

THE CHILDREN OF PROMISE

Genesis 4:17–5:32

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We're looking at a theme that was begun last week: children of the world and children of promise. To provide some kind of linking together, I want to say a word or two more in relation to Cain as we make that bridge from chapter 4 to chapter 5.

A number of years ago I read *The Prince*, a book by Machiavelli, a political philosopher whose basic theme of revolution ran something like this: Political revolution is much like an illness or disease. In its early stages it is almost impossible to detect but rather easy to cure. However, in its later stages, it is easy to detect but almost impossible to cure.

I thought of that theme in reference to Cain. We have here the seeds of sin beginning in the world. As time goes along, these sins become so easy to detect but so very impossible to cure. In Cain's line we see in his sons and grandsons the capacity to create or destroy. They make weapons, but the same things that go into making weapons could have been made for peace. We find this at large in our world today. In this country we have the ability to kill the world many times over, but we do not have stockpiles to make peace in the world many times over or to feed the world many times over.

Cain's line shows the capacity and the desire to create community—citizens living together in hopes of finding some kind of camaraderie, fellowship, friendship. But the very thing that Cain creates—a city—is a place of alienation, a place that modern sociologists say creates the deep depersonalization of man. This is seen in our suburbs and our apartments. We really don't know the people living adjacent to us. We thought that the city, the apartment complex, the suburb, the

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heavy population would bring us rest and a fulfillment to loneliness, only to find that the thing that has been created actually intensifies the loneliness.

In Cain's line we see the toleration of sexual excess. In his line we see the passionate vindication of violence. And, most importantly, with Cain we see the total absence of the mention of God in His relationship to people. Instead we see a gradual moving away from God. While Cain at least wants God for protection, his descendants in the person of Lamech care not whether God is around or not. In fact, Lamech flaunts God in a poem that glorifies sex and violence.

Thus, God must work through another line within human history if His purposes are to be realized. When a person has gone from the scene or if they have failed, God raises someone else up. Even if they have succeeded, God prepares someone to take their place one day. As we read in Genesis 5, I think of the phrase that is on John Wesley's tombstone: "God buries His workman but never buries His work." We see that given to us so beautifully in this fifth chapter.

Genesis 5:1–32, NIV:

"This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.' [Notice both male and female were named "man" when they were created.] When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died. When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. And after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

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When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. And after he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died. When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. And after he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died. When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. And after he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters.

Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. [This is a different Lamech than in chapter 4, by the way.] And after he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died. When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, ‘He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.’ After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died. After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.”

As we look at this text, I want to do what one expositor of Scripture has called some “donkey work”—hard work that is not necessarily spiritually refreshing. I hope that by doing so we can provide some basis for accepting the credibility of this text.

I. You’ll recognize right off that two problems can be advanced in respect to this passage of Scripture.

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A. One problem is that if you total the years together, it appears that the total time span is too short to satisfy the need for understanding how old mankind is. For example, if you add all the years from Adam to the death of Methuselah, you'll come up with 1,656 years. If you add these years together with other chronologies in Scripture, you come up with a date suggesting that the age of man can be dated precisely at 4004 B.C. Yet we have archeological remains from the oldest city civilization that we know of—Jericho—going back perhaps 7,000 years, anywhere from 1,000 years or more beyond the 4004 B.C. date.

So we have to look and see what the Scripture is actually saying. Often there is a problem with communication. One person says something and knows what is meant by it. Another person listening understands it in an entirely different way.

We have a term used here in Genesis—"became the father of"—that can have a wider usage than the one we normally apply to it. This is characteristic of genealogies in Scripture. The most striking example is the genealogy of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew uses three divisions in his genealogy—fourteen names from Abraham to David, fourteen names from David to the captivity of Judah in 586 B.C., and fourteen names from that captivity to the birth of Christ. If you look very carefully at the text in Matthew 1:8, you'll find this phrase: "Jehoram the father of Uzziah" (NIV). Yet if you do some cross-referencing and put that text in relation to 2 Chronicles 21–25, you'll find that between Jehoram and Uzziah there are three generations not named in Matthew. In other words, Matthew is using a selective framework of genealogy—14-14-14—which for his listeners provides a convenient vehicle for memory. His purpose was not to give every separate name that existed in succession in the genealogy, but rather to give key links. Someone has said that genealogy is not the successive genealogy of links. It is instead separate landmarks of persons along the way. In other words, "father" is used rather loosely—the

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same way that in creation, the word “day” in the Hebrew meant far more than simply a 24-hour segment of time.

The number ten is also very important in the genealogies of Genesis. In all there are ten genealogies of Genesis where you’ll find the phrase “these are the generations of.” The first is found in Genesis 2:4: “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created” (KJV). There are ten such usages in Genesis. Also, there are ten names from Adam to Noah. Later in Genesis 11, there are again ten names from Shem, the son of Noah, to Abraham. So rather than continuous links, what is being used here are separate landmarks. At least you have that impression as you read Genesis 5, because if you were to take all the years and add them together in a continuous link—which Genesis never does—then what you’d have is all nine of these people living at the same time. A few years before Noah was born, Adam was still living. From reading the text, you don’t get the impression that this is the case.

So in looking at it, we now understand that in Genesis 5:9, “When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan” (NIV) could also mean that he became the father of the father of Kenan, depending on how many links were in between. We don’t have Scripture taking the viewpoint that says mankind began in 4004 B.C. Neither do we have Scripture saying that man’s years can be traced back as far as 50,000 or 100,000 years. In respect to fossils that are being found, perhaps they are from a type of being that is not man but strikingly resembled man.

B. Another problem suggested by persons who don’t believe in Scripture is that not only does the time period in Genesis 5 seem too short, but also the individual life span seems too long. Out of the ten names mentioned in the chapter, seven lived more than 900 years.

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You may take one of two views in terms of personal feeling. The first is, isn't it great to live that long? The second is, wouldn't it be terrible to live that long? I suppose that depends on how much you enjoy what you're doing right now.

Some have tried to make sense of this by saying that this represents family groups—that such and such a family was a continuous family for so long. But that doesn't make sense because we're talking about individuals like Enoch, like Noah, like Seth. These clearly are not family names but individual people.

An enterprising individual has said that these years represent lunar months in the Hebrew mind. You take the age that was given like Methuselah—969, divide it by twelve, and you come to a rather reasonable age of about eighty-five or ninety when he died. That sounds very sensible until you find that when consistently applied, Enoch was the father of Methuselah when he was less than five years of age. So you come down to only one possibility if you're going to take the Scripture seriously: These represent literal life spans.

One thing that accounts for their longevity is that the Flood has not yet altered the kind of environmental conditions in the severe way that we have today. Also, the curse of sin in respect of bringing death has not yet brought the life span of man to such a short time. As it says in Psalm 90:10, it's appointed unto man that he should live threescore and ten years. But here in Genesis 5, we have something else.

It is significant to note that in spite of the age to which they lived, all of the people in this passage fall short of 1,000. It's fascinating to look later in Revelation and find the word "thousand" used in reference to the golden age, the age of peace and justice in the world. It is suggestive of the fact that man, even in his grandeur of age, never reached the completeness of the golden age that God will one day bring to the earth.

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Having dealt with those two problems, I hope there's a better foundation established in your mind regarding these words.

II. Let's look now at some spiritual applications that arise from this chapter.

A. One thing to be seen is the tolling of the bell of death—the tolling of earth's funeral bell. You find that phrase, “then he died,” recurring with monotonous repetition. Notice how frequently it broke into the text: eight times. “Then he died.” It is an incredible repetition of the word that the serpent or Satan spoke to the woman in the Garden of Eden. He said, “When you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will not die” (Genesis 3:4). God's Word is very plain in showing us that Satan's words are not only deceptive, as we saw in chapter 3, but they're also utterly and totally in error. If you give in to the kind of thing that he is saying, if you follow him in his contradiction of what God has established, ultimately you will reckon with the judgment that God says would come. Satan says, “You will not die.” But here, again and again, we see “Then he died, then he died, then he died.”

Death is certain. It's one of those inevitabilities. In this genealogy we see not only the certainty of death but also the three important things that are mentioned about everyone except for Enoch, who breaks the pattern: They are born, they have children, and they die. As if to say these are the basic stuff of life. When you look back over a period of time, that's about all you can say.

Probably a hundred or 200 years from now when people are looking at our names somewhere in a scrapbook, that's about all that could be said. They were born, they had children, and they died. It's kind of humbling to realize that most of us will never make much of a mark outside of that. Life does not usually come to us in such a way to make us as individuals stand out or significant. This makes the giving of Christ all the more incredible—that while most of the human race is caught up in being born, parenting, and dying, the Lord thinks of us so significantly that He gives

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himself on our behalf. We who don't merit much attention gain all the attention from God. The whole scriptural story is bent on showing us that God thinks a whole lot of us plain, ordinary folk.

I always like to read the names in genealogies. Whenever I come across a genealogy in Scripture now, I take the time to read it. I remember that, of all the thousands of people whose names aren't in Scripture, this person was significant enough to make it. Out of respect to His personhood, I should at least try to pronounce his name.

B. Also in this Genesis 5 text is a great hope held out for redemption—what God is going to do in reversing the effects of Adam's fall. We see this phrase being used in the first two verses of chapter 5: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God" (NIV). That's such an incredible phrase. This does not mean that God is a physical being and when we were made we were miniature gods. To be made in the likeness of God involves something else. It is God who we see in the Book of Exodus when He reveals himself to Moses, who knows who He is. He says, "I am God." He has identity of self.

We also have been made by God to be conscious of ourselves. A dog does not know how to say, "I am a dog." There's no dog consciousness. But we're able to say, "I am." We're able to think. We're able to say, "Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going?" All of these are a part of being man. Man, when created, is made in the image and after the likeness of God. The concept of self.

C. But when the Fall comes, the next concept emerges. The child that is born, Seth, is made not in the likeness of God but in the likeness of Adam. There's probably a negative or positive thing that could be said here. On the positive side, Cain couldn't be described as being in the likeness of Adam, because he was still moving away from Adam's God and Adam's faith and Adam's

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acceptance of God's covering. That phrase is never used of him— "He was created in the likeness of Adam." But Seth was in the likeness of Adam. I like to think something more than physical is meant there, although I realize the physical aspect is involved. But perhaps what is also involved is on Seth's part and his descendants' part—their willingness to try to come back to God. It isn't until the New Testament that we begin to understand that now there's a possibility for us to be made—not simply after the likeness of Adam, but made again after the likeness of God. What Adam lost in his fall, we regained through Christ.

It can be said of us that we are made after the image of God—not because when we become a Christian our physical features suddenly change. It means a change of spirit has resulted. So we see a consciousness of self here and a recognition on the part of Seth and his descendants of the need for dependence upon God.

III. Standing out in this story is the beautiful example of Enoch.

With everyone except Noah there is repetition—born, parented, and died. But with Enoch, the seventh from Adam, there is a sharp contrast. Last week as we looked at Lamech, a descendant of Cain, who was also the seventh from Adam, what a contrast he was to Enoch: Lamech, the person who was deep into sexual abuse and violence, contrasted with Enoch, who walks with the Lord. Sometimes we look at these people of the Old Testament and say, "If I had the circumstances they had, I also could walk with the Lord. Enoch probably had it easy. The pressures upon him to sin were not as great as they are upon me."

Yet there's an answer in Scripture to that. When you read the letter of Jude, the shortest book in the Bible and just before the Book of Revelation, you will find a description of the type of environment that Enoch lived in. It's not too different from ours at all—people who are grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters flattering people to

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gain advantage. All of those things were a part of Enoch's generation. Yet in the midst of that decline away from God, here is a man who chooses to walk with the Lord.

An intriguing phrase is used in Genesis 5:22: "After he became the father of Methusaleh, Enoch walked with God" (NIV). Some have suggested that he really didn't begin walking with God until he had a child and that sobered him up. There's a lot of truth to that. Being a parent does things to you. You become more concerned about others than simply yourself or your immediate family. Maybe that's too much for the text. Maybe we should simply assume that he walked with God all along.

There is an intriguing thing happening here. This phrase "walk with God" was used to describe the communion that the first man and woman had with God. Genesis 3:8 shows God walking in the cool of the day in the Garden. His purpose was to have fellowship. Now for the first time since Adam, that phrase is again used. God is walking. There is intimacy, fellowship, face-to-face communion. God is not coming down in a physical form and walking physically with Enoch. I don't think that's intended in this text. But there is close fellowship among them. What does it mean to walk with God? How do we take Enoch's phrase, "walk with God," and apply it to our own lives? I think it means at least two things.

A. To walk with God means to go in the same direction as God. It's kind of rough to take a walk with a person when you're going separate directions. Both must go in the same direction. No controversy between them. God's suggestions do not even need to be commands for Enoch. The slightest hint of God suggesting something becomes that by which Enoch orders his life. Perfect and unbroken fellowship. They're both going in the same direction.

B. They're also going at the same pace. Certainly to walk with a person indicates that they're also in step. It's hard to walk with a person when they're way out ahead of you.

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Isn't it great that when God chooses to walk with us He chooses not to run at the pace He could fly? Instead, He limits himself to walking along with us. We learn to walk as we take steps in His direction. He neither walks ahead of us nor behind us. He chooses to walk beside us and likewise we walk with Him.

As a result of this walk we see Enoch's translation. Enoch is caught up; He does not die. He's only one of two in Scripture that does not experience death. Here perhaps we see what God originally designed when He created the first man and woman. Here is what the world would have been like if they had not sinned. Instead of death when a person's pilgrimage was completed, he just simply goes out of the earth to be with the Lord. No process of death but simply stepping from one phase of existence into another phase of existence. To have time made into eternity. With Enoch we begin to see demonstrated what God had perhaps demonstrated with Adam.

IV. Enoch is also a beautiful picture of the last generation that will be alive when the Lord himself comes.

There will be a great group of people, among whom we hope to be, who will never experience the pain or the penalty of death. They, like Enoch or like what God intended for man, will simply step from this phase of experience into the next phase of experience with God.

A little girl came home from Sunday School class and her mother asked what she had learned that day. She said, "The Sunday School lesson was about Enoch. He used to take long walks with God. One day he walked so far that God said, "It's too far to go back; come on home with Me."

Another exciting thing that is happening within this text is the expectancy of parents toward their children as revealed in the choice of names given. We saw this two times with Eve. When Eve first brought a child into the world, she says in Genesis 4:1: "I have gotten a man with the help of

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the Lord.” The literal meaning of the name “Cain” is “gotten” or “begotten” or “gotten with the help of the Lord.” Perhaps when this baby boy was born, Eve saw in him the hope that through this child the curse placed upon mankind would be reversed—that maybe it would be he that would break the serpent’s hold by crushing the serpent’s head or triumphing over Satan and his power.

When there was no promise in the line of Cain, Eve hopes again. She has another child, Seth. His name literally means “appointed.” Again, perhaps, we see expectancy welling up within Eve as she names this child. Maybe this child will take over the appointment of reversing that which has been instituted with the Fall.

When Seth’s descendant, Lamech, brings a child into the world, he again reaches for significance in the child’s name. He says, “His name shall be called Noah,” which literally means “rest” or “comfort.” In the poem Lamech uses in Genesis 5:29, he makes a play on words about Noah’s name: “Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief. Noah shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.”

Over and over again, all through the Old Testament, we see the hope of parents toward their children, or sometimes the hope of God toward His people. God renames Abram, Abraham. God renames Jacob, Israel. Hannah names her child Samuel. People are looking, hoping that their child might be the one to begin a new humanity, a new world. Some of these children rise to great attainments for God; others fall to great depths. But no child, no matter their eloquence or greatness, is able to succeed in being the hinge person who becomes the new Adam who makes a new humanity; who turns things all around; who comes into life free and with that freedom never chooses wrongly, never chooses sin.

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In Matthew 1:21 the news is broken to Joseph about the child in Mary's womb: "You shall call His name Jesus." Why? What is the significance of the name Jesus? The name means "Savior." The angel says it: "He shall save His people from their sins." The tremendous significance of Genesis 5 begins to come into focus.

There is more than one genealogy in Scripture. There is the genealogy in Genesis 5, which is called the book of the generations of Adam. Throughout the Old Testament we see ample illustration of the generations of Adam going on. But the New Testament begins with the story of another generation. This is the generation of Jesus Christ.

When you come to Jesus of Nazareth—Jesus the Messiah—the genealogy stops. He never has physical children. Jesus does not choose to beget children in a physical way. Instead He chooses to beget children of God in a spiritual way.

So the New Testament can speak of Jesus and Adam as being two men—the only two men who have ever really lived and understood what humanity was all about. Adam who was the first man, but he fell and lost his consciousness of sinlessness that God had implanted in him. The second Man, Jesus, lived as God intended for Adam but shows that He is even more than man—He is the Son of God. Through Jesus Christ came the possibility that we can be something else than in the genealogy of Genesis 5—simply children of a man. To our lives came the possibility of becoming the children of God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The book of the generations of Adam. The book of the generations of Christ. Think again about the phrase "then he died." Whenever you find the phrase "then he died," we know from Scripture and experience that it is appointed unto man once to die. But the Scriptures do a marvelous thing with another word—the word "birth." We may never use the phrase, "then he died," again, for

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there is only one death in the physical dimension. But we can be described as “and he was born and he was born again.”

How can that be used? Because when we are born again, when we experience the second birth that Christ gives us, we may have to face physical death but we never have to face death or separation from God. The new birth means that we are something far more than a child of man. We are the children of God. What a coherent and consistent theme this is through Scripture.

Genesis 5—the generations of Adam. Matthew 1—the generations of Christ.

When you come to the end of the Bible, in Revelation 20:12, you’ll find this phrase used when the dead small and great are brought before God: “Another book was opened, which is the book of life” (NIV).

What is the Book of Life? I don’t think I’m guessing from the Scriptures when I say the Book of Life consists of those who belong to the generation for Jesus, who have been begotten by Him in a new and living way to be sons and daughters of God. Such news ought to elate us. It ought to put tremendous significance into the ordinariness of life, in the humdrum world in which you and I may live. It says something very important. God thinks much of you; God thinks much of me. When all was lost, God made provision that we should be found in Christ.

Closing Prayer

What a glory it is, Lord, to gather around Your word and to know Your presence. Time and time again, Lord, we feel like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who knew You in the breaking of the Word, whose hearts burned within them as You spoke. That same Spirit bears witness to us again this hour as You speak. What a joy it is to be counted in Your generation. I pray, Lord, that we would really stop and think and worship and praise You for the significance of our lives in You and what it took for You to be involved with us. To a very ordinary world You came,

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Lord, to bring a very extraordinary message: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me [though he were a child of Adam] will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25, NIV). We praise You for that word today. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.