

# ONLY EVIL ALL THE TIME

by Steve Zeisler

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Janet Sharp is a resident of one of the Florida communities that was torn apart by tornadoes last week. She and her husband were able to escape their home with only what they could carry in their hands. I heard her being interviewed on the radio about the devastation, and they asked, "What did you take with you?" Her answer was, "The photo albums. Pictures of my family." These were more important than any furniture, documents, or other physical belongings which could be replaced.

Noah survived the flood with a book containing the history of his family. Genesis 5:1 begins with this word: "This is the written account of Adam's line." The account is the genealogy of Noah's family, descended from Adam. In the cataclysm that Noah faced, he could save only a few things on the ark, and one of the things he chose was the history of the people: the names and the stories of those who had been preserved with God's oversight for generations.

People and the events that make up their lives are important to God. In this study we're going to consider some of the implications of this truth.

Genesis 5:1-11:

**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."**

**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.**

The genealogy goes on, but we'll stop there. Before we look at the text, let's step back for just a moment, as we frequently need to do in these studies, and talk about some of the debated issues that are raised by this text. There are two questions arising from Genesis 5 that are difficult for scholars to square with the discoveries of archeology and geology. We are not likely to have answers that will satisfy all scientists and historians and Bible scholars. We shouldn't feel any particular concern about this. The Scriptures are God's word to us, and truth does not need to be approved by any examiner. But it's worthwhile to comment on some of the issues.

One question concerns the time period from Adam to Abraham. You may be aware of the famous notation of Archbishop Usher in one of the early versions of the King James Bible, claiming that the earth was created in 4004 BC. If all you had to work with were these genealogies, and you added the number of years from Adam to Jesus, that's the number you would come up with. But Bible genealogies do not always claim to be complete, and there are many examples of this in other places in the Bible. For instance, a number of times Jesus is called the son of David in the New Testament. It's consistent with Hebrew thought to speak of Jesus as the son of David, but a thousand years intervened between David and Jesus. We can assume on this basis

that the time period from Adam to Abraham could be a great deal longer than the generations listed would suggest.

Another question concerns the great length of life here. People lived about 900 years in the time before the flood. It's very difficult to read this any other way than at face value. But how can that be? We don't know what happened in the catastrophe of the flood that changed conditions on earth so that human beings couldn't live as long. Notice in Genesis 6:3 that God determined in the course of judging the wickedness of humanity that they should live no longer than 120 years. I will comment on the reason for this life shortening change in planetary conditions below.

## THE RECORDS GOD KEEPS

Let's consider the text. First, we read the names Seth, Enosh, and Kenan. More names are listed after these. The names in the Bible belong to real people with real lives. The fact that God took care to preserve these records clearly suggests that he takes histories like ours seriously.

There are other references in the Bible to the records that God keeps. Remember the best known record of names, mentioned in the last document of the Bible, the Revelation of John. In 20:12 it says, "...I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." Janet Sharp saved her photograph albums out of the tornado because she wanted to remember her family. Even more so, God is committed to preserving a record of our lives. There is no such thing as the person who has no value, about whom no one cares, of whom no record is being kept, because God cares. There's no chapter of your life that hasn't been recorded.

I was listening to the Giants baseball game yesterday in the car. The announcer spoke about a player who had spent nine years in the minor leagues, and had never been to the majors. Yet they had statistics about his spring training batting averages for four different big league clubs. If the baseball people keep records of spring training games for players who never make it to the show, don't underestimate the attention of God.

The things God measures are different from the things humans measure. He cares about choices of faith and trust, risks we take for his sake, love we extend, repentance we make. Those things matter more to God than whether we were rich or poor, widely traveled or not, healthy or sick. The Lord attends to Christ's being formed in us.

## A LONG WALK WITH GOD

A second observation is about a remarkable individual in Noah's genealogy, Enoch the son of Jared (not Cain's son of the same name). His account is told in verses 21-24.

**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.**

Enoch had a son, Methuselah, who was presumably his first child. This particular child had an effect on Enoch.

Before the possibilities and the responsibilities of parenthood descend on us, we often plan to conquer the highest hills. But for a great many folks, having a child changes things. What they want for their life becomes not so much great accomplishment but godly character. They want to pass on something worth having to their children. And so the longing for God is awakened in many, especially men, when their first little one comes into the world.

I imagine that's what happened to Enoch. He had a son, and then, it says, he walked with the Lord for 300 years. This walk with God that he began when his child was born became very rich and meaningful to him.

Intimacy with God became a delicious feast, a joy in itself. It carried on for 300 years, well after Methuselah was an adult. The near companionship of the Lord grew sweeter and sweeter, more and more meaningful to Enoch, until one day the line between life on this earth and life in heaven for eternity was so thin that he slipped across it without even noticing.

My wife Leslie loves to go for walks with her friends, and I usually don't (though I am willing to follow a golf ball from one side of the fairway to the other, into the woods and back out). I don't like walks because they're not efficient. If you're trying to get something done quickly, you don't take a walk.

That is why the metaphor of a walk with God is so helpful. When you're walking with someone, you're not moving so fast that conversation is difficult. You can enjoy your companion. And then everything else becomes enjoyable. You can look together at the cloud formations, the turning of the leaves in the fall, the sound of the stream that you're walking by, or whatever else is going on. And so taking long walks with someone is a great picture of intimacy.

That became Enoch's way of life. Year after year, for longer and longer periods of time during the day, he shared more and more life with the Lord. Enoch's walking with God is another way of saying that he just enjoyed everything about his Lord, everything that was true of sharing life together with him. And eventually, as I said, he had become so heavenly there was nothing left to tie him to this life.

## EXPECTING TO DIE

The third observation from chapter 5 is the eight-fold repetition of the phrase "...and then he died." One reason for this is to set off Enoch. The record of each death makes his story all the more remarkable. But another reason is to tell us something else about how to think about life.

Periodically I'm called on to do a memorial or funeral service. Sometimes those who attend will observe that their friend died unexpectedly. That is a curious thing to say. Who among us doesn't expect to die? The problem is, we expect to die in the distant future, and we assume that we can get around to priorities at our own speed, and if we get distracted and selfish for a period of time, we can make changes later. But the drumbeat of this genealogy, "...and then he died...and then he died...and then he died...and then he died," declared that we are not as much in control of life and death as we imagine and hope ourselves to be.

Jesus told a striking parable about a rich man whose productive land impressed him very much. "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:18-20.)

It's a great foolishness to spend all our resources on ourselves and imagine that we're in charge of determining the time when life ends. The genealogy of Genesis 5 ought to stir us to put first things first. It can be a reminder to live with the awareness of the end, and to take the calling of God seriously.

## POTENT EVIL

Let's move on now to chapter 6. The opening verses of chapter 6 are similar to what the meteorologists said last summer when they were taking the temperature of the ocean off the western coast of South and Central America. They found the temperature was much higher than normal, indicating that an El Niño year was coming.

That's a bit like what we find in Genesis 6. The "temperature" of the terrible moral conditions was going to bring rain. The rain doesn't come in the verses we'll look at here. Years would go by before the deluge. But once these conditions obtained, the coming of the rain was inevitable.

Genesis 6:1-6:

**When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."**

**The Nephilim were on the earth in those days-and also afterward-when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.**

**The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.**

This is a peculiar, difficult-to-interpret description of human conditions just prior to the flood. It's important to use our imaginations a bit to understand life on earth at this time.

The summary is chilling: *every* inclination of the hearts of human beings was *only* evil *all* the time.

The statement of God in verse 3 is significant. "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be [only] a hundred and twenty years." The point seems to be that human beings were beginning to balk at mortality. 900 years of life wasn't enough. They were trying to break the reign of death, to live forever. But God said, "No, I'm not going to permit such a thing. I'm not going to have human creatures with whom I strive forever." Setting the boundary at 120 years put limits on the growth of evil that was accomplished by our long-lived ancestors.

Man's experiments with becoming immortal were a dance with demons. The distinction between demons and humans was being blurred. The phrase "sons of God" is sometimes used of angels, and is used that way in verse 2. Angels, both righteous and evil, do not die. Apparently fallen angels (demons) were cohabiting with human women and having children, the Nephilim. Rebellion, hatred of God, and promotion of wickedness accomplished the commingling of demons and human beings. It became more and more difficult to distinguish human from demonic. The price of immortality was loss of God's image, and a soul become irredeemable.

Additionally, we can note in verse 1 that it says that man began to increase in number on the earth. Now, the genealogy in chapter 5 talks about human population being increased. But "numbers" here refers to potency or strength. Human beings were not only increasing in numbers, but they were becoming stronger, more organized, more efficient, more capable.

## GOD'S JUDGMENT AND GRIEF

So God determined to judge the human race. We noted that Enoch had become so heavenly that there was nothing left to tie him to earth. The opening verses of chapter 6 describe exactly the opposite outcome. Corruption had become so thorough that there was nothing human left about these people. They had already drowned everything human about themselves in a kind of moral wretchedness that existed before the drowning in water ever took place. The deluge was the logical outcome of the way of life these people had chosen for themselves. As Enoch became heavenly, they became hellish. And the results were inevitable. They had already destroyed themselves.

Verse 6 is also significant in recording not the anger of God, but his grief. We see the amazing connectedness of God with human beings, now lost human beings who barely existed anymore. It says at the end of verse 6 that his heart was filled with pain, that he had lost something extraordinarily precious to him. He loves us so much that later in Roman times, he would execute himself rather than lose us again.

What sort of useful application might we make from all this? I would suggest just one. Our lives are the product of choices we make day after day, week after week, year after year. We're either becoming like Enoch, the intimates of God who enjoy his presence, love his truth, and rejoice in fellowship with his people, so that the book records faith, maturity, and conformity to Christ in us; or we're becoming something else-something fit for hell.

It's worthwhile to examine the path our lives are taking, to observe whether we listen to God, believe him, act on his word. The pain in his heart is a declaration of his love for us. If he loves us that much, oughtn't we love him back? Otherwise, we must be warned about the other option, the chance of becoming more and more fit for destruction, of having less of ourselves worth saving.

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