

Sermon Title: Paul: The Mystery Apostle
Scripture Text: Eph. 3:1-3 (Ephesians #14)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 8-1-21

This morning we come to Ephesians Chapter 3—the beginning of what we call Chapter 3; of course, Paul didn't write six chapters, he wrote one letter; but this is where Paul is about to pen a glorious prayer for his friends in Ephesus and, by extension, for all believers who would ever read this; and it would express his desire that we would be "filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

He actually kind of starts the prayer at the beginning of Chapter 3, at Verse 1, but then—and this thrills the heart of people who think like I do—he interrupts himself, and he digresses about the whole purpose of his life and his whole purpose for penning this letter. There is a place in Verse 1 that has a dash, and if you stopped there and skipped all the way down to Verse 14, there would be no missing part of the logic of the book. That's the beginning of the prayer, but then this is the sort of impromptu sidebar introduction. So, this is a good point in Ephesians for us to take a step back, and by focusing on Paul's little self-imposed preamble to his prayer, we can see how all of this that he's writing about in Ephesians fits into the eternal plan of God—the big, broad picture.

There's a fascinating keyword in our text: the word "mystery." We already saw it in Chapter 1, Verse 9, where he said: "In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the *mystery* of His will"; and I told you when we got there that we're going to be focusing more on "mystery" in Chapter 3. Well, here we are in Chapter 3, and we're going to focus *a lot* today on "mystery."

And he has talked about this "administration suitable to the fullness of the times...the summing up of all things in Christ" (1:10), so what He has "made known to us" about this "mystery" (vs. 9) is related to "the fullness of the times" and "the summing up of all things in Christ"—there's a connection to a bigger picture strongly hinted at right there.

Well, God has chosen to reveal to us by His own desire and predetermination, and exactly, by the people and the writings and the places that He did these things, He has given us this formerly-hidden mystery as to "the summing up of all things in Christ." He has "made known to us the mystery." That means that "in Christ" we now have the revelation of things not known in Old Testament times (cf. Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:7; Col. 1:26).

Of all the books of the New Testament, the Book of Ephesians happens to be the one where *the most* is written about this "mystery," which is about "the summing up of all things in Christ"; it's about the Church, "the body" of Christ (Eph. 5:23), comprised of Jews and Gentiles together "in Christ" (Eph. 3:6).

Now, I'm going to massage that a little bit. And by the way: I got a *really* outstanding question for "Provoke the Pastor," asking me to talk about the "mystery" that Paul was talking about; so I'm *accidentally* stealing my own thunder, and I won't be answering this question again in the coming weeks.

But as we move through this, I decided we could title this "Paul: The Mystery Apostle"—and by that, I mean intentionally to make a little play on the word "mystery."

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Think of it as: We are making our way on a trip through Ephesians, but we're going to stop at one of those pullouts along the highway, where there is this majestic view as far as the eye can see, in 180 degrees and all the way off to the horizon. And then we'll come back, and we'll continue to connect the dots in the Book of Ephesians.

So this is going to be "Paul: The Mystery Apostle," and at the risk of sounding like a cheesy movie trailer, the outline is: The Man, The Mystery.

Alright, here we go: The Man. Paul mentions himself here, and I want to tell you some things about him. Chapter 3, Verses 1 through 3—this is our whole text this morning—and I still owe you going back and connecting everything to the end of Chapter 2; we'll do that next Sunday, Lord willing. Paul says: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles"—and now, here's that dash, from which you could go right into his prayer in Verse 14; but he says this: "for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief."

Well, what he "wrote before in brief" is...well, what he's already written in this book—Chapters 1 and 2, *especially* Verses 19 through 22 of Chapter 2, where he just finished off. And remember: That's all about this glorious, unforeseen thing where Jews and Gentiles—who for *centuries* had *hated* each other—are now brought together in Christ, and the distinctions are *gone* (vs. 16). In Christ we "stand" in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2)—Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male, female, barbarian, Scythian—all those that are listed in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11. *Any* human distinction we could make, anything that would drive wedges between people and create hostility between people—that's *wiped out* in the Body of Christ, because *all* come hearing the same message (Rom. 1:16); "those who were near" and those "who were far away" (Eph. 2:17), in the terms of Jews and Gentiles—all by the same message receiving the same salvation (Acts 15:11).

Paul is going to pray for the Ephesians—and by extension, he is praying for us—telling us it's not enough to merely *understand* that it's wonderful to be "in Christ" and to be part of the "church" that He is building (Matt. 16:18); he wants us to dig deep and pray diligently that we will do our individual and our collective parts to "be filled up to all the fullness of God" (3:19; cf. Eph. 4:13). That terminology implies that you have some *work to do*, that you can be continually "filled up," that there's something called "fullness" that you *want* to reach—and hence, the great prayer later in this chapter.

But notice how *personal* this is. This is why I say, here is The Man. He says: "I, Paul"—that's unusual. He uses his own name here for effect; I think he is *meaning* to connect emotionally with his friends in Ephesus, and this would have evoked a tender response. Remember how Paul had stopped by Ephesus on his way back from his Third Missionary Journey, and he spent some time with them, called together the elders of the church; and as he was leaving, "they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him" (Acts 20:37)—it literally says they were "falling on his neck and kissing him" as he said goodbye. There's a *deep* connection between Paul and his friends in Ephesus. And so he says, "I'm just appealing to you as your friend, as your Brother in Christ."

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And notice what else he says to describe himself here: "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus..." Now, this is interesting. Where did he write this book from? Rome—specifically: *in a prison cell* in Rome. And I'm sure that if there was an orange jumpsuit that he wore—and I kind of doubt there was—it did not have a logo on it that said "Property of Jesus Christ." But that's how *Paul* saw it all (cf. Phil. 1:13). He was *not* arrested by Rome—he was arrested at the hands of some Temple authorities by some angry unbelieving Jews who misunderstood what he had done and turned it into a wild false accusation. He wound up getting *turned over* to the Romans to spare his life, and then he winds up appealing his case "to Caesar" (Acts 25:11), which was his right as a Roman citizen. So he ultimately was *arrested by Jews, imprisoned by Romans*, and he says, "I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ."

How does that work? Well, I belong to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God. God is sovereign (Dan. 4:35). So, if I am a prisoner and I am in a jail cell in Rome, I am *exactly* where Jesus Christ wants me (see Prov. 20:24; Jer. 10:23), and I am *happily* "chained" to Him, if you will. Now, he didn't *choose* to be in prison. But regardless of whatever his captors thought, they were just doing the will of God by keeping him there until the time that he was to be released.

And he was there to further the cause of Christ. His imprisonment, he says—"the prisoner of Jesus Christ"—was "for the sake of you Gentiles." Paul was God's chosen instrument to spread the Gospel, and he had a very specific plan: Every place he went, he followed his own pattern that he wrote in Romans Chapter 1: "to the Jew first" (vs. 16); he *always* went to the synagogue, he *always* evangelized the Jews *as much* as he could for *as long* as he could, and he would always get thrown out; and he would go "to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46), and he would bring as many of them to faith as God would choose to draw to Himself in that place (vs. 48); and there would be the birth of a church—Jew and Gentile together in the Body of Christ. And it was pretty obvious that Paul was sent to areas that were predominantly Gentile (see Acts 22:21; Rom. 1:5; 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7).

He was to do something far beyond what the other Apostles had done. The doors had been opened first, just as Acts 1:8 says, to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14); and then the doors had been opened up to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27)—and then, along comes Paul; and God used him to spread the Church so that by the end of Paul's ministry, the number of Gentiles in the Body of Christ greatly outnumbered the number of Jews.

Now, would you notice: He mentions this thing that God gave him to do as a "stewardship." "Stewardship" comes from the English word "steward"; we don't use that word very much, but the word means: "a manager of someone else's affairs." The Greek word is *oikonomia*; it comes from the word for "house," and it's a mashup—"portmanteau" is the right fancy word for that—it puts together two words: the word for "house" and the verb for "manage." So, a "steward" is "one who manages the affairs of the house on behalf of the owner." So he's not the owner, but the owner delegates to him the management of these things. The "steward" is the person, the "stewardship" is the job description: Here is what you must do; and until I come and settle up accounts with you, this is what you should continue to do.

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Now, I want to try to unscramble some possible confusion about this. The King James Version—and the New King James Version translators followed in their path—they chose the word "dispensation" to translate *oikonomia*, which our translation renders as "stewardship." Why did they do that? Well, in early 17th-Century British English, the word "dispensation" meant exactly what we say the word "stewardship" is. That's what it meant; it was the requirements for managing the affairs for the owner of the house.

Now, a place where this gets confusing is that, over time, in the world of theology, the word "dispensation"—and the concept of "Dispensationalism"—has come to be used for a period of time within the plan of God: a "Dispensation" before Christ, after Christ; before the coming of the Holy Spirit, after the coming of the Holy Spirit; before the Second Coming, after the Second Coming. So it describes different periods of time (e.g., Lk. 21:24); and most people, when you say the word "Dispensation," if they've been steeped in 20th and 21st Century theological terms, they think of a period of time. "Period of time" is *not* what this word means here in Ephesians; it's instructions—or, as I say, the job description for the steward. So on another day, we'll talk about what we mean by "dispensation" and "dispensational."

But, *this is* something that is peculiar to a "time," in the sense that these were things that were formerly not known, now they are revealed (vs. 5), and they lead to "the summing up of all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). So, yeah, there is a *connection* to a "period of time," but that's not what the word means—no specific time reference. Just note that Paul is talking about this ministry to Gentiles which had landed him in prison, and he knew what he needed to do because of it.

Alright, there's The Man. Now: The Mystery. We're not going to do a detailed exposition of 3:1-3 just yet; we're going to do what is, ultimately, a massive word study.

Paul's Apostleship itself was a "mystery." He was *not* one of Jesus's disciples. He was *not* one of the ones that Jesus announced as His Apostles, after spending all night in prayer (Lk. 6:12-13). As a matter of fact, he wasn't there when the Gospel was first preached, after Christ rose from the dead and sent the Holy Spirit. During those early years of the Church, Paul—or, "Saul" of "Tarsus" (Acts 9:11; 13:9)—was an avowed enemy of Christ; he was a hater of Christ, a hater of Christians, a hater of the Church (Acts 8:3; 26:9), until his spectacularly dramatic conversion in Acts Chapter 9.

The Gospel was making the progress that God said it would: It'll start in Jerusalem and in Judea; it's going to jump to the Samaritans; it's going to jump to the Gentiles—that had already taken place in the first 8 chapters of the Book of Acts. And *then*, along comes Paul (Acts 9:15).

I'm going to tell you in a few minutes that the meaning of the word "mystery" is "something not formerly revealed, and now has been made known." So, Paul was a "mystery." *Nobody* had a meeting among the Apostles and said, "You know, we really need to add one! We really need to open a branch in Gentile-land!" *Nobody* was saying that!

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Paul's own description of this is in First Corinthians Chapter 15, Verse 8. First Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter; and he's talked about the Gospel: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (vss. 3-4), and He "appeared to" many (vs. 5), and he starts listing appearances of Christ, and he mentions that "more than five hundred" had seen the risen Christ (vs. 6). Well, that was all before Christ ascended to the Father, in Acts Chapter 1. And then Paul says this: "and last of all"—who was the last person to see the physically-resurrected Christ? He says: "and last of all, as to one untimely born"—that word literally means, like an "accidental birth," something that is out of the time frame that you would expect—"He appeared to me also" (vs. 8).

No one saw that coming! *No one!* No one *could* have seen coming the fact of *another* Apostle, outside the circle of those who had been with Jesus, and *he* would be the one who primarily takes the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Apostles were very clear, when Judas had defected and they wanted to appoint one, it had to be somebody who was "with us"—with Christ; it had to be somebody who had seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21-23). *That wasn't Paul!* He is an *anomaly*. Why, you might even say, he's a "mystery."

Now, here's what I want to spend the rest of our time on today. Remember, we've pulled off the road in Ephesians; we're at that viewpoint; we're up on the little hill; it's a *crystal-clear day*—we can see as far as our eyes will let us see. We're going to take a little side-trip here, and look at this word "mystery."

Studying the word "mystery" is *also* open to some ambiguity—some confusion, if you will—and the reason is that we have, in English, the word "mystery," and it's *not* a translation of a word in the Bible; it's a *transliteration* of a word in the Bible. What does that mean? Well, if I translate a word, I tell you what it means; if I *transliterate* a word, I take it from *its* language and *its* alphabet, and letter-by-letter, I match it up with another one. The Greek word for "mystery" is "mystery." Actually, you would pronounce it *mustērion* in the New Testament. So, our English word is *not necessarily*—I won't say it's inaccurate, but it's not the breadth of the translation of the Greek word "mystery"; or, in a sense, it's not the *precision* of the Greek word *mustērion*. For example: In English, you might watch a show on television that tells you how far our telescopes can look, and they say, "And beyond that, there are *mysteries* of the Universe." In that sense, a mystery is something we can't know.

Or, we might say, "The police investigation has come up empty, and so the reason for his disappearance remains a mystery." That means we're pretty sure it's *there*, but we can't get to it. We say something is "mysterious" because we can't explain it, or it's very difficult to comprehend; or it could even be eerie or spooky—in that sense, "mysterious."

The *ultimate* example of something very difficult to understand that we would call a "mystery"—that is the missing sock, after you do the laundry. That is a mystery that *no one* has ever solved, and it just keeps happening! You *know* you put an even number in; how did you get an odd number out? And by the way: When it happens twice, it never evens out, either.

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Now, all that is to say: That way we use the word "mystery," in all of its breadth of understanding, is *not* how *mustērion* is used in the Bible. In the Old Testament, you won't find this word in Hebrew; there is no Hebrew word that transliterates to "mystery"; there is no Hebrew word that is the direct equivalent of *mustērion* in the New Testament. But in the Old Testament, there *is* a word that has the root of "deep," like a "mystery" is something way deep down; we're looking into the abyss and it's so deep, we can't see it—*until* it is brought to the surface, and then we *can* see it.

This word that we are going to look at this morning—which we've already seen in Ephesians—the way this word is used in the New Testament *finds its origin* quite specifically in the Book of Daniel. You've heard of this thing called the "Septuagint"; the Septuagint is the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language—between 100, 150, 200 years before Christ came. So, many New Testament believers, even many Jews—they were called "Hellenistic Jews" (Acts 6:1; 9:29) because they were Greek-speaking Jews—they knew their Scriptures from the translation of the Old Testament into the Septuagint form; just like you and I are sitting here this morning, and I don't think *anybody* has their Hebrew and Greek open, and isn't bothering with an English Bible; we need a translation to let us understand that.

The translators of the Septuagint chose the Greek word *mustērion*, and they used it in eight verses in the Book of Daniel—seven of them in Chapter 2, and the eighth one in Chapter 4, Verse 9, which refers back to the ones in Chapter 2. Now, here's the deal; you'll see how this word was used. The essence of it is: Something not formerly revealed now has been revealed. Here's how it first came into use in any Biblical context:

King Nebuchadnezzar had an elaborate dream; it was given to him by God. Now, it's interesting: King Nebuchadnezzar isn't exactly a glorious king of Israel; he's not a king of Israel *at all*. He wanted to know what this dream meant; he knew it was *very* significant. So he called in his "magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" (Dan. 2:2)—in other words, all the pagan spiritual superstars that he could get hold of—and he asked them to explain this dream to him.

They said, "Okay. Tell us the dream, and we will tell you what it means." Now, *any charlatan* can do that! You tell him what your dream is, he'll do a cold reading of you and fish around a little bit, and give you something that sounds plausible to you and that he thinks that you want to hear.

Well, they didn't like Nebuchadnezzar's response to that; it's in Daniel 2, Verses 5 and 6—"The king replied to the Chaldeans, 'The command from me is firm: If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap.' Do you think anybody was sorry they answered *that* call? 'But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation.' " Now, he's the only guy in the room who knows what he actually saw in his dream, so they're going to have to have supernatural revelation to understand what this is. They could not know it without that happening (1 Cor. 2:11).

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Well, needless to say, they couldn't do it. Then God used Daniel to reveal the dream and its meaning. That *detailed dream* is *very* significant. It was about how God is superintending the rise and fall and sequence of the kingdoms of this world while He is simultaneously *using* all of that in the unfolding of *His* plan for *His* Kingdom of *His* Messiah (cf. Rev. 11:15).

The point for us today is that Daniel 2 is the beginning of the theological use of the Greek word *mustērion*. A "mystery" is something that *cannot be known or understood* until God makes it known (1 Cor. 2:7-10); *and* these "mysteries" that were revealed through King Nebuchadnezzar's dream all had to do with God's plan of the ages that He prepared from the foundation of the world, but it's hidden until He reveals it (Deut. 29:29).

So, look again at our text: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." What I've been telling you in Chapter 1, what I've been telling you in Chapter 2, what I've been telling you about this *incredible* miraculous union of Jew and Gentile by something that *neither* Jews nor Gentiles on their own could *ever* accomplish—I've told you *a little bit* about it; God *gave that* to me, and I've been explaining it to you.

The "mystery" that he refers to is the supernatural spiritual union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Eph. 3:6). And lest you think I'm stretching it, just look at the next two verses: "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery"—and this time, he puts a qualifier on it—"the mystery *of Christ*, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit."

He says that "What I've been telling you, and what I'm now writing to you, is what has been made known by God to the Apostles who came before me, and seamlessly now being delivered through me to the Gentiles."

He was living out in his ministry what the other Apostles had spoken of and just *begun* to do (e.g., Acts 15:7). And he was the one that God primarily used to write down "mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 8:10) as they are unfolding in this age, between the First and Second Coming.

Now, the "mysteries made known" in the New Testament are *fascinating*, and I'm going to do my best to fascinate you in the next 15 minutes, as we talk about this.

There are 27 occurrences of the word *mustērion* in the New Testament. They all build on the meaning of the word as it is developed in the Septuagint from the eight times it occurs in Daniel. Of the 27 in the New Testament, 20 of them are from Paul—so that's the *other* sense in which I call him the "Mystery Apostle"; he is the one who wrote the most about the "mysteries."

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Nothing can make your day better than spending the afternoon studying 27 occurrences of one Greek word. I'm sorry you didn't get to do it with me this week. You've missed out! May God grant you, in His *abundant* grace, the opportunity for you to do that on your own. If you want to get started on the thrill of something like that, start with the word "propitiation," because it only occurs four times in the New Testament—much easier to trace through.

I want to show you these uses of this word in chronological order, because it's easy to pick *one* of them—such as Paul saying, "The mystery of Christ"; Ah, well, it's Christ: He's the mystery. Well, but then he says "mystery" of other things: mystery of something else, and mystery of something else. So, just bear with me. I'm going to take you through all 27 uses.

The first use in the New Testament of the word "mystery" or "mysteries" is in Matthew 13, Verse 11—and by the way, there are parallels in Mark 4:11 and in Luke 8:10. If you ever wanted to know the difference between the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God," *there isn't any*; Jesus and the authors of the Gospels used them interchangeably; Jesus usually used "Kingdom of Heaven" with Jews, and He used "Kingdom of God" with Gentiles—just their frame of reference.

But what He's saying in Matthew 13:11 is that "To you"—to you the Believers, as opposed to the rejecters—"it has been granted to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." So only Believers—those who have faith in Christ—can grasp this heretofore unknown information about the Kingdom program of God. And He says there are "mysteries" about it, there are *several* mysteries about it; hence, seven distinct parables; they're distinct, but they are all related; and they all have to do with this era after the King has come the first time and been rejected and crucified, and then He comes a second time—and that's something that was a "mystery"; it was never revealed in the Old Testament.

The next chronological use of "mystery" comes from one of Paul's earliest letters: Second Thessalonians 2:7—"For the *mystery* of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way." *That* "mystery," never before revealed, was the fact that the coming of "the lawless one" (2 Thess. 2:8)—the "antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18)—is now being restrained. There *are* some hints in the Old Testament about "the Prince who is to come" (Dan. 9:26); but here's a detail about him: There is something that is holding that back now, and we'll get into what that means at another time, when we study another book.

The next chronological use is First Corinthians 2:7, where Paul says: "But we speak God's wisdom in a *mystery*, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory." He's talking about the salvation of those whom God has chosen to save and bring into this wonderful thing that we know as the Body of Christ (cf. Jn. 15:19; Acts 13:48; Gal. 1:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10). So, if you will, that use of "mystery" refers to God's wisdom; it's the whole of New Testament revelation, described as a "mystery" because it wasn't known until it was revealed.

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The next one is First Corinthians Chapter 4, Verse 1—"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and"—here's a word you might be familiar with: "stewards," those who manage the affairs of the owner—"servants of Christ and stewards of the *mysteries* of God." And again, plural; there are *many* aspects of this age in which we live, in which we have new stuff from God that was never known before, many mysteries made known in the whole of the New Testament.

The next use is First Corinthians 13:2—"If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all *mysteries*...but do not have love, I am nothing." That verse doesn't really contribute to the concept of "mystery" or "mysteries"; it's sarcasm; Paul is ridiculing the idea of gobbledygook so-called "mysteries" when they are declared in ecstatic speech, if it's not done in love. In other words, he's chiding them for a misuse of something. That doesn't really tell us anything about a specific aspect of "mysteries."

The next one is First Corinthians 14:2. This one is *also* kind of an outlier. He says: "For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks *mysteries*." Now, there he's using terminology from the pagan Babylonian "mystery religions": "We speak in this ecstatic speech. It's gibberish. You can't understand a word of it. Nobody profits anything from it, because it's 'mysteries' in the spirit," and it's a whole pride thing. So you can toss that one out, as well; it has nothing to do with God's revelation, because when *God* reveals a mystery, it is *marvelously understandable* (Is. 45:19); and these are people claiming that the reason they *can't* be understood is that they are speaking "mysteries."

Alright, here's a *very specific* one: First Corinthians 15:51—"Behold, I tell you a *mystery*"—this is something *never before* stated like this—"we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." Not everybody in the Body of Christ is going to die, *but* they will all be transformed (Phil. 3:21). What does that mean? He's talking about the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:17). There are all these hints of Gentile salvation, the idea of the Church as a group distinct from Israel, being brought together and then, now removed from the earth. That last part was not stated before. It's there in First Thessalonians Chapter 4; he doesn't use the word "mystery" there, but he describes it more thoroughly.

Then there's Romans 11:25. And remember, we're going chronologically in the order that the New Testament used these words. Paul says: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this *mystery*—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

Now, here's part of the "mystery": Did we *replace* Israel—all of God's promises to the Jews *nullified*, and He's going to give them all to the *Gentile* Body of Christ? *No!* (see Jer. 31:35-37) The Nation of Israel has been *temporarily, partially hardened*—not every Jew (Rom. 11:1), and not forever (Rom. 11:26-27), "but until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." And already, by the end of the First Century, the Body of Christ was numerically far more Gentile than Jewish; but here's a new "mystery": Israel is not finished; God is going to deal with them; He is going to fulfill all of His promises to them; but right now, this is "a partial hardening."

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Then there's Romans 16:25-27. This passage is often used—and I think, correctly—as a very good way to describe what a "mystery" is. This is Paul's benediction at the end of the book, and he says: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery*"—and here's the definition—"which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, *has been made known*"—hidden; now, through the Apostles, it is "made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen."

This is the "mystery" of the breadth of Gentile salvation. It wasn't understood before Jesus came. He told the plan in Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8. Now it's being unfolded, and now we can look back on it and see this definition.

Ephesians 1:9 we've already seen: "the *mystery* of His will." The context, in Verse 10, defines this "mystery" as "the summing up of all things in Christ." This a whole part of the eternal plan of God, not before known; and it's all going to be wrapped up "in Christ."

Then there's the passage *we're* in: Ephesians 3:3-4 uses the word twice: "that by revelation there was made known to me the *mystery*, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the *mystery* of Christ." Put that in the context of Ephesians: What had previously been hidden was that you are "blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (1:3), and that is riches for Jew and Gentile together (3:6).

A little bit later in our chapter, we'll come to this—probably in our next visit to Ephesians—Ephesians 3:8-9, where Paul says: "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the *mystery* which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." This connects to *the whole plan of God*—but He hadn't *told us* about this part, until Christ came.

Then there's a really interesting one: Ephesians Chapter 5, Verse 32—"This *mystery* is great..." What has he been talking about? Husbands and wives. And he says, "But I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." So here's a new "mystery": Part of the relationship between "Christ and the church" has been previously hidden, in that it is an analogy to marriage. "Christ and the church" is a good picture of marriage; marriage in Christ is a good picture of Jesus and the Church.

Then there's Ephesians 6:19—"And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the *mystery* of the gospel." You see, it's "the mystery of Christ," it's "the mystery of the gospel," it's the mystery of the Rapture, it's the mystery of marriage, it's the mystery of "the man of lawlessness"—*all* of these things are part of this. And in context, that refers back to Chapter 5, Verse 32—that thing about the relationship between husband and wife.

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Then in the Book of Colossians—which, by the way, he wrote in the same time frame as Ephesians, from the same jail cell—in Chapter 1, Verses 25 through 27, he says: "So that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the *mystery* which has been hidden from the past ages...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." In that one, as in First Corinthians 2 and others, the "mystery" is equated with the *whole* of New Testament revelation.

Then there's one in Colossians 2:2—"God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself..." Every New Testament "mystery" is related to Christ.

Then there's Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 3—"praying... that we may speak forth the *mystery* of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned." That refers back to the use in Colossians Chapter 2.

Then there's First Timothy 3:9; he's talking about people who are qualified leaders in ministry: "holding to the *mystery* of the faith..." Now, "the faith" is a technical term in the New Testament for the sum total of New Testament doctrine. We say: "Stand firm in *the faith*" (1 Cor. 16:13)—that means: Don't waffle on doctrine.

Then there's First Timothy 3:16—which, by the way, relates back to First Timothy 3:9—"By common confession, great is the *mystery* of godliness..." It's also called "the mystery of godliness" because: How can anybody be godly? We're so *ungodly*! (Jer. 13:23) We would need a godliness that *isn't ours*; a righteousness that we can't create—that's "in Christ" (Phil. 3:9).

Alright, hold your breath; we're making the final turn; here we go: Revelation Chapter 1, Verse 20. This is Jesus speaking to John; He says: "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands..." Now, here's an interesting thing: Those had been mentioned a whopping *four verses earlier*, and He says: "Now I'm going to explain that mystery." This hadn't been known before. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." There, it's Christ's relationship to the Church—unknown in Old Testament times—completely in His grasp, if you will; and now, that is revealed.

Then there's Revelation 10:7—"In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the *mystery* of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets." That "seventh angel" refers to Revelation Chapter 11, Verse 15, where the seventh angel with a trumpet blows his trumpet, and there is an announcement: The Kingdom is here! Now, there's a little bit of stuff that has to happen in the brief interval between the Seventh Trumpet and the Second Coming of Christ, but that use is: "The mystery of God is finished"! So this "mystery" era of the Kingdom has a *beginning* and it has an *end*, and now both ends are made known.

There's *one more* of these: it's Revelation Chapter 17, Verses 5 through 7—"On her forehead a name was written, a *mystery*, 'Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.' And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints,

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and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I will tell you the *mystery* of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.' "

Where do you get "seven heads and ten horns"? *Daniel!* (Dan. 7:7, 20, 24) This one relates back to Paul's first use of it in First Thessalonians 2:7; this is part of "the mystery of lawlessness"; this is the *end part* of the career of the Antichrist.

I don't expect you to remember all of this; you're going to have to thrill yourself with your own all-afternoon word studies. But understand: It's okay to call Paul "The Mystery Apostle." His whole ministry was a surprise—a *mystery*—nobody was looking for it! It was revealed by God at His sovereignly-chosen time (Gal. 1:15-16), that Paul would pick up the ball of this ministry that was now open to the Gentiles, and he would take it to *way beyond* what anybody else did or thought could be done. And then, He also used Paul to *record* many of the things that had begun to be taught by the Apostles; and then he brought it to fruition as he ministered to the Gentiles.

But, please: Don't let this remain merely academic. Realize the riches that we have: "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Oh, and by the way: We're piggybacking with Paul. We're following in his ministry. God has given *us* a stewardship! *We are also* "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1)—the Gospel, Christ, the Church, the end times—this is all granted to us (1 Tim. 3:15), and the Church will *die* in one generation, if we're not faithful to pass it along.

Now, stay tuned in Ephesians and you'll have a lot of great stuff coming your way, to learn *how* to be the best possible steward that you can.

Now, let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for the glorious riches that are ours in Christ. Thank You for this stewardship that You have granted to us. We pray, along with the Book of Revelation: "Lord Jesus, come!" We pray, like what He taught us in the Sermon on the Mount: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But we also know that the unfolding of Your will on Earth involves us being stewards of this wonderful message of salvation by grace through faith, not as a result of anything that we can do—none of us can boast. Thank You that we are Your workmanship in Christ Jesus. Work in us; work through us, we pray. If there is anyone here who feels left out—not part of what is going on—bring them to faith in Christ. Make the dead live, that they can be regenerated and come to the Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.