

Article of the Month – May 2009

Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (3)

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First I want to apologize that some errors have crept into the footnotes of last month's article. A corrected version can be asked for at: recruiting4missions@gmail.com

We now continue our series of 12 missionary themes in Genesis. This month's theme is:

Theme 3: Man's Sin Problem

God created man to have fellowship with Him: He wanted a lover with whom He could share His heart, blessings, power, dominion and Throne. Therefore He created man with a free will. Relationships that do not come from free moral choice are not relationships of love. Created as free moral agent, man can choose to accept or reject such a relationship. This choice was made visible by God placing two kinds of trees in the Garden, and man was instructed *not* to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.¹ There was a choice, and the consequence was spelled out clearly: life or death.

The *nature* of Eve's temptation does not differ from how people are tempted today. They fall for the same arguments when it comes to exactly quoting God's words. This fall had nothing accidental, it started with pre-meditated sin: the arguments were well thought-through and the act was committed deliberately. There was no excuse.² The *content* of the temptation³ Eve faced, consisted of doubt about the word of God, that Satan had sown into her heart: 'Did God *really* say...?' – then saying something God had not said, namely that man could not eat *from any tree* in the Garden. The woman answered in a way that departed from God's literal words by adding *and you must not touch it*. The devil then leaves his subtlety by flatly denying God's warning that they would 'surely die'. Satan interpreted God's words differently from how He meant them. God spoke first of all about a spiritual death: man forfeited his relationship with God. After that, physical death would be a time bomb in their lives and in that of their descendants. This is what Satan did *not* speak about. His next argument was: 'you will be like God, knowing good and evil'. People interpret this half-truth today as 'you will be a bit of god yourself'. Man found out the hard way that knowing good and evil did not make him happier, because this knowledge is not neutral. From the moment man got to know sin he was hooked.

¹ Gen. 2:9,16,17

² '... so that men are without excuse ...' (Rom. 1:20b)

³ Gen. 3:1-5

The *motive* behind the temptation is that *Satan himself* wanted to be like God⁴ and injected that desire into the heart of *man*. Man had been created to rule,⁵ so all Satan had to do was use this God-given purpose and defile it by selfish motives. Such motives know no limits and overstep God's boundaries. Man's power only functions well within these, but Satan seduces people to desire what goes beyond what God's purposes for them.

Satan uses the same pattern of temptation repeatedly and the Bible warns us constantly. Since Gen. 3 we understand who planted evil in man's heart, although man became a willing field to receive these weeds. The *consequences* of man's sin were a consciousness of nakedness, a fear for God, the urge to hide, blame shifting and others, culminating in spiritual and physical death.⁶ From James we learn that two parties are involved in generating sin:⁷ the tempting power of sin, and man's own evil desire – over which he should rule.⁸ Understanding this is vital to World Missions. If we know our enemy and his limited power, as well as Jesus' victory over him, we have a message for the world.

The sin of one couple affected the whole of creation:⁹ man and his descendants as well as flora and fauna came under the curse.¹⁰ When Cain murdered Abel God said that killing brings a curse.¹¹ Murder is the worst of sins and generates the strongest guilt-consciousness. The only way to deal with that, safe repentance, is to justify oneself. The consequence is a hardening of heart. Cain did not repent and left God's presence after which he founded his own God-less line of descendants.¹² Later Noah cursed Canaan for the sin of Ham.¹³ Canaan inherited that curse because Ham did not repent of his impurity. Therefore this root of sin continued unchallenged, poisoning later generations. God added a clause in His promise to Abram:¹⁴ cursing the Lord's chosen, whether individual man or a whole people, causes the curse to return on who pronounced it.¹⁵

Idolatry leads to death *too early*, and to not reaching one's destination. Rachel stole her father's household gods; unable to abandon the spiritual contamination of her father's house. Ignorant about the guilty party, Jacob pronounced death on the trespasser.¹⁶ Not long after that Rachel died in child birth without ever reaching Isaac's tents, her home by promise.¹⁷ Although the family rid itself of these gods,¹⁸ we don't read about repentance,

⁴ Is. 14:13,14

⁵ Gen. 1:26,28

⁶ Gen. 3:10, 8, 13 & 14 respectively

⁷ James 1:14,15

⁸ Gen. 4:7b

⁹ Gen. 3:14-19

¹⁰ Rom. 8:19-21

¹¹ Gen. 4:8-13

¹² Gen. 4:17-24

¹³ Gen. 9:20-27

¹⁴ Gen. 12:2

¹⁵ Gen. 27:29b

¹⁶ Gen. 31:32

¹⁷ Gen. 35:16-20

¹⁸ Gen. 35:2,4

which might have lifted Jacob's curse over Rachel. Later in the Scriptures we see cases where punishment was decreased when the trespasser(s) repented.¹⁹ Next month we will take a closer look at Satan, as the originator of sin, our 4th theme.

¹⁹ See e.g. 1 Kings 21:20-29, or Jonah