

*Foundations: Patterns*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*Matthew 24:37-44; Hebrews 11:1-6; Genesis 5*

Today's final Scripture reading is Genesis 5. It's a longer reading than some, and it's a lot of genealogy, but it is one of the most important genealogies in all of Scripture. May God grant us wisdom to hear from His perfect, sacred, and holy Word. "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. 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. 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."

The Farmer's Almanac is a book of patterns. Published since 1818, it's a guide to all sorts of things, from weather patterns and the best time to plant your garden to planning your most successful fishing trip. The publishers of the Farmer's Almanac claim that their predictions have about 80-85% accuracy. A scientific 5-year study of the Almanac found about 50% accuracy, which was better than flipping a coin, but not by much. Doesn't matter much, because 203 years later, it's still selling copies.

Patterns can often seem boring to the uninitiated. Most people look up at the night sky and just see a bunch of stars. But others look up and see constellations, they watch those patterns move over the seasons, they look in telescopes and see anomalies in the patterns. It all depends if you know what you're looking for.

Patterns can make the old seem new again. When I've watched a movie several times, I'm not just watching for the story and the characters. I'm looking for hints and patterns in the way the director frames shots, how he uses lighting, how she uses choreography. Even bad movies can be fascinating when you start looking for patterns in filmmaking techniques. See enough patterns and you can tell what other filmmakers directors have been inspired by when they intentionally use the same patterns.

Today's passage is a genealogy, and for most of us, genealogies are boring. I've heard it said that the only interesting genealogy is your own. When I was a kid, I was fascinated by the fact that I was a distant relative of the famous movie actor Clark Gable. Nowadays, ask anyone under 40 and they'll say, "Who's Clark Gable?" And when it turns out I'm a sixth cousin and not his great-nephew or something, all of a sudden, even people who are interested tune out.

But genealogy contains patterns, and when we look closely, they mean more than what we might think. Today's genealogy is your genealogy. If we believe that the Bible describes a worldwide flood and not just a flood throughout the ancient Near East, then these are in fact everyone's ancestors. While they are still very far removed from us in history, they trace our lineage back all the way to the world's beginnings. We may not know all the history in-between, but we have the history back to the first human beings. And the patterns in this genealogy are telling us something.

Now what does this genealogy mean? First, at least to the ancients and many people groups today, it means this: *they were real*. When we study ancient history and folklore, we find that most ancient fictional characters – the mortals who interacted with the gods – have no genealogies. Most mythology is a patchwork quilt of stories involving various deities, but very little that grounds them in the real world. Occasionally there will be a tale that explains some previous event on Earth – the gods were angry and that explains why this area had a famine, the gods were merciful and spared this village from a band of marauders. But little deep connection.

The genealogies of the Bible, however, mean we're meant to take the Bible differently. From the very first pages of Scripture, we know these aren't just random stories. These events happened to real people in real places in real time. Many of the people in this genealogy are never mentioned again; they are completely unimportant to the history of the world except for one thing: they lived.

I read a story from a missionary several years ago who had been attempting to bring Christ to a native people group in Africa. The tribe listened to the missionary with the barest of interest. The missionary got through many parts of the biblical story, talked about Jesus, all His miracles, His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. No real reaction. Near the end of his time with the tribe, sensing they simply weren't interested, when he was asked if there was any more to be said about Jesus, he kind of glumly said, "All that's left are his genealogies." The missionary had skipped them because he thought they would be of no importance to them, just like they often mean so little to us today. And immediately there was a stir. The leaders of the tribe were stunned. They asked him, "Why did you not start here? All this time we thought you were teaching us nice stories, myths, and legends. But this changes everything!" To them, the genealogy spoke to the truth that these were real events that they must take seriously.

Next thing we might notice as a pattern here: *they lived to be truly ancient*. The fact that many of these men lived almost a thousand years is almost impossible for us to believe. Yet in a few chapters, we'll see God greatly shorten the lifespan of humanity. Because of that, there's no reason not to believe these numbers. It means there was enough time for humanity to build immense civilizations before the flood. It is no stretch for us to acknowledge civilizations going back thousands of years because there was clearly time for them, even by the shortest system of dating human society by biblical terms.

We might think, "Could ancient man really live that long? Or did they just have the numbers wrong? Is this just myth?" What I think is funny is that we, looking back at civilizations six thousand years in the past, think we understand those civilizations better than the people who lived in them did. We make all sorts of mistakes all the time about the historical evidence we dig up.

Just this week, there was a story about how scientists have done a new analysis of Tyrannosaurus Rex. Guess what? The new analysis, based on newly compiled data about their tails, tells us that their speed was not like what we see in Jurassic Park. Turns out – *if they're right this time* – Tyrannosaurus Rex travelled about 2-3 miles per hour. That's the same typical walking speed of humans today. So if you've ever worried that you might get outrun and eaten by a T. Rex, you don't have to worry anymore!

In the case of the ancients living an incredibly long time, it seems to have less to do with bad numbers and more to do with God's grace. Humanity was the jewel of God's creation, and death was not God's ultimate intention for us. He gave the first humans countless years to turn to Him, to trust in Him, to get to know Him. And as we'll see in coming weeks, it's their eventual refusal to do so that brings us to the point of humans living for such a relatively short period of time.

Another pattern, one more important than we might give it credit for: *they had children*. This might seem like a no-brainer, but the ancients had significant families. They were fulfilling God's mandate to fill the earth and subdue it. The fact that they mention other sons and daughters, not just the firstborn male, means that the other children counted too.

In most eras of human history, this would be a footnote to a footnote. But society is changing quickly around us, into a society never before seen in human history, one that may not even have a future. The American birth rate the last few years has been around 1.75 – which means that we no longer are replacing ourselves. We could be here all day to figure out many of the issues behind it, but there's simply no doubt that if they have families, young people start them later and have less children. It's not just an issue in the United States – it's worldwide.

Part of the issue may be that in a rapidly changing world, where we have so many forms of amusement and entertainment, combined with jobs that have people tied to their phones all day and all night, that family is getting pushed out of the way. Maybe it's the push towards the self as all important. At one point, most cultures valued the group and the extended families that made up the tribe. Now, every man and woman is for themselves. It's a fundamental change.

This isn't to say that everyone is made to have a family. The apostle Paul spoke very positively about the value of singleness, that one could dedicate more of one's time to godly pursuits when single. In a time where families were expected, Paul broke cultural norms suggesting that it was a blessing from God to be willingly single in order to focus on God's Kingdom. But to be intentionally single only to pursue one's pleasures is very different. This is not a lesson for us so much as an observation of these patterns. Family has been a typical part of human society from the beginning. We who are believers have a new family – the family of faith – the local church. We are brothers and sisters adopted into God's family. Whether it's a physical, earthly family or a family of Kingdom believers, we welcome family.

The last pattern, and maybe the most important pattern to note, is this: *they all died*. I imagine you all might be thinking right now, "Has Pastor Jason lost it? Of course they all died!" That everybody dies is something we know from a young age. It seems ludicrous to say it. But there's something important about the pattern. For some reason, we're repeatedly reminded of the obvious: "then he died."

Why would the Bible state something we fundamentally know? There's no reason to say it when we have a listing of how many years each of them lived. It's a given. And yet, over and over again, it's stated. It's a little bizarre. Compare this to the situation of other ancient peoples – many of whom believed in reincarnation in various forms, others who believed in versions of the afterlife. For these ancient ancestors, there's no talk of heaven or hell, no final judgment beyond life, just...death. The end.

Why is this the case? Genesis 5 is giving us for the first time in Scripture the end result of the curse Adam and Eve's sin brought upon the human race. Unlike Abel, who was murdered, now we see humanity come to the end of the line through old age...really old age! Even you lived close to a thousand years, there was no escaping the inevitable. Eventually, death comes. This passage presents us with the finality of it and the inescapability of it. We hear it over and over for that reason. This is the fate of humankind – to be born, to live, to perhaps have a family, and to die.

This pattern is intentional. We have two competing thoughts in our minds, all of us. One is that we will die. The other is that we will live forever. Sometimes, especially as teenagers, we do stupid things because we don't see the inherent risks in them. We assume no one will get hurt, even when we do dangerous things. I could tell you stories but I won't, because that would be pretty irresponsible in itself!

But it's more than just that. There's something deep in us that tells us that we were made immortal, that there is something beyond this life, that death is somehow a deep mistake in the system. And we're right in that. Death is something our ancestors chose in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ecclesiastes 3:11 teaches us, "God has planted eternity in our hearts." When we hear, "and he died," repeated each time, our first thought is, "Of course," but there's part of us that says, "That can't be it!" We know there must be something more.

And suddenly, we're proven right. What sticks out like a sore thumb is the story of Enoch. This is not the son of Cain we heard about last week; this is several generations removed down a different family line. This Enoch is different in more ways than that, though. It starts out the same as the others, but then there's a change. Enoch walked with God. He lives 365 years – probably a number signifying perfect completion like the number of days in a year. And he simply is no more – God took him.

This is one of the most astonishing passages in Scripture when we look at what has come before. We've seen sin, we've seen murder, we've seen death. We have no concept yet introduced of an afterlife. But this man who faithfully walked with God suddenly disappears from the earth without a trace. God has taken Enoch to be with him!

And that leads to our final thought from this passage: *in a world full of death, there is hope in God*. Jesus' coming is literally thousands of years away. Death is a certainty. We have the barest of hints of a Savior back in the garden of Eden who will crush the serpent, but nothing to suggest that death won't be final. The pattern is established; we know what to expect. And then suddenly, out of left field, from out of nowhere, hope.

There is so little said about Enoch that it's almost impossible to say with any certainty what Enoch actually did. We aren't told he's perfect. He simply walked with God. And for that, God reached out and took Enoch to his eternal home in paradise with Himself. That's hope. It shows us that God is merciful, and that He is powerful enough to save anyone who walks with Him. When we reach the New Testament, we learn that all people who are saved are saved through Jesus, no matter when they lived. Jesus is the permanent solution to the problem of sin throughout all of history. Enoch does not taste death because Jesus would taste it for him.

But the story of Enoch gives us hope. God provides for those who will trust in Him. The Bible only records a couple of people who don't actually die, who God transports directly to Himself, and Enoch is one of them. Our hope is not that we will avoid death. Our hope is that God will give us life after death, that we will not perish but have everlasting life in God's Kingdom.

And unlike the ancients in Genesis 5, we know how God has accomplished it. We know how God's perfect justice is satisfied and how He can allow sinners into His Kingdom. The sliver of hope in the story of Enoch is made known to the whole world in Jesus. We no longer have to wonder how it might happen. We no longer have to wonder if we can approach God. We no longer have to wonder if our failings and sins will keep us from God's presence if we truly desire Him and His ways. Through Christ, it's all been resolved. As Romans 3:23 reminds us, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Friends, because of Christ, the pattern is broken. We are not destined for the same fate as Adam and his immediate descendants. Through faith in Christ, we can have a new life and a new hope. Through faith, we are not counted in the genealogy of Adam but in the genealogy of Jesus. Through faith, we can know that we will not die and stay dead but will be resurrected into eternal life with our God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Will you believe today and see the new pattern of hope in your life? May it be so for all of us.