



Genesis - Chapter Five

I. Genesis 1:1-11:26 - Primeval History (continues)

Summary of Chapter Five

This chapter provides the genealogies from Adam to Noah providing the age of each patriarch when he fathered his first son and the age at which he died. Three generations stand out: Seth is listed as a son in his father Adam's likeness, who in turn was created in the likeness of God; Enoch who walked with God and was taken by him without seeing death; and Lamech, whose lifespan contrasts the lifestyle of his namesake in the line of Cain.

The chapter concludes by naming the three sons of Noah from whom the future generations of humankind would descend following the cataclysmic flood.

I.c Genesis 5:1-6:8 - Adam's Descendants

This section of Genesis falls into two distinctive parts. Whereas 5:1-32 is largely a genealogy that traces a single line of descendants from Adam to Noah, naming only one person in each generation, 6:1-8 provides a worldwide picture of increasing human wickedness. The contrast between these two elements is not simply between the particular and the universal but, more importantly, between righteousness and evil.

I.c.i Genesis 5:1-32 - Adam's Descendants to Noah and His Sons

After a brief introduction, which echoes elements of Chapter One, this passage follows a particular line of descendants from Adam to Noah. The chapter's layout is dominated by a distinctive literary structure that is repeated for each of those specifically mentioned in each generation.

The pattern may be set out as follows: When A had lived X years, he fathered B. A lived Y years after he fathered B and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of A were $Z = X + Y$ years, after which he died.

This is the first of several major genealogies in the Bible. Genealogies were important to people in that day especially because many blessings were determined by inheritance, such as land, privilege of the firstborn, and sometimes office, such as kings, priests, etc. Genealogies also serve important historical purposes in helping identify order of events in relationship to one another. They also provide some concept of how far apart events were chronologically. There are, however, difficulties in genealogies that make it difficult to be sure how precisely they were intended to be taken.

Since the word fathered in a genealogy can mean ‘fathered an ancestor of,’ it is possible that this genealogy skips any number of generations; certainly the literary conventions allow for this. That omissions do actually occur appears from comparing, for example, the genealogy of Moses in Exodus 6:16-20 with that of Joshua in 1 Chronicles 7:23-27: undoubtedly the genealogy for Moses has been compressed, as confirmed in also Ezra 7:1-5 with 1 Chronicles 6:4-14.

At three points in vv.3-31, the pattern is briefly broken to introduce additional information involving Adam-Seth, Enoch, and Lamech-Noah. One of the most striking aspects of the passage is the great age of the first people in Genesis. Other ancient Near Eastern texts attribute even longer lives to earlier generations; e.g. the Sumerian King List mentions kings who reigned, interestingly, before a flood, for periods of 28,800, 36,000, and 43,200 years. Given that the life span of people today, and at least since the flood, is much shorter than the life span of those listed from Adam to Noah, the question is often raised as to whether the remarkable longevity of these patriarchs as given in vv.1-32 should be taken at face value or whether their longevity has some other explanation. Some have suggested that the figures should be understood as symbolic, e.g. that they may be related to various astronomical periods; or that the numbers are encoded with some unknown honorary significance; or that the figures were calculated by a different numeric method, e.g. that they should be divided by a factor of 5, plus, in some cases, the addition of the number 7 or 14. No writer, however, has offered a convincing alternative explanation, and none of the proposed alternatives can be substantiated with any certainty. The traditional understanding is that the numbers should be taken at face value, often assuming that something changed in the cosmology of the earth or in the physiology of humans, or in both, after the flood, resulting in a rapid decline in longevity, finally stabilizing at a normal life span in the range of 70 or 80 years: <<***The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away***>> (Psalm 90:10). In any case, one clear implication of these genealogies is that these people actually lived regardless of how long, and that they actually died, with the exception of Enoch.

¹ This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. ² Male and female he

created them, and he blessed them and named them 'Humankind' when they were created.

Genesis 5:1-2

This is the list of the descendants of Adam. The heading that introduces 5:1-6:8 differs from all the others by referring to a book; see the comments made on 2:4a. This was probably something like a clay tablet that preserved the contents of vv.1-21 and possibly 11:10-26, although there the pattern is somewhat abbreviated. The book is named after Adam, Hebrew 'adam. The same Hebrew word is also translated in v.1 as humankind and in v.2 by Humankind. This reflects the fact that Hebrew 'adam may function as a proper name, a common noun denoting a male individual, and a generic noun denoting male and female human beings, further indicating that creation made the two genders equal in the sight of God, although made for distinctive purposes.

He made them in the likeness of God. Traditionally, this likeness has been seen as the capacities that set man apart from the other animals, ways in which humans resemble God, such as in their spirituality, the characteristics of reason, morality, language, a capacity for relationships governed by love and commitment, and creativity in all forms of art. All these insights can be put together by observing that the resemblances, man is like God in a series of ways, allow mankind to represent God in ruling, and to establish worthy relationships with God, with one another, and with the rest of the creation. The apostle Paul sums this up in his letter to Colossæ: <<*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator*>> (Colossians 3:9-10).

³ When Adam had lived for one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. ⁴ The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵ Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

Genesis 5:3-5

The linear list of descendants begins with Adam and then proceeds to name his son Seth. As 4:25 records, Seth is Adam's third-born son. This line is clearly presented as offering an alternative to the line of seven generations linked to Cain in 4:17-18. However, whereas Cain's line leads to a killer in the seventh generation, the comparable generation in Seth's line produces Enoch, who walked with God and did not die; refer to the comments made on vv.21-24.

Genealogies often include those who inherit certain blessings or the right to certain positions, not necessarily the first child born, let alone all the children born. In this case, the determining factor is the ancestry of Noah. It is therefore likely that men in the list may have had other children born before the son who is listed. It is possible that there might have been daughters born before the sons listed, since only sons are listed in the genealogies. Or there might have been sons born before the sons who are listed, but these earlier sons may not be listed because they were not reckoned in the genealogy of Noah. This would also be true of Adam. It is possible that some of his daughters were born before Seth.

He became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image. From the normal pattern of the genealogy, the phrase ‘fathered Seth’ would be expected here. The additional material introduces the idea that Seth resembles Adam. While this implies that Seth is made, like Adam, in the divine image, it also suggests that he images his father as well, as Paul indicates: *<<Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven>>* (1 Corinthians 15:49); Seth’s line, however, is certainly portrayed more positively than that of Cain.

Although all humankind has thus inherited the likeness of God through their common ancestry, so too they have imputed sin through Adam. It is this sinful nature that has caused all of the world’s problems ever since and was the reason why God had to come as its Saviour in the form of his Son: *<<For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ>>* (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

He died. God had told Adam: *<<but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die>>* (2:17). Although Adam may have tasted spiritual death by being excluded from God’s presence, his physical death did not come immediately for he lived to be nine hundred and thirty years old. However, like almost all human beings, he was still destined to die. Yet there remains hope for life beyond the grave: *<<And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him>>* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

⁶ When Seth had lived for one hundred and five years, he became the father of Enosh. ⁷ Seth lived after the birth of Enosh for eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. ⁸ Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

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

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

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

¹⁸ When Jared had lived for one hundred and sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch. ¹⁹ Jared lived after the birth of Enoch for eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.

Genesis 5:6-20

These verses just enumerate the names in the genealogies. There is little of special interest to discuss regarding these men. The names from Adam to Noah are as follows: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. Noah's sons are: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This listed is repeated in the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 1:1-3.

²¹ When Enoch had lived for sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah for three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

Genesis 5:21-24

The usual pattern of the genealogy is altered with the substitution of the expression Enoch walked with God. This is then developed further in when the expected phrase 'and he died' is replaced by the comment then he was no more, because God took him <<*By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and 'he was not found, because God had taken him.'* For it was attested before he was taken away that 'he had pleased God'>> (Hebrews 11:5). The NT also reveals that Enoch was considered to be a prophet: <<*It was*

also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘See, the Lord is coming with tens of thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgement on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him’>> (Jude 14-15).

In this passage, and in certain other contexts in Genesis, the Hebrew verb for walked is a distinctive form that conveys the sense of an ongoing intimacy with God: <<He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?>> (Micah 6:8), and: <<True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity>> (Malachi 2:6). Remarkably, because of this special relationship, Enoch did not die, as is confirmed in the case of Elijah in 2 Kings 2:1-12. The narrator’s desire to highlight this fact may explain why the present genealogy, unlike the one in Genesis 11:10-26, regularly mentions that ‘X died.’

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

Genesis 5:25-27

According to the dates given, it is possible to conclude that Methuselah, the oldest recorded human, died in the year of the flood, although it seems not as a result of the flood.

²⁸ When Lamech had lived for one hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son; ²⁹ he named him Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.’ ³⁰ Lamech lived after the birth of Noah for five hundred and ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters. ³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died.

Genesis 5:28-31

The genealogical pattern is disrupted by the inclusion of Lamech’s explanation for the name Noah. Lamech’s comment on the name Noah, Hebrew *noakh*, which strictly speaking means ‘rest,’ Hebrew *nuakh*, introduces the related concept of

‘relief’ or ‘comfort,’ Hebrew *nakham*. Lamech expects that Noah will bring both rest and relief from the painful toil of working the land, refer to 3:17-19.

Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands. God would bring the hope of salvation to those who descended from Noah but Creation waited for true salvation: <<*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*>> (Romans 8:19-21).

Lamech’s seven hundred and seventy-seven years provides an interesting point of contact with his namesake in 4:18-24 and the seventy-sevenfold vengeance.

³² After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Genesis 5:32

After Noah was five hundred years old. Noah was by far the oldest man recorded to have fathered children, although the ages given are only an indication of how old the patriarch was when he father the son of note.

Although this verse gives the impression of continuing the genealogical pattern used in vv.3-31, the naming of three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, brings the list to an end. A similar ending draws to a conclusion the genealogy of Shem in 11:10-26.