

CHRIST and the CHURCH



PART 6

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THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST (Ephesians 3:1-13)

A. THE MYSTERY CONCEALED (3:1-6)

1. Definitions

- *Mystery* (Gr. *mystērion*): something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain.
- *Jew*: generally a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ("Jew" → Judah").
- *Gentile* (Gr. *ethnos*): a non-Jew.

2. The Mystery

- How was God going to bring universal blessing (Abrahamic Covenant, Gen. 12:3)?
- How was God going to bring salvation to all races (Isa. 49:6)?

3. The Problem

- Jews and Gentiles were hostile toward each other (Eph. 2:14).
- Racial contempt between Jews and Greeks.
 - The Jews despised the Gentiles as worthless in the sight of God, and the Greeks despised all other nations seeing them as Barbarians.
 - Gentiles occupied the land of Israel which was given to the Jews (Gen. 15:18).

a) Jews felt superior to Gentiles.

- They were chosen by God to be a special nation as part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2).
- They physically marked their body (circumcision) as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:10).
- God gave them the Mosaic Law (Exodus 20).
- God's presence was made known in their tabernacle/temple (1 Chron. 6:48).
- An eternal king would come through their lineage (2 Sam. 7:13-16).
- They practiced additional strict religious laws--traditions/oral laws (Mark 7:4).

b) Gentiles felt superior to Jews.

- Because the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King, while the Gentiles "honored" their kings.
- Militarily, Gentiles dominated the Jews for centuries (Assyrians, Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and Romans).
- Gentiles occupied the land of Israel and ruled over the Jews.

c) Cultural factors.

- Jews spoke mostly Aramaic and Hebrew.
- Gentiles spoke mostly Greek, and some Latin (Romans).
- Jews worshipped in synagogues, Gentiles worshipped in pagan temples (Artemis, etc.).
- Jews worshipped one God (Deut. 6:4-7), Gentiles worshiped many gods (Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, etc.).

B. THE MYSTERY NOW REVEALED (3:7-13)

1. Paul now turns to the very heart of the letter—the mystery or secret was that the love and mercy and grace of God were not meant for the Jews alone but for all mankind.
2. "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6).
3. This was a new discovery.
4. No one at that time had ever dreamed that God's privileges were for all people.
5. It was Paul that was enabled to discover this first—it was given to him by God!
6. He regarded himself as the recipient of a new revelation and his excitement about this can be seen in these verses.

(1:5) God predestined...

...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (1:10; 2:22)

(1:15) For this reason...
I pray that you may know the hope to which he has called you (1:15, 18)...

- ✓ You are alive (2:5), not dead (2:1)
- ✓ You are seated with Christ (2:6), not separate from him (2:12)
- ✓ You were excluded from Israel (2:12)
- ✓ You were foreigners to the covenants of promise (2:12)
- ✓ You are now near, not far away (2:13, 17)
- ✓ You are at peace, not hostile toward each other (2:14-16)
- ✓ You are one, not two (2:14, 15)

Consequently...

- ✓ You are fellow citizens, not foreigners or aliens (2:19)
- ✓ You are members of God's household, the church (2:19)
- ✓ You, the church, are built on Christ the chief cornerstone (2:20)

(3:1) For this reason...
The mystery was made known to me (3:3)...that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel (3:6), which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11)

Though God had promised universal blessing through Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and Isaiah predicted salvation to all races (Isa. 49:6), how God would do this was a mystery even to the greatest prophets.

This was unknown in previous generations (3:5)...it was a mystery to them, but later revealed to Paul.