

Genesis 5 The Generations of Adam

3/2/2001 12:28 PM

Overview

We now enter the third section of the eleven sections of Genesis, and the second to be introduced by the formula, “The generations of X.” As we saw at the outset, this expression introduces the family history of the character to whom the previous section led up.

- 1:1-2:3 was prolog, describing the creation of the heavens and the earth.
- 2:4-4:26 was “the generations of the heavens and the earth,” the family history of the planet in its earliest years.
- 5:1-6:8 now describes the family history of Adam, bringing us down to the next major character, Noah, whose own family history then begins in 6:9 with the same heading.

This section in turn has three parts:

- 5:1-2, a short prologue pointing back to the previous sections (ch. 1-4)
- 5:3-32, a long genealogy ending in Noah’s sons
- 6:1-8, the intermarriage of the sons of God and the daughters of men, and God’s decree of judgment, setting the stage for the next section (the flood)

1-2, The Prologue

This brief paragraph reiterates the main facts of creation as they are relevant for the genealogy that is the main burden of this section. Each of these facts establishes God’s sovereignty over man.

1. God created man. Cited at the beginning and again at the end of the paragraph. God is our creator.
2. He made him in the likeness of God, that is, male and female. Recall from our discussion of 1:26,27, that the “likeness” of God consists in the duality of man within the one-flesh relationship. Moses here reemphasizes this teaching by citing and amplifying only the “likeness,” not the “image” language. Thus God is presented as our exemplar; godliness becomes the most natural objective of our lives.
3. He blessed them, “And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better,” Heb 7:7. A key aspect of that blessing is fruitfulness, which sets up the genealogy in this chapter.
4. He named them, a new piece of revelation not made explicit before. Just as Adam demonstrated his rule over the animals by naming them, so God’s naming of Adam indicates his authority.

3-32, The Begats

See the accompanying table. The repetitive structure of the genealogy, so tedious to western readers, accomplished several things.

1. It bridges a long gap between main episodes of the story.
2. By its very regularity, it calls our attention to things that break the rhythm.
 - a. These irregularities are especially dense in the first and last panels of the genealogy, where they call our attention to the start and the finish.
 - b. They also crop up in the middle, highlighting isolated incidents that, while not important enough to form a major episode in the narrative, still must not escape our attention.
 - c. These intermediate irregularities occur with names that are shared in the Cainite and Sethite genealogies (Lamech, Enoch). One motivation for giving more information about these two individuals is to distinguish them from their cousins in the line of Cain.

We consider first the general pattern, then focus our attention on these irregularities.

The general pattern

Six sections, alternating age information with the birth of the next link in the chain, a reference to other sons and daughters, and the regular refrain, “And he died.”

1. Age at son
2. Birth of lineal son (not necessarily the first; cf. Seth; but the one through whom the line is continued)
3. Later years
4. Sons and daughters
5. Total years
6. “And he died”

Chronology

Two points need to be considered: the length of individual lives, and what we can learn of the antiquity of Adam.

Individual Lives.—Why would people live so long in these early years? Two answers.

1. After the flood, ages decrease dramatically. This suggests that the *efficient* cause of the long lives lies in antediluvian climate and environment; perhaps the waters stored up in the heavens, released at the flood (the so-called “vapor barrier” theory), reduced UV and cosmic radiation reaching the earth, thus retarding aging processes.
2. The *telic* cause is no doubt God’s merciful desire that Adam be able to communicate widely to his posterity the history of the garden, his sin, and God’s promise. He could personally have taught all of his descendants down through Lamech (see chart on the handout). The knowledge of God in these first two millennia was not handed down through countless generations, but known at first or second hand from those who actually experienced the foundational events.

Antiquity of Adam.—Age information (points 1, 3, 5) makes it difficult to evade the chronological implications of these chapters. The question is, are we justified in adding these up

to get a strict chronology (as did Bishop Ussher to get creation at 4004 BC)? Or might there be gaps that could yield a much more distant creation, closer to the requirements of modern anthropology?

A number of arguments have been proposed to support the idea of gaps; see W. Green's article in 1890. Three seem particularly important to keep in mind:

- “Bear,” “begat” can extend further than a single generation:
 - Gen 46:18, 25 (but Qal instead of Hiphil)
 - Matt 1:8 omits Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25), Joash (2 Kings 11:21), and Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1) between Joram and Uzziah, probably to get the mnemonic arrangement of 3x14 in v.17.
- The latter case shows that there can be omissions in structured genealogies; this can also be traced in parallel OT genealogies (e.g., 1 Chr 6:3-14 is the same list as Ezra 7:1-5, but between Azariah and Meraioth in Ezra 7:3 there are six names in 1 Chr 6:7-9).
- Lack of sum: When numbers can be summed, Hebrew authors love to do so. E.g., Num 2:25-32 shows two levels of totaling in the census. See also Neh 7:66. Also Num 7:12-83 for details, sums in vv.84ff (not only counts, but also weights).

So it would be hard to insist that there cannot be any gaps here. But there is no explicit evidence of gaps. And even if there are ten names omitted for every one listed (an extreme case, unparalleled elsewhere in the OT), we could never get to the kinds of time required to align with modern theories of human development. Abraham is born AM 2013, 2134 BC, and the latter date aligns with known historical customs, so a 10x multiplier would have Adam created 22,000 BC or 24kya, much later than current estimates for the emergence of *Homo Sapiens* (appearing as early as 200kya, and certainly by 30kya)

Lacking any evidence for gaps, we will treat the chronology as consecutive.

Other Details

Birth of lineal son and other sons and daughters (items 2 and 4) emphasize the divine blessing of fruitfulness recalled in vv. 1-2 from 1:28.

The seventh item is the somber refrain, “And he died,” reminding us of the certainty of God’s judgment on the race. Though this is the line of the promised seed, yet they too must die.

3, Seth’s Begetting

Note first of all that the descendant mentioned in the genealogy is not necessarily the first-born son. Cain and Abel came first, and Cain’s line persisted. The descendant in the genealogy is the one through whom the line of promise is descended.

The unique feature of this entry in the genealogy is the mention that “Adam … begat [a son] in his own likeness, after his image.” There are two important aspects to this likeness.

1. We have just been reminded (5:1) that Adam is in the likeness of God. So his own likeness includes the likeness of God. In spite of his sin, he is able to pass on that likeness to his

offspring. Thus murder is wrong because people bear the image of God (9:6), even many generations after Adam and Eve.

2. Yet the image that is passed on is not directly that of God, but of God as refracted through Adam. Adam's likeness includes sin as well as the likeness of God, and his children cannot escape that burden as well. We will see this in ch. 6, when even the offspring of this godly line are implicated in sin.

3, Seth's Naming

Emphasizes the meaning associated with the name in 4:25; we are to recognize here a line particularly established by God, and associated with public proclamation of God's name in bold witness against the seed of the serpent.

Note that in 4:25 Eve gave the name, while here Adam does. Likely, they worked it out together, as parents do today.

4,5, Description of Adam's Life

I can't discern any significance in these variations

22,24, Enoch's Piety

The text calls to our attention two distinctive things about Enoch: how he conducted his life, and how it ended. Heb. 11:5 gives us an interpretation of this verse.

His Walk

Walk with God: there are a variety of expressions with this verbal root, with differing emphases suggested by the prepositional constructions.

God walks in the midst of his people.—He comes to us as he did to Adam, but emphasizes that this fellowship is contingent on our obedience to him.

Hithalakti betokkem: yy to Israel (Lev 26:12) *beqereb maxaneka* Deut 23:14; need to be pure so as not to offend him.

Walk with the Lord.—This expression, used with *Enoch* and *Noah* and in variant forms of *Levi* and in *Micah* 6:8, implies close personal relationship, fellowship, friendship. What God sought with Adam in the Garden (esp. *hithpael*). Enoch's experience shows that while we cannot enter the garden, the garden can come to us. But this close fellowship is subject to the fundamental rule that two cannot walk together except they be agreed (*Amos* 3:3, which in the context applies to walking with the Lord).

Yithalak 'et yy: Enoch (5:22, 24), Noah (6:9)

Halak 'im yy: Mic 6:8

Halak 'it yy beshalom ubemishor: Levi (Mal 2:6)

Walk before the Lord.—Characteristic of *Abraham* (17:1), where it is accompanied with the charge, "be ye perfect." Implies that our life is constantly open to God's inspection, unlike that of Adam, who sought to hide himself in the trees.

Yithalak lipney yy: Abram (17:1; 24:40) and Isaac (48:15, in mouth of Jacob); Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3); David (Ps 56:14, ET 13); Ps 116:9

Halak lipney yy: 1 Kings 2:4 (God's charge to David)

Walk after the Lord.—He not only watches how we walk, but shows us how. Our task is to follow him. This exhortation is always associated with fearing the Lord, keeping his commandments, and obeying his word. *Josiah* is the example here.

Halak axarey yy: Deut 13:4; Josiah (2 Kings 23:3 // 2 Chron 34:31); always coupled with obeying his commandments. Contrast Deut 8:19, “walk after other gods”

Walk in God's {truth, law, way}.—Closely linked to the previous one; these are the mechanisms, the indicators he gives us to enable us to walk after him.

Hillek ba'amunateka: David (Ps 86:11)

Halak betorat yy: Israel (Exod 16:4);

Halak bederek 'a\$er cvh 'etkem yy Deut 5:33; 13:5; 28:9; Ps 128:1

Halak beshem yy: Mic 4:5

Heb. 11:5 is interesting on two points.

- Moses writes that Enoch “walked with God,” but Hebrews follows the LXX in replacing “walked with God” with the expression, “pleased God,” not a bad paraphrase. “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” Amos 3:3. He will not walk among us if we displease him (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14).
- Moses implies that Enoch's translation was the result of his godly life, but Heb. 11:5,6 insists that it manifests his faith. The outward conduct is nothing; what counts is the desire of the heart for intimate fellowship with the Lord. Brown: “walking with God” is a gift of God's grace to him as a result of his faith. But this is very much the same as the assertion that true faith produces a godly life.

Cf. Jude 14; Enoch was frustrated by the ungodliness all about him.

His Translation

Note the timeline at the bottom of the chart. If the list is reasonably complete, then Enoch's translation could be witnessed by every generation except the first (Adam) and the last (Noah), and would be a striking witness to them of God's blessing on those who are faithful to him. Adam had the direct promise of God in the garden, but those after him would not have had that experience.

Hebrews makes it explicit that he is spared death, escaping the judgment that falls universally on his kin. Thus his translation as well as his walk show that God can graciously bring the privileges of the garden to his people.

29, Noah's Name

Contrast the faithful proclamation of this Lamech with the vengeful boast of his namesake in the line of Cain.

The name “Noah” *noax* is a pun in its first two consonants with the verb “comfort” *nixam*.

Why does the earth need comforting? The balance of Lamech’s comment refers back at three points to the history of the garden. Note from the chart that Adam was still alive when Lamech was born (they overlap by 56 years). One can imagine Lamech hearing this history from Adam, and longing for deliverance from it. Lamech’s comment has three parallel points: Noah will comfort us

- from our work, lit. “deeds”
- from the toil of our hands
- from the ground which the Lord has cursed.

Deeds.—This is noun derived from the verb “to make” or “to do.” So far in Genesis, this verb is used only for three things:

- God’s actions.
- Adam and Eve making fig-leaf aprons in a vain attempt to hide their nakedness.
- Sin: God’s interrogation of Eve (3:14), the serpent (3:14), and Cain (4:10).

Against this background, it is probably best to understand Lamech as referring not to our labor, but to our sinful deeds. Two points to mention:

- Even in the line of Seth, there is frustration with sin in the earth. We will see in ch. 6 that this line is not immune from the defects we saw in the line of Cain. Like righteous Lot, Lamech was “ vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Pet 2:7).
- Yet he does not claim perfection for himself; like Daniel and Nehemiah, it is “our deeds,” not “their deeds,” from which he desires comfort.

Toil of our hands.—“Toil” is the same word used to describe the judgment on Eve (3:16 “sorrow”) and Adam (3:17 “sorrow”). He desires relief not only from the besetting sin, but also from the painful labor that God has imposed on the race as a result.

The cursed ground.—This expression ties the other two together: painful labor results from the cursed earth, which results from the wicked deeds.

Summary: Calvin: “the holy fathers anxiously sighed, when, being surrounded with so many evils they were continually reminded of the first origin of all evils, and regarded themselves as under the displeasure of God.”

- What a contrast with the other Lamech, who, far from feeling the burden of his own sin and that of his ancestors, reveled in it.
- God has apparently given him an indication that Noah will be the means of relieving the ongoing burden of sin in some way.

32, Noah’s Generation

Only one son is named for the earlier links in the chain. Three are named for Noah, the last in the chain, as in 4:19-22 and 11:10-26. The genealogy is for the writer a superhighway to get between points of interest; as he reaches the destination, he slows down and broadens out the view.

The other points in the stylized structure of the genealogy are deferred until the death of Noah in 9:28-29, which returns to this pattern. Thus the section known as “the generations of Noah” (ch. 6-9) is contained in an external inclusio at the end of “the book of the generations of Adam.” However, it certainly is not subordinated or secondary; cf. Walsh’s notion of “framing inclusion.”

6:1-8 Prospect

Two parallel paragraphs:

	1-4, Mixed Marriages → Limited Lives	5-8, Wickedness → Destruction
X saw	6:1 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2 That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.	5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.
The LORD said	3 And the LORD said , My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.	7 And the LORD said , I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.
Disjunctive clause: dominating circumstance	4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown.	8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

1-4, Mixed Marriages

1-2, What is Seen: Marriages of Sons of God and Daughters of Men

Context.—Men began to multiply, and had daughters. Cf. 4:22; 5:4b, 7b, 10b, 13b, 16b, 19b, 22b, 26b, 30b.

Sons of God.—Who are they?

- The expression in the OT uniformly refers to members of the heavenly council, including Satan: Job 1:6; 38:7. This conforms to its use in Ugaritic, where it denotes heaven’s court, cf. 1 Kings 22.
- 2 Pet 2:4-5 describes certain angels who sinned and were imprisoned as a result, at the time of Noah, clearly alluding to Enoch ch. 10, which is describing angels “who have united themselves with women.” (NB: The consensus of believers down through the years is that

Enoch is not inspired, so we do not accept what it says uncritically. However, when a NT writer, borne along by the Spirit, cites it, we are justified in accepting the detail that is cited as correct.)

- Jude 6-7. v.7 should be translated, “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha and the cities about them, in like manner to these [that is, the angels], giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” Like Peter, the reference to angels is to our passage, and their pursuit of “strange flesh” is compared with the sin of Sodom and Gomorrha.
- How about Matt 22:30?
 - The Lord is commenting on social structure, not physical ability to procreate or perform other human tasks. Cf. the angels who ate with Abraham and Lot in Gen 18:1,8; 19:1-3.
 - His comments concern “the angels in heaven.” In fact, the OT does not call these beings angels, a term that it reserves for righteous angels. Like Satan in Job 1, they had access to the heavenly court, but are now (according to Jude) locked up awaiting judgment.

Lesson: We need to realize how closely intertwined our physical world is with the spiritual.

- For ill: Eph 6:12, wrestling against spiritual forces; cf. demons in Mark 9:14-27.
- For good: Heb. 1:14, the angels are here to minister to us; cf. Dan 6:22 (lion’s den); Heb 13:2.

Took them wives.—The expression describes legitimate marriage, not rape. Thus it implies the consent of the girls’ parents. Peter refers to “the angels that sinned,” but the humans were not right in the relation, either. Even if the parents didn’t know that these were angels, they do not exhibit the concern of godly Abraham to take a spouse from among one’s own people, so that both parties’ convictions and culture will be compatible.

Matt 24:38 characterizes these days as “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” and criticizes the people because they “knew not” that the flood was coming.

- They were preoccupied with their daily activities, and gave no thought to the Lord’s priorities.
- In spite of the experience of Adam and Cain, they did not recognize that they must answer to the Lord for all that they do, and were not living their lives in the consciousness of his judgment.

Because of this, the parents of these daughters did not detect the trap into which their children were falling, entering intimate liaisons with wicked spirits. Are we any better?

- Are we alert to the spiritual forces at work all around us?
- Do we care to adjust our lives to please the Lord?

3, God’s Decree: Limitation of Human Life

Consider each of the clauses in this verse.

My Spirit shall not always strive with man.—The language of “striving” describes the tension between God’s prophets and man’s sin.

Isa 63:10, the sin of God’s people vexes the Holy Spirit.

Neh 9:30, when the prophets cry out against their sin, it is the testimony of the HS who empowers them.

It is this patient protestation by the Spirit that the Lord here describes as “striving.” We have already seen evidence that even in in the line of Seth, there is apostasy:

- Enoch’s “walk with God” is presented as something exceptional. (We also know from Jude that he was a prophet, decrying, the ungodly deeds which ungodly men have ungodly committed.)
- Lamech’s confession of “our deeds” as something from which deliverance was needed
- The carelessness of parents in the marriages of their daughters.

1 Pet 3:18-20 ascribes precisely this responsibility to the Spirit of God preaching in the days of Noah. The true child of God, while resting in the Lord’s secure care, will always feel the tension of being a pilgrim in a strange land. Cf. Lot, 2 Pet 2:7, “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” How is your vexation level? Do you feel the striving of God’s spirit in you? Do you care?

For that he also is flesh.—Here is the first record in the Bible of a fundamental tension between flesh and spirit that continues through the NT:

- “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would,” Gal 5:17.
- “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,” 1 Cor 2:14

Fallen man is hopeless, apart from inward regeneration by God’s Spirit. The prophetic confrontation provides the basis for condemnation and the ultimate judgment, never for widespread conversion. In every age, only a remnant respond to the preaching of the word, and the mass must be removed through judgment.

Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.—God resolves to place a limit on this period of antagonism between himself and mankind. In this case, the limit is 120 years. This is the parade example of God’s *longsuffering* (1 Pet 3:20), which was a facet of God’s fundamental and oft-repeated characterization of himself to Moses in Exod 34:6. (Sometimes paraphrased by “slow to anger,” Neh. 9:17; Ps 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2.) He exhibits it even toward the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction (Rom 9:22).

- Parallel: Amorites, Gen 15:13-16.
- Lessons:
 - God is longsuffering. He does not lash out immediately at men in their sin, but gives them room for repentance. Cf. Rom 2:1-5; 2 Pet 3:9.
 - Yet though judgment is deferred, still it is sure. He is not slack, 2 Pet 3:9.

Research notes on v.3—not in sermon

Three big questions in this verse:

1. Meaning of “strive”
2. Relevance of the reference to flesh

3. Reference of the 120 years

Meaning of “strive”.—This Hebrew verb *yadon* appears nowhere else in the OT. Numerous speculations have been made concerning its meaning:

- A. “Strive, contend,” based on flawed derivation from *dyn*: God is tired of struggling with the sinful race by prophetic protestation and correction. Cf. 1 Pet 3:18-20. Possible allusions in Ps 90:1-5.
- B. “Defend, shield, protect,” from Heb *ndn* “sheath” and Akkadian *dananu*: God will no longer continue to answer for man’s sin.
- C. “Abide, remain,” reflected in LXX and Vulgate, and based on Arabic or on a disputed sense of Akkadian *dananu*: Heb *ndn* is also sometimes understood in this way (“my spirit shall not be sheathed in man forever); usually related to 2:7 and a link between God’s breath and his Spirit. But man’s spirit is not the same as God’s. The OT does not recognize the default presence of God’s spirit in men as the means of sustaining their life; the indwelling of God’s spirit is a special blessing of the new covenant, Ezek 37:14; 36:26,27, and therefore could not have been considered part of the default equipment of mankind. But cf. 6:17; 7:15; “spirit of life.”

Relevance of man’s flesh to God’s frustration.—I take it as given that the particle is to be understood in the sense, “because,” rather than “in their error.” But one still questions what the connection is with the decision no longer to “strive.”

- A. Calvin: Because man is flesh, marred with sin, his reason does not function. As a natural man, he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. Link to A.
- B. Cassuto: In spite of their quasi-divine parentage, the offspring of the mixed marriages are still flesh, not gods, and will not live forever. Goes with C.

Reference of the 120 years.—Two main alternatives.

- A. Might describe the length of time left until the Flood. Cf. 15:13-16. Fits best with *yadon A* or B. Objections focus on the fact that it is only 100 years from Noah, but Noah does not figure in this paragraph, and God’s judgment to this effect might well have taken place in Noah’s 480th year. Then the birth of his children would have been part of God’s preparation to preserve a remnant. This also aligns best with v.13, noting the “end” of some period and referring again to “flesh.”
- B. Might describe a new limit on human life; until now, has tended to 1000 years, the Lord’s “day”, but will now be sharply curtailed. Best fits with *yadon C*.

4, Preparation: The Giants

This sentence is a disjunctive clause in Hebrew (subject-initial). It focuses in on the offspring of these marriages; presumably they introduce the next paragraph, as the final concluding line about Noah does 6:9ff. It tells us three things:

How these giants came about: they were the offspring of the mixed unions described in 6:1-2.

When they were on the earth: not only in the days of Noah, but also “after that.” Apparently the flood did not put an end to this sort of liaison. Cf. use of *gibbor* in 10:8 of Nimrod.

Genesis 5 The Generations of Adam

- The particular word used here for “giant,” *nefilim*, “fallen ones,” appears elsewhere in the OT only in Num 13:33, the report of the spies from Canaan. (Were they actually *nefilim*, or were the spies simply comparing them to the primeval history?)
- The spies describe them as “the sons of Anak,” and we know of the Anakim elsewhere in the OT: cf. Deut 9:1,2; Caleb drove his sons out of Hebron, Josh 15:14.
- In particular, Deut 2:10-11, 20-21 describes at least four and perhaps five races of giants:
 - *Anakim*
 - *Refa'im*, which is the major reflex of “giant” in AV (except Job). It means “shades, ghosts,” and thus is similar to *nefilim*. Goliath and his kin belong to this category. One of the important valleys leading up to Jerusalem is called “the valley of the ghosts.”
 - *Etim* in the territory of the Moabites
 - *Zamzummim* in the land of the Ammonites
 - Perhaps the *Horim* of 2:12 were also in this category.

Lesson: While God *punishes* sin according to his pleasure, he does not *eliminate* it from the world until the return of our Lord. Circumstances from the past will keep recurring. This is precisely why we can gain “patience and comfort” from the records of the past. The world they describe is the same one in which we live now.

Who were they? Three terms are used to describe them.

- “Giants,” lit. *nefilim*, “fallen ones.” Cf. GKC %84a.l p. 231, like ‘*asir, mashiax*, “a passive meaning to denote duration in a state” (for defective *hireq*, see *nasi*’, *nesi’im*, Ex 34:31). The name may denote their half-heavenly origin; people saw them as divine beings fallen to earth.
- “Mighty men of old,” *gibborim*. A standard term for a military hero. These half-breeds were mighty fighters, with superhuman strength. “Of old,” the legendary ones; cf. Ezek 26:19-20, esp. its association with destruction by a flood.
- “men of renown,” lit. “men of name.” It is God’s prerogative to make a name for himself (2 Sam 7:23), to bring glory to himself. People who seek fame often run afoul of the Lord’s commands. Note:
 - Gen 11:4, this was the intention of those who built the tower of Babel.
 - Num 16:2, those who rose against Moses in the rebellion of Korah were “men of name.”
 - 1 Chr 5:23-26, so were the children of Manasseh, “famous men,” who transgressed against the God of their fathers.
 - Ps 49:11-13 is God’s general verdict on such.

Let us resolve to seek the Lord’s glory, not our own. But this was not the direction of the giants of Gen 6.

It is noteworthy that the verb “to fall” and the term “mighty men” often occur together in the OT. Cf. Ezek 32:27, describing fallen soldiers. The same collocation is 3x in David’s lament over Saul and Jonathan, “how are the mighty fallen,” 2 Sam 1:19, 25, 27. And compare our Lord’s admonition that “they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,” Matt 26:52.

- The world sees those who build their own reputation by forceful acts as “fallen ones” in the sense of “gods on earth.”
- The Bible portrays them as dead corpses, moldering in their graves.

5-8, **Wickedness**

Here we have three verbs describing what the Lord did, and then the description of Noah. The three verbs show a progression. God takes account of what is going on, responds to it emotionally, and reaches a decision.

5, *The Lord Saw*

God looks in two places: “in the earth,” that is, abroad in human society, and in the “heart,” the thoughts of the individual. In each case, Moses echoes earlier verses. We can confirm the first globally; the second, only individually. He makes two observations that are important for us to understand. Both emphasize that the problem is not temporary and superficial, but rampant and persistent.

In the earth, wickedness is great (RBH), an echo of 6:1-2, where men began to multiply (RB) and produce fair daughters. Contrast Isa 11:9, when the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord.

- Man’s evil is *extensive*. It pervades his society.
- And it matters in the sight of God. It is not “innocent fun” or “childish mistakes,” but Great Wickedness.

The heart.—God saw that something is only evil continually. Compare Gen 1; whatever God made was good, but whatever man thinks is evil. The universality of the corruption is expressed in two ways: “only evil,” so that there is nothing good, and “continually,” so that there is no period when the man is not controlled by it.

- Man’s sin is *intensive*. It pervades his individual thought, his purposes, plans, desires.
- Cf. Jer 17:9, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”
- Cf. Mark 7:21-23, “from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness”.
- Isa 50:11 shows the futility of kindling one’s own fire for guidance.

6, *The Lord Repented*

The notion of God repenting has been the object of extensive theological discussion, since it seems to stand in tension with God’s omniscience and sovereignty. Every such reference uses a

particular Hebrew verb, *nixam*, which is entirely different from the verb used to describe human repentance.

- Human repentance is described using *shubh* “to turn.” This verb does express the idea of a change of direction. This verb is never used of God.
- When God is said to “repent,” the term has an emotional, not a volitional, sense. It describes the pain that God feels over something that has happened.

This emotional sense is clear in the context here, in the parallel with “it grieved him at his heart.” Thus a better translation would be, “the Lord sorrowed *because* he had made man ...” The creation of man brought him grief and pain. This is not the same as saying that he regrets the decision. His broader plan for the universe required the creation of man, along with the pain that God experienced through man’s sin.

This understanding avoids the challenge to God’s sovereignty, but leaves another. The creeds of the reformation (Westminster Confession; 39 articles of the Church of England) universally confess that God is “without body, parts, or passions.” Even Calvin falls into this trap: “Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God’s hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.”

This, I believe, is a concession to Greek idealism. Aristotle defined God as the “unmoved mover,” causing everything yet completely unaffected by anything around him, and many of the church fathers and reformers, educated in the classics, carried these ideas over to their reading of the Bible. But He is not an automaton, a pure logic machine, and emotion is not a weakness of the creation. Scripture everywhere depicts God as loving, hating, rejoicing, and grieving. Love is his very essence (1 John, “God is love”). Here, in the early chapters of the Bible, he presents himself to us as an emotional being.

7, *The Lord Said*

Notice the content of the decree, its extent, and its motive.

The Decree

The literal statement is, “I will wipe away man from upon the face of the earth.”

- Cf. wiping dirt off of a dish (2 Kings 21:13),
- or wiping one’s mouth after eating (Prov 30:20),
- or wiping away a tear (Isa 25:8).

The majority of uses (21x) deal with wiping away people or their works in judgment. But starting with David (Ps 51:1,9), there is the realization that God can also wipe away sins, and the term becomes a metaphor for forgiveness as well as judgment (Ps 51:1,9; 109:14 [cf. the sense of judgment in 13]; Prov 6:33; Isa 43:25; 44:22; Jer 18:23; Neh 4:5).

Lessons:

1. God is the master cleaner. He can set right a corrupt and sinful world.
2. He can also cleanse us from our sin, if we repent and call on him.

The Extent

Includes the animals. At first, it seems unjust that God would punish the animals for man's sin, but

- household punishment:
 - Korah, Num 16:21ff. Initially, God would destroy all but Moses and Aaron; upon their intercession, he invites the rest of the nation also to withdraw from the wicked ones.
 - Achan: because of his sin, the Lord was angry with the nation (Josh 7:1), and Achan's family died with him (7:24).
 - In Babylonian and Persian times, the punishment for an evildoer extended to the destruction of his house ("house become a dunghill," Dan 2:5; 3:29; Ezra 6:11).
- Collateral benefits to the stranger in Israel. Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19; etc. Cf. the eschatological promise in Zech 8:23; Isa 55:5; 60:3. Illustrated in Num 10:29-32; 1 Cor 14:25.
- Exhortations:
 - *Come out* from among them. Num 16:21, 23, 45 (Korah); Jer 51:6 (Babylon); Rev 18:4 (eschatological Babylon).
 - *Put out*: deliver unto Satan. 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20; cf. Tit 3:10.

Lesson: Watch out whom you associate with. We are social creatures. God deals not only with individuals, but also with groups. His mercy spills over among those with whom he is well pleased, but his wrath can make life miserable for those near its targets.

The Motive

Earlier we saw that the Lord is characterized as having emotion. Now he explains his decree as stemming directly from his grief and pain. This is hardly an exception. God is regularly presented as acting, not out of reason, but out of emotion.

Love.—John 3:16, "God so loved ... that he gave ... "; Heb. 12, "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth"; Deut 7:7,8. We are never given a cause for God's love; it is elective, grounded only in his sovereign will.

Anger.—1 Kings 11:9-11; 2 Kings 17:18; in both cases we have man's disobedience → Divine anger → judgment.

Hate.—Lev 20:23. Cf. Prov. 6:16, the seven things that we are not to do are not merely forbidden by the Lord, but said to be *hated* by him.

Why then do we consider it weakness for people to have emotions, or to act out of emotion?

- Wrong *stimulus*: our emotion may be triggered by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. If I am tired, or have a headache, or have recently suffered a personal loss, I may be liable to very strong emotions for which I cannot claim divine precedent. Our emotions, like everything else in our lives, are subject to the struggle between flesh and Spirit (Gal 5:16-17), and only those stimulated by the Spirit are to be trusted.

- Wrong *object*: we may love the wrong thing. 1 John 2:15 (the world), 2 Tim 3:2 (ourselves), 2 Chr 19:2 (those who hate the Lord), or fear the wrong thing Matt 10:28, or hate the wrong thing Prov 8:36 (wisdom); 12:1 (reproof)
- Wrong *response*: sometimes we need to trust the Lord, not take actions into our own hands.
- Wrong *timing*: It is hasty: Titus 1:7, “not soon angry.” God is “slow to anger,” Exod 34. Self-control is not the absence of emotion, but being sure it is grounded correctly.

Mnemonic: We need to SORT out our emotions. (Brian Johnson)

Lesson: We can err in two ways with regard to emotion.

1. Our emotions may get out of line with God’s, in stimulus, object, timing, or response.
2. We may try to avoid it entirely, and follow after a false ideal of Platonic rationalism. But then we become cold and unfeeling. Godly emotion will lead to obedience and belief, but one can have obedience and belief in the strength of the flesh without truly loving God.

Neither is correct. May God enable us to live our lives with the fervency of divine emotion, perfectly aligned with his. The true sign of the work of God’s spirit in our lives is not that we obey God, or believe true statements, but that we love him and his people, and hate the world and the flesh. A true understanding of the importance of Godly emotion will guard us against superficial, rationalizing religion.

8, Noah

At the end of the previous paragraph, a disjunctive clause focused our attention on the giants, whose proud, aggressive behavior led to the wickedness that triggers the Lord’s sorrow in 5-8.

Again here, a disjunctive clause prepares for what follows. We are introduced to the one person who will be preserved through the coming judgment.

“Found grace”: the first instance of a common (37x) phrase in the OT. Sometimes translated “found favor.”

- Like our “if you please.”
- Very deferential; it is always the inferior who “finds favor” in the eyes of the superior.
 - The recipient with the most different donors is David before Saul (1 Sam 16:22), Jonathan (20:3,29), king Achish of Gath (27:5), and the Lord (2 Sam 15:25).
 - Conversely, the Lord is the most common grantor, at 11 times, to Noah (Gen 6:8), Abraham (18:3), Moses (7x), David (2 Sam 15:25), and Israel (Jer 31:2).
 - Jacob in 47:29, and Laban in 30:27, are noteworthy precisely because they violate this norm.
- The recipient never gives any reason for the favor that is requested. As in the NT sense of the word, this is a claim on “unmerited favor,” which must arise purely within the donor. In the next verse we will read that “Noah was a just man [and] perfect in his generations, [and] Noah walked with God.” But this is in a new section, *after* we learn that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” As always, our righteousness is the *result* of God’s grace toward us, not the cause of it.