

Science and Genesis 5: 1 – 6: 8

Genesis 5: 1 – 6: 8 deals with a number of issues but chapter five in particular is best known for its recording of men living very, very long lives. What are we to make of such a claim?

Over the last couple of years I have produced four blog series dealing with the first four chapters of Genesis. The series for Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 was produced in full on 23. 12. 2010, Genesis 2: 4 – 25 on 10. 4. 2011, Genesis 3: 1 – 24 on 4. 7. 2011 and Genesis 4: 1 – 26 on 31. 7. 2011. This blog series will examine Genesis 5: 1 – 6: 8, with a few comments being made from a scientific point of view.

The account of Adam and what followed from Adam

Chapter 5 begins with “This is the book of the *“toledoth”* of Adam. As discussed in a previous blog, the Hebrew word *“toledoth”* probably has the sense of “the account of” with the reference here being to Adam and some matters that followed from Adam. The previous and first reference to *“toledoth”* in Genesis occurred in 2: 4. The next *“toledoth”* after 5: 1 occurs in 6: 9. With the suggestion that the various *“toledoth”* references are indications of original sections of Genesis being pieced together to produce the complete book of Genesis, this blog series will be restricted to that one section, Genesis 5: 1 – 6: 8. That there is a reference to “the book of the *“toledoth”* in 5: 1, though there is no other conjunction of “book” with *“toledoth”* in Genesis, adds some weight to the notion that at least in this case we are dealing with a section of material that once stood in its own right.

Adam (5: 1 – 5)

The Hebrew word, *“adam”* occurs six times in these five verses. Not once is it accompanied by the definite article but twice it is to be understood generically to refer to “mankind”. God created (*bara*) man (male and female) and named them “man” (vv. 1, 2). But the prime reference is to “the” man whose name is “Adam” (vv. 1, 3, 4 and 5). The writer has no difficulty in moving freely between *“adam”* - mankind and *“adam”* – the man Adam, because the man Adam is the first of mankind. (Matters of a scientific nature dealing with the notion of Adam as first man were dealt with in earlier blogs.)

Somewhat repetitively, echoing Genesis 1: 26 – 28, the writer records how God made (*asah*) mankind in the image of God, that they were male and female and that God blessed them. What is added here however, is the reference to, “in the day” that God created (*bara*) mankind, “in the day” when they were created (*bara*) (vv. 1, 2). Probably the point being made is that the sixth day of Genesis 1 is in mind. It is also possible that the writer wishes to make clear that being made in the image of God and being blessed were not matters which came about subsequent to the creation of mankind. Mankind was made in God’s image and blessed by him from the start.

As the writer unfolds what follows from Adam, his concern to begin with is almost solely with Seth. Abel had previously been mentioned and had of course come to an untimely end. Cain also had earlier been referred to along with what followed from him, his genealogy. So

now, at this point, the writer is concerned with Seth. That Adam fathered sons and daughters is noted but almost by way of passing reference. Seth provides the connection between Adam and the list of names that is about to unfold.

Of some interest, as mentioned in a previous blog, Seth is “fathered” in the likeness of Adam, according to his image (5: 3) just as mankind is made in God’s image after his likeness (1: 26). It would appear that whatever significance we give to mankind being made in God’s image, after his likeness, a matter discussed in some detail in an earlier blog, the similarity between God and the mankind he made is substantial. Indeed that the writer mentions that Seth was fathered in the likeness of Adam, according to his image who as male with female had been made in the image of God, after the likeness of God, could be his way of indicating that this imaging, this likeness, does not stop with first man but is passed on from mankind to mankind.

And so, Adam lived for 930 years, 800 years after he fathered Seth. No information is given in Genesis 4 as to when he became the father of Cain or Abel, or as to how long any of the descendants of Cain lived. It is only in chapter 5 when discussing Adam, Seth and his line that references to years become important. It would seem to be that, relatively speaking, the lineage of Cain is unimportant. (The extreme oddity of the extraordinary longevity of Adam and those who follow will be discussed later.)

Seth to Methuselah (5: 6 – 27)

I am again indebted to Walton¹ for his insights into the language used in these early chapters of Genesis and also for information concerning surrounding cultures that could be considered relevant for understanding certain aspects of these chapters. He indicates that while the names Seth and Enosh are clearly Hebrew, the only names in the lists in chapters 4 and 5 that have a reference to the divine name “El” are, Mehujael, Methushael and Mahalalel. The use of “El” indicates a Semitic setting for the language involved. He also states that “indications of Mesopotamian (Akkadian) include the use of the term, *mutu*, ‘man’, in Methushael and Methuselah” and that “most of the names can be explained using Hebrew etymologies.” He concludes that if one “accepts that Hebrew did not develop as a language until the first half of the second millennium B.C. ... it is logical to conclude that these are translations from a language used in earlier sources.”

The complete list of names – Adam to Noah is ten in number, with special attention being given to the first and last and also to the seventh – Enoch. A feature of the list of names in chapter 4, if one begins with Adam, is that the seventh there is also written about in some detail – Lamech, not to be confused however with the Lamech of chapter 5. Furthermore, just as this Lamech, last on the list of seven, has three sons so does Noah, last on the list of ten named in chapter 5. The list of names in chapter 11 also has some features parallel with those of chapter 5. In chapter 11 the list begins with Shem and ends with Terah. If one adds to the list Noah, father of Shem, there is a total of ten names with the one named at the end

¹ See Walton, J.H., **Genesis**, the New Application Commentary Series, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001, pp. 279-285 for comments on Genesis chapter 5.

also having three sons. Such similarities among the lists suggest a degree of artificiality. This is not to suggest however that the names were not meaningful or even that they did not belong to real people. None the less, it might mean that one does not have tight person to person genealogical lines. Any genealogy where all linkages would have been expressed could have contained many more names. Walton points out that “comparing biblical genealogies to one another shows that there are several generations skipped in any particular presentation. This type of telescoping also occurs in Assyrian genealogical records.”

It should be noted that all those from Adam to Lamech are recorded as having “other sons and daughters”. Noah is spoken of with reference to his sons only and all three are named. It could be inferred from the blessing of God upon Noah and his sons, “Be fruitful and increase in number” found in Genesis 9: 1, that Noah also had other sons and daughters, though that is not certain. The list of seven names, together with the reference to “other sons and daughters” probably indicates that the population was steadily increasing. God had pronounced his blessing for mankind, “Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth” (Genesis 1: 28) and his words had come to fulfilment. While, as Walton puts it, “in the Mesopotamian traditions overpopulation was considered a major problem ... the Atrahasis Epic (indicating) that overpopulation contributed to the noise of humanity and brought on the flood”, in the Genesis account it was never a question of overpopulation. Nor was the existence of a large population to be seen as anything other than the fulfilment of God’s intention for mankind. What was extremely disturbing to God was the increase in wickedness as mankind increased. And what was disturbing to man was the unfailing curse in which God had cursed the ground.

But why does the list exist in the first place? Could not the writer have simply moved on from Seth to Noah, making a general reference to population growth, without expressing any continuity? Obviously for the writer, continuity is important. This is an account of humanity. One person leads onto another just as one event leads onto another. Many individuals named may not be all that important in themselves but it is necessary that they all be linked, with special significance being given to those who begin the list and those who end the list.

The seventh person named in the list, Enoch, is however of some significance in his own right. It is reported of him that “Enoch walked with God and then he was not for God took him.” With Walton, the phrase, “walked with God” expresses the idea of “living in a way that pleased God.” That “he was not” at least at first strikes one as a little odd. However considered alongside of, by comparison, his short life span of only 365 years, it could either signify that he simply died before his normal time or that in some other sense he ceased to exist as a human being on the earth. That “God took him” is consistent with either possibility. However that it is also recorded that “he walked with God” might indicate that for benevolent reasons God took him before his “natural” time, to be with him, either through an early death or without any normal death occurring. On the basis of the text alone and without considering later ideas about what happened to Enoch, a degree of uncertainty remains. Later speculation about Enoch in Jewish literature abounds but it is later speculation.

What is of interest is that “in the Mesopotamian lists of pre-Flood sages, the seventh in the list, Utuabzu, is said to have ascended to heaven.” Furthermore, “in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Shu, the god of the air, is instructed to take the king to heaven so that he does not die on earth.” Such texts together with the Genesis text could have relied on material dated earlier than all three. Alternatively there could have been borrowing among the texts. Is the Genesis text a theologically purified version of textual material that the writer relied upon as he constructed his version? That is a possibility.

The Long Ages

Enoch and Lamech aside, the ages recorded for the seven, Adam to Methuselah, when they died varies between 895 (for Mahalalel) and 969 (for Methuselah). Lamech died when 777 years old and Noah lived for 950 years (Genesis 9: 29). The age at which the record indicates that a son was born to a father, for Seth to Lamech varies from 65 years (when Jared was born to Mahalalel and when Methuselah was born to Enoch) to 187 years (when Lamech was born to Methuselah). Adam had his third son, Seth, at Aged 130 and it is written of Noah that he had his three sons when 500 years old. On performing a few elementary calculations, one can determine that Lamech, who lived for 595 years after the birth of Noah, died 5 years before the flood (which occurred when Noah was 600 – Genesis 7: 6) and Methuselah died in the year of the flood.

A few remarks should probably be made about the age when Lamech died and the age when or by when Noah had his three sons. In the text no comment is made about Lamech’s death occurring earlier than expected, yet by comparison his death is early. Is it possible that he is given, somewhat artificiality, the age at death as 777 because it would be inappropriate for him to die during the flood? As the last named before Noah and with the flood occurring when Noah is 600 he has to die when relatively young if not to die during the flood. Or did it just happen that way?

With respect to Noah and when his three sons were born, it appears rather odd that whereas others have their son born (their first born son?) when they are aged between 65 and 187 years, Noah’s three sons are born when he is about 500 years old. A consideration of 7: 6, which indicates that Noah was 600 at the time of the flood, 9: 24 which states that Ham was the younger (or youngest?), 10: 21, which sees Japheth as older than Shem, and 11: 10 which gives Shem the age of 100 2 years after the flood, suggests that Shem was born when Noah was 502, with Ham born earlier and Japheth born even earlier (or the other way around). It could be that we are meant to see Japheth born when Noah is 500, Ham born, say when he is 501 and Shem born when he is 502. However it might be that the text is simply indicating that by the time Noah was around 500 he had had the three sons.

What are we to make of these very large numbers? Walton writes, “In the Sumerian king list the shortest reign is 18,600 years while the longest stretches to 43,200. Eight kings compile 241,200 years between them. The text uses the standard sexagesimal values. If the notation is read with decimal values rather than sexagesimal values, the numbers are in the same range as the biblical numbers, and the totals of the lists are nearly identical.” Is the Biblical

material, brought about by one means or another, a reflection of this Sumerian data? If so it is probably significant that while the Sumerians named are “kings” those named in Genesis are not so designated. Perhaps one theological point being made is that God does not operate through or need kings with perhaps the additional idea being conveyed that indeed there is only one king and that is God himself. All others are simply men whom God may directly interact with if he chooses.

However the problem of the large numbers still remains. One possible explanation is that the Genesis material is simply dependent on data such as that provided in the Sumerian king lists, but that as the Genesis material develops the ages to which people live are shortened to bring them more into conformity with normal expectations, a theological point being made in the process about the wickedness of man and God’s decision to shorten life spans (See Genesis 6: 3).

An alternative suggestion providing an explanation for long life will now be offered but very, very tentatively. Modern considerations of the interaction between genetic factors and the environment responsible for aging suggest that it may be possible with some control over these factors in the not too distant future to increase current life spans to as much as 200 years. It could have been that given different genetic and environmental factors operating sometime in the distant history of *homo sapiens*, people indeed had life spans of say 200 years. Could it not even have been possible for this figure to have been much greater prior to this? Additionally and of some relevance, genetic and environmental factors favouring a slowing down of aging might also have meant a slowing down of sexual maturation.

But what does one make of the anthropological evidence of remains considered to have belonged to human beings who died at ages within what we consider to be limits with which we are familiar? I have little knowledge of this field and perhaps that is very evident. However consider the following hypothetical. Some pelvic remains are judged to be that of a young adolescent female (as judged by modern bone structures) and given say an age of 10 to 12 years at death. But if genetic and environmental factors were such in the ancient world, to both increase longevity by slowing aging (as compared with what we know today) and to delay sexual maturation (as compared with what we know today) by the same or a related process, the same evidence might suggest, using a factor of five, that the pelvis came from a **young** adolescent female who was **50 to 60** years at death! Using this type of scenario, the recorded age range of 895 to 961 would translate to 179 to 192 (using a factor of five) by way of comparison for our times, recognising the possibility of living to 200 years as not being too unreasonable in the not too distant future and therefore maybe possible in the past. Using the same factor, the range of when sons were born (65 to 187) would translate to 13 to 37. On this basis Noah would have fathered children at around 100 years old or earlier. What is proposed here is of course merely a suggestion. It may be regarded as too unsubstantiated for serious consideration.

However if there is any truth to this proposal then what we have preserved for us both in the Sumerian king lists and in the Genesis account is a record of some people of considerable

antiquity living far longer than we would normally judge possible given only our current perspectives on the aging and sexual maturation processes.

Noah (5: 28 – 32)

Unlike the other names in the list in chapter 5, why Noah is named “Noah” is explained. Lamech called his son, “*Noach*” (meaning “rest”) because he considered that he would “comfort (*nacham*) us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord (*Yahweh*) has cursed” (5: 29). The curse of 3: 17 had never been waived. Not uncommonly he was employing a play on words. Later in this blog series a suggestion will be made that “*nacham*” has the underlying meaning of “bringing a change to”. “Comfort” is not an unreasonable expression for what results from a favourable change to the conditions under which one works to make the ground fruitful.

Walton comments, “This hope (of Lamech’s) has been thought to find its complement in 8: 21” (“I will never again curse the ground because of man”). Yet, as he points out, the Hebrew for curse in 5: 29 is “*arar*” (as it is in 3: 17) but in 8: 21 it is “*qalal*”. He is of the view that “*arar*” “expresses removing something or someone from the protection and favour of God”, while “*qalal*”, when God is the subject, “involves taking punitive action against someone or something.” What actually did happen, consequent to the coming of Noah?

Walton suggests that Lamech’s hope for Noah may have been misguided. Though Lamech referred to “*arar*”, “*qalal*” turned out to be the issue. A flood occurred, there was comfort for only very few and the ground remained removed from the protection and favour of God. However when the flood abated, God did not take punitive action against the ground but provided “rest”, as is the meaning of the name, “Noah”. Walton refers to this rest as a type of equilibrium which he sees described in 8: 22 – “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”

Rather than Lamech having a thoroughly correct understanding of Noah’s role in God’s purposes, does the existence of the two different Hebrew words for “curse” indicate that to the contrary he got it wrong concerning the nature of the curse that was his focus in 5: 29 and the nature of the curse that was God’s in 8: 21, though he got it right with respect to the rest that would follow the flood and at least the comfort that would also follow the flood? It would seem strange to have Lamech speak prophetically and yet get it even partly wrong. So alternatively, perhaps Lamech got it right both with respect to the curse the notion of rest and the idea of comfort.

Using Walton’s understanding of the two types of curse, the situation can be understood as follows. Upon the man having eaten of the tree which God commanded that he should not eat, the ground is cursed, that is, it is removed from God’s protection and favour with the explanation that the man in sorrow shall eat of it all the days of his life, that it shall bring forth thorns and thistles and by the sweat of his face he shall eat bread until he returns to the ground. Lamech’s understanding is that labour and painful toil exists because of the curse that God uttered, that is, the removal of his protection and favour. (In a previous blog the possibility that the ground outside the garden was already fit for disobedient man and that

God's curse of the ground, that is, the removal of his protection and favour from the ground, can be viewed, at least in part, as a statement about the nature of the ground being appropriate for disobedient man.) However Lamech posits that associated with Noah's existence there shall be some type of rest associated with the labouring and toil that exists as one works the ground. This comes about after the flood with the promise given by God that there shall be regularity to the times of sowing and harvesting, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. Man will still have to obtain his bread with toil and sweat but there will be some comfort for him brought about by some softening of the curse, resulting from the regularity upon which he will be able to depend as he works the ground to gain his bread. At the same time, though the flood itself with its devastating consequences upon the living world might indicate some type of punitive action against the ground, the promise of regularity points to the contrary. Rather than there being punitive action, a type of blessing results.

There is yet another possibility while not being a denial of the general scenario outlined above. Perhaps Walton is making too much of the idea of a distinction existing between "*arar*" and "*qalal*". In 5: 29 the word is "*arar*" and the text there relates back to 3: 16, where "*arar*" is also used. In 8: 21 the word is "*qalal*" but this also relates back to 3: 16. "I will never again curse (*qalal*) the ground on account of man" (8:21) harks back to "the ground shall be cursed (*arar*) because of you" (3: 16). A clear cut distinction between the words, at least in these contexts, simply does not seem to hold!

One last word on what Lamech says concerning Noah. The way the record reads is that Lamech speaks prophetically. Under the providence of God his words came to pass. Though quite unpalatable to some, it is possible that the writer makes Lamech speak prophetically, by putting words into his mouth. Perhaps less open to objection is the idea that Lamech, who dies only five years before the flood, being aware of what God will do and the part that Noah will play sees associated with him a type of rest that will come to him and those with him who survive, in the world after the flood. Perhaps the idea from Lamech's point of view is that after the "cleansing" character of the flood things must be somewhat somehow easier for those who still have to work the land to obtain their food. It turns out that that this relative "rest" comes about via a regularity promised by God but Lamech knows nothing of that.

That God, previously referred to as "*Elohim*", is referred to as "*Yahweh*" in v. 29 may simply be a reflection of the use of "*Yahweh Elohim*" in 3: 14, the name of the one who cursed the ground there (3: 17). Yet even if that is the case, the reference to "*Yahweh*" probably speaks of the very personal element involved in God removing from the ground his protection and favour, if that is the way we should understand the curse.

To Noah are born the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

The Sons of God and the Nephilim (6: 1 – 4)

The first few verses of chapter 6 relate to what has gone before. Chapter 5 makes it clear that over many generations, many sons and daughters have been born. And so here the writer refers to a time when man began to multiply on the face of the earth (*adamah*) and when daughters were born to them. Perhaps daughters are mentioned because they are the ones who

give birth to those who were increasing in number. (“Man” [*adam*] could be understood to refer to either males or mankind). The verses also lay a foundation for what is to follow in vv. 5 – 8 with vv. 1 – 8 as a whole being a lead in to the account of the great flood.

That the reference to “the sons of God marrying any of the daughters of men as they chose”, is followed by the statement that the Lord (Yahweh) said that his Spirit would not always contend with man, probably indicates that what the sons of God were doing was despicable in the sight of God.

Walton² outlines how from earliest times the phrase, “the sons of God” was thought to refer to angels (see, for example, the understanding of Genesis 6 in 1 Enoch) then how in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., Jewish commentators thought that it was a reference to “rulers”. At the same time, Christian commentators thought it was a reference to men from the lineage of Seth, while believing that the phrase, “the daughters of men” was a reference to the line of Cain. While arguing against the Jewish view that the rulers were engaged in polygamy, Walton suggests that the reference is indeed to rulers but rulers that exercised among other things, “the right of the first night”³. The practice involved an authority figure imposing “his will on his people by demanding and exercising the right to spend the first night with any woman who is being married.” Of course he would select those “daughters of men” whom he saw as “beautiful”. He cites the Gilgamesh Epic to indicate that this practice existed from ancient times. He also refers to the evidence that “at times kings were construed as sons of deity and ... authorities were occasionally designated *elohim* when they were engaged in duties as representatives of God.” Referring again to the Gilgamesh Epic, he cites how Gilgamesh is portrayed as two thirds god and one third man.

If sexual depravities of this sort are being referred to in the text, one can understand why God would decide that his relationship with men had to change. Walton sees a progression of offenses beginning with the individuals Adam and Eve, extending to the family as in the case of Cain, then to society leaders as in the case of these rulers and then to everyone, just before the flood. The way in which God decides to change this relationship at this point however, is to diminish their life spans. Yahweh says that his Spirit will not always strive (*diyn*) with man in his erring. Behind the word translated “strive” lies the idea of having to contend with, that is putting up with without making any changes. God will not simply go on and on putting up with erring mankind. There comes a point in time when he decides that he will now act. He will now bring about change. They are flesh. They are mortal and that mortality will now be made more evident. They have been enjoying very long lives but now the length of those lives will be severely shortened. Perhaps by referring to his Spirit (*ruach*), God is making a connection between himself and the spirit (the breath) they require in order to live. Perhaps the reader is also meant to see a reference to the breath that God breathed into the man in the first place (Genesis 2: 7), though the Hebrew word used to describe breath on that occasion is

²Walton deals with vv. 1 – 4 in the work mentioned in note 1, pp. 290-298.

³ Walton recognises that 2 Peter 2: 4 and Jude 6 with their references to certain angels are considered by some to be reflecting on the Genesis passage, but argues against this understanding.

“*neshemah*”. Now their days will be reduced to 120 years – a reduction, on average, by about seven eighths! And it is Yahweh who decrees it. He is the one who personally utters, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man in his erring”. The days of man, who is actually flesh, shall now be reduced to 120 years.

The introduction of the “Nephilim” at first glance may seem odd. In Numbers their existence is reported by the spies sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. “All the people we saw in its midst were men of stature and we saw there the Nephilim, the sons of Anak of the Nephilim. We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers and so we were in their eyes.” (Numbers 13: 32, 33). The Nephilim appear to be people of considerable physical height. Their size could have given them considerable advantages over others in battle and such prowess could have created for them a reputation of some note. Indeed that is how Genesis 6: 4 concludes, if one understands the reference still to be to the Nephilim - “they were the warriors of old, the men of renown”. But it would probably be a mistake to infer from the use of the word, “*gibborim*”, unhelpfully translated sometimes by the word “heroes”, that they were to be held in high esteem. The writer seems to be simply drawing attention to men who were of large size, powerful in battle and having a considerable reputation, men who came into existence even before the sons of God behaved in the way they did but who persisted up unto at least those times. Indeed the text seems to suggest that such Nephilim were also the offspring of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men. Perhaps such offspring were given positions of power and prestige and so because of this power became to be associated with those men of stature, powerful in battle and famous – the Nephilim. The text is not easy to understand. Etymologically, “*nephilim*” carries with it the notion of fallen ones. The writer might have been seeing in their name, that as great as they were they were not invincible.

It is possible that given the existence of the Nephilim after the flood, a reader making sense of both the Genesis and Numbers accounts might have viewed the term, “Nephilim” as generic rather than genealogical in character. The Nephilim might have been considered to be people of a particular type rather than people of a common biological line.

In vv. 1-4 the picture is being given of the existence of rulers of power behaving according to their fancy and of warriors who were renowned for their power. And it is upon a world of men with such power that God will rain down (excuse the pun) judgment. The rulers are not given the name “kings” and the warriors are described as Nephilim – the fallen ones. In the final analysis, God alone is king, God alone rules. In the final analysis God alone is mighty, God alone cannot fall but others will.

The wickedness of man (6: 5 – 8)

Then Yahweh, this deeply personal God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth upon which he had been placed and that every imagination (*yester*) of his thoughts (the framework for his thinking) was only evil all the day long. With such words as “every”, “only” and “all” the reader is meant to realise that what God saw was all encompassing, all

pervading and all extensive wickedness. As Walton points out⁴ the text here makes no reference to the worship of false gods or hybrid creatures created by angels cohabitating with men or that even that the concept of God has been distorted. Whatever such men were like in other respects, their wickedness was great.

“And Yahweh was grieved (*nacham*) that he had made (*asah*) men on the earth and his heart was filled with pain.” Walton recognises that there are various ways to understand “*nacham*”. One way is to see the language used of God as simply anthropomorphic. It describes God as though he were a human being. Walton considers the various meanings of “*nacham*” that people consider possible and suggests another way how the word should be understood. He lists various categories that lexicographers recognise for the word such as, “grieve, repent, console, relent, be comforted, and change one’s mind”. He then offers what he considers to be a cohesive concept which embraces all of these categories. His suggestion is that the word is best understood in accounting terms - that essentially the word should be understood “in terms of acting to keep personal, national or cosmic ‘ledgers’ in balance.” He refers to Judges 21: 6 where various tribal leaders seek to balance the ledger for Benjamin, the tribe having been decimated. Consequently he sees the text in Genesis describing not Yahweh as regretting, grieving or being sorry but Yahweh as seeking to address the situation of the extensive wickedness of man. “His course of action entails wiping almost the entire population from the earth.” Such a procedure will redress the terrible imbalance that has arisen. Of course God’s heart was filled with pain that he would have to so act. Walton writes, “his heart tormented him [i.e. he was distressed]”. I take it that Walton sees the idea that God experienced torment as anthropomorphic in character even though he has not approached the “grieving that he had made man” as anthropomorphic. Walton’s approach is indeed novel and perhaps correct although one could argue that from the point of view of consistency, an anthropomorphic viewpoint would have been more acceptable. It is also interesting that when referring to “*nacham*” in 5: 29, Walton is quite at ease with the translation of the verb being “comfort”. Whatever we make of God’s reaction to the situation it still seems to convey the idea of God feeling as well as acting as though he were a human being. Perhaps Walton’s approach is in the end anthropomorphic anyway.

With all apologies to Walton and others who know far more than I will ever know, an appeal to a cohesive concept may be very useful for setting boundaries to what a word can and cannot mean. However in a specific text, the meaning to be supplied is determined very much by the context, though the meaning decided upon has to lie within certain boundaries. Given that many Hebrew words have to do a lot of work, the meaning of a particular word in a particular context is only sometimes, perhaps rarely, likely to amount to a cohesive meaning incorporating somehow or another all possible meanings. With respect to “*nacham*” I suspect that in 5: 29 the sense is something like “bringing about change to” and that in 6: 6 and 6: 7 it is something like “changing the mind with respect to”. My suggestion for the overriding cohesive character of “*nacham*” or, put in another way, its underlying character, has to do

⁴ Walton has some discussion on vv. 5 – 7 in his commentary referred to in Note 1, pp. 307 - 311

with the notion of “change”. This is not too dissimilar to Walton’s overarching concept of “acting to keep things in balance” though it is less restrictive.

Yahweh’s decision was to wipe from the face of the earth man whom he had created (*baraḥ*) – that is, he whom God had in a very personal fashion brought into being in the first place. But not only is mankind to be destroyed but also animals, things that crawl and birds of the sky, for he repented (*nacham*) that he had made (*asah*) them. (The Hebrew word translated “animals” (*behemah*), though a probable reference to domesticated animals in Genesis 1: 24 and 2: 20 is probably here a reference to animals wild or domesticated.) Again the same word, “*nacham*”, translated here as “repented” is used as in the previous verse. From Walton’s point of view it again has the sense of God seeking to redress the situation but this time the focus seems to be upon the animals, crawling things and birds as well as man.

Are these other creatures involved not simply because by the method that God will adopt they also must suffer, but because their existence is somehow linked with mankind’s existence? Perhaps we need to be reminded that in Genesis 1: 26, mankind was to “rule over” the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky and over cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing. (The fish of the sea are not mentioned in 6: 7 for obvious reasons.) Again in the garden, the man gave names to all the cattle (*behemah*), and to the birds of the sky and to every animal of the field (Genesis 2: 20)⁵ (but not the fish of the sea). To a significant extent, the various creatures that are to be destroyed are here on earth because of man. The destruction of mankind will mean that they have to be destroyed as well. If they are left upon the earth, their basic function cannot be fulfilled. Only a few will survive the flood and those few will accompany a man – Noah.

At the same time that such destruction is brought to the attention of the reader, a note of hope is given. “And Noah found grace (*chen*) in the eyes of the Lord (Yahweh)”. We wait for the next “*toledoth*” before receiving more information on Noah. However, at this point in the unfolding drama, one man stands out as the object of God’s kindness. Because we are not given any further information at this juncture, that Yahweh has looked with favour upon this one man, focuses our attention again upon this God. He will almost utterly destroy but not this man. This man is the one to whom he shows extraordinary kindness. And this is the man named “rest” – Noah. And rest he personally will have one day, though difficult and turbulent times lie ahead.

So ends this “*toledoth*” – this accounting of things.

⁵ What might be understood by the various terms used to describe various living creatures and the notions of “ruling over” and “naming” was discussed in an earlier series.