

This is the last of our “Stranger Things” series. I hope you’ve enjoyed it. This morning we look at a story that reads like it comes out of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* more than it does the Word of God.

We find this story, or at least a key part of it, Genesis 6. This passage sets up the story of Noah and the ark, explaining why God saw the need to destroy the world with a flood. The second part of this story we’re familiar with. The wickedness of humanity becomes so great, spreads so far and so wide, that the only way to save humanity was to destroy all of humanity except for one family.

But the first part of this passage offers another reason why God destroys the world, and it talks about the sons of God having children with the daughters of men and a strange race known as the Nephilim who were the mighty heroes of old. When we begin to pull on this thread, we’ll find that it runs throughout the entire Bible, and it leads to some rather surprising conclusions.

(Slide 1) *1 When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”*

(Slide 2) *4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.*

5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

(Slide 3) *6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

(Advance Slide) There’s some strange things going on in this passage. God wants to destroy humanity because they have become irredeemably wicked. And a part of this wickedness stems from the “sons of God” marrying and having children with the “daughters of men.” They seem to be unusual children. They’re called *Nephilim* and we’re told they were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Here’s where things get weird. *Nephilim* is the Hebrew word for *giants*. This passage is talking about giants. Now if you’ve read the Old Testament at all, this isn’t a complete shocker. Some of the enemies Israel had to deal with entering the Promised Land were giants. Remember the 12 spies sent in to scope out the land. Only Caleb and Joshua brought back a positive report. Here’s what the other 10 spies reported in Numbers 13:31-33:

(Slide 1) *31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report*

about the land they had explored. (Slide 2) They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

These spies didn't think they could conquer the Promised Land because there were Nephilim (giants) living there. Compared to them, we look like grasshoppers and they could squash us just as easily. We also learn here the Nephilim are known by another name— *the descendants of Anak*, or the sons of Anak, or literally in the Hebrew, *Anakim*.

(Advance Slide) When you learn this story of the 12 spies in church, it's usually about faith winning out over fear. The ten spies didn't have enough faith in God to help Israel win over the giants whom they feared. They put more stock in their fear of the giants rather than their faith in God. Caleb and Joshua, however, believe God could give them victory. Be like Caleb and Joshua rather than the ten other spies.

Devoted to Destruction

That's all true and good application as far as it goes, but there's more going on here. The incident with the 12 spies happens about 2 years into Israel's journey in the wilderness. Their unbelief in this instance is one of the primary reasons God made them detour around the wilderness for 38 more years – waiting for a whole generation to die off.

Have you ever wondered what happened to all the giants when Israel shows back up at the Promised Land nearly 4 decades later? The giants are still there. They still populate the land.

A key reason why God gave the land of Canaan to Israel was to rid the earth of the people who lived there. The local population was to be completely wiped out. Entire cities were to be "*devoted to destruction.*" Nobody left alive. No looting. No spoils of war collected. Everything destroyed. Joshua 10:40 says,

40 So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded.

(Advance Slide) This is one of those Old Testament details that deeply disturbs modern readers, and makes many modern believers very uncomfortable trying to defend it. This is where those accusations that the God of the Old Testament is a cruel and heartless tyrant. How could any good and loving God tell His people to wipe out entire populations, including women and children?

The reason God sent Israel in there was to wipe them out because they were *Nephilim*. They were *Anakim* or *Anakites*. They were descendants of those described in Genesis 6. This was a deliberate attempt at genocide, the wiping out of entire genetic line of people. God was removing the *Anakim* or *Nephilim* from the earth. Let me read Joshua 11:21-22, but wherever it

says *Anakim*, I'll replace it with the word giants, so you get feel for what I mean.

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

So, all of these giant descendants of the *Nephilim* are wiped out. Almost. It mentions three cities where some remained— Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. I don't know if those names ring a bell, but they all have something in common. They all three of the main cities of Israel's perennial enemy, the Philistines. The Philistines would be a thorn in Israel's side for generations.

Goliath and His Brothers

Israel had to keep dealing with these giants, these *Nephilim* until the time of David. Of course, we all remember the story of David and Goliath. Goliath was a Philistine from the city of Gath. He was an *Anakim*, a descendant of the *Nephilim*, one of those who wasn't wiped out by Joshua's conquest.

What we don't remember, though, is that Goliath wasn't the only one. The end of 2 Samuel 21 tells of how David's warriors hunted down and killed 4 other giants who wielded huge, heavy weapons, and one of them had six fingers and six toes. Each of them, like Goliath, is said to be a descendant of Rapha. They were his brothers. This is the last time that giants were a problem in Scripture. Their genetic line now seems to be finally and fully wiped out.

Why the Nephilim Must Be Destroyed

So, the *Nephilim* or the *Anakim* are the giant descendants of sons of god and daughters of men, and God was intent on wiping them out. Why? Why is God so intent on wiping them out? Why is Yahweh determined to destroy each and every last remaining *Nephilim*? So much so that he sends a flood to destroy the earth. So much so, that he sends an entire nation on a mission with a license to kill each and every one of them. So much so, that King David's warriors hunt them down like medieval knights looking for that last dragon?

Go back to Genesis 6:4, "*the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them.*" Who are these "*sons of God*" having children with the "*daughters of humans*?"

Let's take a look at some other passages of Scripture. First we go to the book of Job.

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. - Job 1:6

Your translation may say angels. It literally says, "sons of god." In the same way, in 2:1 we read,

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.

The angels are called sons of god here, not in the same way that Jesus is the Son of God. He was of the same essence of God. These angels are called sons of god in the sense that they are spiritual beings as god is and they are his creation. In Job 38, God asks Job *“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”* And he goes through different aspects of creation asking Job where he was? Down in vs. 7 says, *“when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”*

This is at creation. The sons of god are shouting for joy at God’s creative work. Who are they? They can’t be people, because there are no people yet. These are the angels shouting for joy.

In Dt. 32:8-9 this is what we read:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders[a] of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.[b] But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

Each nation was given a particular region, and the nations were assigned to the sons of god. These sons of god had delegated authority over these nations, but God took Israel for himself. God would have a special relationship with Israel, but the other nations were delegated to the sons of god.

(Advance Slide) I believe the most obvious interpretation here is that these sons of god were angels. A part of the angelic rebellion which led to God casting one third of the angels out of heaven was that some of these angels came to earth, manifested themselves in human form and had relations women who were willing to step far outside of the bounds God had set for them. This led to this genetic line of *Nephilim* or *Anakim* which even hundreds of years later would still give us Goliath who was nearly 10 foot tall. This is why their offspring are giants capable of feats of superhuman strength. They are the evil spawn of this illicit union between rebellious angels and human women.

The ancient Jewish understanding of this passage is that the sons of God in this passage were rebellious angels. Ancient Jewish texts even give them names say there was about 200 of them. I’m not sure how much stock to put into that, but it does tell us how they understood these verses. This was also the understanding of the early church until the time of Augustine who took issue with this interpretation. He was hugely influential, and the Christian interpretation of this passage moved in another direction.

In this view, the *“sons of god”* were the righteous descendants of Seth, he was the third son of Adam and Eve and brother to Cain and Abel. These righteous men then marry the unrighteous daughters of wicked men which allows wickedness to spread across the earth.

The problem with this interpretation is that it doesn’t explain the origin of the *Nephilim*. Why would normal human men who marry normal human women have giant offspring? That simply doesn’t make sense. It also ignores how the Bible uses this phrase *“sons of God”* in other places.

In recent decades, biblical scholarship has been moving back toward the original understanding of this passage. In fairness, though, there are godly, biblical scholars that still hold to the idea that the sons of God are not angels, but men. I respect their and their scholarship, but I don't think it is compelling.

The most straightforward reading is that the *Nephilim* are the evil spawn of unholy unions between fallen angels and wicked women.

If so, why? What is Satan's plan of attack in doing this? If you go back to God's promise in Genesis 3 that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, Satan's motives become clear. The seed or offspring of the woman won't be able to crush him, if Satan is able to completely corrupt the human genepool? His was trying to destroy the Messianic bloodline.

This is why the flood happened, and why these four verses about the Nephilim were included in explanation for the flood. By flooding the earth and saving only one family, God was able to preserve a purely human genetic line, and rid the earth of this corrupted genepool.

How Did the Nephilim Survive the Flood?

This brings up a crucial question, though. If the flood, wiped out all of the Nephilim, then how is it that we still find the Nephilim on the earth after the flood? Remember, Genesis 6:4 said, "*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days (before the flood), and also afterward.*" How is this possible? Two possible explanations are given:

- The flood didn't destroy everyone and everything. It was only a regional flood, and some survived outside of the affected area. I don't find this explanation very satisfying. It goes against the fairly clear biblical statements of a worldwide flood.
- Rebellious angels continued to mate with human women after the flood. Genesis 6:4 even reads as if this is the case. "*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them.*"

Genesis 6:1-4 was Satan's attempt to destroy the promised Messianic bloodline. This explains why God acted so swiftly and severely to remove this evil from the face of the planet.

It explains why God sent Israel into the Promised Land with a specific mission to wipe out any descendants of these perverted unions. They had the potential to destroy the human race and corrupt the messianic line. They were the game-breaking bug in the code and they had to be deleted.

If we continue to pull on this thread, it also explains a couple of mysterious passages in the New Testament. Both Jude and Peter have strange references to God chaining angels in the abyss. **2 Peter 2:4 says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment."** This isn't like of

fire hell. In the Greek, the word used here is *Tartarus*, this is the bad part of the Abyss, the bad part of *Hades* or *Sheol*. This is where the wicked dead await judgement. So, these angels have been preemptively sent to the abyss to await their final judgment.

Similarly, in Jude 6, it says, *"And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day."*

So you have these angels who rebelled against God and stepped outside the authority God delegated to them. As a result, God has confined ahead of time until final judgment.

This isn't all rebellious angels. There are certainly demons still at work in Scripture after this. Demons are still at work in the world today. We know from the book of Revelation, that Satan and the rest of his demons will be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire at the end. But these rebellious angels, who abandoned their proper dwelling to have illicit unions with human women, are chained in the abyss until judgment. God said, "You will not be doing that anymore."

This also explains why demons don't seem to do the same thing today. They don't want to be immediately sent to hades. Remember the demons in Luke 8 who were cast out of the man living among the tombs on the other side of the Sea of Galilee? Luke 8:31 says, "They begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss," and they begged Jesus to let them go into a herd of pigs which they immediately drove down a steep embankment drowned in the sea. **Victory Celebration**

It also explains one other mysterious reference in 1 Peter 3:18-20.

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

So, after being crucified, Jesus goes and proclaims a message to the spirits in prison. Have you ever read this verse and wondered who these spirits were and what Jesus said to them?

The *spirits in prison* would be the fallen angels chained in hades after their sinful unions with human women. Picture this is a victory dance, a touchdown celebration. Jesus was showing them that their plan did not work. The Messiah still came just as promised, and even his death on a cross did not defeat him. All their efforts were in vain.

This is why in just two verses, in 1 Peter 3:22 it gives a triumphant proclamation that Jesus has *"gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."* That's the same terminology Paul uses to describe all the different levels and kinds of spiritual beings. After Jesus went and proclaimed victory to the spirits in

prison, His triumph over them was complete.

Baptism and Victory

You may have noticed that I skipped over one verse in 1 Peter 3. It is verse 21 which talks about Baptism. Peter compares the ark that saved Noah through the flood to Christian baptism.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

I bet you never thought of your baptism in light of these events. Who would connect baptism to angels and demons, giants, spiritual warfare and a conspiracy to corrupt the messianic bloodline?

Peter sees baptism as something that joins you to the triumphant victory that Jesus won over these spiritual forces of darkness that conspired to keep him from ever coming as the Messiah. Baptism is more than just a symbol. Baptism is more than just a ritual, a religious rite. It is more than just an act of obedience.

Though it is something we act out in the natural world, baptism is ultimately a spiritual act that achieve real ends in the spiritual realm. It accomplishes something very real, very deep, and very powerful. Baptism connects us to this great, triumphant victory by which Jesus defeated all these spiritual forces of darkness. This is how salvation secures your spot at the right hand of Jesus over all other authorities and powers. This is why Satan has zero power over you unless you give it to him.