

THE SONS OF GOD AND THE NEPHILIM – GEN. 6:1-4

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Genesis 6:1-4 is a notorious *crux interpretum* that has long intrigued Bible readers because of its mysteriousness. Its brevity and unusual content and our distance from the original setting and culture open the door for speculation, which makes a range of interpretations possible. Traditionally, there are three or four main takes on the text, but rather than discuss each of them, I simply offer and briefly defend the understanding that I consider most likely, being aware that no interpretation is free from difficulties.

The text states: ¹ Now it came about, when mankind began to be numerous on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them, ² that the sons of God saw the daughters of man, that they were attractive, and they took to themselves wives from any that they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not always be a shield for man, for he is flesh; his days shall be 120 years." ⁴ 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. They were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

I. Who are the "sons of God"?

The first major question facing the interpreter is the identity of the "sons of God" who took as wives the daughters of man. In accord with "the oldest view and that of most modern commentators,"¹ I think they were rebellious or fallen heavenly beings, what we know today as demons. I say that for the following reasons.

A. The phrase "sons of God"

The precise Hebrew phrase "sons of God" (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, *benê-hā'ēlōhîm*) that appears in Gen. 6:2 and 6:4 occurs only three other times in the Old Testament. It is used in Job 1:6 and 2:1 and, sans the article, in Job 38:7, all of which refer to supernatural or angelic beings. The equivalent phrase in Aramaic, in singular form (son), occurs one time in Dan. 3:25 (בַּרְאֲאֵלָהִין, *bar-'ēlāhîn*), where it also refers to an angelic being, as is made clear in Dan. 3:28.

The phrase appears four times with divine names other than אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōhîm*): אֱלִים (*'ēlîm*) in Ps. 29:1 and 89:6 [MT 89:7], עֲלִיֹן (*'elyôn*) in Ps. 82:6, and אֱל־הָי (*'ēl-hāy*) in Hos. 1:10 [MT 2:1]. The references in Ps. 29:1 and 89:6 are clearly to heavenly or angelic beings. In Ps. 82:6 the phrase stands in apposition to אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōhîm*), which there seems to refer to human rulers or judges, either as divine representatives or as wielders of divinely granted authority.² And in the

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 139.

² אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōhîm*) often refers to God (e.g., Gen. 1:1), but it can refer to angelic beings, as is clear from Ps. 8:5 and the inspired comment on that verse in Heb. 2:7. The word also can refer to human rulers or judges, which is how it is often translated in Ex. 21:6 and 22:8. The statement in Ps. 82:1 that "in the midst of *'ēlōhîm* he judges" indicates that God is judging in an assembly of heavenly beings. The judgment he issues in that exalted setting is given in vv. 6-7:

prophecy of Hos. 1:10, the phrase refers to the people of Israel. So, while the expression "sons of God" in Gen. 6:2,4 favors a reference to angelic beings, that being the more common usage, it does not eliminate a reference to human actors.³

B. The contrast between "sons of God" and "daughters of man"

As the human population was becoming large, the "sons of God" saw that the "daughters of man" were attractive.⁴ The phrase "daughters of man" בְּנוֹת הָאָדָמָה (*benôt hā'ādām*) in Gen. 6:2,4 occurs nowhere else in Scripture. It clearly refers to the female human beings who were born as part of mankind's proliferation noted in v. 1. The fact they are specified to be humans, "daughters of man," in contrast to those called "sons of God," implies that the sons of God are something other than human. As Ronald Hendel notes, attempts to identify the sons of God with a human group "fail to account for the semantic contrast with 'the daughters of humans.'"⁵ Umberto Cassuto explains:

Several commentators have already noted: (1) That the expression *the sons of God* is used here in contradistinction to *the daughters of men*, and these words – *daughters* and *men* – cannot be understood in this verse in a different sense from that which they have in v. 1, which definitely refers to the human species as a whole; hence 'the sons of God' must be entities existing outside the sphere of humankind.⁶

Gordon Wenham states:

[I]n 6:1-4 the contrast is between "the sons of God" on the one hand and "the daughters of man" on the other. The alternative interpretations presuppose that what Gen 6 really meant was that "the sons of some men" married "the daughters of other men." The present phrase "sons of God" is, to say the least, an obscure

"I said, 'You are gods ('*ēlōhîm*), sons of the Most High ('*elyôn*), all of you; ⁷ nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince."

From Jesus' discussion in John 10:33-36, I conclude that '*ēlōhîm* in Ps. 82:6 refers to human rulers or judges. Jesus in those verses defends himself against the charge of blasphemy for saying he is the "Son of God" by noting that God in Ps. 82:6 called the human beings to whom the word of God came (referring to the judges of Israel or to Israel at the time of the giving of the Law) "gods." His point is that this text establishes conclusively that it is appropriate to refer to the men of Psalm 82 as "gods." And if it is not blasphemous to refer to the men of Psalm 82 as "gods" because they had a certain relationship with God, then how can they claim it is blasphemous for him to refer to himself as the Son of God when he has a far more intimate relationship with the Father, having been set apart by him and sent into the world? Since the '*ēlōhîm* of Ps. 82:6 are human beings, the appositional phrase בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן (*bené 'elyôn*) likewise refers to human beings.

³ Regarding Deut. 32:8, the NET note states:

For the MT בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (*beney yisra'el*, "sons of Israel") a Qumran fragment has "sons of God," while the LXX reads ἀγγελῶν θεοῦ (*angelōn theou*, "angels of God"), presupposing בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים (*beney 'el*) or בְּנֵי אֱלִים (*beney 'elim*). "Sons of God" is undoubtedly the original reading; the MT and LXX have each interpreted it differently. MT assumes that the expression "sons of God" refers to Israel (cf. Hos. 1:10), while LXX has assumed that the phrase refers to the angelic heavenly assembly (Pss 29:1; 89:6; cf. as well Ps 82).

⁴ In this context, the adjective טוֹב (*good*) carries the sense of fair, beautiful, or attractive.

⁵ Ronald Hendel, *Genesis 1-11*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024), 267.

⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 291-291.

way of expressing such an idea. It is made the more implausible by 6:1 where "man" refers to all mankind. It is natural to assume that in v 2 "daughters of man" has an equally broad reference, not a specific section of the human race.⁷

C. The interpretive history

Mitchell Chase recently reviewed the ancient Jewish and early Christian interpretations of Genesis 6:1–4. He concludes regarding the former:

The ancient understanding about the identity of the "sons of God" is the angel view. Multiple textual witnesses in the intertestamental period and in the first century AD confirm this. However, after the first century AD, there were Jewish writings that leaned away from the "fallen angels" interpretation. Such writings adopted a non-supernatural view of the "sons of God," but the "angel" view did not fade away entirely.⁸

As for the understanding in the early church, Chase states:

The earliest view of the "sons of God" among the church fathers was that these were rebel angels who engaged in sexual sin with human women. This was the prevailing view in the first four centuries of the early church.

From the 4th century AD onward, the "Sethite" view – that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2 were human descendants of Seth – gained traction.

According to Sydney Page, the angel view was held by Justin Martyr (c. 100-c.165), Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Tertullian (c.160-c.225), Lactantius (c.240-c.320), and Ambrose (c.339-c.397). He states, "This view held the field in the East until early in the third century, when it was rejected by Julius Africanus (c.160-c.240), and in the West until much later."⁹

D. The understanding of Peter and Jude

In making their argument against certain false teachers, Peter and Jude took for granted that their audience agreed that some angels had sinned in the past and as a result were being held by God in darkness pending the final judgment (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). According to Jude (v. 7), those angels had abandoned their own dwelling and had done something analogous to Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which had engaged in sexual immorality and gone after different flesh.

Peter and Jude counted on their readers being familiar with the story and accepting it as true, which means it was from a widely known source that was accepted as authoritative or at least reliable. Given that the other examples of divine judgment that they cite in making their

⁷ Wenham (1987), 139.

⁸ See, e.g., Mitchell L. Chase, "[Who Are the Sons of God, Daughters of Man, and Nephilim?](#)" (October 3, 2023).

⁹ Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 47.

case – the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destruction of unbelieving Israelites after the Exodus – are all from the Old Testament, one expects the story of the sinning angels likewise to be from the Old Testament, the best known and most authoritative of sources.

If Gen. 6:1-4 refers to angelic sin, as was the traditional Jewish understanding, that text is compatible with the angelic sin referred to by Peter and Jude. Angels sinned by abandoning their proper sphere for sexual reasons, coming to earth and in some way marrying and procreating with human women. If Gen. 6:1-4 does not refer to angelic sin, one is at a loss to find another Old Testament text to which Peter and Jude could be referring. Even if one could read the fall of Satan out of Isa. 14:12-20 and Ezek. 28:11-19, which is most doubtful,¹⁰ that fall does not fit what Peter and Jude say about the situation. Those texts refer to a single being rather than multiple beings and lack any parallel to a perverse sexual motivation analogous to that at work in the sinning of Sodom and Gomorrah.

That Peter and Jude are referring to Gen. 6:1-4 is further established by the fact they affirm elements of the traditional Jewish understanding of Gen. 6:1-4 that are not found in the text. Specifically, they affirm that the sinning angels of whom they are speaking are being held by God in a dreadful spiritual realm of darkness awaiting the final judgment. That is how the fate of the sinning angels of Gen. 6:1-4 is described in extrabiblical literature of the period, especially in *1 Enoch*, a book with which Jude was unquestionably familiar, as he cites it in vv. 14-15. Thus, Peter and Jude put their inspired imprimatur on those elements of the traditional understanding of Gen. 6:1-4, thereby confirming they were speaking about Gen. 6:1-4.

That does not mean, of course, that Peter and Jude affirm all elements of the traditional understanding of Gen. 6:1-4, every elaboration on the event that found its way into extrabiblical literature like *1 Enoch*. For example, Peter and Jude say nothing about *how* the angels carried out their sin, whether by materializing or possession, and nothing about their offspring being giants or their sin being responsible for the Flood. We have no inspired indication that those claims are true.

The above evidence has convinced the vast majority of modern commentators that Peter and Jude were referring to Gen. 6:1-4 when they spoke of the angels sinning. These include J. N. D. Kelly, Richard Bauckham, Michael Green, Norman Hillyer, Douglas Moo, Steven Kraftchick, Peter Davids, Gene Green, Robert Harvey and Philip Towner, Lewis Donelson, Duane Watson and Terrance Callan, Herbert Bateman, and Thomas Schreiner.¹¹

¹⁰ See, e.g., Duane A. Garrett, *Angels and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 36-42; Page (1995), 37-42; B. J. Oropeza, *99 Answers to Questions About Angels, Demons & Spiritual Warfare* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 80-83; John R. Gilhooly, *40 Questions About Angels, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 103-112.

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1969), 256-258, 331; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 50-53, 248-249; Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 109-110, 178-180; Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 187-188, 242-243; Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 101-103, 240-242; Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 38-39, 125-126; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 48-51, 225-226; Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 66-70, 249-251; Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter & Jude*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 80, 192; Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster

E. Harmony with Jesus' statement about angels and marriage

In Mat. 22:23-28, Mk. 12:18-25, and Lk. 20:27-33 some Sadducees, who denied there will be a future resurrection of the dead, posed a riddle to Jesus about a woman who had seven husbands during her lifetime through a series of Levitical marriages. They asked the Lord whose wife she would be in the resurrection, thinking they had exposed a fatal flaw in the belief in the resurrection. Jesus explained that they were mistaken because there will be no husbands and wives in the resurrection. Those raised from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and thus the marriage bond that was dissolved at death (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39) will not be reinstated. The reason they will neither marry nor be given in marriage is that resurrected people are like angels in the sense they are immortal (1 Cor. 15:53-54), no longer subject to death (Rom. 6:9), and thus the procreation that takes place in marriage to sustain humanity will not be necessary. As David Garland puts it, "Jesus' response to the riddle assumes that since death is no more, marriage is no longer needed to propagate the human species."¹²

The fact that resurrected humans will be immortal like the angels and therefore will not marry because there is no need for them to reproduce does not mean that fallen angels, prior to the resurrection, when humans are still marrying and procreating, could not coopt that institution for their own evil purpose by marrying human women. As spirit beings that are not subject to death, the fallen angels of Gen. 6:1-4 were not seeking to propagate their species by producing other angels through sexual relations with human women. Rather, they were seeking to satisfy their lust for the women, which I believe they did through possessing human males (see next section). Jesus' teaching is not inconsistent with that understanding, as the Spirit confirms in 2 Peter and Jude.

II. How could rebellious angels (demons) marry and procreate with human women?

Angels could only marry and procreate with human women if they materialized as a man, complete with reproductive capability, or took possession of a man to use his body for their sexual purpose. We know that in the Garden Satan took control of the serpent, one of the wild animals God had made (Gen. 3:1), to use for his purpose, and we know that demon possession occurred often in New Testament times, but there are no instances in Scripture in which demons, fallen angels, materialize in any way, let alone as human beings capable of procreating. Faithful angels who are dispatched for God's purpose sometimes become, or at least appear to become men (e.g., Gen. 18:1-2, 19:1-2; Judg. 13:9-11; Mk. 16:5), even capable of eating (Gen. 18:8), but Satan or demons appear only in visions (Zech. 3:1; Mat. 4:8-9; Lk. 4:5-7;¹³ Rev. 9:1-21, 12:3-17, 16:13-14). The only time we are told anything about their appearance is in Revelation 9, 12, and 16, where they are described as nightmarish locusts, a fiendish cavalry, a great red dragon, and frogs.

John Knox Press, 2010), 179-180, 243; Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 180; Herbert W. Bateman IV, *Jude*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 174-182; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, CSC (Nashville: Holman, 2020), 401-404, 539-544.

¹² David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 811.

¹³ It is only in a vision that all the kingdoms of the world can be seen in an instant from a mountain.

Page remarks, "The New Testament portrays demons as longing to possess human bodies, and one could understand what happened in Genesis 6 in terms of spirit possession."¹⁴ This seems more likely than the view that the fallen angels in Gen. 6:1-4 married human women and procreated with them by materializing as human males. The link between the demon and the one being possessed is such that the speech and the action of the possessed person can be ascribed to the demon(s) (e.g., Mat. 8:28-31; Mk. 3:11, 5:12; Lk. 8:31; Acts 19:13-15). Thus, the action of the possessed person in marrying and procreating can be said to be the action of the demon. I agree with William Cook's assessment: "Admittedly, these passages don't provide a definitive answer as to how spiritual beings could have sexual relations with women. But in light of examples we see in the New Testament, it seems best to assume that these evil spirits took possession of the bodies of wicked men and used them for their own sinful purposes."¹⁵

III. What is the meaning of v. 3 and how is it related to the conduct of v. 2?

Part of the problem in understanding v. 3 is that the key verb *יָדֹן* (*yādôn*) occurs only here, and its derivation and meaning are disputed. Many proposals have been made based on alleged cognates, one notable example being E. A. Speiser's appeal to the Akkadian verbal base *dnn*.¹⁶ If he is correct, then v. 3 can be rendered, "My Spirit will not always be a shield for man, for he is flesh; his days shall be 120 years."

Some object that such a translation "does not really make sense in the context of the earlier chapters of Genesis, where God has not shielded the guilty, and human beings have already taken responsibility for their own actions since Genesis 3."¹⁷ But I think it does make sense in light of the increasing wickedness in the world noted in Gen. 6:5 and illustrated in 6:2. The point is that God's patience, his withholding of a global judgment on humanity, will not continue indefinitely because man is "flesh" in the sense of being "corrupt" (HCSB, CSB). Mankind will cross the threshold of God's patience at which point God will in a sense "undo creation" and start over. God in his mercy will give mankind 120 years to repent before he inundates the world.¹⁸ This may be the time to which Peter refers in 1 Pet. 3:20 when he says, "when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."

¹⁴ Page (1995), 49. Their possession of human males was especially outrageous because, being done to satisfy their perverse sexual desire, it was used to marry and procreate with human women, which put demoniacs in human families in the culturally dominant roles of husband and father.

¹⁵ William F. Cook, "[Who Are the Sons of God in Genesis 6?](#)" (January 6, 2020). Others favoring or acknowledging the possibility of the possession view include Franz Delitzsch, *New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. by Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), 225-226; Willem A. VanGemeren, "The Sons Of God In Genesis 6:1-4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43:2 (Spring 1981), 348; R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 125; John MacArthur, *1 Peter*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 213.

¹⁶ E. A. Speiser, "YDWN, Gen 6:3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956): 126-129; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB, 3rd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 44. NET note states: "E. A. Speiser argues that the term is cognate with an Akkadian word meaning 'protect' or 'shield.' In this case, the LORD's Spirit will not always protect humankind, for the race will suddenly be destroyed."

¹⁷ John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 88.

¹⁸ Many believe the 120 years refers to a limitation on the human lifespan, but many people after the time of Gen. 6:3 lived longer than 120 years. This is true of Noah and many of his descendants, as shown in Genesis 11. Even Abraham lived to be 175; Isaac to be 180; and Jacob to be 147.

Since this warning is directed to mankind, some think it proves that the "sons of God" in v. 2 must be human actors. If angelic beings were the culprits of v. 2, then why are the threatening words of v. 3 directed only to mankind? This objection overlooks the significance of the final clause in v. 2: "and they took to themselves wives *from any that they chose*." In a culture in which daughters were given in marriage by their families (e.g., Gen. 24:41, 29:19, 34:8), a decision regarding which the daughters could have some influence (e.g., Gen. 24:8, 57-59), the fact daughters were given to demoniacs *without exception*, that they succeeded in marrying any women that they chose, signifies the corrupt and godless state of the society. Wenham states: "It must 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. The obvious avoidance of any terms suggesting lack of consent makes the girls and their parents culpable."¹⁹

The rebellious angels were indeed dealt with, as was known in the intertestamental period and confirmed by Peter and Jude, but the focus of the narrative is on human sin and its catastrophic effects. Genesis 6:2 is a snapshot of societal decay, the culmination of which was the Flood.

IV. Who are the Nephilim and what is their relationship to the sons of God?

Verse 4 is a parenthetical comment about the Nephilim,²⁰ who in the second sentence of the verse are identified as the mighty men of old, the men of renown. The NET note states, "The parenthetical/explanatory clause uses the word הגִּבּוֹרִים (*haggibborim*) to describe these Nephilim. The word means 'warriors; mighty men; heroes.' The appositional statement further explains that they were 'men of renown.'" As Jaap Doedens explains:

In identifying the גִּבּוֹרִים [mighty men] with the נַפְלִיִּם [Nephilim], the personal pronoun הֵמָּה [they] serves a crucial function. The word הֵמָּה can refer to the offspring implied in the clause וַיִּלְדוּ לָהֶם: "they bore offspring to them, these (הֵמָּה) are the Gibborim" [mighty men]. However, if this is what is meant, the pronoun הֵמָּה would have better been left out: "they bore them to the Gibborim". The syntax of Gen 6:4 makes it more probable that the word הֵמָּה refers to the first word of Gen 6:4: הַנְּפִלִים [the Nephilim]. This would mean that the author of Gen 6:4 uses the qualification Gibborim as an alias for the Nephilim.²¹

The Nephilim were great figures of the past whose exploits still circulated in the culture. It is noted that they were present, already on the scene, in the days when the sons of God

¹⁹ Wenham (1987), 141.

²⁰ Hendel (2024), 271, states: "The etymology of *nəp̄līm* (Nephilim) may be important in understanding their identity, although this too is unclear. The word is a passive adjectival construction from *npl*, 'to fall,' and means 'ones who are fallen.' In Hebrew, the term 'fallen ones' evokes the idea of one who has fallen in battle, for example, 'How have the mighty fallen?' (2 Sam 1:19, 25, 27), and 'the fallen warriors of old' (Ezek 32:27, reading "of old" with the LXX)."

²¹ Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: Analysis and History of Exegesis* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 68. See also, John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 147; Wenham (1987), 143; John Sailhamer, "Genesis" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 115.

procreated with the daughters of man as reported in v. 2 and that they remained for an unspecified time thereafter. John Sailhamer explains:

The antecedent of הֵמָּה (*hēmmâ*, "they") is *hannepilîm* [the Nephilim] (Skinner, 147). The *hannepilîm* were in the land "in those days" and "also afterward," "when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them." The sense of the phrase *wegam 'aḥrê-kēn 'ăšer* ("and also afterward when") appears to be that the *hannepilîm* were not the offspring of the union of the sons of God with the daughters of man, since the *hannepilîm* were in the land "while" and "also after" the time of the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men.²²

The purpose of the verse was to make clear that, contrary to whatever legends the initial audience may have heard about the Nephilim, those ancient heroes had nothing to do with the sin of the angelic beings that was reported in v. 2. They were background to that event, not a product of it. Adam Howell, Benjamin Merkle, and Robert Plummer state:

The expression "afterward" (אַחֲרַיִךְ) usually occurs in the second of two verbal sentences: the first sentence says that event X did or will happen; the second says that subsequent to the event in the first sentence, event Y did or will happen. Here we must note that the expression אַחֲרַיִךְ is modified by a relative sentence that refers specifically to the event in verse 2. Therefore one could assume that "those days" means before the cohabitation of divine and human beings. Verse 4 would then comment that the Nephilim were in the earth before the business of angelic and human beings cohabiting and also afterward and therefore had nothing to do with these unions.

This latter interpretation is strengthened by considerations of discourse grammar. Verse 4 consists of two clauses or sentences, the first verbal, the second verbless. Both are marked by asyndeton (i.e., no conjunction or connector at the beginning of the clause/sentence). In the first, the verb is non-initial, meaning the subject occurs before the verb. This pattern marks a commentary or explanatory digression. The fact that the first sentence is subject initial indicates a new topic. The relative sentence in verse 4 correlates this new topic with the events of verse 2. The verbless clause is a further comment on the Nephilim. They were the heroes from the distant past. This may mean the distant past with reference to the writer, or it may indicate a period long past in reference to the event of 6:2. Therefore the writer would be demythologizing the Nephilim. These heroes of ancient times were there before and after the events of 6:2 and were not necessarily related to them at all.²³

²² Sailhamer (2008), 115.

²³ Adam J. Howell, Benjamin L. Merkle, Robert L. Plummer, *Hebrew for Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 86. See also, Peter Gentry, "[Were the sons of God in Genesis 6 fallen angels? Who were the Nephilim?](#)" (11/18/2019), beginning at 9:44.

The only other mention of the Nephilim in the Hebrew Bible is in Num. 13:33. It states that some of the spies who had been sent to reconnoiter the land promised by God to Israel reported back: "And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who are from the Nephilim; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." In other words, the spies claimed to have seen the Nephilim in that they saw the sons of Anak, giants who allegedly descended from the Nephilim.

This does not mean, of course, that there actually were descendants of the Nephilim after the Flood. That possibility is eliminated by the fact that all airbreathing land creatures except those on the ark perished in the Flood (Gen. 6:11-13, 17, 7:4, 21-23), and there were no Nephilim on the ark, only Noah, his sons, and their wives. The spies, whose report is labeled "evil" (Num. 13:32), described the inhabitants of the land hyperbolically as descendants of the Nephilim as part of their effort to discourage the Israelites. They referred to them as the mighty and renowned warriors of history to heighten the Israelites' fear. Nahum Sarna states:

While it is not certain from [Gen. 6:4] whether or not the Nephilim themselves procreated, it is contrary to the understanding of the biblical narrative that they should have survived the Flood. Hence, the reference in Numbers is not to the supposedly continued existence of Nephilim into Israelite times; rather, it is used simply for oratorical effect, much as "Huns" was used to designate Germans during the two world wars.²⁴

Wenham says the faithless spies described the Sons of Anak "with fantastic hyperbole as Nephilim."²⁵ Timothy Ashley says, "Connecting the *men of great stature* with the *Nephilim* is an exaggeration for rhetorical effect."²⁶ And Kenneth Mathews says, "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."²⁷

²⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*. J.P.S. Commentary (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 46.

²⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 120.

²⁶ Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 243.

²⁷ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 337.