

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327175384>

# The Nephilim: A tall story?: Who were the Nephilim and how did they survive the flood?

Article in *Tyndale Bulletin* · January 2015

CITATIONS

0

READS

18,086

1 author:



[Robin Routledge](#)

Unaffiliated

11 PUBLICATIONS 20 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

# THE NEPHILIM: A TALL STORY?

WHO WERE THE NEPHILIM

AND HOW DID THEY SURVIVE THE FLOOD?

Robin Routledge

([robin.routledge@cantab.net](mailto:robin.routledge@cantab.net))

## Summary

*The Nephilim figure prominently in some popular literature. Their portrayal is speculative, but also based on Second Temple texts, which portray the Nephilim as the giant offspring of angels and human women who were responsible for the corruption that resulted in the flood. The OT includes few direct references to the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33; possibly Ezek. 32:27), though they have been generally linked with giant pre-conquest inhabitants of Canaan, particularly Anakites and Rephaim. The lack of detail in the OT suggests the existence of underlying extra-biblical traditions, though substantial differences appear to rule out Second Temple texts as a source for OT writers. Because the OT appears to include references to the Nephilim existing both before and after the flood, an important question is whether (or how) they survived the deluge. This article argues that the Nephilim in the OT are associated, primarily, with the antediluvian era; though are, intentially, linked with postdiluvian 'heroes' to highlight the perversity of the pre-flood generation, who, in seeking liaisons with heavenly beings, seek to overcome their mortality. How they survived the flood does not appear to be of interest to the OT writers.*

## 1. Introduction

The *Nephilim* appear to be of considerable interest, and there are a great many books on the subject. Some are fantasy; though their number, and the way they frequently use widely accepted religious

ideas, illustrate the significance of the *Nephilim* for popular culture. Others are written as non-fiction, and set out theories about the origins of the *Nephilim*, and their continued and future activity.<sup>1</sup> These usually adopt the common view that the *Nephilim* are the gigantic, evil, hybrid offspring of human and non-human beings; with the latter viewed either as fallen angels or as extra-terrestrial aliens (or a combination of both). As such, the *Nephilim* represent the corruption of the human race prior to and during the days of Noah, and the primary purpose of the flood was to destroy them. The presence of *Nephilim* in Canaan at the time of the exodus (Num. 13:33) is frequently thought to be due to a second incursion by heavenly beings;<sup>2</sup> though it has also been suggested that the *Nephilim* strain persisted in the family of Ham (probably through Ham's wife) and was passed to his son, Canaan, and thence to the former inhabitants of the Promised Land.<sup>3</sup>

In reaching these conclusions, writers make substantial use of canonical and non-canonical texts, and mythological sources. This article will not engage directly with those texts and theories, though the discussion will have a bearing on them. The level of popular interest in the subject does, though, suggest a corresponding need to review the biblical data.

In the OT the *Nephilim* (נְפִלִים) are referred to, specifically, only in Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33. In both cases the LXX translates the term γίγαντες, and this is reflected in the KJV translation: 'giants'. The term, *nephilim*, may be related to the Hebrew verb נָפַל (*nāphal*, 'to fall'), suggesting that these are the 'fallen ones';<sup>4</sup> though the nature of

---

<sup>1</sup> Brian Godawa, *When Giants Were upon the Earth: The Watchers, the Nephilim, and the Cosmic War of the Seed* (Los Angeles, CA: Embedded Pictures, 2014); Patrick Heron, *Nephilim and the Pyramid of the Apocalypse* (New York: Citadel, 2004); L.A. Marzulli, *On the Trail of the Nephilim: Giant Skeletons and Ancient Megalithic Structures* (Spiral of Life, 2012); Rob Skiba, *Archon Invasion: The Rise, Fall and Return of the Nephilim* (King's Gate Media, 2012). For further 'recommended' texts see Skiba, *Archon Invasion*, 333-35.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Heron, *Nephilim*; Marzulli, *Trail*.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Skiba, *Archon Invasion*.

<sup>4</sup> P.W. Coxon, 'Nephilim', *DDD*, 618-20; Allan M. Harman, 'נְפִלִים', *NIDOTTE* 3:129-31, esp. 130; Richard S. Hess, 'Nephilim', *ABD* 4:1072-1073; H. Seebass, 'נְפִלִים', *TDOT* 9:488-97, esp. 497; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 213-17; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants from Qumran: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (TSAJ 63; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 111-12; Ronald F. Youngblood, 'Giants', *NIDOTTE* 4:676-78; Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits* (2nd edn; WUNT 2.198; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 22-23, 82-83.

that fall is unclear. There may be a further allusion to Genesis 6:4 in Ezekiel 32:27, where the term נִפְלִים (*nophlim*, ‘fallen’), the participle of נָפַל, occurs.<sup>5</sup> Some also suggest a link with נִפְלָה (*nēphel*), which refers to an abortion or miscarriage (cf. Job 3:16; Ps. 58:8).<sup>6</sup>

Non-canonical texts, particularly those dating from the Second Temple period, contain more detailed information about these ‘giants’. These texts have been the subject of substantial academic discussion in recent years.<sup>7</sup> One area of debate is the relationship between them and the biblical material. Another relates to canonicity, particularly of 1 Enoch.<sup>8</sup> There is not opportunity in this article to deal with those issues in detail. My starting point is that these are non-canonical works, which elaborate on the canonical text, and particularly Genesis 6:1-4, according to their own agenda, within their own historical, political and theological context.

This article will engage with some of the more significant extra-biblical texts. Its primary focus, though, will be the *Nephilim* from an OT perspective.

## 2. The *Nephilim* in the Old Testament

### 2.1 The *Nephilim* and OT Giants

#### a. *Nephilim* and *Gibborim* (גִּבּוֹרִים)

According to Genesis 6:4, the *Nephilim* were on the earth ‘in those days’;<sup>9</sup> which refers to the period leading up to the flood. The verse

<sup>5</sup> Though see John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 154-55.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ber. Rab.* 26.7: ‘*Nefilim* denotes that they hurled (*hippilu*) the world down, themselves fell (*naflu*), and filled the world with abortions (*nefilim*)’.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Loren T. Stuckenbruck, ‘The “Angels” and “Giants” of Genesis 6:1-4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation: Reflections on the Posture of Early Apocalyptic Traditions’, *DSD* 7.3 (2000) 354-77, esp. 354, n. 1; Wright, *Origin*, 5, n. 8.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Enoch is regarded as canonical by the Ethiopic Church. McDonald argues that the reference in Jude 14-15 to what Enoch ‘prophesied’, implies that NT writers viewed the text as inspired by the Spirit and therefore as Scripture [Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission and Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007) 105-111], though that is not conclusive. Cf. Stephen Dempster, ‘Canons on the Right and Canons on the Left: Finding a Resolution in the Canon Debate’, *JETS* 52.1 (2009) 47-77, esp. 66.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all biblical references are from the NRSV.

then continues the earlier reference to the liaisons between the ‘sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of human beings’ (v. 2), and notes that those relationships resulted in offspring. It seems likely that the Hebrew construction should be taken as frequentative: ‘*whenever* the sons of God went in to the daughters of human beings, they had children by them’.<sup>10</sup> It is not clear, though, how this statement, and the children it refers to, relate to the presence of the *Nephilim*, nor how those two groups relate to the ‘heroes’ (גִּבּוֹרִים, *gibborim*) that were of old, ‘warriors of renown’. One possibility is that the *Nephilim* were contemporary with, but independent of, the divine-human relationships and the children resulting from them. In that case, though, is it the *Nephilim* or the offspring that are identified with the *gibborim*?<sup>11</sup> Another possibility is that the reference to the offspring of divine-human relationships is an explanation of the first part of the verse, and that the *Nephilim*, the *gibborim*, and offspring, are the same.<sup>12</sup>

Fockner argues that the *Nephilim* should be identified with the *gibborim*, and both are distinct from the offspring of the illicit affairs.<sup>13</sup> In his view the ‘sons of God’ are believers who intermarry with unbelievers, and their apostasy contributes to the wickedness that results in the flood. However, the increased wickedness of humankind did not mean the end of ancient heroes, who were on the earth then, ‘and also afterward’. Whilst not impossible, there are problems with viewing the ‘sons of God’ as human beings.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult, too, to see how this interpretation fits into the development of the flood narrative.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991) 261; Helge S. Kvanig, ‘Gen 6,1–4 as an Antediluvian Event’, *SJOT* 16.1 (2002) 79–112, esp. 84–85; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 338; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Milton Keynes: Word UK, 1991) 135–36, 143. Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (OTL; London: SCM, 1972) 113; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964) 44.

<sup>11</sup> Because of its frequent use this term will usually be transliterated.

<sup>12</sup> Another view identifies *Nephilim* with the ‘sons of God’; e.g., Leroy Birney, ‘An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4’, *JETS* 13.1 (1970) 43–52, esp. 50–52; though see Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Sven Fockner, ‘Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God’, *JSOT* 32.4 (2008) 456–56, esp. 453–55.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Robin Routledge, ‘“My Spirit” in Genesis 6.1–4’, *JPT* 20 (2011) 232–51, esp. 238–42; see also, e.g., Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 262–65; David Clines, ‘The Significance of the “Sons of God” Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the “Primaevial History” (Genesis 1–11)’, *JSOT* 13 (1979) 33–46, esp. 33–36; Rick Marrs, ‘The Sons of God (Genesis 6:1–4)’, *RestQ* 23.4 (1980) 218–24, esp. 220–22; Willem A. VanGemeren, ‘The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)’, *WJT* 43.2 (1981) 320–48, esp. 333–43; John H. Walton, ‘Sons of

The view that the *Nephilim* are contemporary with the *gibborim*, with the latter viewed as the children of the divine-human marriages, is well-supported.<sup>15</sup> This does, though, raise the question of why the *Nephilim* are mentioned at all. If, as indicated by the report of the spies in Numbers 13:33, Israel came into contact with the *Nephilim* during the exodus period, the reference in Genesis 6:4 might be intended to offer further explanation of the people's fear, and their failure to enter the land, on that occasion. However, if the *Nephilim* in Genesis 6:4 are associated with neither divine-human offspring nor the *gibborim* all we have from that verse is their name, and possible indication of the antiquity of the race. The formidable size of the *Nephilim*, which would seem to engender greater fear than the length of time they may have been in the land, is referred to only in Numbers 13:33. Genesis 6:4, thus, appears to add little to explain the people's fear. Furthermore, these were not a people that the Israelites, generally, had any direct contact with. In the exploration of the land, the only reported sighting of the *Nephilim* was by the spies; the nation as a whole did not see them. And they are not mentioned until the second 'unfavourable report' (Num. 13:32). There are no further specific references to the *Nephilim* in the conquest narratives or, indeed, in the rest of the OT. So why would the writer of Genesis 6:4 include an unexplained reference to them, that is unrelated to the rest of the passage? And, in particular, when it is potentially problematic, raising serious and unanswered questions about the survival of the *Nephilim*, and so about the all-consuming nature of the flood (e.g. Gen. 7:23).

A majority of commentators take the view that the terms *Nephilim* and *gibborim* in Genesis 6:4 both refer to the divine-human offspring of the 'sons of God' and 'daughters of humans'.<sup>16</sup> There remains the

---

God, Daughters of Man', in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove; Leicester: IVP, 2003) 793-98; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 139-40.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 269-70; Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 335-38; Wright, *Origin*, 81-82.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) 243; Clines, 'Sons of God', 34; Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers* (NCB; London: Marshall Pickering, 1995) 140; VanGemeren, 'Sons of God', 320-48; Ronald Hendel, 'The Nephilim Were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context' in *The Fall of Angels*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Themes in Biblical Narrative; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 11-34, esp. 16, 21; Hess, *ABD* 4:1072; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 115; Speiser, *Genesis*, 44-45; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 142-43; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (London: SPCK, 1984) 378. See also Chris Seeman, 'The Watchers Traditions and Gen 6:1-4 (MT and LXX)' in *The Watchers in*

issue of why the *Nephilim* are mentioned by name at all, given the relative silence about them of the OT more generally. However, linking them with these heroes of old, who were, presumably, better known, may provide some justification. Such figures might include Gilgamesh, the legendary king of Uruk and eponymous hero of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, who is described as part human and part divine.<sup>17</sup> Pointing to the divine-human origin of the *Nephilim* and to their reputation as warriors, in contrast merely to their antiquity, would add a much more credible explanation of the fear caused by their mention in Numbers 13:33.

The LXX translation of both *Nephilim* and *gibborim* by γίγαντες may reinforce the link between them; though the LXX's use of the term is inconsistent.<sup>18</sup> It also seems likely that Ezekiel 32:27, which is part of a passage describing the descent of Egypt into Sheol (Ezek. 32:17-32), alludes to Genesis 6:4. As noted already, 'fallen' translates נִפְּלִים (*nophlim*), the same consonantal text as *nephilim*, and this occurs alongside *gibborim* as an ascription: 'fallen warriors'. In addition, the LXX reading, 'of long ago', which seems to be preferred at this point, presupposes the Hebrew מְעוֹלָם (*me'olam*).<sup>19</sup> This is the same three-fold combination that occurs in Genesis 6:4; and the clear identification of the נִפְּלִים with the *gibborim* in Ezekiel 32:27 might suggest the same in Genesis 6:4.

The noun *gibbor* or *gibborim* is generally taken to refer to 'the mighty' or 'mighty warrior(s)'.<sup>20</sup> The reference to Nimrod as a *gibbor*

*Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Angela Kim Harkins, Kelley Coblenz Bautch, and John C. Endres, S.J. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2014) 25-38, esp. 31-33.

<sup>17</sup> *Gilgamesh* 1.46. See Hendel, 'Nephilim', 27-29; see also Ronald S. Hendel, 'Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward An Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4a', *JBL* 106.1 (1987) 13-26; Matthew Goff, 'Gilgamesh the Giant: The Qumran Book of Giants' Appropriation of Gilgamesh Motifs', *DSD* 16 (2009) 221-53, esp. 231-32; Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, 'The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical *Nephilim*' in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 39-44; David P. Melvin, 'The Gilgamesh Traditions and the Pre-History of Genesis 6:1-4', *PRSt* 38 (2011) 23-32.

<sup>18</sup> 'Gigas/ntes' translates *gibbor/im* on a minority of occasions (Gen. 10:8-9; 1 Chr. 1:10; Pss. 19:5; 33:16; Isa. 3:2; 13:3; 49:24-25; Ezek. 32:12, 21, 27; 39:18, 20).

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48* (WBC 29; Dallas, TX: Word, 1990) 135; Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 25-48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 220, 227-29; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (OTL; London: SCM, 1970) 436, 438-40; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Augsburg Fortress, 1983) 168, 176.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., W. Coxon, 'Gibborim' *DDD*, 345-46; H. Kosmala, גִּבּוֹר, *TDOT* 2:367-82, esp. 373-77; Robin Wakely, גִּבּוֹר, *NIDOTTE* 1:806-816.

(Gen. 10:8-9; 1 Chr. 1:10), translated as γίγας by the LXX, has led to speculation that he was descended from the *Nephilim*,<sup>21</sup> and it is possible that he, too, may have been viewed as one of the heroes of old.<sup>22</sup> However, apart from the reference in Genesis 6:4 and the possible allusion to it in Ezekiel 32:27, there seems to be no close connection between *Nephilim* and *gibborim* in the rest of the OT: the *Nephilim* may have been *gibborim*; but in the wider context, the *gibborim* were not necessarily *Nephilim*.

### **b. *Nephilim* and *Rephaim* (רִפְאִים)**

The elliptical phrase, בְּנֵי עֲנָק מִן־הַנְּפִלִים (*bene 'anaq min-hannephilim*, 'the sons of Anak from the *Nephilim*') in Numbers 13:33, suggests a link between the *Nephilim* and the Anakites.<sup>23</sup> This text does not appear in the LXX, and some consider it to be editorial, added in the light of the reference to the Anakites in the first report (Num. 13:28).<sup>24</sup> It makes little sense as part of the spies' report and appears to be an explanation by the narrator of the reference to the *Nephilim*. It is not surprising that there was a tradition linking the Anakites, who were viewed as exceptionally tall,<sup>25</sup> with the antediluvian *Nephilim*. However, whilst there might have been such an association in the popular mind, the phrase itself is too vague to indicate a definite genealogical link. And, if it does occur here primarily to explain how the spies made the jump from Anakites to *Nephilim* and why the people

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Ronald V. Huggins, 'Noah and the Giants: A Response to John C. Reeves', *JBL* 114.1 (1995) 103-110, esp. 106; Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 356-57; K. van der Toorn and P.W. van der Horst, 'Nimrod before and after the Bible', *HTR* 83.1 (1990) 1-29, esp. 16-18.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Hendel, 'Nephilim', 28; see also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (London: T&T Clark, 2011) 160-64; David S. Farkas, 'In Search of the Biblical Hammurabi', *JBQ* 39.3 (2011) 159-64; Mary Katherine Y.H. Horn, "'... A Mighty Hunter Before YHWH": Genesis 10:9 and the Moral-Theological Evaluation of Nimrod', *VT* 60.1 (2010) 63-68; Yigal Levin, 'Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad', *VT* 52.3 (2002) 350-66; Peter Machinist, 'Nimrod', *ABD* 4:1116-17; Aron Pinker, 'Nimrod Found?', *JBQ* 26.4 (1998) 237-45; C. Uehlinger, 'Nimrod', *DDD*, 618-20.

<sup>23</sup> 'Anakites' relates to the descendants of Anak, who are variously referred to as 'children/sons of Anak' (Num. 13:22, 28, 33; Josh. 15:14; Judg. 1:20) and *Anakim* (Deut. 1:28; 2:10, 11, 21; 9:2; Josh 11:21, 22; 14:12, 15). They were defeated during the conquest; and do not re-appear in the OT.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Ashley, *Numbers*, 243; Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5; Waco: Word, 1984) 141; Davies, *Numbers*, 140.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Deut. 2:10, 21; 9:2.



believed them, it does not necessarily imply that the narrator endorsed the validity of that tradition.

In Deuteronomy 2:10-11 Anakites are linked with the *Rephaim*;<sup>26</sup> a term also sometimes translated as γίγαντες by the LXX.<sup>27</sup> Og of Bashan, whose bed was nine cubits long,<sup>28</sup> suggesting that he was of giant stature, was from the *Rephaim* (Deut. 3:11); and the four Philistines, described as ‘descendants of the giants’ (הַרְפָּה, *haraphah*) (2 Sam. 21:16-19), a group that included Goliath,<sup>29</sup> may also be related to the *Rephaim* (cf. 1 Chr. 20:4).<sup>30</sup>

The *Rephaim* are particularly associated with the land promised to and conquered by Israel (e.g. Gen. 14:5; 15:20); and, like the Anakites, were defeated during the exodus and conquest.<sup>31</sup> They are last mentioned in the period leading up to the final suppression of the Philistines under David (2 Sam. 21:16-22).

Both *Rephaim* and *Nephilim* are linked with the Anakites; though, the OT does not relate them directly to each other. There may, though, be a link in the OT use of the term *Rephaim* to refer to the ‘shades’ that inhabit Sheol.<sup>32</sup> The relationship between ethnic and underworld *Rephaim* is unclear. Some see the two as distinct.<sup>33</sup> Others suggest that a comparison with the Ugaritic equivalent (*rp'm*) may provide the basis of a connection between them.<sup>34</sup> However, whilst in Ugaritic texts they

<sup>26</sup> Emim and Zamzummim were also regarded as *Rephaim* by the Moabites and Ammonites respectively (Deut. 2:10-11, 20-21); cf. *Ber. Rab.* 26.7.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Gen. 14:5; Josh. 12:4; 13:12; 1 Chr. 11:15; 14:9; 20:4. In Deut. 2:11, 20 the term is transliterated as *Raphain* (see also Deut. 3:11, 13).

<sup>28</sup> A cubit is usually reckoned as around eighteen inches; see further, Clyde E. Billington, ‘Goliath and the Exodus Giants: How Tall were they?’, *JETS* 50.3 (2007) 489-508; J. Daniel Hays, ‘Reconsidering the Height of Goliath’, *JETS* 48.4 (2005) 701-714; ‘The Height of Goliath: A Response to Clyde Billington’, *JETS* 50.3 (2007) 509-516; R.B.Y. Scott, ‘The Hebrew Cubit’, *JBL* 77.3 (1958) 205-214.

<sup>29</sup> Goliath is not individually referred to as הַרְפָּה (2 Sam. 21:19 cf. vv. 16, 18, 20), though is included in the collective reference (v. 22).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., R. Liwak, ‘רָפָאִים’, *TDOT* 13:602-614, esp. 613; David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Nottingham: Apollos: IVP, 2009) 508.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Deut. 3:8-13; Josh. 12:4; 13:12; 17:15.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; Isa. 14:9; 26:14, 19.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Shemaryahu Talmon, ‘Biblical *repā'im* and Ugaritic *rpū'i(m)*’, *HAR* 7 (1983) 235-49; see also Michael L. Brown, ‘רָפָאִים’, *NIDOTTE* 3:1173-80, esp. 1178.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTS 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 217-25. Conrad L’Heureux, ‘The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim’, *HTR* 67 (1974) 265-74; Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel’s Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996) 267-74; Mark S. Smith, ‘Rephaim’, *ABD* 5:674-76, esp. 675-76; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor*

are regarded as divine, the shades in the OT are robbed of strength, status, and significance; and links between them and the living *Rephaim* does not imply that the latter were regarded as supernatural. Nevertheless, if a connection between the two could be maintained, there might be a link with the *Nephilim* in the suggested parallel between the *Rephaim*, who come to greet the king of Babylon in his descent into Sheol in Isaiah 14:9-11,<sup>35</sup> and those, among whom Egypt takes its place in Ezekiel 32:22, 24.

However, while the three-fold reference to נְפִלִים (*nophlim*), גִּבּוֹרִים (*gibborim*), and מְעוֹלָם (*me'olam*) in Ezekiel 32:27 suggests an allusion to Genesis 6:4, that combination does not occur elsewhere in Ezekiel 32:17-32. Moreover, the MT of verse 27 seems to place a deliberate distance between the גִּבּוֹרִים נְפִלִים, the honoured dead,<sup>36</sup> and the other fallen nations, who, like the *Rephaim* in Isaiah 14:9-11, are regarded negatively. The emphasis of Ezekiel 32:27 thus appears to be that the נְפִלִים referred to in the earlier verses are *not* the *Nephilim* of Genesis 6:4. Though the use of the same word may suggest an ironic link between the fallen nations and the honoured dead. I will return to this later.

### c. The *Nephilim* and OT 'Giants': Conclusion

These comparisons have been taken to indicate a synthetic link between the giants of OT history and the antediluvian *Nephilim*.<sup>37</sup> However, the relationship is made explicit only in Numbers 13:33; and even there, I have suggested, it may not have been endorsed by the biblical narrator. The association may have existed within popular tradition; but it does not appear to have been viewed as significant by the OT writers.

Giants in the OT more generally do not appear to be regarded as having supernatural origin. There is a suggestion that Og might have been regarded as a god in Ugarit;<sup>38</sup> but there is no indication of that in

---

*Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (New York; London: T&T Clark International, 2010) 66-71.

<sup>35</sup> The verb נָפַל is not used in Isa. 14:9-11, though does appear in v. 12, still referring to the king of Babylon, but in a different context.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 135, 137-38; Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 220, 227-29; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 436, 438-40; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2:168*, 176.

<sup>37</sup> Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 357-58.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Day, *Yahweh*, 223; Maria Lindquist, 'Og's Iron Bed', *CBQ* 73 (2011) 477-92, esp. 486; Zvi Ron, 'Bed of Og', *JBQ* 40.1 (2012) 29-34, esp. 32-33; Stavrakopoulou, *Land of our Fathers*, 68.

the OT. These figures were formidable; but they were not demigods. That distinction may also be indicated in the development of the spies' reports (Num. 13:25-33). The majority of them wanted to persuade the Israelites not to enter Canaan. Their first report (vv. 25-29) notes the presence of the Anakites, whose height is not mentioned but may be assumed. However, in the light of Caleb's faithful response, the nature of the report changed. At that point the spies introduced an exaggerated reference to the presence of the *Nephilim*, maybe based on a tradition, noted by the narrator, that linked the Anakites with the *Nephilim*. The details of any such a tradition are not known, but must have included enough to make the report of the spies credible. They must have included enough, too, for the people to be aware of the *Nephilim* by name and reputation, and for that to cause them to be afraid. As noted already, that fear might be related, directly, to the link between the *Nephilim* and the demigods of Genesis 6:4; and to the subsequent reputation of the 'heroes of old'.

It would appear, though, in the light of the lack of any previous, or subsequent, reference to the *Nephilim* in connection with the conquest narrative, that the specific reference to them here by the spies is only for rhetorical effect.<sup>39</sup> Hendel argues that they were the original inhabitants of Canaan;<sup>40</sup> a view shared by several popular treatments of the subject. That, though, seems to assume that the spies' 'unfavourable report' (Num. 13:32; cf. 14:36) was reliable. However, the term used here, דִּבְבָהּ (*dibbah*), may suggest that the report was untruthful.<sup>41</sup> Olsen maintains that it 'does not correspond to what the spies had actually seen'.<sup>42</sup> According to Wenham it is 'an outrageous misrepresentation', and the reference to the *Nephilim*, 'fantastic hyperbole'.<sup>43</sup> The need to exaggerate the report suggests that the presence of the Anakites alone, even of Anakite giants, did not constitute a

---

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g. Ashley, *Numbers*, 243.

<sup>40</sup> Hendel, 'Nephilim', 21.

<sup>41</sup> Ashley, *Numbers*, 242; Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1981) 120; see also H.-J. Fabry, 'דִּבְבָהּ', *TDOT* 3:72-79. In Prov. 10:18 דִּבְבָהּ is linked with 'lying lips', indicating an untruthful message. Elsewhere its use seems more ambiguous (e.g. Gen. 37:2 Ps. 31:14; Jer. 20:10; Ezek. 36:3).

<sup>42</sup> Dennis T. Olsen, *Numbers* (Interpretation; Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox, 1996) 79.

<sup>43</sup> Wenham, *Numbers*, 120.

sufficient disincentive to an Israelite attack on the land, compared with the threat of facing demigods.<sup>44</sup>

Another significant aspect of the *Nephilim* appears to be their great size. As already noted, the Anakites were viewed as giants; though the spies' original report did not focus on that. The second report, however, not only introduces the reference to the *Nephilim* but also notes that, by comparison, the spies appeared and felt 'like grasshoppers' (Num. 13:33; cf. Isa. 40:22). This indicates that, in this context, size does matter. The link with the Anakites suggests that the report builds on the tradition that the *Nephilim* were extraordinarily tall. Certainly, that is how they appear in later non-canonical texts. Qumran versions of 1 Enoch 7:2, for example, suggest a height of three thousand cubits.<sup>45</sup> This contrasts with the recorded heights of other biblical giants which, whilst unusual, are of a substantially different order.<sup>46</sup> So, for example, taking a cubit as eighteen inches, Goliath, at six and a half cubits, was nine feet nine inches tall.<sup>47</sup> It seems possible, too, that while the *Rephaim* may have been generally taller than the Israelites, the difference may not have been as great as is sometimes imagined; and the height of some figures may be singled out for special mention because their stature was unusual, even amongst their own people.

This seems to indicate a possible discontinuity between the *Nephilim* of popular story and those with whom the people of Israel came into more regular contact. As noted already, references to the *Nephilim* in Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33 (and maybe Ezek. 32:27) indicate that they were part of a wider tradition that we have only limited access to. And the credence given to the report of the spies indicates that that tradition included the belief that there still might be

---

<sup>44</sup> According to Olsen, the spies are 'mythologizing both the land and the inhabitants into primordial monsters' (*Numbers*, 79). According to Goff, Sir. 16:7 may also refer to Canaanite rulers, described in terms evoking Gen. 6:1-4; see Matthew J. Goff, 'Ben Sira and the Giants of the Land: A Note on Ben Sira 16:7', *JBL* 129.4 (2010) 645-655.

<sup>45</sup> 4QEn<sup>a</sup>; 4QEn<sup>b</sup>; see, e.g. J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 151,167; Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1985) 28.

<sup>46</sup> Amos 2:9 appears to be rhetorical exaggeration; cf. Deut. 1:28.

<sup>47</sup> Billington ('Goliath', 508) and Hays, ('Height of Goliath') suggest smaller heights of eight feet seven inches and six feet nine inches respectively. Billington notes references to other 'giants' with similar heights in Egyptian texts (*COS* 3:13) among the Shasu, and argues that they, too, may be related to the Anakites ('Goliath', 505-506).

*Nephilim* on the earth. They do not appear, though, within the orbit of the ordinary Israelite; unlike other OT giants with whom the Israelites had regular and ongoing contact, even to the extent that Og's oversized bed was highlighted as a potential tourist attraction (Deut. 3:11).

## 2.2 *The Nephilim and Ancient 'Heroes'*

It seems significant that the view of the *Nephilim* in the OT is not essentially negative. Genesis 6:1-3 appears to criticise the human-divine marriages which cross boundaries between the earthly and heavenly orders. However, the offspring of those unions are not criticised explicitly: indeed the description of them as 'heroes that were of old, warriors of renown' (v. 4) might suggest something more positive.<sup>48</sup> The object of divine judgement was the hubris that led to the production of these children, not the children themselves. That is not to suggest a wholly positive view of the *Nephilim*. Their canonical portrayal, though, is not as negative as in non-canonical writings.

So, for example, as noted, in Ezekiel 32:27, נִפְלִים appears to refer to an honoured group of the 'fallen' who occupy a preferred place in Sheol, one from which the fallen of Egypt, together with the dead of other nations, are excluded. The description of the *Nephilim* as 'fallen ones', is sometimes understood in terms of fallen angels, or those who are morally fallen.<sup>49</sup> However, there is nothing in Genesis 6:4 to warrant that view; and the possible parallel with Ezekiel 32:27 seems offer a more positive appraisal. These are presented as the legendary heroes of the past, who are now fallen, but are still deserving of honour.<sup>50</sup> The same term, נִפְלִים, is also used to describe the Assyrians

<sup>48</sup> 'Renown' (Heb. שֵׁם, *shem*, 'name') could be taken negatively. Blenkinsopp suggests a link with the tower builders at Babel (Gen. 11:4) who seek to make a 'name' for themselves; and the description of Nimrod as a *gibbor* (Gen. 10:8) might indicate that *gibbor*, too, should be understood negatively (Blenkinsopp, *Creation*, 127). Mathews further argues that lexical links between Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10) and the building at Babel (Gen. 11:1-4), particularly references to Babel, Shinar and the building of cities (rather than of altars, as with the patriarchs), portray Nimrod negatively (*Genesis 1-11*, 450-51); see also Horn, 'Mighty Hunter', 67-68. However, whilst it may be that Nimrod is, intentionally, portrayed as rebellious, the retrospective application of the argument to Gen. 6:4, and the suggestion of an essentially negative view of *gibborim*, שֵׁם, and therefore of *Nephilim*, seems less justified. At Babel the tower-builders sought a name for themselves; and this contrasts with Abraham being given a name by God (Gen. 12:2). But that distinction is not evident in Gen. 6:4.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Youngblood, 'Giants', 678.

<sup>50</sup> Another possible identification is with Greek semi-divine heroes (e.g. Herakles). Hendel suggests a parallel between Hesiod's view of the Trojan War as a means of destroying the demigods who resulted from divine-human relationships (Hesiod,

and Elamites (Ezek. 32:24, 26). And all of these groups, including the גִּבּוֹרִים נְפִלִים, are described in the same way, as those who bring ‘terror to the land of the living’ (vv. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 32). As suggested already those similarities may be viewed as ironic. All of these nations have sought to emulate those fallen heroes and so hope to share their posthumous honour. That ambition, though, will be frustrated. They are ‘fallen’; but are not the ‘heroes’ they aspire to be.<sup>51</sup>

The reference to the *Nephilim* in Numbers 13:33, is less positive. Though even here they are presented as formidable, rather than evil. That is consistent with identifying them as ancient heroes. Who would want to attack a land under the protection of such beings?

Later elaborations of the flood narrative present the *Nephilim* as wholly negatively. That later view may be reflected in the LXX’s use of γίγαντες, which, by the second half of the first millennium BC, had acquired negative associations. Here, too, there was a transition. When Hesiod describes the emergence of the γίγαντες of Greek mythology, as the product of heaven (in the form of the blood of Ouranos) and earth (Gaia), they are ‘giants with gleaming armour, holding long spears in their hands’.<sup>52</sup> However, when they wage war against the Olympian gods, they take on a monstrous aspect.<sup>53</sup> It is the negative perception of the *Nephilim* that may be reflected in the non-canonical sources and in the LXX.<sup>54</sup> Significantly, the LXX omits the ‘not’ from the text of Ezekiel 32:27, thus ranking the *Nephilim* of Genesis 6:4 alongside the

---

*Catalogue of Women*, fragment 204), and the destruction of the *Nephilim* through the flood (‘Demigods’, 18-20); though cf. Wright, *Origin*, 88-89.

<sup>51</sup> Block notes the lack of evidence of traditions identifying the *Nephilim* with ancient heroes and suggest that this text revises mythological ideas to highlight the dishonour of Mesech-Tubal (*Ezekiel* 25-48, 228). However the existence of such traditions does appear to be necessary to justify biblical references to the *Nephilim*.

<sup>52</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 183-86. This is generally dated around 700 BC. Despite possible parallels, the γίγαντες and their predecessors, the Titans, who had the same parentage are not the offspring of gods and human beings. Wright, though, notes a possible connection between the Titans and the ‘sons of God’ (*Origin*, 73-76; cf. 80, n. 132).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Apollodorus, *Library*, 1.6.1; see further William Hansen, *Classical Mythology: A Guide to the Mythical World of the Greeks and Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 177-79; Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2004) 86-91; G. Mussies, ‘Giants’, *DDD*, 343-45; Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth & Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 82-86.

<sup>54</sup> See also Wis. 14:7; Sir. 16:7.

rest of Judah's fallen enemies. The MT appears, though, to preserve an older, more positive understanding.<sup>55</sup>

As already suggested, if we are to make sense of the report of the spies in Numbers 13:32-33, we must assume the existence of extra-biblical traditions relating to the *Nephilim*. An ordinary Israelite may have had no direct contact with such beings, but they were part of the nation's folklore, and as such had an impact on the people's understanding of the world. That, in turn, justifies the reference to them in Genesis 6:4, which points to their divine-human origin.

I have argued that the primary focus of Genesis 6:1-4 is the attempt of human beings to reverse the effects of the punishment in Genesis 3:19, particularly in relation to mortality, by consorting with heavenly beings.<sup>56</sup> The fact that their offspring were linked with ancient heroes and renowned warriors might be seen to further highlight the sin of the parents, who, by producing such godlike specimens may have thought they had achieved their goal.<sup>57</sup> That may be reinforced by a play on the term עֹלָם (*'olam*), which provides a link between the divine announcement that human beings will not live 'forever' (לְעֹלָם, *le'olam*),<sup>58</sup> with the birth of these *gibborim* who are 'from of old' (מֵעֹלָם, *me'olam*).<sup>59</sup> It, thus, suits the theological purpose of the writer of Genesis 6:1-4 to include the reference to them here, in the catalogue of human sin leading up to the flood. And having referred to the offspring of these divine-human liaisons, it is natural, further, to identify them with the *Nephilim* of folklore.

However, because this text serves, primarily, as a prelude to the flood, and so has an antediluvian context, there is still the question of how the *Nephilim* continued after the flood. It may be worth noting at this point that, despite their supernatural origin, the *Nephilim* still appear to be regarded as *flesh*, and so would have been expected to have been destroyed in the flood along with everything else (Gen. 7:23). The divine-human marriages may have been an attempt to elevate the human race to a higher order of being, however God's

<sup>55</sup> The negative connotations associated with γίγαντες explain why the LXX may have omitted 'not'; it is less clear why the MT may have inserted it.

<sup>56</sup> Routledge, 'My Spirit', 242.

<sup>57</sup> Routledge, 'My Spirit', 244-45; cf. Marrs, 'Sons of God', 218-24, esp. 220.

<sup>58</sup> For discussion of this interpretation of v. 3 see, e.g., Routledge, 'My Spirit', 235-36.

<sup>59</sup> See Kvanig, 'Gen 6,1-4', 85.

statement in Genesis 6:3, ‘my Spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh’, which anticipates the destruction of the flood, indicates that the attempt had failed. Despite efforts to become like God, human beings are and remain flesh.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.3 ‘And also afterward’

The postdiluvian existence of the *Nephilim* is suggested by the phrase: ‘and also afterward’ (Gen. 6:4), which may have been added in the light of the further mention of the *Nephilim* in Numbers 13:33.<sup>61</sup> However, it is positioned awkwardly in the text, resulting in possible ambiguity in its interpretation.

One possibility is that, if the *Nephilim* are the offspring of the divine-human liaisons, their continued presence indicates that these liaisons continued after the flood. However, if the hubris that led to the crossing of boundaries between the earthly and heavenly orders was a significant factor leading to the flood, it seems unlikely that this would have continued without further reference. In the OT it appears to be confined to the antediluvian period. That is the case in Second Temple texts, too, suggesting the absence of significant underlying traditions to the contrary. The position of the phrase immediately after the reference to the *Nephilim* may indicate that while the *Nephilim* continued to exist after the flood, the divine-human liaisons did not. Though that, again, raises the issue of how the *Nephilim* survived.

I have argued that the origin of the *Nephilim* is linked with divine-human marriages, which necessarily occur before the flood. However, the *Nephilim* are also intentionally associated with the heroes of popular tradition, in order to highlight the perversity of the generation before the flood; and those ‘heroes’ occupy the postdiluvian world. That creates a tension; and the phrase ‘and also afterward’ seems to acknowledge that.<sup>62</sup> However, its simplicity, and the lack of further qualification or explanation, suggests that *how* that transition may have taken place was not a major issue for the OT writers. It is, though, dealt with in some detail in non-canonical texts.

---

<sup>60</sup> See Routledge, ‘My Spirit’, 245–46.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Blenkinsopp, *Creation*, 27; Hendel, ‘Nephilim’, 16; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 143; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 378.

<sup>62</sup> Hendel suggests that the writer had access to traditions about the *Nephilim* that were conveyed accurately but were not internally consistent (‘Nephilim’, 22).



### 3. The *Nephilim* in Non-canonical Texts

Non-canonical literature referring to the illicit relationships between angels and humans and to the offspring of those relationships, who are usually identified as ‘giants’, includes the *Enochic Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1–36), the *Book of Giants* and the *Book of Jubilees*.

Using language similar to Genesis 6, the *Book of Watchers* (*BW*) refers to the multiplication of human beings, and the birth of beautiful daughters, who attracted the attention of angelic beings, the ‘watchers’ (e.g. 1 En. 10:8-9; cf. Dan. 4:13, 17, 23). Some of those angels bound themselves by an oath to procreate with women (1 En. 6); and in doing so, crossed boundaries between the human and the divine (1 En. 15:3-7). They are also charged with spreading knowledge that led to violence and corruption (1 En. 7:1-2; 8:1-3; 9:9),<sup>63</sup> including knowledge of adornment, by which human woman, apparently encouraged by their fathers (1 En. 8:1-2), stirred up the watchers’ lust.<sup>64</sup> The offspring of these liaisons are described as ‘giants’, whose lawless activities threatened the destruction of human beings (1 En. 7:4-6; 9:10). The flood, which destroyed everything except Noah and his family (1 En. 10:2-4), was sent to cleanse the earth from the bloodshed and corruption caused by the watchers and their offspring and to bring blessing to human beings (1 En. 9:1-2; 10:1-2, 7, 15-22).<sup>65</sup> The giants, whose destruction was also the result of internecine conflict (1 En. 9:9-10, 12), then emerge after the flood as disembodied evil spirits (1 En. 15:8-12).

---

<sup>63</sup> *BW* appears to combine separate traditions: one links corruption with the offspring of angels, led by Semihazah, and human women; the other links it with the spread of illicit knowledge among humans by Asael (Azazel); e.g. Paul D. Hanson, ‘Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11’, *JBL* 96.2 (1977) 195-233; George W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11’, *JBL* 96.3 (1977) 383-405, esp. 383; Stuckenbruck, ‘Angels and Giants’, 363; Wright, *Origin*, 21-22.

<sup>64</sup> See William R.G. Loader, *Enoch, Levi and Jubilees on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in the Early Enoch Literature, the Aramaic Levi Document, and the Book of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007) 57-58; Amy E. Richter, *Enoch and the Gospel of Matthew* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 183; Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012) 23-37. This is also suggested in later texts, e.g. *T. Reu.* 5:6; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen. 6:2 and *Pirqe R. El.* 22 (26a); see Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 187, 112-14.

<sup>65</sup> According to Nickelsburg, unlike the contrast in Gen. 6 between Noah and unrighteous humanity, ‘the opposition here is between the superhuman giants and the whole of the human race which they are laying waste’ (‘Apocalyptic and Myth’, 391).

*BW* is generally thought to be dependent on the text of Genesis 6:1-4,<sup>66</sup> and arose in a particular historical context, maybe where the people again felt threatened by ‘giants’, and looked to God to bring restoration as in the days of Noah.<sup>67</sup> More recently, it has been suggested that Genesis 6:1-4 may be a shortened version of the Watcher story.<sup>68</sup> That, though, seems unlikely both because of relative dating and content. Genesis 6:1-4, in its present form, should not be dated later than the early post-exilic period (around 500 BC); and the traditions behind the biblical text, which is generally ascribed to J, may be several centuries earlier.<sup>69</sup> The earliest parts of *BW* are no earlier than the late fourth century BC.<sup>70</sup> We have seen, too, that in Genesis 6:1-4, in contrast to *BW*, the offspring of the divine-human liaisons are not regarded as inherently evil; and nor are they linked directly with the flood. It seems improbable that its writer would both presuppose, and also offer a radically altered version of, the traditions found in *BW*, without further explanation.<sup>71</sup> The view of evil spirits and the reference to the ‘souls of those who have died’ appealing to heaven (1 En. 9:10), also seem to reflect later theological ideas. It is not impossible that older traditions

---

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Hendel, ‘Demigods’; Nickelsburg, ‘Apocalyptic and Myth’, 386; George W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘Enochic Wisdom and Its Relationship to the Mosaic Torah’ in *The Early Enoch Literature*, ed. Gabriel Boccaccini and John J. Collins (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 81-94, esp. 81-82; Seeman, ‘Watchers Traditions’, 34; James C. VanderKam, ‘The Interpretation of Genesis in 1 Enoch’ in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 129-48.

<sup>67</sup> Nickelsburg suggests a background in wars of the Diadochi who succeeded Alexander (‘Apocalyptic and Myth’, 389-91); Stuckenbruck sees a link with the spread of Greek culture, which parallels the corrupt practices introduced by the watchers (Loren T. Stuckenbruck, ‘Demonic Beings and the Dead Sea Scrolls’ in *Explaining Evil Volume 1: Definitions and Development*, ed. J. Harold Ellens [Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011], 121-44, esp. 123).

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 31-32; see also Black, *1 Enoch*, 14; Philip R. Davies, ‘Women, Men, Gods, Sex and Power: The Birth of a Biblical Myth’ in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993) 194-201; cf. Kvanig, ‘Watcher Story’; Melvin, ‘Gilgamesh Traditions’, 25.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 11-38; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, xlii-xlv; cf. Seeman, ‘Watchers Traditions’, 27-28; Jonas C. Greenfield and Michael E. Stone, ‘The Books of Enoch and the Traditions of Enoch’, *Numen* 26.1 (1979) 89-103, esp. 92-95; cf. Van Seters, *Prologue*, 21, 151-54.

<sup>70</sup> See Helge S. Kvanig, ‘The Watcher Story and Genesis: An Intertextual Reading’, *SJOT* 18.2 (2004) 163-83, esp. 167; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 31-32; Nickelsburg, ‘Apocalyptic and Myth’, 390-91; Stuckenbruck, ‘Angels and Giants’, 362-63; Wright, *Origin*, 23-28.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Seeman, ‘Watchers Traditions’, 34.

underlie both texts.<sup>72</sup> However, similarities also suggest that the writer of *BW* was aware of Genesis 6:1-4, maybe alongside other traditions.

The *Book of Giants* (*BG*) appears to have been influenced by *BW*, and contains similar themes, though written from the perspective of the antediluvian giants,<sup>73</sup> who appear to include the *Nephilim*.<sup>74</sup> One of the giants in the Qumran text of *BG* is called Gilgamesh, whilst another, Hobabish, may be linked to Humbaba, who is killed by Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the *Gilgamesh Epic*; and this has been taken to indicate the widespread influence of the Mesopotamian text.<sup>75</sup> As in *BW*, these giants are the source of evil on earth, and are destroyed through in-fighting and through the flood. Here, too, there is a sense of their survival in a disembodied form.

There is a further reference to the *Nephilim* in Jubilees 7:21-22,<sup>76</sup> where, again, they are identified with the giant offspring of the union of fallen watchers and human women (v. 20; cf. 5:2). *Jubilees* follows the Genesis account quite closely, though it, too, has its own particular outlook and agenda. Like Genesis 6, and unlike *BW* and *BG*, it sees the flood as divine judgement, primarily, on human corruption (Jub. 5:19-21), albeit a corruption instigated by the miscegenation of the watchers (Jub. 5:2-3). The giants, appear to fight against and destroy each other prior to the flood (Jub. 5:7-10; 7:22-24). Though, as in *BW* and *BG*, they continue to exist into the postdiluvian era as evil spirits (Jub. 10:1, 5).

With the exception of *BW* there is little debate about the relatively late date, derivative nature and non-canonical status of these texts.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Melvin argues that this may include the motif of the divine spread of learning. This, he argues, is present in the *Gilgamesh Epic* and is reflected in *BW* ('Gilgamesh Traditions'); see also Kvanig, 'Genesis 6,1-4', 90-91.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., Ida Frölich, 'Mesopotamian Elements and the Watchers Traditions' in *Watchers*, ed. Harkins, Bautch, and Endres, 11-24, esp. 21-23; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 57-58, 298-339; W.B. Henning, 'The Book of Giants', *BSOAS* 11.1 (1943) 52-54; John C. Reeves, 'Giants, Book of', *EDSS* 2:310-11; Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 366-69; *Book of Giants*; James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2012) 81-84.

<sup>74</sup> See Stuckenbruck, *Book of Giants*, 110-12, 126, 129-30, 150-53, 177.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Goff, 'Gilgamesh the Giant'.

<sup>76</sup> For more general discussion of *Jubilees* see Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 371-74; James C. VanderKam, 'Jubilees, Book of', *EDSS* 2:434-38.

<sup>77</sup> Like 1 Enoch, the *Book of Jubilees* was regarded as canonical by the Ethiopic Church, though not elsewhere. The high number of copies of the text found at Qumran indicates that it may have been regarded as authoritative among that community; though, as VanderKam suggests, 'there are no indications that *Jubilees* ever became more widely authoritative in Jewish circles' (VanderKam, 'Jubilees', 2:437)

Consequently, while they indicate views, particularly in relation to the origin of evil and of evil spirits, within Second Temple Judaism, they shed less light on the identity of the *Nephilim* in the biblical text.

As previously suggested, there may have been a tradition underlying biblical references to the *Nephilim*, and this may have been known to later writers. However, where later accounts are substantially different from the biblical text it seems reasonable to assume that those differences were not part of that earlier tradition, and thus reflect a later understanding. Consequently, any interpretation that depends too much on these non-canonical texts must be treated with some caution.

An explanation for the survival of *Nephilim* into the postdiluvian era may be indicated by the *Pseudo-Eupolemus Fragments*, possibly dating to the second century BC.<sup>78</sup> These indicate that Babylon was founded by giants who escaped divine punishment; and one of them, Belus (or Belos), is said to have built a tower that was named after him, possibly the tower of Babel. As the survivor of the flood, Belus may be linked with Noah,<sup>79</sup> suggesting that Noah may have been one of the *Nephilim*. Reeves notes that in the *Genesis Apocryphon*<sup>80</sup> and in 1 Enoch 106–107,<sup>81</sup> Lamech expresses concern that his son Noah may be the offspring of his wife and one of the watchers.<sup>82</sup> In those texts Lamech's fears are put to rest. However, in Reeves' view, this suggests a tradition that Noah may have been a giant. That view is then reflected in the *Pseudo-Eupolemus Fragments*; and the *Genesis Apocryphon* and 1 Enoch 106–107 are polemic against it.<sup>83</sup> Reeves also notes that the Manichaean text of *BG* refers to a giant named Atambish, which may

---

<sup>78</sup> Eusebius quotes Alexander Polyhistor, who refers to these texts in his *Preparatio Evangelica*, 9.17.1–9; 9.18.2; see R. Doran, 'Pseudo-Eupolemus' in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 2:873–82; E.H. Gifford, *Eusebius of Caesarea: Praeparatio Evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)* (1903), published online by Roger Pearse (2003) 212; Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 358–62.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Stuckenbruck, 'Angels and Giants', 360; Wright, *Origins*, 87–88.

<sup>80</sup> See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1 (1Q20) A Commentary* (Biblica et Orientalia 18B; Rome: EPIB, 2004).

<sup>81</sup> See also, e.g., Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007) 636–43.

<sup>82</sup> For a comparison of these texts see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 'The Lamech Narrative in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen) and the *Birth of Noah* (4QEnoch<sup>c</sup> ar): A Tradition-Historical Study' in *Aramaica Qumranica: Proceedings of the Conference on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran in Aix-en-Provence 30 June–2 July 2008*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2010) 253–72.

<sup>83</sup> John C. Reeves, 'Utnapishtim in the Book of Giants?', *JBL* 112.1 (1993) 110–15.

be a later reflex of Utnapishtim,<sup>84</sup> the survivor of the flood in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and so the equivalent of the biblical Noah. Huggins questions the identification of Belus with Noah, and suggests that Nimrod is a more likely candidate.<sup>85</sup> Though there seems little indication from other sources that Nimrod survived the flood.

There are other explanations for the survival of the giants in later texts. One is that Ham was one of the offspring of the watchers and was slipped into the Ark unnoticed.<sup>86</sup> This would suggest that Ham's descendants were giants, including Canaan, and so would explain the reference to the *Nephilim* in Numbers 13:33, and also the description of Nimrod as a 'giant'. Other sources suggest that Og, the last of the *Rephaim* (Deut. 3:11), was the sole surviving giant from the antediluvian period,<sup>87</sup> and may have escaped the flood, with the connivance of Noah and his family, by travelling on the outside of the Ark.<sup>88</sup> Alternatively, Og was the son (or maybe the grandson) of Ham's wife and one of the watchers, Shamhazai.<sup>89</sup> These views stand in stark contrast to the simplicity of the biblical remark: 'and also afterwards'. The number and diversity of these 'explanations' also seem to indicate that there was no widely accepted explanation for the giants' survival.

The Enochic view that regards the 'sons of God' and their offspring as supernatural beings appears to be rejected in Rabbinic midrash from the second century AD.<sup>90</sup> This is reflected in *Bereshit Rabbah*: 'Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai called them the sons of nobles; Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai cursed all who called them the sons of God' (26:5). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, which appears to be an exception to the general

---

<sup>84</sup> Reeves, 'Utnapishtim', 115.

<sup>85</sup> Huggins, 'Noah and the Giants'. As already noted, Nimrod is described as a giant in the LXX text of Genesis 10:8-9.

<sup>86</sup> This is one of the beliefs of the gnostic Sethians, criticised in the fourth century AD by Epiphanius (*Panarion*, 39.3.2); see *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1-46)* trans. by Frank Williams (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 255-61.

<sup>87</sup> *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Deut. 3:11.

<sup>88</sup> *Pirque R. Eli.* on Gen. 7:23; see Adelman, *Return*, 110-18.

<sup>89</sup> According to *Yalkut Reubeni* on Gen. 7:7 (17<sup>th</sup> century AD), Og and Sihon were sons of Shamhazai and Ham's wife; cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 188-89. *B. Nid.* describes them as 'sons of Ahijah the son of Shamhazai' (61a), though does not specifically link them with Ham's wife.

<sup>90</sup> See, e.g., Philip S. Alexander, 'The Targumim and Early Exegesis of "Sons of God" in Genesis 6', *JJS* 23.1 (1972) 66-71; Coxon, 'Nephilim', *DDD*, 619; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 122-59, 190-232; cf. Matthew Goff, '1 Enoch' in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 224-37, esp. 35.

Rabbinic view, replaces ‘*Nephilim*’ in Genesis 6:4 with the names of the fallen angels Shamhazai and Azael, referred to in *BW*.<sup>91</sup> This identification may have been prompted by the possible link with נפיל; though it is not one that is generally associated with the earlier literature. Enochic traditions re-emerged in later Jewish writings, such as the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*.<sup>92</sup> The view that Genesis 6 refers to fallen angels and their offspring lasted longer in early Christian circles; but in the third and fourth centuries AD it appears to have faced criticism there too.<sup>93</sup>

The ways in which non-canonical material has been received is of interest for the history of interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. It also indicates that there is no consistent understanding either of the text or of the identity of the *Nephilim*. And the fact that key aspects of the traditions could be laid aside so readily by the Rabbis further supports the view that they are not part of a common stream that might also underlie Genesis 6:4. Consequently attempts to discover an OT view of the *Nephilim* cannot rely on non-canonical texts.

#### 4. Who Were the *Nephilim*? Towards a Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion I want to suggest some (tentative) conclusions.

First, the canonical view of the *Nephilim* is sufficiently different from the views developed in the earliest non-canonical texts to indicate that it has not been influenced by them. It seems more likely that the non-canonical writings build on the OT, and supply information that was felt to be lacking. Views expressed in Second Temple and early Rabbinic material diverge fundamentally; though it is possible to see how both may be (substantially) expanded versions of the OT material. Consequently, the non-canonical literature is of little value in helping to interpret the biblical text; and speculation regarding origins and current and future activity of the *Nephilim* must be treated with some caution.

<sup>91</sup> *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen. 6:4. In Alexander’s view this reflects a version of the Palestinian Targum predating rejection of Enochic traditions (‘Targumim’, 71). Reed suggests that the reference was added after the re-emergence of Enochic traditions (*Fallen Angels*, 213-14).

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Adelman, *Return*, 112-18; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 233-73.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. Alexander, ‘Targumim’, 63; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 73.

Second, the *Nephilim* are probably to be viewed as the offspring of the ‘sons of God’, understood as divine beings, and human women; and they are also to be identified with the *gibborim*, the ‘heroes of old’. In their biblical portrayal, as distinct from later representations, where they are the epitome of evil and responsible for the flood, these demigods are not viewed essentially negatively; and in the popular mind might have included Gilgamesh, Nimrod and figures from Greek mythology, such as Herakles.<sup>94</sup>

Third, in line with the link with ancient heroes, the *Nephilim* appear outside the general sphere of life of ordinary Israelites, unlike giants mentioned elsewhere in the OT, who, at least up to the time of the Davidic empire, posed a real and ongoing threat to the people. And, whatever the later reputation of, for example Og, the OT writers do not view these giants as supernatural. The reference to the *Nephilim* in Numbers 13:33 should be seen as rhetorical exaggeration, rather than indicating their actual presence in the land.

Fourth, although the *Nephilim* originate in an antediluvian setting, for the spies’ report to be credible, traditions about them must include the view that somehow they were present after the flood, hence the additional remark ‘and also afterwards’. Indeed, there seems little point in making specific reference to the *Nephilim* at all in Genesis 6:4 unless they were of some ongoing significance. However, the OT offers no explanation of how they were thought to have survived the flood. It simply recognises that that was the case, and resists further clarification.

Fifth, the reference to the *Nephilim* in Genesis 6:4 is, in my view, linked with the hubris of human beings who intentionally consort with the sons of God to seek to re-acquire some kind of immortality. Their description as ‘heroes’ serves to emphasise the distorted values of that generation, and so serves as an important element in the characterisation of the widespread human corruption that results in the flood. If that is the primary purpose of the reference to the *Nephilim* in Genesis 6:4 it would account for their very rare appearance elsewhere in the OT.

---

<sup>94</sup> See, e.g. Adelman, *Return*, 111.