

**PART THREE**  
**BEFORE THE FLOOD**  
**GENESIS 5:1 – 6:8**

### Introduction to Genesis 5:1 - 6:8

For the second time we meet the Hebrew *tôl'dôt* (see 2:4). This time it introduces a list of those who were generated from Adam. As noted in the Introduction, importance is measured by antiquity (see page 24). The ultimate aim of the authors is to demonstrate that the people of Israel go right back to the beginnings of history. This genealogy comes from the Priestly School. It witnesses to the continuing of God's blessing 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' (1:28), despite human sin.

Note the repeated pattern, the constant rhythm, as the blessing is handed on. The variety of names and numbers points to the changes that occur within this divinely blessed rhythm.

Like the Babylonian king list this genealogy has ten names, with extraordinarily long reigns, and like the Babylonian king list it ends with the hero of a flood story. It is not evident that the genealogy depends on the ancient king list. Rather, it points to a common tendency to systematise in this way.

The long lives attributed to these ancestors prior to the flood is a measure of their importance. It is common in Near Eastern myths. One commentator reminds us: 'Josephus can call on Egyptian, Chaldean, Phoenician and other ancient witnesses for the remarkable, and gradually receding, life-span of people' (Delitzsch). There are differences in the numbers given in the various versions. The total number of years spanned by these ten generations adds up to 1656 years in the Massoretic Hebrew text, to 1307 in the Samaritan text, and to 2242 in the Greek Septuagint text. The total number of years in the ten generations of the Babylonian king list is 432,000 years! The huge numbers in the Babylonian king list are clearly mythical in origin. The numbers in Genesis show that our measurement of time is irrelevant in the primeval (pre-flood) world.

The key aim of the authors is to locate history (beginning with Abraham, Genesis 12) with God's promise of blessing on the human race, while highlighting the immeasurable vastness of the development of humanity prior to Abraham.

Scholars are agreed that this genealogy comes from the Priestly School. The opening verses pick up the earlier statement:

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

– Genesis 1:27-28

‘Adam’(5:1) and ‘humankind’(5:1) both translate the Hebrew *’ādām*. Being in God’s likeness is something that is of the essence of being human and is true of every member of the human race.

It is clear also that male and female are both necessary for the continuing of the blessing. The primitive (and incorrect) understanding that human life was present in the male seed accounts for only the male being named in the genealogy. They thought that only the male handed on life. The female provided the ‘garden’ for the nourishing of the life placed there from the male.

The first three names in the genealogy, Adam, Seth and Enosh, are the same as those in the genealogy of Genesis 4:25-26.

**<sup>1</sup>This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God.**

**<sup>2</sup>Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Human-kind” when they were created.**

**<sup>3</sup>When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.**

**<sup>4</sup>The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>5</sup>Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.**

**<sup>6</sup>When Seth had lived one hundred five years, he became the father of Enosh.**

**<sup>7</sup>Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>8</sup>Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; and he died.**

The blessing continues

**<sup>9</sup>When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan.**

**<sup>10</sup>Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>11</sup>Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.**

**<sup>12</sup>When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel.**

**<sup>13</sup>Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>14</sup>Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.**

**<sup>15</sup>When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jared.**

**<sup>16</sup>Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>17</sup>Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; and he died.**

**<sup>18</sup>When Jared had lived one hundred sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch.**

**<sup>19</sup>Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>20</sup>Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.**

**<sup>21</sup>When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah.**

**<sup>22</sup>Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>23</sup>Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years.**

There are obvious links with the names in the genealogy of Genesis 4:17-18.

‘Kenan’ corresponds to ‘Cain’ in 4:17.

‘Mahalalel’(‘one who praises God’) has a similar sound to ‘Mehujael’ of 4:18.

‘Jared’ corresponds to ‘Irada’ of 4:18.

For ‘Enoch’ see 4:17.

‘Methuselah’ corresponds to ‘Methushael’ of 4:18.

Enoch’s life span corresponds exactly to the number of days in a year. Others have a longer span but there is a special completeness about Enoch’s life.

The author repeats 5:22 ‘Enoch walked with God’. ‘Walking with God’ refers to the special, immediate, intimacy proper to the primeval narrative (see also Noah 6:9). Verse twenty-four introduces into the genealogy a special tradition concerning Enoch. ‘Was no more’ expresses the mystery of his unexplained disappearance. The author can only say that it was God’s doing.

It is little wonder that when, in late Judaism, there was speculation about the after-life, it was to Enoch that they turned as a guide. In the New Testament see Hebrews 11:5 and Jude 14.

In contrast to 4:23-24, Lamech gives birth to hope. His words here carry Good News. The name ‘Noah’ (noah) echoes the idea of ‘to give relief/comfort’ (nāḥam) – a word found also in Isaiah 40:1 which announces the end of the exile and the reversal of Israel’s fortunes. Note the paradox in verse twenty-nine. Relief is to come out of the ground that has been cursed.

Verse thirty-two prepares us for the genealogy of chapter ten. The narrative breaks now to tell the story of the flood – the story of God’s saving action.

The major purpose of the priestly genealogy of Genesis chapter 5 is to provide a universal backdrop to the cult that Israel is to offer in the Jerusalem temple. YHWH is the creator of humankind. Israel is a special part of humanity, and has a mission within it. The New Testament, too, has a genealogy as a preface to the story of salvation (see especially Luke 3:23-38 which uses Genesis 5 in verses 36-38).

**<sup>24</sup>Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.**

**<sup>25</sup>When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech.**

**<sup>26</sup>Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>27</sup>Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died.**

**<sup>28</sup>When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son;**

**<sup>29</sup>he named him Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that YHWH has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the *grinding* toil of our hands.”**

**<sup>30</sup>Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters.**

**<sup>31</sup>Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; and he died.**

**<sup>32</sup>After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.**

**<sup>1</sup>When human beings began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,**

**<sup>2</sup>the sons of the gods saw how beautiful the daughters of the human beings were; and they took wives for themselves as they chose.**

**<sup>3</sup>Then YHWH said, "My spirit shall not abide in human beings forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years."**

**<sup>4</sup>The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of human beings, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.**

The authors of Genesis draw on an ancient story that has echoes of the myths which see the great heroes as being the result of the union of women with the gods. Their interest is in the warrior class, the *gibbōrīm* (6:4), who act like gods – hence ‘sons of God’, in that they are powerful enough to take any woman they choose. The pharaoh is an example (Genesis 12:10-12), as is David, who sinned against Uriah by having him murdered to cover up his sin with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). This is another example of the way human beings fail to live within the boundaries established by the creator. YHWH seems disgusted. We think of the words of Jeremiah:

‘I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage of all the nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel’, says YHWH.

– Jeremiah 3:19-20

According to this story YHWH sets a limit on this behaviour by restricting human life to 120 years – traditionally considered in Israel as the perfect life span. Moses lived 120 years (Deuteronomy 34:7).

It would seem that in the original myth which lies behind our text, the ‘N<sup>c</sup>philîm’ were semi-divine beings, the fruit of marriages between gods and human beings. The term is later used for giants, encountered by the scouts who went ahead to spy out the Promised Land (see Numbers 13:33).

Here, in the abuse of power and lust, we are given another insight into the human condition in which human beings, created for communion with God, behave in ways that are destructive and against God’s design. YHWH’s intervention demonstrates the conviction of the authors that those who overreach the limits designed by God and abuse their power will not finally prevail.

Look what happened when the kings of Judah followed their own designs. The community forming around the temple in post-exilic Judah is to learn the lessons of the past and to be a humble and obedient people, bound together strongly by cult and the sharing of the land, and faithfully obedient to the covenant.

The essential point being made here is that when YHWH decided to ‘blot out human beings’ it was not an arbitrary or capricious decision. He decided to do so because ‘the wickedness of humankind was great’. The authors focus on YHWH’s sorrow, regret and grief in having to make the decision (6:6-7). He is a troubled parent ‘grieved to the heart’, hurt by betrayal. God had such great hopes and intentions for humankind. How different the heart of God from the heart of human beings.

Human wickedness can corrupt and so destroy a whole generation who are bent only on evil. We recall the words of Jeremiah, speaking of God’s reaction to the corruption of Jerusalem:

I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my heart into the hands of her enemies. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest; she has lifted up her voice against me— therefore I hate her. Is the hyena greedy for my heritage at my command? Are the birds of prey all around her? Go, assemble all the wild animals; bring them to devour her.

Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no one lays it to heart. Upon all the bare heights in the desert spoilers have come; for the sword of YHWH devours from one end of the land to the other; no one shall be safe. They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of YHWH.

– Jeremiah 12:7-13.

If there is hope, it will not come from the human heart (6:5). It will come only from the heart of God (6:6). We recall Hosea:

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

– Hosea 11:8-9

God cannot pretend human beings are different from what they choose to be, nor can God pretend away the consequences of the evil that human beings do. But if one man finds favour there is an avenue for God’s saving grace to act. Such a man is Noah.

**<sup>5</sup>YHWH saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.**

**<sup>6</sup>And YHWH was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.**

**<sup>7</sup>So YHWH said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”**

**<sup>8</sup>But Noah found favour in the sight of YHWH.**