***The Purpose of the Church - PH08-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

Preparation for the study of the Word of God requires that we be in the status of spirituality. Spirituality is a matter of being rightly related to God the Holy Spirit. We become rightly related to God the Holy Spirit as the result of having all known sins confessed. Spirituality is not to be confused with spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity deals with several specific facets of our lives. These take time to build. They take time to develop as the result of our entrance into a knowledge of the principles of the Word of God. However, any newborn believer may be 100% spiritual. That is, he is in a condition where he is positive toward the teaching ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

So we're going to bow in a few moments of personal examination of heart, in order that all the things that have been said this week that ought not to have been said; the thoughts that have been entertained which ought not to have been entertained; the actions which have been taken which should not have been taken; and, the reactions which were expressed which should not have been expressed should all now be confessed and admitted for the sins that they were. Otherwise, you might as well leave as of this point, for this study will be of no profit to you spiritually whatsoever. You will have a religious experience, and that's all you will have, unless you are in a position where the Spirit of God can instruct you. Confession of sin opens the door to that instruction, and no one is above the need for that kind of confession. Shall we pray.

Our Father, we pray that You will give us the quietness of heart and uninterrupted moments of thinking in order to permit You to tell us the things that ought to be brought before You. We pray for speakers and congregation alike that there shall be a receptivity and a positive response to what the Holy Spirit has to bring to us. We thank you that these things have been prepared in eternity past, and that You have brought us to this moment in time with all things prepared now for our blessing and for our learning; and, that none of us, no matter what our human I.Q. is, has been shortchanged in the ability to understand and to learn spiritual things. So we pray that You will give us the guidance to understand the words through the filling of the Spirit, and to be responsive to it in order that that which we learn may affect the elements of our soul, so that our minds and our wills and our emotions may be dominated by right thinking and by Your Spirit rather than the corrupt old sin nature with all of its lusts. For we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

In this session, we look once more at the church invisible. This is the second segment on that, and this is based on Philippians 1:1. You will recall that the apostle Paul, in this first verse, addresses the saints of the church age in two places. He first addresses those who are in Christ Jesus, and these are Christians who are in the organism of the body of Christ. This refers to the church invisible--the universal church, which includes all believers of all denominational persuasions. He also addresses his remarks to those at Philippi which are Christians in the church organization in the city of Philippi, and this refers to the church visible--the local church, which is an organization.

Please remember that in the city of Philippi, as all the cities of the New Testament world, Christians met in homes. There were hundreds of believers. Therefore it was not possible for there to be any one home in which all of the believers met. It would be very difficult for a large mass of believers even to meet out in an open field, and to have any consistent reasonable instruction in the Word of God under those conditions, for people to be able to hear, and so on. Obviously, when he says, "In Philippi," he is speaking to many many churches which met in many many homes, and over each church there was one leader, a pastor-teacher, who was the authoritative guide within that local congregation. He writes this book to the geographic location of Philippi, and to the individual assemblies of believers within their city.

So we have here, on the one hand, the organism of the body of Christ. On the other hand, we have a local church which is a visible segment of that living organism--that which constitutes Christ's body. We found that the word "church" meant a called out group of believers. It comes from the Greek word "ekklesia," and the Jews had a Hebrew word, "kahal," which was comparable to "ekklesia." "Ekklesia" is the word that was used by the Septuagint translators whenever they came to the Greek word "kahal," which meant a congregation--an assembly of believers who are gathered together. The church, we found, began on the day of Pentecost with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I want to stress to you that, again, there is no connection between the Church and Judaism. The church began on the day of Pentecost. It will end at the rapture. It has lasted now almost 2,000 years. We know not how much longer it will last, but the church age is an intercalation. The word "intercalation" was a favorite word of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer to describe the fact that the church age was an insertion within God's program which insertion was never revealed in the Old Testament. For that reason, we said that the church was a mystery. The word "intercalation" appealed to Dr. Chafer because it means that there is no connection with what came before, nor any connection with what comes after. It's just something you stick in. It's just inserted. You just take something; split it apart; and, put something else in that has no relationship to what came before or after.

So this age of the church is a distinctive era in God's dealing with mankind. And I must again stress to you that the Pauline doctrine of the church is second in importance only to his revelation concerning salvation by grace. It is through Paul that we have these two great doctrines in the fullness of their revelation: salvation by grace; and, the doctrine of the church in the age of grace. These two doctrines came in their fullness through Paul, and that's why you find them primarily in his epistles. The doctrine of the church and the age of grace is second in importance to that concerning salvation. So, it's very important that you understand what the church is; what it is all about; how it is constituted; and, how God functions in this age. You will not begin to enter into your heritage as a believer; you will not begin to be able to function according to the techniques of the Christian life that keep us stable and moving ahead in the Lord's service without all the crises ups and downs; and, you will never be able to do this until you begin with an understanding of the church as it fits in the age of grace.

Paul's gospel (or his good news) that he referred to included these two features: salvation by grace; and, the church age. Both of these doctrines came to Paul by direct revelation from God, and they are detailed in his epistles. You can read about that in Galatians 1:11-12 and in Ephesians 3:1-6.

**The Purpose of the Church**

So we want to take up in this session, on this background, the purpose of the church. I'll begin by telling you what is *not* the purpose of the church, but which people commonly think is the purpose of the church today. It is not the purpose of the church to fulfill Israel's promised covenant blessings. God made certain covenants--agreements with his people, Israel. One of them, the Mosaic Covenant, was conditional. It said, "If you will do this, then I will do this." However, God also made other covenants which were unconditional that did not depend on Israel's obedience. God did say that, "If you are disobedient under these promises, you will be disciplined. However, the time will come when I will bring you around, as a nation, to the fulfillment and the entering into the full enjoyment of the blessings of these covenants."

These covenants include the Palestinian, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenant. Up to the time of the birth of Christ, what these covenants promised to Israel had never been fulfilled. Jesus Christ, as a matter of fact, came to bring to fulfillment these promises, which included that a king would be ruling forever over Israel from his throne in Jerusalem. They included the fact that they would have eternal possession of the land that had been promised to them through Abraham. They would never lose it again. This land would extend from the Nile to the Euphrates River. They've never held that. They promised spiritual blessings--the spiritual blessings of the new birth and of the filling of the Holy Spirit. They promised that Israel would be the leading nation in a world of peace and prosperity, and that as that leading nation, she would be the source to all the world of the knowledge of God. That has never been fulfilled, and she is obviously not the leading nation of the world today. Also, we are obviously not in a world of peace and prosperity. Many other promises were made, none of which were fulfilled, of this nature, up to the death of Christ.

So, Jesus came to fulfill these covenant promises, and thereby to provide the basis for salvation. In Luke 2:30, we read, "My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Within this verse, "A light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel," we have revealed the two aspects of the mission of Christ when he came to this earth. He came to bring something to the gentiles, in the way of salvation. He came to bring the glory of the fulfillment of the covenants, which included salvation, to Israel.

Jesus Christ, as you know, was rejected by the Jews, and He was crucified. So, the Jewish kingdom that He came to inaugurate was postponed. It was not dismissed--just postponed. The Jews will yet realize every one of these promises, and they will yet have a kingdom. When they did reject the Lord, He turned to a new mission, which was the building of the church--His body and His bride. God's purpose today is not, therefore, to fulfill these covenant promises. This is not the age of the building of the kingdom. Sometimes you hear preachers who like to use that phrase, "building the kingdom." There is no such thing going on today. God is not building the kingdom. The whole kingdom aspect of Scripture has been set aside. What He is building is something totally different and totally unrelated to the kingdom promised in Scripture. The thing He is building is the church. Israel's kingdom has been postponed because of the rejection of her King, Jesus Christ (Acts 1:6-7). Israel's promises are yet to be fulfilled apart from the church program (Romans 11:25-27).

**Grace**

So, first of all, let's get the picture. God's program today is the out-calling of the church, a new body of believers from Jew and gentiles who will be related to Jesus Christ His son as His body. He is the head and the bridegroom, and we are His body (and will be His bride in heaven). You can read about this in Ephesians 2:18 and Romans 10:12-13. God is, in this age, building His Son's church. This is done on the principle of grace. The church is the product of grace alone. Grace, as you know, is the unearned blessing of God as the result of the death of Christ. It has freed God to act in the fullness of His love.

We as Christians are to show forth the glories of God's grace, Ephesians 2:6-7 tell us. The death of Christ removed all limitations of what God wanted to do for us. The only limitations now are those that are negative responses to His word imposed upon us. Salvation under this system is a free gift, and there is no human obligation attached to that salvation to earn it or to keep it. You don't get any credit because you accept it. Faith is a non-meritorious act. It's simply accepting what God has provided. God has declared all of us under sin in order to remove any possibility of anybody misunderstanding that you could approach God with any merit. Galatians 3:22 has condemned us all under sin.

So, if God's church is created by grace, this has to be the New Testament method of dealing in the local church structure. We're not going to get into the local church in this session, but we are in the sessions to come. We're going to come to battle with the greatest fight which is going on in church circles today, and that is the question about authority. The line of debate of how a church is structured, and how the lines of responsibility are conducted. I can tell, you as a preview, that they are very very defective--far from the scriptural pattern. Once the apostles left us with their absolute spiritual authority, the roof caved in very quickly upon the local church operation and the local church concept. We're going to go into that in the future, but whatever we do on the local basis has to be done on the principle of grace. This is in contrast to the Old Testament works and legalism way of life; that is, doing things to get God's blessing.

Grace in salvation and grace in the Christian life is the rule now. This is because through grace, God has already blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. This has to be our guiding principle in the local church. Therefore, grace has to determine how we preach the Word. We have to appeal to you on the basis of believers who already are perfect in Christ; and, on the basis of believers who have every blessing and everything you could ever ask for--it is only your entering into it. That's the only question that confronts you. We must appeal to you on a different basis than those in the Old Testament when the prophets spoke to them. They would say, "If you behave, God will reward you. If you don't behave, God will not reward you."

The magnificence of grace is that God says, "Whether you behave or not, I'm going to reward. Now if you don't behave, I'm going to discipline you, and I'm going to bring you around. But you are my child. You're the apple of my eye. You have a special relationship to My Son. Even though you have a despicable old sin nature, you are related to My Son as His bride. Therefore I love you with all the capacity of infinite love."

Therefore, we preach to you as those who stand in that grace position. It determines how we secure finances for the Lord's work. We have to gather money in this assembly in a way that you are free to act in privacy and without any false appeals given to you. If you want to know how to conduct yourself with your money, then get the audio recordings that are free and available to you on the doctrine of grace giving. It is considerably different than what you might think it is, and what you commonly hear. Grace has to determine the kind of invitation we give to salvation. Salvation is a matter of belief. It is not a matter of public confession. It is a matter of a decision in your mentality, which the Bible calls your "heart"--not some public move which you make which will confuse and distract you from the real issue. Those of us who went hoofing it down an aisle know how dangerously close we came (and I'm humanly speaking) to slipping right by salvation--the very thing that we were looking for. Those of us that God has called are going to find our way in some other way, even if some idiot misdirects us at the strategic point when we are interested in entering the family of God.

How we receive members into the local church has to be based upon grace. We must consider grace in how we treat the priesthood of you as believers--that we recognize that right living is the norm. However, your living is as unto the Lord, and it is your business and your responsibility as to how you live, except as your living affects the structure of this church organization. Otherwise, we stay out of your business, and you stay out of other people's business.

Now there are some people that are no longer around this church once it was made clear to them that they had to mind their own business, and that they couldn't go around trying to act as priests for other believers. They were the kind of power hungry old sin natures that they just couldn't stand that, so they had to find themselves someplace else where they could go around and be pushy into other believers' business. That violates the principle of grace.

It determines how we treat the visitors in our service. I cringe when I think of some things that are done. I was in one recently where they spent a considerable amount of time in the morning service saying, "Now, how many of you are from Indiana?" I thought that if they're going to do that, they could really have added a beautiful touch if they had the lady at the organ playing, "Indiana, My Indiana." And then they said, "How many of you are from a foreign country, Texas?" They were being cute up there. But again, you could just hear, "The eyes of Texas are upon you," and everybody standing and sharing. Mind you, these are people who have come to worship God, and we're having a roll call of the states. You can go to the Democratic convention and have that. This is kind of pathetic stuff, and we're all guilty of this. I cringe when I think of some of the things I used to do, as I will later cringe at some of the things I now do, as I learn better about grace relative to people who come in the service, and treating them with respect in their priesthood.

How we view authority and leadership in the local church has to be by grace. There are lines of authority. There are lines to be respected. There are lines to be obeyed, and there is a God to be recognized as being in supreme command, who places and who removes. We deal with grace with all the old sin nature failures of our church members. There are no heroes in the Christian life, including in the local church, or from the best of leadership down to the worst. There is an old sin nature, and therefore, like the Lord said to the rich young ruler, "There is none good. And if you are calling me good, you are suggesting that I am God, young fellow, because only God does not have an old sin nature, and therefore only God is good."

So the purpose of the church is to form a special group of believers on the principle of grace in this intercalated inserted age into God's program with the Jews, unrelated to that program--a special body of believers who will forever be related to Jesus Christ in a unique way. When you get to heaven, you will not be in the same relationship to the Lord Jesus that Abraham; David; even Adam; or, any of the Old Testament saints are. Yours will be a unique, wonderful, intimate, close relationship of a specified nature that only deals with those in this age. We have been fortunate. We have been honored to have been born in the age of grace.

**The Church Was a Mystery**

This church truth has been revealed to us in Scripture. I've already pointed out to you that the church is never found in the Old Testament Scripture. Because it is never found in the Old Testament, it is distinct from Judaism. In the New Testament, the church is called a "mystery" as far as its relationship to the Old Testament goes. In Romans 16:25, we read, "Now to Him that is of the power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery* which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandments of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."

Here we have the Scriptures referring to the church as a "mystery" in the Old Testament. The Greek word for mystery is "musterion." You can see that it is simply transliterated from the Greek into the English. In English, the word "mystery" connotes something that we can't understand. We don't comprehend something, and we say, "Oh that's a mystery to me." However, that is not what the Greek word means. A mystery in Scripture means something that is a truth which has been unrevealed in the Old Testament, but which is later made known in the New Testament. It is something that was hidden in the Old Testament, but is now exposed for light to shine upon it for our understanding in the New Testament.

The church as such, however, is not called a mystery in the New Testament. However, its main features are. For example, one of the main features of the church is the fact that Jews and gentiles are joined together in one body. Ephesians 3:1-11 tell us about that. Jew and gentile are joined together in one body in Christ. In the Old Testament, such a thing was inconceivable--that a Jew and gentile would ever be related spiritually. You know from your Bible history the troubles that the early Church had over accepting gentiles into the church. It took a counsel that you can read about in Acts 15 to finally decide, "Yes, God is bringing gentiles--these dogs, as the Jews called them--into the church. They're part of us in the body of Christ--one with us in the Lord." Furthermore, these two are joined as equals.

In the Old Testament, the gentiles were promised salvation. That's true. They were also promised blessings in the millennium, but only under the Jews. They were not promised this as coequals with the Jews. This one body of Jews and gentiles is called, in Ephesians 1:22-33, the church. There was also the fact of Christ indwelling every believer in Colossians 1:24-27, and this is called a mystery. The Jew and Gentile in one body is called a mystery. Christ indwelling every believer, which is true only of the church age, that's called a mystery. The fact of the church being related to Christ as His bride, that is called a mystery in Ephesians 5:22-23.

Israel was viewed as the wife of Jehovah--the estranged wife. She was not viewed as the bride. This was a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament. The fact of the rapture of people being caught away alive to meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)--that was a mystery, we're told. The Jews only knew about resurrection. They only knew about dead people coming back to life. They never heard about people walking around on this earth, and one day all of a sudden they're caught up, and taken into the presence of God alive. That was a mystery. That's one of the main features about the church. None of these internal realities were revealed in the Old Testament. The Jews were only promised external manifestations of Christ. These internal realities were never promised to them. All of these things were secrets--mysteries--later revealed.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as you know, had two advents. The first He has already performed. The second is yet to come. We may view these as two mountain peaks. 1 Peter 1:11 tells us that the prophets of the Old Testament had a difficulty understanding what was being revealed to them concerning the coming of Christ. This was because as they read the prophecies which God gave them, they found that Jesus Christ was coming under two aspects. First, He was coming as the suffering Lamb of God, and He was also coming in glory as the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah. 1 Peter 1:11: "Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."

We know today that Christ came first in suffering as the lamb, and He is coming in glory as the lion. As they stood and looked at this prophetic truth, they saw it all as one peak, so to speak, of the mountain. They didn't realize that there were two mountain peaks. They just saw this as one peak: here was an event; and, here was an event, and they saw them right together. If you have ever climbed mountains, you get to a certain level, and you look ahead, and you do see two peaks. It appears to you that these are two bumps on the same mountain. Yet, as you get up to the first hump, and get to the summit, you suddenly realize that that other bump is at a distance, maybe a mile or more away with a valley in between.

What they did not realize in the Old Testament, because the church was a mystery, is that Christ was going to come two times: once as a suffering lamb, when He was rejected; but, a second time as the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah when He would be accepted and He would reign in His glorious millennium rule over all the earth. In between was that church age. That was the mystery. That's what was not revealed. That's what they didn't see, and that's why it was confusing to them--the revelation that they received.

The Old Testament prophecy only deals with Israel. Get that straight. The Old Testament only deals with Israel. It never says one single thing about the church. For that reason, the church never appears. Yet, as God talks about His program for the Jewish people, He comes in His revelation to this first peak--the death of Christ. Now he has something more to say to them because, from here on, comes the period of the tribulation and the period of the millennium. He has much to reveal about this. So what is God the Holy Spirit going to do when he talks to the prophet? Well, what happens is that the prophecy, when it comes to the death of Christ, just stops; or, the prophecy, if it continues, leaps over the church age and it starts talking about the tribulation or the millennium.

If you are an Old Testament reader, you read along, and you read about this factor of the Savior coming--the Messiah coming--in His suffering lamb quality, and what was going to happen. Then all of a sudden, you're reading about the tribulation or millennium. You wouldn't know that there was a separation between them because the church was a secret never to be revealed. I stress this in order to make it clear to you that the church is absolutely unrelated in every way to Judaism. It never even showed up in the slightest degree in the Old Testament Scripture.

If the church is the full blossom from Israel, the bud, then we open the door to all of these legalistic practices of Judaism which are so often imposed upon Christians today. You've heard preachers say, "How many of you will receive Christ as your savior? Raise your hand." This is a public spectacle technique. "Every member a tither." The tithe was the Old Testament income tax which has nothing to do with Christians. "If you don't behave yourself, and if you don't give the money to the Lord, he's going to take it away from you by wrecking your car." This is the old technique, "Be good and behave yourself, or I'm going to hit you." You can go on and on. You know what they are.

All of this stems from the idea that the Old Testament carries over into the New Testament, and that the church is the fulfillment of Israel's promises. The similarities that do exist between Israel and the church do not prove identity or relationship. A dog and a horse both have four feet, but they're not the same animal. The differences make the two mutually exclusive. There are some very significant differences between Israel and the church such that they are in no way the same and in no way related. So the Old Testament revelation just left gaps. When it came to the church age, the Old Testament just left a gap, and then it went on.

In the Gospels, you have no reference to the church age, except in two places. The first reference is in Matthew 16:18, where the Lord stood on gentile ground in Caesarea Philippi and announced that He was going to build His church. Then the second reference is in the Upper Room discourse, the night before He died, in John chapters 13-17, where we have pure church truth. However, other than that, you find nothing about the church in the gospels. The gospels are the fulfillment and the continuation--they're the end of the Old Testament. They are the conclusion of the Old Testament era. So until the time of the Lord's ministry on earth, the church was a complete mystery (Ephesians 3:1-10).

**Israel's Timetable**

Israel was given a timetable for its history to end. I want to show you how this works, and how the Old Testament Scriptures simply left gaps where the church could be put in. In Daniel 9:24-27, I think that all of you are acquainted with the fact that Daniel was given a timetable for the completion of God's program with the Jews. God said to Daniel, "I am going to deal with the Jewish people for 490 more years, and then I will be through. Now this timetable began when the command was given by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem. You may read about that in Nehemiah 2. King Artaxerxes of the Medo-Persian Empire gave the command to rebuild Jerusalem. That was in 445 B.C., and the prophetic clock started ticking of this 490 years that God had allotted to His people Israel.

Scholars who have worked with chronology have demonstrated conclusively, that 483 years clicked off of this timetable, and that brought us to the death of Christ upon the cross. With the death of Christ, and the formal complete rejection by Israel of their Messiah, God's program with the Jews stopped. The timetable just came to an end. Only 483 years has been fulfilled. Daniel 9:26 describes this as the time when the Messiah was cut off. That is, He was rejected and killed. You can see that you have seven years there that are yet left unfulfilled of the total promised. The Scriptures indicate this break, with the cutting off of the Messiah, because between the 483rd year and the 484th year has been inserted the whole church age. That's where it comes in.

When Daniel wrote, he didn't understand that the expression "the Messiah would be cut off" was indicating a break in God's program that he had promised of this 490 years with the Jewish people. He didn't understand that between year 483 and 484 of that program, the church age was going to be inserted. That's exactly what, from our perspective, we realize now has happened.

In Luke 4, we have one of the dramatic examples of how the Old Testament leaves gaps for the church without actually revealing the church. It's a mystery, but there is room allotted for it. In the passage beginning with Luke 4:16, we're told about Jesus Christ coming from His baptism and returning to His hometown of Nazareth. He came to Nazareth, where he'd been brought up, and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. When it came worship day, the Lord Jesus was in the place of worship--the synagogue, as we ought to be in church:

"And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives; and, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'" And there He stops. Verse 20 then goes on to say that He closed the book; handed it back to the minister; and, then He began explaining to the people, saying to them, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." Then He gave an expository sermon on that passage.

The result was a riot in the synagogue. There was nothing but negative volition response. They said, "Who are you to come in here and talk to us about this Scripture being fulfilled. You're nothing but a kid who lives down the street, whose father is a carpenter, and we know who you are. We've seen you run around the streets all the days since you were growing up as a teenager. They became so infuriated by the things that He said to them, that they stormed out of the synagogue, and Jesus walked to the top of a cliff, and the mob stormed up after Him to hurl Him over to His death. He simply moved out from among them. The whole circumstance of this revelation was something dramatic--that He on this first occasion back home should have said, "This Scripture is now fulfilled in your hearing this day."

Let's actually look at what Jesus was reading. In Isaiah 61, He had read from the first two verses. This is what he was reading. You'll notice that Isaiah 61 says, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted (all of which was part of his First Advent ministry); to proclaim liberty to the captives in the opening of prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Then, you will notice there is a comma, and the rest of the verse says, "And the day of the vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn." Then it goes on from there.

So you notice a very strange thing happened. While the Lord read from this Old Testament passage, He came to this comma and stopped reading, right there in the middle of a sentence. Why? Because "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and all that had come before it" was what He fulfilled at his First Advent. However, when He takes up the phrase "the day of the vengeance of our God" and all that follows after this is a description of what's going to happen at the second peak when he comes as the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah--when He comes in judgment. The First Advent was not an advent in judgment. He came as the meek and lowly lamb to bring salvation, and to do all the things that He said here preceding this phrase "the day of the vengeance of our God." This was the acceptable year of the Lord."

However, "the day of the vengeance of our God"--that was yet to come. Before it arrived, the church age was to be inserted. So we see how beautifully even the Lord, here on His first time back in the synagogue, reads a Scripture, and He's going to give an exposition, the very place that he stopped points out to us that something important is tied up in that little comma. The thing that's tied up in it is the whole church age. This alone should demonstrate to you that the church has nothing to do with the Old Testament; with Judaism; or, with Israel as a program.

If you sat and read this in Isaiah, you would never know that there is a difference. You would never have grasped the distinction. That's why it was a secret--a mystery. Yet, not one part of the passage after the comma has been fulfilled to this day. Not one iota of the passage after the comma has been realized to this day.

Another example that shows the gap in the Old Testament is in Daniel 9:26-27. In verse 26, we have the prediction of the rejection of Christ as the Messiah by the Jews, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Verse 27 leaps over and tells us about the rule of the antichrist during the seven-year tribulation. There's a gap between verse 26 and verse 27. So we know from other Scriptures that the rejection of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem have already taken place, but that the coming of the antichrist has not yet taken place, because that doesn't take place until the church is removed. So between verses 26 and 27 in Daniel 9 is the church age, though it is not so indicated in the reading of Daniel 9.

So we have tried to establish for you here, concerning the church universal, that we have the purpose of God in this age to call out this special group of people of which you are a part for His Son. You are to be uniquely related to His Son. The principle of your relationship to him is grace. This truth was never revealed in the Old Testament. It was a complete secret, and it was revealed only later in the New Testament. Constantly, we have in the Old Testament, places left where the church age would be inserted.

This, for you who are believers, is a very exciting prospect someday to find yourself related to the Lord in this way. If you are not a Christian, or you've been sitting around search for a long time imagining that you are some kind of a good religious person, you have no part in what we have talked about. And yet, you could be a part of this body. We would urge upon you the realization that you do not follow the pattern of the Jews who rejected the very Savior that they waited so long for, but that you accept Christ who has come. Through His death upon the cross, He died spiritually and he died physically in order to fully satisfy all the justice of God against you and your sin. So that now you are perfectly free. That's what the age of grace means--that God is free to love you if you will permit Him to do so by accepting His Son. If you will open your response to Him and accept Him as your Savior, you will enter the body of Christ. All that we've been describing will be yours by receiving that Savior.

Shall we pray. Our Father, we pray that believers will respond with a great tenderness to the fact that you have been so merciful and so kind as to include us in Your Son's family. We pray that for those who are outside of that family that their minds might reach out in acceptance of this gospel offer, and that they may enter the family of Your Son. We thank you, Father, for this gathering and this fellowship. We thank you for the patient attention of this assembly. We pray that their hearts would be tremendously profited; their souls strengthened; and, their minds clarified with the vision and the direction of Your service that You have for them because they were here. For we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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