

Genesis 5: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Genesis chapter 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. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died. When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died. When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years, and had other sons and daughters.

Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died. When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalel. Kenan lived after he had fathered Mahalalel 840 years, and had other sons and daughters.

Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died. When Mahalala Mahalala had lived 65 years, he fathered Jared. Mahalala lived after he fathered Jared 830 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Mahalala were 895 years, and he died.

When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years.

[2 : 1 6] Enoch walked with God after he fathered Lamech. When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died. When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son, 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. Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. A few chapters ago we saw the generations of the heavens and the earth, and now we begin the generations of Adam. Adam functions both as a name for an individual man, but also as the name for the race built, in the case of Eve, and descended, in the case of everyone else, from him. He stands for the entirety of humanity. His name is given to humanity. He was created in God's image and likeness, and now he has a son Seth, in his image and likeness. Now when we're reading a text like this, it's important to remember that we read the scriptures as people who swim in a society of literally trillions of texts of different kinds. Everything from text messages, to things that we read on the internet, to books that we pull down from a shelf. And we're accustomed to single readings of texts with low signal to noise ratios, or pure surface signal that we can read quickly, we can get the message, and we don't have to return to them. But the original readers of scripture would have devoted years to studying them closely in a society with a very limited body of knowledge that was highly integrated. They were also quite used to the exceedingly dense signals of texts that might require a hundred readings or more to discover. And when we're reading something like this genealogy, it's important to remember that, because there's a lot within this. And I'm going to throw out a few things to notice and see if you can put any pieces together. I have not been able to put these pieces together yet, but there's something promising here. First of all, we've already seen a genealogy in the previous chapter. Adam, Cain, Enoch,

Erad, Mehugel, Methusel, Lamech, and then Jabal, Jubal, Tubal, Cain, and Nema. And I wonder whether the sons of Lamech are supposed to recall Cain and Abel. I've already mentioned this in the previous discussion. But there are a number of points of similarity with the genealogy that follows, and a number of people have noticed this. So there's Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, is that a reminder of Cain? Mahalalel, is that Mahujael, is that some connection there? Jared, Erad, Enoch, there's another Enoch in the previous one. Methuselah, and then Methuselah, and then there's a Lamech in both, and then it ends with Noah. And perhaps we're supposed to read these two lines in juxtaposition with each other, as a sort of commentary on their respective and their contrasting character.

That's one suggestion. The similarities between the names have been noticed by many. The other thing that's noted, should be noted, is that the age at which the patriarchs give birth is included, which isn't always the case in these sorts of things. Some have suggested that that's to give a complete chronology, so that you can map from one to another, and you can have a very clear idea of what happens when, at which point, and you can count out the years and number the age of the earth for that reason as well. But there are interesting things about the numbers too. Carol Hill has observed that there are preferred numbers. There are numbers that we see, and then there are numbers that we don't see. She notes that for the 30 numbers listed for the patriarchs prior to the flood, from Adam to Noah, all of the ages end in a 0, 5, 7, 2, or 9. And she observes that these can all be forms of adding 5 and 7, or adding 5 and 7 and 7, or something like that. These are significant numbers numbers that arise from key, core significant numbers. And numbers that are an exact century are mentioned on three occasions within these. That's unusual. It's not what we'd expect. It's not what we'd expect if this were just a random set of numbers. In the Septuagint, a number of these figures differ, and some have argued that the Septuagint numbers should be preferred over the numbers that we have in our Bibles. But again, it's worth seeing that many of the properties of the numbers are shared both by the Septuagint and the version in our Bible. Even though they're different numbers, they have similar qualities and characters to them. And that, again, is an interesting feature.

Many of the numbers can be combined to form other numbers in the passage. It's another weird feature. It's not what we'd expect. Others have observed the connections between the numbers and the synodical orbits of the chief planets, as calculated by the Babylonians. So Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Add all five of these, and you get the year that the flood ended in the Septuagint numbering.

[8 : 12] And note also figures like Enoch. Enoch is 365 years old when he dies. Now, that's a number we know. It's a number that should stand out to us, like other numbers that we have within the text. And so pay attention to those sorts of details, and you may notice some important things.

Richard Hess has argued that there is wordplay and significance to the names of the characters in the narrative. So we see the name of Adam connects him with the earth. Ish and Isha are connected together. Eve connected with life. We have Cain and Abel, their names given some sort of significance. And in all of these cases, these occur within the narrative. But within the genealogy, he suggests that there are roles and characteristics that are associated with the names. I've already suggested some of these in the case of Cain's genealogy.

And some, like Noah, are interpreted for us. But when we consider these things, maybe there is some greater significance to be found in this particular set of names. Others have pointed out that there might be some analogy between Genesis 1 as the generations of the earth, day following day, first day, second day, etc., all the way down, and Genesis 5 as the generations of Adam, who came last in the previous generations. Both end on the theme of rest. The first with the Sabbath, and then the second with Noah that's going to give rest in their labours. So there's a similarity there. There are 10 words of creation in Genesis chapter 1. There are 10 generations in Genesis chapter 5. What else can we see? Well, there's a contrast between the technologically advancing descendants of Cain that we've seen in the previous chapter, and the descendants of the righteous, of Seth, who do not seem to be associated with the same progress in technology. We'll see the same sort of thing in the contrast between the story of Babel and the development of the technology of firing bricks, and the call of Abraham, who does not have the same technological advancement. At the end of both genealogies, or near the end, the one who fathers the final generation, is a figure called

Lamech. Lamech, whose wives are Adar and Zillah, and has three sons and a daughter, and then Lamech, who's the father of Noah. In the first one, he's associated with 70 times 7, and in the second, he's associated with 777. That's his age. Some questions to ask about this passage. First of all, how does God creating humanity in the image of God relate to Adam fathering a child in his image and likeness? How can one illuminate the other? And a second question, why do we have years and ages in the genealogy of Seth, but not in that of Cain?