



Part 22 – More Than a List

Genesis 5:1-32

The Bible records the birth of children with utmost sobriety. Indeed, some of the most profound words of prophecy in Scripture are spoken either in anticipation of or to accompany particular births. This is surely due to the promise of Genesis 3:15 wherein God promised to put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and that the

Savior would be born through the line of the woman. Every birth in the godly line of Seth and later through Noah's son Shem would be a progressive unfolding of that salvation promise.

Derek Kidner observes that chapter five “serves at least three ends in the scheme of Genesis. First, it bears witness to man's value to God, by naming individuals and stages in this early human phase: each is known and remembered. Secondly, it shows how the line of Seth the ‘appointed’ (4:25) led on to Noah the deliverer. Thirdly, it both demonstrates the reign of death, by its insistent refrain, and conspicuously breaks the rhythm to tell of Enoch, the standing pledge of death's defeat.” (Kidner, 79).

1. The image which still remains

Vv. 1-5 – “This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created” (vv. 1-2).

- This list represents men and women who lived and died – men and women who loved and were loved – who bore and raised sons and daughters. The list of names is also a reminder of the consequences of sin as the repetition of the clause “and then he died” reminds us. In verse 5 we are told that after a long life and having fathered sons and daughters, Adam died. Though God mercifully extended Adam's life, the sentence for rebellion announced in chapters 2 and 3 was eventually carried out.
- While the genealogy points out the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) it also reminds us of the dignity of human life. The opening words borrow from the creation account telling us that man (male and female) bears the image of God. Neither sin nor sin's consequences have removed the image of God from humanity.

2. The life which is worth living

Vv. 21-24 – “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (vs. 24).

- The repetition of the words, “and then he died,” have far greater significance than to merely relay a fact. The repetition of “and then he died,” is a powerful reminder of the wages of sin. And for the unbelieving, such a stark reminder of the inevitability of death may easily lead to despair.
- However, the sad repetition of the dying is interrupted by a remarkable person. Enoch, we are told...
...walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Vv. 22-24).
- This is not to be understood as quid pro quo: Walk with God and avoid death. Enoch's miraculous departure from this present life is extraordinary and intended to be understood as such. The lesson to be learned from Enoch is gained not in his mysterious departure but in his exemplary life. Enoch walked with God.
- The clause “walked with God,” points to the fact that the godliness of the Old Testament saints was not a cold or legalistic exercise. Old Testament piety, just like that of the New Testament, was warm and intimate. Later we will be told that Noah walked with God. Abraham was called “the friend of God,” and Moses spoke to God as one friend speaks to another (Exodus 33:11).

3. The names which tell God's story

Vv. 28-32 – “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son [29] and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.” (Vv. 28-29).

- Chapter five is a record of Adam's descendants. But at a deeper level the list of names tells the story of God's faithfulness. There has long been debate over the genealogy of Genesis chapter five. For instance, did the inspired writer intend the genealogy to be exhaustive? Is it possible that certain persons and generations were skipped for various reasons? We know that the Bible often uses numbers for the sake of theological instruction. There are ten generations between Adam and Noah, just as there are ten generations listed in the genealogy of Shem (11:10-26). Genesis lists ten generations before the flood and ten after. Ten is a number symbolizing completeness in the Bible. Think of the ten plagues or the Ten Commandments. For this reason, some scholars believe Moses intends to give the reader a summary of the generation that lived between Adam and Noah. If this is so, it in no way diminishes the trustworthiness of the account as this practice was not unusual at the time.
- Then there is the question of the longevity of those who lived prior to the flood. Are their lifespans to be understood literally or as references to the length of their family line? Considering the straightforwardness of the language and the fact that the lifespans of Enoch and Noah are clearly meant to be taken as personal rather than representative, the best option is to understand as literal the remarkable pre-flood longevity of human life. Also, the very fact of their ages enabled them to transmit the revealed word of God, His will, more effectively as it was remembered overlapping great numbers of years in each generation.
- In the Bible, a genealogy is never just a genealogy. It is never just a list. In the Bible, genealogies tell stories. Specifically, the biblical genealogies tell God's story – the story of his redemptive plan to save his people.
- "Seed," "descendants," and "lineage" are a central theme, perhaps the central theme of the book of Genesis, as the chapter title, "These are the generations of" indicates. The book is concerned with the progress of the seed of the woman, first mentioned in 3:15, and as we proceed through the book the identity of the seed is progressively identified: who the seed is and who it is not. It is not Cain, it is Seth; it is not Japheth or Ham, it is Shem; it is not Ishmael, it is Isaac; it is not Esau, it is Jacob, and so on. Genesis is, in this way, a messianic history. Genesis points us ultimately to the birth of Jesus Christ.
- The Ancient Near Eastern reader would expect the first born son to be the chosen seed. The law of primogeniture — that the eldest is the one who carries the family identity forward — so sacred a principle in the ancient world, is regularly violated in God's story. This is one of the first demonstrations of the fact that salvation is by grace, by an act of sovereign election, and not by nature or custom or personal identity. Cain was Adam's firstborn, but he was rejected and Seth chosen instead. Cain was not the seed. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn but Isaac was the child of the promise. Ishmael was not the seed. Esau was Isaac's firstborn but his younger brother Jacob bore the family seed into the future, and so on.
- The genealogy of the rejected seed is consistently given first in the book of Genesis. Cain's genealogy in the second half of chapter 4 is given before the genealogy of the chosen seed. The genealogies of Japheth and Ham are given before that of Shem, Ishmael's genealogy before Isaac's, Esau's genealogy before Jacob's, and so on. The Bible is not uninterested in that part of humanity that lies outside the stream of redemptive history; they too are God's image bearers and, as we have already seen, are objects of his kindness and care — but those genealogies are cul-de-sacs, dead ends, and do not take us anywhere (Wenham, 97).
- Saints and sinners are found throughout the descendants of Adam including the Messianic line. God raised up prophets like Noah (2 Peter 2:5) and Enoch (Jude 14-15) who walked with God and preached to their generations. Undiscerning eyes may look at God's patience with sinful humanity as a lack of justice on God's part. But God will bring to completion his redemptive plan which includes the final judgment of the wicked. God will not acquit the guilty (2 Peter 3:9). The list of names from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Abraham (11:10-26), "represent history not as a succession of meaningless generations but as human activity under the hand of God leading to climactic salvation in the fullness of time" (Waltke, 119).