



## THE ANAKIM AND THE NEPHILIM

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After the people of Israel left Egypt, they came to the borders of Canaan, the land that Yahweh their God had promised to them. Before they entered the land, Moses sent 12 spies to investigate the land and its people (Num. 13). In a later passage Moses seems to place responsibility for the spies being sent on the people of Israel (Deut. 1:22). With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the spies brought back a pessimistic report of their survey of Canaan. To 10 of the spies, the fortified walls of the Canaanite cities were an overwhelming obstacle for their conquest of the land (13:28). The spies also were terrified by the size of the inhabitants of Canaan. "They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 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'" (Num. 13:32-33 NIV). In their exaggeration of the situation, the spies spoke to the assembly of the leaders of Israel of the terrible predicament awaiting the people of Israel. The spies added that, in addition of being people of gigantic stature, the Anakim were the Nephilim, the dreadful people who lived on earth in the days before the flood.

Twice the *Kings James Version* uses "giant" to translate the word "Nephilim" in verse 33. In the *New International Version* Nephilim is used to describe the inhabitants of Canaan. In addition, the *King James Version* uses the word "giants" several other times, but most of them are either a translation for the word "warrior" (Job 16:14 NIV) or for the word "Rephaites" (Deut. 2:11, 20 NIV) or "Rapha" (2 Sam 21:22 NIV). The Rephaim were another group of people who inhabited the land of Canaan before the time of the Exodus (Gen. 15:20). Rephaim is a plural word in Hebrew. The *New International Version* uses Rephaites to express the plural sense in English.

The identification of the Anakim and the Nephilim in the Old Testament is a difficult problem because the passages where these two names appear are not easy to interpret. Since the contexts in which these passages appear are not clear, scholars have offered different interpretations in their attempts to identify the Anakim and the Nephilim.

According to the book of Joshua, the Anakim were associated with the southern part of Canaan, specially the city of Hebron. The original name of Hebron was Kiriath Arba, a name given after its original founder, Arba, the forefather of Anak (Josh. 15:13) and the greatest of the Anakim (Josh. 14:15). Thus, according to this brief genealogical information, the Anakim were the descendants of Anak (Num. 13:22). They were a tall people who lived in Canaan (Deut. 2:21). The word *anak* in Hebrew means "long-neck" or giants. The Anakim were not the only group of tall people who lived in the land of Canaan. The Rephaim (whom the Ammonites called Zamzummities) lived in the territory of the Ammonites and were as tall as the Anakim (Deut. 2:20-21). The Emim, who lived in the territory of the Moabites also were as tall as the Anakim (Deut. 2:10). Both the Emim and the Anakim were considered to be Rephaim (Deut. 2:11).

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This identification of the Rephaim with the Anakim and of the Emim and the Anakim with the Rephaim reflects the popular view that all the inhabitants of the land were giants. Because the word *Anak* appears in the Hebrew with a definite article, and because Arba, the father of Anak was called the greatest of the Anakim (Josh. 14:15), Anakim may have been a collective word used to describe, not a nation or a tribe, but rather people who had one thing in common: they were all of gigantic stature.

The words of the spies, however, introduce another problem. The problem develops because the spies identified the offspring of the Anakim with the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4. The identification of the Nephilim is made difficult because the most important passage where the word appears (Gen. 6:1-4) is obscure and has produced numerous and at times, contradictory interpretations.

Questions about the identification of the Nephilim abound. Even the English translations of the Old Testament do not agree on how to translate the word. For example, the *King James Version* translates the word as "giants." This translation is influenced by the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint used the word *gigantes* to translate the word *naphal*. Most modern translations leave the word *Nephilim* untranslated, thus putting the burden of interpretation on the reader.

Most scholars today derive the word *Nephilim* from the Hebrew verb *naphal*, which means "fallen ones."<sup>i</sup> Thus some scholars view the Nephilim as the ones fallen from heaven, that is, divine beings or angels. Others have identified the Nephilim with robbers and people who preyed upon individuals, violent men who fell upon their victims. Some scholars have derived Nephilim from a Hebrew word *nephef*, which means "miscarriage."<sup>ii</sup> These scholars understand the Nephilim as unnaturally begotten superhuman beings emerging from miscarriages.

A more difficult problem is posed by the relationship between the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4 and the "sons of God" and "the daughter of men" of Genesis 6:2. Genesis 6:1-4 does not clearly say whether the Nephilim were the offspring of the marriage between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Since scholars are divided on this issue, it becomes imperative to look at the identification of the Nephilim from both perspectives.

Presupposing that the Nephilim are the progeny of the sons of God and the daughters of men, the question becomes: who were their parents? Several views have gained popularity among interpreters of Genesis 6:1-4. First, many interpreters identify the sons of God with the believing descendants of Seth and the daughters of men with the unbelieving descendants of Cain. Under this interpretation, the Nephilim would then be men who were born of these unequally yoked marriages into ungodly homes; men who lived lives of violence and who fell upon innocent victims. The second view identifies the sons of God with ancient dynastic rulers who practiced polygamous marriages and identifies the daughters of men as the women in their harem.<sup>iii</sup> Their children, the Nephilim, then were mighty tyrants whose life of oppression and tyranny was intolerable to God. A third view identifies the sons of God with fallen angels and the daughters of men with human women. According to this view the Nephilim were men born out of an unnatural relationship, half human, half demonic, a violation of the created order. This is the view taken by the *Good News Bible*, which translates Genesis 6:4 as follows: "In those days, and even later, there were giants on the earth who were the descendants of human women and supernatural beings. They were the great heroes and famous men of long ago."<sup>iv</sup>

Those who presuppose that the Nephilim were not the children of the sons of God and the daughters of men distinguish them from the *gibborim*, "the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown" (Gen. 6:4 NRSVB).<sup>v</sup> That is the position taken by Keil who suggests that the Nephilim were tyrants and oppressors who were already in existence before the sons of God cohabited with the daughters of men.<sup>vi</sup> Hamilton also takes a similar position, saying that the Nephilim were men of imposing stature and that the mighty men, the *gibborim*, were the children born of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Hamilton

translates 6:4 by setting the first part of the verse in parenthesis, as an explanatory sentence: "(The Nephilim were on the earth in those days--and later too.) Whenever the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of humankind, they fathered children by them. These were the mighty men of old, men of reputation."<sup>vii</sup>

A fourth view, which has not gained popularity among scholars, says that the Nephilim were the sons of God, and they were the ones committing the sins that brought about the moral decline in the days of Noah and served as the reason for the deluge.<sup>viii</sup>

Several people of gigantic stature appear in the Old Testament: Goliath, the warrior of the Philistines, was six cubits and one span in height (1 Sam 17:4 KJV), that is, "over nine feet tall" (NIV). Og, king of Bashan and one of the Rephaim, had a bed of iron that was 9 cubits long and 4 cubits wide (Deut. 3:11 KJV) or "more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide" (NIV). Benaiiah, one of David's warriors, killed an Egyptian soldier who was 5 cubits tall (1 Chron. 11:23 KJV) or "seven and half feet" (NIV). Since the average size of an Israelite at the time of the conquest was slightly above five feet<sup>ix</sup>, any person above six feet was considered to be a giant.<sup>x</sup> Many of the Philistines soldiers that David and his soldiers killed were descendants of Rapha (2 Sam. 21:15-22), although only one of them was considered to be a huge man (v. 20). After David's time, the Rephaim are not mentioned again in the Old Testament.

Although the spies were utterly afraid of the Anakim, the Anakim were conquered by Joshua and driven out of the land. Only a small remnant survived; they found refuge in the cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Joshua 11:21-22). Caleb conquered Hebron, the stronghold of the Anakim and drove out the three clans of the Anakim (Josh. 15:14). Thus, it is possible to conclude that when the Israelite spies said that saw the Nephilim in the land, they were using the word as a synonym for Anakim. Both words are used to describe the imposing physical condition of the original inhabitants of the promised land. Centuries later, the prophet Amos, referring to the overwhelming size of the original inhabitants of Canaan, said that the Canaanites were as "tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks" (Amos 2:9 NIV).

<sup>1</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 658.

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958) 624.

<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1962) 196.

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<sup>1</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951) 137.

<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) 261, 270.

<sup>1</sup> Leroy Birney, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970): 51.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Callaway, "A Visit with Ahilud," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9:5, September/October 1983, 44.

<sup>1</sup> Rachel Hachlili and Ann Killebrew, "The Saga of the Goliath Family--As Revealed in their Newly Discovered 2,000-Year-Old Tomb," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9:1, January/February 1983, 50.

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