

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS – THEIR ORIGIN IN GOD’S NATURE

GOLDEN TEXT

“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations”. (Genesis 17:4)

USEFUL PRACTICE

The love of God is the true motivation for the believer to carry out missionary work.

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8

Genesis 12

1- The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

2 - “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 - I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Genesis 17

1- When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

2 - Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,

4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.

5 No longer will you be called Abram[b]; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

LESSON OBJECTIVES

I) To explain the missionary nature of God;

II) To emphasize the love of God as a fundamental principle of Redemption;

III) To establish the cross-cultural biblical view of mission.

INTRODUCTION

The word “cross-cultural” brings the idea of a missionary who crosses the barriers of a people's culture, or civilization, to present the love of God. This implies interaction with all ethnic groups on earth, with different aspects of people's lives. In this week's lesson, we will see that, through it, God chose a family to reach all the families of the earth. This process took place through Abraham, his family, the nation of Israel, the person of Jesus and, finally, the Church. Thus, we will focus on the missionary nature of God, as well as on the character of his love as the basis for all the missionary practice of Christians.

I- THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF GOD

1- The missionary nature of God in his call of Abram (Gen 12:1-3). The expression “Leave your country” reveals an order and a call from God for Abram to go to a place that, at first, he did not know (Heb. 11:8). A promise came along with that order: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). This promise concerns a spiritual blessing to the world through Abraham's seed. In this sense, the apostle Paul writes that this blessing refers to the Gospel revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, the legitimate descendant of Abraham (Gal. 3:8, 16). Thus, from one family, God provided salvation for the whole world (Gal. 3:16; 4:4). Therefore, we can say that the origin of Cross-cultural Missions is intrinsically related to the missionary nature of God.

2- Mission as God’s activity in the world. To understand mission as God's activity in the world, we need to go back to the special revelation that God himself made in his Word. Chapter 17 of Genesis shows us the sovereign and exalted God who relates to a limited human being (Gen. 17:1). He is so careful about his promise that he changed Abram's name to Abraham in order to reaffirm his covenant, which would transcend the geographical fulfillment of the promise (Gen. 12:1 cf. 17:5, 8). Here, Mission as God's activity in the world is clear. He himself, and no one else, is the central character of missionary activities. God acts in the world by his grace to reconcile it to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Therefore, our greatest missionary model is God himself.

3- Our missionary model. The basic missionary model that we have for the Church today is not based on illustrious figures from the history of the Church, nor on contemporary projects of people with notable accomplishments. Certainly, the models of today and those of the past deserve our attention in order to broaden our missionary vision, especially in the application of cross-cultural missions. However, our main model of missions is revealed in God himself, whose missionary nature is demonstrated to us in the Old Testament (Gen. 3-9; Isa. 55:4).

II – LOVE OF GOD: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

1- The love of God. The Bible shows that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). In the Old Testament, we see his love in his dealings with all men (Deut. 33:3). We also see this love in God's choosing of Israel (Deut. 7:7; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 1:2) and in his relationship with that people in a process of covenant renewal in which his mercy and kindness are revealed (Deut. 7:9; Isa. 54:5-10). In the New Testament, this love of God for all creatures is affirmed and expanded (John 3:16). The Most High is revealed as loving,

because He Himself is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and the former, in turn, is His very essence. Therefore, love is the basis for the entire plan of redemption revealed in the Word of God.

2- Redemption in the Old Testament. Redemption means releasing the slave from his bondage based on paying a price for a redeemer. This is the basic concept for the biblical view of salvation. In the Old Testament, redemption is associated with Israel's family, social, and national life as follows:

- a) Ransom for the release of a slave (Lev. 25:48-55);
- b) Recovery of a field (Lev. 25:23-34);
- c) Rescue of a firstborn male (Ex. 13:12-16);
- d) Rescue of someone who would be condemned to death (Ex. 21:28-36).

In addition, the Bible also shows God acting *redemptively* on behalf of man:

- a) When Jacob invokes: “the Angel who has delivered me from all harm” (Gen. 48:15, 6);
- b) When God declares his intention to free Israel from the bondage of Egypt, saying, “I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm” (Ex. 6:6).

3- Redemption in the New Testament. In the New Testament, redemption is strictly a divine activity that is accomplished through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). In this case, the sinner's remission is secured on the basis of the ransom price paid to God the Father by Jesus Christ in his death on the cross (Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18,19) whose redemptive work is declared in the New Testament (Heb. 9:25-28). However, the experience of redemption will only be complete and consummated at the second coming of Christ, on the occasion of the believer's final glorification (Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14). Therefore, the sinner's redemption plan is the glorious announcement of missionary work that is founded on the love of God.

III – BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL CHARACTER OF MISSION

1- A Missionary God. The Old Testament reveals a missionary God. In the book of Genesis, God deals not only with a specific nation, but with all mankind:

- a) The Fall of man (Gen. 3:15);

b) The Flood (Gen. 6:13);

c) The election of a people to bless all the others, after the Tower of Babel (Gen. 12:3). In these texts, both man's failure and God's judgment and promise are characterized. Thus, the missionary God established a strategy to bless all peoples through Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you [...] and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3).

2- The choosing of Israel and its mission. Through Abraham and his faith, God chose Israel to be a special people throughout history; that he might share in a special way in his plan to redeem all mankind. By establishing a vertical and correct relationship with God, Israel would be an example for other nations. The Almighty's desire was for Israel to distinguish itself from other peoples as his precious jewel. He wanted Israel's holiness, as a living example of his power and grace, to attract the other nations. However, Israel failed that purpose. The promise established in Genesis 17:8 was invalidated by the nation's apostasy and unfaithfulness (Isa. 24:5; Jer. 31:32). Therefore, Israel was taken into exile in Assyria (2 Kings 17), while Judah was later taken into captivity in Babylon (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36).

3- The choosing of the Church. The Lord God has always desired that the Gentiles be brought to the light. Salvation through Christ is the divine fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham to bless all peoples on earth. Although Israel failed its cross-cultural ministry, God transferred that missionary ministry to the children of the New Testament – the Church of God. This Church inherited a divine duty, being called to participate with God in the evangelization of the world. Therefore, we were called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-14).

CONCLUSION

We have seen the missionary nature of God from the very beginning of the Bible. Starting from one family, God planned salvation for all mankind. This reveals that God's redemptive plan is based on his high and glorious love for the whole world (John 3:16). It is this love that encourages the Church of Christ to take missionary work seriously until the Lord Jesus returns. God has not given up on sinners. Therefore, He counts on us, because He wants "all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4).