

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

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CHAPTER SIX

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND MISSIONS (Continued)

WE HAVE SPENT a great deal of time with the missionary message of the Old Testament. If the message is missionary, then it is not necessary for us to get other evidence to prove that the Old Testament also has a missionary purpose. Yet we can plainly show that, too, from the words of the Old Testament itself.

Look at the opening chapters of Genesis. Man sinned, and immediately GOD made known what was to be the channel of His redemption. But as we read the story in chapter 3 we realize that this is not to be the redemption of just a single man or group of men. GOD's plan embraces the whole of humanity. He purposed to provide a salvation sufficient for all mankind.

Again, in chapter 4 we have the account of the first murder. But with it we have the foundation for that very sense of missionary responsibility that Paul expresses so forcefully in Romans 1:14. GOD questioned Cain about his brother. Cain burst out rather petulantly, "**Am I my brother's keeper?**" And many a modern follower of Cain has tried to shrug off responsibility in the same way. But GOD still thrusts aside that flimsy excuse. He still wants to hear from us the acknowledgment, "**I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise; so as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel**" - I am ready to tell everyone the good news of GOD's redemption.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis have to do with the whole of mankind. It is not until chapter 12 that the scope is more limited. Then we have GOD choosing one man, Abram, and his descendants to stand in a special relationship to Himself. The Hebrew people are to be the channel of His revelation and of the salvation that He is going to bring to the world.

But even in choosing Abram, and in making a special covenant with him, GOD didn't lessen His vital interest in all men. Look at the way He states His promise to this man of faith. Every time He repeats it He mentions that He proposes in this way to bring blessing to the whole world. "**In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 12:3); "**all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him**" (Genesis 18:18); "**in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 22:18). When He renews the promise to Jacob, He says the same thing, "**In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed**" (Genesis 28:14).

In the Book of Exodus we have the beginning of GOD's special dealings with the Hebrew people, as He tries to make them into a nation to fulfill His purposes. We see Him called "**the God of the Hebrews**," as if He were a purely national deity. His great final purpose in choosing them is nearly lost to sight. It is subordinated to the immediate program of welding them into a nation and bringing them into possession of the promised land. When He gave the Law to the people at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments did begin with a reminder that the GOD who was speaking was the same one who had created the universe. But the Law itself and the covenant were given to them as a people distinct from the rest of mankind.

Still, even in the Law we don't entirely lose sight of the final world-wide objective. In Numbers 14:21 GOD says, "**As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.**"

Again in Deuteronomy 10:14-19 He reminds the Israelites, "**Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. . . For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords.**" And lest they should get haughty because of this great privilege He adds, "**Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.**"

Of course when we come to the prophets the consciousness of GOD's missionary purpose becomes very strong. Perhaps no one expresses it more beautifully than Isaiah. In chapter 49:6, GOD speaks to His servant the Messiah, and says, "**It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.**"

And in another Messianic passage, chapter 52:13-15, GOD says: "**Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.**"

Does the Old Testament show a missionary purpose? Who can doubt it? Even in the choosing of the Hebrew people that missionary purpose stood out. As one writer has put it, "***The choice of one race among many was not an anti-missionary act on GOD's part, selecting one and letting others go by; it was rather among the most missionary of His acts, choosing one and filling it with a sense of His will and deep understanding of His nature so that it might teach all mankind that nature and that will. GOD's elections are always for the channeling of blessings. The favored group that forgets this will soon lose the favor.***"

MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

Our third question is an interesting one, and one that deserves more careful study and attention than we are going to be able to give it. Does the Old Testament reveal any missionary activity? Was there any attempt to bring the blessings of the Old Testament revelation to others? Did

those who received the revelation comprehend its scope? Did they realize that it was for all men? Were the descendants of Abram conscious of their God-given task?

It is very evident that a majority of the people didn't have any such consciousness. In the minds of many doubtless the idea of the extension of the message was identified with the idea of the expansion of political Israel. The benefits to be had through a knowledge of the true GOD were for those who became Jews.

This is not a strange idea. In fact it is all too readily understood in the world today. A common accusation against the missionaries of CHRIST in many lands is that they are tied up with their governments. They are held to be spies or advance agents of American or British imperialism, either politically or economically.

But if the Old Testament has a clear missionary message and purpose, there must have been some appreciation of the call to a more unselfish ministry. In some cases we know that this was true. Whatever other lessons we may get from the Book of Jonah, for example, we know that it is a definitely missionary book. The prophet's message was not a pleasant message. He was a very unwilling, and later a disgruntled missionary. Yet a missionary he was, and that in the distant Assyrian city of Nineveh.

Still, such examples of missionary activity are comparatively rare in the Old Testament. Such men as Daniel did make GOD known in other lands; but little is said about any large-scale attempt to win others to His worship.

In spite of this lack of information about missionary activity in the Old Testament, we know that some was carried on before the time of CHRIST. CHRIST himself speaks of the strenuous efforts of the Pharisees "**to make one proselyte**" (Matthew 23:15). Also there were numerous proselytes, or converts to the Jewish faith, who came to the feasts at Jerusalem, as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). So there was some recognition of missionary responsibility, even though it was very little in comparison with the later Christian missionary enterprise.

For it is in Christianity that missions reaches its peak.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
