

Thought For The Week

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Sunday, October 25, 2026 — Scott Reynolds

Beginnings: Genesis 5

The Book of the Generations of Adam

Genesis 5 opens with a phrase that is easy to skim past: “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” Most of Genesis is structured by the recurring Hebrew heading *toledot*—“these are the generations of...”—ten times in all. These headings look forward. They introduce what came from a person or a thing, not a backward-looking biography. But one of them is different. Only here does the text say “the *book* of the generations.” The Hebrew word *sefer* points to a written record, a deliberate account, not a loose collection of names.

That small difference matters. After the fall and the split of Cain’s line (the line John later calls “of the evil one”), the book re-centers the reader on the line through which the promised seed will be carried forward. The same phrasing appears only once more in Scripture. Matthew opens his Gospel with “the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.” The parallel is intentional. Genesis 5 begins the written continuity of the seed of the woman; Matthew begins the line that ends in the Messiah.

A Clear Pattern, and One Exception

Once the book is introduced, a simple pattern appears. A man lives a certain number of years, fathers the named son, lives additional years, and then the refrain comes: “and he died.” Adam (930), Seth (912), Enosh (905), Kenan (910), Mahalaleel (895), Jared (962), Methuselah (969), Lamech (777). The numbers are long, but the ending is the same. The two oldest men in the record—Jared and Methuselah—are Enoch’s father and son. Everyone remembers Methuselah. Almost no one remembers the man seven years younger.

The refrain is not filler. It is the echo of the curse spoken in Genesis 3. Death has entered the line of Adam, and the book records it without apology. The long intervals between the birth of the named son and the father’s death are not wasted space. They are the data that let a reader construct a continuous timeline from Adam forward. Read with the genealogy in Genesis 11, the same method carries the line through the flood to Abraham. A plain reading treats the numbers as the text’s own chronological markers.

There is one interruption. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. He does not die in the ordinary way. The refrain is broken by direct divine action. Enoch is the exception that shows death is not the final word. The book records both the universality of death and the possibility that God can interrupt it. Hebrews 11:5–6 affirms the same truth: by faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death... and without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Even this early, God demonstrates power over death when death is the rule and the consequence of the curse.

The Image Continues

The book begins by recalling the original creation and then recording the first birth in the line it will trace. “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God... When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (Gen. 5:1–3). The contrast is deliberate. The same Hebrew vocabulary used for God’s making of Adam is now used for Adam’s fathering of Seth. The image of God is not erased. It continues to be transmitted through ordinary generation. That is why, after the flood, God can forbid murder on the ground that man is made in God’s image (Gen. 9:6), and why James can still warn that the tongue can curse those who are made in the likeness of God (Jas. 3:9). Seth is still an image-bearer. So are we.

At the same time, the wording is not identical. The narrator does not say Seth was fathered in the likeness of God a second time. He says Adam fathered a son in his own likeness after his image. The image continues, but it continues through a man who has already sinned and who already stands under the sentence of death. The most immediate and explicit consequence the chapter itself records is mortality. “And he died” begins at once and runs through the genealogy. Death is the fruit of the curse spoken in Genesis 3:19. It is not a declaration that Seth entered the world already guilty of Adam’s sin.

Some have read the contrast more strongly. Matthew Henry wrote that Adam begat a son in his own image—sinful and defiled, frail, wretched, and mortal like himself. John Calvin spoke of the image as so spoiled and impaired by the fall that distinctive features may truly be said to be destroyed, with only a frightful deformity remaining. Both treat the transmission of the image as including a corrupted moral nature that predisposes the child to sin.

Scripture, however, never says the image was lost or annihilated. The continued use of the language after the fall shows that every human being still bears the image of God in a real sense. Sin mars the exercise of the image; it does not eradicate the image itself. The text registers a real post-fall change—the image is now passed on by a mortal man living under the consequences of his own sin. Those consequences are inherited: pain, toil, a creation subjected to futility, and above all, death. What is not asserted is an inherited inclination that makes sinning necessary, or a guilt that attaches at birth.

James 1:13–15 keeps the responsibility clear. Each person is drawn away by his own desire and enticed. Desire conceives and gives birth to sin; sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Sin is an act of the will. The curse is the consequence of Adam’s sin. Sin is not the consequence of the curse.

The book of the generations of Adam therefore affirms both realities at once. The image continues, and with it the dignity that still belongs to every human being. The image is transmitted under the conditions of the fall, and with it the mortality the rest of the chapter documents without interruption. Seth is named, not Cain, because this is the appointed line through which the promise will be kept. The same dual reality—the dignity that remains and the brokenness introduced by sin—will later be developed when Paul contrasts the image of the earthly man with the image of the heavenly man. For now the text simply records the facts. The likeness continues. The line continues. Death continues. It does not teach that anyone is born a sinner.

What Still Shapes Us

The book of the generations of Adam does not leave us only with ancient names and numbers. It leaves us with two facts that still shape every life.

First, the image continues. Seth was fathered in Adam's likeness, yet he remained an image-bearer. So do we. The capacities that mark us as human—reason, speech, moral awareness, the ability to know and be known—are still present. This is why Scripture can still forbid murder on the ground of the image and still warn us that the tongue can curse those made in the likeness of God. The dignity is real. It is not erased by the fall, and it is not reserved for a few. Every person we meet still bears it.

Second, death continues. The refrain is not an ancient curiosity. It is the standing condition of Adam's line. We live under the same curse. Pain, toil, and the certainty of death are not theoretical. Yet the chapter also records one interruption. Enoch walked with God, and God took him. Death is universal, but it is not ultimate. The same God who kept the line through which the promise would run is able to interrupt the reign of death.

We do not treat people as though the image has been lost, nor do we pretend the curse is not real. We live as those who still bear God's likeness in a world where "and he died" remains the ordinary end of the story, and we do so in the confidence that the line documented here was preserved for a reason. The book of the generations of Adam tells us both what we are and what we are waiting for.

The chapter does not rush. It gives ages, intervals, and repeated notice of death. It also gives the means to trace a continuous line from the first man to the generation that will enter the ark, and later Scripture will carry that line still farther. A plain reading does not require us to compress generations or reinterpret the numbers so they match different assumptions about the age of the earth. The text supplies its own framework. It assumes creation by the word of God, the entrance of death, the preservation of a promised line, and the reality of a coming judgment that will end the world that then existed.

When we finish the chapter we have a written record, a clear pattern of mortality, one remarkable exception, and a timeline that can be extended. We also have a contrast. The line of Cain moved downward. The line documented here continues under the promise. Both lines live in the same world. Only one is presented as the book of the generations of Adam. The same record that documents death also documents unbroken continuity. That continuity will matter when later voices claim that all things have continued as they were from the beginning. The book of the generations stands as a witness against that claim. It remembers a beginning that was not uniform, a death that entered by transgression, and a line that was preserved by the God who spoke the world into being.

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Genesis 5 opens with a quiet but significant phrase: “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” Most of Genesis is structured by the recurring heading “these are the generations of...” (Hebrew **toledot**). These headings look forward, introducing what came from a person or a thing. Only here does the text say “the **book** of the generations.” It presents a written record—the deliberate account of the line that continues from Adam after the fall and the split of Cain’s line.

The same phrasing appears only once more in Scripture. Matthew begins his Gospel with “the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.” The parallel is intentional. Genesis 5 begins the written continuity of the seed of the woman; Matthew begins the line that ends in the Messiah.

A clear pattern runs through the chapter. A man lives a certain number of years, fathers the named son, lives additional years, and then the refrain comes: “and he died.” The long ages are striking, but the ending is the same. Death has entered the line of Adam, and the book records it without apology. There is one interruption. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. He is the exception that shows death is not the final word.

The book also recalls that God made man in his likeness, then records that Adam fathered Seth “in his own likeness, after his image.” The image of God is not erased. It continues through ordinary generation. That is why Scripture can still forbid murder on the ground that man is made in God’s image, and why James can warn that the tongue can curse those made in the likeness of God. At the same time, the image is now passed on by a man who already stands under the sentence of death. The consequences of the curse are inherited. An inherited guilt or irresistible inclination to sin is not asserted.

The book of the generations of Adam does not leave us only with ancient names and numbers. It leaves us with two facts that still shape every life: the image continues, and death continues. We do not treat people as though the image has been lost, nor do we pretend the curse is not real. We live as those who still bear God’s likeness in a world where “and he died” remains the ordinary end of the story, confident that the line documented here was preserved for a reason—until God himself brings the interruption that Enoch only foreshadowed.

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