

“When Light Pierced the Darkness”

Genesis 5

Dr. Jerry Nelson

In 1986 Nechama Tec, a sociology professor at the University of Connecticut wrote a book entitled: When Light Pierced the Darkness. Tec, a Polish Jew, had survived the Holocaust as a child but years later wrote her book to describe the mercy shown to some Jews by Christians during the worst years of WWII. One Polish Jew was taken from his home to a nearby woods and with scores of others forced to strip and kneel down to be shot. He was only grazed but pretended he was dead. That night he crawled out from under the dead bodies and stark naked made his way to a nearby farmhouse. The poor peasant farmer and his wife, who were Christians, not only took him in but hid him for the 27 months until it was safe for him to leave. In the midst of unbelievable darkness there were intermittent rays of light.

The early chapters of Genesis are very dark – a very discouraging picture of humanity. After a promising beginning in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ruined it not only for themselves but also for everyone else. Their sin resulted in a curse on creation and judgment on them and their offspring.

As we saw last week, in Genesis 4, Adam’s and Eve’s son Cain did even worse than they had done – he killed his own brother. And Cain’s descendants continued the downward spiritual spiral.

When we come to Genesis 6, next week, we will see that the degeneration of the human race continues until God wipes out all humanity except Noah and his family.

In chapter 5 we come to what at first glance appears to be nothing more than historical filler – a way of connecting the present to the past. But while that connection to the past is important, as we will see in a couple of minutes, there is more here and Moses very carefully crafts the chapter to communicate those other important issues.

What we will see in chapter 5 is light piercing the darkness. In the midst of a sad litany of death we will see God’s grace shining

through. The tedium of the dark list makes the gracious exceptions stand out more vividly.

I will now read the text and I want you to look and listen to the sharp contrasts that are drawn. Watch for the exceptions to the otherwise sameness. The old Sesame Street jingle said, “one of these things is not like the other.” Watch for exceptions to the usual. But also watch for words or phrases that appear again and again – the author’s technique for making his point. And try not to get “hung up” on the numbers you will hear – knowing that we will come back to that issue a little later.

READ Genesis 5:1-32 and 9:32

What’s the sameness you hear in these verses?

- 1. A man is named and we are told how old he was when he had his first son.*
- 2. We are told how long the man lived after his first son was born.*
- 3. We are told he had other sons and daughters*
- 4. We are told how old he was when he died*
- 5. We are specifically told “then he died.”*

That same litany is retold 10 times with ONE exception.

What’s the exception? Of Enoch it says in verse 24, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” NO MENTION OF HIS DEATH!! No other genealogical listing I know mentions specifically that the people died. It is obvious that if someone is said to live a certain number of years it means they died – but here in Genesis 5 the author specifically said, “then he died.” Nine times he wrote it, then one time he didn’t. Moses draws a sharp distinction between all the others and Enoch. This is not accidental or coincidental but very intentional. Hundreds of years later the author of Hebrews in the NT corroborates our interpretation when he writes in Hebrews 11:5, “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death...”

In the midst of this list of death after death after death there is this one man who did not die. What is Moses’ point? To begin to answer that let’s look at the two other anomalies in the text. Two other times

the monotonous list is broken up with commentary out of the usual. Those two times are at the beginning and the end of the chapter.

*Verses 1-3 make the point that just as God created Adam and Eve in the likeness of God and named them, so Adam had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him...” In the first five books of the Bible, Moses will include several genealogies linking the people of Israel, to whom he is writing, back to Moses and Abraham, and Noah and, in this text, to Adam himself. He wants them to know that the source of their life, just as it was for Adam, is none other than God himself. **They** are created in the likeness and image of God. Back in chapter two Moses spelled out what that meant for Adam and Eve. Image and likeness are two different words with the same idea. God did something unique for Adam and Eve. God gave them a capacity to represent him, to reflect him in ways nothing else on earth could. To be made in the likeness and image of God is to be created so as to relate to God, each other and the rest of the world in ways that nothing else in creation can. In Genesis 5:1-3 Moses is clearly pointing out that what was true for Adam and Eve is equally true for their son Seth and all human beings that follow them, including the Israelites. Through procreation (men and women having children) we are made in the likeness/image of God. I didn’t note it earlier but another phrase repeated of each man in the text is this one: “he became the **father** of...” Moses is tracing that father-son relationship from God himself right down to the Israelites themselves. He wants them to live with an awareness of their connection to God – He is also their father. And by that same means (procreation) he is also our father.*

I said that to understand the point Moses is making in this chapter we must not only see the sameness in the text but we must see the anomalies. We have already noted two of them:

- 1. Enoch doesn’t die.*
- 2. And the emphasis on the uniqueness of all humanity including the Israelites – God is the source of their lives.*

But I want you also to see the third anomaly in the text – it is at the end of the chapter. Anticipating the story of Noah and the flood that is coming, Moses tells us that Noah’s birth was seen by his father Lamech as a cause for hope. When Noah was born, Lamech said,

He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.” Lamech wouldn’t have known, but from the next four chapters we know that Noah does bring comfort – Noah is used by God to save the human race from extinction.

So death is not the end because at three points in the chapter, we have darkness being pierced by light. At the beginning when it is demonstrated that we are all the offspring of God himself through Adam and Eve and then Seth and every other father and mother down through the ages. Secondly light in the midst of darkness is demonstrated when Moses hints at the comfort, the salvation from total destruction Noah would bring. And thirdly and most pointedly, I think, light is demonstrated in the terse but pregnant reference to Enoch when it says, “He walked with God”.

Before going further though I want to deal briefly with two questions that are often on people’s minds when they read this chapter.

“Did those guys actually live that long?” AND

“Did Adam appear on the earth only 6000 years ago?”

Though I shouldn’t “spill the beans” I will tell you right up front that the answers to these two questions will be singularly unsatisfying to some of you.

Let me take the second question first: “Did Adam appear on the earth only 6000 years ago contrary to what the fossil records tell us about the appearance of humans on the earth thousands of years before that?” The problem occurs this way: If you take the age of each man at the birth of his first son from Abraham back to Adam and add them up you might conclude that Adam was created about 4000 years before Christ. But that flies in the face of much other evidence we have demonstrating that humans appeared long before 4000 BC. And I’m not talking about biological evolutionists who think of humans as being present on earth for millions of years.

Several explanations have been offered to account for the difference. The most plausible explanation suggests that not all the generations are listed - that Moses selected 10 men out of many more. There are occurrences of selective lists in the Bible and the word “father” can equally accurately be translated “forefather”. So it is possible that

*Moses didn't even intend to list all the generations. But the truth is **we don't know for certain** how to explain the relatively short time between Noah and Adam or between Abraham and Adam that is suggested by the Bible. That doesn't mean the Bible is wrong, it simply means that the date of the origin of the species is just not the point of the text.*

The first question I posed earlier was this one: "Did those guys actually live that long?" Could anyone have lived to be 969 years old? Some have suggested that the years were counted differently then - maybe only a month or so counted for a year. That suggestion quickly breaks down when we look at Genesis 6-9 where clearly a year is determined by the solar cycle. Some have suggested that the numbers are symbolic – all are combination of 7s and 5s. But again that suggestion lacks merit when there is no explanation of what the numbers are supposed to symbolize. Most plausible is that these people did in fact live this long and they were able to do so because the conditions on earth were possibly very different before the flood. It is equally possible that the effects of sin on human beings and on nature itself had not had time to become as severe as later. Again the short answer to our question is, "We don't know."

I do think two things become clear when we read the precise way the ages of these men are mentioned:

- 1. Moses is communicating that these are real people.*
- 2. And he is communicating that they lived a long time ago.*

*I want to draw your attention now to what I think can be demonstrated to be the highpoint of the text – Enoch! We have already seen that Enoch did not die. In contrast to every other man listed, Enoch was taken by God without dying. But as unusual as was the end of his time on this earth – that is not what stands out the most about Enoch. What stands out most vividly is the reason why he didn't see death. He "walked with God". Twice Moses mentions it. Genesis 5:24, "And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years...Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The writer of Hebrews gives us further insight into this man and what it means to "walk with God". **Hebrews 11:5-6** "By faith Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For*

before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

To understand the point that Moses is making I think it helps to remember to whom he is first writing – the Israelites of Moses’ own day. Those people, like us, were too ready to believe that a good relationship with God was merely as matter of dutifully obeying the laws God had given. Or they could have concluded like some of us are tempted to conclude – since everything and everyone dies anyway, what’s the point. Moses will illustrate the point in Enoch – A person who walks with God finds life. It is not mere law keeping – it is a living relationship. This way of life was not only Enoch’s but also Noah’s. In Genesis 9:6 we read of him that he too “walked with God.” This is the life Moses wants the Israelites to live. They are to live believing that God is their father, that they are as connected to him as Adam was. They are to live believing that their future is by God’s provision as much as humanity’s future was provided by God through Noah. They are to live walking with God.

I want to conclude with a long quote but I think it will speak to you as powerfully as to me if you read it silently as I read it aloud:

“Enoch walked with God because God was his friend and liked His Company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God’s path.

“We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we consciously think of Him at all times, but because he is naturally suggested to us by all we think of...(as a lover’s thoughts always return to his beloved). When some change in his circumstance is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God – will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God.

“When he falls into sin he cannot rest until he has resumed his place at God’s side and walks again with Him. Walking with God is a persistent endeavor to hold all our life open to God’s inspection and in conformity to His will; a readiness to give up what we find causes

any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if (things aren't right in our fellowship with God; a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him.

This walking with God necessarily (shows in all of life). Just as you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar the feelings of your friend, just as you naturally endeavor to adjust your (actions and words to the needs of your friend), so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavoring to please him, repressing the thoughts you know he disapproves, and endeavoring to (nurture) such dispositions as reflect his own character.

It is easy then to understand how we may practically walk with God – it is to open to Him all our purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on our scheme of life and idea of happiness – it is to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God (even when you cannot hear his voice or see his footprints ahead of you). Marcus Dods Book of Genesis p51