

## The Purpose Of The Church

Spiritually and Physically

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I owe this sermon largely to the encouragement of Helmut Fraund who did a great deal of reading and research and wrote me a letter that gave me quite a basis for some notes, pointing me toward Mr. Armstrong's *Mystery of the Ages* and I know that he did not know at the time, but it fit into the tail end of the series that I was beginning to prepare for the Feast of Tabernacles and I think provides a right conclusion for it.

Most of us growing up in either Canada, the United States, or Western Europe, has had an almost totally false concept of what a church is. Most of us in our pre-conversion days, if asked what is a church, I think that we would almost invariably have responded that it is a building. We would think of the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Mormon Church, and the Seventh Day Adventist, or any other church, but almost invariably a building comes to mind, and it is possible that even though you might have been in the church 20 years, a building may still come to your mind when you think in terms of a church.

I do not know whether you realize it but the term “church” is applicable only to the Christian religion. There are a lot of religions in this world, but the term church only applies to the Christian religion. Other religions have temples, mosques, and synagogues, but they are merely buildings; and the church is described as a building in the Bible only in the faintest metaphorical sense. We are going to cover this point first in I Peter 2.

**I Peter 2:5** You also, as living stones [stones, bricks, blocks immediately gives one a picture of a building], are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I want to show you that seeing the church in the sense of a building is not entirely missing from the Bible. It is there to a very small degree and so that

is what we are covering here, the places where it is indicated that it indeed might be a building, where it is called a spiritual house, we are living stones in a spiritual house.

**I Corinthians 3:9** For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

So there the metaphor is shown to be a building.

**Ephesians 2:19-20** Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

There we have building terms, construction terms—foundation, cornerstone in whom the whole building being joined together—just like any building that we would build, whether a house or a skyscraper of some kind.

**Ephesians 2:21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple [which is also a building] in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

In each of these cases, the inference is describing something being put together by a master designer as a spiritual habitation. This is different from a normal building. We even saw in one place where we are described as living stones. You do not know of any other building that is made out of living stones. Everything else is concrete, steel, wood, plastic, rubber, and glass, not living stones, so you can begin to see that we are talking about a building designed by a designer that is alive. Get that point, this building is unusual, it is alive, it is a living organism, but the building metaphor is nonetheless there.

People do not live in a church building. In the normal usage, it is merely a place of meeting for those who constitute the church. The Greek word *ekklesia* had no particular religious usage until the apostles assigned it one in

the Bible. The word was used by the Greeks merely to indicate an assembly or a group of people, not even all the time called together.

You can see in the book of Acts where the riot occurred in the city of Ephesus, you can see the word *ekklesia* used a couple of different times, and in this case, it was a mob. They were only faintly called together, there was no official calling together, they just heard things rumored around the city that was something unusual was going on and so they all gathered together as a mob, as a group, and the Bible calls that an *ekklesia*, or as we would say a church, but really an assembly of people. In most common usage, the word church in the secular Greek means an assembly of people called together for some purpose, but it can be used in a broad sense of merely being a mob that gathered because they were attracted for some reason. Let us look in Ephesians while we are here.

**Ephesians 1:20-22** Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the head.

Here we come to a different metaphor, a different analogy: Head over all things to the church which is His body. Now body in English can be used in a number of ways. We talk about a body of water and a body of water is nothing but water that has come from various sources but has collected in one place as in pond, as in a larger spot, a lake, or as in an ocean. So it is a body of water collected.

What we are talking here in the terms of body is parts gathered from all over the place that have been put together. He uses the term “head” because He is indicating here the human body which has a head, but it has all kinds of different parts in it and they are all collected together in one form. Unlike the body of water, the parts of the human body are connected: a liver from San Antonio, and the heart from up in Washington, and the eyelashes from another place. Not that way though, but the body is nonetheless a number of different functioning organs and pieces and parts that had been put together that it has a head and Christ is the head. Christ is alive and therefore the body

is alive. This body is a living organism described as we see now in two different ways: as a body that is alive and as a building that is alive.

**Ephesians 4:11-14** And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [This is a body that can be taught.], till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

**Ephesians 4:16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies [The word joint again indicates a human body.], according to the effective working by which every part does its share [Buildings do not move around from place to place working, carrying on operations, but people do.], causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

This is the most frequently used metaphor for what the church is. It is compared to a living human body called the body of Christ. It is organized and arranged for the purpose of carrying out a function, you got that from verse 16.

**Ephesians 2:14-16** For He himself is our peace, who has made both one [The both here are Gentiles and Israelites and they have been brought together into one. One what? One body.], and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself [the body of Christ] one new man from two, thus making peace, that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

**Ephesians 4:3-6** Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were

called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The church is a spiritual organism united by what every part has in common, and this is what has drawn us together. That organism is not confined to one corporate organization, but it exists anywhere these elements that bind us together are found. So, He can make a statement “where two or three gather together in My name that I am in the midst of them.” I would not explain that any further because that really has a more specific application than it does to the body of Christ. It has to do with settling dispute among the brethren, but it does indicate that where those who have Christ’s Spirit who are united in Him in a common cause—in common purpose, in a common work, for a common reason—they are part of that body.

None of these explains the purpose of the church, only what it is and what it is not. It is a spiritual organism, it is alive, it has a head to give it direction, and it has a function that it is to carry out. I said a little bit early that the word “*ekklesia*” indicated an assembly or a group called together for some purpose. When one adds the name God to *ekklesia*, it becomes God's group. Now it has more specific identity, God's group that has been called and arranged for a purpose.

At this point, I am going to have play a very brief section of a sermon that Mr. Armstrong gave in the Ambassador Auditorium and unfortunately, it is not dated. However, you can tell by his voice that he is an aged man and so you got to have to listen closely because he only makes this statement for a short period of time, then he went on to describe something else. But what he is going to do here is tell you from his own lips what the church or why the church is.

Because God has been revealing all of that. And the church is a temple of which Christ is coming and He is coming. The temple is His wife and He is going to marry that temple. Probably the people that live next door to you across the street from you couldn’t understand this word if you tried to argue with them or preach to them for a thousand years. Unless God calls no one can come to Christ. Jesus said, “No man can come to Me except the power

which sent Me draw him.” Are you going to make Jesus Christ a liar? If there is anyone that can come to Christ except when the Father draws them, Jesus Christ didn’t tell the truth. That’s either true or it is false. You can’t find any scripture that will contradict it. God has called us to a job to get done. He called everyone for a duty, and no one has been called except for a duty, and every time that duty was preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Duty is preparing for the Kingdom of God. I am going to give you more information in regard to that from the publication, *Mystery of the Ages* by Herbert W. Armstrong and I am going to be doing a bit of reading from it. I am going to be reading from two of the mysteries. The one is the mystery of the church and the other is the mystery of the Kingdom.

First of all from page 200, this is under “Mystery of the Church: The Real Purpose of the Church.”

To the shocking surprise to nearly every reader of this volume I will state first what the church was not and is not. It is not the instrumentality by which God is trying to save the world. Few may realize it, but Jesus made no attempt to gain converts or to invite people to give their hearts to Him or to accept Him as their personal Savior. On the contrary, He called out, or drafted, twelve disciples. The word disciple means student. These twelve were students being taught by Jesus the true gospel of the Kingdom of God and this involved the entire purpose of God in creating the human race on this earth. That meaning had been rejected or lost by the first created man, Adam.

Then he goes on to recapitulate about Lucifer and then Adam’s sin. Then in page 201, “Now Why the Church?”

Christ came also to call out selected and chosen ones from Satan’s world to turn from Satan’s way into the way of God’s law and to qualify to reign with Christ when He comes to replace Satan on the throne of the earth. Those called into the church were not called

merely for salvation and eternal life, but to learn the way of God's government and to develop the divine character during this mortal life in the church age.

From page 227 (still under “Mystery of the Church” and incidentally, I am only hitting a few high spots. It appears far more times that I am going to read.

Yet the church too does exist, but again why? What is it really? What purpose does it serve? We have seen that there is indeed a purpose being worked out here below. Winston Churchill stated that before the United States Congress. There is a reason for the presence of humanity on earth and for the working out of that purpose, there is a master plan. The church is an important part of that plan. Never lose sight of the setting that led up to the raising up of the church. Keep in mind who and what God is: the divine creating Family now reproducing itself in mankind. Bear in mind further, in order for Christ to restore God's government over the earth, He would need with and under Him a qualified and organized personnel of God-beings all having rejected Satan's false way, having proved their loyalty to the government and righteous way of God. God's church was designed in His supreme master plan to prepare that dedicated and organized personnel of God-beings. The church then became God's instrumentality for aiding Him in bringing about the salvation of humanity. [Remember that.]

Let us go on to page 332, this time under “Mystery of the Kingdom of God” under the section, “Government Planned From the Beginning.”

Now we come to a revealed insight into the wonderful planning, preparing, and organizing of the perfect government of God. There will be no incompetent and selfishly ambitious politicians seeking to get their covetous hands on the throttle of government power by the deceptive political methods of the world. Today, people are asked to vote into office men they know little about, men whose qualifications are largely misrepresented. In the soon-coming

government of God every official placed in authority shall have been tried and tested, trained, experienced, and qualified by God's qualifications.

The fact illustrates the purpose and necessity of the church. The function of the church is not merely to convert the firstfruits, not merely to bring about salvation to those specially called out of the world and into the church, but to prepare and train them for these positions of leadership in the Kingdom when salvation will be open to all the living.

Another one, page 338,

But in case place these kings and rulers will be resurrected immortals born into the Kingdom (family) of God as Spirit beings, not flesh and blood mortals, and in every case, they will be those who qualified not only by conversion, but by overcoming, spiritual character development, growth in Christ's knowledge, training in being ruled by God's law and government as well as learning to rule.

From page 351, again under the "Mystery of Kingdom of God":

The very purpose of the church of this present time is to provide God's training school or teacher's college to train in spiritual knowledge, education, and godly character to supply all the positions at the beginning of the wonderful 1000-year reign of Christ on earth.

One more quote, this is from the Good News, and I want you to notice the date, May 1979. This was right after the church was attacked by the state of California in January 1979 and it is the Personal from Mr. Armstrong, and it is the last section, and the title of it is "God's Church Made Ready."

In this train of thinking, I have had to ask myself what has Christ been doing with my life since I was brought back in August 1977. I know God called me to proclaim worldwide gospel of the Kingdom of God [and he says] then the imminent Kingdom of God, and all

that has been my job since conversion in 1927. That job is not yet finished. Although we have no way of knowing of how far we must reach people in all parts of the world, God does not expect us to reach every human on earth with His message, and we may be closer to what He expects than we think.

Later on he said that job has been done. I think what he meant, if I can interpret that and I hope I am interpreting it clearly, he meant that his job in doing that had been done because he was certainly aware that the Two Witnesses were coming. He was certainly aware that the Christ has not returned yet and the preaching of the gospel to the world will go on; it is the responsibility of the church.

But my efforts as Christ's apostle since the heart failure have been almost wholly devoted to preparing God's church, the spiritual temple to which Christ will come. [He said] I could write much more along this line, but I want to leave that thought with you as we come to God's Feast of Firstfruits. Let us bear personally in mind that we in God's church must be made ready. For Christ is coming soon and we are not yet fully ready to be instantly changed and caught up to be our Lord as He comes in the clouds.

I again want you to understand that none of these quotes is intended to in any way deny the other part of the church's function of preaching the gospel, but rather to emphasize that Mr. Armstrong was gradually turning his emphasis away from that and toward the feeding of the flock in the preparation of the church.

With that in mind, how does the church fit into history? What was the setting that led to the raising up of the church? How does God look at His church in the context of history, both past and future? I think we need to look at this quite frequently if only to fill ourselves with the awesome greatness of our calling and at the same time to be constantly reminded of what we have been called to and to give really humble recognition of how undeserving we are of what we have received.

I know that we have been reminded even here one of Mrs. Armstrong's favorite scriptures was Psalm 133. I heard Mr. Armstrong on a radio

broadcast which I heard again and again through the years, that he said Ephesians 1 was probably his favorite chapter in all of the Bible, and every time that he did that or had it done on the radio, he normally read it out of the Moffatt translation which is awesome to read. It is really inspiring.

**Ephesians 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.

He is talking about the church here and he is talking to you and me that this has been planned, it has been God's purpose from the very beginning. That there would be an organization that we now know of as the church. And you think that the vast billions of people that have lived and died from the time of Adam and Eve, and you and I are a part of that group which indeed is an extremely tiny group in terms of all the multiple billions who have ever lived. But God chose it from the very beginning before the foundation of the world and here is the purpose.

**Ephesians 1:4-5** That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.

The predestination here does not apply to us as individuals. It applies in general to the fact that God planned that there would be a church, that there would be a group that would have characteristics that were similar to His Son.

**Ephesians 1:5-9** Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God. God is reproducing Himself. Our awesome destiny, our great potential is to be very God just as much God is God, but not having the authority of God, that is, the Father or the Son.

**Ephesians 1:9-12** Having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one [body] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

God uses the term children of God. In many cases He uses the term son. Not necessarily son of God, but He uses that word in the sense of “bearing the characteristics of.” You have heard of people who are sons of Belial. Belial means foolishness. It had the characteristics of foolishness. So when He says children of God or sons of God, we know that we are now the sons of God, but we are not yet what we are destined to be when we will fully and completely be sons of God and very God. However, even now He expects us to bear the characteristics of God.

The church therefore is not some kind of cosmic accident, but purposefully planned by the Creator. But the trail to what the church is today has been one that is long and unfolding. It has not completely unfolded yet and it will not be until Jesus Christ returns. If one wants to know what the church ought to be doing now, I think one has to understand why the church exists in the first place and what it is going to be doing in the future. You can already anticipate that even from some of things that we read, the quotes from Mr. Armstrong’s book. Armed with those things, then, one can see from God's perspective what the individual member ought to be doing now if he agrees with God's purpose for the church and does not neglect it in his personal life.

For the lack of time, I am going to be leaving out a lot of scriptures that could be injected here to specifically cover some of the things that I will be covering in broad generalities. The picture has to begin with the creation of the angelic beings whom God created and to whom God gave rulership,

dominion of the earth. They were created and then some rejected His purpose for them. One-third of them did rebel against Him, attacked Him, lost the battle, and then were cast back to the earth. However, we read in places like,

**Ephesians 6:12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We see these phrases or terms in other places and what Paul means by principalities and powers are the demons and Satan who still sit in the seats of authority, in the positions of authority that God delegated to them when He gave them dominion over the earth. So, we find that even today, that they, though unseen, still rule the earth and influence the lives of mankind toward the ends that they purpose. And we understand that that purpose is the destruction of God's purpose and they are doing this not just because they are hateful, but also because they want to hang on to their dominion.

God created Adam and Eve and gave them the opportunity to qualify to replace Satan and his demons as inheritors and rulers of the earth, but they too disqualified themselves by submitting to Satan instead. About 2,000 years later, God began in earnest the formation of His church with the calling, the conversion, the testing, and the perfection of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is the father of the faithful and the church is to consist of those characteristics which make them related to Jesus Christ, who is faithful above all and the one who confirmed the covenants and promises that were given to Abraham. He is the father of the faithful and in the strictest sense of the word, that is when the church began—with Abraham.

It began in earnest, we understand, when Jesus Christ came and God sent His Holy Spirit, but the roots of the church are back there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From Abraham and Sarah came Isaac, and from Isaac and Rebecca came Jacob, and then from Jacob, from his wives and concubines, came the twelve sons and these twelve became the progenitors of the nation of Israel. But before we get to the New Testament church, God purposed to work through another church.

**Acts 7:37-39** This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness [The King James has the word “church” in the wilderness.] with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the ones who received the living oracles to give to us.”

The word congregation there is *ekklesia*. You might wonder why the translators translated it congregation. There is a very good reason why they did. Because Israel is never even one time in the Old Testament called the church of God. It is never called the church of Israel either in the Old Testament. There is a reason for that. Church, remember I told you at the beginning especially when God's name is added to it, implies a sanctity. It implies a calling out and election that has a sacred purpose to it.

And so Israel is never called the church of God, but it is called the *congregation* of Israel, not the congregation of God. In 23 verses, it is referred to as the congregation of Israel. It was named after a man. However, though, God did propose, and He entered into a covenant with them, and we are going to go back and look at that because it is important to understand this in the flow of history back in Exodus 19. He had a purpose for Israel, and He entered into an agreement with them.

**Exodus 19:10** Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them. . .

The theme of this Feast of Tabernacles has been sanctification unto holiness and how we have to apply ourselves in our responsibility to that.

**Exodus 19:10-13** . . . consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their clothes and let them be ready for the third day. [Sanctification has something to do with being ready.] For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the site of all the people. You shall set bounds [limitations] for the people all around, saying ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall

surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow. . . .’

**Exodus 19:14** So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people and they washed their clothes.

Does that make a relationship with Ephesians 5, “the washing of the water by the word”? What did they have to do? They had to wash their clothes. What is clothes the symbol of? It is a symbol of righteousness. And what does the bride in the New Covenant prepare herself for? We will see it in just a little bit.

**Exodus 19:15** And He said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; and do not come near your wives.”

In Exodus 24:1-8 the covenant was made, was entered into through blood, typifying the blood of Jesus Christ. We find that

**Exodus 24:6-8** Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. [He was reading to them the laws of their marriage.] And they said “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people [Remember the book of Hebrews and the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.], and said, “This is the blood the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.

In Ezekiel 16 I think you understand here that Israel is portrayed as a baby who grows up and becomes very beautiful young woman.

**Ezekiel 16:8** “When I passed by you again and looked upon you, and indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you [a marriage covenant], and you became Mine,” says the Lord God.

**Ezekiel 16:20-21** “Moreover [I want you to note a marriage has taken place] you took your sons and your daughters [see, children of Israel], whom you bore to Me [children are born out of a marriage], and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?”

Keep that in the back of your mind. A covenant has been entered into, a marriage has taken place, and that marriage has borne children who were sacrificed to demons.

**Jeremiah 3:8** “Then I saw for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had to put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but also went and played the harlot also.”

A divorce took place. Isaiah 50:1 indicates the same thing. Divorces are granted where a marriage has gone astray. Because of this, twelve places in the Old Testament where Israel is called the congregation of the Lord. He is showing up a measure of possession because a marriage had been entered into and children, at least metaphorically, had been born as a result of this marriage. So it does show through the use of that phrase a certain degree of sanctity due to their marriage, but never the degree of the “Israel of God” as shown in the New Testament. The Israel of God mentioned Galatians 6:16. Here is why, in Deuteronomy 29, there was never the sanctity that God expects of His church in the New Testament under the New Covenant.

**Deuteronomy 29:4** “Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this day.”

He never did give them His Spirit as a general means of conversion because He was not working with them to convert them. However, He was working with them with a purpose in mind. He did want something from them and that they failed to provide. It was not something that was over and above

what they would have been able to do even without the Spirit of God, but even what He wanted them to do which was far short of what He wants the church to do, they failed in that, miserably.

**Isaiah 43:10-12** “You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore, you are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “that I am God.”

We can go to a number of scriptures. This is what He wanted them to do before the world; to be His witness. This was not a proselytizing witness. There is no command for them to do that. He merely wanted them to witness to the world as an example of His way of living.

Now He wanted a second thing from them in which they also failed. We have to turn back to the book of Malachi for that.

**Malachi 2:13-15** And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

God wanted holy seed. He wanted parents to teach their children. I think it so appropriate, we had the Blessing of the Little Children and the reading of this scripture and we are going to see in a little bit how important this is to the New Testament church.

After God divorced Israel and Judah, He waited another 600 years before sending His Son to reveal the mystery of His purpose, to preach the gospel of

the Kingdom of God. There might be a number of reasons why the long delay, but I think that you can see that God at this time was not overly anxious about saving the world, to go through a period of 600 years when it seems as though virtually little happened. We have some record in the Bible through the Minor Prophets; we have a little bit in Ezra and Nehemiah, we have some in Malachi, Haggai, the things we are going on, but there were gaps of hundreds of years before God ever did anything.

**Mark 1:14-15** After John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

We understand, we can fill things in here that God did not reveal the mystery to very many people. Even though He came, He was only calling a few.

**Mark 4:10-12** But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn and their sins should be forgiven them.’”

The mystery was revealed only to His disciples and the rest of the world pretty much goes its way in greater and lesser degrees of ignorance.

**Matthew 16:18** “And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church [Here is the first mention of church in the New Testament.], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

We can already see piecing these things together that the church was going to consist of those to whom the mystery had been revealed. The called-out ones, those elected, those predestinated according to God's purpose to bear

the image of His Son, those who are going to have the characteristics of God in their lives beginning to work, beginning to make the witness to the world in which Israel failed.

**Matthew 16:19-20** “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then He commanded His disciples they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

That does not sound as though He was trying to get all kinds of people converted, does it? He was not overly concerned about preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Yes, it is a part of the work of the church, but the church’s main responsibility is preparing those who are called. You can see the history and I do not even need to tell you anymore than what I am already telling you, you see the model through which God is working and that there have been long periods of time in the history of man when very little preaching to the public was ever done. Only occasionally would God raise up somebody like the twelve apostles, or a Peter Waldo or a Herbert Armstrong, and then there would be an intense period of activity, the church would be all fleshed out.

In many cases after that fleshing out, it would carry on for another couple of hundred years before God would raise up another person and the purpose was not so much to make a witness to the world, but God raised somebody up in order to call a few more out to get them prepared. Where do you think the rest of the converts came from after that expansion period? It came from the families and the children of those that He called out when the great explosion took place in adding to His church.

God is the one who is responsible for calling out and begetting children and then adding them to the Family. Jesus said no one can come to Him unless the Spirit of the Father draws him. And it is these called-out ones of which the church is built. It is to them that a New Covenant is proposed that is better and displaces the old.

Turn with me to Hebrews 8. What we are going to read here is taken from Jeremiah 31.

**Hebrews 8:6-8** But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them [notice the plural pronoun, covenant is singular, them cannot be referring to covenant, but rather it is referring to something else that is plural], He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

We would not go any further with that because we want to continue chasing this theme. I want you to go back to Romans 8 because we have to find out where the fault was and it says,

**Romans 8:3** For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.

There was nothing wrong with the law, there was nothing really wrong with the covenant, the problem was in the people—they—the plural people for finding fault with them, finding fault with the people. God then proposed a New Covenant. The people were too weak to keep the law in its spirit.

**Deuteronomy 29:4** “Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.”

He had a different purpose for them. He was working through them, they were His congregation, He had something for them to do, but it had nothing to do at that time with the salvation of the world. But with the church, there is a degree of sanctity given and required far greater than what the congregation of Israel ever had because God is aiming to eliminate the problems in those people who are in the church through the New Covenant.

It says it was established on better promises. And what those promises were, were things like the forgiveness of sin, like eternal life, like the receipt of

God's Holy Spirit, the divine nature, having access to God, being able to go right into His throne room through our Savior Jesus Christ. Is the New Covenant also a marriage covenant? Yes, it is!

**Revelation 19:6** And I heard, as it were, the voice of the great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering saying “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteousness acts of the saints. Then He said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to marriage supper the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”

Notice carefully a major difference between the Old and the New Covenants. How long did the Old Covenant people have to sanctify themselves? Three days. How long do you, brethren, have to sanctify yourselves? A lifetime! That is how serious the responsibility is, that is how much greater the New Covenant is than the Old Covenant. God is shooting *all* the works, as we might say. He is putting all His money that He is going to be able to sanctify a people so that they will be ready for that marriage when it finally takes place. You notice the instruction was given to Moses to sanctify the people. Moses is a type of Christ. Who is doing the sanctifying? Jesus Christ. He is washing us in order to prepare us so that we will be ready, and He can present us to Himself.

The parallels are so close, it is scary, so that we can understand what it is that God wants from us and what we can turn our lives to. That New Covenant is not going to be completed until we are sanctified and those three days have gone by and we are washed clean. And did you notice, the Israelites were told to wash their clothes. Did you see what it says the bride has on? Fine linen, clean and white. She has been cleaned inside and out. In the outside, we are only reflecting what is on the inside. What we are being cleansed of is the image of man, all of our carnality.

Now the church which Jesus Christ has been building for 2,000 years will then be ready as the firstfruits of God's purpose to assume its offices of

helping God increase His Family. What happens when people marry? They have children. Is God going to have children from His marriage? What did He say in the book of Ezekiel? “You have taken the children that you have born to Me and put them into the fire.” What did He say in Malachi? He wanted holy seed from the union that He had with Israel of which the marriages of the men and women were but a type. And God expects that there is going to be children born from the marriage of His Son and the church. That is what He is preparing them for. When will those children be produced? Well, they are going to come in spurts, but the first group is going to be, of course, during the Millennium.

In Romans 9-11 God is revealing His plan for saving Israel after the return of Jesus Christ. In giving this revelation, God is showing why we have the opportunity we now have and the part that we are going to be playing in their salvation in the future. It is not given in great detail, it is given in a sketchy overview, but there is enough there that we can be able to see that we are going to be the saviors that are going to go out to save the world. I am not talking about the saviors in the sense of forgiveness of sin, but we are actually called saviors in one place in the Old Testament.

**Romans 9:1-6** [Paul begins by saying] I tell you the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscious also bearing the witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. It is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.

What He is beginning to explain here now is that God has not gone back on what He said that He was purposing to do. Instead now, the Israel with whom He is working, is the Israel of God, and the great majority of those people have been elected, chosen out, called out of the Israelitish nation. However, there are certain numbers of Gentiles that He is also calling out in

various parts of the world, but even here I would say that the vast majority of the Gentiles that He is calling out are those who are living in Israel, because that is mainly where the message has gone to.

He goes on here, but for the lack of time, I will not go into it. He tells us the reason the church exists is because Israel failed. And why did they fail? We better listen to this: They failed because of unbelief. In one sense, the deck was stacked against them because God never gave them His Spirit. But still the reason that they failed was because they did not believe to the extent that they could have believed. We better not fail in that because the just shall live by faith. We do not want to repeat the mistake that the Israelites made.

**Romans 11:1-3** I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or did you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how He pleads with God against Israel saying, “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars and I alone am left, and they seek my life”?

And God went on to show Elijah that there were 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal. I think that is so interesting, Elijah, God's great prophet, did not know that God was doing the work somewhere else. Think about that. What Paul is leading to here is this: That salvation comes to people, the knowledge of God's way, the mystery of God, comes by the election of God. He is the one who chooses those He wants to understand His Word.

**Romans 11:7** What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Remember in chapter 10, He said that I bear witness for record of my people what zeal that they have for God, but not according to knowledge. Israel was seeking after God, they did not know what to look for and God never revealed Himself to them.

**Romans 11:7-8** What then Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it and the rest were blinded. Just as it is

written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”

I know that Paul has in his heart and mind here the desire to implant, to impress within us a sense of awe of what has been given to us. Mighty fine people out there and they do not know what God is doing.

**Romans 11:11** I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! [God is going to save them.] But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

God is going to use a bad attitude on the part of Israel to actually play a part in saving them. He is going to instill in them a spirit of “look what they have, but I do not have.” Gentiles yet.

All these people are going to be inspired to jealousy they are dead and in their grave now, for the most part. But they are going to come up in that resurrection that Ed Clapp was talking about. And when they come up, part of their feeling about themselves, about God, the world they see around them, is going to be tinged with jealousy and probably also anger that they did not understand, that they did not take advantage of, that they did not do as good of a job as they could have done. But that is something that is all off in the future.

**Romans 11:12** Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

You see why I am saying here that those of us in the church are having an opportunity because Israel failed and God turned in another direction. I am sure that God knew that they are going to fail. He knows human nature. He was not surprised that they failed. God always has Plan B to go to and He supplies Himself with options and we might be Plan B, C, D, or E. I do not know. We might be way down the list. God has called the weak of the world. He started out with a strong of the world. He started out with angels and now He is down to the cream of the crud as Richard Plachette used to say.

What is it going to be like when God moves to save Israel?

**Romans 11:13-15** For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world [listen to this, tie this to verse 11 and 12], what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

When is the reconciling of the world going to begin and who is going to do it? The people who are going to do it is the people to whom this Book was written! *You* are going to reconcile the world to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Even now Paul says in II Corinthians 5 that the church has a ministry of reconciliation. We are just practicing for what is coming, because when we are prepared, Christ will come and then will begin the *real* ministry of reconciliation, the salvation of Israel.

**Romans 11:16** For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Who is the firstfruit? You are. What is He talking about here? He is using holy in the sense like leaven and when you put a little leaven in the lump, the whole lump becomes leavened and we are going to be the seed that is going to transform, as it were, Israel, a whole nation into a holy nation.

**Romans 11:23** And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

They were broken off. He is going to put them back in again.

**Romans 11:25** For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

The times of the Gentiles, brethren, will be over whenever Christ returns. And so the hardening is only going to last until then and then the salvation of Israel begins and that is what you are being prepared for.

**Romans 11:26** And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. . .

He even tells you the time element when the times for the Gentiles will be over and the hardening will be taken away.

**Romans 11:27-29** . . . For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

He told Abraham that your seed will be saved and your seed will be a blessing to all the earth. We are the firstfruits of Abraham’s seed. He is the father of the faithful in the metaphor that is being drawn.

**Romans 11:30** For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience.

Because Israel fell short, now we have received mercy. God has turned to the church, the Israel of God, because Israel was disobedient.

**Romans 11:31-32** Even so [now look how God is going to turn this thing over] these [the disobedient ones, Israel] also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. [God's mercy to Israel is going to be extended through you.] For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

God is going to use the tribulation to soften Israel’s heart and when the Deliverer comes out of Zion, there are going to be very many of them who are going to be ready to be converted.

We can find that in Ezekiel 20:33-38. God is going to use the tribulation to do this—the time of Jacob’s trouble. Then we find in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and

this is very important, that the New Covenant is going to be made with Israel. Be careful here. He did not say the Gentiles. God is going to save Israel first. He has an order, a progression to His purpose.

Right now, we are the Israel of God, we are the holy seed that is going to marry Jesus Christ. And then, from our union with Jesus Christ, is going to come the seed that God expected of Israel at the first, but instead the seed went through the fire in offerings to idols. But then because of the church being the holy lump that is impregnating Israel with the Spirit of God and showing and teaching the right way of life, Israel will become converted and they will become holy. Then what will happen? Then comes the Last Great Day and Israel will have joined the Israel of God and Israel along with the Israel of God will be used to save the Gentiles.

Of course, everybody else who is a part of that resurrection to the last great day, the overwhelming percentage, maybe 90% of those people, are going to be Gentiles. Because the Gentiles outnumber the Israelites by so many. You can see it in the world today, one billion people in China alone, all Gentiles; 800 million in India, all Gentiles. All the Israelites together are not even 500 million and it has been that way all through history. The Gentiles have had the preponderance of the population of the world. I hope you see the progression clearly.

Incidentally, I should put something in here, this does not mean that God will save no Gentiles in the Millennium. He certainly will. There is an indication in Isaiah 19 that two Gentile nations that He may work with are Assyria, which is probably Germany, and Egypt. He is going to work with them. He does not say there though He is going to save them. He says that they are going to be 1, 2, 3 with Israel, but it is very likely that He is going to work a saving work in Assyria and also in Egypt.

Then in Zechariah 14, we receive a more definite indication of a spiritual work with Egypt when He says that they do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, then they are going to be plagued. But understand God's work is expanding out. Right now, the bulk of the people are from Israelitish nations with the few Gentiles brought in, and all of these are preparing to be the Bride of Christ so that God can have a lot of children from that marriage in the Millennium. The church will then be used to be the means through

which reconciliation to God is affected in the Israelite nations with some conversion of Gentiles.

There is an additional proof here that I will interject here that God is not, I feel, going to be working with many Gentile nations in the Millennium, and that is supplied from Revelation 20 where this great war takes place. Satan goes out to destroy or to stir up the nations and he specifically mentions Gog and Magog, the great oriental, heavily populated nations. I hardly think that these are converted people attacking the camp of the saints.

What is very likely going to occur is they will be slaughtered in that battle and then God will, just a few months later, resurrect them into the Great White Throne judgment as part of that. And those great hordes of Gentiles who have lived and died from the time of Adam and Eve, all the way up to that period, never had the opportunity of salvation, will then be reconciled to God through the work of the church of God, the Israel of God, the nation of Israel whom God has now converted and made that New Covenant with and made a part of His Family. Then all of them together, the church under Christ and the nation of Israel, will then work toward the salvation of the entire world. This fits right into two places in the Scripture.

**Joel 2:28** “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”

If you read this whole thing in context, I think, you are going to have to come to the agreement that this is most likely after the Millennium. That agrees with John 7:37 where Jesus mentioned the spirit coming out of the belly and that is when God is going to really move to save the world. But by that time, His Family will have expanded all the way to include the nations of Israel as well.

Let me read one final thing from Mr. Herbert Armstrong, from page 252 of the *Mystery of the Ages*:

It is that body God has specially called out of Satan's world. It is a body called for a very special purpose, to be trained, to become

rulers and teachers when God does set His hand to convert the world, to be enabled to rule and teach the world with and under Christ. It is also necessary that they be first converted from human into actual God-beings, members of the divine God Family. That explains why they are repeatedly called the firstfruits of God's salvation. The day of Pentecost was originally called the Feast of Firstfruits, picturing the church being called and trained for their special mission prior to the time when God will open salvation to the world. Let it be clearly understood that the time has not yet come when God has opened the way of the Tree of Life to Satan's world. Rather than open the Tree of Life to Satan's world, God has selected those predestined to be specially called that they might be prepared as kings and teachers. Being actual God-beings under Christ when God does open the Tree of Life to the whole world that will be the time when as in Joel 2:28 God shall at last pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.

I hope that these sermons, at least at this point in time, have led to a very logical conclusion. And that we all agree as to the purpose that God is working out in our lives so that we can all turn our attention in this coming year to achieving as much as we possibly can in this regard. I think that we should have at least a much clearer picture of what we are going to be doing. The qualifications for that is what is worked out during this period of sanctification.

So when we come to that time, and we have the character and the attitudes or reflect enough of what God is, His image, then Christ will return because the church will then be finished and prepared to do the work that it is designed to do.

I hope that you are looking forward to that day and you can now turn your attentions much more strongly and clearly in that direction.