

# Major Bible Themes

BY

**LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER**

**1871-1952**

In the Public Domain

---

For newer revised edition by Lewis Sperry Chafer and John Walvoord  
please see *Major Bible Themes Revised Edition* (Copyright 1974)  
ISBN: 0-310-22390-3

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE CHURCH: HER MISSION

Strictly speaking, the Church has no mission; for God has never commissioned her as a corporate body to undertake any task whatsoever. It is true that by means of the Church, God is now making known His wisdom, and will yet make known His grace to the angelic hosts (Eph. 3:10; 2:7); but this calls for no effort or sacrifice on her part. All divine commissions are to the individual believer; and this is reasonable, since Christian service is the exercise of a personal gift in the power of the indwelling Spirit. It is noticeable that no service program for the church succeeds until it becomes a service program for the individual.

Another error to be avoided in connection with this subject is the supposition that the divine purpose in this age is the conversion of the world. It is true that the world will be converted and there is yet to be a kingdom of righteousness in the earth; but, according to the Bible, that day of a transformed earth, so far from being the result of Christian service, is said to follow rather than precede the return of Christ, and is said to be made possible only by His personal presence and immediate power. It is after the smiting of the Stone -- a symbol of the return of Christ -- that the God of Heaven sets up an everlasting kingdom in the earth (Dan. 2:44, 45). It is after the Lord

returns and sits on the throne of His glory that He directs the sheep on His right hand to enter the earthly kingdom prepared for them (Matt. 25:31-34). In like manner, it is after He is seen descending from Heaven that Christ reigns a thousand years on the earth (Rev. 18:11 to 20:9. Note, also, Acts 15:13-19; 1 Cor. 15:20-25).

## **I. THE PRESENT DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE WORLD**

When anticipating the peculiar features of this age (Matt. 13:1-50), the Lord made mention of three major characteristics: (1) Israel's place in the world should be as a treasure hid in the field (Matt. 13:44); (2) evil should continue to the end of the age (Matt. 13:4, 25, 33, 48); and (3) the children of the kingdom who are likened to wheat, to a pearl of great cost, and to good fish, shall be gathered out (Matt. 13:30, 45, 46, 48). Of these three characteristics of the age, it is disclosed that the last, or the gathering out of the children of the kingdom, constitutes the supreme purpose of God in this age. In accordance with this, it is stated in Romans 11:25, that Israel's present blindness is only "until" the completion of the Church (note Eph. 1:22, 23). Likewise, the "mystery of iniquity," or evil in the present age, is declared to continue, though restrained, until the Restrainer -- the Spirit of God -- is taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:7), and, as the Spirit will depart only when He has completed the calling out of the Church, the immediate purpose of God is not the correction of the evil in the world, but the out-calling of all who will believe. Israel's covenants will yet be fulfilled (Rom. 11:27), and evil will be banished from the earth (Rev. 21:1); but the present purpose of God, for which all else most evidently awaits, is the completion of the Church.

In Acts 15:13-19 we read the substance of James' address at the conclusion of the first council of the Church in Jerusalem. The occasion of this council was to determine this same question as to the present purpose of God. The early church was largely composed of Jews, and these were confused with regard to their own national position in the light of the fact that the new Gospel was flowing out to Gentiles. James states that, according to Peter's experience in the house of Cornelius the Gentile, God is first visiting Gentiles (a like visitation of the Jews is assumed) to take out of them a people for His name. "After this," James continues, the Lord will return and then will fulfill all His purposes for Israel and the Gentiles.

The practical bearing of all this upon the subject of this study is that, in the present age, never is the individual believer (much less the Church) appointed of God to a world-improvement program; but the believer is called to be a witness in all the world to Christ and His saving grace, and through this ministry of Gospel preaching the Spirit of God will accomplish the supreme divine purpose in the age.

## **II. THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH**

Christ prophesied that He would build His Church (Matt. 16:18), and the Apostle Paul likens the Church to a structure of living stones which "groweth" and is "being builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21, 22, R.V.). Likewise, the believer's ministry of soul-winning and edification of the body of Christ continues, not for ever, but "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The "stature of the fulness of Christ" does not refer to the development of Christ-like men; but rather to the development of the body

of Christ to its completion (note Eph. 1:22, 23). The same aspect of truth is restated in Ephesians 4:16, where the members of the body, like living cells in the human body, are represented as being unceasingly active in soul-winning, and are thereby making "increase of the body."

### III. the believer's ministry

Christ gave a prediction that the seed sowing which is to characterize the present age would result in but a fourth portion becoming "wheat" (Matt. 13:1-23). Nevertheless, though the preaching of the Gospel is a savor of death unto death as well as of life unto life (2 Cor. 2:16), the child of God is commissioned to be instant in season and out of season in his efforts to win the lost. He is appointed to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), knowing that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). It is also stated in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

This ministry rests upon every believer alike and may be exercised in three different ways:

1. The Gospel may be presented to the unsaved through sacrificial gifts. Evidently there are many earnest believers who would rejoice to win a soul for Christ who have not awakened to the effectiveness of giving their substance to this end. The messenger cannot go except he be sent, but the one who sends him is a partner in the service and has taken stock which will pay eternal dividends.

2. Again, the Gospel may be presented to the unsaved in answer to prayer. He who has said, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14) will certainly thrust laborers into the harvest in answer to prayer. It is easily proven that there is no more fruitful ministry possible to the child of God than prayer; yet how very few seem to realize that souls are saved through that service.

3. So, also, the Gospel may be presented to the unsaved by word of mouth. Since all are commissioned to this task, there are certain imperative conditions to be observed: (1) The messenger must be willing to be placed where the Spirit wills. (2) The messenger should be instructed as to the precise truths which constitute the Gospel of grace which he is appointed to declare. And (3) the messenger must be Spirit-filled, else he will lack that impelling passion for the lost which alone prompts one to fearless and tireless soul-winning service. "After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," Christ said, "ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). Apart from this filling there will be no disposition to witness. But, being filled, there is no staying the outflow of divine compassion (Acts 4:20).

## QUESTIONS

1. a. What has God commissioned the Church to do?

b. Who alone is responsible for all true service and why?

2. What is the present divine purpose?
3. Show from the prophecies that Christ must return before a kingdom of righteousness will be set up in the earth.
4. Name three characteristics of this age as stated in Matthew, Chapter 13.
5. Of these three which is proven to be the present purpose of God in the world?
6. What order of events is given in Acts 15:13-19?
7. By what agency and service will the Church be gathered by the Spirit of God?
8. Do the terms and figures used as to the development of the Church imply that this development will go on without end?
9. Define the responsibility of those who are called to preach.
10. a. Are all believers called to this ministry?
  - b. What results are they to anticipate?
11. Indicate as to how the Gospel may be preached through sacrificial giving.
12. Indicate as to how the Gospel may be preached through prayer.
13. Name three essentials of fitting for the one who would preach the gospel by word of mouth.
14. Are all Christians called alike to the three-fold service of giving, praying, and preaching?