the Creator-God and His fallen angelic beings culminate with Jesus and in the events of Revelation.