

## Article of the Month – September 2009

### Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (6)

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This month we look in our series of 12 missionary themes in Genesis at

#### ***Theme 6: Man-made 'Solutions' for the Sin Problem***

From the day of the fall, man had to live with the manifold consequences of sin. His conscience often told him that he was wrong, that he was guilty towards his fellow man but most of all towards God. Man was bothered by his conscience; it was like a pain in his soul for which he sought relief. All the time he knew: I am wrong, I have to change. At the same time he understood by his frequently repeated sins

that it is very hard to change, let alone do away with the accumulated guilt. Some cried out to God for help, others hardened their hearts and tried to silence their consciences. The word 'conscience' is made up of two words, 'con' and 'science' and they literally mean '(together) with' and 'knowing'. God knows that sin is wrong and through his con-science man 'knows together with God' that his particular sin is wrong.

In Gen. 4 we see the first pair of brothers, Cain and Abel, present an offering to God. Both, mature men as they were, were conscious of their sins.

*Abel* understood that there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood and in offering an animal he simply followed the example of God,<sup>1</sup> of which he had heard undoubtedly from his parents. He had come to understand that sin inevitably leads to death because when his parents had sinned, God killed an animal to cover their nakedness. Blood had to flow on behalf of them and *Abel* understood that it would be no different for him, so he voluntarily killed and shed blood to atone for his sins. It provided him with a cover in the eyes of God and his conscience received peace.

*Cain*, on the other hand, had no such understanding. He probably did not know what to do about his sins and he had silenced the outcry of his conscience by hardening his heart. He accepted his sinful behavior by trying to convince himself 'that's the way I am' without trying to change. Yet, he still knew that his attitude was not right and one day, maybe following the good example of his brother, he decided that it could do him no harm if he too brought an offering. It is this hardened and unrepentant heart that still has some elementary sin-awareness left that starts to display religious behavior: it looks right, it may even feel right, but it is not, at least not in the eyes of God. *Cain* knew he had sinned but might have considered it too small a thing to kill and shed blood for, like his brother had done. In fact, *Cain's* sacrifice was an offering of *works*,

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 3:21

whereas Abel's sacrifice was an offering of *faith*. It is obvious that he did not receive the inner peace Abel had and he noticed the difference. That difference made him jealous, angry and depressed.

After a while he translated his unhappy feelings into bitterness and the wish for revenge. Later he could not bear it anymore and killed his brother who, by his godly character, kept shaking Cain's conscience awake – which Cain had previously done his best to silence. But at last he was liberated of this pain in the neck, Abel.

It was by this first murder that an initial separation of mankind took place: between those who follow God in His ways and those who *think* they follow Him but are walking their own ways. The second one, truly *without* God, persecuted the first one, truly *with* God and so it has been ever since. All through history the counterfeit followers have persecuted the true followers of God.

As early as in Gen. 4 we see the first separation between the true and the false church. This will be further explored under Theme 10, where we will look at the origins of Babylon. That separation will culminate into a worldwide conflict at the end of time, which the Bible calls the Great Tribulation.<sup>2</sup>

In Gen. 4 we see the only real separation there really is in all of humanity: the ones *with* God and those *without* Him. This has been true throughout the era called 'time' and will remain true throughout eternity. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the first group does everything within its power to warn the second group and bring them back to God. That is our mission – a Mission really of which God is the Architect – a Mission that states that God wants no one to be separated from Him and perish.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 24:21

<sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. 3:9

