

Genesis 5

In this chapter we encounter a ten-generation genealogy. It begins with Adam and ends with Noah. Though many genealogies can be skimmed over, this one has several items of interest that have caught the attention of Jews and Christians across the centuries.

First, we encounter a ten-generation genealogy. Since ten represents completeness, this may be one way of showing that the period between creation and the flood had run its appropriate course. Thus, when the tenth generation ends, it is time for something new.

Second, we are reminded that Adam and Eve were created in the likeness of God, were blessed by God and were called humankind. Seth, the son of Adam and Eve (there is no Cain and Abel here) however, is made in the likeness of Adam, not God. In some sense this may mean that the image of God, while still present in Seth, had been diluted by the actions of the first couple; that sin has dimmed the image of God a bit in him and in us.

Third, we encounter people who lived very long lives. The lives range from around 300 years to about 900 years. While Christians across the centuries have used these ages to assign a date to creation (Bishop Ussher claimed in 1654 that the date of creation was October 22, 4004 BCE), we can see in them as reflection of the stories about Mesopotamian Kings who supposedly lived lives between 18,600 and 43,200 years. While the Hebrew scriptures don't push the age envelope that far, they probably felt a need to lengthen the life-spans of our ancient ancestors to show just how important these people were.

Fourth, we meet Enoch. While most of us have probably never heard of Enoch, he holds a special place in Christian tradition, including a book named for him in the Apocrypha, which is in Roman Catholic Bibles. The scriptures tell us that Enoch *"walked with God"* (vs. 22, 24) which many have taken to mean that God gave him secrets that were given to no other human being. In addition, in verse 24 we read that Enoch *"was no more"* which was interpreted to mean that he never died, but was taken directly to heaven.

Fifth, we meet up once again with Lamech (who you may remember from chapter 4) who fathers a son name Noah. When he does so, Lamech says, referring to Noah, *"Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from the toil of our hands"* (vs. 29). While being a bit cryptic, this statement links Noah's story back to the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden. When God discovers that the first couple had eaten from the fruit of the forbidden tree, God curses them both. The curse for Adam goes this way. *"...cursed is the ground because of you (Adam); in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth..."* (vs. 3:17). It is as if Lamech is hoping that his son will reverse the curse that has evidently been handed down across these ten generations. As we will discover, this hope does not come to fruition, and the curse continues into the generations ahead.

Reflection: This chapter helps us to begin to get a sense of the linear nature of the Biblical story. What I mean by this is that while some Eastern religions are cyclical, as people are born and reborn, just as gods and goddesses were/are born and reborn, Judaism and Christianity are linear. As Christians, our linear story has a beginning (creation), a middle (the death and resurrection of Jesus) and an end (the restoration of creation as described in Revelation). Every story in the Bible is tied to that larger story. Thus, when Lamech speaks of the hope of Noah ending the curse, we know that this can only be done later in the story, through the work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to be created in the likeness of God?
2. What has God shown you that you might share with others, as Enoch is said to have done?
3. Where do you see yourself fitting into the linear story of God's people?