

## **Ephesians 3:1-13 Answers** **The Mystery Hidden From Past Generations**

### **Overview:**

The letter to the saints in Ephesus can be divided into two parts:

Chapters 1-3 are theological (doctrine/belief); chapters 4-6 are practical (duty/behavior)

Chapters 1-3 concern the Wealth of the Believer; chapters 4-6 concern the Walk of the Believer.

### **Introduction:**

Finish this quip: “Birds of a feather — flock together”. That is a truism both in nature and with men.

Most churches are made up of the same types of people (a Spanish speaking church, a Chinese church, a rich church, a young church, a white church, a Messianic congregation, etc.). People feel more comfortable when they don't have to cross social or cultural boundaries. This is understandable. Yet every church should welcome any other believer no matter what his ethnic or cultural background. There is to be no exclusion.

The second paragraph of Ephesians 2 was written specifically to Gentile believers and pressed home the truth that in Christ there is peace between Jew and Gentile and that the two are now one new man. **Read 2:14-16.** Ephesians 3 is a continuation of this truth and is still directed at believing Gentiles.

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**\*\*\*\*What is the mystery of Christ (3:1-6)?** The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs (with the Jews) and members of the same body (with the Jews) and partakes of the promise (3:6).

**Paul started off by writing “for this reason” (3:1); for what reason?** This refers back to 2:11-22 and the truth that believing Gentiles are now accepted as full kingdom citizens together with the believing Jews.

### **How did Paul describe himself in 3:1?**

- 1. Why is it significant that Paul considered himself a prisoner of Christ rather than Caesar (3:1)?** It is a matter of divine perspective! Jesus essentially said the same thing to Pilate (that he had no authority over Jesus except what God had given him). We are to walk by faith, not by sight.
- 2. In what sense was Paul a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles (3:1)?** *See ahead to 3:8. Also see Galatians 1:16.* Paul was known as the apostle to the Gentiles (read 3:8) and he was in prison (probably in Rome) when he wrote this (along with Colossians, Philippians and Philemon). Had Paul not been roaming about the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, he probably would not have ended up in prison.

ESV **Galatians 1:16** (God) was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . .

**What assumption did Paul make in 3:2-3?** Paul assumed that his Gentile readers had heard that Paul had been given special stewardship from Jesus to take the Gospel to the Gentiles and that Jesus had made known to Paul the mystery of Gentile inclusion.

**Paul spent several years in Ephesus before leaving and later writing this letter. How could they not have heard this (3:2-3)?** See *Acts 19:10*. Sometimes in the Greek language, “if” actually means “since” (there is no doubt about it). Also, it had been a number of years since Paul left Ephesus; new converts had been added to the church and the church had spread out from Ephesus into the surrounding areas.

**Application:** Stewardship” (3:2), is from *oikonomia* (*oikos* = house; *nomos* = law; basis for “economics”). A steward takes care of someone else’s property. Each of us is a steward of the time, talents, gifts, etc. with which God has entrusted us. Even in prison, Paul made the most of his time by writing letters and witnessing to the guards!

**In general, what is a mystery (3:3)?** A mystery is a secret. Agatha Christie wrote murder mysteries (Who done it?) Churchill described Russia as a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. The mystery Paul mentions here is not incomprehensible, but was merely unknown until God was pleased to reveal it (it is a revealed secret).

**Where had Paul already “written briefly” (3:3) about his mystery?** See *1:9-10*.

**3. When Paul had previously “written briefly” (3:3) about this mystery (3:6), what did he say about it?** See *1:9-10*. In *1:9-10* Paul wrote without explanation that the mystery was to unite all things in Christ. Now, in *Ephesians 3*, he further explained that he meant Jew and Gentile united together in the church.

**What can we learn about the mystery from 3:4-5?** It was largely hidden to past generations of God’s people (during the Old Testament era)\* but “now” in the New Testament era it was fully revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets.

For example, God revealed to Abraham that all families on earth would be blessed in Him, but how this would be fulfilled was not clear until after Jesus came.

**4. Why do you suppose God hid the mystery to past generations (3:4-5)?** It was not time yet; Christ came in the fullness of time, at the right time. The Bible contains progressive revelation; God did not tell his people everything at once.

**Note:** For a second time in this letter Paul wrote of apostles and prophets, this time clearly with reference to New Testament prophets (2:20, 3:5). The next occurrence is in 4:11 (again with clear reference to New Testament prophets).

**5. Review: According to 3:6, what is the mystery?** See *2:14-16*. The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs (with the Jews) and members of the same body (with the Jews) and partakes of the promise (3:6).

**Secondary Application:** Paul expected them to understand “when you read this” (3:4). The authors of the New Testament assumed and expected their letters would be read and understood. **What church is infamous for trying to keep its members from reading the letters of the apostles?** The Roman Catholic Church did this. Commenting on this back in 1643, a London protestant wrote, “Here he confoundeth the papists on account of their cursed practice in taking away the key of knowledge — the reading of the Scriptures; in which fact they are like the Philistines putting out the eyes of Samson, and taking away the smiths, not leaving a weapon in Israel” (Eadie, p. 215).

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**\*\*\*\* Why did God make Paul a minister of the Gospel (3:7-13)?** Paul “was made” a minister of the Gospel to preach Christ to the Gentiles and to make known the revealing of the mystery (3:8-9). Notice the verb tense: Paul did not decide to become an apostle; Paul “was made” one by God.

Word Study: “minister” (3:7) is from *diakonos*, which literally referred to a table waiter. Paul saw himself as a servant, not an exalted official.

**6. Based on 3:7-8, what was the reason for Paul’s success as a minister of the Gospel?** Paul was enabled to minister the Gospel as a gift of God’s grace and by the working of God’s power. Yes, Paul worked hard, but ultimately the success was from God.

**Example:** Joseph was successful in Egypt not because he was so wise in and of himself, but because God enabled him to be successful in order to save the Hebrews. In fact, it could be argued that sometimes Joseph did very unwise things, yet God over-rode it to use him.

**7. Why did Paul consider himself to be the very least of all the saints (3:8)?** See *1 Corinthians 15:9*. No reason was given, but one reason Paul considered himself the least of the apostles is because he had persecuted the church.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 15:9** . . . I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

**8. Review: For what two reasons was Paul given grace (3:8-9)?** Paul was given grace to preach Christ to the Gentiles and to make known the revealing of the mystery (3:8-9).

**9. Why did Paul allude to the creation (3:9); what is the link between God’s creation of all things and the past concealment of the mystery?** Perhaps it is because the hiding and final revealing are by prearranged determination (Eadie, p. 230).

**10. Based on 3:10, what cosmic purpose was served when the hidden mystery was realized in the makeup of the church?** See *1 Peter 1:12*. The rulers and authorities in heavenly places are angels. Peter wrote that the angels are quite interested in God’s plan of redemption for mankind (1 Peter 1:12). That Jew and Gentile could and would accept each other as legitimate heirs of the kingdom was an aspect of God’s wisdom that the angels had apparently never considered. God’s kingdom decoupled from Israel exclusively and also hitched up to the Gentiles, a big change.

**According to 3:11, how long had God planned to bring Jew and Gentile together as His people?** It was all according to God's eternal purpose.

**11. It is stated in 3:12 that through faith in Jesus we have boldness and access with confidence. Based on the context, boldness with respect to what and access to what?** We have boldness as Gentiles to consider ourselves full kingdom citizens with confident access to the household/kingdom of God.

**What request did Paul have in 3:13?**

**What was Paul suffering (3:13)?** He was suffering imprisonment.

**12. Why would the Gentiles have been tempted to lose heart over Paul's suffering (3:13)?** Since Paul's imprisonment came as a result of his ministry to the Gentiles, perhaps they felt somehow responsible for his arrest. The book of Acts reveals that Paul had been arrested for taking an Ephesian Gentile named Trophimus to Jerusalem (he was accused of taking him into the Temple).

**13. In what sense was Paul's suffering their glory (3:13)?** Paul did it all for them. His persecution sort of proved the success of his ministry. Jewish fanaticism had not been able to stop Paul.

### So What?

**Paul started the next paragraph with "for this reason" (3:14), the same as in 3:1; for what reason?** See 2:11-22. As before, the reason was God's purpose to bring the Gentiles into His kingdom, making Jew and Gentile into one new man. Paul began a thought in 3:1 but got sidetracked and did not complete the thought until 3:14. "For this reason" (3:1, 14) Paul gave thanks to God. (It is good to know that I am not the only one who ever got distracted!). All the first paragraph is a parenthetical remark.

*At this point simply read Paul's prayer: 3:14-19.*

**What is the mystery of Christ that was hidden from past generations by was revealed to the apostles and prophets?** The mystery is that God's plan all along was to include Gentiles in His kingdom, making Jew and Gentile into one new man, one new body and fellow heirs.

**14. What contemporary application can you make from the revealed mystery?** There are to be no ethnic distinctions in Christ. Whereas it is true that birds of a feather flock together out of preference, no church should exclude or look down upon anyone of any ethnic background who has faith in Jesus.

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