

Tell Me The Story: *Keeping His Word* - week 9

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Oct. 24, 2021

Read Genesis 5 NIV

As a thank you to our reader let me say you covered a lot of generations for us, more than you know. You covered all of the early part of human history from Adam to Noah in less than a few minutes. Congratulations!

But what did you actually read in reading this genealogy? All genealogies are giving us names in chronological order, but not necessarily “strict, continuous chronology.” The same as if you know you’re a “Daughter of the Revolution,” when you recount your lineage to me, you wouldn’t want to or need to tell me the name of ever generation of your family from now back to 1776. To convey to me that you are a “Daughter of the Revolution,” but you would also never convey them to me out of order. You wouldn’t say, “My family fought in 1776, and my grandma was born in 1903, and my great-great-great grandpa on her side was born in 1842 and his son was the great-great-grandson of a revolutionary General.” Genealogies always stay in chronological order, even if you only highlight a few more interesting generations.

The same for genealogies in the Bible. They stay in order, even if they only highlight a few of the more interesting generations. This means something else: you cannot add up all the ages of persons named in Genesis 5 and work

backward to the date of the birth of Adam. James Ussher, a scholar of the 1600s, assumed strict chronology and used Genesis 5 to argue that creation took place on October 23, 4004 BC. (*So sorry, we missed our 6025th anniversary of creation of the world yesterday. We should have had a big party!*) Now Ussher's calculation might be true, but it might not. Genealogies cannot give an undisputed answer, for they often skip generations.

Biblical genealogies are important because they teach us two things: the nature of history and the value of individuals.

1) The genealogies teach us that history is linear. History moves. It is not the endless repetition of the same pattern. This is the unique contribution of the Judeo-Christian faith to our understanding of time. History moves forward – sometimes downward, sometimes upward, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, but always forward. History is heading somewhere. There is a trajectory, a *telos*. This is good news to people caught in religious philosophies of monotonous repetition, and this good news to people who believe “we are born, just to die”. History is linear, not cyclical; we are not stuck in meaninglessness. We live with hope for full life and a trajectory of harmony in God's Kingdom.

2) The biblical genealogies also teach that individuals have value. History is not driven by great ideas alone, but by great ideas and people who think, make decisions, and

act out their ideologies in real time with real people and real communities. The God of history values individuals. Indeed the genealogies declare that God remembers individuals and names. People matter, and names matter. Our names matter. We count in the unfolding in history.

We know how important it is to remember someone's name. We know how much we regret forgetting someone's name. Biblical genealogies tell us: God remembers us! Indeed, God has a book in which he writes the names of those claims for himself, the Lamb's book of life, as it is called in Revelation 21:27. Your name and my name may never appear in the *Who's Who* of the 21st-century. No matter. What matters is that they are written in the big book – in God's *Who's Who*.

So, the biblical genealogies help us make sense of our stories by teaching us that history has meaning, that it is linear and not endlessly cyclical. And they remind us that individuals matter.

What does the genealogy of Genesis 5 uniquely teach us? How does this chapter of *The Story That Makes Sense of Our Stories* make sense of our stories? God is keeping his word. God, the Creator and Redeemer, the God of justice and mercy, is keeping his word.

We see and hear this in four terms the author of the genealogies uses: “**begat,**” “**died,**” “**rest,**” and “**took.**”

The genealogy of Genesis 5 is returning to Genesis 1, where God started the flow of history. After the sad, dark story in Genesis 4, the story of Cain the murderer and his line deteriorating to the point where Lamech boasts about murdering a boy, Genesis 5 goes back to the beginning and reaffirms God's decision to make a creature in his own likeness. The point is that God is not going to give up. **"He blessed them" (5:2) echoes the original "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'"**

Then through a chain of nine **"begats,"** God is making sure to fulfill his promise in Genesis 3:15, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman in between your seat in her side; he will bruise you on the head."** God is keeping his word about bringing into the world the seed of the woman, who will crush the head of evil.

The second term in which we see and hear God keeping his word is **"died."** Eight times, **"and he died."** God said that **"in the day"** we declare independence from him, we would not be able to make life work on our own. We would die. And we did. And we still do.

We were not supposed to die. Look at how many years they lived, long lives. They lived so many years because we were originally created to live a long time – *forever and intimacy with God*. I know it is hard to imagine. Whether the numbers in the genealogy are literal or symbolic or both, the point is that we were not supposed to die.

In Genesis 11, after the flood, the genealogy has smaller lifespans, smaller numbers, showing that slowly but surely God's word is being actualized. **"You will surely die"** becomes **"And he died."** Yes, it is depressing, but the genealogy does not want us to live in a make-believe world. The genealogy wants us to face the reality of judgment. Yes, death is not going to have the last word, as we will see in a moment. But death is here and now lives.

"And he died," "and he died," "and he died." It is right to lament the reality of death, because it did not have to be. It is right to cry out and protest. Jesus weeping at the grave of Lazarus was his own expression of, *"This ought not to be."*

Genesis 5 is reminding us that death exist, and that **"he died"** because we humans did not believe God when he told us we could not make it on her own. "He died," "he died," "he died." God is keeping his word.

A third term is "rest." This word brings us back to the song of creation, when God establishes the seventh day, the day of rest. God is going to bring us into the blessing of the seventh day. God has something to give us on the seventh day that he has not given in the other six days. God is going to have his way; he's going to bring us into his rest. The promised **"seed of the woman"** who brings this rest will come many generations later. He is Jesus who when he came said, **"Come to me all you who are weary and**

have overburdened yourself, and I will rest you.” (Matthew 11:28).

The genealogy of Genesis 5 preaches, that God keeps his word about the seventh day. God will give us rest from the consequences of human sin.

This brings us to the fourth term in Genesis 5 in which we see God keeping his word: **"took."** The pattern of **"he died," "he died," "he died"** is broken by the startling declaration, **"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him"** (v. 24).

Amazing! This is too hard to get our minds around. Enoch does not have to go through the process of dying. He is simply **"taken"** by God, as the prophet Elijah would be years later (2 Kings 2:11-12).

Why is Enoch spared the **"he died"**? Twice the text says, **"Enoch walked with God"** (vv. 22, 24). This means, I think, that he walked with God in a unique way, in a deeply intimate way, all the time, every day, in every event. He **"walked with God."** In a world seeking to operate without any reference to God, Enoch walked with God.

God graciously calls all his people to do this. **"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, But to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"** (Micah 6:8). The apostle Paul will echo the call, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, the employer you to walk in a

manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). **"walk in love"** (Eph 5:2). **"Walk as children of Light"** (Eph 5:8). **"Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh"** (Gal 5:16).

Enoch **"walked with God,"** and **"he was not, for God took him."** God chose to spare Enoch the pain of death to show that death will not win in the end. Already, God is trampling on death, telling us that death is not going to have the last word. All the way back in Genesis 5, we see this hope: death will not have the final word.

God is keeping his word. God created us for fellowship. God created us to enter into life with him, to enter into his own inner life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And God is going to have his way. Enoch is *Exhibit A*. Death will not have the last word over those who seek to walk with the God of life. Eventually ***the seed of the woman*** will come. He will overcome the power of death. But here is the mystery: he will not, like Enoch, be spared death. He will walk right into the jaws of death, and he will let death have its full way with him. And in so doing, he will deal death a deathblow. ***"When death stung Jesus Christ, it stung itself to death."*** - Peter Joshua. Jesus provided the cure for the disease of sin and death.

The apostle Paul, who knew the genealogies of Genesis 5, says, **"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ [the New Adam] all will be made alive"** (1 Cor 15:21-22).

Evangelist Ravi Zacharias says, “*Jesus did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came into this world to make a dead people live.*” God is keeping his word in the seed of the woman. In Jesus, the New Adam, God is keeping his word. **“And the tombs were opened.”**

(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson’s book *The Story of All Stories*.)