

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XXIX : GENESIS 5:1–6:8 – THE BOOK OF THE HISTORY OF ADAM – PART 3

“This paragraph ... is one of the obscurest in the Pentateuch.” [Cassuto, 1:291]

“Unquestionably, 6:1-4 is the most demanding passage in Genesis for the interpreter. Every verse is a source of exegetical difficulty.” [Mathews, 1:320]

“The present section of Genesis has been the subject of debate for centuries, most scholars considering it to be one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the Pentateuch.” [Ross, 178f]

“The point of this cryptic passage, whichever way we take it, is that a new stage has been reached in the progress of evil, with God’s bounds overstepped in yet another realm.” [Kidner, 83]

“Until this point the Scripture has discussed the sins of individuals: Adam, Eve, Cain, Lamech. Now for the first time the emphasis shifts to the sins of a group, ‘the sons of God,’ with the result that God’s punishment is directed not against a man, but against mankind. This emphasis of the sins of a group is perpetuated in the Flood event.” [Hamilton, 1:271]

Eleventh Paragraph – The Story of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Men:

‘¹ Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ² that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. ³ And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” ⁴ There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.’ (Gen 6:1-4)

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 1 – And it came to pass when men began / to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,

v. 2 – that the sons of God saw / the daughters of men that they were fair;

and they took them wives / of whomsoever they choose.

v. 3 – Then the Lord said,

**“My spirit shall not abide / in man for ever,
in as much as he, too, is flesh,
but his days shall be / a hundred and twenty years.”**

**v. 4 – The Nephilim were on the earth / in those days,
and also afterward,
when the sons of God came in / to the daughters of men,
and they bore children to them.**

These were the mighty men that were of old, / the men of renown.

THESE VERSES ARE PART OF THE ADAMIC GENEALOGY TOLEDOTH — Just a reminder these next couple paragraphs (6:1-8) all connect with what has preceded (the Adamic genealogy) rather than with what follows (the Flood). As mentioned in lesson 27, looking at these verses in that light changes our perspective of what is written. “Though 6:1-8 appears to have little connection with the preceding genealogy, it is in fact closely integrated with it. Those key words which appear in multiples of six or seven in 5:1-6:8 are well represented here: ‘man,’ ‘the LORD,’ ‘God,’ ‘sons,’ ‘daughters,’ ‘make,’ ‘create.’ In content, 6:1-8 takes up the subject matter of chap. 5. 6:1 introduces the story of the ‘daughters’ often mentioned in passing in chap. 5 despite their apparent irrelevance to the genealogical line. Now they become the focus of attention. Indeed, the opening phrase ‘When man began to multiply’ could refer to the whole process of multiplication recorded in 5:1-32, while the closing sentence about Noah in 6:8 links this paragraph to the close of the genealogy in 5:29-32. Gen 6:5-8 makes a typical conclusion to one of the larger sections in Genesis in that it rounds off one stage of the story and adumbrates the next. It acts as a trailer to the flood story. By focusing on God’s ‘making’ and ‘creating man’ in 6:6, 7 and 5:1, 2, it also forms a loose inclusion with the opening paragraph of 5:1-5.” [Wenham, 1:136]

A POLEMIC AGAINST ANCIENT MYTHS — “Many critical scholars view 6:1-4 as a remnant of an old myth, or at least originally mythic in form and function, historicized by the Yahwist (J) or a later editor.... Originally, it is contended, the intent of the tale was to explain the beginnings of a race of giants. *If this were the case with 6:1-4, we must fault the enigmatic Yahwist (J) for his poor efforts at camouflaging the mythical element. More likely, as we find in the creation narrative (1:1-2:3) and the Tower of Babel (11:1-9), vv. 1-4 are a refutation of pagan stories that told of a race of superhuman giants. Ancient memory rightly reflected the distant past when fierce tyrants ruled the day, but the author of Genesis by relating the Nephilim to the wickedness of the times and their ensuing judgment showed that they were altogether mortal, not at all superhuman, and subject to the judgment of God. The biblical author not only ‘set the record straight’ but also used it as testimony condemning the wicked generation, which deserved the cataclysmic flood to follow.*” [Mathews, 1:324f]

THREE OPINIONS OF 6:1-4 — This lesson will be presented in a different fashion than previous lessons because of the controversies therein and how these verses all interrelate to each other. Historically there has been three opinions concerning the identity of the ‘sons of God;’ whatever theory one takes effects their understanding of the entire passage:

- **THE ‘SONS OF GOD’ WERE FALLEN ANGELS** — In this view these fallen angels defied God by moving outside their appointed realm and married / raped human women, thus mixing the heavenly realm with the terrestrial. These unnatural unions produced the ‘Nephilim.’ Some LXX manuscripts appear to have accepted this view, translating the words ‘sons of God’ as ‘angels of God’ in Gen 6:2, 4. Proponents of this view can boast it is the oldest opinion *known* since it was advocated among the Jews at least by the 2nd century BC as indicated by *1 Enoch* 6-11, as well as early Christian writers (the word ‘known’ is highlighted because there are many centuries between the writings of Moses and the 2nd century BC; what is *truly* the oldest theory is unknown). It should be noted however that later rabbinic tradition departed from this viewpoint and argued for ‘sons of nobles’ listed next.

- **THE ‘SONS OF GOD’ WERE HUMAN JUDGES OR RULERS** — This was introduced by the Jews about the middle of the 2nd century AD, along with a curse

pronounced on anyone taking the angel view (*Genesis Rabba* 26.5). “‘*The sons of the rulers.*’ These were the sons of the princes and judges, for *elohim* always implies rulership, as in Exodus 4:16: ‘*and you shall be his master.*’ ‘*The daughters of man*’ were the daughters of the general populace; the multitude, the lower classes, who did not have the power to resist their superiors. Thus, the Torah begins the narrative of the tragedy by speaking of the subjugation of the weak by the powerful.” [Scherman, *The Chumash*, 27] In this view the Nephilim are not regarded as children of those marriages but were their contemporaries. Alternatively some understand this to refer to polygamous warriors or despotic kings who fathered the ‘*Nephilim*’ and ‘*heroes of old*’ who were infamous for their cruel tyranny. This thus relates back to Cain’s dynasty where there are the origins of cities, polygamy, and violent tyranny. But while avoiding the difficulties inherent within the ‘*angel*’ view, this interpretation has never had a large following outside of the Jews.

● **THE ‘SONS OF GOD’ WERE THE GODLY LINE OF SETH THAT INTERMARRIED WITH THE UNGODLY LINE OF CAIN** —

In favor of this view is that chaps. 4 and 5 contrast the ungodly Cainites and the godly Sethites, but here in 6:1-8 the two lines intermarry, resulting in a community of unprecedented wickedness. Separation between the godly and ungodly is a recurring theme in both the Old and New Testaments. The importance of such separation is evidenced by the recommendation of Balaam; after his power of cursing was taken from him, he suggested women be privily sent by the Midianites to seduce the people of God to their downfall (Num 25). “*The descendent of Seth succumbed to this sin because they were attracted by the wrong things: ‘The daughters of men were good-looking.’ Apparently they did not look at the heart, or the spiritual worth of the women, but merely at outward appearance. That is much like Western society, in which a person is judged principally by looks and material possessions. That is the way of the serpent! It is living by sight and not by faith.*” [Currid, 1:180] “*The sins of the sons of God consisted in entering the sacred marriage relation under the promptings of mere desire for beauty, regardless of the effect on their holy mission as world preservers.*” [Carroll, 1:173] “*For marriage is a thing too sacred to allow that men should be induced to it by the lust of the eyes.*” [Calvin, 1:239]

WHAT DO THE COMMENTATORS I AM USING TEACH? — Of those I am using in my studies, *Rabbi Umberto Cassuto*, *Gordon Wenham*, *Henry Morris* and *John Skinner* all hold to the **ANGEL** theory. Those holding the **HUMAN RULERS** theory is *Rabbi Nosson Scherman* in *The Chumash* (although he gives the ‘*line of Seth*’ as an alternative understanding); also note both *Bruce Waltke* and *Allen Ross* holds a modified form of this: they teach the ‘*sons of God*’ were demon possessed tyrants. Those holding to the **LINE OF SETH** theory is *Kenneth Mathews*, *Karl Keil*, *Ken Ham*, *B. H. Carroll*, *John Gill*, *John Lange*, *John Calvin* and *John Currid*. Both *Derek Kidner* and *Victor Hamilton* try to remain as neutral as possible, although both makes a comment or two which may indicate their leaning (if we are able to use their random comments as evidence of what they believe, they are on the opposite sides on this topic with *Hamilton* towards the ‘*Seth*’ theory and *Kidner* towards the ‘*angel*’ theory). Some observations:

● **this is not a matter of ‘numbers’** – ‘*proving*’ who has the correct interpretation is not a matter of the number of Bible teachers that believe this way or the other; **the final authority of ALL matters of doctrine is the Word of God itself, not Bible teachers.** Rather the above is given to show those who advocate for a particular theory.

- *there are good Bible teachers who hold to each of the theories* – as just witnessed, each of the theories have good solid Bible teachers who hold to that interpretation; therefore we must be careful to respect those who differ in these non-essential doctrines.

While I acknowledge the difficulty of the passage (regardless of one's position) and understand those who advocate for the angel position (a position I once held), this lesson will be presented from the viewpoint of the 'LINE OF SETH' interpretation. A wise reminder from Kenneth Mathews: "Although we commend the Sethites as the 'sons of God,' no view escapes troubling criticism. The mysterious identity of the 'sons of God' continues to humble the expositor." [Mathews, 1:332]

GENERAL REASONS FOR GEN 6:1-4 TO BE REFERRING TO THE 'LINE OF SETH'

● **THE REASON GIVEN FOR THE FLOOD IS THE SINS OF MEN, NOT ANGELS** —

While there are good arguments for the 'angel' theory, in my mind the strongest argument against it is that *the Lord does not send the flood because of the sins of angels but because of the sins of men*: 'And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.' [Gen 6:3, 5, 6] "God's punitive action in 6:1-8 is solely directed against humanity, not angels – 'My spirit will not remain with man forever.' The punishment oracle in the garden included the chief culprit, the serpent, as well as his human partners in the first crime (3:15-19), but here the passage speaks only of 'man.' According to the angel view, the celestial beings are the primary instigators of the decadent deed." [Mathews, 1:333f] "Though there are different views on whether Genesis 6:1-4 refers to the sin of angels when it talks about the 'sons of God', there can be no dispute that the entire section immediately preceding the command to build the ark (Gen. 6:5-13) clearly emphasizes human sin, and human sin alone, as the reason God brings the flood upon the earth. God is not sorry that he has made angels, but that he made man (v. 6). He does not decide to blot out fallen angels, but man (vv. 6, 13); it is not the violence and corruption of angels which arouses his anger, but the violence and corruption of man (vv. 5,11,12,13)." [Wayne Grudem, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: vol 17, 1 Peter; InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL; 1988; pp. 224, 226] "If the sons of God were angels, the narrative is concerned not only with men, but with angels also; and it is not the custom of the Scriptures merely to relate the judgments which fall upon the tempted, and say nothing at all about the tempters.... The judgments of God are not only free from all unrighteousness, but avoid every kind of partiality." [Keil, 1:136f]

● **IF ANGELS, WHY NOT USE THE NORMAL TERMS FOR 'ANGELS'?** — Even though Rabbi Cassuto agrees with the 'angel' theory discussed above, he notes that if the text refers specifically to angels, why does it not use the normal terms for them, *mal'ākhê 'elōhîm* [literally, 'messengers of God'] or 'messengers of the Lord?' [Cassuto, 1:292]

● **NOWHERE DO ANGELS PROCREATE** — It has often been pointed out that angels do not procreate, 'For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven' (Matt 22:30), to which those who accept the 'angel' theory reply this may be true of the holy angels but does not necessarily apply to fallen angels. While there is no way to prove either position without Biblical support, it should be pointed out that *while angels*

may take on other human properties (cf. 18:1, 2, 8 with 19:1, 5), there is no evidence procreation is a trait of the heavenly hosts; there is a vast difference between holy angels who acquire the ability to eat and rebellious angels with sexual properties.

● **THE NT SPEAKS OF GOD ‘PATIENTLY WAITING’ FOR REPENTANCE, BUT NOWHERE IN SCRIPTURE DOES GOD OFFER REPENTANCE TO ANGELS** — ‘who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.’ (1 Pet 3:20) “For whom was the patience of God waiting? That the ‘spirits in prison’ are further stated to be those ‘who ... [disobeyed] when God’s patience waited,’ strongly suggests that God was waiting for them to repent, otherwise there would be no point in Peter’s mentioning God’s patience. Furthermore, the word ἐξεδέχeto [exedécheto; from ἐκδέχομαι, ekdéomai: *to remain in a place and/or state, with expectancy concerning a future event*], ‘waiting,’ has the nuance of hopeful or expectant waiting for something to happen. *The ‘angelic’ interpretation of this passage does not seem appropriate here, because neither the Old nor New Testaments teach that fallen angels ever have a chance to repent (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). But if Peter is referring to human beings who disobeyed, the statement is entirely consistent with repeated instances, throughout the Bible, of God’s patient waiting for repentance before bringing judgment (Gen. 6:3; Ps. 103:7-12; 106:43-46; Hos. 11:8-9).*” [Grudem, *1 Peter*, 226f]

● **OTHER NT PASSAGES PROVIDE NO SUPPORT ONE WAY OR THE OTHER** — Those who point to New Testament passages for support (1 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) neglect that they are also complicated by their own exegetical obscurity; to point to controversial passages to shore up support for their own controversial passage is to pour muddy water on an already murky situation.

● **THE ‘SONS OF GOD’ ARE ALSO USED TO REFER TO MEN IN THE OT** — One of the strongest arguments used by those believing the flood was caused by the cohabitation of fallen angels with women is that the OT only uses the term ‘son of God’ (*bēn ’elōhîm*) to refer to angels, not men (or so they say). Support for that is Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 where the ‘sons of God’ are unquestionably angels.

‘Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.... Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.’ [Job 1:6; 2:1]

‘When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?’ [Job 38:7]

As commented by Karl Keil: “Apart from the context and tenor of the passage, [the ‘sons of God’ referring to angels in the OT] would lead us most naturally to regard the ‘sons of God’ as angels, in distinction from men and the daughters of men. *But this explanation, though the first to suggest itself, can only lay claim to be received as the correct one, provided the language admits of no other. Now that is not the case. For it is not to angels only that the term ‘sons of Elohim,’ or ‘sons of Elim,’ is applied.*” [Keil, 1:128] Keil continues to list the following examples where the terms are used in reference to men:

‘If I had said, “I will speak thus,” Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.’ (Ps 73:15; while addressing Elohim, the godly are called ‘the generation of Thy sons,’ i.e., the sons of Elohim)

'Then you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn.' (Exod 4:22; i.e., 'thus says Yehovah, Israel is My beni')

'You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.' (Deut 14:1; '*children of the Lord your God*' = '*ben Yehovah elohim*')]

'They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: a perverse and crooked generation.' (Deut 32:5; the Israelites are called His (God's) sons)

'Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," there it shall be said to them, "You are sons of the living God."' (Hos 1:10; '*sons of the living God*' = '*ben chay el*')]

'Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.' (Ps 80:17; where Israel is spoken of as the son whom Elohim as made strong)

● **'SONS OF GOD' COULD MEAN 'GODLY SONS'** — Another observation not discussed much is as follows: “ '*Elōhîm* can be rendered as a genitive of quality, meaning '*godly sons*,' referring to the heritage of the Sethites.... This genitive use attributes a quality or condition to the construct so as to represent or characterize that person. The occurrence of this use is well attested with *bēn* ('son'). ” [Mathews, 1:330]

● **'DAUGHTERS OF MEN' AS AN ANTITHESIS OF 'SONS OF MEN' DOES NOT DEMAND THE 'SONS OF GOD' WERE NOT HUMAN** — “From the expression '*daughters of men*' ... it by no means follows that the sons of God were not men; any more than it follows from Jer 32:20, where it is said that God had done miracles '*in Israel, and among men*,' or from Isa 43:4, where God says He will give *men* for the Israelites, or from Judg 16:7, where Samson says, that if he is bound with seven green withs he shall be as weak as a *man*, or from Ps 73:5, where it is said of the ungodly they are not in trouble as *men*, that the Israelites, or Samson, or the ungodly, were not men at all. In all these passages '*men*' denotes the remainder of mankind in distinction from those who are especially named.” [Keil, 1:130]

● **GENESIS ALREADY DIVIDES THE LINES OF CAIN AND SETH** — “According to the angel hypothesis, angels alone are here to be understood, notwithstanding that there is no mention of angels immediately before this, to stand as its antecedent, but only of the pious race of Sethites. Chap. 5 gives us an account of pious *men*, of chosen *men*, of a wonderfully glorified man of God; but of angels, on the contrary, there is not a word, even to this place.... In the fourth chapter there is described the line of the Cainites as still divided from the line of Seth; in the fifth chapter we have the line of the Sethites in its devotedness and elevation; then, finally, in the section before us, the mingling of both lines, and the universality and flagitiousness of corruption, as, according to the programme of the Cainitic Lamech, it culminates in the two fundamental features of carnality and cruelty. *Whoever reads Genesis, to the passage before us, without any prejudice derived from opinions alien to it, would never think of understanding by the bne Elohim [sons of God] anything else than the pious Sethites, and by their connection with the daughters of men anything else than a corruption of marriage and a mingling with the Cainites. This would especially appear from the fact, that in this section the sharp contrast between the two lines, which is so prominent in the previous chapter, wholly disappears.*” [Lange, 1:281ff]

● **THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ‘THE SONS OF GOD’ AND ‘THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN’ WERE NOT RAPE NOR FORNICATION BUT RATHER MARRIAGES** — The angel theory teaches fallen angels came and ‘took’ (i.e., rape or fornication) human women as they desired; a life-long marital relationship is contrary to that teaching. *“‘And they took them wives’ is simply the usual expression for legal marriage. The passage contains not a single word, either here or in the Lord’s speech in v. 3, alluding to rape or adultery or to any act against the Lord’s will.”* [Cassuto, 1:294] *“Now lāqach ‘ishshāh (‘to take a wife’) is a standing expression throughout the whole of the Old Testament for the marriage relation established by God at the creation, and is never applied to πορνεία (porneia, Greek for ‘fornication’), or the simple act of physical connection.”* [Keil, 1:131] *“It is suggested that rape or polygamy is implied by this description. However, this cannot be sustained.... It ought also to be borne in mind that the girls’ fathers would also have been implicated, since, if there was no rape or seduction, their approval to these matches would have been required.”* [Wenham, 1:141]

● **THIS SIN IS NOT UNIQUE TO THE ANTEDILUVIANS IN THE OT** — “The falling away of the Israelites in the desert came not from any amour between angels and the daughters of men, but from an unlawful intercourse between the Israelites and the women of Midian (Numb. 25). So the apostasies of Israel in the time of the Judges were derived from the mingling of the Israelites with the daughters of the Canaanites (Judg. 3:6). The fall of Solomon, and the falling away of the people that followed it, came from Solomon’s connection with foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1). So the ten tribes sunk into the worship of Baal in consequence of the connection of Ahab with the Sidonian Jezebel, whose horrible significance goes on even to the Apocalypse (1 Kings 16:31; Rev. 2:20); and so, too, Ezra and Nehemiah, after the great visitation, know no other way to secure their people against a new degeneracy, than by contending earnestly against foreign marriages. Thus again and again do the theocratic mesalliances [‘a marriage with someone who is considered socially inferior’, here spiritually-speaking] of one section reflect themselves in the Israelitish history, without the angels playing any part therein.” [Lange, 1:283]

● **WHILE THERE ARE APOCRYPHAL WORKS ASCRIBING THE FLOOD TO THE SIN OF FALLEN ANGELS (E.G., ‘THE BOOK OF ENOCH’), THERE ARE ALSO APOCRYPHAL WORKS ASCRIBING THE SIN TO MEN ALONE** — “Those who favour [the view that the spirits in prison are fallen angels] point to the many places in extra-biblical Jewish literature where the ‘sons of God’ who married ‘the daughter of men’ in Genesis 6:2,4 and begot children by them, are understood to be sinful angels who married human women. This understanding of Genesis 6 is frequent in extra-biblical literature, being attested in at least the following nine texts: Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1:73; Philo, *On the Giants* 6; *Questions on Genesis* 1.92; *Qumran Damascus Document (Dead Sea Scrolls)* 2.18; 1 Enoch 6.2,6; 106.13-14; Jubilees 5.1; 10:1-6; 2 Baruch 56.12-15. **However, it is often not appreciated that such an interpretation of Genesis 6 is far from uniform in Jewish tradition.** The following list shows nine other texts where non-angelic interpretations are held:

While Philo himself calls these ‘sons of God’ angels in one place, he later calls them ‘good and excellent men’ (Philo, *Questions on Genesis* 1.92). Moreover, the Targums and the Rabbinic literature are unanimous in viewing the ‘sons of God’ as human beings. *Targum Onkelos* on Genesis 6:2 and 4 reads ‘sons of princes’ (or, ‘great men’), and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* has the same. *Targum Neofiti* has ‘sons of the Judges’ in both verses. *Tosefta, Sotah* 3.9a interprets ‘sons of God’ as men of the generation of the flood. In the *Midrash Rabbah*, they are understood as ‘sons of judges’ and as ‘leaders’ (*Midrash Rabbah on*

Genesis 26.6 on Gen 6:2, quoting Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, c. AD 140), or as the generation of men at the time of the flood (*Midrash Rabbah on Numbers* 9.24, on 5:27). The Babylonian Talmud at *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 108a understands them as men at the time of the flood. Symmachus translates Genesis 6:2 as *'the sons of the rulers'*.

Although this material is admittedly somewhat later than 1 Enoch and Jubilees, which are both to be dated in the second century BC, the citations from Philo and the Targums are certainly not irrelevant for New Testament exegesis – indeed, the Rabbinic material generally represents a stream of Jewish tradition which is certainly relevant as a background for New Testament studies. And the citations in this second group are divers and frequent enough to give strong indication of the existence of a *'non-angelic'* view of the *'sons of God'* in Judaism, especially more orthodox Judaism, before or during the time of the New Testament.... ***All of these texts (forty-five listed here, from every strand of Jewish tradition) must be seen in contrast to the slight evidence of a tradition of angelic sin at this time: one text (Jubilee 10:4-5) which mentions angelic sin in Noah's day and two (Testament of Naphtali 3:5; 1 Enoch 67:8-13) which say angels were punished at the flood (one of which, Testament of Naphtali 3:5, also says the earth was made 'without dweller or produce' because of angels' sin). Not one text from any strand of Jewish tradition mentions angels disobeying 'during the building of the ark'. The overwhelming weight of extra-biblical tradition – as well as the biblical evidence itself – emphasizes human sinners, not angels, as the most likely to be meant by Peter's phrases, 'who formerly [disobeyed] ... in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark.'***” [Grudem, *1 Peter*, 220f, 226]

● **THERE WERE 'NEPHILIM' BEFORE THE 'SONS OF GOD' COHABITED WITH THE 'WOMEN OF MEN'** — One of the arguments from those believing the flood was caused by fallen angels cohabiting with women was that the offspring of these unions were *'nephilim'* = *'giants, half-demon and half-human.'* But the Scriptures state there were these *'nephilim'* prior to the sin of the *'sons of God'*:

*'There were giants on the earth in those days, and **also afterward**, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.'* (Gen 6:4)

“*'And also after that,'* which shews that the preceding clause respects giants in former times, *'when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men,'* came into their houses and chambers, and lay with them: *'and they bare children unto them,'* or giants unto them, as may be supplied from the former clause: ***for the sense is, as there were giants before this general defection, so there were at this time,*** when there was a mixture of the Cainites and Sethites; which were the offspring of the sons of God, or the posterity of Seth, mixing with the daughters of men, or the posterity of Cain.” [Gill, 1:47]

There are a minority of translations that give credence to the opposite, giving the illusion the *'Nephilim'* came from the sins of the *'sons of God'*:

'Now giants were upon the earth in those days. For after the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, and they brought forth children, these are the mighty men of old, men of renown.' [Douay-Rheims 1899]

'The Nephilim appeared on earth in those days, as well as later, after the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of human beings, who bore them sons. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.' [New American Bible Revised Edition]

Adding to the confusion are some translations and paraphrases which do not even pretend to be neutral in their translation (please remember an ‘*interpretation*’ given by a translation or paraphrase is of no more value than anyone else’s opinion):

‘The children of the supernatural beings who had married these women became famous heroes and warriors. They were called Nephilim and lived on the earth at that time and even later.’ [Contemporary English Version]

‘The Nephilim were on the earth at that time (and also immediately afterward), when those divine beings were having sexual relations with those human women, who gave birth to children for them. These children became the heroes and legendary figures of ancient times.’ [International Standard Version]

‘In those days, and even afterwards, when the evil beings from the spirit world were sexually involved with human women, their children became giants, of whom so many legends are told.’ [the Living Bible]

Those I am studying however states the Hebrew will not allow for that nuance. ***“There were Nephilim, it is said, in those same days, not there became or came to be.”*** [Lange, 1:282] ***“The first thing that may be said with certainty is that, on the basis of the opening clause, the ‘Nephilim’ existed on the earth prior to the mixed marriages of verses 1-2. The Nephilim were not the progeny of those unions.”*** [Currid, 1:179] “Some, e.g., Skinner [Genesis, 145f], translate *hāyû* ‘arose,’ in which case the Nephilim are the offspring of these cryptic marriages: ‘The Nephilim arose on the earth.’ We would expect in this case the *wāw*-consecutive construction *vawih^eyû* (cf. Keil, Pentateuch, 137).” [Mathews, 1:337]

● **WERE THESE ‘NEPHILIM’ THE OFFSPRING OF FALLEN ANGELS?** — Adding to the above, several other points argue against the ‘Nephilim’ being the offspring of the illicit affairs of the fallen angels and the ‘daughters of men.’

● The verse order itself argues against the ‘Nephilim’ being the offspring of angels and mankind. “The order of the two remaining verses in this pericope is interesting. That is, the word about the divine displeasure (v. 3) comes between the cohabitation scene (v. 2) and the reference to the children produced by this union (v. 4). ***By placing the verse where it is, the author is making the point that this forbidden union itself is offensive to Yahweh, rather than the fact that such a union produced (hybrid) offspring....*** Had v. 4 preceded v. 3, the likelihood would have increased that we are to understand the Nephilim as the bastard offspring of this union. But the present order of the verses argues the contrary.” [Hamilton, 1:265f; 269] ***“The problems rests with the progression of vv. 1-4. The expected transition from the sexual unions recounted in vv. 1-2 to the acknowledgment of children born to those unions in v. 4 is interrupted by the oracle of judgment in v. 3. Verse 3, however, is logically the end of vv. 1-2, which leads to God's interdiction against the marriages. There is no compelling reason to alter the present arrangement of vv. 3 and 4.”*** [Mathews, 1:337]

● As pointed out by Kenneth Mathews, ***“Sometimes overlooked is the fact that the Nephilim are not specifically said to be the offspring of the marital unions.”*** [Mathews, 1:337]

● ***“It is worth noting that the giants are not said to have sprung solely from this origin: if some arose in this way (‘also after that’), others existed already (‘in those days’).”*** [Kidner, 85]

- The fact there are ‘*Nephilim*’ centuries after the Flood as Israel enters the promised land argues against the ‘*Nephilim*’ being the offspring of fallen angels. ***If the ‘Nephilim’ were a race, whether produced legitimately or illegitimately, how did they survive the Flood?*** Even if one accepts the ‘*Nephilim*’ in Num 13:33 were genuinely giants, from whence did they come? There is nothing in Numbers to suggest the sin of Gen 6:1-4 (as interpreted by the ‘*angel theorists*’) was again taking place. In addition to that Kenneth Mathews notes, “Moreover, the Anakites in Deuteronomy are cataloged with peoples, such as the Rephaites, who resided in Canaan and were known for their size and military prowess (e.g., Deut 1:28; 2:10-23; 9:2). Yet it is significant that the Nephilim are never listed in Deuteronomy where the inhabitants of Canaan are given.” [Mathews, 1:336f] ***This argues strongly that the term ‘Nephilim’ is a descriptive word of a type of people rather than a race.***

EXPOSITION OF GEN 6:1-4

v. 1 – *And it came to pass when men* — A clear link with chapter five. The word ‘*man, men*’ is Hebrew ‘*ādḥām*, is used here in the collective sense, ‘*mankind at large*.’

began to multiply on the face of the ground, — as in v. 7, thus establishing a connection with the next paragraph. “There is no small irony in 6:1-8, for expanding procreation has been matched by an outbreak of worldwide immorality. ***Procreation is the realization of God’s blessing (1:28) and is venerated in chap. 5, but human survival is not dependent on the mechanism of sexual procreation alone. There must be a concomitant obedience on the part of the human family to God’s moral order (e.g., 2:7 with 3:17; 2:24). Human achievements becomes overweening pride if it is obtained independently of God (e.g., 3:6; 6:4; 11:1-9); divine blessing or correction is correlated with human conduct.***” [Mathews, 1:323]

and daughters were born to them, — Unusual for Hebrew word order, the subject of the clause ‘*daughters*’ here precedes the verb and so throws it into prominence. [Wenham, 1:139]

v. 2 – *that the sons of God* — The beginning of the controversy discussed above. ***“The narrator’s assumption is that they are readily identifiable by his audience. But if his audience knew their identity, it has been lost to subsequent readers. Accordingly, our only recourse has been to raise some possibilities with the greatest strengths and the least weaknesses.”*** [Hamilton, 1:262] See above for more detail.

saw the daughters of men that they were fair; — Hebrew, *tōvhōth*, ‘*good, good in appearance, beautiful, pleasant*.’ “Although we have said that the ‘*sons of God*’ refers to the Sethites, we do not insist that the ‘*daughters of men*’ refers exclusively to Cainite women. Verse 1 speaks of human procreation in general by the collective use of ‘*man*,’ meaning ‘*people*,’ as in 5:1b-2 (cf. 6:5). ‘*Daughters of men*,’ then, in v. 2 again refers to women regardless of parentage, but among these ‘*daughters*’ are the offspring of Cain.” [Mathews, 1:330f]

and they took them wives — Those advocating the ‘*angel*’ theory state fallen angels cohabited with women; but to ‘*take them as wives*’ interrupts their theory. See above for details.

saw ... good ... took — The sequence of ‘*saw ... good ... took*’ parallels most closely the terminology in 3:6 and suggests the sinfulness of the action of the sons of God. When the woman saw and took, she transgressed a boundary set by the Lord. “[The] description of the sons’ activities is reminiscent of Eve’s in the garden. She saw that the tree was ‘*good*’ (*tōvh*), and these sons saw that the daughters of men were ‘*attractive*’ or ‘*good*’ (*tōvhōth*).” [Hamilton, 1:265]

of whomsoever they choose. — “*Any of them they chose’ accentuates the Sethites’ crime of inclusiveness. Their unrestricted license accelerated the degeneracy of the whole human family. The patriarchs traditionally married within their family (endogamy).* Instructions in the Mosaic community prohibited intermarriage with Canaanite neighbors (e.g., Exod 34:16; Deut 7:3), and special regulations carefully governed foreign marriages (e.g., Deut 23:7-8; cf. 25:17-19). Moses’ generation had tasted the bitter fruit of foreign entanglements, which resulted in their seduction into sinful practices (e.g., Num 25). Old Testament history illustrates all too well how interreligious unions speed disaster for Israel. ***This Sethite incident of intermarriage with the ungodly leads to the deterioration of the godly family; as a forewarning it alerts the holy seed of Israel not to neglect God’s prohibition.***” [Mathews, 1:331]

v. 3 – Then the Lord said, — The Lord did not actually speak to any one, but ‘*He resolved, decided,*’ and introduces God’s thoughts to Himself. We find the same in v. 7; in this respect, too, the two paragraphs are parallel.

“My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, in as much as he, too, is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.” — There are four interdependent difficulties contained within this short verse:

- **‘My Spirit’** — the identity of *rûchî* [from the root *rûach*], rendered by most of our popular English versions as ‘*My Spirit*,’ ‘*My spirit*’ [Douay-Rheims 1899; Geneva 1599; KJV, New Catholic Bible; NRSV, Revised Geneva Translation, RSV, Wycliffe Bible]; a few paraphrases translate it as ‘*My breath*’ [Common English Bible]; ‘*my life-giving breath*’ [Contemporary English Version], ‘*breathe life*’ [The Message]. There are two main understandings for this word used here:

- **God’s personal presence (‘My Spirit’),** as in 1:2 where the ‘*Spirit of God*’ hovers over the darkened waters at creation. In this view God no longer personally ‘*contends*’ for the human family; ***Martin Luther described this as the cessation of preaching to those who are hardened beyond reach. “Essentially God declares that his longsuffering with sinful humanity has come to an end and he will no longer suspend judgment.”*** [Mathews, 1:332] “It does appear that the most natural reading of the passages refers to God’s Holy Spirit in His ministry of ‘*convincing the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*’ (John 16:8).” [Morris, 170] ***“The withdrawn Spirit of 6:3 calls to mind the hovering Spirit of 1:2. Where it hovers there is order, and chaos is restrained. Where it is withdrawn, chaos flourishes unchecked.”*** [Hamilton, 1:267]

- **God withdraws His ‘spirit,’ the principle of life-giving power, which is necessary for survival.** By withdrawing His spirit, God destroys all living things, human and animal, who have within them the ‘*breath of life*’ (6:17; 7:15; cf. Ezek 37:14). ‘*My spirit*’ is also an allusion to the making of the man in 2:7 where the Lord breathes life into Adam. “The withdrawal of God’s ‘*spirit*’ (*rûach*, v. 3), if it can be rightly equated with ‘*the breath of the spirit of life*’ (*nishmath rûach chayyîm*) in 7:22 (cf. 7:15), infers a causal connection between God’s judgment and the flood event, where all the living are destroyed.” [Mathews, 1:321] “[It] seems much more likely that it denotes the life-giving power of God. on which every creature is entirely dependent for its life. It is called the ‘*breath of life*’ (2:7) or ‘*the spirit of life*’ (6:17; 7:15) and the phrase ‘*my spirit*’ is used again in Ezek 37:14.” [Wenham, 1:141] “The opening clause, ‘*My spirit will not remain,*’ probably refers to the divine spirit of life (see 2:7). ***And so, God is promising to withdraw life from mankind, and thus end its terrible conduct.***” [Currid, 1:178] “The Spirit of God is the source of natural life (Ps 104:29-30).” [Waltke, 117]

“In effect these first two opinions are made of the same cloth, for there is little difference in substance since the principle of life is bestowed by God himself.” [Mathews, 1:333]

● ***‘shall not strive’*** — Hebrew, *yādhôn* ; while this is variously translated, the sense of the translations seem to divide between ***sustaining the life of humanity*** (*‘remain,’* [Christian Standard Bible, Common English Bible, Contemporary English Version, Douay-Rheims 1899, International Standard Version, NET]; *‘abide,’* [ESV, RSV, NRSV]; *‘stay in,’* [New Life Version]; *‘dwell in,’* [Wycliffe]; *‘live in,’* [Complete Jewish Bible]; *‘give life,’* [Easy English Bible]); or ***striving against humanity*** (*‘strive,’* [ASV, Amplified Bible, Jubilee Bible, KJV, Legacy Standard Bible, NKJV, Revised Geneva Translation, YLT]; *‘struggle,’* [Evangelical Heritage Version, Geneva 1599, God’s Word Translation, New International Reader’s Version]; *‘contend,’* [NIV]; *‘plead,’* [Darby]; *‘put up with,’* [New Living Translation]). “Specifically what God refuses to do *‘with man forever’* is obscured by the meaning of the difficult *yādhôn* . It occurs just once, and its derivation is uncertain. The NIV’s *‘contend’* probably reflects the root *dîn* , meaning *‘judge, rule’* (as BDB), indicating God will no longer deal with or plead on behalf of man. Thus the NJB reflects this understanding: *‘My spirit cannot be indefinitely responsible for human beings.’* Preferable is the traditional understanding *‘remain’* as found in many English versions (REB, NAB, NIV text note; *‘abide,’* NRSV, NJPS). ***Since the philological evidence for the meaning of the word is ambiguous, we are left with context alone to decipher the sense of the passage. The idea of ‘remain,’ as suggested by the ancient versions, coalesces with ‘My spirit’ as an allusion to the ‘breath of life’ (2:7; 6:17; 7:15). Thus God intervenes so that the removal of his empowering, life-giving spirit results in the abbreviation of life. The GNB offers the sense in the paraphrase, ‘I will not allow people to live forever.’*** [Mathews, 1:333]

“*‘Remain’* is a hapax legomenon that has been variously understood. However, the early translators (LXX, Vulgate) seem to have been confirmed by modern etymological research. Cassuto pointed to cognates in Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic, and late Hebrew which all support the meaning *‘abide, remain.’*” [Wenham, 1:142] “The judgment is that God will not endlessly and forever permit his life-giving spirit to enliven those who disorder his world. The breath of life (Gen 2:7; Ps 104:29-30) remains his to give and to recall.” [Waltke, 117]

● ***‘with man forever, for he is indeed flesh’*** — the meaning of *bāsār* has two senses in our translations; the difficulty in some of the translations is, *‘in what sense is this word being used?’* By that I mean some refer to ***‘man’ in the sense of merely a mortal man***; e.g., *‘man,’* [NIV, Evangelical Heritage Version]; *‘flesh and blood’* [God’s Word Translation]; *‘mortal,’* [Geneva Bible 1599, International Standard Version, NET, NIV, New Living Translation (as *‘mortal flesh’*)]. Others believe it carries with it ***the sense of our depravity***; e.g., *‘corrupt,’* [Christian Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible]. But where the confusion enters is the majority of our English versions translates it as *‘flesh’* [ASV, Amplified Bible, Common English Bible, Complete Jewish Bible, Darby Translation, Douay-Rheims 1899, ESV, Geneva Bible 1599, New Life Version, KJV, NASB, NRSV, RSV, Wycliffe, YLT], ***but ‘flesh’ in what sense? – as merely mortal or is this a reference to our sinful nature?*** “After God declares his intention, the following clause gives reason for it: *‘for he [man] is mortal.’* ... The essential sense of *bāsār* is human helplessness or weakness, whether it is the inherent frailty of corporeal life (e.g., 7:21) or the endemic moral flaws of humanity (e.g., 6:12). ***If ‘mortal’ is its proper nuance in our verse, we ask how this can be reason for God’s reproof (v. 3). Alternatively, moral depravity would fit better contextually, giving reason for the judgment. Yet this ambiguity created by bāsār actually bridges the cause-effect sense of both meanings. It is humanity’s mortality that is foremost in mind in this passage since the cessation of God’s life-giving is tied to the life and death of mankind (cf. 2:7 with 7:22), but the moral failing of human life cannot be dismissed altogether, for standing behind mortality is sinful corruption (3:17-19, 22-24).***” [Mathews,

1:334] *“[This] portion of the verse suggests that the ultimate root behind the sin of these sons of God was that they were ‘flesh.’ Here is man at his weakest and most vulnerable. Man is many things – formed and animated by God, a divine image bearer, but he is also flesh. To be sure, the OT in general, and the opening chapters of Genesis in particular, do not teach that simply being flesh is sinful, as if the two were synonymous. After all, the man used this same word to describe his partner in 2:23, and together they became ‘one flesh’ (2:25). But *bāsār* does seem to be a general term to describe the limitation and fallibility of humankind. And it is this fallibility that makes possible any kind of trespass.”* [Hamilton, 1:268f] *“Men, says God, have proved themselves by their erring and straying to be flesh, i.e., given up to the flesh, and incapable of being ruled by the Spirit of God and led back to the divine goal of their life.”* [Keil, 1:136]

● **‘yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’** — What is the significance of the 120 years? Two explanations have been suggested, both of which fits the context:

● **‘The length of human life upon the earth shall henceforth be 120 years.’** — A greatly diminished number compared to the antediluvians. An immediate objection to this understanding is that many lived longer than 120 years after the flood; e.g., Abraham, 175; Isaac, 180; Jacob, 147. In response those advocating this interpretation states but *this was implemented gradually, thus the post-flood period the recorded ages steadily decline (Gen 11)*. *“The longer life spans among postdiluvians can be attributed to a gracious delay in the same way that the penalty of death for Adam and Eve was not immediately executed (2:17; 3:16-19).* This judicial restriction on human life nevertheless explains and anticipates the drastic decrease in life span among the patriarchs. Because of Moses, who lived 120 years (Deut 31:2; 34:7), this figure may have become enshrined as the ideal achievement – a benchmark of piety. Later, seventy years were recognized as the realistic norm (Ps 90:10).” [Mathews, 1:335]

● **‘For 120 years I shall be forbearing with them; but if they do not repent, I shall bring a deluge upon them.’** — As with Ninevah, the Lord announces a period to allow man to repent, *‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’* (Jonah 4:5). “Therefore some interpret the 120 years as a period of grace before the flood, a kind of *‘lull before the storm.’* Jewish tradition understand the 120 years as opportunity for repentance (cf. *Targum Onkelos; Pirke Aboth* [‘Chapters of the Fathers’] 5:2; cf. 1 Pet 3:20).” [Mathews, 1:335] *“Moreover, here also the admirable benignity of God is apparent, in that he, though wearied with the wickedness of men, yet postpones the execution of extreme vengeance for more than a century.”* [Calvin, 1:243] *“The 120-year delay allows time for people to repent and provides testimony of the coming judgment through Noah and his huge ark.”* [Waltke, 117; see also Ross, 183; Currid, 1:178f; Keil, 1:136]

NOAH WAS NOT BUILDING THE ARK FOR 120 YEARS — If the 120 years was a period for repentance, it should be noted Noah did not take that full 120 years to build the ark (as is often said). As pointed out by Ken Ham [171ff], in Gen 11:10 Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arphaxad, two years after the flood. Thus Shem was born 97 or 98 years before the flood and was 98 when he came off the Ark. We are also told Noah was 500 years old when he begat Shem, Ham and Japheth (Gen 5:32) and that Noah was 600 years old at the commencement of the flood (Gen 7:11). Of the three sons, we know Japheth was the eldest (Gen 10:21), Shem the middle son (Gen 11:10) and Ham the youngest (9:24). But when the Lord instructed Noah to build the ark, He said, *‘But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark — you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.’* (Gen 6:18) We are later told that it happened as the Lord

had said: ‘On the very same day Noah and Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark.’ (Gen 7:13) **Thus Noah and his sons were building the ark for maybe 55-75 years.**

YEARS BEFORE THE FLOOD	EVENT
100	Noah had Japheth, the eldest of the sons, when he was 500 years old (Gen 5:32; 10:21)
98	Noah had Shem who was 100 years old 2 years after coming out of the ark (Gen 11:10)
96-95 ?	Ham the youngest is born; it is not known exactly the age difference between Ham and Shem (Gen 9:24; 7:13)
55-75 ?	God told Noah that ‘Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives’ were to go into the ark that they would build; thus Noah’s sons were old enough to be married before construction of the ark began. (Gen 6:18)

v. 4 – The Nephilim — ‘Nephilim’ is a transliteration from the Hebrew *nēphilîm* . **To whom or what this refers is one of the great unsolved mysteries of the Old Testament.** The word is only found here and Num 13:33 (see above for our interpretation to the identity of these ‘Nephilim’).

OUR TRANSLATIONS — Most of our English Bibles just transliterate the word as ‘Nephilim,’ several translates it as ‘giants’ (Wycliffe Bible, 1599 Geneva Bible, KJV, NKJV, Darby Translation, Douay-Rheims 1899, Common English Bible, Good News Translation, Jubilee Bible 2000, The Message, New Catholic Bible) or ‘very large men’ (New Life Version), ‘a giant warrior race’ (The Voice). Note the Contemporary English Version says ‘children of the supernatural beings’ which is more of an interpretation than a translation. Probably the closest to the actual meaning of the word (as far as we are able to ascertain) is the Young Literal Translation that uses ‘fallen ones.’ Numbers 13:33 is of no assistance since most of our English Bibles again transliterates the word as ‘Nephilim’ (although it is interesting Young’s Literal Translation uses the word ‘Nephilim’ instead of ‘fallen ones’). A few again translates it ‘giants’ (Wycliffe, Darby Translation, KJV, NKJV, Good News Translation, Jubilee Bible 2000, the Living Bible, Modern English Version, New Catholic Bible, New Living Translation) or ‘people of a tall stature’ (Douay-Rheims 1899), ‘men of great stature’ (Geneva Bible 1599).

WORD MEANING — The etymology of the Hebrew word is uncertain. It is commonly related to *nāphal* , meaning ‘to fall;’ thus the ‘Nephilim’ are considered ‘the Fallen Ones.’ But whether this refers to their expulsion from heaven, their death as ‘fallen’ in battle, or to their moral degeneracy, depends upon how one understands the rest of this passage. The versions which use the word ‘giants’ gets that from the LXX’s γίγαντες (gigantes) which was also carried over into the Latin Vulgate. That is probably based upon the later account in Num 13:33 where the frightened Israelite spies marveled at the exceptional height of the Nephilim, remarking that the Hebrews were no more than like ‘grasshoppers’ before them. “Defining the term on the basis of Numbers 13 may be misleading since the spies were certainly exaggerating (‘grasshoppers’) the opposition they encountered in Canaan. **Actually the faithless spies counted all the inhabitants as formidable: ‘All the people we saw there are of great size’** (Num 13:32). There is no intention in Numbers to

equate the Nephilim of Moses' day directly with the antediluvian Nephilim. *When we consider the evidence of Deuteronomy's recollection of these Canaanite peoples, it is better to understand the allusion to the Nephilim therefore in Numbers 13 as figurative, cited by the spies because of the violent reputation attributed to 'Nephilim' from ancient times.*" [Mathews, 1:337] *That there were actual giants from the antediluvian age has been proven by archaeological findings, but that again does not mean 'Nephilim' means 'giants.'* "One of the most amazing facts revealed by paleontology (the study of fossilized remains of creatures which inhabited the earth in a former age) is that nearly all modern animals were once represented by larger ancestors. One thinks of the mammoths and cave bears, giant cockroaches and dragonflies, and huge reptiles like the dinosaurs. Along with them are occasionally found giant human footprints, suggesting indeed that *'there were giants in the earth in those days.'* Not only in the Bible, but in numerous other ancient books, are preserved traditions of giants." [Morris, 172]

THE 'NEPHILIM' WAS DESCRIPTIVE OF GREAT, WICKED WARRIORS — If the 'Nephilim' was not a race but descriptive of those alive during the time that the 'sons of God' were marrying the 'daughters of men,' I believe Ken Mathews gives the best understanding of who they were: *"We have remarked earlier that 'Nephilim' is best taken in Numbers 13 as a scare tactic by the cowardly spies who drew on these shadowy figures of the past to win their case. 'The Nephilim' with the definite article in 6:4 indicates that a specific or well-known group or class is meant. When the spies appealed to the designation 'Nephilim' as imposing adversaries, they drew on the reputation of the Nephilim, probably because of their association with an era infamous for its violence (6:5-8). This is further insinuated in 6:4 by the presence of the 'heroes [gibbōrîm] of old' (i.e., Gibborim) who are the 'children' born to the sons of God and daughters of men. These are the warrior class, men of ignoble reputation whose violent exploits are remembered (cf. 6:11-13) and whose names strike fear in the hearts of their hearers. They are identified as 'men of renown,' not divine or semidivine figures. Despite their notorious achievements they are no more than 'men,' subject to the same judgment as any (v. 3). As warriors of 'renown' they seek reputation by their wicked deeds in the way the people of Babel will seek fame through their building enterprise (cf. 11:4). The allusion in 6:2 to Eve's vain desires (3:6) and the inclusion of 'name' here contribute to the motif of prideful autonomy, which characterized the sins of pre-patriarchal times (chaps. 1-11)."* [Mathews, 338f] *"Luther gives the correct meaning, 'tyrants:' they were called 'Nephilim' because they fell upon the people and oppressed them."* [Keil, 1:137] *"I do not, however, suppose, that he speaks of all the men of this age; but of certain individuals, who, being stronger than the rest, and relying on their own might and power, exalted themselves unlawfully, and without measure"* [Calvin, 1:244]

were on the earth in those days, — This refers to the pre-flood period when the events of 6:1-3 took place. "The first thing that may be said with certainty is that, on the basis of the opening clause, the 'Nephilim' existed on the earth prior to the mixed marriages of verses 1-2. The Nephilim were not the progeny of those unions." [Currid, 1:179]

and also afterward, — 'And also afterward' is a parenthetical comment reminding the reader that giants were still around in the post-diluvian period (Num 13:33). [Wenham, 1:143]

when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. — "To the unprejudiced mind, the words, as they stand, represent the 'Nephilim,' who were on the earth in those days, as existing before the sons of God began to marry the daughters of men, and clearly distinguish them from the fruits of these marriages." [Keil, 1:137]

These were the mighty men that were of old, — *mighty men* = Hebrew, *gibbōrîm* , the same word being used for Nimrod and his bestial kingdom (10:8-11); although the word is also used in a positive sense; see David’s ‘*mighty men*’ (2 Sam 23:8-39; 1 Chron 11:10-47).

the men of renown. — Hebrew, *hashshēm* , literally, ‘*the name,*’ i.e., ‘*noted, renowned or notorious men.*’ “The use of the name motif in Gen. 1-11 appears several times. It surfaces with a negative connotation in the Tower of Babel episode, where the builders wished ‘*to make a name*’ for themselves (11:4). This self-aggrandizement contrasts with the promise of God that he, not Abraham, would make great the patriarch’s name (Gen. 12:2; 2 Sam. 7:9).” [Hamilton, 1:271]