



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Missiology

### Lesson 1 – God’s Eternal Universal Plan of Salvation, Old and New Testaments

Christian missionaries can proclaim the Gospel of Christ without studying methods and cultures and without using loud speakers and microphones or other modern means of communication. But there is one thing that Christian missionaries must have to do their work: they must have the Scriptures – either in written form or embedded in their memories. For the Scriptures not only give us the content of what we must proclaim, but also provide the basis and reason for mission work.

From the Scriptures we learn, first of all, that there is only one plan of salvation for all people. This plan of salvation goes back all the way to eternity in God’s mind. During His discussion of the coming judgment at the end of the world, Jesus told His disciples that on the last day **“the King (Jesus) will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’”** (Matthew 25:34). Jesus’ apostle Paul taught the very same thing. He wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: **“He (God) chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world”** (Ephesians 1:4).

God’s plan of salvation was not fully revealed to all from the beginning. Paul refers to God’s plan as a **“mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”** Although it was in part hidden, it was **“the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Ephesians 3:9-11). God **“has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Timothy 1:9-10). **“He (Christ) indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you”** (1 Peter 1:20).

Thus, God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is eternal. There has never been a different plan of salvation other than the one devised by God in eternity. In the last few centuries, various Christian groups have taught a different idea called *dispensationalism*. This teaching claims that there are several different dispensations (that is, systems of order), and that each dispensation has its own plan of salvation. In the “Old Testament dispensation”, for example, they claim that God gave His law so that people could be saved by their obedience to the law. They say that we are now under a different dispensation in which salvation is attained by faith in Christ. Dispensationalism denies that God’s plan of salvation in Christ is eternal.

There are many other reasons for denouncing dispensationalism as a false teaching, but the most important reason is the fact that it denies the clear teaching of Scripture that God has had only one plan of salvation from eternity: salvation through faith in Christ. The Scripture references given above clearly teach this truth.

God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is also universal. It is intended for all people of all ages. There were at least two moments in history when all living humans were told about God's universal plan. The first was in the Garden of Eden, shortly after Adam and Eve fell into sin. God Himself announced the plan of salvation to all mankind (Adam and Eve were the only living human beings) in these words directed at Satan, the deceiver: **"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"** (Genesis 3:15). God's plan of salvation involved a future contest between the Woman's Seed and Satan. In this contest the Woman's Seed would be the winner, even though it would involve a real struggle. He would have His heel bruised by Satan, while Satan would have his head bruised. "Bruised" is no doubt too weak a term; Satan would have His head crushed. He would be utterly defeated. Hebrews 2:14 gives us the full explanation: **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself** (the Woman's Seed, Jesus Christ) **likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."** Jesus was most definitely the Woman's Seed, a true human born of a human mother (Mary), and the One who overcame the devil by suffering and dying in our place on the cross.

The second moment when all living human beings were told of God's plan of salvation came after the great flood when Noah and his three sons and their four wives stepped out of the ark. Surely the promise given to Adam and Eve had been passed down to them through the previous generations, and they were all aware of what God had said. At this time Noah made a distinction between his three sons, declaring specifically: **"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem"** (Genesis 9:26). This shows us that God's plan of salvation would be carried out through the offspring of Shem, rather than that of Ham or Japheth.

Nevertheless, God's promise to Abraham, of the line of Shem, stated that the blessings of the coming Woman's Seed would benefit all mankind. God said to Abram (his name at that time): **"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3). This same promise was repeated in similar words to Abraham's son Isaac and to Isaac's son Jacob. Moses, the spokesman the Holy Spirit used to write the words of Genesis, also tells us that God's promise of the Woman's Seed was the means by which Abraham would be saved, for he wrote: **"And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6). The way of salvation for Abraham and all others (Jew and non-Jew alike) is by faith in God's promise of the Woman's Seed. This is the only way sinners can be counted as righteous in the sight of God.

It was God's plan to choose one particular nation, the children of Israel (Jacob), to receive and to pass on God's promise of a Savior. God put this nation in the land of Palestine, right at

the junction of three continents, so that from Israel other nations and people would also learn of the coming Savior. When the Israelites were about to enter Palestine, Moses told the people that God's blessings would be poured down on them, with this purpose: **"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD"** (Deuteronomy 28:9-10).

When Israel was obedient to God, this purpose was fulfilled. For example, in the days of King David and the early days of King Solomon, the blessings of God were poured out on the people to such a degree that the kingdom of David and Solomon became one of the most powerful nations on earth. Therefore, Solomon included non-Jews in his dedication of the Temple. They, too, could pray to the God of Israel, and he asked God to hear their prayers: **"Moreover concerning a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm) when he comes and prays toward this temple, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel"** (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Among the non-Jews who most likely came to faith in the God of Israel in the Old Testament we can list Jethro (Moses' father-in-law), Rahab of Canaan, Ruth of Moab, the Queen of Sheba, Naaman of Syria, the Ninevites, and the sailors traveling with the prophet Jonah. There may have been many others whose names were not recorded in the pages of the Bible but are known to God.

The fact that God's plan of salvation was intended for all people is repeated many times in the New Testament. Jesus told Nicodemus: **"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). The apostle Paul compared the universal effect of Adam's action and the universal effect of Jesus's: **"As through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life"** (Romans 5:18). In other words, what Jesus accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection obtained justification (the forgiveness of sins) for all mankind, as many as were condemned by Adam's sin. The Bible clearly teaches that God's desires to save all, that Christ's life and death and resurrection is for all. It teaches universal redemption, universal justification, and the universal love of God for all peoples and nations without exception. Therefore, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"** (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Notice how many times the word **"all"** is repeated in these words of Paul to his assistant Timothy: **"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. This is good and acceptable in the**

**sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all** (1 Timothy 2:1-6). This is the testimony of the apostle John also, who wrote: **“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2).

There is one grievous sin in particular that has interfered with God’s eternal and universal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. That is the sin of racism. By racism we mean the notion that some individuals or races are superior to other individuals or races. Racism causes some to be unwilling to share the Gospel of Christ with those they consider to be inferior. There are many differences between individuals and between races, but we are all the same with respect to two things: 1. We are all sinners who have disobeyed God and deserve eternal punishment. 2. God wants to save us all, Jesus died to save us all, and the Holy Spirit wants us all to hear the Gospel of Christ and be saved by faith in Jesus. There is no human being of any race that God does not want to be eternally with Him in bliss. Since this is true of God, it should also be true of all who are God’s children by faith in Christ. We should want every person to be saved.

The history of the world and of the church shows that at times the sin of racism has been prevalent among men and has hindered the mission of the Christian Church. God’s special blessings to the Jews led many of them to look down on all non-Jews. The prophet Jonah, for example, did not want to preach God’s Word to the people of Nineveh because he was afraid that they would repent and thus avoid God’s judgment. Jonah would have preferred their destruction to their salvation. But God corrected his thinking. In the New Testament the work of the apostle Paul was obstructed by the Jews who did not want to share their Messiah with non-Jews.

There have been many other instances of racism since then. In the United States of America, for example, there were times (and still are) when white people despise black people and black people despise white people. And yet the same God has sent His Son to save them all, and those who believe in Christ are one Church, in spite of differences in appearance, culture, language, and background. We should look at every individual we meet as someone for whom Jesus died.

Jesus’ instructions to us are very clear; He says: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”** (Matthew 28:19). He says: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15). The apostle Peter was slow to bring the Gospel to Gentiles. The Lord gave him a special vision to direct him to a Gentile home, where he then testified: **“God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean”** (Acts 10:28). **“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. ... He is Lord of all”** (Acts 10:34-36).

There is no basis for racism in God's creation. Paul told the Athenians: **"He (God) gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth"** (Acts 17:25-26). He **"now commands all men everywhere to repent"** (Acts 17:30). Paul wrote to the Romans: **"Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also"** (Romans 3:29). He wrote to the Galatians: **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Galatians 3:28). And to the Colossians: **"There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all"** (Colossians 3:11).

We can all look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be no racism. We will look, **"and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"** (Revelation 7:9-10).

### Questions

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1. Why do we call God's plan of salvation an eternal plan?
2. Why do we call God's plan of salvation a universal plan?
3. What role did the Israelites play in God's plan of salvation?
4. In what way was the location of Palestine important for the Gospel of Christ?
5. Name some Gentiles who became believers in God through contact with Israel.
6. What verses prove the universality of Christ's redemption?
7. What is the sin of racism?
8. Is racism prevalent in your area of work? If so, give examples.
9. Use Scripture to show that racism is contrary to the will of God.
10. Why is it important to remember that there is only one Savior for the world?