

## The “Nephilim” in Numbers Chapter 13

### **Introduction**

One of the previous articles on this site discusses the group of people called the “Nephilim”, who are first referenced in Genesis chapter 6. In particular, that article investigates the *origins* of that group.

That article puts forth the possibility that the Nephilim were the children of rebellious angels, who mated with human women. As a result, the Nephilim were essentially a race of “superhuman bullies”. Here is the link to that article:

### [Who were the “Nephilim” of Genesis 6?](#)

As mentioned in that article, it appears that the rebellious angels were “imprisoned” in some way, after they committed the sin of mating with human women. In particular, 1 Peter 3:18-20, 2 Peter 2:4-5,9-10 and Jude 1:6-7 all state that God imprisoned those angels because of their sin.

In addition to that, the article also posits that the *primary* reason why God had to cause the flood is that the earth had become *overrun* with Nephilim. That is, the Nephilim were “dominating” all the rest of humanity – and that is what led to the spread of *extreme* evil across the earth.

### **Another Appearance of the Nephilim**

For the sake of the argument, let’s assume that the Nephilim **are** the progeny of rebellious angels – and that God imprisoned those angels after their sin. In addition, we know that the flood killed all of the Nephilim who were living *prior* to the flood – because only Noah and his family survived the flood.

So, after the flood, all of the existing Nephilim had been killed – and all of the angels who had *caused* the Nephilim to be born had been imprisoned.

As a result, it would appear that after the flood, there could *never* be any **additional** Nephilim – because all of the angels who caused the Nephilim were imprisoned; and all of the existing Nephilim were dead.

However, take a look at the passage below – which describes events that occurred hundreds of years after the flood. That passage contains the report that the Israelite spies gave, about the land of Canaan:

#### **Numbers 13:32-33 (ESV):**

<sup>32</sup> So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. <sup>33</sup> 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.”

As listed above, the spies saw **Nephilim** in Canaan! How can that be – since all of the rebellious angels had been imprisoned since the time of the flood?

## Who are those Nephilim?

One question that immediately arises about the above passage is: who, exactly, are the “Nephilim” mentioned in Numbers 13? In particular, are these Nephilim **also** “superhuman” beings – like the ones in Genesis 6 – or are they just “normal” humans?

In that passage, the spies mention that “the people we saw were of great height”. Of course, the phrase “great height” is a relative term – i.e., it *could* mean a person who is 10 feet tall – or it *could* mean a person who is 6’4”.

The passage also states that the spies “seemed like grasshoppers” when they compared themselves to the Nephilim. At face value, that phrase appears to indicate that the Nephilim were superhuman beings. However, that phrase is presumably a *figure of speech* – it is probably “hyperbole”. That figure of speech is basically an **exaggeration**, which is used to emphasize a point – rather than being literally true.

One obvious example of hyperbole can be found in Matthew 5:30, in which Jesus states “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away”. Jesus is certainly not telling us to mutilate ourselves – he is using exaggeration to emphasize a point.

As a result, it is necessary to find objective descriptions about this “new” group of Nephilim, in order to determine if they are “superhuman” or not.

## The Descendants of Anak

The above passage in Numbers 13 mentions that the Nephilim were descendants of the man named Anak. So, who are these descendants of Anak? Those descendants – the “**Anakim**” – are not mentioned very often in Scripture; but there are some references to them – and those references provide important information about of the Nephilim in Numbers 13.

First, Scripture tells us that the Anakim are part of an overall tribe of people, called the “**Rephaim**”. Basically, Scripture mentions three separate groups of people who were living in Canaan at that time – and all three of those groups are part of the overall “Rephaim” tribe. The three groups of people mentioned are the Anakim, the Emim, and the Zamzummim. The following passages mention those three groups – and they mention that those groups are all considered Rephaim:

### Deuteronomy 2:11 (ESV):

<sup>11</sup> Like the Anakim they are also counted as Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim.

### Deuteronomy 2:20-21 (ESV):

<sup>20</sup> (It is also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there—but the Ammonites call them Zamzummim— <sup>21</sup> a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim;

The reason why it is important to know that the Anakim are part of the Rephaim tribe is that there are some objective descriptions of Rephaim in Scripture. First, consider the following passage, which describes one particular member of the Rephaim:

### **Deuteronomy 3:11 (ESV):**

(For only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed 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.)

From the above passage, King Og – who was one of the Rephaim – had a bed that was 9 cubits long. The “common cubit” was about 18 inches in size. So, this means that Og’s iron bed was over 13 feet long.

If King Og was simply a tall “normal human” – i.e., if he was 6’4” – then it appears unlikely that he would have had a bed that was 13 feet long. After all, that would have meant that his bed was more than *twice* as long as his height!

Nevertheless, the size of King Og’s bed does not *prove* that he, himself, was of superhuman size. So, let’s examine *later* passages in Scripture, to determine if the sizes of any Nephilim, themselves, are stated.

The book of Joshua states that the Israelites wiped out all of the Anakim in Canaan – **except** in the cities of Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. In other words, some of the Anakim **survived** in those three cities:

### **Joshua 11:21-22 (ESV):**

<sup>21</sup> And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. <sup>22</sup> There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain.

Next, note that the giant Philistine warrior named Goliath – from the famous “David vs. Goliath” battle – came from the city of Gath. As a result, it is relatively safe to assume that he was one of the Anakim:

### **1 Samuel 17:4-7 (ESV):**

<sup>4</sup> A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. <sup>5</sup> He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; <sup>6</sup> on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. <sup>7</sup> His spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

As mentioned earlier, a “cubit” is about 18 inches long. Also note that a “span” is about 9 inches. So, since Goliath’s height is listed above as “6 cubits and a span”, that means he was almost 10 feet tall!

So, we know that Goliath was *much* taller than a “normal” human. Now, let’s see if we can determine anything about his physical strength – to determine if he was stronger than any normal human. From the above passage, we can see that Goliath was wearing a coat of scale armor. The battle armor worn by warriors in ancient times generally had a **maximum** weight of 40 to 50 pounds – because armor heavier than that would prevent a warrior from fighting effectively. (Armor that was used for jousting was heavier – but that was because knights did not need to *move* during jousts.)

As listed in the above passage, we can see that Goliath’s suit of armor weighed 5,000 shekels. One Biblical shekel weighs about 0.4 ounces, or 1/40 of a pound. As a result, Goliath’s armor weighed about 125 pounds – i.e., it was about 2.5 times as heavy as the *heaviest* battle armor worn by normal humans. This indicates that Goliath was *much* stronger than any normal human being.

From all of the above information, it certainly appears that the Nephilim mentioned in Numbers chapter 13 were, indeed, of *superhuman* stature – i.e., they were *not* simply “tall” normal humans.

### **How did they arise?**

As mentioned in the introduction, Scripture indicates that the rebellious angels, who caused the Nephilim in Genesis 6 to be born, were *imprisoned* for that sin. Also, all of the Nephilim who were living during that time were *killed* by the flood.

So, that raises a question – if all of the rebellious angels were imprisoned before the flood – and if all of the Nephilim who were alive at that time were killed by the flood – then how did **additional** Nephilim appear, after the flood? That is, if all of the rebellious angels were “incapacitated”, then how could *additional* Nephilim be born, *after* the flood?

One simple answer to that question could be that after the flood, **additional** angels became *rebellious* – and mated with human women. That sequence of events certainly would cause additional Nephilim to be born; however, it appears very **unlikely** that that situation accounts for the Nephilim in Numbers 13.

Basically, as mentioned earlier, it appears that one of the primary reasons why God had to send the flood is because the earth had become “overrun” by Nephilim. Also, after the flood, God made a covenant with Noah that He would never again send a flood to destroy the earth.

So, since God has promised to **never again** send a flood – and since the Nephilim were one of the primary **causes** of the flood – it does not seem very likely that God would allow additional angels to mate with humans. After all, if the world became “overrun” with Nephilim again – and if God could not send another flood – then that would (presumably) have *interfered* with Jesus being born into the world.

### **Are there any Other Explanations?**

As mentioned above, it appears that the Nephilim mentioned in Numbers 13 were of superhuman stature – i.e., they were not simply tall normal humans. Also as mentioned, it appears **unlikely** that those particular Nephilim were the children of rebellious angels and human women.

So, is there any other possible explanation? Is there any other way that the Nephilim in Numbers 13 could have obtained “superhuman” characteristics?

One of the passages that is referenced above is Jude 1:6-7. That passage (along with several others) indicates that God has imprisoned the rebellious angels, for their sin of mating with humans.

The book of Jude continues on after that point, to include a very interesting prophesy, as follows:

#### **Jude 1:14-15 (ESV):**

<sup>14</sup> It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

It turns out that the above passage is a **direct quote** from the ancient Jewish religious work called the “Book of Enoch”. Here is the passage in question:

**Enoch 1:9:**

<sup>9</sup> And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones To execute judgement upon all, And to destroy all the ungodly: And to convict all flesh Of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, And of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

The first part of the Book of Enoch was completed at around 300 BC – and it was evidently **well known** to the Jewish community during the time of the apostles. The Book of Enoch is not part of the Biblical canon that is in use today – except in two Christian denominations (Ethiopian Orthodox and Eritrean Orthodox), and in one Jewish group (Beta Israel). Nevertheless, the apostle Jude quoted from that book – so it is worth investigating that book further.

As mentioned above, another passage that speaks about rebellious angels being imprisoned is 2 Peter 2:4-5. In that passage, Peter mentions that the angels were imprisoned in the place called “Tartarus” – although many English translations render that Greek word as “hell”. The HCSB translation preserves the actual Greek term:

**2 Peter 2:4 (HCSB):**

<sup>4</sup> For if God didn’t spare the angels who sinned but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness until judgment;

Tartarus is a term from Greek mythology – it is the place where the Greek gods imprisoned the titans. At first glance, it appears strange that Peter would use a Greek mythological term. However, it turns out that the Book of Enoch also uses that *very term*:

**Enoch 20:1:**

<sup>1</sup> And these are the names of the holy angels who watch. <sup>2</sup> Uriel, one of the holy angels, who is over the world and over Tartarus.

Apparently, the Book of Enoch is the **only** ancient Jewish religious work which uses the term Tartarus. So, it *may* be that Peter “borrowed” the term Tartarus from the Book of Enoch.

Another item to note has to do with the Yom Kippur ceremony, as listed in the Torah. As part of the ceremony, lots are cast over two goats. One of the goats is sacrificed; but the other one is sent away into the wilderness. The one sent into the wilderness is marked as “for Azazel”. Here is the passage in question:

**Leviticus 16:8-10 (ESV):**

<sup>8</sup> And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. <sup>9</sup> And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord and use it as a sin offering, <sup>10</sup> but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

The Bible, itself, does not tell us what the term “Azazel” refers to. Presumably, the meaning of that term was known to people in ancient times; but it is not known now.

As it turns out, the Book of Enoch *uses* the term “Azazel” in a number of places. In that book, Azazel is the **name** of one of the rebellious angels. In particular, take note the following two passages:

**Enoch 10:8:**

<sup>8</sup> And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin.’

**Enoch 10:4-5:**

<sup>4</sup> And again the Lord said to Raphael: ‘Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein.

<sup>5</sup> And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light.

In the first passage above, all sin is “ascribed” to Azazel – i.e., Azazel is “ceremonially blamed” for all of the sin in the world. In the second passage, Azazel is imprisoned in the desert – i.e., he is “banished” into the wilderness.

Of course, those two items bear a *striking* similarity to the second goat – the goat “for Azazel” – in the Yom Kippur ceremony. As mentioned, that goat is “ceremonially blamed” for all the sin of the Israelites; and then that goat is “banished” into the wilderness!

As a result, it *may* be that the term “Azazel” in the Yom Kippur ceremony refers to a rebellious angel, or demon. (Some scholars acknowledge that possibility.)

**One Final Item to Note**

The Book of Enoch is quite *explicit* about the fact that the “original” Nephilim – i.e., the ones that appeared prior to the flood – were the children of rebellious angels and human women. For example, consider the following two passages:

**Enoch 6:1-2:**

1. And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. 2. 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.’

**Enoch 7:1-2:**

1. 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. 2. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants

The above passages leave no doubt that the pre-flood Nephilim were, in fact, the children of rebellious angels and human women. There is another interesting item to note about those passages, however. Those passages state that in addition to having children with human women, the angels also **taught** humans about many subjects. As listed above, the second half of verse 7:1 reads as follows:

and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants.

Interestingly, there are other passages in the Book of Enoch which *also* speak about angels teaching humans various “arcane arts”. For example, consider this passage:

**Enoch 8:2-3:**

2. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray, and became corrupt in all their ways. Semjâzâ taught enchantments, and root-cuttings, Armârôs the resolving of enchantments, Barâqijâl (taught) astrology, Kôkabêl the constellations...

There is one specific “theme” that keeps arising – over and over again – with regard to the angels teaching humans. The theme is that there is a **link** between “enchantments” (i.e., magic) – and plants. Basically, plants themselves – along with “root cuttings” (i.e., the preparation of roots or herbs) – are associated with performing *magic rituals*.

At first glance, the idea of a “link” between plants and magic may look preposterous. However, consider this: tobacco, nicotine, marijuana, and opium are all products of *plants*. In the ancient world, the effects of opium on a person could have been described as a “magic enchantment”.

Also note that the Greek word that is used for “root cuttings” is *pharmakeia* - and of course that Greek word is related to the English words “pharmacy” and “pharmaceuticals”...

In essence, the above references to “plants” and “root cuttings” evidently refers to processing *specific* plants, into **chemical compounds**. The effects that those chemical compounds had on people would appear to be “magic” to the ancient world.

The reason why this is important is that certain chemical substances can have very **dramatic** effects on the physical attributes of people. For example, as the name implies, the substance called “human growth hormone” (HGH) regulates the growth of people. It turns out that in some documented cases, abnormally high amounts of HGH have caused people to grow to seven and even eight feet in height. Also, the use of “anabolic steroids” can allow humans to build up abnormally high amounts of muscle mass – i.e., they can allow humans to become much stronger than normal.

So, it *may* be that the rebellious angels taught humans how to create specific chemical substances – substances which would cause people to gain “superhuman” size and strength. If that is the case, then that could explain how additional Nephilim appeared, after the flood. Basically, the superhuman Nephilim who were encountered after the flood would have been people who were affected by chemical substances – because those chemical substances would have caused those people to gain superhuman size and strength.

Overall, the above scenario states that the rebellious angels did two specific things, when they came to the earth:

- First, they had children with human women, to produce the “original” Nephilim.

- In addition, they **also** taught humans how to produce body-altering chemical substances, so that additional Nephilim could be “generated” simply by using those substances – i.e., **without** requiring angels to mate with humans at all.

If the above scenario is correct, then that would certainly explain how the Nephilim were present in Numbers 13 – even if all of the rebellious angels had been “imprisoned” prior to the flood.

There is one final piece of evidence, which seems to imply that “biochemical substances” were in use in Canaan, during the time of Numbers 13. Here is another excerpt from that chapter, about the expedition of the 12 spies into Canaan:

#### **Numbers 13:23-24 (ESV):**

<sup>23</sup> And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup> That place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there.

As noted, the spies cut down a single cluster of grapes. Then, they placed that cluster on a pole, and two men carried it between them.

Of course, a “normal” cluster of grapes only weighs a few pounds. So, if the cluster that the spies found was of “normal” size, then it does not make sense for *two men* to carry it on a pole. As a result, the above passage certainly implies that that cluster of grapes in question was of “giant” proportions. That, in turn, may mean that *chemical substances* were being used, to greatly increase the yield of plants there.

#### **Conclusion**

Scripture contains significant evidence that the Nephilim in Genesis chapter 6 – that is, the Nephilim who were present before the flood – were the children of rebellious angels and human women. However, all of the rebellious angels were apparently “imprisoned” before the flood – and all of the Nephilim who were living before the flood were killed by the flood.

As a result, it is not clear from Scripture how any **additional** Nephilim could appear, after the flood. Of course, additional Nephilim are mentioned in Numbers chapter 13 – and the events there occurred hundreds of years after the flood!

Scripture quotes from the Book of Enoch; and it appears that Scripture also *references* items from that book (without directly quoting it). As a result, it is worthwhile to examine what *else* that book has to say about the Nephilim.

The Book of Enoch is quite explicit that the pre-flood Nephilim were the progeny of rebellious angels. That book also indicates that those angels taught humans how to produce chemical substances. Some chemical substances can have dramatic effects on humans’ *physical attributes* – in particular, some substances can cause people to gain great size and strength.



As a result, it *may* be that the Nephilim in Numbers 13 were people who used chemical substances – the substances revealed by the angels – to gain superhuman size and strength. That would explain how additional Nephilim could arise – even without any angels mating with humans.

Of course, the above possibility is not addressed at all in Scripture – one way or the other – but it at least appears to be a *plausible* explanation for the presence of the Nephilim in Numbers chapter 13.