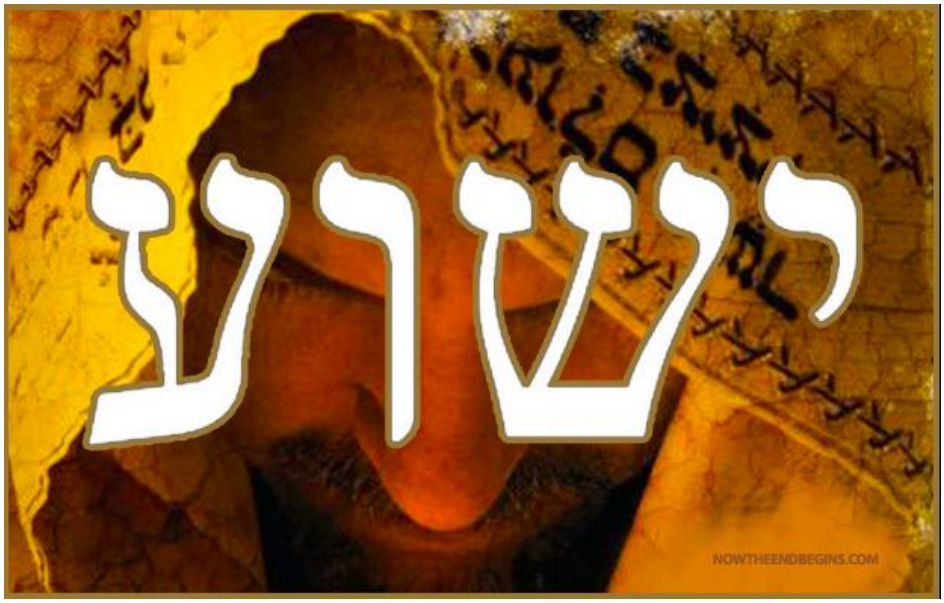
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The Mystery of Messiah
3: 1-13

The mystery of Messiah DIG: Highlight the various times Paul used the word “mystery” as you read these verses. How does the Gospel message qualify as a mystery? How does the Gospel demonstrate that all people can find a place in Messiah’s Church? Why did Paul describe God’s plan – to offer all people salvation – as a “secret” or a “mystery?” What is the difference between circumstances and willingness to share the Gospel? Why did Paul speak of the mystery that the Gentiles are now welcome in God’s family?

REFLECT: Is sharing the Gospel more of a responsibility or a privilege? Since God’s purposes include using believers to share the Gospel with all people, what roadblocks get in the way of believers fulfilling that purpose? How do Paul’s words address any of those potential roadblocks? Have you pondered your spiritual blessing lately? What have you done to return the blessing to Isra’el and the Jewish people? The secret of God’s salvation is too great for us to understand it. Then what do you base your salvation on?

The mystery of Messiah is not that the Jews will convert to a new culture, but that Gentile believers will join Jewish believers in partaking of Messiah’s riches.



This passage is largely a parenthesis, which runs from **verse 2** through **verse 13**. **Rabbi Sha'ul** begins **his** prayer for believers to understand their resources as one **in Messiah**, and then decides to reemphasize and expand on some of **the truths he** had already mentioned. **He** does not actually get back to the prayer until **verse 14**, where **he** repeats the phrase **"It is a consequence of this"** in order to pick up the thought originally introduced in **verse 1**. **He** seems to have felt that **the Ephesians** were not ready to hear **his** prayer on **their** behalf until they better understood – and were therefore better to apply – **the truths he** wanted to pray about. And it seemed essential for **Paul** to affirm **his** authority for teaching such a new and far-reaching **truth** as the oneness of **Jew** and **Gentile in Messiah**, which **he** does by saying that **God Himself** gave **him the truth** and the commission to proclaim it. In **3:1-13 the apostle** leads us to focus on five aspects of this divine **mystery**: **its prisoner**, **its plan**, **its proclamation**, **its purpose**, and **its privileges**.[119]

The prisoner of the mystery (3:1-4): It is a consequence of this that I, Sha'ul, am a prisoner of the Messiah Yeshua (3:1a). The apostle was writing this letter as **he** was incarcerated in a Roman **prison**. It was not the only such letter as it is clear that there were several writings that became known as the Prison Epistles (or Letters). Those mentioned specifically are **Philippians**, **Colossians** and **Philemon**. It is interesting that **the Rabbi** does not state here that **he** is a prisoner of Rome, or some injustice of a pagan system. **He** sees **God's** purpose even in **his** time in jail, not unlike **Joseph** did in **Genesis** when **Pharaoh** locked **him** up. In this

case, **Sha'ul** is convinced that **He** is **a prisoner of Messiah Yeshua** because of the message and for the sake of **the Lord**. Much of this letter of **Ephesians** can be even more greatly appreciated as one keeps in mind that these are not pious religious platitudes from a rabbi living in comfort. It is clear that **Paul** strongly believed all that **he** was teaching was in spite of (or maybe as a result of) **his** own troubles.

On behalf of you Gentiles (3:1b). From the earliest verses of the Torah the message of blessing **first to the Jews**, would also expand to all **the nations** (to see the commentary on **Genesis, to see the link click Dt – I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**). The prophets of **Isra'el** continued to confirm that **the Gentiles** would also receive many blessings from **ADONAI** because of **the Messiah (Isaiah 1:1-10; Amos 9:11-12)**. **The Talmud** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**) **likewise understood that God would ultimately reach out to the Gentiles as well: "The Holy One, blessed be He, looks to the peoples of the world, hoping that they will repent and so bring them near beneath His wings" (Numbers Raba 10:1). Sha'ul** understood the clear call of **YHVH** on **his** life as **the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13-14)**.

With this calling came a tremendous amount of risk as **he** traveled to distant lands and proclaimed a controversial message, both within **the Jewish** community and also within **the Gentile** community, for different reasons. While **the Jews** needed to come to grips with the messianic claims of **Yeshua**, **the Gentiles** also needed to deal with the rebuke of paganism and rampant immorality in **their** society. Nevertheless, **Sha'ul** persisted, and boldly brought this message of hope throughout the Roman Empire at great risk to **his** own personal safety. How ironic it was to see a traditional **Jewish rabbi** under arrest for **his** loving ministry to those outside **his** own people, **Isra'el**. This is a reminder to all **Gentile** believers that **they** owe a debt of gratitude to the early **Jewish** believers who brought the Gospel to **them (Romans 15:27).**[120]

I assume that you have heard of the work God in His grace has given me to do for your benefit, and that it was by a revelation that this mystery (Greek: *musterion*) **was made known to me. I have already written about it briefly, and if you read what I have written, you will grasp how I understand my insight into the mystery of Messiah (3:2-4).** The word **mystery** in the Bible has a different meaning than generally in our society. It doesn't mean something that is difficult or impossible to explain, like "the mysteries

of outer space." No, **a mystery** in the Bible is something that was once hidden, but now has been revealed. And **Paul** uses an interesting phrase to describe **the revelation** of this **truth** – the Greek word *apokalupsis,* meaning *revealing or unveiling.* This concept is reminiscent of part of the **Jewish** wedding ceremony.

A distinctive element of the ceremony is the veiling of the bride by the groom just before the actual ceremony. This dates back to the tricky wedding of **Jacob**, where **he** didn't check carefully under the veil of **his** bride and ended up with a surprise marriage to **Leah** (see the commentary on **Genesis Hg – Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel**). Since that time, **Jewish** grooms make sure to veil their bride just before the wedding ceremony to confirm that he had the right one! During the ceremony the veil is lifted to reveal the identity of the bride as they start their new life together as husband and wife. This **truth** would seem to apply to **the "mystery"** to which **Sha'ul** alludes. The identity of this truly, that is, **God's plan** through **the Messiah**, has now been revealed much the same as a **Jewish** bride unveiled on her wedding day.[121]

The plan of the mystery (3:5-6): In past generations it was not made known to mankind, as the Spirit has now been revealed to His apostles and prophets (3:5). The Greek behind **has . . . been revealed** is in the aorist tense, which refers to specific acts or events. Coupled with **now**, it indicated immediate **revelation** during **Paul's** day, which was given exclusively to the **apostles and prophets** of the B'rit Chadashah, and not to anyone else before or after **them**. The giving of new revelation through the living **prophets** in the first century was intended only for **the foundation** of the Church. **Sha'u**l stated with absolute certainty in **Ephesians 2:20** that the Church was **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.**

That in Messiah, and through the Good News, the Gentiles were to be joint heirs, a joint Body and joint sharers with the Jews in what God has promised (3:6). It is difficult for us to realize how revolutionary this was in **Paul's** day and most **Jews** then and now do not accept it. **The mystery** of **God** is, in the larger sense, the plan of redemption through the work of **Messiah**. An important subset of that plan is **the Gentiles** will be equally accepted in this plan of Messianic blessing. **Rabbi Sha'ul** again is quite careful to be abundantly clear with **his** readers. **Gentile** believers do not replace the **Jewish** believers in this **plan** but shares in **their** spiritual blessings. **He** does not say **they** have become sole **heirs**, but that **they** are **jointly** receiving these blessings along with the **Jewish** remnant.[122]

Gentile believers are not described as starting a new religion or new exclusive community, but that **they** are now **jointly** part of an eternal **plan** of one spiritual **Body** with their **Jewish** brothers and sisters. Neither are **the Gentiles** said to be taking over the promises of **YHVH**, but **jointly sharing** these blessings with **the Messianic Jews**. But it is also important to understand that this does not include aspects of the physical covenant. **The Land of Isra'el** is promised to **Abraham** and **His** descendants (see the commentary on **Genesis Eg – I AM the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans**). Only the spiritual blessings associated with the other aspects of the covenants are shared with **the Gentiles**.

There is no room to see **Sha'ul** as an advocate of replacement theology (see the commentary on **Acts Ag – Replacement Theology and Acts**), or supersessionism as is common in some religious groups today. Some teaching even appropriates the blessings for Christians while leaving the curses for **the Jews**! When clearly understood, the teaching of **Rabbi Sha'ul** reinforces the unity between **Jew** and **Gentile**. It also explains that **Gentile** believers now get to share in the Jewish blessings, except for the **Land** Covenant as seen above.[123]

The proclamation of the mystery (3:7-9): I became a servant (Greek: *diakonos*) **of this Good News by God's gracious gift.** In a similar line of thought in First Corinthians, Paul emphasized this calling of **grace, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove to be in vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with Me" (First Corinthians 15:10). Which He gave me through the operation of His power (3:7). The Lord** is the power behind **the servant**. To **the Colossians**, **the apostle** said: **I labor, striving according to His power, which mightly works within me (Colossians 1:29).**[124]

To me, the least important of all God's holy people, was given this privilege of announcing to the Gentiles the Good News of the Messiah's unfathomable riches (3:8). As the apostle reflected on **the** wondrous **mystery** of **Messiah**, **he** could not help but remember **God's** gracious call in **his** own life. It would have been enough for this **Jewish** man to come to the realization that **Yeshua** was the **Jewish Messiah**. Yet, **Sha'ul** was not your average **Jew**. As one of the **zealous** rabbinical students of Gamaliel, **he** had risen to lead the "Anti-**Yeshua** Committee" to snuff out this perceived heretical **Jewish** sect. But an amazing thing happened on **his** way to **Damascus** when **he** encountered the risen **Yeshua**! Going from a persecutor to a proclaimer, **Sha'ul** had a deep appreciation for **God's** grace (see **Acts Bc – Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**)! **He** humbly admits that

he clearly did not deserve such an honor of being part of **Messiah's** Kingdom

Rabbi Sha'ul also rejoiced in **his** calling to bring that same Good News to **the Gentiles**. **And of letting everyone see how this secret plan is going to work out. This plan, kept hidden for ages by God, the Creator of everything (3:9).** In an amazing way, **ADONAI** called this traditional **Jew** to bring the light of salvation and the Scriptures to the dark pagan world. It is not so strange, however, when you consider the many promises of the TaNaKh that the light of **the God of Isra'el** would ultimately be shared worldwide through **the Jewish people (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6)**. This **secret plan (mystery)** was therefore nothing new, but **Paul** rejoiced in the fact that this **plan** was being realized through the work of **Messiah Yeshua**.[125]

The purpose of the mystery (3:10-11): is for the rulers and authorities in heaven, namely, the angels, **to learn how the manifold wisdom of God** is seen through **the existence of the** eternal, universal, unseen **Church** made up of all the believers through the ages **(3:10).** Consequently, there will be a multitude of cultural expressions in this universal **Body** and all cultures are to be respected. Yet, it is ironic that many people today fail to understand that **Jewish** followers of **Yeshua** usually desire to maintain their **God**-given heritage through the expression of a messianic synagogue. **The mystery** of **the Church** is not that **the Jews** will convert to a new culture, but that **the Gentiles** will join the **Jewish** believers in partaking of **Messiah's** riches. In reflecting on these **truths, Sha'ul** rejoiced in **the** eternal **wisdom of God's plan**.[126]

The Rabbi continues to explain that **this was in accordance with God's eternal purpose, accomplished in the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord (3:11).** Everything God has ever done has had the ultimate purpose of giving **Himself** glory. As **Paul** declares elsewhere: **There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua Messiah, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him (First Corinthians 8:6),** and **all things have been created by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).** Therefore, in the classroom of **God's** universe, **He** is **the Teacher**, the angels are the students, the Universal **Church** is the illustration, and the subject matter is **many-sided wisdom of God.**[127]

The privilege of the mystery (3:12-13): In Messiah and through faith we can now approach God with boldness and confidence (3:12). This incredible **truth** has a practical application in the life of the believer. For **the Gentiles**, there

was a newfound access to **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, now their heavenly **Father**. What was so remote in the pagan religions is not a reality through **Isra'el's Messiah**. They have been brought near to **God** and have a new **confidence** as **they trust** in the redemptive work of **Yeshua**. Not only that, but contemporary Bible-believing Christians should also have a heart of gratitude for this **truth**.

By using the first-person plural, **the Rabbi** also acknowledges that even those who are **Jewish** enter a new reality through the work of **Messiah**. There were always some barriers that kept even the most religious **Jews** at a distance from **their God (Isaiah 59:1-2)**. The early Messianic community included **tens of thousands** of **Jews**. At the festival of Shavu'ot about **three thousand** were saved **(Acts 2:41).** Many years later, however, **tens of thousands** of **Jewish** believers were still zealous for **the Torah (Acts 21:20)**. Therefore, they experienced a new, closer walk with **ADONAI** and confidence not previously experienced. In **Yeshua's** own words: **I have come so that they may have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10 ESV).**[128]

So I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf – it is all for your glory (3:13 CSB). Rabbi Sha'ul began **Chapter 3** by referencing **his** imprisonment for the Gospel and then concluded by addressing the subject with **his** readers. **He** mentioned to **them his afflictions** on **their behalf**, referring to **his Gentile** ministry. Perhaps they saw in **Paul's** difficulty the world's growing hostility toward the Gospel. Perhaps we feel the same at times, watching a culture that is increasingly becoming more hostile to **God** and **His truth (John 17:17)**. Regardless of the reception they found and that we might find, we have great reason to continue **faithfully** sharing our witness. Rejection and suffering in this world are not the end of the story, for there waits for **Messiah's** children a glory beyond comprehension.[129]