Giants
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Cultural Insight

There are a number of places where the Old Testament references "giants." In the King James Version, the word *giants* is the translation for a number of Hebrew words whose meanings are somewhat obscure. One word translated as "giant" is *nephilim* (Genesis 6:4; Numbers 13:3). The most common word translated as "giants" in the Old Testament is *rephaim* (Deuteronomy 2:11; Joshua 15:8; 1 Chronicles 20:4). Like *nephilim*, the derivation of this word is somewhat obscure but may be related to an ancient Israelite notion of some kind of legendary dead. Another word associated with "giants" in the Old Testament is *anakim*, or the children of *anaq*, which is simply transliterated in the King James Version.

The translation of the word as "giants" comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which translates both Hebrew words *nephilim* and *rephaim* as the Greek *gigantes*, which is a plural of the word *gigas*. This Greek word is cognate to our word *giant* (and *gigantic* comes directly from it), and it referred in a Greek mythological context to ancient individuals who were characterized by their great height and strength. As the Old Testament describes the *nephilim* and the *rephaim* in similar terms, in many ways this is not a bad translation. It is worth noting, however, that we simply do not have a lot of information from the Bible or other Near Eastern texts about those described by these terms.

Although Goliath from the Philistine city of Gath is probably the most famous "giant" in the Old Testament, he is not described using any of these specific terms. The book of 2 Samuel, however, associates the city of Gath with a family of giants, which it does describe using a variation on the term *rephaim*.

Related verses

Genesis 6:4

Numbers 13:3

Deuteronomy 2:11, 20–21

Deuteronomy 3:11–13

Joshua 12:4

Joshua 13:12

2 Samuel 21:16–20

Moses 7:15

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