

The Pastor's Pen
The Giants
Who Were They?
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Today is the Super Bowl between the Colts and the Bears. Thankfully the Broncos are no longer total losers in the big game, even though they didn't make it this year. But every Super Bowl I end up going back in time to those tragic days when Denver would lose 100-3 to whatever team they were playing. The second big blowup they had was against the NY Giants. The Giants! How's that for a transition into a topic that many people are curious about?

The most famous giant in the Bible is **Goliath**. We read that Goliath was a Philistine who was "six cubits and a span" tall (1 Sam 17:23).¹ This would put him at about 9'9" in height! Goliath had a brother named **Lahmi**. Scripture records his death: "Elhanan the son of Jair struck down Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam" (1 Chron 20:5). Goliath had a similar spear and we read that the weight of just the iron tip was 600 shekels or 15 pounds (1 Sam 17:7)! **Goliath had a son** who had a total of 24 fingers and toes (20:6)! Apparently, some of the giants were not just large, but freakish in appearance. And then there was **Sippai** who is said to be a descendent of the Raphaim (see below) and possibly one of Goliath's sons (20:4). David and his "mighty men" (Heb: *gibborim*, possibly named after the likes of those they were killing to memorialize their exploits and mock their victims) slew these and others down.²

The Philistines were peoples who sprang from the Casluhim (Gen 10:14; 1 Chr 1:12) who came from the Ludim who came from Mizraim (10:13) who came from *Ham* (10:6) the son of Noah. Ham was possibly Noah's youngest son (Gen 9:24).³ Ham had three other sons (listed) besides Mizraim. They were Cush, Put, and Canaan. Canaan is probably the most famous of these children, because he was the one God cursed for Ham's sin (see Gen 9:25).⁴ The descendants of Canaan became those various and detestable tribes like the Hittites, Sidonians, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites and Hivites. We read that these clans spread to regions that included

¹ This follows the Hebrew Masoretic Text. But the *LXX* has him at four cubits and a span or 6'9". A recent article attempts to prove that Goliath is the shorter of the two, but I do not see what the big deal of killing a six foot tall man would be (see J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath" in *JETS* 48:4 (Dec 2005), p. 701ff). Saul was said to be a head taller than anyone else (1 Sam 9:3), but he is not considered a "giant" by the Scripture.

² For example, Benaiah is said to have killed two lion-like men and then an Egyptian giant who also had a spear like a weaver's beam (1 Chr 11:22-23). Another giant from the Raphaim named Ishbi-benob had a spear the head of which weighed 7 pounds. He tried to kill David, but his mighty men put him to death and made David swear to never go to battle again (2 Sam 21:16).

³ However, the order the sons are listed always has Ham second, possibly implying that Japheth is the youngest.

⁴ If Ham is actually not the youngest son, then we have to explain who the "youngest son" of Noah is in Gen 9:24. Obviously, it isn't Japheth, since Japheth is blessed rather than cursed by Noah. There is a sense in which *Canaan* might be considered the 'youngest' Son of *Noah*. I realize this sounds strange, since he is listed as the son of Ham (Gen 10:6). In that same list Canaan is listed as the last (i.e. *youngest*) son. How could Noah also be considered his "son" if he is Ham's son? The explanation would be as follows: If Ham had relations with his mother to produce Canaan (this is a possible meaning of what happened when Ham "uncovered his father's nakedness [compare Gen 9:22 with Lev 20:11; 20-21; 18:6; Ezek 22:10]), then Noah might have considered Canaan his own son in the sense that his wife gave birth to the boy. Furthermore, genealogies often call grandchildren "sons," because there is no Hebrew word for "grandson." Combine these two and it is not impossible that Canaan could be called Noah's youngest son.

Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 10:19). In fact, they eventually spread to live throughout the Promised Land as well as Moab and Edom east of the Jordan River (see below).

There is a particularly interesting (but sickening) thing that happened to Lot in Sodom. The men of that town banged on his door demanding to commit Sodomy (from where we get the word) with the “*men*” that were guests of Lot for the evening (Gen 19:5). The interesting thing is that these men were actually *angels* of God (19:1). Did those evil men of Sodom know this? Perhaps they did. Why else would every man of the town have been so interested in these particular guests? Have you ever thought about how truly bizarre this whole story is? Sodom of course gets the similar fate as the world of Noah’s day: total annihilation because of sexual sin.

A probable descendent of Canaan was a fellow named **Anak** (son of a giant named **Arba** – Josh 15:13). When the Israelite spies went into Canaan⁵ they reported back that they “saw the *Nephilim* (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim) and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them” (Num 13:33). The use of “grasshopper” is a comparative figure possibly comparing size⁶ and/or a coming plague in times of bounty.⁷

Anak had three sons (**Ahiman, Sheshai, Talmi** – Josh 15:14) and the Scripture makes a big deal about how Israel overtook these three and came into possession of Hebron, the city that the family had built. Josephus writes about Hebron and says it was inhabited by “A race of giants, who had bodies so large and countenances so entirely different from humans, that they were amazing to the sight and terrible to the hearing. These bones are still shown to this very day.”⁸ Scripture says that they were “a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?'" (Deut 9:2).

Besides Anakim and Nephilim, the Scripture identifies a third major group of Giants called the Rephaim.⁹ Living in the land of Moab (belonging to the descendents of Lot) these Rephaim were known as Emim by the Moabites (Deut 2:11). To the north in the territory of Ammon the Ammonites called them Zamzummim (Deut 2:20). South of Moab in Seir or Edom were the Horim . These were dispossessed by Esau when he took the land God had given to him (Deut 2:12, 22). Finally, to the south along the Mediterranean Sea there dwelt the Avvim (Josh 13:3). They were possibly related to the Hivites, descendants of Ham whom the Lord commanded the Jews to completely annihilate (Deut 20:17). The geographical summary of these giants is that they completely surrounded and enveloped the Promised Land.

Deut 2:10 says of the Rephaim that they were “a people strong and numerous, and as *tall* as the Anakites.” In Gen 14:5 these peoples (as well as the Horites and possibly the Amalekites and Amorites [see below]) are all brought together as Kedorlaomer and his allies go out and defeat the majority of these giants (this is the same chapter in which Melchizedek goes out to meet Abram). Apparently they were a real nuisance to the surrounding shorter population.

⁵ Because he lived in Canaan it is logical to conclude that he was descended from Canaan.

⁶ Alec Motyer in his commentary on Isaiah references this verse and says, “The greatness of God is seen in the minuteness of the people, who by comparison are like grasshoppers (cf. Nu. 13:33).” (Motyer, *Isaiah*, 306).

⁷ Grasshoppers are most often identified with their cousins the locust as being a blight upon the land.

⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.2.3.

⁹ *Rephaim* or *Rapha*’ is translated by the LXX as *gigantes* or giants (see below definition of Nephilim).

One of the last of the Rephaim was a king named Og of Bashan.¹⁰ Og's bed was "made of iron and was more than nine cubits long and four cubits wide." That is about thirteen feet long and six feet wide! (Deut 3:11). Israel defeated Og and his rival Sihon. Sihon was the king of the Amorites at that time (Num 32:33), thus making them a probable race of giants as well. Sihon is never mentioned in Scripture as a giant, but because he is always considered side by side with Og, it is reasonable to suppose he was.¹¹ As we can now see very clearly, there were many giants among the sons of Canaan the son of Ham.

Ham had another son named Cush. The most famous early descendent of Cush was Nimrod. Nimrod is said to be the first "mighty" man (*gibbor*, see above and the name of David's "mighty men" or *gibborim*) upon the earth (Gen 10:8). Nimrod was a hunter (10:9), of whom or what we cannot be certain. He built Babel (later Babylon, the "anti-city") and Nineveh (10:11, later capital of the Assyrian empire). He may even have been worshiped as the founder-god (Marduk) by the Babylonians. His great "might" might have been more than political. As the first of the *gibborim* (cf. Gen 6:4), and like those we have already seen, it is quite possible that he was mighty in physical size as well.

Interestingly, all of the post-flood giants of the Bible -- without exception -- are descended from Ham. As we have seen, sometimes they are called Anakim or Rephaim and even Nephilim. There is no reason to think that their gigantism was anything less than physical size (though it then developed into political and economic gigantism as these men were able to overthrow any enemy they chose because they were so large and physically powerful).

This last term, Nephilim, is curious because it has a pre-flood reference in Gen 6:4. This is one of the most disputed passages in Genesis, if not the whole Bible. *Nephilim* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. It *sounds* like the Hebrew verb "to fall" (see perhaps Jude 6). But the Greek *LXX* uses the word "gigantes" (as it does for Rephaim) from which we get the English "giant" (see Geneva, KJV, NKJV, Living Bible). This is the actual meaning of the word.

The oldest interpretation that we have goes back to the Rabbis, whom I have already shown in a footnote interpreted them as being giants. According to the text the gigantism was a result of a sexual union. "The sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they *bore children* to them." The result of this union was the *Gibborim Nephilim* or Mighty Giants. From the days of at least the writing of *Enoch* and other intertestamental literature until today, this interpretation says that the gigantism (which was physical) resulted because the "sons of God" were fallen angels.¹²

Angels are often called "sons of God" in the OT, especially the earliest books of the Bible (Cf. Gen 24:3, 4; 26:34, 35; 27:46; 28:1, 2, 6-8; 34; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Many people object to the

¹⁰ Bashan is the region north of Ammon and east of the Sea of Galilee.

¹¹ Rabbinical literature identifies him as Og's brother. The ancient rabbis likewise list both kings as grandsons of Shemjazzai, a fallen angel (Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 61a). see http://www.come-and-hear.com/niddah/niddah_61.html. On Sihon's fall see Num 21:21-26, 32. The country of Sihon is probably between that of Bashan and Ammon.

¹² John Gill notes that the *Targum of Jonathan* calls two of these angels by name: Schanchazai and Uziel. According to James Boice, the book of *Enoch* has much to say about (what it thinks is) God's judgment upon fallen angels (James M. Boice, *Genesis Vol. 1*, pg. 308). Boice also wonders aloud how Jude 6 is not echoing the book of *Enoch*. His treatment in Genesis 6:1-4 is worth reading, since few Reformed people are willing to even consider this view as an option.

idea that angels could have relations with human beings (i.e. how can a noncorporeal being have intimacy with a physical being?). Thus, other interpretations have arisen for this passage. Since Augustine, the standard Reformed answer has been that “sons of God” refers to the godly line of Seth while “daughters of men” refers to the wicked line of Cain. Both groups are totally human.¹³

This interpretation has the advantage of being immediately contextual in that these two genealogical lines are being contrasted in the earlier chapters of Genesis. It has the further advantage of being covenantally centered. The idea is that the sin of the “the sons of God” was their failure to marry within the covenant.¹⁴ But it completely ignores the term “sons of God” and its usage other places in the book of Genesis. It further ignores how gigantism could result from this ordinary physical relationship. It is not immediately apparent to me how this would happen and nowhere else in Scripture does this happen. Finally, it ignores the seriousness of the crimes taking place in the world in those days. My opinion is that things must have been really very bad for God to become so grieved that he would wipe men off the face of the earth.¹⁵

For this reason Meredith Kline proposes that we understand the mighty giants as “Men of the aristocracy, princes and nobles, in contrast to the socially inferior ‘daughters of men.’”¹⁶ I’m not completely opposed to Kline’s exegesis here, but it seems to me it once more ignores the three main points that the Augustinian interpretation ignores.

In light of all this, Deuteronomy 9:2 has struck me as an interesting verse. It says, the Anakim were a people “great *and* tall.” Not one, but two adjectives are used to describe these peoples. Their physical stature I have already commented upon at great length. Their nobility and political power has also been evidenced. There is no reason to suppose that these Nephilim were not *a combination of both*, except a presupposition which says that the ancient interpretation of angelic-human offspring is impossible.

Matthew 22:30 is often used as supporting the main argument against this interpretation, “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven.” Supposedly this verse teaches that angels are asexual beings, incapable of copulation at any level. James M. Boice astutely observes that this verse does not say this, but only that angels “do not marry.”¹⁷ We know from Scripture that angels can assume human form, are sometimes

¹³ Though this is Augustine’s final conclusion he does make two interesting observations. First, he admits that these giants were *physically large* people. “It pleased the Creator to produce them, that it might thus be demonstrated that neither beauty, nor yet *size and strength*, are of much moment to the wise man.” Second, Augustine refuses to say with absolute certainty that copulation could not occur between two such different kinds of beings. “I dare not determine whether there be some spirits embodied in an aerial substance, and who are capable of lust and of mingling sensibly with women.” (Augustine, *City of God*, Book 15, Ch. 23-24).

¹⁴ Israel was prohibited from marrying outsiders (Ezra 10:2 etc.). This has its seeds when Ishmael and Esau each take foreign wives rather than those belonging to the house of Abraham. The idea is that this covenantal arrangement extends back earlier.

¹⁵ It is probable that 1 Pet 3:19-20; 2 Pet 2:4-5; and Jude 6 refer to this point in time. Notice the latter two mention a grievous sin that caused angels to sin and be punished by God.

¹⁶ Meredith Kline, “Divine Kingship and Gen 6:1-4” in *WTJ 24:2* (May ’62), p. 187ff. Kline’s view follows older Jewish sources like Symmachus, Aquila and the Targums.

¹⁷ Boice, p. 309. “This is not the equivalent of saying that the angels are sexless or that they could not have had sexual relations with women if they had chosen to do so.” Among the Reformed, Boice and Henry M. Morris (*The Genesis Record*) take our position. In the early church Justin Martyr (“Second Apology” ch. 5, 7 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p. 190), Irenaeus (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, Demonstration 18), Tertullian (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 3, p. 470), Athenagoras (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 2, p. 142), Origen (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 4, p. 466, 567), Clement of

called “men,” and can even be touched (the human men of Sodom wished to have relations with them. Is this Sodomy a harkening back but intensification of the pre-diluvian sin of Gen 6:4?). We also never hear of any “female” angels in Scripture which strongly suggests that there aren’t any. Perhaps this is why they do not marry!¹⁸

I often wish that I could accept the less supernatural interpretations of this text without having to add this older view as well. It is especially interesting that Genesis makes it a point to say that the Nephilim were on the earth both prior to and after the flood (Gen 6:4). If to be a Nephilim after the flood meant that you were necessarily huge in size, would not those Nephilim prior to the flood have to be as well? If so, how does sexual union between “Christians” and “non-Christians” result in gigantism? I cannot get past this unimpeachable fact.

How the Nephilim “survived” the flood is not known, but it is interesting that Ham is said to be the father of all these giants (was there something in his or his wife’s blood?). What we do know is that none of the giants are ever spoken of as “good” by the Scripture. They are always the enemies of God’s people. Part of the conquest of the Promised Land involved the total eradication of the inhabitants of that land, and we have already seen a lot about what those people were like. Never in history prior to or afterward are any people (including the Jews) permitted, let alone commanded, to destroy an entire race of people. Clearly, God let the sin of the Ammorites and these others extend for a while (Gen 15:16), but soon the time came for the true ‘Sons of God’ to inherit the land.

In the OT, the tiny grasshopper was allowed to become a plague of God’s wrath upon the giants taking up residence in Canaan. Today, we have our inheritance in Christ who is the *Gibbor* of *Gibborim* (Mightiest of the mighty; Isa 9:6). Tomorrow, Christ will extend out inheritance to encompass the archetypal Promised Land: the whole earth. The lesson of the giants is simple. Only God’s people may be called truly “giant” in the eyes of God, by his grace alone. Whatever the past contained, it belongs now to the realm of mystery and myth.¹⁹ Today we look forward to the power of God that overcame the most humans and/or angels could bring against his power. He has overcome and given us the victory.

Alexandria (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 2, p. 274), Eusebius (*Preparation* 5.4-5), and others take it. An interesting article by Robert Bradshaw on the history of this interpretation can be found at: <http://www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/Chapter5.htm#17>

¹⁸ Two points arise from this observation. First, part of the *imago dei* in Genesis is that God made them male and *female* (Gen 1:27). If there are no female counterpart angels, it is a reason to assume that as a species the angels are not made in the image of God. This of course does not exhaust the meaning of *imago dei*, but it does suggest that together the human race exemplifies Deity. Second, this would explain why there is no marriage among angels. That is, homosexuality is always wrong! (See Gen 19 and the story of Lot. Now include in your reading the potential “gigantism” heritage that underlies the ancestral heritage of those cities).

¹⁹ By myth I refer not to the Scripture which is completely accurate but to the universal acknowledgement of giants in mythology, including the Titans of Greek mythology, Marduk in Babylon, Ishtar in Mesopotamia, Cyclops’ in Roman myth and many others. It is strange that so many ancient myths from cultures completely unrelated would have stories of such creatures. To me it is like the universal acknowledgement of the flood. Perhaps they are all based upon some very ancient giants whose exploits made men deify them? Also, archeology has also uncovered evidence of giants on every continent including the town of Warren, MN where by wife is from as reported by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 23, 1883. See the interesting book “Genesis 6 Giants” by Stephen Quayle for more information.