



Giants, monsters, and human differences: Reinterpreting the Nephilim through folklore, cultural memory, and disability studies

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Abstract

Among the most enigmatic figures in biblical literature, the Nephilim fill an intricate mesh of theology, mythology, folklore, cultural memory, contemporary insights into human differentiation etc. The Nephilim themselves only feature lightly in Genesis 6:1-4 and Numbers 13:32-33. Nevertheless, they remain the subject of generations of discussion over their origins, identity, and symbolic significance. This paper re-appraisals the Nephilim drawing upon an interdisciplinary perspective and integrates biblical studies, apocryphal literature, archaeology, folklore, cultural memory theory and Disability Studies. Referencing the Book of Enoch and Book of Giants, the article studies how traditions of giant-like beings first developed as parts of religious narratives and later became enshrined in some of the world's folklore such as giants, ogres, oni, and trolls. Comparative thinking brings forth recurring themes of power, liminality, fear, transgression, otherness and man's relationship to the unknown. Although archaeological and scientific evidence bears little out the existence of a prehistoric race of giant humanoids, they are still valuable in symbolic and cultural terms. Specific focus is on giant and monster traditions for special education children, and the way in which these narratives could be utilized in inclusion education, bibliotherapy, narrative therapy and discussions of stigma, diversity, disability identity and social belonging. The paper contends that giants and monsters are not so much historical entities, but also social symbols that culture uses as ways to make sense of what is normal/other/least protected/inclusive. An alternative to the Nephilim perspective would reveal that the stories of ancient peoples maintain a central role in shaping more contemporary paradigms of human diversity and social acceptance.

Keywords: Cultural memory, disability studies, folklore, human difference, Nephilim

Introduction

Nephilim - and most of us know this - the name itself has puzzled people for centuries. They are often referred to as giants of antiquity, but they possess a nuanced and controversial status in biblical speculation, theology, archaeology, folklore and comparative myth. As they are so obscurely identified, all sorts of theological discussion, mythological speculation, and popular interest have derived from their enigmatic appearances in various cultures. While they are explicitly referred to in the Old Testament verses that describe the creatures (Genesis 6:1-4 and Numbers 13:32-33), a debate between secular and Biblical theologians regarding who they are and where they came from has persisted for centuries. The word *Nephilim* as described in Genesis 6:4 has been described when the "sons of God" were gathered together with the "daughters of men," and they issued great-looking, famous individuals before the Great Flood (approximately 2348 BC; Ussher, 1658/2003) ^[48]. Also, in Numbers 13:32-33, Israelite spies mentioned meeting descendants linked to the Anakim, whose incredible stature generated fear and uncertainty as did the term *Nephilim*. Even though Hebrewized as "giants" in the 1611 AD King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, this version represents a long-standing interpretive tradition

rather than a universal linguistic meaning. Both secular and Bible scholars today still argue over whether the original word really describes physically gigantic beings, powerful warriors, mythical heroes, or symbols of infraction and social disorder (Walton *et al.*, 2000; Heiser, 2015) ^[23, 49].

As a result, the vagueness of the Nephilim has made them perennial in religious commentary and the visual imagination. When they are not in biblical story, they have been associated with divine-human or demigod boundary crossing, moral corruption, fear and divine judgment. These topics were fleshed out to a much greater extent in later Second Temple Jewish literature (Simkovich, 2018) ^[45]. Prominent accounts are included in the Book of Enoch (Charles 1917 ^[9]; Schodde 1882; see figure 1), the Book of Giants (Henning 1943; Lumpkin 2014 ^[25, 32]; see figure 2). These two texts depict the Nephilim as the children of fallen angelic beings and human women. According to them, they were the agents of cosmic disorder. The term Nephilim evolved into more than just a short biblical mention. They became potent theological and mythological symbols. Historical communities drew on these symbols to interpret issues around morality, authority, and the relationship of humankind to the divine (Collins, 2024; Reed, 2023) ^[10, 40].

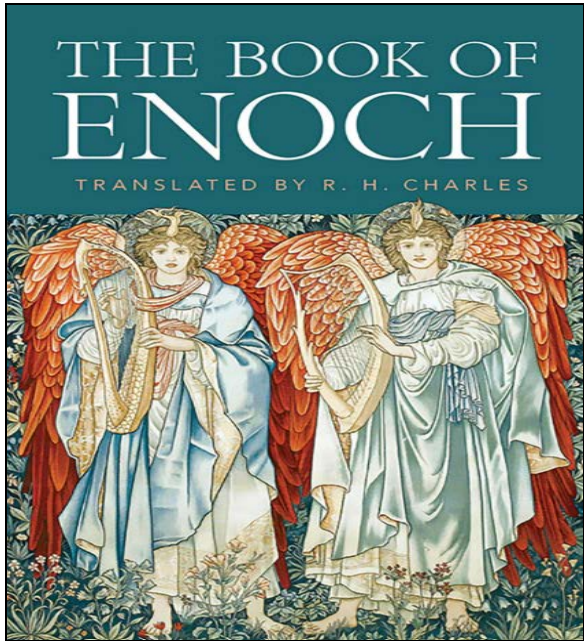


Fig 1: *The Book of Enoch* (Charles, 1917)

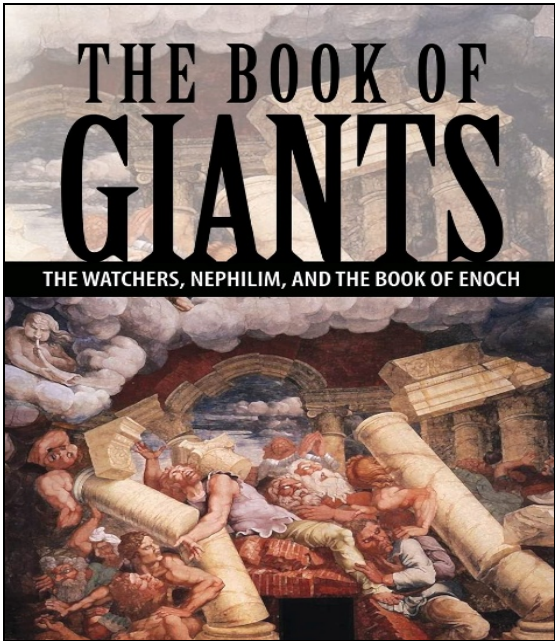


Fig 2: *The Book of Giants* (Lumpkin, 2014)

Not limited to biblical literature, the traditions of gigantic beings run throughout history. They also abound in world mythology and folklore as well. Parallel creatures (refer to Figure 3) are the Mesopotamian monstrous guardians (Kitz, 2025) [27], Indonesian and Malaysian rakshasa (Rodrigues, 2018), Japanese Oni (ogres; Reider, 2010) [41, 42], European fairy-tale giants (Bottigheimer, 1986) [8], and Scandinavian trolls (Lindow, 2014) [31]. Though these creatures derive from a variety of cultural and religious traditions, they often embody astronomical influence, liminality, chaos, moral peril, and the danger to the established orders of things and

the limitations of civilization. It has been claimed, and often persistently argued, by anthropologists and folklorists, that the repeated occurrence of such phenomena is indicative of longer-standing apprehensions about nature’s threats, war, invasion, social instability and encounters with other and different peoples (Dundes, 1997; Bennett, 2022) [6, 14]. Collective memory and oral tradition (Eriksen, 2014) [15] preserve and reshape these concerns. Their repeated appearances across culture indicate that giant traditions perform crucial psychological, theological, and cultural works that go beyond questions of historical being.

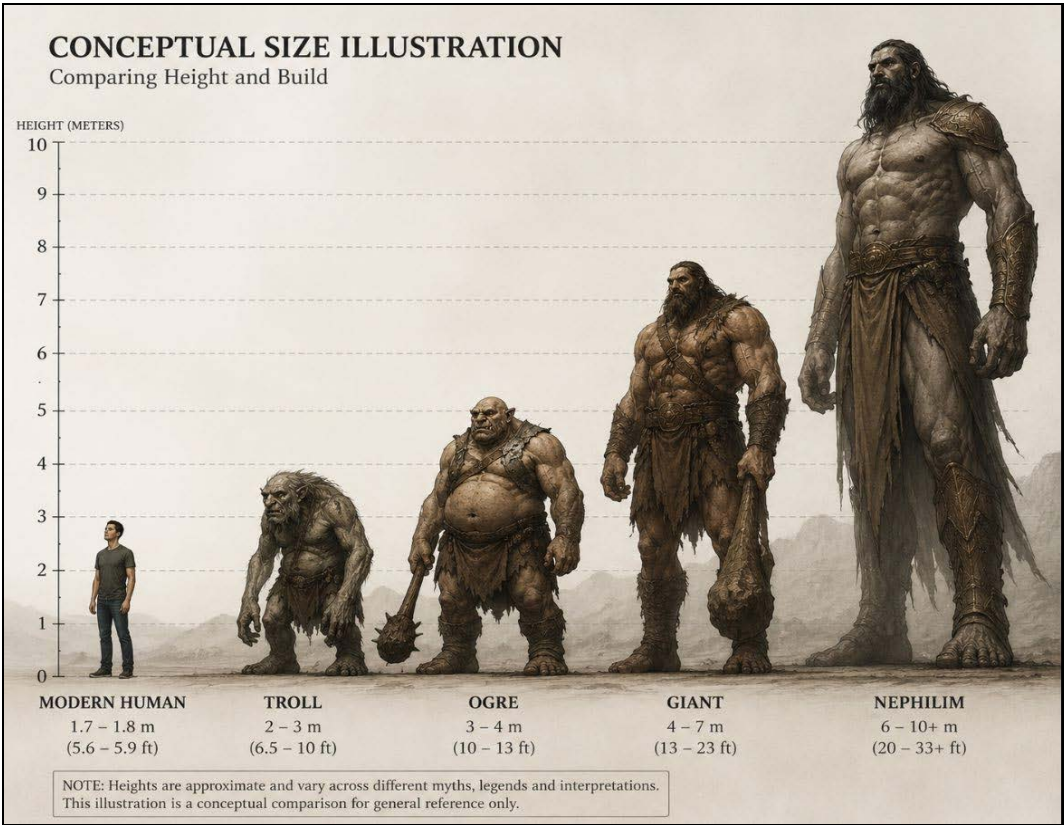


Fig 3: Comparing Height and Build

Taking such factors into account, the author of this paper provides a perspective on the Nephilim through an interdisciplinary lens by connecting biblical theology, apocryphal literature, archaeology, folklore, and studies of cultural memory as follows: (i) discusses references to the Nephilim in the Old Testament; (ii) discusses the narratives added by the Book of Giants (Henning, 1943; Lumpkin, 2014) ^[25, 32] and such related works; (iii) assesses archaeological and historical interpretations; and (iv) compares biblical giant traditions to similar figures that exist in worlds and cultures across regions. Using this technique, the author argues that the timeless fascination with the Nephilim is really not a matter of historical verification at all. Instead, they are deeply symbolic, theological, and cultural, as ongoing representations of power, transgression, fear, and the unknown. Because the sizes of Nephilim, giants, ogres, and trolls can vary among the biblical, mythological, and folkloric traditions, the chart below (see Table 1) uses common citation or representative heights from literature and not definitive measurements.

Table 1: Comparative Table

Being	Approximate Height	Relative Size
Modern Human	1.7-1.8 m (5.6-5.9 ft)	Baseline
Troll	2-3 m (6.5-10 ft)	Large humanoid
Ogre	3-4 m (10-13 ft)	Very large humanoid
Giant	4-7 m (13-23 ft)	Massive humanoid
Nephilim	6-10+ m (20-33+ ft)	Colossal figure

The Old Testament refers primarily to the Nephilim (Gen 6:1-4) as giant or mighty beings. A widely recognized biblical giant is Goliath, whose height has ranged between approximately 2.0 to 3.0 m, depending on traditions among manuscripts. Ogres, coming mainly from European folklore (Bottigheimer, 1986) ^[8], and fairy tales like Puss in Boots (Perrault, 2022) ^[37]. Trolls are derived largely from Scandinavian folklore (Lindow, 2014) ^[31], and are depicted in different sizes from human-sized to mountain-like. Mythological giants have been found in various traditions such as in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Kovacs, 1989 ^[28]; see Figure 4) and also in the Poetic Edda (Hollander, 1962 ^[26]; see Figure 5).

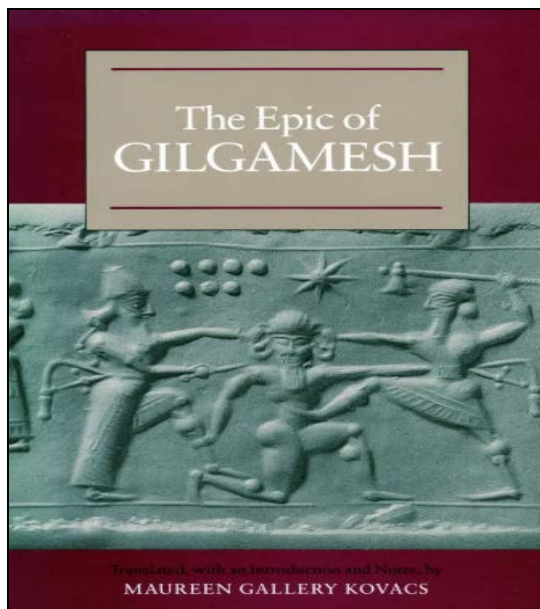


Fig 4: *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Kovacs, 1989)

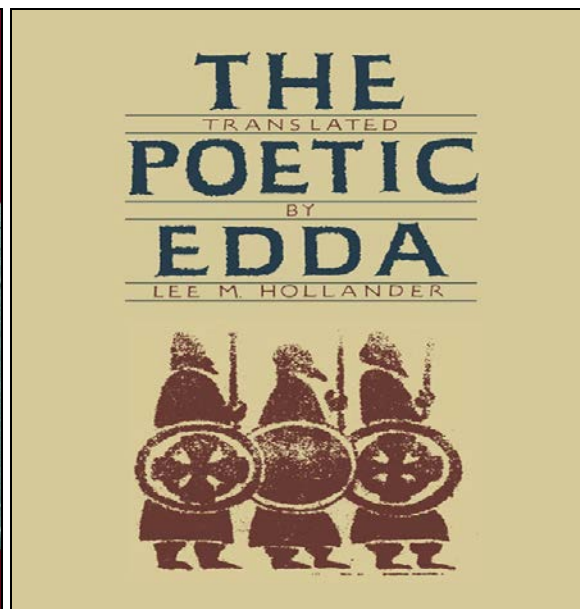
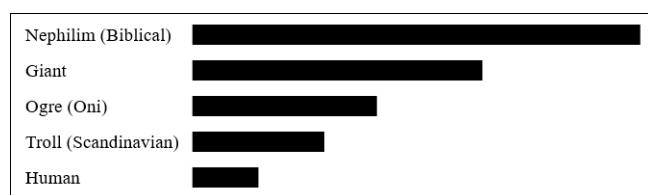


Fig 5: *Poetic Edda* (Hollander, 1962)

Table 2 (below) illustrates how these monstrous creatures compare in simple size. To perform a visual comparison, the human is used as a baseline.

Table 2: Simple Size Illustration

Conspiracy theories and pseudohistorical assertions abound about ancient giants, but there is little verified archaeological or historical record of the prehistoric practice of giant anthropoids (Doak, 2025; Lindow, 2002; Trinkaus, 2005). For one, Lindow (2002)^[12, 30, 47] regards giants and

trolls as mythological entities rather than historical entities. Conversely, Trinkaus (2005) ^[47] observes that despite the body variation natural to humans and infrequent manifestations of pathological gigantism, there is no definitive evidence of a distinct population of non-pathological giants. Similarly, occasional references to these individuals or isolated skeletal remains of giant civilization only suggest pseudohistorical descriptions: none substantiate claims of very high human sizes that the human species had. Rather than being understood through a scientific lens, the Nephilim traditions can be viewed in general as a theological symbol, mythological elaboration, mythical representations of unusually tall individuals, or cultural narratives molded by the socio-cultural worldview of ancient societies (Annus, 2010). In this sense, Doak (2025) ^[1, 12] argues that YouTube-made conspiracy narratives about “giants” are popular reworking of historical

archaeological narratives and rarely provide evidence of their historical existence.

In addition to its theological and folkloric relevance, giant narratives continue to be relevant to contemporary education and therapeutic settings. Children are often exposed to giants, ogres, trolls and other exotic figures in literature, religion, mythology, fantasy and popular culture. These figure types can mediate children's understandings of difference, power, vulnerability, belonging, and social inclusion (Powell & Scanlon, 2015) ^[39]. In disability studies and inclusive education, mythical creatures have also been read as symbolic expressions of societal attitudes to difference and otherness in an attempt to explain those attitudes as symbols of otherness (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Asma, 2009) ^[4, 14]. Moreover, narrative-based educational programs (e.g., bibliotherapy and narrative therapy) illustrate where symbolic characters can assist children in examining issues including fears and emotional conflict and identity formation and the problem of exclusion (White & Epston, 1990; Heath *et al.*, 2005) ^[22, 51] in age-appropriate ways. Furthermore, symbolic characters from bibliotherapy, narrative therapy, and creative arts interventions can be used to help children explore fears, exclusion, resilience, identity, and belonging in relation to a psychologically safe space and in the process with respect to themes of exclusion, identity, and belonging (White & Epston, 1990; Heath *et al.*, 2005) ^[22, 51].

More fundamentally, the chronic interest in the Nephilim speaks to more than just a curiosity in creatures of unaverage size and power. That these stories endure is because they engage with the most basic human questions, as much about ethics and power as they do about difference, vulnerability and social acceptance, about what's called "known" and "unknown." Interpreted as theological symbols, mythological mythic archetypes, cultural totems or educational instruments, the Nephilim and other giant forms of narration continue to serve as powerful structures by which societies make sense of the weird and all the dimensions of human experience.

Research Methodology

This research utilized an interdisciplinary qualitative research design founded on literature review, comparative textual analysis, and interpretive thematic analysis. These approaches are prevalent among studies of theological, historical, folkloric, and cultural texts to investigate meaning, representation, and symbolic purpose in texts in different historical and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) ^[11, 33]. The project did not look for evidence in support of the Nephilim, giants, ogres, or trolls, but sought to know how they have been represented, understood, and remembered in religious tradition, mythology and folklore, educational literature, and disability studies. Relational sources also derived from the Old Testament, but were related to the Nephilim specifically by Genesis 6:1-4 and Numbers 13:32-33 as well as references to Anakim, Rephaim, and Goliath. These materials were analyzed in conjunction with the alleged apocryphal Book of Enoch (Schodde, 1882) and Book of Giants (Henning, 1943) ^[25], which afford more comprehensive stories regarding the history and activities of giant beings in the Second Temple. Historical-critical and comparative theological modes were employed to elicit common themes of divine-human boundary crossing,

transgression, power, fear, judgment, or moral disorder (Collins, 2024; Heiser, 2015) ^[10, 23].

Subsequently, the comparative mythology and folklore framework was used to analyze giant-like figures from various cultural traditions (e.g., Mesopotamian monstrous guardians and Japanese oni, European fairy-tale giants, and Scandinavian trolls). This author therefore conducted a comparative analysis to explore whether symbolic roles, cultural functions, and representations of power, liminality, danger, and social order are the same and different across different cultures (Dundes, 1997; Lindow, 2002; Reider, 2010) ^[14, 30, 41]. By doing this cross-cultural comparative analysis allowed identifying recurring archetypes, while taking into consideration the distinctive historical and religious contexts in which these narratives were constructed.

In addition, literature review from disability studies, inclusive education, bibliotherapy and narrative therapy were incorporated to ensure discussion of contemporary impact. A particular focus was devoted to research about representations of difference, difference of appearance, the status of otherness, of stigma, of shaping identity, and of social-inclusion (Asma, 2009; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Shakespeare, 2017) ^[4, 14, 44]. Further, the author also applied the thematic synthesis by including an examination of literature that discusses the ways in which storytelling about giants, ogres, trolls, and the Nephilim might inform discourse on diversity, disability identity, building empathy, or therapeutic support for special needs children (Heath *et al.*, 2005; White & Epston, 1990) ^[22, 51]. The analysis was informed by cultural memory theory (assessing myths, legends, and religious narratives as repositories of collective meanings that go on shaping contemporary understandings of identity, morality and social relationship) (Assmann, 2012; Bennett, 2022) ^[5, 6].

Integrating theological, folkloric, historical, archaeological, and disability studies approaches, this paper aimed to form a fuller picture of the continuing importance of giant traditions and their engagement in knowledge and practice, across the disciplines of anthropology, theology and science.

Old Testament Accounts of the Nephilim

The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) explicitly mentions the Nephilim only two times, but these references have spawned wide-ranging theological, historical, and exegetical discussion. The earliest and strongest mention would be in the *Book of Genesis* right before the story of the Flood. Genesis 6:1-4 states that the Nephilim came from a time when "the sons of God" took human women as wives and produced children who would be described as "mighty men" and "men of renown." It says: "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward" (Genesis 6:4, New International Version [NIV]). If true, this narrative has raised the question among scholars, were the Nephilim themselves the children of such unions, an ancient race of powerful beings, or legendary warriors of awesome strength and stature, a debate that is not yet settled. The term *Nephilim* in Hebrew could come from the root *npl* ("to fall"), which has resulted in some scholars translating it as "fallen ones" while some keep the original rendering of "giants" for various later interpretive reasons (Walton *et al.*, 2000 ^[49]; e.g. in ancient versions of the Septuagint, e.g. *gigantes*).

The Biblical background to Genesis 6:1-4 indicates that the Nephilim were already being connected with increasing wickedness and disorder in the world, prior to divine judgment via the Flood. The text does not explicitly criticize the Nephilim themselves, but their very appearance is followed by God declaring that human wickedness had become ubiquitous and that divine intervention was justified (Genesis 6:5-7). This short story was later developed in Jewish interpretive traditions, notably in the literatures of the Second Temple (Simkovich, 2018)^[45], notably the *Book of Enoch* (Schodde, 1882) and the *Book of Giants* (Henning, 1943)^[25], which portray the Nephilim as violent hybrid beings born of fallen angels (often known as the Watchers) and sinful women. Nevertheless, the Old Testament itself is relatively conservative, with only limited narrative information and ample interpretive ambiguity (Arnold & Beyer, 2002)^[2].

The second explicit Old Testament reference to the Nephilim in Numbers 13:32-33 refers to the Israelite spies' reconnaissance mission into Canaan. After they had taken some survey of lands, ten of the spies returned, holding up caution to describe the inhabitants as extremely large and fearsome: "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and we looked the same to them" (Numbers 13:33, NIV). The Nephilim here are attached to the Anakim, a people known for their great stature and immense strength. This may have been a rhetorical maneuver, reflecting the spies' fear of themselves and their own incompetence. Most biblical interpreters have cautioned that the passage should not be taken literally: ancient reports of war often employed hyperbolic language to intensify threats or make readers rethink their refusal to battle (Ashley, 1993)^[3].

There are also other groups of giants are mentioned in related Old Testament passages, although Nephilim does not appear. The Anakim are mentioned in Deuteronomy 1:28, as "strong and tall," and Deuteronomy 2:10-11 and 2:20-21 refer to the Emim and the Rephaim, groups remembered as imposing and large populations at the land. The Rephaim also appear on books of the Hebrew Bible as ancient giants; for example, Deuteronomy 3:11 shows king Og of Bashan with an iron bed "huge in size," indicating that he was an extraordinary type of size. Together they formed the basis of subsequent Jewish and Christian understandings of a prehistoric or antediluvian race of giants associated with the Nephilim tradition (Heiser, 2015)^[23].

The story of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 also is a contributor to biblical giant traditions indirectly, though Goliath is not a Nephilim (Donnelly & Morrison, 2014)^[13]. A tall Philistine warrior from Gath named Goliath, his height varies throughout the pages of the Old Philistine Record from about 6 feet 9 inches to over 9 feet tall in various textual traditions. His encounter with the shepherd David also epitomizes his faith (1 Samuel 17:45-50) overcome by his providence. Further references to the giant soldiers of Gath in 2 Samuel 21:15-22 follow suit in the biblical trend where giant enemies oppose God's people as never before (Younger, 2021)^[52].

From an exegetical lens, there are three main theories of the Nephilim that dominate biblical scholarship. The first, also known as the "angelic view," interprets the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 as angelic beings whose unions with human women produced the Nephilim. In relation to God, the one

that comes forward is the "Sethite view" (Siqueira, 2005)^[46], wherein the "sons of God" are considered the righteous descendants of Seth who married the morally corrupt offspring of Cain, rendering the Nephilim fully human but spiritually fallen. Third, we read the Nephilim as ancient warrior-kings or tyrannical rulers who were their "giant" peers but whose "giant" nature did more to signify social dominance and military prowess than to express their physical size (Walton *et al.*, 2000)^[49]. Because the Old Testament account is filled only with insufficient detail, not a single interpretation has produced consensus among scholars.

Overall, the Old Testament presents Nephilim as enigmatic creatures with exceptional reputation, horrifying size, and the moral tensions of early human existence. Genesis 6:1-4 includes them as boundary markers for divine and human boundary-crossing, and a rising evil predating the Great Flood, Numbers 13:32-33 presents them as a terrifying creature associated with the Anakim from Canaan. Other characters such as the Rephaim and Anakim are cited to give further substance to this biblical image of giants. Nevertheless, the brevity and ambiguous content in these passages have made the Nephilim appear to be one of the most enigmatic ones ever discovered in biblical theology as well as ancient Near Eastern studies.

Book of Giants and Apocryphal Interpretation

The apocryphal *Book of Giants* (Henning, 1943)^[25] and his companion *Book of Enoch* (Schodde, 1882) do much more than a handful of references to Old Testament literature alone. These Jewish texts, and the ones left in the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, all depict the Nephilim as the offspring of the Watchers (fallen angels) and of human women. In those writings, the giants are portrayed as violent and corrupt creatures who have such immense power and moral corruption to spread evil even before the flood. The *Book of Giants* has even given names to specific giants like Ohyah and Hahyah, who had prophetic dreams predicting a ruin of the divine and had requested a reading of the patriarch Enoch (Henning, 1943)^[25]. In these texts, the Nephilim are viewed as more than mere, large-human figures: they are also hybridized creatures suspended in a space between the divine and human worlds (Henning, 1943)^[25]. As a theological perspective, three main interpretations have developed of the Nephilim. The first is the 'angelic' or Watcher reading, where they are considered the literal descendants of fallen angels and human females. This interpretation was common in the early Jewish press and was influential in some primitive Christian traditions. The Sethite interpretation (Siqueira, 2005)^[46] offers another view, suggesting that the 'sons of God' were righteous descendants of Seth who intermarried with Cain's ungodly descendants resulting in morally degraded beings who were nevertheless fully human. The third is the Nephilim being great military or kings of dynasties who were gigantic (figuratively big) who could rule politically or in terms of military power or power of legend: Not enormous height (Britannica, 2026)^[38].

Historical and Archaeological Angle.

Traditions of giants can be traced back centuries to several ancient societies, including the Mesopotamians, the Greeks, Canaanites and Norse peoples. In the ancient Near East excessive reports of big warriors usually embodied military

terror or political propaganda. The biblical description, found in Numbers 13:33, of the Israelite spies feeling “a lot like grasshoppers” when compared to the Anakim, are rather hyperbolic claims, created to symbolize danger and fear rather than accuracy of anthropometric reference. As Nicklasson (2009) ^[35] points out, in ancient literature, incredible heights symbolized chaos, might, or contradiction with the divine order.

However, archaeologists and physical anthropologists disagree that there can be credible evidence for a prehistoric race of giant humans matching the gigantic Nephilim we picture in popular lore. Despite being filled with scandal and sensationalistic claims on the Internet as well as from pseudohistorical literature, archaeologists have not found scientifically-supported skeletons of the human nine to fifteen feet tall. The large-scale finds in these skeletal giants, many of which today are considered hoaxes (a fact, at least as far as the truth is concerned) were due to animal-related misdiagnoses of giant skeleton types, such as mammoth or mastodon skeletons, that were misreported in newspapers during the nineteenth century, and pathological gigantism in those affected by endocrine conditions (such as pituitary adenomas) in clinical cases (Doak, 2025) ^[12].

Nevertheless, archaeology has found records of exceptionally tall people in antiquity. Occasionally, skeletal remains of unusually tall humans, often over two meters (some 6.5 feet), were found in ancient cities like Egypt and Rome. But these cases are probably best understood as anomalies in biology, rather than evidence of a special lineage of giants. Conversely, figures in the Bible (such as Goliath and his other giant siblings) may represent the memory of exceptionally tall warriors afflicted with gigantism or acromegaly rather than creatures of the underworld. In medical and historical accounts of biblical narratives, such interpretations are increasingly favored.

Folklore & The Mythological Elements of Giants, Ogres, and Trolls in World Traditions

Giant archetypes of overwhelming power, untamed wilderness, or a universal menace to human nations pop up in folk-inspired studies of the environment. For instance, the English fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Giddy, 2020) ^[19] describes a giant that lives atop a magical beanstalk, but it also contains both strength and wealth, including a golden harp and a goose that lays golden eggs. The giant acts as an antagonist (though also representative of tyranny) on the one hand. As Zipes (2012) ^[53] posits, folklore scholars interpret these stories as symbolic narratives about social concerns about inequality, resource shortages, and the triumph of human ingenuity over seemingly insurmountable challenges. By embedding this example within this paper, we can show how giants transitioned from potential memories of remarkable humans or religious beings into moralized figures in oral heritage.

On the contrary, ogres also occupy a similar but also very specific place in folklore as monstrous human species, usually associated with cannibalism, wilderness, and moral evil. The Epic of Gilgamesh in the ancient Mesopotamian literature contained similar figures to ogre archetypes, especially that of the giant forest guardian Humbaba (or Huwawa) who protects the Cedar Forest and possesses terrifying supernatural properties. Humbaba represents chaos and the perils of transgressing divine authority, tropes similar to the Nephilim image of the destroyer found in

apocryphal texts (George, 2003) ^[18]. The oni are powerful supernatural individuals in Japanese folklore. They are often transliterated as ogres or demons and are known for their sheer size (they are larger than life), horns, and horrible facades. Oni are often portrayed as punishing immoral behavior or wreaking calamity, although in some regional traditions they can also play protective or ambivalent roles (Reider, 2010) ^[41]. Despite the user citing Obi, the likely intended figure is the Japanese oni, another much more common folkloric type of character, ogre-like. These instances could be woven in to show that other civilizations conceived titanic or monstrous entities as moral and cosmological representatives as opposed to actual historical people.

Trolls in Scandinavian myths constitute additional valuable comparative points. Trolls in Norse and in Scandinavian sources, for example, are described as giant, menacing figures living in the mountains, caves, and forests, as well as threats that are beyond the pale of civilization. For some, trolls are just monsters, others fools, and some are simply things that light, if left to their own devices, can make and that just become stone. According to folklorists, troll stories most probably arose in attempts at cultural comprehension of weird landscapes, dangerous wildernesses, and unknown humans in the absence of stable civilization (Lindow, 2002) ^[30]. This comparison to Nephilim traditions is especially handy, inasmuch as there are larger-than-life beings in both narratives who represent horror, liminality, or the subversion of divine or social order. Including Scandinavian trolls helps the comparative perspective as it reveals that the imagery of the oversized humanoid entities is geographically ubiquitous and persists psychologically among many cultures.

Thematically, the addition of folklore on giants, ogres, and trolls strengthens the discussion in this paper at least in three respects. First, it places the Nephilim in a comparative mythology context, as it implies that ancient civilizations frequently invented tropes about giants as symbols of chaos, divine retribution, or existential danger. Second, it lays a framework to separate religious stories and folkloric evolution, and to demonstrate how sacred texts can lead to mythological treatments or even twin traditions thereafter. Thirdly it suggests that the lack of archaeological record of literal giants does not serve to devalue their cultural relevance. Such entities instead might therefore be interpreted as potent archetypes of narrative that are inscribed in shared history and symbolism (Dundes, 1997) ^[14]. As a result, this section is not an obstruction of biblical or mythic accounts so much as an interpretative tool by which the persistent obsession with giants might be viewed more fully.

Discussion: Symbolism, Theology and Cultural Memory of Giants, Ogres and Trolls

The repeated appearances of giants, ogres and trolls in religious traditions, mythology or folklore seem to mean these creatures are more than mere descriptions of supernatural beings; from another perspective symbolic figures are necessary for understanding existential fears in the context of morality and power, the struggle between civilization and chaos. Whether in the biblical tale of the Nephilim, the Mesopotamian and Japanese ogreish beings or the Scandinavian trolls, vast figures also often embody what we see as danger, impurity and moral disturbance.

Their presence in such far-flung cultures suggests long-lasting significance in the collective human imagination, or memory, of all cultures (Dundes, 1997)^[14].

1. The Giants, Ogres, and Trolls: Symbolism

The giants symbolically often represent obstacles that are insurmountable, acts of political oppression, or untamed elements. The Nephilim and related giant figures within biblical literature (such as the Anakim and Rephaim) represent great power struggles and ineffectuality before divine intervention. Similar to David and Goliath, the giant in this story is not only an intimidating foe in the world, but also a symbol. He embodies challenges where none were encountered, and yet their conquering courage had overcome the obstacles (see 1 Samuel 17:45-50). In European mythology, giants like the giants of *Jack and the Beanstalk* stand in for predatory power, greed, or the social inequality of the era. The greed of the giant, holding treasures and placing him or her above the common pejoratives that populate the earth, helps to enforce social structures and limitations that the protagonist must face in a very practical manner over brute power (Zipes, 2012)^[53].

Ogres, on the other hand, often represent depravity, predatory risk and the danger of social disorder. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the monster, Humbaba, is the custodian of the Cedar Forest and serves as a metaphorical fence between civilization and the wilderness. His horrifying appearance and supernatural power emphasize fears about the transgression of sacred borders and discovery of the unknown (George, 2003)^[18]. In line with this, in Japanese mythology, ogres or demons or oni are also known as manifestations of punishment, vice, or karmic retribution. Oni stories often instruct about good deeds and ethical principles as well as community anxieties of disaster and chaos (Reider, 2010)^[41]. Ogres grotesquely present as the grotesque figures symbolically externalize their internal human anxieties along with ethical transgressions in bodily dimensions, by means of their sheer size, horns, and grotesque features.

Trolls embody liminality, chaos, and a terror of the natural world in Scandinavian folklore. Traditionally they occupied caves, forests, mountains, and remote wilderness, where spirits of the divine operate outside human civilization boundaries. Folklorists claim trolls portrayed as cautionary tales, both warning about dangerous or unknown land, and describing esoteric, geological formations and punishing landscapes. The myths held that trolls transform into stone in sunlight are metaphoric oppositions of night and ignorance to light, order, and the truth that comes with the divine (Lindow, 2002)^[30]. By this standard, trolls mean a terrifyingly terrifying cocktail of monsters that not only inhabit the literal monstrous realm but also a metaphorical one.

2. Theological Interpretations

Giants, for example, as do ogres, or similar beasts, tend to symbolize spiritual and divental challenge. Within the Old Testament, the Nephilim live a story of transgression in which the boundaries that separate human from divine realms seem breached (Genesis 6:1-4). In Second Temple Jewish literature (Simkovich, 2018)^[45], such as in the *Book of Enoch* (Schodde, 1882) and the *Book of Giants* (Henning, 1943)^[25], these things represent the embodiment of corruption and cosmic disorder whose downfall through the

Flood is the redress from sin directed at divine justice (Nickelsburg & VanderKam, 2012)^[34]. Those theological readings understand giants not merely as physical entities but as signs of moral decay and revolt against divine power. Similar theological motifs are found in other cultures. Giant or monstrous beings often embody primordial chaos to which order must be established in Mesopotamian mythology. The demise of Humbaba in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* represents human triumph in perilous wilderness but poses ethical concerns with hubris and divine authority (George, 2003)^[18]. These trolls (jötnar) and giants of Norse mythology are commonly understood as cosmic antagonists to the gods, standing in opposition to divine order while also becoming part of the creation myths' respective narrative. They also argue that Norse cosmology does not always present giants as pure villains but rather represent the dynamic balance of chaos and order in an equatable but ambiguous space (Lindow, 2002)^[30]. This sort of theological ambiguity evokes some of the biblical frictions over the Nephilim, whose exact form has been left intentionally ambiguous.

3. Giants, Ogres, and Trolls as Cultural Memory

In terms of cultural memory, stories of giants or ogres or trolls might maintain some fragmented memories of past history, environmental experiences or encounters with unfamiliar peoples but are thus passed down through generations. Another anthropologist has shown that giant stories could be recount of memories of abnormally tall people or powerful warrior factions or encounters between peoples of different bodies and sizes (Harris, 2006; Haze, 2018)^[20, 21]. Some claim that large myths are also symbolic representations, such as giant myths, of which a great deal of those giant myths, encoding cultural trauma, war trauma, domination, and fear of extinction by external agents for the sake of external influences, or of conquest, in some versions of the past, represent cultural damage are symbolic codes.

Folklorists stress that oral customs commonly represent symbolic truths even in cases that historical accuracy is impossible to check. For instance, stories of trolls in isolated Scandinavian mountains may also preserve memories regarding unknown peoples as trolls live in remote locations in Scandinavian mountains that may represent memories of isolated places or fears about the hiddenness of hostile environments. Just as massive stories in both Europe and the Near East are remembered with the memory of a ruined ancient cave, megalithic structure, or a ruined civilization that later would be attributed to creatures of extraordinary size when it became apparent that ordinary humans could not build these structures (Dundes, 1997)^[14]. The Nephilim's epic narratives might also be traced to ancient Israelite attempts to rationalize memories of powerful foes or vestiges of earlier societies within a theological cosmology centered on divine authority.

Cultural memory in turn can account for the continuing appeal of giants, ogres, trolls, and other gigantic animals in contemporary Western texts, movies, and popular culture (Könninen, 2002). These figures nonetheless serve as archetypes of people's archetypal encounters with fear, difference, and moral ambiguity. 'From children's fantasy narratives to children's fairy tales, they are still an effective way of storytelling because they externalize an often overlooked but most universal struggle within the mind of a person': fear of the unknown, the pull/pull that exists

between vulnerability and resilience, and the challenge of dealing with the impossible (Zipes, 2012) ^[53]. If giant-like creatures continue to survive through culture, it is not because, as evidence of historical necessity, they are evidence of historical reality because their symbolic utility over successive eras transcend society and generations.

4. Concerning Special Needs Children and Disability Studies

Disability studies and cultural studies academics suggest that mythical monsters often communicate society's fears about bodies, behavior, identity and anything that does not conform to normative expectations (Garland-Thomson, 1997; Asma, 2009) ^[4, 17]. Giants, Ogres, Trolls, and other wonderful creatures are often symbolic of "otherness," a reflection of how societies create and react to difference. Engaging critically with these narratives such narratives, in this way, will provoke children with disabilities, especially with special-needs students, to explore such narratives can help bring into-trouble-shaping images, prejudices, stereotypes, prejudice, social ostracism and prejudice, and stereotyped attitudes, and forms of exclusion in society to the classroom can have the potential to foster a healthy development of positive disability identity for children with special needs. When teachers, therapists, therapists, and carers frame these narratives around such narratives while also looking at these narratives through an inclusive-minded lens, it becomes clear that as they see that human diversity is to the world, children see that humans are too different, from a variety of abilities, looks, physical features, and world-actions by different beings. Such discourses can help encourage acceptance, empathy and respect of diversity; respect for and understanding of diversity in people, and minimize the stigma that may come with disabilities and developmental disabilities and disorders (Shakespeare, 2017; Westby, 2022) ^[44, 50]. With guided reflection children may learn to differentiate physical or behavioral differences from moral character, and to understand that being different does not mean that we are either dangerous, inferior (or less deserving of respect) (Bishop, 1990; Nussbaum, 2010; Westby, 2022) ^[7, 36, 50].

From a therapeutic and developmental perspective on children's lives, mythology, such as giants, ogres and trolls, may be seen as a symbolic representation in all its forms for children's fears, grievances, suffering and difficulties. Symbolic characters were frequently used in narrative therapy, bibliotherapy and creative arts therapy to help children "externalize deep experiences and emotions." For instance children with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability and anxiety disorder may feel an identification with someone who knows nothing of them or someone who is a misunderstood giant. In this way the child is able to explore from his position on one side-the problems exclusion loneliness and societal misunderstanding have (White & Epston, 1990; Heath *et al.*, 2005) ^[22, 51]. Exploring symbols such as this can contribute to development of emotional literacy, self-awareness, emotional self-definition, self-awareness, perseverance and empathy among peers.

Studying the Nephilim and similar giant practices and traditions of the past can also enhance the culturally and religiously literate practice of children with religious and cultural-religious literacy, working with children and families from religious families. The Nephilim of the

biblical *Book, Genesis*, described as giants, great warriors or symbolic figures standing in for human sin and divine punishment have been translated into myriad interpretations as giants, mighty warriors or embodiments of human disobedience and of divine punishment (Hendel, 1987) ^[24]. Learning about these traditions helps professionals appropriately respond to children's religious inquiries and cultural stories, while also helping them discern theological allegory from science's account of human diversity, disability and unusual development. This is especially significant since some past cultures mistook physical or developmental difference for supernatural reasons whereas contemporary disability studies and developmental science dismiss such a narrative (Shakespeare, 2017) ^[44].

Within disability studies, the figures of giants, ogres, trolls and the like can, of course, be interpreted as societal constructions of normality and difference. So, they both symbolically, and culturally symbolize fear, disorder, ethical disaster, and certain threats to overcome. Theologically, they are often representations of disorder, transgressiveness, or conflicts within the cosmic order. From the angle of cultural memory, the idea is that these beings preserve historical fears, environmental insights or even recollections that become myth through oral tradition. Whether explained in the biblical Nephilim, Mesopotamian ogre accounts, Japanese oni or Scandinavian trolls, these characters offer deep insights into how human societies think about threat, morality, power and the unknown.

Conclusion

The Nephilim occupies a multidimensional and multi-sensory space at the nexus of biblical theology, mythology, folklore, cultural memory and modern ideas about human differences. While the Old Testament offers little more than short mentions of the mysterious beings, subsequent Jewish texts (such as the *Book of Enoch* [Schodde, 1882] and the *Book of Giants* [Henning, 1943 ^[25]]) radically expand their identity, casting them as agents of violence, corruption, and the dissolution of divine order. The coexistence of angelic, Sethite, sociopolitical, and symbolic readings illustrates that the identity of the Nephilim is unsettled and points to wider conflicts between the material, theological, historical, and literary views of sacred texts.

A comparative analysis has shown that giants appear in common throughout the world in myths and legends. The giants, ogres, oni, trolls, and other gigantic humanoid figures that weave their way into every story continue to play their roles as symbols of chaos, moral threat, liminality, dominion, humanity's coming face to face with phenomena that we cannot yet make sense of. Their endurance in societies diverse both geographical and cultural suggests that such stories persist because they tackle universal issues of susceptibility, social order, violation, dread and unfamiliarity. For this reason, the Nephilim are not so much individual figures from the Bible but symbolic figures in the larger symbolic tradition of how societies construct meanings and make sense of experiences that contradict traditional explanations.

From archaeology and modern science, there is no empirical data that supports the presence of a prehistoric race of massive humanoids that is equivalent to what we have seen in popular depictions of the Nephilim. Historical accounts would more adequately be understood as theological symbolism, mythological embellishment, recollections of

extremely tall people, religious reflections or social analogies, and cultural expressions of encounters with foreigners and foreign environments. Nonetheless the lack of scientific verification does not diminish the importance of giant traditions. Rather it emphasizes the value of these as cultural narratives which recall memories, moral instruction and spiritual worries cross-generationally, as past memories that are shared between generations.

Critically, the giants, ogres, trolls and Nephilim can also be critical in understanding contemporary disability, disability studies, inclusive education, and therapeutic practices too. These figures offer an opportunity to scrutinize how societies have formed norms of normality, difference and otherness. Critical readings of these narratives challenge children to identify physical and behavioral differences from moral character, defy stereotypes of atypical appearance or behavior and enable them to better appreciate, or empathize and integrate characters into their lives on a wider social level (Bishop, 1990; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Shakespeare, 2017)^[7, 14, 44].

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