

The Mystery¹

The Mystery (Gr, *musterion*: from a derivative of *muo*: to shut the mouth; a secret or mystery) referred to in this article is taken to mean the entire body of truth that was revealed to the Apostle Paul. This was done by a series of direct heavenly revelations from the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ to Paul over about a thirty year period of time. Below are some Scriptures that refer to the Mystery in the Pauline revelation:

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 fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”**

Romans 16:25 **“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,”**

Ephesians 3:3,4,9 **“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) And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the **mystery**, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:”**

Colossians 1:26,27 **“Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:”**

When you analyze Scripture you can see that God’s main purpose for Creation was for Him to have a people that could be with Him in a loving family relationship for all eternity. The specific aspects of how Creation is to provide this family and why God chose this method is not fully understood from a casual reading of Scripture and is beyond the scope of this article. The purpose of this article is to sketch out what the Bible reveals about the sequence of programs He has used to deal with His mortal creation as we head toward immortality.

An overview summary of the programs, in order of use or occurrence, starts with Adam and Eve in a sinless state in the Garden of Eden. This apparently wasn’t what God was shooting for because the faith of Adam and Eve hadn’t been tested. At the first temptation, provided by the serpent, they sinned and the program had to be changed. At that time God promised a **“Seed”** that would bruise the serpent’s head, which we now was Christ when He made the full payment for the sins of mankind with His death on the cross. In the meantime God shed blood to cover the initial sin of Adam and Eve until the fulfillment of the promise of the **“Seed.”**

As time went on the earth became populated, sinfulness increased, and finally God judged mankind and destroyed all life on the earth by means of a universal flood, except for Noah, his wife, his three sons, their three wives, and at least two of every form of animal life. After the flood God promised Noah that He would never again allow a flood to destroy all life on the earth. He placed a rainbow in the clouds as a sign of this promise and instructed Noah to replenish the earth.

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However, as the earth was being repopulated, sinfulness once again increased, and mankind began to congregate in one area. Because of this disobedience God judged mankind and this time He scattered them over the earth by confusing their language.

At this point God essentially concluded His dealings with mankind and men and women were known as “**nations,**” “**heathen,**” “**Gentiles,**” or “**Uncircumcision.**”

Next, God chose a man named Abram to begin a people He could have dealings with and also a people that could be a channel for the promised “**Seed.**”

Abram’s name was later changed to Abraham and he became the father of the nation Israel. It is through Israel that God then channeled His dealings and planned to ultimately resume His dealings with the Gentiles as well.

As the nation Israel grew, God gave them the Law through Moses, which consisted of more than 600 commandments, regulations, and ordinances.

As the nation Israel began to take possession of the land promised to Abraham, they were under the leadership of Moses, Joshua, and the judges.

During the time of Samuel, who was to be the last judge, the Israelites rejected God the Father by demanding a king to judge them instead of having God reign over them. (I Samuel 8:4-7)

As a result of this sin, the nation Israel never fully held possession of the Promised Land, even to this present day. Through the ministry of the prophets, God prophesied that He would send the Messiah to redeem Israel from her sin. This Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, was the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ. God also promised Israel that He would establish an earthly kingdom where Jesus Christ Himself would reign as King, on the throne of David, and a tremendous time of peace and prosperity would result.

During the three-year earthly ministry of the Messiah, He preached repentance, that the kingdom of (from)² heaven was at hand, and this message was given to the Twelve Apostles to preach as well.

The nation Israel, for the most part, rejected her Messiah along with His message of forgiveness for their sins and His preaching of the coming prophesied kingdom. This rejection took the form of unbelief and their demanding His crucifixion.

Jesus Christ rose from the grave on the third day and instructed His disciples again to preach the gospel of the kingdom with water baptism for the remission of sins.

They were to begin with the nation Israel in Jerusalem and if Israel responded this time, they were to proceed with the same gospel in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The Lord then ascended to heaven after promising to send the Holy Spirit to empower them in this commission, usually known as the *Great Commission*.

The water ceremony of baptism was part of the fulfillment of God’s conditional promise, through Moses, that the Israelites would become a “**kingdom of priests,**” in the coming earthly

²Kingdom of heaven is taken to mean coming *from* heaven (to earth).

kingdom, if they would obey His voice and keep His covenant. This washing or baptism was done in conjunction with the blood sacrifice in preparation for the priesthood. (Exodus 19:5,6; 29:1-4,10,11)

With the preaching of the “**kingdom of (from) heaven at hand,**” the Israelites were now ready to become that “**kingdom of priests**” if they would believe and submit to water baptism.

As you begin reading the book of Acts, you find the apostles being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and Peter preaching the gospel of the kingdom as the Lord had instructed. The people of the nation Israel now need not only to repent of their broken covenant relationship with God but also to repent of the sin of murder in demanding the crucifixion of their Messiah. (Acts 2:22,23,36-38)

The Bible records that about three thousand souls were added to the Jewish Church as a result of Peter’s Pentecostal address. In his next address/sermon the charge of murder was lessened, by acknowledging their ignorance, and the promised kingdom was finally offered. (Acts 3:13-21) This agrees with our Lord’s prayer on the cross: “**...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**” (Luke 23:34)

Despite the fact that many had responded earlier, the majority in the nation Israel along with her leaders rejected this offer. (Luke 7:29,30)

If this wasn’t enough Israel’s leaders also began persecuting the apostles who were preaching the gospel of the kingdom. (Acts 4:1-3)

According to the parable in Luke 13:6-9, Israel was expected to produce fruit during the three year ministry of Christ. When this didn’t happen the extra year was granted, during which insufficient fruit was produced and the persecution of the few continued.

Despite much persecution God allowed His program to continue unchanged for the extra year, until Stephen was stoned to death by the Jewish leaders. It was at this time that the nation Israel resisted or blasphemed the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7:51-60)

This was the third and final chance for Israel. First, they had rejected God the Father by demanding a king under Samuel. Second, they had rejected God the Son at the cross. Now, their rejection of God the Holy Spirit through Stephen resulted in their committing the unpardonable sin about which they had been warned. (Matthew 12:31,32)

After the stoning of Stephen the unrepentant Jews began to unrelentingly persecute the Jewish church. This “**great persecution**” began in Jerusalem and scattered that church abroad. There are two noteworthy aspects of this scattering of the Jewish church: first, the apostles stayed at Jerusalem in obedience to their commission from the Lord; (Acts 8:1-4) and second, the scattered Jewish church preached the word to the Jews only (the Gentiles will be dealt with shortly) in obedience to the commission from the Lord. (Acts 11:19)

It was at this point that God began to change the program of His dealings with the nation Israel. First, Jesus Christ Himself struck down Saul, also known as Paul, on his way to Damascus. Then He saved Paul, commissioned him an apostle, and through a series of revelations, communicated a new program whereby salvation would be offered directly to the Gentiles in spite of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah and subsequent fall. At this time God temporarily set aside the kingdom program with the Jews and began a new program, called *the mystery*, to

both Jews and Gentiles. The term *mystery* means that you can't find this program forecast in the prophetic Scriptures, it was "**hid in God.**" (II Corinthians 12:1; Romans 11:11,25,32; Ephesians 3:1-9)

The terms of the new program resulted in Paul preaching a new "**gospel of the grace of God,**" whereby individuals can be saved by truly believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and that He died for their sins. The difference in this gospel is that Christ's blood and His blood alone is sufficient payment for all past, present, and future sins of those who believe this gospel of God's grace. (Acts 20:21,24; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 1:8; Ephesians 2:8,9; Colossians 2:13)

Earlier, we identified the *Great Commission* as it related to the preaching of the *gospel of the kingdom*. Now, let's take a look at the *current commission* as it relates to the preaching of the *gospel of the grace of God*. There are two aspects to the *current commission*. First, God has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ. (II Corinthians 5:17-21) Second, according to the example of the Apostle Paul, we preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and help all see the *fellowship* of the *mystery*. (Ephesians 3:8-12) The word *fellowship* (Gr, *koinonia*: participation, communion) suggests: the loving participation and communion among members of the body of Christ, in the *mystery*.

The complete changeover from the *prophetic* program to the *mystery* program took about thirty years as the Apostle Paul was receiving revelations from the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the Jews failed to see that their program with God had changed then, today, many Christians are combining the previous program with the current one called the *mystery*. It is no wonder that there are over 400 denominations today that differ in relation to what parts of the old program are combined with the new *mystery* program. This new *mystery* program with the gospel of the grace of God and the church, which is His body, will continue "**until the fulness of the Gentiles [full number of the Gentiles]³ be come in.**" (II Corinthians 12:1; Acts 28:27,28; Romans 11:25, 16:25; Ephesians 1:22,23; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I Corinthians 15:51,52)

Once "**the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.**" the Lord will take the church, His body, to heaven, and God's prophetic program, on the earth, with Israel will resume. It will begin with the tribulation period, lasting seven years and will include Christ's second coming to earth to establish the promised earthly kingdom. It is then that He will reign as King on David's throne. He will resurrect the kingdom saints of all ages and the Twelve Apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 1:32,33; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; Acts 2:29,30)

The first phase of this kingdom we now know will last 1,000 years, during which time Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit. At the end of 1,000 years, Satan will be "**loosed out of his prison,**" and he will "**go out to deceive the nations.**" (Revelation 20:1-8)

This time God will quickly end the final outbreak of sin on the earth. He will then resurrect and judge the unsaved of all ages at the "**great white throne,**" and usher in the eternal state where the saved, of all programs, will occupy "**a new heaven and a new earth:**" and the unsaved, of all programs, will be "**cast into the lake of fire.**" From then on sin will be no more and the saved will spend eternity with God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in a sinless state as it was in the beginning, when God created the heaven and the earth.

³Gr, *pleroma*: completion

(Revelation 20:9-15) This will involve a new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1,2,9-27) and the consummation. (Ephesians 1:10, I Corinthians 15:24-28)

So today, we are living in God's final outpouring of His grace during a time called **“the dispensation of the grace of God”** (Ephesians 3:2). This dispensation will close when **“the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”** with the rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ and then the remaining unbelievers on the earth will experience the undiluted wrath of God during the seven years of time known as the Tribulation described above.

To learn all that God communicated, through Paul for us, concerning the body of truth called the Mystery, we need only to study (II Timothy 2:15) the letters Paul wrote while he was receiving the revelations. The chart below will list which books of the Bible pertain to God's heavenly program called the Mystery and which ones pertain to His earthly program called Prophecy. Note that the books of Acts and Hebrews are transitional from one program to the other and back again.

May God richly bless you as you seek understanding in His Word!

