

Article of the Month – June 2010

Twelve Missionary Themes in Genesis (11)

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In the series of 12 missionary themes in Genesis we consider our one but last topic, namely

Theme 11: Forfeited Salvation Means Judgment

This theme is a spiritual axiom: it was as true in the time of Genesis as it is today. The word ‘judgment’ means ‘separation between two groups, parties, or possibilities’. In Greek the word *κρίσεις* (*kriseis*) is used, from which our word crisis is derived. A crisis

means: ‘the passing from one situation (room or circumstance) to another’. In other words: when in a crisis you step over a threshold, leaving something behind and entering into something else.

Our task in missions is to announce salvation and acquaint people with the consequences of their choice – acceptance or rejection. Either they renounce their sins and be reconciled to God, or they cling to them and stay separated from Him.¹ Preaching the Gospel is indeed bringing people into a crisis: it leads them from the threshold of death to life and encourages them to take that step. Everyone finds himself in that predicament, whether he knows it or not. It is our task to make it known. That is why Jesus sent us to all nations.² It is not an option, as if we had a choice; it is an *urgent mission*. Let me give you eight examples:

In Gen. 3 *Adam and Eve* were warned not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were told that the outcome would be a certain death. The message to the first human couple was different from the one to later humans: ‘You are safe now, but to keep safe, you should not eat of that tree.’ Later the message became: ‘You are spiritually dead. Unless you accept God’s salvation, you remain dead and be lost forever.’

The *next* example we see in Gen. 4. *Cain* is warned to master over the sin that tempted him. He did not listen, sinned, refused to repent and hardened his heart. He left the presence of the Lord.³ So he became the founder of a Godless line of descendants. A choice like this has eternal consequences. We do not know whether Cain physically heard God’s voice, but that does not matter: everybody can ‘hear’ God’s voice via his or her conscience. That is why Paul wrote later that man has no excuse to keep on sinning.⁴

In the *example of Noah* we see that a whole generation had left God’s ways⁵ and was warned about a coming worldwide catastrophe as judgment over their sins. None except Noah’s

¹ Is. 59:1,2

² Matt. 28:18-20 & Acts 1:8

³ Gen. 4:16

⁴ Rom. 1:18-20

⁵ Gen. 6:5,11-13

family believed and all others perished. The era of grace had been about a century⁶ in which people could ponder Noah's message and repent. God was very merciful to wait so long. Would Noah's generation have repented if He had waited longer? Not likely!

The *fourth* example is seen in Gen. 11. The *peoples* of the earth resisted God's will for them (namely to scatter), so God interfered with a judgment that was more social than catastrophic: the language confusion forced them to spread out over the earth.

A good example is the *fifth*, in Gen. 18 & 19: the story of the destruction of *Sodom and Gomorrah*. God wanted to acquaint His friend Abraham with what He was about to do.⁷ He, Who is slow to anger,⁸ investigated whether the Sodomites sinned as much as He had heard. Then He revealed His plans for judgment to Abraham and allowed him to intercede for the cities. God went to the limit of His grace to honor Abraham's requests.⁹ Never before had God showed such respect for people, longing for their partnership in His business. He wants to bless, not destroy, and therefore inspires His 'watchmen' to intercede for the nations. When we accept that inspiration we may still save people from judgment. And although God carried out His judgment when only four righteous people were found, He provided salvation for them. Even when judgments like natural disasters hit the world, we can be absolutely certain that God treats no one unjustly.

The *sixth* example we see in Gen. 21. *Ishmael* mocks Isaac, just as his mother had despised Sarah.¹⁰ They were then sent away from Abraham's house. It has not been different throughout the ages and neither will it be at the end of time: when the sons of Ishmael mock the sons of Isaac they will face judgment. Remember that Genesis is the book of beginnings, where principles were planted that would apply throughout human history.

Example *seven* we see in *Esau's* life. The hatred for his brother Jacob, son of the Promise, was only formally reconciled long after they separated,¹¹ but it lasted only for their life time and applied for their personal lives. The principles Esau had built into his life could never please God and he too set a pattern for his descendants. Often in Israel's history Esau's descendents gave Jacob's offspring a hard time¹² although they could never overpower them completely.

Finally, in Gen. 39-47 we see a worldwide *famine*. The Bible does not say *explicitly* that it was a judgment, but it should not surprise us when we look at Egypt's idolatry.¹³ Yet, when judgment is necessary, God also provides a way of salvation.¹⁴ Later we often see that famines are judgments over people's collective sins, e.g. in Judges and Ruth.¹⁵ This was no coincidence. Only the people that went to Egypt benefited from Joseph's provisions and faced no starvation. All others perished, because they didn't know or believe there was food in Egypt. Either they thought they could manage without Joseph, or that they wouldn't be hit that hard. They are like all others today, who think they can be saved without Jesus.

⁶ Compare Gen. 5:32 with 7:11

⁷ Gen. 18:17

⁸ Is. 48:9

⁹ Gen. 18:20,21,32

¹⁰ Gen. 21:9 & 16:4 respectively

¹¹ Gen. 33

¹² E.g. 2 Kings 8:20-22

¹³ See my article 'Power-encounters as Missionary Method' (1) of April 2009

¹⁴ Ps. 105:16-22

¹⁵ Compare Judg. 21:25 and Ruth 1:1 and see how the latter is caused by the former

