

## Article of the Month – December 2009

### Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (8)

By Steef van 't Slot, Ph.D.



In the series of 12 missionary themes in Genesis we now look at

#### ***Theme 8: Examples of God's Universalistic Purpose***

We must make a distinction between the words *universal* and *universalistic*. With *universal* I mean *applicable* to all, and with *universalistic* I mean *available* to all. So, when speaking about God's salvation we cannot say that it is *universal*. That would mean that everyone who ever lived would be saved and that therefore there is no place for judgment, condemnation, punishment or hell. It would not really matter then, whether one sins or not, whether high moral standards are maintained or not, whether one has a noble or an evil character. Therefore, we can never apply the word *universal* to only a part of humanity. There *are* things that can be considered universal: sin is, in the sense that (except for Jesus Christ) all men have sinned; death is universal and so is judgment.<sup>1</sup> There are no exceptions.

When we use the word *universalistic* we mean, speaking about salvation, that it is *available* to all men. Christ died for all: He offers salvation to all (that is a universalistic purpose) but not all accept it. Therefore salvation can not be considered to be universal in its final result.

Let me give you seven examples:

*Firstly*, the enmity God set between Satan and mankind<sup>2</sup> is universalistic, although many choose to side with the devil. Everybody is *offered* to side with God against the devil, but not everybody *accepts*. Many love their sin too much.

*Secondly*, redemption becomes universalistically *available*<sup>3</sup> – but will never be universal so as to encompass all.

*Thirdly*, the facts that the ground is cursed, that death came to all people and that sin became the common denominator<sup>4</sup> are examples of *universalism*. It hits all, without exceptions.

*Fourthly*, the covenant God made with Noah<sup>5</sup> was *universal*: made available to *you and your descendants* – encompassing all of humanity and *every* living creature.<sup>6</sup> The promise that '*never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth*' (italics mine) is *universal*: it is a waterproof promise. It is not a promise that applied to some but not to others; it was offered to sinners and saints alike. Similarly, the sign of the rainbow is meant as a *universal* promise of protection.

*Fifthly*, in the next two chapters<sup>7</sup> we see that *all* nations were scattered, according to God's original plan.<sup>8</sup> This scattering was *universal* in the sense that it applied to all. At the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 3:23; Heb. 9:27

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 3:14

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 3:15

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 3:17, 3:19 and 6:5,11,12 & 8:21 respectively

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 9:9-17

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 9:9,10-12,15-17

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 10 & 11

time<sup>9</sup> when representatives of *all* nations, tribes, peoples and tongues will stand before the Throne, this scattering is eliminated. The word *all* then has to be understood again in a *universalistic* way: although salvation was offered to all, not all accepted it.

*Sixthly*, God's covenant with Abraham<sup>10</sup> is *universalistic* in nature: it includes *all* peoples on earth to be blessed, but exclusively through his line, to be continued through Isaac,<sup>11</sup> Jacob,<sup>12</sup> the nation of Israel<sup>13</sup> and finally Jesus Christ and His Body on earth, the Church.<sup>14</sup> We see that God works in a *particularistic* way: He chose *one* man, developed him and his descendants into *one* nation, from which *one* Man came forth of Whom *one* worldwide Body was born. This *particularism* could never lead to *universalism* since there would always be people who refuse to conform to God's only, unique way of salvation. Therefore, the outcome of the Abrahamic covenant would be *universalistic* in nature.

*Finally*, in the story of Joseph in Egypt we see famine everywhere<sup>15</sup> (take note of the repeated words *all* and *whole* in all four verses). The need for physical food was *universal* but the provision was *universalistic*: people had to decide themselves to go to Zaphenath-Paneah,<sup>16</sup> the only man from whom they could obtain grain. Joseph was their only hope. They had to conform or starve. The same applies today in a non-physical sense. The need for spiritual food is also *universal* but the provision is equally *universalistic* in nature as in Joseph's time. People have to decide themselves to go to Jesus Christ, the only One from Whom they can obtain forgiveness for their sins and reconciliation with God. He is the only hope for mankind: no other name has been given through which they can be saved.<sup>17</sup>

Summarizing it:

*Universalistic is:*

- Enmity between Satan and mankind;
- Redemption: available – but not universal in the sense of encompassing all;
- *All* nations, tribes, peoples, tongues. Salvation is offered to all but not accepted by all;
- *All* peoples on earth were to be blessed, but only through Abraham and via Christ;
- The only solution for the famine: people had to go to Zaphenath-Paneah;
- The only solution for the spiritual famine: people have to go to Jesus Christ.

*Universal is:*

- The curse on the ground;
- Death;
- Sin;
- The '*never again* promises', offered to sinners and saints; the rainbow is a sign;
- *All* nations were scattered;
- The need for physical food and that for spiritual food is *universal*.

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<sup>8</sup> Gen. 1:28

<sup>9</sup> Rev. 5:9 & 7:9

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 12:2,3

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 17:19

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 27:29; 28:13-15

<sup>13</sup> Ex. 19:5,6

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 41:54-57

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 41:45

<sup>17</sup> John 14:6; Acts 4:12

