

The Church In God's Purpose

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Introduction

Let us consider the church in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:8-12). The Greek word **ekklesia**, translated "church," identifies those who are "called out" into "an assembly, a congregation, a church." The Greek word translated "purpose" literally signifies "a setting forth," i.e., a public presentation of "that which is planned in advance, plan, purpose, resolve, will."

Some think that they can maintain a relationship with the Lord but have little or no association with the church. However, in God's scheme of redemption, one cannot separate Christ from the church. From a Biblical standpoint, the church plays a fundamental role in God's scheme of redemption.

We are called by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14-15), out of the domain of sin, into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13-14; 1 Thess. 2:10-12). In the NT, "kingdom" and "church" are used synonymously (Matt. 16:13-19). As Christ is King over his kingdom, He is head of the body, which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:22-24; Col. 1:18; 1:24). The church is composed of the saved, and the saved make up the church (Acts 2:38-47).

Before The Foundation of the World

Before the foundation of the world, God chose a realm in which salvation could be found (Eph. 1:3-5; cf. Matt. 25:34; 1 Pet. 1:17-21). Accordingly, the church is a demonstration of His divine wisdom and eternal purpose (Eph. 3:8-11). Far from being an "afterthought" or "substitute measure," the church is central to God's plan of salvation.

In The Garden of Eden

As humanity fell under the curse of sin, God revealed that one day the Tempter would be dealt a crushing defeat: the seed of woman would destroy Satan (Gen. 3:15). This prophecy provides the first glimpse of the coming Savior. Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, was uniquely the seed of woman (Matt. 1:18-25; Gal. 4:4-5; Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7).

Through His resurrection from the dead, Christ destroyed the power of Satan, and broke the terrorizing grip he held over death (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:50-57; 2 Tim. 1:9-10). Accordingly, the Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:7-8).

In The Time of Abraham

God's threefold promise to Abraham provides the framework through which His eternal purpose would be realized: I will give the land of Canaan to your descendants; I will make you a great nation; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:1-7; cf. also 13:14-17; 15:5-7; 15:17-21; 17:1-8; 22:15-18; etc.).

Christ, the seed of Abraham, provides hope for the hopeless (Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3:16). Regardless of background, those who obey the gospel are heirs of this ancient promise (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 3:1-7).

In The Time of Moses

The Mosaic Code prepared the way for the coming Messiah (Rom. 5:20-21; Gal. 3:19-25), and foretold the advent of Jesus Christ (Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:17-26). Judaism was never intended to be permanent, but looked forward to the establishment of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13). The authenticity of the gospel message is based upon fulfilled prophecy originally set forth in the Law of Moses and the Prophets (Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39-47; Acts 26:19-23; 28:22-24).

In The Time of the Prophets

David

David prophetically foreshadowed the betrayal of Christ (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-15; Acts 1:15-26), His crucifixion (Ps. 22:11-18; 69:20-21; Matt. 27:33-44; John 19:28-30), and also His resurrection (Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:22-36). He anticipated the violent opposition of sinful men to the ministry and message of Christ (Ps. 2:1-3; Acts 4:23-31). Nevertheless, His rule and reign would be triumphant (cf. Ps. 2:4-12 and Acts 13:26-39; cf. Ps. 118:22-23 and Matt. 21:42-44; cf. Ps. 110:1 and Matt. 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

Isaiah

Often called the Messianic prophet, Isaiah foreshadowed Christ's coming, birth and ministry, sacrifice and suffering, and also the establishment of His kingdom/church (Isa. 2:1-4). These events would occur "in the last days," i.e., in the final dispensation of time, the Messianic or Christian age (vs 2; Heb. 1:1-2; Acts 2:16-17). The church would have its beginning in Jerusalem or Zion (vs 3; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 2:1-4). All nations and peoples would have access to it (vs 2-3; Mark 16:15-16; Col. 1:21-23). Mankind would be judged and governed by Christ (vs 4; Matt. 28:18-20; John 12:48). His kingdom would be peaceful and prosperous (vs 4; Matt. 5:9; Rom. 8:6-8).

Daniel

Daniel also prophesied about the church. He identified the time in which God's kingdom would be established (Dan. 2:31-45). Nebuchadnezzar's dream revealed the four great world powers that would arise prior to the establishment of God's kingdom.

The Babylonian empire, ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, was represented by the head of gold. It remained dominant in world affairs until 539 B.C.

The Medo-Persian empire was represented by the breast and arms made of silver. Established by Cyrus, King of Persia, and Darius, King of Media, this empire lasted until 330 B.C.

The Greek empire, established by Alexander the Great, was represented by the belly and thighs of brass. Alexander conquered the known world in a few short years, but died in Babylon in 323 B.C. at the age of 33. Because he did not leave an heir to the throne, his three generals divided his kingdom. Ptolemy took Egypt, Seleucus controlled the East, and Cassander commanded Macedonia. This kingdom passed from the world scene before the birth of Christ.

The fourth great world government was the Roman empire, represented by the legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. During these days, God would set up His kingdom which would stand forever. New Testament history takes place in the days of Roman domination (Luke 3:1-2; Acts 28:17; etc.).

Conclusion

The great importance of the church can be seen by the planning and preparation that went into its establishment. Indeed, the church is an expression of God's eternal purpose. Don't you want to be a part of that kingdom which shall never be destroyed? Have you responded to the gospel's invitation? Are you in Christ Jesus?

In Christ, one finds relationship (Rom. 6:3-4; 16:7), redemption (Rom. 3:24), eternal life (Rom. 6:11, 23), deliverance (Rom. 8:1-2), love (Rom. 8:38-39), unity and purpose (Rom. 12:4-5), glory (Rom. 15:17), responsibility (Rom. 16:3, 9), and approval (Rom. 16:10). One enters this blessed realm through obedience to the gospel (Rom. 1:1-6; 6:3-4, 16-18; 16:7, 25-27).