

Major Bible Themes

52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*
written by Lewis Sperry Chafer and revised by John f. Walvoord

The Church: Her Membership

- Introduction
 - The word “church” is a translation of the Greek ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia) which means “called out ones.”
 - ✦ In early Greece the cities were often ruled by pure democracy in which every citizen would gather together to act upon matters of mutual interest.
 - ✦ Since they would be “called out” of their ordinary occupations to an assembly where they could vote, the word ἐκκλησία came to mean a gathering or assembly – the result of being called out.
 - ✦ Because of this meaning, ἐκκλησία is found in the LXX to refer to a gathering or assembly of people.
 - ✦ The word ἐκκλησία is sometimes used in the N.T. to refer to local churches (Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1).
 - ✦ However, when ἐκκλησία is used in the N.T. to refer to the body of Christ, it is a technical term referring to those who are called out of the world and joined together in union with Christ (Eph 1:22).
 - In the New Testament the Church is revealed to be the central purpose of God in the present dispensation.
 - In the previous dispensation the people of Israel – an earthly nation, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, made up of believers and unbelievers – were God’s stewards on the earth.
 - In contrast, the Church is made up of a body of believers from Pentecost to the Rapture – Jews and Gentiles, on earth and in heaven – joined together in a living union with Christ by the baptism of the Spirit.
 - In the unfolding of revelation concerning God’s eternal plan, God chose not to reveal the Church in the Old Testament.
 - During the First Advent of Christ, He remained quiet concerning any details of the Church until the Upper Room discourse (John 13:31-17:26) – a private meeting with His disciples on the night before He would be crucified.

- The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God
 - The Bible recognizes three major divisions of humanity.
 - ✦ The Jews, or the children of Israel, are that nation which sprang from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and are, according to divine purpose & promise, the chosen earthly people of God.
 - In the out-working of God's plan, Israel has been chosen and scattered, but will one day be gathered and blessed.
 - The Jews have been preserved by God and will again be God's stewards on earth after the Rapture of the Church.
 - The eternal promises of God to Israel – national entity (Jer 31:35-36), land (Gen 13:14-15), throne (2 Sam 7:13), king (Jer 33:20-21), and kingdom (2 Sam 7:16) – cannot be altered.
 - ✦ The Gentiles are the vast unnumbered company, excluding the Israelites, who have lived on the earth from Adam until now.
 - Apart from a certain few instances, God did not extend immediate promises to Gentiles from Adam to Christ.
 - Old Testament prophecies predict great earthly blessings for Gentiles in the yet future millennial kingdom.
 - In the present age, any Gentile who believes in Christ is just as much a part of the body of Christ as the Jew who believes in Christ – there is no distinction (Rom 3:22; 10:12-13).
 - ✦ The Church of God refers to the whole company of the redeemed who have been saved in the present dispensation (from Pentecost to the Rapture), not to the membership of organized churches.
 - The members of the Church are distinct because...
 - ✦ all individuals in that company are born again and enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5) and are destined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).
 - ✦ all individuals in that company are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) unlike the believers in any previous dispensation.
 - ✦ they are no longer in Adam partaking of the ruin of the old creation (2 Cor 5:17), but are in Christ partaking in the new creation of all that Christ is (Col 2:10).
 - ✦ in the sight of God their nationality is changed, for they have come upon new ground where there is no Jew or Gentile, but Christ is all, and in all (Col 3:11).
 - ✦ they are now citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20) and all their promises, their possessions, and their position are heavenly (Eph 1:3) making them distinct from all other people on earth.
- The Church – A New Organism
 - While future blessing for the Gentiles in the kingdom was a topic of Old Testament prophecy, the unique organism of the Church was kept secret (Rom 16:25-26).
 - The mystery of the Church, an entirely new entity in God's plan made up of Jew and Gentile alike being reconciled in one body (Eph 2:14-16), was hidden in God for ages (Eph 3:9).
 - The completion of the Church ending in the glorious Rapture event was also a mystery (1 Cor 15:51-52).
 - Israel is not cast away (Rom 11:1-2), but is under a hardening of the heart until Christ restores them (Rom 11:25-27).

- Church Membership
 - Everyone who is born again in the present dispensation is a member of the Church.
 - ✦ Not everyone who attends a local church is born again.
 - ✦ Not everyone who is born again attends a local church.
 - ✦ It is, however, God's plan for all who believe to be part of a fellowship of believers assembling together (Heb 10:25).
 - Members of the Church are seen...
 - ✦ on the earth as a pilgrim band of witnesses who are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20) and not of this world (John 17:16).
 - ✦ in heaven as the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:7), partakers of the glory of Christ who will co-reign with Him in the kingdom.
- Questions
 - How does the purpose of God for the Church contrast with the purposes of God for individuals and nations in the Old Testament?
 - What is the original meaning of the Greek word for church (ἐκκλησία)?
 - How is this word used in the LXX translation of the Old Testament?
 - What are the two meanings of the word "church" in the New Testament?
 - Explain why Christ had to come at the First Advent prior to the Church.
 - How does the baptism of the Spirit relate to the Church?
 - Name and define the three major divisions of humanity.
 - What are some of the eternal promises God has given to Israel?

- What promises has God given the Gentiles?

- In what sense is the Church a distinct company of people?

- On what common ground has God placed Jew and Gentile in the present dispensation?

- What has happened to Israel's covenant promises in the present dispensation?

- How does Rom 11:25 characterize the people of Israel today?

- What will happen to Israel after the Rapture of the Church?

- How does the salvation of an individual relate to being a member of a local church?

- Is it possible to be saved and not be a member of the Church?

- What is the role of the Church on earth in the present dispensation?

- What is the destiny of the Church after the present dispensation?