

# How Did the Giants Survive the Flood? A Survey of Jewish and Christian Interpretations

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If the purpose of the flood was to wipe out all flesh upon the earth (Genesis 6–9), how do “giants” (Nephilim, Rephaim, and Anakim) reappear so prominently in the biblical narrative after the flood? This is a difficult question.

Genesis 6:4 introduces the subject:

*“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of mankind, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown”* (NASB).

That phrase “and also afterward” has led to centuries of speculation and debate. Below is an outline of the main theories from both Jewish and Christian interpreters.

## The Second Incursion Theory

The second incursion theory posits that the Nephilim, before the flood, were destroyed; however, after the flood, “sons of God” allegedly repeated the sin of Genesis 6, resulting in the production of new giants in the land. Dr. Michael Heiser argues for this view:

“The only explanation that accounts for the wording of Genesis 6:4 (‘and also afterward’) and the appearance of giant clans after the flood is a second incursion of divine-human copulation.” (The Unseen Realm, 2015, p. 106).

The Book of 1 Enoch may support this view. While it expands on the story of the Watchers’ sin, and while it is not explicit about a second incursion, it does portray ongoing demonic activity after the flood.

This view preserves the flood’s totality while also explaining later giants. Critics will ask why God would permit a second angelic rebellion after such a decisive judgment. It certainly leaves some unanswered questions.

## The Line of Ham’s Wife Theory

This view holds that the Nephilim line survived through one of Noah's daughters-in-law, possibly the wife of Ham.

Midrash Genesis Rabbah 26:7 speculates that the corruption could have passed through Noah's family: "The corruption came into the ark through Ham's wife."

Rashi (1040–1105 CE), the famous medieval Jewish commentator, also suggests that the seed of giants may have been transmitted through the wives of Noah's sons.

Some early church interpreters entertained similar ideas, though it never became a dominant Christian position.

This view maintains a single flood judgment without requiring a repeat angelic sin. Its weakness is that Scripture emphasizes that Noah was "blameless" (Genesis 6:9) and chosen with his family, which seems to suggest purity of line.

## Og the Giant Theory

Some rabbinic traditions propose that Og, king of Bashan (later mentioned in Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 3), personally survived the flood, either by clinging to the ark or being preserved by Noah.

"Og sat on a beam of the ark, and he swore to Noah and his sons that he would be their slave forever. Noah made a hole in the ark and fed him every day." (Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 23)

Strengths: Provides a colorful explanation of why giants reappear, with Og as a direct link.

Weaknesses: This is a midrashic legend, not supported by the biblical text.

## Figurative or Hyperbolic Reading

The word Nephilim may have become a descriptive label for later tribes of unusually tall or mighty men (Anakim, Rephaim), without implying actual continuity from the pre-flood beings. John Walton, an evangelical scholar, says:

"The reference to 'Nephilim' afterward may not mean the same creatures survived, but that the Israelites saw later formidable peoples through the lens of the earlier story." (Genesis, NIV Application Commentary, 2001, p. 320).

Similarly, some Jewish critical scholars argue that the *Anakim* were remembered as “giants” but were not literally such.

This view avoids the claim that the same supernatural rebellion was repeated. The weakness of this view is apparent; it undermines the biblical narrative, which connects Genesis 6 and later accounts of giant clans.

## Mythological Overlay Theory

From a critical academic perspective, the giant traditions reflect shared ancient Near Eastern mythologies of semi-divine heroes (e.g., Mesopotamian Apkallu, Gilgamesh). The biblical author reused these motifs in a polemical manner.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Jewish Scholar) says:

“The biblical Nephilim are Israel’s transformation of Mesopotamian antediluvian sages and heroes.” (Reading the Women of the Bible, 2002, p. 190).

This view aligns with other critical Ancient Near Eastern studies, but again, its weakness is that it treats Genesis 6 essentially as mythological

## Conclusion

The survival of giants after the flood remains a contested point in biblical interpretation. Jewish Tradition often favored legendary survival stories (Ham’s wife, Og). Christian Tradition leaned toward either a supernatural second incursion (Heiser, some evangelicals) or a figurative reading (Walton). Critical Scholarship tends to see giants as mythological reworkings of ANE archetypes (Frymer-Kensky).

## References:

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- Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 23.
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