

Article of the Month – February 2009

Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (1)

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For the next 18 months we will look into 12 missionary themes that we find in the book of Genesis. They will be treated in pairs, alternated by other missionary themes. The purpose is to show that world missions was by no means God's 'afterthought' which only started in Matthew 28 or Acts 2. On the contrary: Genesis, the book of beginnings, is as much the book of the beginning of world missions as it is the one about the origin of the human race. Like many other great biblical topics, that of world missions develops according to the hermeneutical principle of progressive revelation: basic biblical issues unfold as time progresses.

These themes have a direct relationship to world missions. They are major themes in the Scriptures. The Bible in its entirety is a book of world missions. God is the God of 'all nations, generations and peoples'. This can be seen in every Bible book.

Theme 1: Who Sends? The Missio Dei – Origin of Missionary Endeavour

The need for world missions is hard to understand for anyone who has no understanding of Who God is: His attributes, character, plans and claims with regard to humanity, and how He reveals Himself in His Word in language, pictures and illustrations.

God introduces Himself in His Trinitarian existence: Verse 1 speaks about 'God'; verse 2 about the 'Spirit of God' and in verse 3 the 'Light' appears: Christ in His pre-incarnate state.¹ Then He speaks about 'us' and 'our', indicating three or more Persons, sharing the same Godly essence of Being, and relational in character.² Similarly, mankind was created relationally,³ reflecting the Trinity by body, soul and spirit – united in one human life. The Godhead is revealed in three Persons, yet is One in Being.⁴

Man was created to live in two worlds. As the *Adam*, he was created 'from the dust of the ground' (*'adamah' in Hebrew*). Then, God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath (*'ruah' in Hebrew, lit. 'spirit'*) of life'.⁵ Man has been designed to live relationally on earth as well as in heaven: equally equipped to have spiritual communion with God and enjoy

¹ Gen. 1:1-3; John 1:1-5; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6; Col. 1:16

² Gen. 1:26

³ Gen. 2:20b-23

⁴ Deut. 6:4

⁵ Gen. 2:7

fellowship with other people. Human life is not complete if lived on a natural level only; man was created for close contact with God.⁶

Man, created for fellowship with God, sinned and lost it. God provided a way of salvation so that fellowship can be restored. This proclamation of salvation is what world missions is all about: the *Missio Dei*, God's Mission to save a lost human race. Where worldwide human enterprise concentrates on executing the *Missio Dei*, we see *Missiones Ecclesiae*: missions performed by the Church, coming into existence.

People appear in the Bible, *sent* by God to perform certain tasks. We also see people, once sent themselves, become *senders* – within God's purposes.

The *first* sent ones are Adam and Eve: 'sent' out of Paradise to care for a world, under the curse. Until the end of time, every mission will have to do with sin and offered salvation.⁷

The *second* sent one was Noah: not told to *go* somewhere; he was on 'home assignment'. He had to announce judgment over his generation and build the Ark, the only offered possibility of salvation.

The *third* one was indeed told to *go*: Abram had to leave his country, people and father's house to go to the country God would show him. He went with a world-encompassing fourfold promise: 'I will make you into a great nation'; 'I will bless you'; 'I will make your name great'; 'You will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'.⁸ He had to sacrifice to obtain that promise: leaving all that was familiar and embark on an adventure he could not fully grasp at first. With Abram's action the *Missio Dei* became visible: God's first redemptive *person* would grow into a redemptive *nation*.

The *last* person in Genesis, sent by God, is Joseph – although at first it looked as if he was sent on just an errand by Jacob.⁹ This is the first story, where the *father* sends his *son*.

The *first sent* person who became a *sender* is Abraham, when he sent his servant Eliezer to look for a bride for his son Isaac.

Later we read how Isaac, the *next* sender, sent his son Jacob to find a wife.¹⁰

The *third* sender is Jacob, who sent his beloved son Joseph to look for his other sons, who herded his flocks in the dangerous area of Shechem.¹¹

The *fourth* and last sender is Joseph. After he met his brothers, except Benjamin, in Egypt again he sent them back to fetch this younger brother.

Many red threads of Genesis converge in chapters 37-50. The stories of Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, Joseph's rule and salvation ministry might be called a micro-Bible. They contain major elements of God, ruling in history, placing strategic human characters along the line of time to execute His plans to save people. They present an image of the divine Salvation Plan as executed in the New Testament through Jesus Christ.

⁶ God envies intensely the spirit he caused to live in us, James 4:5

⁷ Gen. 3:15, 17-19

⁸ Gen. 12:1-3

⁹ Gen. 37:13; 45:5; 50:20; Ps. 105:16-22

¹⁰ Gen. 24 and 28 respectively

¹¹ Gen. 37:13; Gen. 34