

Through the Generations: Genesis 5

Main Idea: Sin has brought death through Adam, but God will not allow death to have the final word.

I. Death Reigns | Genesis 5:1-20

Genesis 5 begins by taking us back to creation. “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5:1). Yet only a few verses later Adam fathers Seth “in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen. 5:3). Seth remains an image-bearer of God, but he is also born as a son of fallen Adam. That becomes the condition of every generation that follows. **Human beings possess real dignity because we are made in God’s image, while at the same time we inherit a fallen condition that leads to sin and death.** Paul later explains the theology underneath this genealogy: “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12). Christians need to understand both of these truths. If we over emphasize one understanding then we view humanity too optimistically and assume our deepest problems can ultimately be solved by better works. On the opposite end believers focus on human wickedness so much that we begin treating other people as if they have little value. James warns against cursing people precisely because they are “made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). The criminal, the unborn child, the elderly person, the severely disabled, and even the person whose worldview angers us possess dignity that comes from God.

The genealogy falls into a seemingly morbid rhythm: “and he died.” Adam lives 930 years and dies. Seth lives 912 years and dies. Jared reaches 962 years and dies. Methuselah lives 969 years, and even he dies. The extended life spans can distract us from Moses’ point though, God warned Adam that rebellion would bring death, and Genesis 5 shows that consequence working its way through every generation. Our culture has a hard time with that reality. We spend effort trying to extend youth, hide aging, and keep death out of our minds. **Caring for our bodies is good stewardship, but Scripture teaches beyond attempting to live longer, it shows us how to live knowing that we will die.** Ecclesiastes says it is better to go to the house of mourning because “the living will lay it to heart” (Eccl. 7:2). Psalm 90 similarly asks God to “teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). Remembering death is not meant to make believers gloomy... It is meant to make us wise. Mortality has a way of exposing what we give our attention to. Bitterness, status, possessions, petty conflicts, and anxieties can consume years of our lives while offering very little in return. Numbering our days help us to focus on using our time in a manner that is worthy of God. **An eternal perspective should make us quicker to repent, forgive, obey, and invest in things that matter beyond the present moment.**

There is also something humbling about how little Genesis tells us about most of these men. We know almost nothing about Kenan, Mahalalel, or Jared beyond their families and lifespans. Our culture often tries to convince us of “leaving a legacy,” meaning we want to accomplish something worth remembering. Scripture gives us a different measure of what is considered significant. **Most faithful believers will eventually be forgotten by history, but faithfulness before God is never insignificant.** God fulfills His purposes through ordinary people who raise families, serve churches, work faithfully, disciple others, and die without public recognition. Our calling is not to make our names unforgettable, but to be faithful in the time God has given us.

To Ponder:

1. Psalm 90 asks God to “teach us to number our days.” What does it practically mean to live as someone who knows their days are limited, and why can thinking seriously about our mortality actually help us live more faithfully?
2. If death reigns through Adam but life comes through Christ, how should that truth affect the way a believer faces aging, suffering, and eventually death? What about the way they approach evangelism, repentance, and obedience?

II. Hope Remains | Genesis 5:21-32

The repeated pattern of Genesis 5 is interrupted when Moses reaches Enoch. We expect another announcement of death, but instead we get, “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). Hebrews 11:5 explains that Enoch “was taken up so that he should not see death” and says that before he was taken he “was commended as having pleased God.” **Enoch’s escape from physical death is extraordinary, but Hebrews focuses our attention beyond the event itself to the faith that characterized his life.** Verse 6 immediately adds that “without faith it is impossible to please him.” Enoch walked with God because he trusted God. This helps us understand what Scripture means by walking with God. It is more than believing that God exists or occasionally practicing religious works. **Walking with God describes a life lived in fellowship with Him, trusting what He has revealed and increasingly bringing our desires, decisions, and conduct under His authority.** Faith and obedience should not be separated. Obedience does not earn fellowship with God, but genuine faith produces a life that increasingly wants to go where God leads. Paul uses similar language when he tells believers, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him” (Col. 2:6). The Christian life begins by faith and continues by faith.

This also protects us from thinking of spiritual maturity primarily in terms of spiritual experiences. Scripture’s emphasis is not on whether Enoch continually experienced something extraordinary, but on his life that was characterized by closeness with God. **Christian maturity is measured less by occasional moments of spiritual intensity and more by continuing trust, repentance, obedience, and dependence upon God over time.** Sanctification takes place as God steadily conforms His people to Christ through a life of faith day by day. Enoch’s faithfulness becomes even more significant when we remember where Genesis is headed. Genesis 6 describes a world that is becoming increasingly wicked. Biblical faithfulness is not dependent upon cultural conditions. **Believers are never promised an environment that will make obedience easy. Our calling is to remain faithful to God regardless of how wicked culture becomes.** Enoch therefore gives us more than an example of personal devotion, his life demonstrates that God is able to preserve people who trust Him even in generations characterized by increasing rebellion.

The chapter then turns to Noah. Lamech names him Noah and longs for “relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands” caused by the cursed ground (Gen. 5:29). **Humanity has been searching for relief from the curse ever since Genesis 3. The problem is that our flesh longs for instant relief, so we frequently search for temporary quick solutions that we put our ultimate hope in.** Noah will bring some level of relief. God will preserve humanity through him and bring a kind of new beginning after the flood, but Noah cannot reverse the consequences of Adam’s sin. The curse remains, sin remains, and Noah eventually dies. Every created gift disappoints us when we ask it to provide what only Christ can give. Jesus alone says, “Come to me... and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Finally, the genealogy itself is evidence of God’s faithfulness. One generation dies and another rises, but the promise continues until Luke traces the line to Christ (Luke 3:23–38). Believers have a responsibility to teach, model repentance, pray, disciple, and point people to Christ (Deut. 6:6–7; Ps. 78:4–7). Our responsibility is faithfulness, not control. **The hope of the next generation rests not on our ability to preserve the church, but on the God who keeps His promises from generation to generation.**

To Ponder:

3. Why are Christians tempted to value dramatic spiritual experiences over steady, long-term faithfulness? What do you find most difficult about steady, long-term faithfulness?
4. What responsibility does the whole church have toward the next generation, including believers who do not have children of their own? How can you participate in this?