

## Who Were the Nephilim? Genesis 6 and Numbers 13—A Fresh Look

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### Keywords

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Genesis 6:1–6

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 (*bene Elohim*) 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 (*bene Elohim*) 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. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.<sup>1</sup>

Numbers 13:30–33

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the **Nephilim** (the sons of Anak are part of the **Nephilim**); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Genesis 6 and Numbers 13 (pre-Flood and post-Flood) list the term “Nephilim” that has been the center of discussion for many years. At this point, the identity of the Nephilim and the sons of God is still being debated in Christian circles.<sup>2</sup> There is a popular unbiblical view that the Nephilim are space aliens. Of course, most creationists rightly reject this particular view for multiple reasons, but that is not for the discussion in this chapter.

Of the views with some biblical support, some believe that fallen angels bred with women and resulted in giants called Nephilim. Some believe the sons of God were the result of fallen angels who overtook ungodly men to breed with women.

Some believe they were the Sethites (descendants of Adam’s son Seth). There are some minor views as well, such as kings, rulers, or heads of leading family groups as being godly from Psalm 82. This view has many similarities to the Sethite view but eliminates many of Seth’s descendants and merely keeps with the leaders/kings (as well as some other leaders of other tribes) as godly. So, I will now leave this minor view out and discuss the Sethite view, which should encompass it for the most part. Another variation of the Sethite view is that these godly men had relations with ungodly women, and the offspring followed after other “gods” as opposed to God—and “fell away” in tremendous ways. This is called the “fallen men” view. There are other minor views as well as other minor non-biblical views but these are the primary ones I will discuss.

There is a great deal of confusion over the word *Nephilim*. No one today really knows what it means. It is related to the verb series “to fall” (*naphal*) in Hebrew, which is why some direct this to fallen angels or more appropriately, the offspring thereof. However, this also gives strong support to the view that men had fallen away from God. It was these two concepts that helped give rise to the various views mentioned above.

Many have associated the Nephilim with giants. Giant traits may not have been *limited* to Nephilim alone: Goliath, a giant, was not considered Nephilim. As mentioned, the term *Nephilim* is unclear in definition. It is related to the verb “to fall” and the King James Version translates it as *giants* from the influence of the Latin Vulgate’s (early Latin translation by Jerome) term *gigantes* as well as the context from Numbers 13. The context of Genesis 6 does not reveal they were giants. There may have been some influence on the Latin Vulgate by the Septuagint’s (Greek translation of the Old Testament about 200–300 years before Christ) use of Greek word *gigantes*.

Here is a table with a brief summary of the four popular views discussed:

Name	View in short
Fallen angels view	Satan and/or his fallen angels bred with human women and had offspring that were called Nephilim.
Fallen angels overtook men view	Fallen angels and/or Satan possessed men and caused them to breed with women.
Sethite view	The sons of God were the godly line from Adam to Seth down to Noah, and the Nephilim were fallen children who sought after false gods.
Fallen men view	Godly men (sons of God) took ungodly wives and their descendants (Nephilim) followed after the false gods, rejected God, and fell far from God in wickedness.

Many respected Christians have commented on this topic over the years, and their work is to be highly regarded. This discussion is not to impugn their work in any way, but to build on it in iron-sharpening-iron fashion. In fact, in writing this, their research has provided great insights into what I now personally believe about the sons of God and the Nephilim, and I commend them for their work.

As a ministry, Answers in Genesis does not officially take a specific stand regarding these four major views. It is not crucial to biblical authority, since each side in this debate, for the most part, is using the Bible as authoritative to make their case.

### The Fallen Angels View

- Sons of God: Fallen angels
- Nephilim: Mix of human and angel

This is one of the most popular views. It stems from angels being called “sons of God” or interpreted as such in Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7. In fact, if the Nephilim were indeed half human/half fallen angel then it would give great understanding to the many ancient religious views after Babel and demi-gods. As pointed out, Nephilim is related to the verb series “to fall” in Hebrew, giving support to the view that this is related to fallen angels. So, it does hold some status among biblical scholars.

Defenders of this view also find support in two key New Testament passages. In 2 Peter 2:1–11, the Apostle wrote:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.

Before commenting on this passage, we need to look at Jude 4–8.

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.

These verses do not specifically mention the Nephilim, nor do they clearly state that fallen angels had sexual relationships with women. However, they do place “the angels who sinned” (2 Peter 2:4), “who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode” (Jude 6), in the same context as Noah. Both passages seem to compare the sin of these angels with the sin of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who had “in a similar manner to these,

having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh” (Jude 7). Genesis 19:5 reveals that the men of Sodom lusted after the two angels who had gone into Lot’s house. It is important to understand that while these verses seem to lend strong support to the fallen angel view, they do not make a watertight argument for it.

For example, expositor Dr John Gill clarifies with regards to Jude 6:<sup>3</sup>

**Ver. 6. And the angels which kept not their first estate, &c.]** Or “principality”; that holy, honourable, and happy condition, in which they were created; for they were created in perfect holiness and righteousness, stood in the relation of sons to God, and were, for the lustre of their nature, comparable to the morning stars; they were among the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; were a superior rank of creatures to men, and who beheld the face, and enjoyed the presence of God; but this estate they kept not, for being mutable creatures, one of them first sinning, the rest were drawn into it by him, and so were not what they were before, nor in the same estate, or place.

**but left their own habitation;** by attempting to rise higher; or by quitting their station and posts of honour, being unwilling to be subject to God, and especially to the Son of God, who was to assume human nature, and in it be above them, which they could not bear; and by gathering together in a body, in another place, with Satan at the head of them; though this may be considered as a part of their punishment, and they may be said to do what they were forced to; for they were drove out of their native habitation, heaven; they were turned out of it, and cast down to hell; see 2 Peter 2:4. And this their habitation, which they left, or fell from, or they were cast out of, is by the Jews frequently called the place of their holiness, or their holy place.

**He hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness;** by these “everlasting chains” may be meant the power and providence of God over them, which always abide upon them; or their sins, and the guilt of them upon their consciences, under which they are continually held; or the decrees and purposes of God concerning their final punishment and destruction, which are immutable and irreversible, and from which there is no freeing themselves, the phrase, under darkness, may refer to the chains, as in 2 Peter 2:4; where they are called “chains of darkness”; either because the power, providence, and purposes of God are invisible; so the Syriac version reads, “in unknown chains”; or because horror and black despair are the effects of sin, and its guilt, with which their consciences are continually filled: or it may denote the place and state where they are, either in the darkness of the air, or in the dark parts of the earth, or in hell, where is utter darkness, even blackness of darkness; or that they are under the power of sin, which is darkness, and without the light of God’s countenance, or any spiritual knowledge, or comfort: and they are “reserved” in these chains, and under this darkness; or “in prison,” as the Arabic version renders it; which denotes the custody of them, and their continuance in it, in which they are kept by Jesus Christ, who can bind and loose Satan at his pleasure; and it shows that they are not as yet in full torment, but are like malefactors that are kept in prison, until the assize comes: so these are laid in chains, and kept in custody.

Gill continues in verse 7:

**in like manner giving themselves over to fornication;** not as the angels, who are not capable of sinning in such a manner; though the Jews make this to be a sin of theirs, and so interpret Genesis 6:2,4, but rather the Israelites, among whom this sin prevailed, 1 Corinthians 10:8; though it seems best of all to refer it to the false teachers that turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and were very criminal this way; and then the sense is, that in like manner as they, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, gave themselves over to the sin of fornication; wherefore these men might expect the same judgments that fell upon them, since their sin was alike; which sin is a work of the flesh, contrary to the law of God, is against the body, and attended with many evils; exposes to judgment here and hereafter, and unfits for the communion of the saints, and for the kingdom of heaven.

**and going after strange flesh; or “other flesh”;** meaning not other women besides their own wives, but men; and designs that detestable and unnatural sin, which, from these people, is called sodomy to this day; and which is an exceeding great sin, contrary to the light of nature and law of God, dishonourable to human nature, and scandalous to a nation and people, and commonly prevails where idolatry and infidelity do, as among the Papists and Mahometans; and arose from idleness and fulness of bread in Sodom, and was committed in the sight of God, with great impudence: their punishment follows.

The context is discussing ungodly people who have crept into the church and a warning about their future. Such sin and unrighteousness is nothing new:

1. When the Israelites fell away from Him in the desert after Moses brought them out of Egypt, God destroyed them.
2. When the angels rebelled, God bound them to eternal darkness.
3. In a similar fashion to how the Israelites were adulterous to God and sought after other gods; Sodom and Gomorrah were seeking after inappropriate flesh.

God will destroy those who are ungodly and creep into the Church, just as He did the other ungodly people and angels mentioned. Their condemnation will be the same. This type of logical thinking would also apply to 2 Peter 2. Gill discusses this in his commentary in a similar fashion.

Of course, being one of the more popular views, it also comes with more criticisms. One of the prime arguments against this view is that angels are spiritual and don't have DNA to combine with a woman's DNA.

Though this can be argued because angels did take on the appearance of men such as Gabriel (Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:11–20) and the two angels sent to destroy Sodom (Genesis 19:1–13), to assume these angels had reproductive capabilities is another issue. Also, these angels that appeared as men were not the fallen ones. We have no biblical support of fallen angels ever appearing as men or of having physical DNA.

The spiritual can produce physical offspring, as witnessed by the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary. However, the Holy Spirit is the Creator and has that power (Psalm 104:30). Do fallen angels? The Bible simply doesn't reveal this.

While many commentaries, as well as the Alexandrinus manuscript of the Septuagint, refer to the sons of God in Job 1:6 and Job 2:1 as angels, this may not be the best argument for Genesis 6 for two reasons, and some commentaries leave open the possibility that these could be referring to godly men and/or magistrates on earth, who were human.<sup>4</sup>

The author of Job was aware of the term used for angel (*Kalm mal'ak*), as Eliphaz the Temanite used it in Job 4:18. So, if the sons of God were referring to angels, then why not say it? It may be too much to say for sure that these two verses early in Job are referring to angels, but even so, it wouldn't be referring to fallen ones. There are no other instances in Scripture that refer to fallen angels or demons as sons of God to verify this in Job.

Sometimes we fall into the mistake of assuming one name or phrase in a portion of Scripture is the same thing/type as another portion of Scripture. Though this may be the case, one shouldn't be dogmatic about it. For example, the Hebrew *lbb* (0894) for *Babel* or *Babylon* is referring to two distinct empires. If we find *lbb* referring to Nebuchadnezzar, we shouldn't assume it is the Babel that followed soon after the Flood.

Regardless though, Job 38:7 is an excellent example of angels being termed sons of God. However, this is referring to angels during the Creation Week, before any of them fell (which would have to be after God's declaration that everything was "very good" in Genesis 1:31). So this doesn't give much support to fallen angels being called sons of God.

Another argument in opposition to this view is that godly men were sometimes called son(s) of God such as Adam in Luke 3.

Luke 3:38

the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Other passages also confirm that Christians are called this:

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Romans 8:14

because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Romans 8:19

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Galatians 3:26

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

Although each of these is in Greek and the "sons of God" for Genesis 6 is in Hebrew, they are both rendered correctly as "sons of God." Luke 6:35 renders the term "sons of the Most High." Also, Psalms 82:6 has "sons of the most high" and renders correctly that godly humans can be called sons of God in another language. Hosea 1:10 points out that people will also be called "sons of the living God" (note the added descriptor *living*) in Hebrew:

Hosea 1:10

Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God."

Again, this is not identical to the Hebrew in Genesis or Job but still renders that humans can be called sons of God in another format. So, we have instances where humans are called:

- Sons of God (five times in Greek)
- Sons of the Most High (one time in Greek; one time in Hebrew)
- Sons of the Living God (one time in Hebrew)

Why is "sons of God" in Hebrew suddenly off-limits to refer to humans when God has already used similar

formats for calling godly men by such a godly title? It seems unlikely that God would put fallen angels in a class with un-fallen angels, Israelites (God’s chosen people), and Christians (the bride of Christ). I doubt that God would want confusion with fallen angels with his bride! Some dismiss this verse in Hosea out of hand, but it shouldn’t be neglected. Other verses point out that men can be children of God, such as Psalm 73:15 and Deuteronomy 32:5. Thus God-fearing men can also rightly be called sons of God.

I’ve heard the response that the reason Adam and Christians were called son(s) of God was because they were made directly by God in one fashion or another—Adam from the dust by God’s hand and Christians will be made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Along with this then, angels, who were directly created by God during creation week, could also hold to this title.

However, there are other direct creations by God, such as sea creatures, land animals, and so on. Are these also sons of God? Few would say they are. Also, godly men of the Old Testament would one day be new creations in Christ and, by the foreknowledge of God, could easily have been called “sons of God.” So, this argument really doesn’t make a case exclusively for the angelic view, but could also be used for godly men as well.

Also, in Hebrew, we find sons of Israel (*bene Yisra’el*) used of descendants of Israel who were not his direct sons (Exodus 6:6, 6:11, and so on.) Therefore, there is no reason to assume that sons of God couldn’t be referring to men, since they are descendants of Adam, who was a son of God. To clarify, this is not to be confused with the only begotten son of God, Jesus Christ, who was the unique and perfect Son of God.

Another theological problem presents itself for the fallen angels view if we take a closer look at the Anakites (descendants of Anak), descendants of the Nephilim according to Numbers 13:33. The Anakites were not completely wiped out by Joshua. Joshua says:

Joshua 11:22

No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive

The Bible never records their line ending. Thus, there is no reason to assume the descendants of Anak are not still living today. In fact, they have probably interbred with many other people groups since then.

This theological problem has been challenged, though, and rightly so because Numbers 13:33 is part of a bad/evil report spread among the Israelites. But was the information false about the Anakites being Nephilim? Let’s take a look:

Numbers 13:30–33

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

So, was the report of the Anakites being Nephilim accurate or inaccurate, as even falsehoods often contain some aspects of truth. For example, we know that Anakites were indeed in the land, as Joshua went to war with them later. So, what aspects of this report were false and which were true? We get a clue when Caleb and Joshua answer the congregation who was grumbling about the bad report in Numbers 14:6–9.

Numbers 14:6–9

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

The following table breaks down the bad report and analyzes what was false and what was not challenged.

Bad report indicates	Was this challenged by Joshua and Caleb?
The land devours its inhabitants.	Challenged: The land was exceedingly good, flowing with milk and honey, according to Joshua and Caleb.
All the men were of great size; the spies seemed very small in their sight (like grasshoppers).	Challenged: Joshua and Caleb told them not be afraid of the people of the land. They didn’t comment on the size, but many may have been giants, since they do point out that people were afraid of them.
Anakites were there.	Not challenged
Nephilim were there.	Not challenged
Anakites were descendants of the Nephilim.	Not challenged
Anakites were only a part of the Nephilim.	Not challenged

So, it may not be the best argument to say that the false report meant that the Anakites were not Nephilim, since this point (nor other aspects of the report mentioned above) was never addressed as being false. Thus, the argument stands that Nephilim were the descendants of Anak and were around post-Flood. This also reveals that Nephilim can exist without being offspring of “sons of God,” as they are only listed as being descendants of Anak.

Interestingly, Moses, who penned Genesis, said that the Nephilim were on the earth pre-Flood and also afterwards:

Genesis 6:4a

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterwards (emphasis added)

Some translations say “and after that,” and one could argue that this was still referring to a pre-Flood time. However, it makes much more sense that this phrase refers to this post-Flood event, especially since Genesis 6 was penned by Moses.

Acts 17:26 indicates all nations are of “one blood” or “one man.” If some nations are a combination of angelic blood and Adamic blood, as the Anakites would have been in this view as well as the Nephilim pre-Flood, then there is a major problem—Acts 17:26 would be wrong. The Anakites were still living and breeding with many other people groups during Paul’s time. Thus, it presents a problem to say angels bred with women. Another problem presents itself from the rest of Genesis 6:4:

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. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men (*vya ‘iysh*) of renown.

In Genesis 6:4, the phrase “men of renown” uses the Hebrew word *iysh*. This term is used consistently as “man” or descendants of Adam—even Adam used it of himself in Genesis 2:23, yet it is never used of fallen angel, demons, or of Satan. It was used for some *unfallen* angels when they took the form of a man, though. If the Nephilim were crossbreeds between men and fallen angels, then why did the Bible use the term men (*iysh*) as opposed to something that would lead us to believe they were not fully men?

If we follow the context of *iysh* into the following verses in Genesis 6, we find:

- Verse 4: Nephilim are **men** of renown
- Verse 5: wickedness of **man** great
- Verse 6: God sorry He made **man** on earth
- Verse 7: Blot out **man** from earth
- Verse 8/9: Noah found favor with God and was a righteous **man**

The context reveals that Noah was compared with and amongst the men being discussed in Genesis 6, yet unlike them he was righteous (Genesis 6:9). There is no mention of Noah being fully human and other men being half-breeds, but merely that he was righteous among them. Having Noah be righteous among his generations is slight support for the view that sees the sons of God as human.

One early argument against this angelic view was that angels didn’t marry in heaven according to Jesus (Matthew 22:30). This has been responded to many times and it is rightly pointed out that this is referring to angels in heaven, not fallen angels. So, the option was left open that fallen angels may very well do this. However, a new problem now arises. Moses points out that the sons of God took wives (*ishshah* wife/women) (Genesis 6:2). Never once have I found a verse in the Bible where wife, wives, husband, husbands, or marriage was anything other than between a human male and female. If these were marriages between fallen angels and women, then it opens up the possibility of marriages that are not limited to man and woman, when the Bible is clear on this subject.

An argument in response is that *ishshah* could merely be used for women, not wives, and doesn’t necessarily mean they were married, but rather taken for sexual purposes outside of marriage, possibly forcibly. In light of some of these criticisms, this popular view may not be the best one, though many great scholars hold to it and it should be at least respected. I encourage deeper study in both the view and the responses as I am only touching the surface.

Perhaps the most devastating argument against this view came from Jesus Himself, though. We have no instance in Scripture where fallen angels ever materialized as previously stated. This is significant because Christ offered proof of His resurrection when the disciples questioned Him:

Luke 24:37–43

But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when He had said this, He

showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them. (emphasis added)

If fallen angels or demons, which are spirit, could materialize, then this calls into question the entire resurrection of Christ. Christ says spirits do not have flesh and bones, so it would seem these entities can't make physical bodies for themselves.

### The Fallen Angels Overtook Men View

- Sons of God: Men overtaken by fallen angels/demons
- Nephilim: 100% human

This view has some similarities to the previous view in that the sons of God have a relationship to fallen angels. The sons of God would be men who were overtaken by fallen angels and/or demons. Unlike the previous view, this one holds that the offspring were not a mix but completely human. Of course, some of the arguments against the sons of God being angels in the previous section apply here as well.

It is possible for men to be overcome by Satan or demons. Men can easily be overcome or influenced by Satan such as Judas in Luke 22:3. Demons have often entered into people, such as in Mark 5:15.

The question really is this: would such people who are overtaken by demons and/or fallen angels warrant the title sons of God? In gospel accounts, many people were overtaken by demons, but never were they titled sons of God. Other biblical passages do not mention people who were overcome by evil spirits or demons as sons of God either.

In this view, though, there is no problem with Nephilim appearing pre-Flood, getting wiped out, and then reappearing as this happened again. According to this view, the offspring/Nephilim are still 100% descendant of Adam and Eve, thus eligible to receive salvation if they placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The children would have been conceived in sin. But this is nothing new in light of original sin that affects us all since Adam sinned in the Garden. In fact, Psalm 51 says:

Psalm 51:5

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

A problem associated with this view is this: are Nephilim still being born today? If not, then why was it no longer mentioned in the Bible after Moses? Especially with the many demon-possessed and Satanic entrances into men surrounding the time of Christ? So, by this view, any of us could potentially be Nephilim.

Also, it would seem strange that offspring by this union would require an entirely different term (Nephilim) to describe them. Although this may not be one of the better explanations, it is plausible, and I wouldn't discount it entirely.

### The Sethite View

- Sons of God: 100% human
- Nephilim: 100% human

The Sethite view is probably the second-most-popular view. It appeals to the context of Genesis 5, just before the mention of the sons of God and Nephilim. So, it has good support with regards to the literary context.

One variant of the Sethite view is that the sons of God were kings or rulers. This has some biblical support, such as Psalm 82:1–6. Also, this would explain why many ancient cultures refer to demi-gods as well. It also explains how ancestor worship can arise, even in a post-Flood realm. But both of these Sethite views still have problems.

In both of these Sethite views, it is assumed that there was a godly lineage from Adam to Seth and followed down the line to Noah:

Adam—Seth—Enosh—Kenan—Mahalalel—Jared—Enoch—Methuselah—Lamech—Noah

In this godly lineage of Sethites, they were called sons of God being in the context of the previous chapter. These sons of God or their children married or began marrying ungodly women (daughters of men), and their children followed after false gods and rejected the one true God. In other words, they fell away from God—recall the word Nephilim is related to the verb series “to fall” in Hebrew. In this view, offspring from these unions had fallen from God and were termed Nephilim.

While commenting on Genesis in *Exposition of Genesis*, H.C. Leupold says of this view:

But who are these “sons of God”? Without a shadow of doubt, the Sethites—the ones just described in chapter five as having in their midst men who walked with God, like Enoch (v. 22), men who looked to higher comfort in the midst of life's miseries, like Lamech (v. 29), men who publicly worshipped God and confessed His name (4:26). Such men merit to be called the “sons of God” (*benê 'elohim*), a title applied to true followers of God

elsewhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. When the psalmist refers to such (Psalm 73:15) as “the generation of thy children,” he uses the same word “sons,” describing them as belonging to God. Deuteronomy 32:5 uses the same word “sons” (“children,” A. V.) in reference to Israel. Hosea 1:10 is, if anything, a still stronger passage, saying specifically to Israel, “Ye are sons of the living God” (Heb. *benê ‘el chay*). Psalm 80:17 also belongs here. Criticism resorts to a technicality at this point. If God said to me: “Thou art my Son,” criticism’s claim would be: “You have not been called ‘God’s son,’ but ‘my son,’”—a mere technicality. So in the face of the passages we have just cited criticism claims the Scriptures do not use the expression “sons of God” for the godly, because “thy children” is used in three instances and in the fourth another name is used for God, *‘el chay*. We might word the case thus: strictly speaking, “sons of God” is a title applied to the godly; grammatically, the very expression “sons of God” does not happen to be used in reference to them in that very form.

Over against this usage that we have cited criticism arrays another, the substance of which is: The title “sons of God” is used in reference to the angels. This claim cannot be denied; see Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 and Daniel 3:25; also *benê ‘elîm*, “sons of the Mighty,” Psalm 29:1; 89:7. But this claim becomes erroneous when it is thus worded: The title “sons of God” is used only in reference to the angels.

But of these two uses of the title, which shall we choose in this instance? We have had no mention made of angels thus far in Genesis. We have met with other sons of the true God, in fact, the whole preceding chapter, even 4:25–5:32, has been concerned with them. Who will, then, be referred to here? Answer, the Sethites, without a doubt.

This sounds like a fairly good view from an initial glance. However, there are still a few problems.

Were these men and their descendants all godly? Of all of Adam’s children, Seth was deemed worthy to replace Abel, who was righteous, and with him, people began to call on the name of Lord (Genesis 4:26). Enoch was indeed godly without a doubt. In the genealogy listed in Genesis 5, Enoch is singled out with honors unlike any other from Adam to Noah:

Genesis 5:24

Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Noah was righteous among his generations and found favor with the Lord (Genesis 6:8–9). Were others Sethites? Perhaps several in the patriarchal list were righteous, but probably not all Sethite descendants, which is one of the biggest arguments against this view.

It seems that there would have to be some godly heritage passed along for Noah to have any teachings to remain righteous when others weren’t. However, we need to keep in mind the great ages of these patriarchs. Noah lived 950 years, Seth lived 912 years, and Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5). So, a godly heritage could have been passed from Seth directly to one of his descendants, such as Enoch and Methuselah, and then directly to Noah! (Many Bible scholars assume that Methuselah was also godly since his father Enoch, who walked with God in an incredible faith, would not have erred by failing to pass on a godly heritage to his son—Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 14).

The patriarchs in the lineage from Seth to Noah’s father Lamech died prior to the Flood, which was a judgment on man’s sin, so they avoided this judgment. Was this because they were all godly? Perhaps. Regardless, this doesn’t give any solid biblical evidence that confirms that the others in lineage were righteous besides those already discussed, and only a small case could be made for Lamech (see the quoted section by Leupold above).

If we look at the descendants of some of these others in Sethite lineage, why didn’t they pass a godly heritage to their children? Recall, even the other sons and daughters of Methuselah (Genesis 5:26) and Lamech (Genesis 5:30) did not make it to the Ark, and unless they died before the Flood, they would have been considered wicked (Genesis 6:5). In light of this, many Sethites were not saved from the Flood but perished, indicating Sethites weren’t necessarily godly and shouldn’t all be lumped together as sons of God.

Another problem presents itself for the Sethite view when we discuss Numbers 13. Post-Flood, everyone was a Sethite! Where did *those* Nephilim come from?

There is another inconsistency in this view. Genesis 6:1 refers to men being that of mankind, and then, in verse 2, *men* (daughters of *men*) is, in this view, inconsistently held as daughters of the Cainites. So, it may be going a bit far, though it doesn’t negate this view entirely.

In all, this view has fewer problems but is still speculative in some areas.

### The Fallen Men View

- Sons of God: 100% human
- Nephilim: 100% human

This view is similar to the Sethite view, and it could be considered an upgrade from it as well. In this view, not all of Seth’s lineage or descendants were assumed to be godly but can include some of them as godly. It also



eliminates any perceived problem of the Nephilim in Numbers 13 needing to be Sethites, as there have been godly men both pre-Flood and post-Flood. It also holds consistency between the use of men in verse 1 and verse 2 of Genesis 6 keeping both as mankind.

In this view, godly men, such as some of the men listed in the Bible from Seth's line (perhaps some on other lineages as well), were called the "sons of God" in keeping with literary context. So, sons of God were merely godly men of the time. Perhaps Leupold was trying to convey this view but simply didn't take it far enough.

Like the Sethite view, godly men (sons of God) were marrying women who were not godly (daughters of men), such as Cain's (or others of Adam's) descendants, including ungodly people from Seth's line, thus resulting in Nephilim because they *fell* away from God's favor. Once again, the Hebrew word *Nephilim* is related to the verb series "to fall." For example, we know Cain fell away, and Lamech (descendant of Cain) and many other men and women had fallen away. The Nephilim could easily have been people who had fallen or turned from God in a severe way. This would also make sense as to why some of Canaan's descendants (descendants of Anak were Canaanites) were called Nephilim in Numbers 13.

If you recall, Sodom and Gomorrah were so sinful that they were destroyed with direct intervention by God (Genesis 18:20, 19:24). This reminds me of the Flood—God Himself had a direct hand in destroying them (Genesis 6:13, 17). When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, it is logical to assume that many descendants of those people who were not living in the area any longer were not destroyed. In fact, the Bible doesn't say that all of the *descendants* of these places were completely destroyed. Therefore, it is logical that there could have been descendants living out away from the plain, such as Hebron, which is where the Anakites came from (Joshua 15:13).

The Bible indicates that the Anakites were descendants of the Nephilim, but it couldn't have been those wiped out in the Flood, since God destroyed all land flesh. Therefore, it had to be group a people that were *post-Flood*. If the Nephilim had fallen so far pre-Flood that God Himself destroyed the earth as a result of their sin, then it makes sense that the post-Flood account of similar but smaller scale destruction in Sodom and Gomorrah may well have been the Nephilim. With the Anakites, who were Canaanites like those in Sodom and Gomorrah, they may very well have been their descendants.

It makes more sense that they were relatives/descendants from Sodom and Gomorrah (and the other cities of the plain). The sinners who died in the Flood and the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah had one significant thing in common—they were the ones in history to fall so far from God that God Himself had a direct hand in destroying them. So, it makes sense why these two groups could both be called Nephilim in this view: 100% human descendants of Adam who were in a state of being fallen far from God. Of course, there should be no dogmatism about this point.

## Common Questions

### 1. What about the Book of Enoch?

The Book of Enoch is an ancient book that is attributed to Enoch, who is listed in the lineage from Seth to Noah. The Book of Enoch, Jewish traditions, and Josephus hold strongly to the idea that the sons of God were fallen angels and the Nephilim were offspring of such unions.<sup>5</sup> Even the Jewish translators of the Septuagint, who were known to make errors, translated the Genesis 6 phrase as "angels of God," revealing their beliefs. The Book of Enoch says in Chapter 6 and 7:

#### Chapter 6

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' And Semjaza, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And these are the names of their leaders: Samlazaz, their leader, Araklba, Rameel, Kokabel, Tamlel, Ramlel, Danel, Ezeqeel, Baraqijal, Asael, Armaros, Batarel, Ananel, Zaquel, Samsapeel, Satarel, Turel, Jomjael, Sariel. These are their chiefs of tens.

#### Chapter 7

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare

great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.

However, Paul and Christ warn us about Jewish tradition, and we need to keep in mind that the Book of Enoch is not the Word of God, but the words of fallible man (Titus 1:13–14; Mark 7:8–13; Colossians 2:8). What this passage and the Septuagint do tell us is that people of those days believed the sons of God to be fallen angels.

It is true that Jude 14–15 quotes from the book of Enoch (1:9). But that simply means that the quote used by Jude was inspired of God as Scripture. It gives no credence that any other verse in the book of Enoch is inspired.

So, is the book we have today really from pre-Flood Enoch? It wasn't enough to make the Canon of Scripture—it mentions Mt. Sinai, which shouldn't have existed until after the Flood, and Enoch lived long before the Flood. Rarely, if ever, do prophetic works reveal the future name of a place.

## **2. What about Nephilim being men “of renown” and “of old”—doesn't this mean they were the result of a special union?**

Being renowned is simply having fame or being well known. Some Israelites were also men of renown: Numbers 16:1–2

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Da than and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown.

Ezekiel points to men of renown who would come against Israel from many nations.

Ezekiel 23:22–23

“Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.’”

So, saying that men of renown were of special offspring unions may not be wise.

Being “of old” comes from the Hebrew word (*Mlwe 'owlam*), which means of long duration, from antiquity, ancient, or literally old. It can also mean forever or everlasting. Of course, this makes sense; since many of the patriarchs were living for 900 years, it makes sense that early, pre-Flood factors allowed them to live long ages (see Did People Like Adam and Noah Really Live over 900 Years of Age?).<sup>6</sup> God may have pointed this out to us for a significant reason—they were sinning for a long time!

They were likely making a name for themselves in wicked ways (renown) and had been for a long time with no apparent end in sight (of old). This could very well have been the final factor to send the Flood to destroy them for their sin. It also lets us know that although they made a great name for themselves, it was no longer remembered due to God's judgment.

## **Conclusion**

After researching this in more detail than anticipated, I was challenged on many occasions and affirm that this last view, the fallen men view (a modified Sethite view), may be the best at this point in my studies. However, there may still be problems that I have not had presented to me so far. As a fallible human being, dealing with precious little information regarding the Sons of God and the Nephilim, I may be wrong, but when I am wrong this does not in any way affect the accuracy of God and His Word.

In fact, there may be problems or other views that simply have not been brought to my attention. Regardless, I reiterate that Answers in Genesis officially doesn't take a particular stand on this issue as a ministry but seeks to encourage readers to carefully study the Scriptures and always maintain the Word of God as the ultimate authority on all things.

## **Footnotes**

1. All Scriptures taken from the New American Standard Bible.
2. Due to the volume of authors, theologians, commentaries, etc. that have written about the sons of God and the Nephilim, I've opted to not reference each argument and counterargument in detail, or I would have had more references than text. I have found that many arguments were recapped many times over and decided to stick with the arguments as the basis for this discussion. A few references are given that were required though.

3. Gill, J. *Exposition of the entire Bible*. Notes on Jude 6 and 7. Retrieved from, <http://eword.gospelcom.net/comments/jude/gill/jude1.htm>.
4. Gill, J. *Exposition of the entire Bible*. Commentary on Genesis 6:2. Retrieved from, <http://eword.gospelcom.net/comments/genesis/gill/genesis6.htm>.
5. Josephus. *Complete works*, trans. William Whiston in 1867. *Antiquity of the Jews*, chap. III, pp.27–28. Grand Rapid, Michigan: Kregel Publications.
6. Retrieved from, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2008/06/04/did-people-live-over-900-years>.