

The Mystery

In our last issue we discussed that believers are partakers of the kingdom of God and that we are presently enjoying the spiritual blessings of the physical Millennium that is to come. Because the Church Age in which we are living is a preview of the Millennium, the Holy Spirit is being poured out on the Church just as it will be poured out during the Millennium.

We also talked about Jesus going from town to town preaching to the Jews and of how the Jewish leaders persecuted Him. Since the Jews would not receive Him, Jesus left the house of Israel and turned to the Gen- tiles. This is found in Matthew 13:1, "The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side."

Furthermore, He left the house of Israel empty, swept, and garnished. Like the man who had the unclean spirit cast out of him and did not then become born-again and filled with the Word, the house of Israel was open to satanic attack seven times worse than it had experienced before.

When Jesus sat by the sea side (i.e. went to the Gentiles), He taught in parables for the first time. This took the disciples by surprise. When they questioned Him about this, He answered, "...Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11).

In other words, those who had a heart that yearned after God could learn the mysteries of the parables and thereby understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The word "mystery" is an often misunderstood New Testament term. It is not, as many people think, something that God does not want us to know! God wants believers to understand what He is saying to them.

Mystery is a transliteration of the Greek word "musterion." It was brought almost letter for letter from Greek into English; however, its origin goes back farther than the Greek culture itself, to the ancient land of Babylon where men belonged to fraternities. Each fraternity had a teaching or philosophy known only to its members.

They would not tell anyone outside the group what the teachings were. The teachings were not a mystery to outsiders! A modern example of a fraternity is the Masons. College campuses also have fraternities and sororities, each having its own secrets.

We are somewhat familiar with one ancient fraternity because the Magi, or wisemen, belonged to it. Within the fraternity there was much knowledge about science and things of the earth. However, very little is known about them today because they were a fraternity and their teaching was a mystery. As in any fraternity, the members had to join the group to learn the teaching, but they were vowed to secrecy to tell no one else. Therefore, much of their knowledge was lost to mankind.

As this word mystery was brought into the New Testament, it still meant "something known only to the members of a fraternity." The New Testament mystery involved the largest fraternity that ever existed - the body of Christ! Furthermore, the secret initiation rite is, "I believe in my heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord and Savior."

Unlike ancient and present-day fraternities, we *want* outsiders to understand - they just can't! I Corinthians 1:23, tells us that what we preach is foolishness to the world. But, once an unbeliever goes through the "initiation," the Holy Spirit moves into him and he is then able to understand the mysteries.

Mystery, as used in the New Testament, simply means that there is a group of people called the Church which has teachings known to them that are unknown to unbelievers. In fact, these mysteries were unknown even in the Old Testament. God *does want us to know the mysteries*. He just doesn't let those who don't belong to the body of Christ know them.

Did you know that we are operating in revelation of which Isaiah knew nothing? Of which Jeremiah knew nothing? Of which David knew nothing? I have often thought that I would have liked to have lived in David's time, but David would be astounded at today's outpouring of the revelation of God.

Today the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is covering the earth. As the body of Christ grows, this knowledge of God's glory is becoming more and more abundant. We are finding simple keys that unlock the glory of God so that we can move more strongly in His presence.

Before we continue in Matthew 13, let's look at some other scriptures which help reveal the depth of the word mystery.

First let's consider Ephesians 3:1-5,

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

As Paul says in verse 2, we are living in the dispensation of the grace of God. To understand the full impact of the mystery, we must also understand the concept of God's dispensations. (Actually a more accurate word than dispensation is administration.)

God is not whimsical, doing things as the necessity arises. He plans, sets goals, has visions, and accomplishes long-range goals through short-range goals. Furthermore, He achieves everyone of them. For example, although God knew that the Church of Jesus Christ would come into being, He gradually established it through the various dispensations.

In our government, each time a new man comes into office, he brings in his own administration, and as one administration comes into office, another leaves. When Ronald Reagan came into office, Jimmy Carter went out of office.

God's dispensations follow the same idea except that each of His administrations is progressively leading towards a goal. The first dispensation was the Dispensation of Innocence which ended with the Fall.

The next dispensation was the Dispensation of Conscience which ended the Flood. Then came the Dispensation of Human Government which lasted until the Tower of Babel.

Fourth, we have the Dispensation of Promise. This was when Abraham arose out of Ur of the Chaldees and the Jewish nation began. This ended during the time of captivity in Egypt and then the fifth dispensation, The Law, began with Moses. The Law ended at the time of the Cross. Colossians 2:14, tells us that Jesus was, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances (the Law) that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"

When Jesus said, "It is finished," He was referring to the Mosaic Law. He fulfilled every jot and tittle of it and dismissed it at the Cross. Then He arose from the dead, went to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father.

When He poured out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, a new dispensation began, which was unknown in the Old Testament, - the Church Age. Jesus' own disciples did not know that the Church Age was coming or even what the church was. In other words, the church was a mystery!

We know that the disciples were ignorant of the Church Age because they often asked Jesus, "When is the kingdom coming?" They believed that they were going to step right into the Millennial Kingdom. They thought Jesus was going to blow away the Roman Empire, set up His Millennial reign, and that they would then sit with Him.

But Jesus told them that it was not for them to know the time or the season. He assured them the Holy Ghost would bring all things to their remembrance. However, it was only after they came down from the Upper Room that they realized they were in an entirely new dispensation. This unveiling of the mystery of the Church is what Paul was referring to in those verses we quoted from the third chapter of Ephesians.

In Colossians 1:25-26, Paul is speaking of the Church when he says,

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of I God which is given to me for you, I to fulfill the word of God; Even the I mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

The word fulfill literally means "to complete." Paul had the responsibility of completing the Word of God. The completion of the Word is part of the mystery. Paul completed the part of the Word that is the meat for our dispensation. While it is necessary to study the entire Word, we should concentrate on the Epistles. We should become grounded in the New Testament. In fact, we should study the Old Testament in light of the New.

Romans 16:25, which also speaks of the mystery says, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,". The word "stablish" means to "to stabilize." What is it that stabilizes us? Studying the meat of the New Testament. After all, in this verse Paul talked about "his gospel" which would be the epistles he wrote.

Isn't it nice to know that we have something that was a secret in the Old Testament? Jesus has whispered it to us through the Holy Ghost. He does love us!

Let's go over the eight points that the mystery includes.

1. ***It is the body of Christ.*** Old Testament believers knew nothing about the body of Christ. They weren't members of the body of Christ; they were merely servants in His house. They didn't become members of His body until He became the first-born among many brethren, the foundation stone of the Church. (Eph. 3:6-11)

2. ***The Bride of Christ.*** (Eph. 5:28- 32) Although these verses talk about a man and woman joining together in marriage, they have a dual meaning which is expressed in verse 32, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

3. ***The Church.*** (Rev, 1:20) "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

4. ***The Indwelling of Christ.*** The fact that Jesus lives in us, This was unheard of in the Old Testament But, Christ is in us according to Col. 1:26- 27, ". . .Christ in you the hope of glory:".

5. ***Spirituality or Godliness.*** Our means of godliness is different than in the Old Testament. That's found in I Timothy 3:16, "...great is the mystery of godliness. ...

6. ***The blindness of Israel during our dispensation.*** Remember, Israel was faced with demon possession seven-fold worse than ever before. The blindness of Israel is found in Romans 11:25, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in,"

7. ***The rapture of the Church.*** (I Cor, 15:51-57) Jesus *never* discussed the Rapture in the four gospels. In the gospels, Jesus referred to the Second Advent, the coming of the Millennial Reign. The teaching on the Rapture is found in the Epistles. An example of this is found in I Thess. 4:16-17, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." I Cor. 15:51-52a, in speaking of the Rapture says, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..." The Rapture is part of the mystery.

8. ***The kingdom of heaven.*** (Matt. 13) This is the parable of the sower and the seed which we will take up in our next issue.

Now let's take a look at the things which the mystery does not include. The following are not part of the mystery because they are well-documented in the Old

Testament. Remember, the mystery includes only the Church Age from the day of Pentecost until the Rapture of the Church. Not included are:

1. The death of Jesus
2. His burial
3. His resurrection
4. His ascension
5. His sitting at the right hand of the Father. This occurred before the day of Pentecost, so it is not part of the mystery.
6. The Tribulation
7. The Second Advent, the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom.
8. The Millennium
9. His eternal state is not part of the mystery. It comes after the Rapture of the Church and is very well documented in the Old Testament.

Jesus is now starting to touch on the mystery in the parables. Because Israel has rejected Him, He's now turning to the Gentiles. He's teaching of the decline of the nation of Israel and the exaltation of the Gentiles as He's about to establish His Church.

In Matthew 13:17, Jesus tells the people, "For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

Isn't Jesus good to us? We are able to see and hear things which the prophets desired to see and hear but could not.

One last example which shows how important the parables are is found in Matthew 13:34-35,

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

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