

Article of the Month  
February, 2018

***Nephalim (“Giants”)***

Genesis 6:4 (King James Version) reads like this:

There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men; and they bare children to them; the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

The translation is not really accurate, and some of the ideas suggested by the phrasing need careful examination.

“GIANTS”

First of all, the word “giants” is not only misleading, but inaccurate. The Hebrew word here translated “giants” (KJV) simply does not contain the meaning of giant at all. The word is “nephalim.” The New American Standard translators (along with many others such as the ESV and NIV) leave the word untranslated — either because a clear translation is difficult, or because the translators were uncertain of the meaning.

Therefore, we highly recommend what these modern translators do. We would best serve our understanding by RIDDING our Bibles of the word “giants” — replacing the word with the Hebrew word “nephalim.” We will shortly discern its meaning and import, as well as its relationship to other texts in the Old and New Testament writings.

“AND ALSO AFTER THAT...”

This curious phrase needs explanation! The Genesis 6:4 verse is telling us a story about events prior to Noah’s great flood. In just one verse, Moses is explaining the REASON or NEED for the flood. An UNAUTHORIZED **intrusion** had occurred into the world of human beings. The human race had descended generation after generation from Adam and Eve. All of mankind were direct descendants of this original pair UNTIL...

The “until” is the key to understanding this verse and the factors which created the need for the great flood. We will examine the problem in a moment.

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NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTIONS

“Nephalim” quite literally means “fallen ones.” The word refers to those angels which decided to leave the heavenly realm and to meddle unauthorized in the affairs of men. Thus they are “fallen” from God’s favor and from the heights of their former existence. The Apostle Jude (Jude 6) says of them,

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

Jude confirms that these angels (these “nephalim”) left the position which had been assigned to them by God. Jude does not give us much more than this except to tell us that these fallen angels are restricted (chained) under “darkness” until the day arrives which God has appointed to deal with them — the same “day” of judgment during which He will deal with the human race. This is NOT a “day,” of course, but a PERIOD which is a thousand years in length as II Peter 3:5-8 explains (in a context which includes Noah’s flood).

Peter (II Peter 2:5, 5) expands on Jude’s teachings. It reads (KJV) like this:

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (“*tartaroo*”), and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not the old world, but saved Noah...bringing in the flood upon the world...

Peter tells us WHERE these fallen angels are incarcerated. Peter draws on a word from Greek mythology. “*Tartarus*” refers to the earth’s atmosphere. In Greek mythology, this is the place where the “Titans” were banished when Zeus threw them out of his heavenly realm. It is a wonderful analogy, and it shows us how the strange mythologies of heathen peoples are to some degree based on historical fact. There were, of course, no Titans and no Zeus. But these Greek characters represent the truths shown to us by Moses — that God banished the fallen angels to the earth’s atmosphere in keeping with their sin of abandoning their own proper place in the universe.

It is important to note that “hell” (KJV) is a miserable translation for *tartaroo*. This is the ONLY place in the Bible where “*tartaroo*” occurs. “Hell” is NEVER from this word! To translate it as “hell” is a corruption of translation honesty. The fallen angels are consigned to the earth’s atmosphere. The “chains of darkness” is a reference to the fact that God would no longer allow these fallen angels to physically materialize, but rather to be restricted to appearing as apparitions or “ghosts” — functioning mostly at night or in dark rooms. This was a gigantic “come down” from their pre-flood powers and position.

## WHAT DID THEY DO?

Returning now to Genesis 6:4, we are a little better enabled to deal with Moses' strange words. Moses in this context is about to explain the factors surrounding the great flood. He shows us that "There were Nephalim in the earth in those days." In other words, we arrive at a time somewhat PRIOR to the flood that the Nephalim (the fallen angels) had arrived on the earth, having "abandoned their proper abode" (Jude 6, NAS). How long they functioned among men is not stated. But Moses' words tell us that their visit included an activity that may have prompted their desire to be on earth. He states that these angels ("the sons of God") "saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. (Genesis 6:2)" These fallen angels, AT THAT TIME, were able to create (or literally materialize) human bodies for themselves and thus enter into marriages with women who were the descendants of Adam. These couples, then, had children WHO WERE NOT direct descendants of Adam and Eve, but of the fallen angels. A NEW RACE was being born — but NOT by God's consent.

It is this condition which Moses expands upon in 6:4. "The Nephalim (the fallen angels) were on the earth in those days (in the days long before the flood), and also afterward (meaning LATER, after they began to procreate with women), when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men; and they (the wives) bore children to them (to the fallen and materialized angels). These (the children) were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown." "And also afterward" shows us that the Nephalim were in the earth both *before* and *after* they had children. In other words, they stuck around. They didn't just have children and then leave the scene.

We can speculate as to the meanings of "mighty" and "renown" as relates to the children of the Nephalim. But the fame and powers of these children in the earth seem well corroborated by the Greek mythologies from which the Apostle Peter borrowed the word "*tartaroo*." They MAY even have been larger than average humans, i.e., "giants." But this seems not provable.

God did not sanction this new race — a race born separate from Adam, and, therefore, not under the condemnation to death which we humans all suffer by inheritance. In other words, these sons of angels were not dying. The entire race from Adam had its existence threatened by being overtaken by the corrupt rule of the nephalim and their offspring. Hence, God decided to save the pure Adamic race and to destroy the unauthorized race via a great flood. This is why Genesis 6:9 says (KJV) that "Noah was...perfect in his generations." In other words, his line, all the way back to Adam, was not contaminated by the procreation activities of the nephalim. The flood *destroyed* the unauthorized offspring; but the nephalim, themselves, (the fallen angels) were not destroyed. They simply dematerialized and have subsequently been restrained in our atmosphere "under darkness."

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SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

These “chained” and disgraced angels became known as “demons.” Because they could not, by God’s decree, materialize any longer, they sought ways of functioning despite the “darkness” of their restraints. Since they could not materialize, they, instead, “possessed” people. That is, they functioned by TAKING OVER the control of the bodies of humans. Jesus cast them out as a part of his ministry of healing. We even have one instance where these demons possessed a herd of pigs — preferring that to having no physical vehicle of expression. These demons yet function in our midst until their judgment will be accomplished. The Apostle Paul informs us that they will be judged by the glorified disciples of Jesus (I Corinthians 6:3).

Jesus, himself, helps us discern the difference between GOOD angels and FALLEN ones (nephalim or “ghosts.”) Good angels have always had (and still do have) the power of actual materialization — ACTUALLY becoming physical bodies. The fallen angels enjoyed that privilege until the flood. Note the words of Luke 24:36-39:

(We will use the NAS, but we will SUBSTITUTE “ghost” for the word “spirit.” This is the *one place* that translators *should* have done this! In the KJV, for instance, “Holy Ghost” SHOULD BE “Holy Spirit.” But in the Luke text, Jesus IS REFERRING TO GHOSTS, and the word should be translated that way. Jesus’ point is that, because of God’s stated restrictions in Jude and in II Peter, a GOOD angel you CAN TOUCH. A FALLEN angel you CANNOT TOUCH. Your hand will go right through him!) Thus the words of Luke 24:36-39:

And while they were telling these things, he [Jesus], himself, stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I, myself; TOUCH ME and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

A Caution for Us

While we have given a legitimate explanation regarding the TANGIBLE quality of materialized GOOD angels verses the INTANGIBLE quality of visible demons, we should note with care that we now chronologically reside in the beginnings of “The Day of Judgment” of II Peter 3. Since the Apostles Jude and Peter say that the darkness restraints are UNTIL the judgment period, IT IS ALTOGETHER POSSIBLE that fallen angels CAN or WILL SOON be able to regain their powers of TANGIBLE MATERIALIZATION. It is wise to be aware of this possibility lest we be deceived in this strange day of ours!

## HEBREW WORDS AND THEIR CONNECTIONS

The word “nephelim” (Strong’s #5303) also occurs one other place in Scripture: Numbers 13:33. It is important that we consider this usage. Some have mistakenly concluded that this text teaches that the progeny of the “nephelim” lived PAST the flood. Please remember that “nephelim” was a reference **to the angels**, not to their progeny according to Genesis 6:4.

The Numbers text reads (NAS) thusly:

There also we saw the Nephelim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephelim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.

We KNOW that the “nephelim” (the angels, themselves) STILL EXIST but could not physically materialize. So this text MUST NOT mean that the Hebrews SAW the nephelim as materialized humans. What it seems to say is that the Hebrews thought the sons of Anak were **yet contaminated** with nephelim blood — and that is what made them to seem SO LARGE.

We would not question the possibility that these “giants” seen by the spying Hebrews WERE LARGE. What we can assume is that the Jews’ imagination was working overtime. They apparently MISSED THE POINT that the objective of the flood was to RID THE EARTH of ANY remaining “tainted” humans. God’s objectives never fail!

The state of mind of the spies sent into the land was TERRIBLE. Only Joshua and Caleb gave TRUE reports of what was in the land. The others were frightened out of their wits and offered LIES to keep themselves from having to go into the land and, perhaps, suffer for doing so. In other words, they didn’t trust God, and they LIED to keep from obeying Him. We all know the consequences. Israel was forced to spend 40 years wandering in the wilderness as punishment for this very episode. God didn’t believe their report! (Why should we?)

What is our point? Numbers 13:33 DOES NOT DEMONSTRATE that the progeny of the nephelim yet existed post-flood. The verse simply demonstrates what our fears can make us believe.

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“GIANTS”

In I Chronicles 20:4, 6, 8, we have references to “giants.” Again, some have *assumed* this to be a reference to yet-existing offspring of the nephalim. There is NO REASON to think so. The Hebrew word here (Strong’s 7498b) is NOT RELATED to the word nephalim. This account is simply about BIG PEOPLE! Genesis 6 (despite the KJV) DOESN’T TALK ABOUT GIANTS! And even if it did, the “nephalim” refers to the ANGELS, not their offspring.

A similar use of the same Hebrew word is found in II Samuel 21:16, 18, 20, 22. The usage there seems to be a reference to descendants of Goliath. Yes! A VERY BIG man! But surely there is no reason to connect this to the progeny of the nephalim! It might well be noted that such immense people yet exist. A recent edition of the PBS program, “Antiques Roadshow,” showed a size 35 shoe worn by a 20th Century man whose height was about 8-feet — nearly the size of Goliath (who was about 9 feet tall!) Sometimes in our interpretation of Scripture, we forget to look around in our own day to recognize that Scriptural accounts are not so unusual as we might assume.

OTHER RELATED WORDS

Strong’s #5303, “nephalim,” comes with two Hebrew spellings. (We are using the NAS version of Strong’s dictionary because it has improved definitions.) Strong does not give the MEANING of the word except to say that it comes from #5307 (which means “to fall.”) He simply points out that it is often translated “giants” in reference to the “name of two peoples, one before the flood, one after the flood.” Strong is just showing **common usage** — once in the *mistranslation* of Genesis 6, the other in the *misapprehension* of Numbers 13. He is NOT saying that the word MEANS “giants.”

The MEANING of all related words is quite revealing. All the words have as part of their meaning the idea of FALL. We have seen how the angels were FALLEN from favor. A Hebrew *family name* in Ezra 2:50 and Nehemiah 7:52 is from Strong’s # 5304. (Why this family possessed this name is not explained.) Strong’s #5307 is a verb meaning TO FALL — and it is translated MANY ways as a result. The concept of abortion and miscarriage uses the related word, “nephel.” It is appropriate since the fetus FALLS OUT of the mother. (Strong’s #5309)

In short, “Nephalim” is a Hebrew word meaning “Fallen Ones.” Its *exclusive* application is to the fallen angels, not to their descendants.

IN SUMMARY

This was a long and somewhat complicated article. Its point, however, was to explain Genesis 6:4. Angels (“*Nephilim*”) came (without authorization) to meddle in the affairs of men. One of their mistakes was to procreate a separate race of humans, thus polluting the gene pool from father Adam. They did this by materializing human bodies, marrying woman, and begetting a race of super-humans. The flood destroyed the offspring. The fallen angels were prohibited thenceforth from materialization and were restricted to the atmosphere of earth. They were from that point forward known as “demons.” Their fate will be determined as the Kingdom of Christ intervenes to restore mankind.

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