

Article of the Month – February 2010

Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (9)

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We continue the series of 12 missionary themes in Genesis and now consider

Theme 9: The Concept of the Nations

Gen. 10 is the first ‘nations-chapter’ in the Bible: the word occurs 5 times.¹ This theme plays a dominant role, with its climax in Rev. 5:9 & 7:9. From the beginning God has revealed Himself as Lord of all nations. He is not satisfied with less, because He is their Creator. He reaches out to the lost and offers His salvation to all. It is inconceivable that He would be content with one small nation and forget about the rest. He is so interested in every single people group on earth, that He wants the Good News to be preached to its utter limits.

In Gen. 11 we see that the nations strayed from God by uniting, although He had told them to scatter.² They planned to build a tower to reach to the heavens. This was an enterprise to compete with the Most High. God acknowledged their evil intents and the power of their unity and confused their ways of communicating, so that they would stop building. Those who had refused to spread over the earth were now scattered by God Himself, in order to jeopardize the unlimited increase of evil that would otherwise have taken place. The significance that this happened in Babel will be discussed under Theme 10.

The measurements that God took in Gen. 11 do not mean that He gave up on the nations. In Gen. 12 we see how He made a fresh start with Abram, promising him to bless the nations through a nation descending from him. The peoples in Gen. 11 wanted to make *themselves* a name:³ they searched for identity, but outside God. Abram was not concerned about a name; he just did what God told him to do and the result was that *God* promised to make him a name. This is illustrated by the fact that He changed Abram’s name into Abraham.⁴ This gave him a new identity and function. He would be the father of many nations and of all believers, through Christ.⁵

What the nations of Gen. 11 could not reach by their concerted effort, God gave in His grace to one man. In Abraham’s line, through Christ, all nations will be united before God’s throne, and long before that, there was a divine language-restoration.⁶ Some limits of Gen. 11 were lifted in Acts 2; the nations’ artificial attempt to reach unity outside God came to nothing.

¹ Gen. 10:4,20,31,32a,32b

² Gen. 1:28; 9:1

³ Gen. 11:4

⁴ Gen. 17:5

⁵ Gen. 17:4-8; Rom. 4:16 & Gal. 3:16,19,29 respectively

⁶ Acts 2:8-11

Yet, one man's faith allowed God to work out His purpose: to unite them in Himself through Christ.

In Gen. 16 & 21 we see two nations descending from *Abraham*: the line of the oldest son Ishmael, born of the slave woman, and that of the youngest son Isaac, born of the free woman. God made His promises to the latter. The former never conformed but rebelled (as did his mother Hagar) and they left the place of God's promises. Had they loved God, they would have submitted to God's chosen man, but they separated in attitude, life principles and character long before physical separation took place. The two would meet again, but not until Christ had broken down the wall of enmity⁷ and both would submit to Him. Only in Christ hostile tribes and nations can be reconciled, provided they both recognize their sin and their need for His forgiveness. Walls between people, tribes and nations come down where different parties accept Christ's sacrifice.

Lot too left the blessing of Abraham's tents, to live an affluent life in godless Sodom. Peter calls Lot a man who 'tormented his righteous soul' by the sinful deeds he saw.⁸ Lot is a type of the Christians who put material wealth above their relationship with God. Had his relationship with Him been the passion of his life, he would not have considered living in Sodom, but rather have been content with less wealth. Lot's influence in Sodom was too small to save it and he had to flee. His greed caused him to lose his possessions and his wife. It was a high price to pay for leaving the place of blessing. The worst came when his two daughters made their father drunk and caused him to commit incest with them.⁹ Would Lot have come to drunkenness easily in Abraham's presence? Where did the daughters learn their wicked ways? And so Lot also fathered two nations, the Moabites and the Ammonites – who would give considerable trouble to Abraham's descendants later.

We also see two nations descend from *Isaac* and Rebecca:¹⁰ the Edomites via Esau and the Israelites via Jacob. These twins were too different to unite. There could have been salvation for the descendants of the older brother, provided they had gone along with God's direction to serve those of the younger. Yet, Esau's posterity thwarted God's purpose throughout history,¹¹ as Esau himself did. The two had to separate. After Esau despised his birth right¹² by preferring the carnal life of temporal pleasures above God's promises, he hardened himself by picking two Canaanite wives.¹³ And so he begot an ungodly people that later bothered Israel repeatedly.¹⁴

Finally, we see that all nations had a common problem, famine.¹⁵ There was only one solution: going to the savior of the land in Egypt (Joseph, who had been sent ahead¹⁶). Today we see that all nations also have a common problem, sin. For this problem too, there is only one solution: going to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

⁷ Eph. 2:14

⁸ 2 Pet. 2:8

⁹ Gen. 18:30-38

¹⁰ Gen. 25

¹¹ See e.g. Num. 20:14-20

¹² Gen. 25:34

¹³ Gen. 9:25; 10:15

¹⁴ See e.g. Obadiah 1-14 & Mal. 1:2-5

¹⁵ Gen. 41:54-57

¹⁶ Ps.105:17

