

Nephilim in the Bible: Who are they, and what is their significance?

Learn all about the mysterious Nephilim and their possible role in the Genesis flood.

Divine Love Conquering Earthly Love by Giovanni Baglione

Who are the Nephilim? In Hebrew “Nephilim” literally means “fallen ones” and Genesis 6:1–4 tells us they were the offspring of members of the heavenly host and human women that went on to become legendary warriors. Their exploits, however, are not mentioned and the author of Genesis seems to imply that they are responsible for the great wickedness that spread across the earth, forcing God to send the Great Flood.

The mysterious Nephilim are only mentioned by name in the Hebrew Bible one other time, in Numbers 13:33, when the Israelite scouts make fearful claims that Nephilim and their gigantic offspring, the Anakim, inhabit the land of Canaan.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the gigantic ancestors of these same Anakim are called Rephaim and we learn that Og, King of Bashan, was the last of their remnant. (Deut. 3:11) The book also claims that the Moabites and Ammonites drove out races of giants from their lands before they took possession of them (Deut. 2:10-11, 20-21).

It is not clear when the Nephilim of Genesis 6 began to be equated with the gigantic Rephaim mentioned in Deuteronomy, however, by the Intertestamental Period, the Nephilim had taken on their gigantic and monstrous qualities, fully acquiring their negative reputation.

In the literature written during that time, such as the Book of Enoch, Jubilees, and others found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nephilim are the giant offspring of human women and a group of fallen angels known as the Watchers. The Book of Enoch, an apocryphal collection of texts that reimagines the account of Genesis 5–6, states that the Watchers shared secret knowledge with their Nephilim children that led to the corruption of the world. The giants ravaged the earth, filling it with destruction and evil, depleting the world’s food supply, and terrifying humankind. And these actions triggered the flood as punishment for all their terrible deeds.

When Enoch confronts the Watchers about their impending doom, the Watchers implore Enoch to intercede on their behalf. Enoch agrees—but to no avail. The Watchers' petition is not granted, and they and their Nephilim sons are not able to escape their punishment—the flood.

And if you've ever seen the movie production of *Noah* starring Russell Crowe, you'll have a contemporary visual of how these giants might appear—at least according to Hollywood scriptwriters. The fallen angels in the movie *Noah* are loosely based on the Watchers mentioned in the Book of Enoch.

The Hollywood blockbuster *Noah* has generated its fair share of controversy, with some saying the movie took too many liberties with the Biblical text. Certainly, the movie is not a straightforward retelling of the flood story in Genesis 6, but the flood story has been reimagined in both Christian and Jewish texts, such as the apocryphal Book of Enoch, for millennia.

Learn everything about Noah and the Flood

The flood story is one of the best-known Biblical narratives. The Book of Genesis describes God's call to Noah to build an ark for his family and to preserve two of every animal. In time, the earth would be flooded and the world would begin anew. Questions surrounding the historicity of the Biblical narrative, however, have plagued historians and archaeologists for centuries. What do textual and archaeological sources actually tell us about Noah and the flood story? In the BAS Library Special Collection **Noah and the Genesis Flood**, BAS editors have hand-selected articles from *Biblical Archaeology Review* and *Bible Review* that examine the Genesis flood, its interpretations, and what the similar Babylonian flood stories can teach us.

Indeed, this Special Collection is filled with parable and high drama, making it a must-read for any student of the Bible, not just those particularly interested in the Book of Genesis, Noah, and the flood.

Whatever intrigues you about the varying stories of the Flood, you'll find it in this in-depth collection, **Noah and the Genesis Flood**.

It might surprise you to learn how much there is to know about Noah and his ark, yet this collection includes all of these revealing studies:

- **What the Babylonian Flood Stories Can and Cannot Teach Us About the Genesis Flood**

By Tikva Frymer-Kensky

- **Was Noah's Ark a Sewn Boat?**
By Ralph K. Pedersen
- **The Search for Noah's Flood**
By Ronald S. Hendel
- **Biblical Views: Noah, Enoch and the Flood: The Bible Meets Hollywood**
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As a member of the Biblical Archaeology Society Library, you are able to enjoy this remarkable collection of scholarly articles now. Remember, this collection, **Noah and the Genesis Flood**, is just a tiny sample of what you have access to in the BAS Library with your All-Access pass.

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