

Others, including some early Jewish writers, take the words to refer to angels – fallen angels seeking a human body to control.

“My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years” (v. 3). This could be a reference to the time of respite before the Flood (cf. 1 Pet. 3.20) or simply to the much shortened life-span now to be expected. Both are consistent with the story that follows.

The term “Nephilim” is obscure, and is translated “giants” by KJV (after LXX and Vulgate). They were “heroes of old, men of renown” (v. 4).

But then v. 5 – “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time”. This is sin “full-grown” – not just lapses into wrong-doing but a continual bent towards evil. The LORD “was grieved... his heart was filled with pain” (v. 6) – to the point of planning to scrub out this race of mankind, along with the animals and birds, “for I am grieved that I have made them” (v. 7).

However, don’t despair! It’s time for a new beginning! “But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD” (v. 8). As Derek Kidner comments –

The simple brevity of 8 is extremely telling after the sweeping terms of 7. Together the two verses show God’s characteristic way with evil: to meet it not with half-measures but with simultaneous extremes of judgment and salvation. Grace (8) is still sheer bounty, whether the recipient is a Noah or (cf. 19.19) a Lot. The further fact that all life is bound together is made equally plain, with man’s fellow creatures sharing his doom and, as the story develops, his deliverance – a theme taken further in Romans 8.19-21. (*Genesis* 86).

The line of grace will come through one man and his family, just as, in a much fuller sense many centuries later, God’s grace would be poured out in the solitary figure of his Son.

Reflect:

- Judgment and salvation, doom and deliverance – we often have trouble holding the two together. How do we see them operating in the flow of human history in more recent times?

6. The Great Flood. Reading: Genesis 6.9-7.24.

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Studies in Genesis chapters 1-11
by Peter J Blackburn

5. The Line of Grace

Reading: Genesis 5-6.8

We had arrived at Jindabyne in time for New Year 1984. On 6 January one of our younger members wanted to go on a horse ride. I recorded what I witnessed in a reflection on “Horses and Bits” –

A horse had been tethered by its rider to a young gum tree about 8cm across at the trunk on a small rise overlooking the lake.

Something startled it and with a jerk it snapped the tree at the base. Off it went, galloping at full speed, dragging the tree alongside it.

Some insane rider was tugging at the reins – what could it do?

Fortunately, the real rider caught it and calmed it down.

Later a group of horses with young riders set out on a trail behind a leader.

All obediently followed, no matter what the experience of the rider. All returned – no mishaps on the way!

It was the last ride of the day and saddles, bits and bridles were removed. These same docile horses kicked and jumped as if to say, “I’m my own boss now!”

James wrote about horses, bits and the human tongue. The question is, “Who’s the boss?” Is our speech informed by God or inflamed by the devil?

“Who’s the boss?” We may well have that question as we watch or listen to the news – and as we reflect on the flow of human history.

In our system of government, there is a leader of the Opposition – seeking to embarrass the Government of the day, to swing public opinion, hoping to become the next Prime Minister. Some countries have little choice – their President and his party rule “for life” and they cannot vote for change.

But leaders good and bad all come and go. Who’s the boss? Is there any Boss?

Reflect:

- In spite of the Fall and human rebellion and autonomy, is there a divine Hand guiding the overall course of human history? What is the evidence that leads us to this response?

The Line of Grace

Read: Genesis 5.1-5.

We hear no more of Cain’s line. This doesn’t mean that they died out, simply that the long-term effects of Cain’s refusal to repent had been

sufficiently illustrated. The line of God’s grace, cut off in Abel, continues afresh through Seth.

Chapter 5 begins with a re-affirmation of God’s creation of humanity “in the likeness of God”. “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’.” (vv. 1b,2)

This re-affirmation is important for us too. With all that goes on in the world, it would be so easy to forget the divine image in people. No matter how much we have messed it all up, God hasn’t forgotten us.

It is striking that God “created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man’ (‘Adam’).” Male and female together are “man” – a similar point to 2.24 in the creation narrative.

“When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth” (v. 3). We certainly do that genetically, and one side or other sees the likenesses to their side of the family. Some writers have suggested that these descendents were in Adam’s likeness and no longer God’s. This isn’t the intent of the words, though clearly God’s image in humanity is distorted, twisted, broken by the Fall. So Paul writes that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15.22).

As we read this chapter, we are aware of death as a recurring theme. Someone has likened it to walking through a cemetery. We hear the constant refrain, “and he died”. But that may be unduly pessimistic, for these deaths were at the end of very long lives. The chapter is about life and hope and faith in the promises of God.

Reflect:

- What are the evidences of the “image of God” still present in fallen humanity?
- In what ways do we hope to see our children “in our own likeness”? In what ways do we hope our children won’t be “in our own likeness”? As parents and grand-parents, what can we do to encourage our children to follow in the “line of grace”?

From Seth to Noah

Read: Genesis 5.6-32.

At this point it is appropriate to comment on the incredibly long ages of these folk who lived before the Flood.

Before running for other explanations, it is important to see whether the record is consistent with itself. And it certainly is. All the dates add up

correctly. All except Noah were gone from the scene before the Flood began – Methuselah in the year of the Flood. Adam died when Noah’s father, Lamech, was just sixty years old. So there is no need to suppose a long oral tradition about conditions in the earliest days, just a long memory.

Does it make sense to take these long ages literally? They are certainly presented as the true ages of real people. John Gill, one of the old expositors, noted –

And though the length of time they lived may in some measure be accounted for by natural things as means, such as their healthful constitution, simple diet, the goodness of the fruits of the earth, the temperate air and climate they lived in, their sobriety, temperance, labour and exercise; yet no doubt it was so ordered in Providence for the multiplication of mankind, for the cultivation of arts and sciences, and for the spread of true religion in the world, and the easier handing down to posterity such things as were useful, both for the good of the souls and bodies of men. (*Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

There are, however, several reasons why it is difficult simply to use these ages as the basis of a chronology. For one thing, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch both have a range of dates that differ from the Hebrew text, leading to a variation of over 900 years in the date of the Flood. Only ten patriarchs are named. Could there have been other names omitted, as is the case in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, with its three fourteens (Mt. 1.2-17)?

One name stands out in this list – Enoch. Unlike the others, Enoch didn’t die. “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (v. 24) Hebrews tells us that “before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God” (11.5-6).

Reflect:

- Enoch was getting closer to the relationship with God that had characterised the life of Eden. What does it mean to “walk with God”?

Fallout

Read: Genesis 6.1-8.

This passage speaks of a further degradation of the human race. Some interpreters see the “sons of God” as a reference to the godly line through Seth becoming corrupted by inter-marriage with descendents of Cain.