

Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God

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The account of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, is placed in the third section of Genesis¹ and is announced by the major structural word of the book תולדות, generally expressed as "these are the generations of. . . ." However, as Woudstra has demonstrated,² the תולדות structure announces the historical development from the ancestor mentioned and should be understood as, "this is what became of (person's name)," or "this is what happened to the line of (person's name)." Genesis 5:1 would then read, "This is the book of what became of the family tree of Adam."

What did become of Adam's family tree? Whatever happened to the human race? Did God's promise of death (2:16-17) come true? Whatever became of the curse (3:19)? Would man, due to his rebellion, die after all? Before 5:1 no one had died (though Abel was murdered by his brother and Lamech killed a man for wounding him and a boy for striking him, 4:23).

The theme of chapter 5 is the end of life. "No reader of Genesis 5 . . . fails to be impressed by the recurrent phrase 'And he died;' which baldly and emphatically concludes the entry for each of these antediluvians. The whole movement of the regular form of these notices is toward death."³ In other words the answer to the

¹ The first section is 1:1-2:3 and the second is 2:4-4:26.

² M. H. Woudstra, "The Toledot of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance," *Concordia Theological Journal* 5 (1970): 185.

³ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1978), p. 66.

questions, Whatever happened to Adam's family tree? or Whatever happened to the human race? is that they all died. Did God's promise of death ("in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die," 2:17) ever come true? Yes, Adam's line died successively. Whatever became of the curse? "The answer is that, in spite of human achievements (the achievements of chapter 4), the curse of death reigned as king from Adam's time on through the generations."⁴

The account of Enoch, then, the one who walked with God, is placed in the midst of the reign of death. This theme of death harmonizes well with the author's overall theme in Genesis 1-11, the spread of sin and the spread of grace.⁵ "Thus Genesis chapter 5 describes something like a transitional period, during which death caused by sin only slowly broke the powerful physical resistance of primitive human nature."⁶ In other words in spite of human progress, civilization, and prosperity, in spite of mankind's aspirations, he died.⁷ So the setting of Enoch's walk with God is the spread of sin, ending with death.

The two chief components of narrative are characters (people) and events.⁸ Events make up the plot, and the characters are the actors who carry out the plot. The plot of Genesis 5, a plot whose structure is carried along with the monotonous phrase "and he died" (repeated eight times) and whose actors are Adam's family tree (10 men), is a masterful backdrop against which is recorded this remarkable sentence, "Enoch walked with God." In a plot where a funeral bell continually tolls out its mournful drone there is a disjunctive ray of hope, another example of the spread-of-sin, spread-of-grace theme. The plot unfolds in the following way.

The prologue (5:1-2) of this "Genealogy of Death" recalls the creation of Adam. Moses wrote that man, created male and female, made in God's likeness, was blessed by God and named "Man" (this naming here mentioned for the first time in Genesis). Adam also became the father of a son in his own likeness (mentioned for the first time in Genesis), a son made according to Adam's image, a son whom Adam named Seth (v. 3).

⁴ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 171.

⁵ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, pp. 64-73.

⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), pp. 69-70.

⁷ Allen P. Ross, "The Exegetical Exposition of the Pentateuch: Genesis" (class notes in 117 Exegesis in the Pentateuch, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1983), p. 18.

⁸ Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 155-73.

The effect of the prologue, as Sailhamer points out, is to cast God in the role of a father.⁹ He made a son in His own likeness. He named His son. He blessed His son. He is like the Genesis patriarchs who also did the same for their children. This same pattern is duplicated by Adam. One important point emerges in the genealogical list in chapter 5: God is shown to be the Father of all mankind.

The plot continues with a lengthy genealogical list (vv. 3-32) and concludes in 9:28-29 (with the account of the Flood spliced into the record of man from Adam to Noah). The list in Genesis 5 follows this pattern:

Component 1: Person A lived X years and then became the father of B.

Component 2: Person A lived Y years after he fathered B, fathering other sons and daughters.

Component 3: Person A's entire life lasted X and Y years; then he died.

The same pattern is followed again in 11:10-26, beginning with Shem (Noah's son). However, in the record of Enoch, the third component is missing. No mention is made of death. But with the other patriarchs in chapter 5 death is emphasized. Why, for instance, add "and he died" when that fact is understood? If a person's entire life consists of X number of years, it is assumed (logically) that he died. Yet the writer underscores each man's death by repeating the words "and he died." The purpose is to highlight by contrast the account of Enoch. Enoch, seventh in the line from Adam, breaks the structural pattern--he did not live (Component 1), he walked with God; he did not die (Component 3), he walked with God and God took him. The reversal is stark and bursting with theological truth. Obviously the author crafted the genealogy in this way to make it a theological commentary.¹⁰ Theological truth about life and death (under the curse) is being taught by means of this recurring literary pattern and the subsequent break from it. The pattern expresses the author's value system.¹¹

The prologue (vv. 1-2) followed by the monotonous genealogical list of death (vv. 3-32) juxtaposes two opposing themes. The sons and daughters of God the Creator, children made in His own likeness, children designed to be blessed, as a father blesses the children he loves and cares for, fall prey instead to a curse. Those who were once

⁹ John Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 2 vols., The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 2:70.

¹⁰ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 120.

¹¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 95.

blessed are now cursed. Those made in His likeness, those made to live are now destined to die, returning to dust, thereby also falling prey to the serpent who will eat dust (3:14). All the children of God the Father die.

The spread-of-sin motif is evident. But where is the accompanying spread-of-grace motif? Where is the sense of hope in the midst of all this death?

The Account of Enoch, Seventh from Adam

The account of Enoch (5:21-24) marks an exception to the pattern in Genesis 5. In contrast to the smooth, repetitious sequence of the rest of the genealogy, there is an abrupt disjuncture at 5:22. Instead of "And Enoch lived" (which would be the regular pattern up to this point), Moses wrote, "Enoch walked with God three hundred years." Also in verse 24 the author dropped the regular phrase "and he died," replacing it with, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

The effect of this abrupt change at verses 22 and 24 is to place Enoch's life outside the regular sequence of the chapter. "A study of the author's style in Genesis shows that when he wants to begin a specific topic much narrower than the preceding subject matter, he uses such a technique of disjuncture."¹² The change in structure reveals an exception to the accounts of the others. In contrast to the formulae of the others, who lived and died, Enoch walked with God. He did not simply "live"; he walked with God. This suggests that walking with God was a step above mere living.¹³ Furthermore Enoch did not die; he walked with God (stated for the second time), and God took him.

The *hithpael* stem of the verb **הלך** (*waw* plus *Hithpael* preterite) recalls the Lord God walking in the garden (*Hithpael* participle, 3:8)¹⁴ and in some way corresponds to it.¹⁵ Whenever the author of Genesis (and of the Pentateuch) used the *Hithpael* stem of **הלך**, one of the subjects of the narratives is God. (The only exception is Exodus 21:19.) Like Enoch, Noah also walked with God (Gen. 6:9). When Abram arrived in the land, the author picked up the thought

¹² John Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1-2:4a," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 5 (1984): 76.

¹³ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 175.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1987), p. 127.

¹⁵ A. Dillmann, *Genesis*, trans. William B. Stevenson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 1:224-25.

of walking once again: "Arise, walk about the land" (13:17); "Walk before Me" (17:1; cf. 24:40; 48:15). Walking with God involves the idea of continuity or habitual manner of life, and all these examples employ the Hithpael stem (cf. Deut. 23:14).

The mention of the longevity of Enoch's walk-300 years-adds to the force of the verb. So the expression "walked with God" was the author's summary of Enoch's life. Bullinger notes that "walk" is "used of one's continued course of action and life: i.e., the habitual habit and manner of life."¹⁶ Today one might say that walking with God was Enoch's lifestyle.

Why did Moses state twice that Enoch walked with God? Why underline the death of the preceding and succeeding patriarchs? Sailhamer cogently answers these questions:

Why does the author want to point to Enoch so specifically as an exception? It is not merely because he did not die. That in itself is reason enough to merit special attention, but it does not sufficiently explain the purpose of the author in this case. The author's purpose can be better seen in the way he has emphasized, through repetition, that Enoch "walked with God" (vv. 22, 24). The phrase "walked with God" . . . clearly means something to the author, for he uses the same expression to describe Noah as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" (6:9), and Abraham and Isaac as faithful servants of God (17:1; 24:40; 48:15). Its use here shows that the author views it as the reason why Enoch did not die. Enoch is pictured as one who did not suffer the fate of Adam ("you will die") because, unlike the others, he "walked with God."¹⁷

Here then is a glimpse of grace in the midst of the spread of sin (death being a result of sin). Here the funeral bell stops tolling. One man walked with God and God took him.¹⁸ He escaped the clutches of death. Clearly the pathway to life, the road one is to travel to escape the sting of death, is the one of the pilgrim, in which a person walks with God.

At this point Moses did not explain what it means to walk with God. He cited no method or formula. Though he held Enoch up as a model for others to follow, he communicated no descriptive explanation of this "walk." Moses held that explanation until later in the narrative. He uncovered an inherent relationship between the past and the future, using the lives of God's people. "That which hap-

¹⁶ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 832. See also E. A. Speiser, "The Durative Hithpael: A Tan-Form," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75 (1955): 118-21,

¹⁷ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 74.

¹⁸ The same terminology, "God took him," is used of Elijah's transport to glory in which he escaped death (2 Kings 2:1, 5, 9-10).

pened to God's people in the past portends events that still lie in the future. Or, to say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson of the future."¹⁹ Enoch's walk, then, though yet unexplained theologically, is a lesson the author will present at a later time, a lesson (from the past) designed to be learned by future generations of God's people, for they too will live under the curse.

Walking with God, then, incorporates several theological ideas. First, the one who walks with God is a creature made in God's likeness and linked to the Creator in a Father-son relationship. Second, walking with God occurred during the reign of death, thereby making the walk an exception to the normal pattern of living and dying. Thus simply living and dying is portrayed as below the norm in quality. And conversely, walking with God is a step above mere living. It is the way to overcome the curse. Third, the walk is descriptive of a lifestyle, a pattern of life with continuity and duration. Fourth, this walk or way of life is designed to be a lesson for God's people in the future.

In writing of Enoch's life Moses' aim was to communicate hope. Death is not the final answer; for Enoch God overruled death. The black cloud of death, hovering over the human race, a cloud promised by God Himself, a dark cloud expressing the essence of the curse, is split wide open with the brilliant rays of Enoch's life. There is rescue from death. There is rescue from the effects of the curse. There is hope. There is a road back into the garden; there is a method of bypassing the guardian cherubim and flaming sword—there is access to the tree of life. One can indeed live forever. It is possible after all once again to fellowship with and worship the Lord God in the garden. How? By walking with God; thus the lesson of Enoch (placed in the genealogy of death) is this: Life comes through walking with God.

A Pastoral Response

Israelites approaching Canaan needed the lesson of Enoch's life. Etched in their own history was the tragic account of an entire generation lost (to death) in the wilderness (cf. the Book of Numbers; 1 Cor. 10:1-13), a generation that overlooked or ignored the lesson that life with God (eternal life) comes by walking with God.

Enoch's life is also a model for the people of God's New Covenant to follow in their earthly pilgrimage.²⁰ The finality of

¹⁹ John H. Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (September 1987): 311.

²⁰ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 174.

death caused by sin, and so powerfully demonstrated in the genealogy of Genesis, is in fact not so final. Man was not born to die; he was born to live and that life comes by walking with God. The tentacles of the curse, reaching over the entire scope of Genesis 1-11 (except for 1:1-2:3) and causing unrelieved gloom²¹ are thwarted at the seventh from Adam. Walking with God is the key to the chains of the curse. Furthermore walking with God is a step above mere living; it is also the answer to man's deepest need and greatest fear (death).

The New Testament gives a theological commentary on Enoch's life.

WALKING WITH GOD INVOLVES FAITH IN HIM

The writer of Hebrews bolstered the hearts of his readers by communicating the concept that faith is the key to perseverance in the furnace of suffering (Heb. 10:32-39). After giving a brief definition of faith (11:1), he cited an impressive list of people who gained God's approval (v. 2) and won spiritual victories by means of faith. Faith enables believers to understand creation (v. 3, referring to Gen. 1-2). Abel gained a righteous standing with God by means of faith (Heb. 11:4, referring to Gen. 4). And next is Enoch, who by faith "was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God" (Heb. 11:5). The next verse (tucked between references to Enoch and Noah, both of whom are said in Genesis to have walked with God) is critically placed and theologically significant: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (v. 6).

Hebrews 11:5-6 is a divinely inspired commentary on Genesis 5:22-24. The analysis of Enoch's walk with God focuses on his faith in God. Faith then was the theological description of his walk and the instrumental cause of his pleasing God. Two features of Enoch's faith are stressed: his faith in the reality of God ("for he who comes to God must believe that He is," v. 6), and his faith in the responsiveness of God ("and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him," v. 6). Walking with God requires faith in Him, faith in the reality of His existence, and faith in the reality of His responsiveness (to one's faith). Walking with God inspires believers to look to God's future rewards based on their present faith and life.

The writer of Hebrews did not say that Enoch thought about God or speculated about Him. He did not read about God or talk about God and thereby gain His favor. Rather, Enoch believed God and thereby pleased God.

21 Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, p. 66.

It seems then that the intent of the author of Genesis (using Enoch's life) was to anticipate the account of Abraham, the man of faith, the paragon of righteousness, the one who displayed faithful obedience to the will of God. He is the author's profound illustration of the meaning of faith. So Enoch was used to prepare the reader by encouraging him to ask, What does it mean to walk with God?

WALKING WITH GOD PLEASES HIM

In Genesis 5 the Septuagint translates the words "Enoch walked with God" as "Enoch pleased God." The same is true of Noah. The Hebrew reads, "Noah walked with God," but the Septuagint has, "Noah pleased God" (6:9). The account of Abraham has the same interpretation in the Septuagint (17:1; 24:40; 48:15). Bruce suggests these changes were made "from a desire, no doubt, to make the language less anthropomorphic."²² The writer of Hebrews (with the Septuagint as his foundation) went along with this interpretation of "walking with God" as "pleasing God" (linked inextricably to the concept of faith as the instrumental cause of pleasing Him). This suggests an important lesson from Enoch's life: walking with God involves living by faith and brings God's favor. He is pleased with believers when they believe Him, when they live by faith. "To please the Lord and to walk with Him are inseparable factors."²³

WALKING WITH GOD IS NOT LEGALISTIC ADHERENCE TO THE LAW

A profound lesson in regard to legalism and faith can be mined from the account of Enoch. Sailhamer speaks to this point.

It is important to see that for the author of the Pentateuch "walking with God" could not have meant a mere "keeping" of a set of laws. Rather it is just with those men who could not have had a set of "laws" that the author associates the theme of "walking with God." By choosing such men to exemplify "walking with God," the author shows his desire to teach a better way to live than merely a legalistic adherence to the law. . . . For him the way to life was exemplified best in men like Enoch ("Enoch walked with God," 5:22), Noah ("he walked with God," 6:9), and Abraham ("Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness," 15:6). It is to these Patriarchs who lived long before the giving of the law at Sinai that the author of Genesis turns for a model of faith and trust in God.²⁴

In pastoral ministry the message of living each day by faith--regardless of the circumstances--must continually be communicated to God's people. Faith is the *modus operandi* of both salvation and

²² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 287.

²³ F. S. Parnham, "Walking with God," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 118.

²⁴ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 74.

sanctification and therefore it must become the flour (the essential ingredient) in all the meals prepared for and served to God's flock. If faith is the steam in the boiler which moves the locomotive down the track, then Christian leaders must continually and faithfully stoke the fires of faith in the hearts of their people.

Worship services should be designed to contribute to that faith-building process. Hymns and Bible expositions must certainly feed the faith of the sheep. Meetings for intercessory prayer should also help build faith in the One to whom believers pray. Rather than allow people to leave prayer meetings with despairing hearts--seeing the size of the difficulties and the nature of the problems--it behooves leaders to focus their people's hearts on the name of the Lord ("May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high. . . and in the name of our God we will set up our banners. . . we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God," Ps. 20:1, 5, 7). To focus on the name of the Lord (the sum total of His attributes) helps build people's confidence and trust in Him (cf. Matt. 21:18-22).

Pastors and other Christian leaders are to build people's faith in the Triune God of Scripture. To build people's faith is to help them walk with God. To help them walk with God brings God's favor. He is pleased with them. And by nurturing their walk of faith, their pilgrimage of trust, they will walk right into eternity to continue that unabated walk with God-forever. Spurgeon's comments on Enoch are appropriate here:

What a splendid walk! A walk of three hundred years! One might desire a change of company if he walked with anybody else, but to walk with God for three centuries was so sweet that the patriarch kept on with his walk until he walked beyond time and space, and walked into paradise, where he is still marching on in the same divine society. He had heaven on earth, and it was therefore not so [unusual] that he glided away from earth to heaven so easily.²⁵

WALKING WITH GOD OVERCOMES DEATH AND BRINGS LIFE

The reason God overruled death for Enoch was that he walked with God. Walking with God is the way to life, the way to victory over the curse for today and tomorrow. Enoch's life depicts the fact that the reign of death will come to an end and the faithful will reign in life through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

Conclusion

Walking with God involves having faith in Him, and that faith pleases God. And, walking with God is the way to eternal

25 Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Old Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1934), 1:35.

life, the way back into the presence of God, to worship Him and enjoy fellowship with Him forever.

Dods's commentary on Enoch's walk with God provides a fitting conclusion to this discussion.

"Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him." The phrase is full of meaning. Enoch walked with God because he was His friend and liked His company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God's path. We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we consciously think of Him at all times, but because He is naturally suggested to us by all we think of; as when any person or plan or idea has become important to us, no matter what we think of, our thought is always found recurring to this favourite object, so with the godly man everything has a connection with God and must be ruled by that connection. When some change in his circumstances is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God—will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God, and so forth. When he falls into sin he cannot rest till he has resumed his place at God's side and walks with Him again. This is the general nature of walking with God; it is a persistent endeavour to hold all our life open to God's inspection and in conformity to His will; a readiness to give up what we find does cause any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if we have not some satisfaction in our efforts at holding fellowship with God, a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him. This walking with God necessarily tells on the whole life and character. As you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar upon the feelings of your friend, as you naturally endeavour to suit yourself to your company, so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavouring to please Him, repressing the thoughts you know He disapproves, and endeavouring to educate such dispositions as reflect His own nature.²⁶

To walk with God is to open to Him all one's purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on one's scheme of life and idea of happiness, to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God.

26 Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis, The Expositor's Bible* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1893), pp. 51-52.

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