

Genesis 5:1-31 **From Adam to Noah**

While most readers of the Bible do not often spend their hours of quiet devotion pondering the intricacies of the genealogical passages of Scripture, such genealogies are essential to Genesis. And to the historian, they are obsessed over. This is where we thrive. After all, a genealogy contains both dates and dead people. It is our bread and butter. It is what keeps us tossing and turning at night. It gives names to vast amounts of time.

The lineage here discussed encompasses the generations from Adam to Noah. It follows a chronological reckoning of the time from Creation to the Flood. A continuation of this line will be encountered in chapter 10, where the descendants of Noah will be given a more territorial (rather than chronological) emphasis. The intent of this particular narrative is threefold. First, it demonstrates the interconnectedness of the entire human race. All of us are descended from Adam. Second, it reminds us that though the sin of the garden did indeed result in death, God's promise of blessing continued to reign. The point to emphasize is that the *imago dei* would be perpetuated and receive divine favor. Third, the passage shows the universality of such depravity and wickedness that God would eventually destroy all but a handful of the earth's occupants. Despite the many years of life which they were granted, because of sin, man was doomed to death.

Background

Still, a genealogy can seem little more than a list of names. But names, too, are important. In fact, such an emphasis on names is by no means exclusive to ancient Hebrew literature. Combining historical narrative and genealogy is a valued part of such works as the *Iliad*, where the great catalogue of ships in Book II is legendary.

The Bible uses two types of narrative form to express genealogy. One type, found here in Genesis 5 and again in Genesis 11 is a linear (or vertical) genealogy. This type traces the descendants of a family from one generation to the next, usually mentioning only a single individual in each succeeding generation. The other type of genealogy is the segmented (or horizontal) genealogy. An example of this type is found in Genesis 10 and describes the descent of one particular individual through each of their many children.

Often the two are combined, as they are in this passage, where a lengthy linear genealogy is concluded by a segmented genealogy at the end. So we have: Adam

Seth

Enosh

Kenan

Mahalalel

Jared

Enoch

Methuselah

Lamech

Noah

Shem Ham Japheth

Some have been concerned that the similarity of names in this family line, when compared with that of Cain as recorded in Genesis 4:17-22 is an indication of some confusion in the text. Some point to the close relationship between names like Irad and Jared, Mehujael and Mahalalel, Methushael and Methuselah. Others point out that there is an Enoch in each list, as well as a Lamech in each. Using this information, some have suggested that this means there was one particular common source that some copyist misread. That is, they argue that there was a single genealogy of stock names that was appropriated (or misappropriated) depending on the need of the author. Others have implied that these genealogies are not meant to be literal but rather only figurative. In other words, the people mentioned are not necessarily real people, but only symbolic of something else (God's continued blessing, for example).

In fact, there is no grammatical or other textual reason not to consider these genealogies to be what the Bible claims them to be, that is, specific lists of specific people who all played a role in God's plan of salvation. To support this, it is observed that the similarity of some of the names is not as close in the Hebrew as it appears in the English translation. And furthermore, we can easily accept that many people of the same culture would have similar names (think of common names today). Finally, it is not at all uncommon for families that have, or consider themselves to have, some significant role in a people group, to name their children according to certain specific family traditions (kings of England named Henry, kings of France named Louis, and so on).

The use of genealogy was not unique to the ancient Hebrews. In fact, there is even similarity with the historical genealogies of other nations. For example, the kings' lists of Sumer (composed about 2000 BC) follow a pattern similar to the biblical narrative. In the Sumerian narratives, there is a brief description of the origins of kingship from the gods, and then a list of eight kings who ruled a total of 241,200 years before a great flood occurred. The lifespans were exceptionally long, as would seem obvious,. Interestingly, after the flood the reigns of thirty-nine kings are recorded who have much shorter lifespans. This is in agreement with the biblical account where Shem (before the Flood) lived 600 years and Nahor (after the Flood) lived only a mere 148 years.

The point here, and we could compare the biblical narrative with the Assyrian kings list as well, is that ancient peoples made use of genealogies as a natural method of accounting for the development of their civilization. But the differences between the biblical account and the other ANE lists are more important than their similarities. The seemingly extended lifetimes of the biblical prediluvians can hardly be seen as exaggeration when compared with other accounts of the same time period. Also, it must be noted that in the biblical narrative, there is no sense that the kings are descended from the gods. Adam, and all of those that followed, were created beings. In the Sumerian list, and others of the ANE tradition, kings were invariably descended in some way from the gods.

But returning to the importance of genealogy in Scripture, we can recall the New Testament uses of genealogy. Matthew opens his gospel with an accounting of the lineage of Jesus, tracing it back through Israel's history to Abraham. The biological linkage of Jesus of Nazareth with David and then with Abraham was essential to the preconceptions of his intended Jewish audience. Likewise Luke, in his account, traces the ancestors of Jesus back to Adam, and then significantly to God, Himself, "Seth, the

son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38). To Luke’s audience, the Gentile Theophilus, and presumably his other Gentile friends, seeing Jesus as the Son of God rather than the Jewish Messiah was essential. Both authors developed their intended purpose by appropriating the use of genealogy.

Creation and Blessing

This account begins with a restatement of the Creation narrative. “¹This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ²He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created” (v. 1-2).

Similar words are used in the reiteration of the original Creation narrative. This echoing of the creation of man in the image of God, the fact they they were created with specific genders, and that in the beginning the received a blessing not only connect this passage with Genesis 1-2, but demonstrate that in the Fall not all had been lost.

The *toledoth* formula is again given, as it was in describing the days of creation. Here, though, there is a reference to a particular book. It seems the author had access to some written record, though it was certainly not what we could consider a book. This is not a problem for the critical reader. We have no reason to assume that an inspired biblical author could not make use of other, uninspired sources. The Holy Spirit could take advantage of outside sources, as easily as he could make use of human memory, to inspire the particular writings of Scripture. The “Book of the Wars of the Lord” mentioned in Numbers 21:14 or the “Book of Jashar” mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18 are other examples.

The genealogy that followed, covered ten generations from Adam to Noah which encompass 1656 years. Bishop James Ussher read this so literally that, after some mathematical calculations, he concluded that Creation began at 6:00 pm on the evening of October 23, 4004 BC. However, since this list corresponds to the ten generations from Perez to David in 1 Chronicles, and to the ten generational list of David found in Ruth, there is reason to suppose that it is not intended to designate every generation, but rather a significant descendant. That is, this is not a ‘closed’ genealogy, which is an exclusive listing of descendants, but rather an ‘open’ genealogy, which permits gaps in the historical record. A similar style is used in the account of the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Matthew, where there are three sections of fourteen generations. In fact, Matthew 1:8 reads “Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah.” Yet the list of kings recorded in 1 Kings places the order as Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and then Uzziah. A comparison of the priestly list in Ezra chapter 7 with 1 Chronicles 6 yields similar results, in that the lists are not identical but reflect certain gaps. In other words, to say that person *X* fathered person *Y* may simply mean that person *X* fathered the line of which *Y* was a significant member. With this in mind, the exact accounting of years from creation to the flood cannot be stated with exactness.

From Adam to Noah

The divine image of God was passed from generation to generation. Whatever else each man accomplished during his long lifetime, his main role was, at the very least, to pass along the promised blessing through the birth of a descendant. The *imago dei* continued to be present in the descendants of Adam. In its presence, it imparted value to human life.

The account begins with the birth of Seth. ³“When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. ⁴Then the days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died” (v. 3-5).

We see here not only the optimism of the image of God being passed on, but also the reality that because of sin, Adam died. From Adam to Seth not only went the divine image, but also the sin nature that resulted from the Fall. Sinfulness was now as much a part of humanity as God’s image. As Paul succinctly stated, “therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

The “other sons and daughters” referred to the many children not listed by name who populated the earth. It echoed the distinction that humanity was created male and female, and that the human race could only continue through procreation. The difference in gender was required under God’s plan for the human race to perpetuate itself.

We also see here what will be the discernable pattern in the narrative.

A person lived a stated number of years

He became the father of another person

After that he lived another stated number of years and had other children

The person died at the age of a stated number of years

One cannot but wonder at the long lives these people lived. For example, if we assume a closed genealogy, Adam lived 50 years beyond the birth of Lamech. Except for Adam and Seth, all of Noah’s ancestors were alive at the time of his birth. And Seth died when Lamech was 14 years old. It is true that God often promised long life to those who obeyed Him, remember, “honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exodus 20:12).

Yet, since humanity was moving on a trajectory away from God during these years with such a pace as would require the Creator to destroy them all and begin again, it is not likely that this blessing of years can be attributed to obedience. In fact, it may have been a combination of ecological factors present before the Flood, or more prosaically the process by which God allowed humankind to populate the earth. In any case, the life spans decline precipitously after the Flood:

Adam to Lamech - about 800-1000 years

Noah to Abraham - about 200-600 years

Abraham to Moses - about 100-200 years

In fact, after the lives of the patriarchs only Job (140 years), Moses (120 years), Joshua (110 years), and Jehoiada (130 years) are recorded in Scripture as having lived past the century mark. And, of course, we must remember that even 1000 years, an age which no human ever attained, is but one day to God (Psalm 90:4). Perhaps another way to look at it is seen in the Sumerian records of the kings of Lagash where it is recorded that, “in those days a child spent one hundred years in diapers.”

Continuing the genealogy with Seth, the next several names remain obscure.

⁶“Seth lived one hundred and five years, and became the father of Enosh. ⁷Then Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he became the father of Enosh, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁸So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died.

⁹Enosh lived ninety years, and became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰Then Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he became the father of Kenan, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹¹So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died.

¹²Kenan lived seventy years, and became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³Then Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years after he became the father of Mahalalel, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴So all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died.

¹⁵Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Jared. ¹⁶Then Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Jared, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died.

¹⁸Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch. ¹⁹Then Jared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁰So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died” (v. 6-20).

Little is known of these men other than the fact that they continued the progress of the human family. But after Jared, we come to an anomaly in the narrative. The author continues,

²¹“Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. ²²Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. ²³So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (v. 22-24).

Enoch is distinguished as being the most godly prediluvian. We see that in addition to the mere “Enoch lived,” we have “Enoch walked with God.” This reference to his walking with God is not merely anecdotal, as it is referenced again in Scripture, “by faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God” (Hebrews 11:5). To “walk with God” was the biblical formula for describing a lifestyle characterized by deep devotion to and obedience to God. It was a phrase that implied both communion and subordination. It reminds us of Adam in the garden before the Fall. It will be used of Noah, who also possessed a reputation for godliness (Genesis 6:9). It was the exhortation given to Abraham by God, Himself.

¹“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him,
‘I am God Almighty;
Walk before Me, and be blameless.
²I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly” (Genesis 17:1-2).

It later came to symbolize God's presence among His people. ¹¹“Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. ¹²I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:11-12).

To David, it meant obedience in return for mercies received.

“For You have delivered my soul from death,
Indeed my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God
In the light of the living” (Psalm 56:13).

And we can think of Hezekiah’s prayer and plea, “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight” (2 Kings 20:3).

To be identified as having “walked with God” would itself, be a sufficient mark of distinction for any man of faith, yet Scripture also includes that Enoch was so privileged as to not be required to pay the ultimate price for human sin. Only Elijah has shared this privilege, “as they [Elijah and Elisha] were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven” (2 Kings 2:11).

Thus Enoch became a prototype of the man of faith. Later, both Jewish and Christian writers looked to him as an example of godliness worthy to be followed. Such godliness can only be a matter of faith, which is why the writer to the Hebrews, after reminding his readers that Enoch was “taken up” simply declared, “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). That Enoch “walked with God” means simply that he was a man of faith, not only in his beliefs, but in his words and deeds.

As a side note, we cannot fail to recognize that Enoch was taken up at the tender young age of 365, since at the time this was, perhaps, just more than one-third of a normal life span. Let us remember that what we consider the premature death of a young believer is, in fact, a blessing by God. We are entitled to miss the person, but we certainly cannot regret or begrudge the great blessing they received.

The writer concludes,

“²⁵Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and became the father of Lamech. ²⁶Then Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lamech, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁷So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died.

²⁸Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. ²⁹Now he called his name Noah, saying, ‘this one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed.’ ³⁰Then Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah, and he had other sons and daughters.

³¹So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.

³²Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (v. 25-32).

Methuselah is famous for having been the longest living person recorded in the Bible. But other than that, nothing is known. Lamech is distinguished by being the only member of the genealogy to be recorded as

offering an explanation for the name he gives his son. And notice that it is specifically stated that Noah is Lamech's son. The name, Noah, is a wordplay on the Hebrew for 'rest' or 'comfort' that this boy will bring to his people, "this one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed" (v. 29). Such rest was needed because, even this godly line was required to suffer the consequences of the Fall. Lamech acknowledged that it was "in toil" that men worked the 'cursed' ground.

As we know, Lamech's optimistic anticipation of the work of his son was unfulfilled. In the short term (at least by prediluvian standards), Noah did not bring rest and comfort to his people. Instead he built an ark and saw his people destroyed for their wickedness. But in the long term (and with God and the things of God it is often good to take the long term view of things), we can see that the *imago dei* continued with Noah, and the covenant God made with him after the flood began afresh the relationship between God and man.

Takeaways

It may seem there is little for the modern believer to take away from a long list of names, with little description included in the narrative. But may I suggest that we reflect on the following:

First, God is a God of kept promises. Despite the Fall, and despite the continuing sin of all who came after, God continued to allow the human race to prosper and reproduce. And even when it came time to destroy the collective lot of that ungrateful and wicked generation, He still chose to preserve one family in whom to continue the *imago dei*.

Second, to "walk with God" describes a quality of Christian character to which we all ought to aspire. Too often, I think, we use the phrase matter-of-factly, as if any Christian is "walking with God" regardless of their choices or attitudes. Scripture is never so flippant with the attribution. Not all believers, very, very few, in fact, are described as having "walked with God." It is not a given of the Christian life. Rather it is something to be cultivated through the spiritual disciplines. Let us ask God to help us be worthy of such distinction.