

## Biography - Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1843-1921) is undoubtedly best known today as the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, and for his "Systematic Theology". He is a well known premillennial dispensationalist writer and speaker.

Chafer was raised in a good Christian home, his father was a Congregational minister, but died when Chafer was only eleven. His mother managed a boarding house so that Chafer could attend college, but Chafer's education at this time was limited to three semesters centered on music. It was while enrolled in Oberlin College that he met his wife, Lorraine. Chafer began a ministry of traveling music and evangelism, and also held positions as a music director, an interim pastor, and an assistant pastor.

In 1901, Chafer moved to Northfield, Massachusetts and began taking part in the Northfield Bible conferences. It was through these conferences that Chafer became involved with many spiritual leaders of that day, particularly including Dr. C. I. Scofield. It was in association with Scofield that Chafer changed the direction of his ministry from that of an itinerate evangelist to a Bible teaching role. This included an encompassing involvement in the Bible conference movement, and by 1909 Chafer became president of the Northfield Conference. Chafer was to maintain close association with Scofield for two decades; the last twenty years of Scofield's life.

During the first ten years with Scofield, Chafer began teaching at the Mt. Hermon School for Boys and published his first three books; "Elementary Outline Studies in the Science of Music", "Satan", and "True Evangelism."

Chafer soon moved to New Jersey where he became a staff member of the New York School of the Bible. This was Scofield's institute which distributed his correspondence course. Chafer took a position in which he traveled extensively, teaching at conferences. In 1913, Scofield founded the Philadelphia School of the Bible. Chafer was instrumental in this work, chiefly being involved in the writing of the curriculum for the school. After the establishment of this new school, Chafer returned to press with five more books between 1915 and 1921.

In 1922, Chafer moved to Texas to take the pastorate of the First Congregational Church which Scofield had founded in 1882. Chafer also became even more active as a conference speaker, and became a general secretary for the Central American Mission missionary agency, also founded by Scofield. In 1924 Chafer founded the Evangelical Theological College, later to be renamed as Dallas Theological Seminary. Chafer served for the rest of his life, almost thirty years, as the school's president and professor of systematic theology. Chafer eventually resigned from the church pastorate and the mission agency, but began writing more and remained very active in Bible conferences.

One very significant work of Chafer was "Major Bible Themes". This was written in 1926 and was the precursor to his greater work, "Systematic Theology" which was published in 1948. Also contributing to Chafer's "Systematic Theology" was the fact that the school took over the publication of "Bibliotheca Sacra". This is a journal which had been published since the early 1800's, and for which Chafer wrote many articles which contributed directly to his theology set. "Major Bible Themes" was revised after Chafer's death by one of his

successors, John Walvoord, in 1974 and stands as a single volume or "lite" version of "Systematic Theology" which is an eight volume set. The theology expressed and carefully supported in these works are pretribulation, premillennial, and dispensational in frame. They are based on a foundation of the sovereignty of God and the inerrancy of Scripture, and include such stances as predestination, divine election, human plight, and take a Christ-centered approach to the Bible.

A second primary contribution of Lewis Sperry Chafer was the result of his heart for evangelism. Through his lifetime of evangelistic efforts, there must be countless numbers of men and women who God used Chafer to reach personally. Besides this, his experiences in evangelism are related in three published works; "True Evangelism", "Grace", and "Salvation". These themes are also echoed in his theological works. Of these, "True Evangelism" is actually a critique of evangelistic methods which Chafer encountered in his ten year period as an itinerate evangelist. Chafer was succeeded at Dallas Theological Seminary by John Walvoord and Charles Ryrie.