

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

TEXT: EPH. 3:1-12

Introduction:

1. During most of the period of history recorded in the O.T., God was dealing primarily with the nation Israel.
2. All the way from Gen. 12, when God called Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees, all the way to the book of Malachi, the Bible centers almost exclusively on Abraham and his descendants through his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob.
3. This is one of the reasons why some Jews are somewhat proud and haughty (cf. 2:11-13). And because Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews were offended (cf. Acts 22:20-24).
4. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, He was rejected by Israel (cf. John 1:11). As a result of this rejection, God set aside the nation Israel temporarily as His chosen people.
5. We are now living in what is called “the church age” or “the age of grace” or the “dispensation of grace” (Eph. 3:2), whereby God is gathering together a people for His name among both the Jews and Gentiles.
6. After the rapture, God will resume His program with Israel nationally. In the meantime, God’s program is the local church (Eph. 3:10).
7. This is all a “mystery” (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9), i.e. something unknown and unheard of in O.T. times (cf. Rom. 11:25).

I. THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY

II. THE DEFINITION OF THE MYSTERY

III. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY

I. THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY (3:1-4).

1. Paul had not learned the mystery from anyone else, nor had he discovered it through study or research (cf. Gal. 1:15-17). It was “made known” to him by direct revelation from God (Eph. 3:3).
2. Paul “wrote afore in few words” (3:3), perhaps referring to Eph. 1:9-13 or other writings (cf. Rom. 16:25, 26; I Cor. 2:7).
3. This “mystery” involves a new dispensation (3:2). This refers to a stewardship. The grace of God had now reached out beyond the limit of the Jew to the Gentiles, and this stewardship, or trusteeship, had been given to Paul in order that he might dispense it to the Gentiles.

4. The household of God must be managed according to God's perfect plan. Therefore, it was a great privilege given to Paul when God entrusted His plan to him.
5. Paul was God's steward, charged with setting forth the great truth regarding the N.T. church. Today we are living in an age (or a dispensation) of grace, during which God is dealing with people on the basis of His grace (cf. John 1:17).
6. When we speak of the dispensation of grace, we do not mean to suggest that God did not demonstrate His grace in other dispensations. But this age stands in sharp contrast to the age preceding it (law).
7. The primary requisite of a steward is "that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:1, 2; cf. I Peter 4:10).

II. THE DEFINITION OF THE MYSTERY (3:5, 6).

1. Eph. 3:5 gives us the revelation of the mystery. Verse 6 give us the definition (cf. Scofield's notes).
2. This mystery was not revealed to Paul only. Our Lord revealed it to His disciples (John 10:16; cf. Acts 10:9-16).
3. A mystery:
 - A. "was not made known unto the sons of men..." (3:5). In other words, you will not find it in the O.T.
 - B. It "is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (3:5b). This is what we call inspiration (cf. II Tim. 3:16).
4. Remember that these are N.T. "apostles and prophets" (3:5; cf. 2:20; 4:11), not OT prophets.
5. Gentiles are now "fellow-heirs" (3:6). As far as the benefits and inheritance are concerned, we all share equally.
6. The OT prophets predicted that Gentiles would be converted (cf. Isa. 49:6). But the prophets did not explain how the Gentiles would be in the "same body" as the Jews (3:6).
7. Most of the O.T. prophecies deal with the millennial kingdom, not the church (cf. Isa. 60:3; 61:6; Zech. 8:23; 14:16).

III. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY

1. The apostle Paul was given by God a ministry to "make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery" (3:9).
2. God's plan is to give out the Gospel light to "all men" (3:9) through worldwide evangelism. This Scripture teaches that the evangelization of the world was a part of God's plan when He created the universe ("from the beginning of the world..." – 3:9b).

3. Since Paul had this ministry, he was a “minister.” In the Bible “minister” (3:7) means “servant.”
4. Paul was a humble servant (minister) of God (3:8; cf. I Cor. 15:9; I Tim. 1:15).
5. Paul’s ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, as Peter’s was primarily to the Jews (3:8; cf. Gal. 2:2, 8).
6. “The unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8) are very precious and cannot be found through science or psychology or politics or education or any way other than through faith.
7. This mystery is now being taught to the “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (3:10). The angels (fallen and elect) are actually learning something of the wisdom of God through the church.
8. “The church is to be God’s instrument in declaring to these rebellious and now usurping powers the divine purpose, and in administering their principalities after they have been useated and cast down” – John MacMillan (*The Authority of the Believer*).

CONCLUSION:

1. Those of us who have trusted Christ now have great privileges – “boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (3:12).
2. Let us exercise these privileges and boldly approach the throne of grace, confident that God will hear and answer our prayers.