



bb-TBC-54

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Σ days to go	2
☰ Status	On Radar Ready!! Scheduled
☰ Working Title	The Mystery
↗ Project Home	
☰ Priority	
☰ Context	Bible Study Deliverable NLR Preaching
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Introduction

Last time...

Can we recreate Paul's thinking process and the revelation that brought it all together?

Not really, but we can consider some possibilities and we can identify some of the links in the chain.

So. God willing, this time we will try to identify some of the stepping stones in Paul's journey and the manner in which God revealed these things to him...

By Revelation

Paul uses the word 'mystery'. This does not mean that it was particularly mysterious but that it was a hidden secret to be revealed only to those who have been initiated into the secret. In many ways it might have been better to translate the word as 'a secret'. Paul makes some strong claims about this secret or 'mystery'. He claims that;

▼ Eph 3:4-5

...the mystery of Christ, which ***in other ages*** was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: Eph 3:4-5 NKJV.

This is so important that it will bear repeating. The 'secret' that Paul is about to unfold had not been made known in 'other ages' as it was now being made known, by the Spirit, to Christ's apostles and prophets. Paul is about to reveal a secret that

was not known, in its full scope, to Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel. However, this 'secret' was now being made known to Christ's apostles and prophets.

Something has happened here. A change has taken place. The full truth of many of those Old Testament prophets was not known even to those who gave the prophecies. This is a truth that Peter also states. Peter speaks of the predicted sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow and then adds that the prophets themselves

▼ 1 Pet 1:10-12

'inquired and searched carefully'

as they tried to understand the implications of their prophecies. Peter adds that it was revealed to those prophets that the things they were proclaiming were not for their own age but for another. (1 Pet 1:10-12)

The Secret is Out!

What then is the 'secret' that was largely hidden from previous generations of God's saints? The answer is very plain,

▼ Eph 3:5-9

...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the **Gentiles** the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; Eph 3:5-9 NKJV.

There it is, the secret is out! The Gentiles are to be included in the New Covenant! The new Israel is not just the remnant of the old Israel but has a hidden ingredient, a remnant from the Gentiles. It had been 'hidden' from 'the beginning of the ages' but now the secret is out.

Gentiles, outside the Covenant

The epistle to the Ephesians was probably a circular letter written to several churches in the same area of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. The churches in this area were predominantly Gentile, non-Jewish, in their congregations. Paul wanted

these people to understand the very great privilege that God had extended to them in the New Covenant and he spells out their previous disqualification very specifically;

▼ Eph 2:12

at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Eph 2:12 NKJV.

The Gentile nations had no covenant-rights in the way that God's ancient covenant people had had them. They had no share in the promises that God had made to the covenant people. This is one of the bleakest descriptions in the Scripture;

without Christ, aliens, strangers, no covenant promises, no hope, without God...

▼ Eph 2:13-15

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, Eph 2:13-15 NKJV.

"But now..." marks a watershed. Something has changed and it is what happened on the cross that has achieved the change.

One Flock and One Shepherd

In the work of the cross two things have become one. Not in Ezekiel's hands but through nail-pierced hands. From two 'old' things one 'new' thing has emerged. As a result of the work of the cross God has been able to start all over again with a 'new man' and in that new man Jew and Gentile meet without distinction as God's one,

new, people. Paul makes reference to the cross breaking down a middle wall of separation. Many have seen this as a reference to the balustrade in Herod's temple that separated Jew and Gentile and had inscribed on it the ominous words "Whoever is captured will have himself to blame for his subsequent death". This separated the 'Court of Israel' from the 'Court of the Gentiles'. I want to unpack this idea to understand just what Paul means when he says Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation.

In a parallel passage in Colossians he says;

▼ Col 2:13-14

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Col 2:13-14 NKJV.

Notice how he switches pronouns from 'you' to 'us'. In what way were 'you Gentiles' different to 'we Jews'? The difference was that 'handwriting of requirements'. In other words the written demands of God in Sinai's covenant Law. In Galatians Paul says that the Law was 'our' child-conductor to bring 'us' to Christ. Here, in Colossians, the law is 'the handwriting of requirements' against 'us'. To the Galatians Paul says 'we' Jews are no longer under a child-conductor now that faith has come. To the Colossians Paul says 'the handwriting of requirements that was against us' has been taken out of the way.

The Barrier is Down

It was the written code that created the real barrier between Jew and Gentile. It marked off the Sinai Covenant people as distinct from the whole earth and was a constant source of irritation and hostility between the Gentile and the Jew; an insurmountable barrier between Jew and Gentile. But in the cross that barrier of the 'hand-written requirements' has come to its end and God has made peace between the two.

▼ Eph 2:19-22

Now, says Paul, ...therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:19-22 NKJV.

That is the effect of a New Covenant; a new man, a new Israel, a new family of God, a new temple. Christ's death has fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law and now Jew and Gentile in Christ meet on common ground. Little wonder that Paul was so excited when God shared that secret.

Summary

In this chapter 19, The Mystery Unveiled, we traced the background and history of Paul. We noted his unique qualifications to be Christianity's "systematic theologian" but we also noted Paul's insistence that his understanding of the secret plan of God came by revelation and not native intelligence. We speculated on how Paul may have connected the separate parts of the mystery and his statement that other generations did not have the full revelation of what God was planning. Finally we saw that the issue that created the Old Covenant people, the Law, has been fulfilled in all its righteous requirements by Christ himself and that now Jew and Gentile are able to meet on new and common ground.

Bailey, Ron. The Better Covenant (p. 193-196). Kindle Edition.