

EPHESIANS: PRECISION THINKING FOR ACCURATE THEOLOGY

SESSION 11 | EPHESIANS 3:3-12

THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY | EPHESIANS 3:3-6

- Verse 3 –
 - The proper understanding of Eph. 3:3-7 is essential. I am convinced that if one does not understand the mystery that God made known to Paul by revelation, then that person does not have their theology straight, and it will show in their doctrine over and over again.
 - A Biblical **mystery** is something that can only be known **by revelation**. After it is revealed, it is no longer a mystery. The dissemination of the information is not a revelation, nor is it any longer a mystery, but rather the dissemination of the information about what was a former mystery. Therefore, if God made the mystery known to Paul by Revelation, then no other person had received the mystery prior to Paul.

The word mystery needs a brief definition. It is not something mysterious, but it means that which was unknown, hidden from man, till it pleased God to make it known by revelation.

Arno C. Gaebelin, *God's Masterpiece: An Analytical Exposition of Ephesians 1-3* (New York: "Our Hope" Publication Office, 1913), 118.

- The Apostles were given **the mysteries of the kingdom** (Matt. 13:11).
 - Paul wanted others to know the mystery (Rom 11:25).
 - Paul states that the Gospel which we preach is **according to the revelation of the mystery** (Rom 16:25).
 - Paul declares that the mystery was **kept secret since the world began** (Rom. 16:25, Col. 1:26).
 - Paul says that we are **stewards of the mysteries of God** (1 Cor. 4:1).
 - When did Paul previously write about the mystery **afore in few words**? Likely this is a reference to Romans 16:25-26, where Paul did not give the means of revelation as he does here.
- Verse 4 - As stated in the note on v. 3, likely a reference to the mystery as mentioned in Romans 16:25. Concerning Ephesians 1:9, the mystery spoken of there is of **the dispensation of the fulness of times** (Eph. 1:10), not the mystery of the age of grace.
- Verse 5 –
 - It seems time that the church come to realize that the mystery of Paul was **not made known** before it was revealed to Paul. The words of these verses are clear, yet the denial of them is legendary.
 - From Robert P. Lightner, "Christ, His Church, His Crown, His Cross" -
"Paul says the mystery was not made known in other ages "as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5). The "as" clause may be taken either in a restrictive sense, meaning the truth was partially revealed before, or it may be taken in a descriptive sense, indicating it was totally unrevealed before. Since the same truth was declared by the same writer on another occasion (Col. 1:25-26) without the "as" clause, it seems best to understand the phrase in Ephesians 3:5 in the descriptive sense. "

- Verse 6 –

- This is the mystery revealed! It will not only be the Jews, but also the Gentiles who are "joint-heirs," "joint-body" and "joint-partakers" of God's promise in the Messiah, through the gospel.
- The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with promises for the nations, but 100% of them are *after* God has glorified Israel and given her first place among the nations. There is *never* a hint of **fellowheirs** nor that they would be **of the same body**. The idea of Jew and Gentile being of one Body is unheard of in the Hebrew Scriptures. That is, there is not even a hint of this dispensation prior to Paul. The prophets did not predict it, Jesus did not teach it, Peter did not proclaim it.
- Note that this does not replace the promises of God to Abraham and the nation of Israel that would come from him. This is a *new body*, not a new nation.

PAUL, THE APOSTLE OF THE MYSTERY | EPHESIANS 3:7-12

- Verses 7-8 –

- Paul literally says he is a *deacon* of the Gospel. His service of the Gospel comes as a **gift of the grace of God**. While all people have the opportunity to believe, and all believers have the opportunity serve the Gospel, the wording here is unique to Paul and his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles.
- Paul declares himself to be **least of all the saints** (Jewish believers) but nonetheless the one to **preach among the Gentiles**. This is not a false humility, but a true statement due to the fact that he was a persecutor of the saints long before becoming one.
- When Paul speaks of the **unsearchable riches of Christ**, he is making reference to the mystery previously hidden (thus unsearchable).
 - The Greek is ἀνεξιχνίαστος [anexichniastos], the negated form of *ichnos*, which is a footprint or track. Ichology is the study of "traces" to determine information about animals or past situations.
 - If Paul says that this mystery is **unsearchable**, one wonders why so many Bible teachers find *traces* of it prior to Paul.

- Verses 9-12 – *stay tuned!*