

THE CHURCH AGE

by Scofield C.I.

Scofield's examination of the church age within the dispensational framework of biblical history and God's plan of salvation, defining the church's unique place and purpose in the divine program.

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I believe that the failure of the Church to see that she is a separated, a called-out Body in the purposes of God, charged with a definite mission limited in its purpose and scope, and the endeavor to take from Israel her promises of earthly glory, and appropriate them over into this Church dispensation, has done more to swerve the Church from the appointed course than all other influences put together. It is not so much wealth, luxury, power, pomp, and pride that have served to deflect the Church from her appointed course, as the notion, founded upon Israelitish Old Testament promises, that the Church is of the world, and that therefore, her mission is to improve the world. Promises which were given to Israel alone are quoted as justifying what we see all about us today. The Church, therefore, has failed to follow her appointed pathway of separation, holiness, heavenliness and testimony to an absent but coming Christ; she has turned aside from that purpose to the work of civilizing the world, building magnificent temples, and acquiring earthly power and wealth, and in this way, has ceased to follow in the footsteps of Him who had not where to lay His head. Did you ever put side by side the promises given to the Church, and to Israel, and see how absolutely in contrast they are? It is impossible to mingle them. The Jew was promised an earthly inheritance, earthly wealth, earthly honor, earthly power. The Church is promised no such thing, but is pointed always to heaven as the place where she is to receive her rest and her reward. The promise to the Church is a promise of persecution, if faithful in this world, but a promise of a great inheritance and reward hereafter. In the meantime, she is to be a pilgrim body, passing through this scene, but abiding above. In the New Testament we have the history of the Church down to the year 96 A.D. In the first chapter of Acts we have the birth of the Church, and oh, how beautiful she was in her first freshness of faith! It was a lovely manifestation of simplicity, unselfishness, holiness and spiritual power. Yet we pass on but a few years, and in the Epistles to the Corinthians, what do we find? Paul writes, "I hear there are divisions among you." They began then, and they have never ceased to this day. In the second and third chapters of Revelation we have the condition of the Church at that time; full of words still, but fallen from its first love.

After Ephesus, A.D. 96, comes the period of persecution. For three centuries the Church was in awful persecution. Then came a great change. The Emperor Constantine professed conversion, and Christianity became the court religion. Then the tables were turned and the Church began to persecute! And, of all things she should never have done, she became the persecutrix of the Jews! The Church, saved by faith in the Messiah who came from the Jews; having in her hand the Bible which was written by the Jews; receiving her teaching solely and only through Jewish sources, became, for one thousand years, the bitter, relentless, bloody persecutor of Judaism. With that came worldliness and priestly assumption, and the Dark Ages.

Then in the fifteenth century, came the Reformation out of which have come Protestant movements of various kinds. The Bible was put into the hands of the people, and has been translated into many tongues. With an open Bible came light and liberty again, but never union again. On the contrary, division followed division; sect followed sect. It is true that the great body of the churches believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, but they have turned aside the greater part of their resources, to the attempt to reform the world, to educate the world, and, in short, to anticipate the next dispensation in which those things belong, and to do the work that is distinctly set apart for restored and converted Israel in her Kingdom Age. Is the Gospel then a failure? God forbid! The Gospel never failed, and can never fail. God's Word by the Gospel is accomplishing precisely the mission which was foreseen and foretold for it, that whereunto it was sent. And we must not forget, either, that the Gospel will yet bring this world to the Saviour. It is not at all a question of the ultimate triumph of the blessed Lord. The heathen may rage and the people imagine vain things, but the Father will yet set His King on His holy hill in Zion. Converted Israel, glorified saints, even a mighty angel shall yet proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, and "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it" (Isaiah 2:2). "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). All this will surely come to pass, for the Lord hath spoken it--but not in this dispensation. This is the age of the "ecclesia"--of the called out ones.

Let me ask you, what is God doing in this age of ours? Is He not taking out of the Gentiles a people? A few Jews are being converted, for Paul tells us there is always a remnant in Israel according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5), but the great, the altogether vast majority of the Church is taken out of the Gentiles. This we all see. To believe this is not at all a matter of faith, but of simple observation. Not, anywhere, the conversion of all, but everywhere, the taking out of some. The evangelization of the world, then, and not its conversion, is the mission committed to the Church. To do this, to preach the Gospel unto the uttermost parts of the earth, to offer salvation to every creature, is our responsibility. It is the divinely appointed means for the calling out of a people for His Name, the Church, the "Ecclesia."

Further, the purpose of the Father in this age is not the establishment of the Kingdom. The Old Testament prophets tell us in perfectly simple, unambiguous language how the Kingdom is to be brought in, who is to be its ruler, and the extent and character of that rule, and the result in the universal prevalence of peace and righteousness. Alas, nothing would suffice but the bringing of the prophets bodily over into this Church age! This is the irremediable disaster which the wild allegorizing of Origen and his school has inflicted upon exegesis. The intermingling of Church purpose with Kingdom purpose palsied evangelization for thirteen hundred years, and is today the heavy clog upon the feet of them who preach the glad tidings.

See how inevitably so. The Kingdom applies spiritual forces to the solution of material problems. How shall man live long and wisely? The Kingdom is the answer. How shall exact justice be done on earth? The Kingdom provides for it. When shall wars and human butchery cease in this blood-saturated earth? When the Kingdom is set up by the King Himself. When shall creation give up to man her potential secrets? In the Kingdom age. When shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea? When the King and His Kingdom are here. Of all these things the O.T. prophets are full. We turn to the New Testament and find what? The birth

of the King, the heralding of the Kingdom as "at hand," the announcement in the Sermon on the Mount of the principles of the Kingdom, the utter refusal of Israel to receive her King, the passing of the Kingdom into the mixed and veiled condition set forth in the seven parables of Matthew Thirteen, its full revelation being postponed till "the harvest," which is fixed definitely "at the end of this age." And then the Kingdom being thus postponed, what is revealed as filling and occupying this age? THE CHURCH! Christians, let us leave the government of the world till the King comes; let us leave the civilizing of the world to be the incidental effect of the presence there of the Gospel of Christ, and let us give our time, our strength, our money, our days to the mission distinctively committed to the Church, namely, to make the Lord Jesus Christ known "to every creature"!

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