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January 5th: Genesis 5 & John 3:22-36

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 5. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female, he created them, and he blessed them and named them man when they were created.

When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh. Seth lived after he fathered Enosh 807 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.

When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan. Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan 815 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Enosh were 905 years, and he died.

When Kenan had lived 70 years, he fathered Mahalalal. Kenan lived after he had fathered Mahalalal 840 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Kenan were 910 years, and he died.

When Mahalalal had lived 65 years, he fathered Gerard. Mahalalal lived after he fathered Gerard 830 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Mahalalal were 895 years, and he died.

When Gerard had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. Gerard lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Gerard were 962 years, and he died.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Enoch were 365 years.

Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech. Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech 782 years, and had other sons and daughters.

Thus, all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died. When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son, and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, "this one shall bring us relief from our work, "and from the painful toil of our hands." Lamech lived after he fathered Noah 595 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus, all the days of Lamech were 777 years, and he died.

After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. A few chapters ago, we saw the generations of the heavens and the earth, and now we begin the generations of Adam. Adam functions both as a name for an individual man, but also as the name for the race built, in the case of Eve, and descended, in the case of everyone else, from him.

He stands for the entirety of humanity. His name is given to humanity. He was created in God's image and likeness, and now he has a son, Seth, in his image and likeness.

Now, when we're reading a text like this, it's important to remember that we read the scriptures as people who swim in a society of literally trillions of texts of different kinds, everything from text messages, to things that we read on the internet, to books that we pull down from a shelf. And we're accustomed to single readings of texts with low signal to noise ratios, or pure surface signal that we can read quickly, we can get the message, and we don't have to return to them. But the original readers of scripture would have devoted years to studying them closely, and they were very familiar with the texts in a society with a very limited body of knowledge that was highly integrated.

They were also quite used to the exceedingly dense signals of texts that might require a

hundred readings or more to discover. And when we're reading something like this genealogy, it's important to remember that, because there's a lot within this, and I'm going to throw out a few things to notice, and see if you can put any pieces together. I have not been able to put these pieces together yet, but there's something promising here.

First of all, we've already seen a genealogy in the previous chapter, Adam, Cain, Enoch, Erad, Mithujael, Methuselah, Lamech, and then Jabal, Jubal, Tubal-Cain, and Nama. And I wonder whether the sons of Lamech are supposed to recall Cain and Abel. I've already mentioned this in the previous discussion, but there are a number of points of similarity with the genealogy that follows, and a number of people have noticed this.

So there's Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kinan, is that a reminder of Cain? Mahalalel, is that Mithujael? Is that some connection there? Jared, Erad, Enoch, there's another Enoch in the previous one, Methuselah, and then Mithushael, and then there's a Lamech in both, and then it ends with Noah. And perhaps we're supposed to read these two lines in juxtaposition with each other as a sort of commentary on their respective and their contrasting character. That's one suggestion.

The similarities between the names have been noticed by many. The other thing that should be noted is that the age at which the patriarchs give birth is included, which isn't always the case in these sorts of things. Some have suggested that that's to give a complete chronology so that you can map from one to another, and you can have a very clear idea of what happens when at which point, and you can count out the years and number the age of the earth for that reason as well.

But there are interesting things about the numbers too. Carol Hill has observed that there are preferred numbers. There are numbers that we see, and then there are numbers that we don't see.

She notes that for the 30 numbers listed for the patriarchs prior to the flood, from Adam to Noah, all of the ages end in a zero, five, seven, two, or nine. And she observes that these can all be forms of adding five and seven, or adding five and seven and seven, or something like that. These are significant numbers that arise from key core significant numbers.

And numbers that are an exact century are mentioned on three occasions within these. That's unusual. It's not what we would expect.

It's not what we'd expect if this were just a random set of numbers. In the Septuagint, a number of these figures differ, and some have argued that the Septuagint numbers should be preferred over the numbers that we have in our Bibles. But again, it's worth seeing that many of the properties of the numbers are shared both by the Septuagint and the version in our Bible.

Even though they're different numbers, they have similar qualities and characters to them. And that, again, is an interesting feature. Many of the numbers can be combined to form other numbers in the passage.

It's another weird feature. It's not what we'd expect. Others have observed the connections between the numbers and the synodical orbits of the chief planets, as calculated by the Babylonians.

So Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Add all five of these, and you get the year that the flood ended in the Septuagint numbering. And note also figures like Enoch.

Enoch is 365 years old when he dies. Now, that's a number we know. It's a number that should stand out to us, like other numbers that we have within the text.

And so pay attention to those sorts of details, and you might notice some important things. Richard Hess has argued that there is wordplay and significance to the names of the characters. In the narrative, so we see the name of Adam connects him with the Earth.

Ish and Isha are connected together. Eve connected with life. We have Cain and Abel, their names, given some sort of significance.

And in all of these cases, these occur within the narrative. But within the genealogy, he suggests that there are roles and characteristics that are associated with the names. I've already suggested some of these in the case of Cain's genealogy.

And some, like Noah, are interpreted for us. But when we consider these things, maybe there is some greater significance to be found in this particular set of names. Others have pointed out that there might be some analogy between Genesis 1 as the generations of the Earth, day following day, first day, second day, et cetera, all the way down, and Genesis 5 as the generations of Adam, who came last in the previous generations.

Both end on the theme of rest, the first with the Sabbath, and then the second with Noah that's going to give rest in their labors. So there's a similarity there. There are 10 words of creation in Genesis chapter one.

There are 10 generations in Genesis chapter five. What else can we see? Well, there's a contrast between the technologically advancing descendants of Cain that we've seen in the previous chapter and the descendants of the righteous of Seth, who do not seem to be associated with the same progress in technology. We'll see the same sort of thing in the contrast between the story of Babel and the development of the technology of firing bricks and the call of Abraham, who does not have the same technological advancement.

At the end of both genealogies, or near the end, and the one who fathers the final

generation is a figure called Lamech. Lamech, whose wives are Ada and Zillah and has three sons and a daughter, and then Lamech, who's the father of Noah. In the first one, he's associated with 70 times seven, and in the second, he's associated with 777.

That's his age. Some questions to ask about this passage. First of all, how does God creating humanity in the image of God relate to Adam fathering a child in his image and likeness? How can one illuminate the other? And a second question, why do we have years and ages in the genealogy of Seth, but not in that of Cain? John chapter three, verses 22 to 36.

After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Enan near Salem because water was plentiful there and people were coming and being baptized for John had not yet been put in prison. Now discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him. John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.

He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure. The father loves the son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the son has eternal life.

Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. At the conclusion of John chapter three, we return to the theme of the witness of John the Baptist. And this contrasts with Nicodemus' failure to perceive.

Nicodemus is a teacher of the Jews, but he fails to perceive who Christ is and what Israel needs. On the other hand, John has amazing insight into who Christ is and his significance. This returns to themes of chapter one.

And there are many points at which we can see the threads of chapter one being picked

up, providing a broader introduction to the ministry of Christ that ties things together between the two chapters and book ends all that central section that begins Christ's actual ministry. John's ministry and Jesus' ministry overlap. And here we learn that Jesus' disciples practice baptism too.

However, in chapter four, it's stressed that Jesus himself didn't baptize. His baptism was yet to come. That would occur at the events of Pentecost.

It also mentions that John had not yet been thrown into prison. It's an interesting detail. And it, like a number of further details that we find at various points in John, suggests that John was writing to an audience that were largely familiar with other gospels or accounts of the ministry of Christ.

So he wasn't writing in a vacuum. He was writing to people who were aware of the synoptic tradition of Mark, for instance. And it's important to bear that in mind when we often can be tempted in certain liberal forms of scholarship to pit things against each other, just to recognize that the synoptic gospels were probably known by most of the readers of John.

And that makes a difference to the way that we'll think about reconciling and relating these two things and harmonizing them. John's disciples have discussions about purification with the Jew. It's important to remember that baptism was a form of purification rite and it arose in a context where many such rites were practiced.

It might also be worth noting at this point that the language of Jew is used at many points within John's gospel and it can often have a very negative connotation. It is not referring to people who are just Jews in the more general sense that we use it. It can often be in a more technical sense, the leaders of the people.

The people associated with Judea and Jerusalem. So we might think about the way we talk about the folk in DC if you're in the context of the US. Now, when you're talking about people in DC, you're not necessarily talking about people in a poor neighborhood in DC, you're talking about the people in power.

And likewise, I think a lot of the language that's used in reference to the Jews in John's gospel is used in that sort of sense. In this period of overlap between the two ministries, John speaks more directly to the question of succession and how his ministry would decrease and Jesus's would increase. He uses the language of the bridegroom and the friend of the bridegroom.

This connects with the beginning of Jesus's ministry in the sign at the wedding of Cana. Also as the friend of the bridegroom, one of John's tasks would have been to serve as a witness, to witness the marriage and the union and to speak on behalf in certain respects of the bridegroom bearing witness to him. He emphasizes joy.

Joy is the appropriate emotion for a wedding. And later on, we'll see this returned the theme of joy in the context of the resurrection. John the Baptist presents an incredibly high account of who Christ is at this point.

He comes from above. He is a firsthand witness of the things of God and of heaven. He utters the very words of God.

He has the spirit without measure. He is loved by the father and has received all things from him. And our response to him is the difference between condemnation and eternal life.

You can't find a higher Christology than that. This is at the very beginning of this gospel, the highest statement of who Christ is. A question to think about, what is the difference between the baptism performed by Jesus's disciples at this point and the baptisms that they performed after Pentecost?