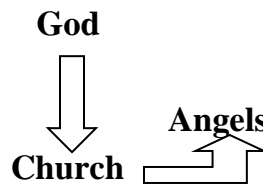


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B0601 – January 8, 2006 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 35 – The Church: Her Purpose And Commission

In the present dispensation of grace, which began at Pentecost and will end at the pre-trib Rapture, God is now making known His manifold wisdom to the angelic realm through the Church.

Ephesians 3:10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.



The “rulers and authorities” are the angels. Ellicot said, “the evil angels would more naturally recognize His power, but the good ones His wisdom.” The good angels have always tried to figure out God’s plan (1 Pt 1:12). The peace that God established between believing Jews and Gentiles who were once completely hostile to one another is a remarkable example to the angels of God’s wisdom and power. With God even the most hostile situation can be remedied. With God all things are possible. God;s planning of the church before the foundation of the world but keeping it hidden until Pentecost heightens our expectancy of all that God has yet to reveal to us about Himself.

Though the church is a “called out Jews and Gentiles united in one body” there is also diversity in the church. Unity and diversity are part and parcel of the Triunity of God and they are part and parcel of the church as well (Eph 4:1-6). Individual believers are given spiritual gifts to enhance the unity of the organism (Eph 4:7-16) and God has a unique plan for each believer’s life. But God’s plan for each individual dovetails into His greater plan for the church universal. The tapestry God is weaving between our individual lives

and the lives of all other church saints is a demonstration of wisdom that is beyond all that we can ask or even think (Eph 3:20). The church is therefore a mighty teaching tool of God for the angels.

I. THE PRESENT DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE WORLD

The present purpose of God is not the regeneration of the world but the regeneration of individuals “called out of” the world to form the body of Christ, which is the church.

Titus 3:5-6 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

While the present purpose of God is not the regeneration of the world but of individuals called out of it, the future purpose of God is the regeneration of the world. This future purpose will be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ when He sits on His glorious throne.

Matthew 19:28 "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

At this time the world will be restored to its original glory as in the Garden of Eden (Ezek 36) but the times of the Gentile kingdoms must run its course before God accomplishes this. Daniel prophesied of five kingdoms, four Gentile and one Jewish:

1. Babylon (Gentile)
2. Medo-Persian (Gentile)
3. Greek (Gentile)
4. Roman (Gentile)
5. God's (Jewish)

TIMES OF THE GENTILES



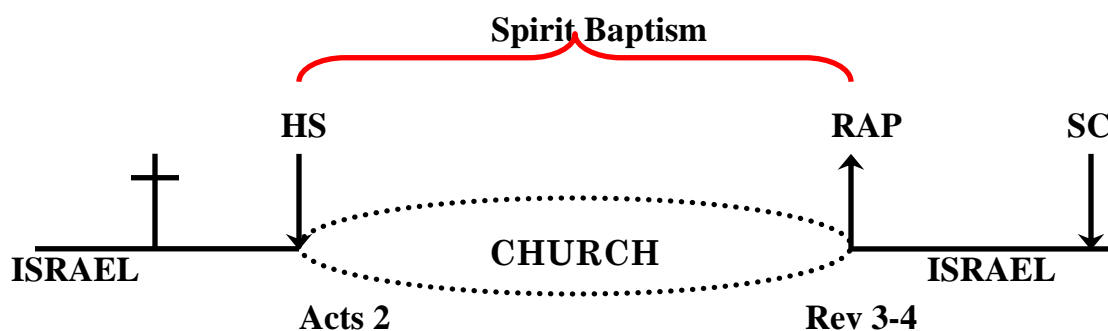
Daniel 2:44 "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

The kingdom that God sets up will crush all the Gentile kingdoms and will endure forever.

It is very important to distinguish between God's present purpose with the church and God's future purpose with His kingdom. We should never think that it is our purpose to build God's kingdom on earth (Amillennialism) or that we will Christianize the world and hand the kingdom over to Christ at its completion (Postmillennialism). For the kingdom to be set up on earth requires God's personal *presence* and *power*. The Church age will end in apostasy after she has been raptured and taken to heaven. This will all take place before the Tribulation begins. However, this should not cause us to give up witnessing but rather to press on with pure lives to witness. After the Tribulation we are seen in heaven descending with Christ as His spotless bride to wage war against the earth dwellers. Only after His Second Coming does Christ separate the sheep from the goats and direct the sheep to enter His earthly kingdom which will last 1,000 years.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH AGE

A. The Church Began With the Baptizing Work of the Spirit (Acts 2)



1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

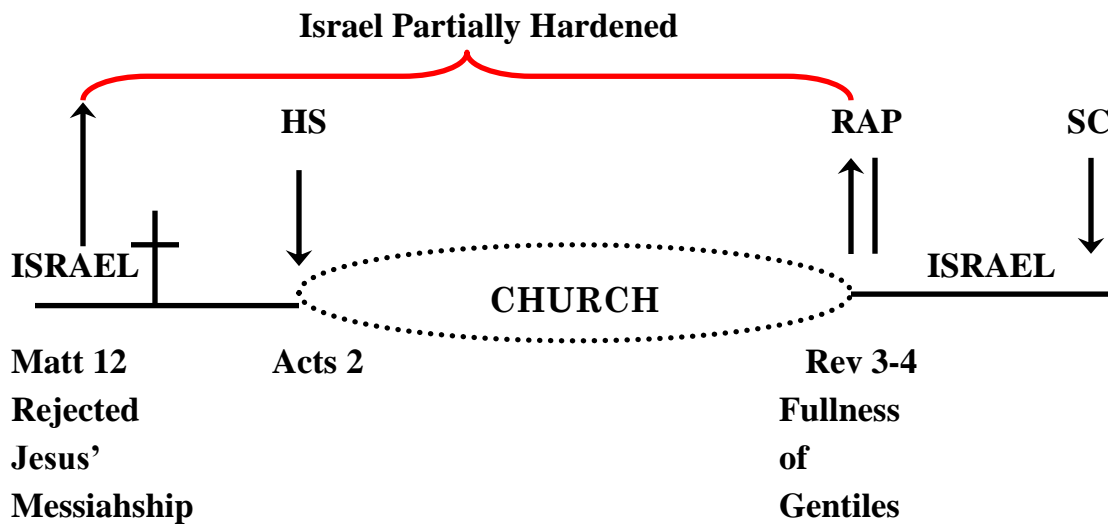
Baptism of the Spirit is required for a person to enter the body of Christ which is the Church. All who genuinely believe are instantly baptized by the Spirit and placed into

Christ's body. This ministry began on Pentecost (Acts 2) and will continue until the pre-trib Rapture.

B. The Church is Marked By A Partial Hardening of Israel Until the Fullness of Gentiles Has Come In (Acts 2-Rev 3)

Romans 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

The hardening is only partial and not total. Jews can still believe in Jesus and become a part of the church (Jewish remnant; Gal 6:16; Rom 11:2, 5). But the nation of Israel as a whole has been partially hardened until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. This hardening began when the nation rejected Jesus as the Messiah in Matt 12. The fullness of the Gentiles refers to the completion of the Church which occurs at the pre-trib Rapture. This leaves time for God to turn again to His program with Israel remove the partial hardening which will result in Jews being justified by faith. All who survive till the end will "be saved" (Rom 11:26) (Lopez).



During the Tribulation great numbers of Israel will believe in Jesus as Messiah. All who survive till the end of the Tribulation will have already been justified by faith and they will be saved by the Messiah who will then fulfill their covenants and set up His everlasting kingdom (Rom 11:26). James saw this delay in God's program with Israel and announced it to the first Jerusalem Council in Acts 15

Acts 15:13-19 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴ "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. ¹⁵ "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, ¹⁷ SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' ¹⁸ SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. ¹⁹ "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

James saw that this period of history would be predominantly focused on the Gentiles and that Israel's covenants had not been permanently abolished (God is faithful) but only temporarily set aside, quoting several OT passages.

Jeremiah 12:15 "And it will come about that after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them; and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land.

C. Believing Jews and Gentiles United in One Body

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The Church is not Jew or Gentile but a new entity that is raceless. As to position all members of the body are equally "in Christ". As to roles the NT specifies distinctions. Thus, just as there is unity and diversity in the Triune God so there is unity and diversity in the body of Christ.

C. During the Church Age There Are 4 Responses to the Word of God

This is not distinct to the church. There have always been four basic responses to the word of God. The parable of the four soils indicates these four responses. The sower sows the word and the four different soils correspond to the people's response to the word.

1. Hear Word, Satan Takes it Away

Mark 4:14-15 "The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

This is the one with no response to the gospel. He hears the word but it is immediately taken away by Satan.

2. Hear Word, Receive With Joy, Fall Away

Mark 4:16-17 "In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

This is the professing believer. He hears the word and thinks it's the greatest thing but never truly believed it. His faith was in vain (1 Cor 15:2).

3. Hear Word, Worries of World Make it Unfruitful

Mark 4:18-19 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

This is the unfruitful believer. He has genuine salvation but the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things take precedence in his life and choke out the word so that it is of no effect. This person will not be fruitful in the Christian life and will not find the center of God's will for his life.

4. Hear Word, Accept It, Bear Fruit

Mark 4:20 "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

This is the fruitful believer. He hears the word and makes it his number one priority day in day out so that he bears fruit for eternity.

D. The Church Complete at the Pre-Trib Rapture

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Resurrection was not a mystery during the OT (cf Dan 12:1-2, 13; Ezek 37; et. al). But the instantaneous transformation of those living was a mystery. Just as the church was a mystery during the OT, so is the truth of instantaneous resurrection of the church. This event will signal the end of God's dealing with the Church on earth and His beginning to work with the nation of Israel once more (that is, the partial hardening of Israel will be lifted).

E. Following the Church is the Apostasy

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

During the Church the world is not getting better or more Christ-like. Evil will continue throughout the entire age. After the rapture the apostasy will take place, which is the absence of any believers on earth. The church may enjoy brief victories through reformation or revival during the church age but the overall trend is toward apostasy.

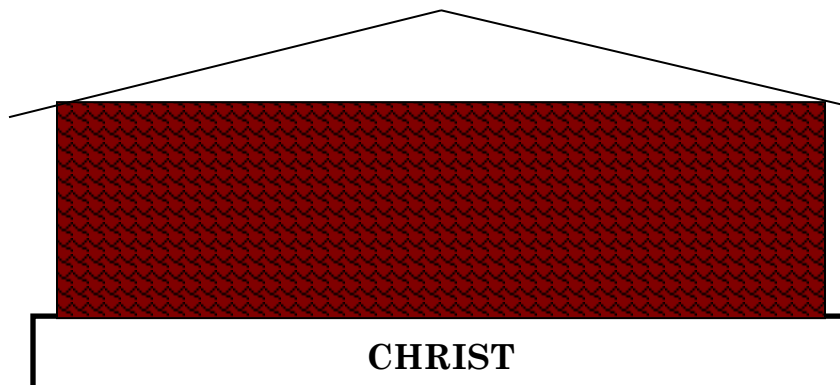
F. Following the Church is the Removal of the Restrainer

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

One of the Holy Spirit's ministries is that of restraining sin in the world. He uses several means to accomplish this; human government, the church, etc...but His ministry of restraining sin will cease when Christ's body, the church is completed. As a result lawlessness will abound and the world will literally experience "hell on earth" during the Tribulation. In the meantime, it is obvious that God's purpose is not to correct the evil world system but to call out of the world system all who will believe in Christ. Once this is completed then God will begin to remove Satan and the usurpers from His world by the Tribulation judgments.

III. THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH

The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ our Lord. No other foundation can be laid except that which is laid by Christ Jesus (1 Cor 3:11). Jesus is the rock upon which He is building His church (Matt 16:18). All who are members of the church are likened to living stones that are being built into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:20-21; 1 Pt 2:5). The foundation was laid by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. The building is being built up stone by stone as individuals believe in Christ. The building will be complete at the pre-trib Rapture.



IV. THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Christ predicted in the four soils the four responses to the word of God. The first is "no response", the second is "professing believer", the third is "unfruitful believer" and the

fourth is “fruitful believer”. The commission of the believer is laid out primarily in two passages. *First*, the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Our responsibility is to be ambassadors for Christ with the message that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them”. God didn’t change but the world has been changed through the death of Christ so that men need only be reconciled to God through faith in Christ who died for our sin and was raised on the third day.

Second, the great commission.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

We are to go and “make disciples of all the nations”. The way we are to make disciples is described in a two-fold way. First, by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. This is water baptism which is a picture of one who has had faith in Jesus. Second, we make disciples by “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”. Teaching the body of truth that the Lord taught His apostles to teach others. Therefore, we are responsible to take the gospel to the world and to make disciples of those who respond by faith.

This ministry and commission rest upon every believer alike and can be carried out by many ways.

1. *Praying For the Salvation of Lost Souls*. Jesus said, “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*” (John 14:14). If we pray for God to send out workers into His harvest He will do it. “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’³⁸ ‘Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest’” (Matt 9:37-38). In effect, Jesus is saying, “if you don’t pray for missionaries then God won’t send them out!” So, the first way we can

fulfill our ministry and commission is by praying for the salvation of lost souls and that God would send workers into His harvest.

2. *Supporting Those Who Preach the Gospel and Make Disciples.* Unless there is someone is sent to preach and make disciples then no one will hear the gospel and be saved and grow in Christ. “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14-15). Therefore, we become partakers of the resulting ministry when we give money to send the preacher.
3. *Preaching the Gospel to the Unsaved.* Since all believers are commissioned to this task there are certain conditions that should be observed: a) the messenger must be instructed in how to present a precise gospel message that is in accordance with grace. Therefore, he must know that the gospel message is the death of Christ for our sins and the resurrection of Christ on the third day. He must also know that the only condition on the human side for salvation is faith in this crucified and resurrected Christ. b) the messenger must be willing to go wherever God wants you to go. c) the messenger must be Spirit-filled. Apart from being Spirit-filled there will be no desire or ability to witness effectively.
4. *Spreading the Gospel and Bible Teaching through Technology.* Such means include newspapers, magazines, journals, books, internet, radio, television, and sacred music. Regardless of the means the truth must be presented in such a way that the Holy Spirit can use it.
5. *Spreading the Gospel through Educational Institutions.* Bible colleges, Seminaries, and other training facilities that equip men to be able to effectively preach the Gospel and teach the truth to large numbers of people. All are not equally effective in preaching and teaching but all bear a part of the responsibility.

Ephesians 4:11-13 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

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