

Lewis Sperry Chafer, 1871-1952

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This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. The occasion serves as an excellent opportunity to recall the life and ministry of this servant of God, and, in so doing, to be reminded of the Lord's grace and faithfulness to His people.

Biographical Sketch

Dr. Chafer was born on February 27, 1871, in Rock Creek, Ohio,¹ where his father, Thomas Franklin Chafer, was minister of the local Congregational church. His father died when he was eleven years old,² and young Chafer was left with the responsibility of caring for the family farm.

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He attended the nearby New Lyme Academy from 1885 to 1888, where his older brother, Rollin, and his sister, Maryette, also were in school. Chafer's biographer states that "there was an orchestra or choral society at that institution and as a young student he was there first introduced to the serious study of music, in which art he became remarkably proficient."³ In 1889, at the age of eighteen, he entered Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music where he studied for three years.

As a youth Chafer heard the simple gospel message of the grace of God preached, and he personally placed his faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ This decision was to have a profound effect upon the rest of his life.

While a student at Oberlin, Chafer met "Ella Loraine Case, a devoted student of music and a deeply spiritual-minded young lady who later became his beloved wife and faithful lifelong companion and coworker."⁵ The two were married in 1896.

During the 1890s, Chafer travelled extensively as an evangelistic singer and song leader. Both "Mr. and Mrs. Chafer became widely used in evangelistic meetings both here and abroad—he as a soloist and song leader, she as a talented organist."⁶

By 1897, Chafer was impressed with the call of God toward evangelistic preaching. A struggle with tuberculosis at this time deepened his dedication to service for Christ,⁷ and for the next seventeen years the Chafers were engaged in a musical and evangelistic ministry. During this time Chafer was ordained to the ministry, a...

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