

*<sup>1</sup> For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – <sup>2</sup> assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.* What is the reason Paul is a prisoner? When we look at the previous paragraph, we see he had written about the Jew and Gentile becoming the habitation of God by the Spirit, the new temple, the New Jerusalem. That is why He is a prisoner. He declared that Jew and Gentile believer in Jesus are a new race, the true children of God, children of faith. That is why he was arrested in Jerusalem, sent to Caesarea Maritima, and on to Rome for his appeal. The Jews were upset that he brought out a whole new meaning to the Scriptures, interpreting them in light of the life of Jesus. (Luke 24:27)

Peter and John saw the conversion of half-Jews, the Samaritans (Acts 8:14) and later Peter had the revelation, on Simon the Tanner’s roof, that God was seeking the Gentiles. (Acts 10:15) They remembered the healings of Gentiles during Jesus’ ministry, the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:26), the Centurion’s servant (Luke 7:3), and the demoniac that was freed and sent to the region of Decapolis. (Luke 8:39) Since the Messiah was predicted to be a light to the Gentiles, the time had come for the mystery to be revealed. Those who studied the prophecies had to wonder how the coming age would include the whole world in the worship of the one true God.

God did what God often does, He used the most unlikely of all characters, a Pharisee named Saul who persecuted Christians, even putting them to death, to reveal that the time had come. (1Corinthians 1:26) At his conversion on the road to Damascus, Jesus gave him this radical new direction. Here is what Paul said the risen Lord Jesus spoke to him as he lay on the ground, blinded by the light of Jesus’ glory. *<sup>16</sup> But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, <sup>17</sup> delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles - to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.* Acts 26:16-18 (ESV)

Saul suddenly realized that Jesus is the Messiah. He had been killing the people who got it right. But not only did these followers of Jesus think Jesus was the Messiah, they believed He was God. Could Paul come to grips with that?

In the words of Jesus to Paul there is a connection with the words of the prophets. Paul is being sent to turn the Gentiles from darkness to light. The prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 42:6) Every Feast of Tabernacles was highlighted by the lighting of an enormous lamp called the Great Light. It was in expectation of the

- Commented [notes1]: Luke 24:27 (ESV)**  
<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
- Commented [notes2]: Acts 8:14 (ESV)**  
<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,
- Commented [notes3]: Acts 10:15 (ESV)**  
<sup>15</sup> And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.
- Commented [notes4]: Mark 7:26 (ESV)**  
<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.
- Commented [notes5]: Luke 7:3 (ESV)**  
<sup>3</sup> When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.
- Commented [notes6]: Luke 8:39 (NIV)**  
<sup>39</sup> “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.
- Commented [notes7]: 1 Corinthians 1:26 (ESV)**  
<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

- Commented [notes8]: Isaiah 42:6 (ESV)**  
<sup>6</sup> “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

light of the world that was coming, the Messiah. The wording of that prophecy that predicts that great light is most peculiar.

*<sup>5</sup> And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him - for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength - <sup>6</sup> he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. - <sup>7</sup> Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you. Isaiah 49:5-7 (ESV) Of whom is the prophet speaking? It is not of Israel, for this one will bring Israel back to God. It is not of Isaiah, for Isaiah did not bring salvation to the ends of the earth. The light of the nations is the Messiah. But look carefully at the wording at the beginning of the prophecy. It is the LORD, YHWH, who says He was formed in the womb to be the servant. This is the mystery within the mystery! That Jesus, YHWH, was the servant of the Father God, the One to whom He gathered Israel and brought Jacob back. Notice in verse 7 the speaker is both the LORD redeemer and his Holy One. (NIV leaves out "his")*

Like rabbi Saul, Israel had, for the most part, devolved into a nation of legalistic rule keeping of the most intellectual kind. Relationship with God had become rule keeping and strict adherence to thousands of decisions on how to keep 613 laws. They needed to be brought back to a husband and bride relationship they had when they first left Egypt. (Isaiah 54:5) But according to the prophecy, when this return was to take place, not only would Israel return, but the nations of the world would receive salvation! This servant of God would accomplish the unimaginable. (Isaiah 53:12)

At Saul's conversion, Jesus used that language of turning the Gentiles from darkness to light. That would link rabbi Saul's mind to this Isaiah passage, and I believe that it was then that the light began to slowly dawn in Saul's understanding. He was the blasphemer, and those he was persecuting were the true believers. It is no wonder that the Jewish rulers wanted him arrested and had plots on his life. (Acts 23:12) This was why he is a prisoner of the Lord for the sake of the Gentiles.

As we often see in the Word of God, there is a compound meaning. His imprisonment resulted in these letters that have helped the Gentile world understand the riches of God's grace throughout the last two thousand years. He was truly a prisoner of the Lord for the sake of us Gentiles and for his message to Gentiles of that day.

The church had accepted Peter's revelation of the Gentiles receiving the Spirit (Acts 11:18), but they were not all that excited about reaching out to the Gentile world. Most of them

**Commented [notes9]: Isaiah 54:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.

**Commented [notes10]: Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

**Commented [notes11]: Acts 23:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

**Commented [notes12]: Acts 11:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

stayed right there in Jerusalem up until the fall of the city and destruction of the temple. It took the radical transformation of Paul, who then desired to make up for the wrong he had done, to get out and start planting Gentile churches. Of course this was obedience to God's call and the command of the Spirit through the church in Antioch. (Acts 13:2) This was the stewardship of God's grace that was given to Paul for us Gentiles, and we have been blessed by it for 2000 years!

This was the revelation God gave to him for us. It echoed the prophecy of Simeon who prophesied over the baby Jesus in the Temple. <sup>32</sup> *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.* Luke 2:32 (ESV)

Paul went on to write <sup>4</sup> *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,* <sup>5</sup> *which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.* As we read the letter to the Ephesians, we begin to understand the revelation and understanding that God had given to Paul. God gave Paul a glimpse into the depth of the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He had already shared some of those rich insights, our adoption (1:5), our guarantee (1:14), our spiritual blessings (1:3), and our place in Christ at the right hand of God. (2:6) Those are some amazing insights! Even though God foretold it through the prophets, they didn't fully understand what they were writing about. They didn't understand those amazing prophecies that came through Isaiah of the One born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), who would be called the Everlasting Father. (Isaiah 9:6) They did not see that God would be among us as Immanuel. And they couldn't have understood how He would offer Himself as the Lamb of God. (John 1:29) It was all there in their Scriptures, but it took a revelation of the Spirit through the Apostles Peter and Paul and those with the gift of prophecy, like the ones that sent out Paul from the church of Antioch to reveal these rich insights.

When God's timing is right, He makes things clear by revelation of His Spirit. (Amos 3:7) That is what I believe will also happen as we approach the end of days. God will reveal the meaning of the hidden things when it is necessary for us to understand. (Daniel 12:3)

<sup>6</sup> *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* Just as Paul had said in chapter 2 verse 12 that Gentiles "were separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world", so he now says that through the gospel, we have been included with those who are blessed through faith. We are heirs along with the true Israel. As Paul said in chapter 1:11, in Christ we have obtained an inheritance, for we have been adopted into the family of God.

**Commented [notes13]: Acts 13:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

**Commented [notes14]: Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

**Commented [notes15]: Ephesians 1:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Commented [notes16]: Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

**Commented [notes17]: Ephesians 2:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

**Commented [notes18]: Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

**Commented [notes19]: Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Commented [notes20]: John 1:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

**Commented [notes21]: Amos 3:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> "For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

**Commented [notes22]: Daniel 12:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.

**Commented [notes23]: Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

Through the gospel we are also partakers in the promise in Christ Jesus. In chapter 5:7, we'll be warned not to be partakers in the deeds of the wicked because God's just wrath will be poured out on them. Here we have the opposite. Be a partaker in the promise in Christ Jesus. The Messiah was to usher in a new age, the age of the Holy Spirit poured out on all. (Joel 2:28) To partake in the promise of the Father, we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and we reap the rewards of co-laboring with God. (1Corinthians 3:9) It is the experience of those streams of living water in Psalm 46, "that make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High God." (Psalm 46:4) Jesus called Him springs of water welling up into eternal life. It is the life of Christ in us by the Spirit!

That experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a seal that guarantees that we are heirs. We have received the light promised to the Gentiles, the salvation that has gone out to the ends of the earth. (Psalm 22:27)

*<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,* Paul was a trophy of grace. His very life showed how gracious God is. He was made a minister through the working of God's power. He didn't choose it. God chose Him. Of all the people on earth, this incredible revelation and the proclamation of it fell mostly to this man who had been a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Who would you pick to be the one to convey this revelation? I know I certainly wouldn't pick a Muslim who was hell bent on persecuting the church. But God is doing that even today as He reveals himself to Muslims in their dreams or through visions similar to the one the Apostle Paul had. We serve an amazing God who loves to reveal His gracious nature to us.

This is the middle expression in Paul's journey to total humility. The first was that he was the least of the Apostles. (1Corinthians 9:2) Here he writes that he is the very least of all the saints. In his last letter he declares that he is the chief of sinners. (1Timothy 1:15) Why did God choose Paul? Because then none of us can say we are too bad to be of service to God. God has taken away all our excuses. He gets glory by using the most unlikely of servants to show that it is all of Him.

God's message through Paul is the unsearchable riches of Christ. We've touched on them in the previous chapters, but there is more, much more. Eternity will not be enough time to plumb the depth of those riches. They are inexhaustible! And they are ours by grace through faith.

If you are bored with your Christian life, you aren't searching for the treasures hidden in Him. Get in the Word. Spend time in prayer. He is like the widow's oil jar that never stopped flowing and her flour jug that never emptied as long as there is need, and we are

**Commented [notes24]:** Ephesians 5:7 (ESV)  
<sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them;

**Commented [notes25]:** Joel 2:28 (ESV)  
<sup>28</sup> "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

**Commented [notes26]:** 1 Corinthians 3:9 (ESV)  
<sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

**Commented [notes27]:** Psalm 46:4 (ESV)  
<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

**Commented [notes28]:** Psalm 22:27 (ESV)  
<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

**Commented [notes29]:** 1 Corinthians 9:2 (ESV)  
<sup>2</sup> If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

**Commented [notes30]:** 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)  
<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

always needy. (Judges 17:12-14) The bread of life and the oil of the Spirit come in inexhaustible supply. By the way, the widow in that story was a Gentile. Jesus included her in His first sermon which was all about God reaching out to the Gentiles! (Luke 4:26)

It was given to this man, Saul of Tarsus, to bring to light for everyone the plan that God kept hidden through the ages, Jesus, God incarnate, the Lamb of God for the sins of the entire world. It is in Paul's writings that we have the bulk of our Christian doctrine made plain for us to understand. His writings along with the words of Jesus help us understand the true meaning of the prophecies and record in the Old Testament.

This was all <sup>10</sup> *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* Peter says that even the angels are curious to look into the wonder of the church, the body of Christ. (1 Peter 1:12) How could God take sinful creatures like us and make us His temple? It is by God's multifaceted wisdom. The heavenly rulers and authorities look at the church and see, in various ways, the wisdom of God. They must be in awe that God could make His masterpiece out of such material.

How wise of God to allow us to rebel so that our love for him could be our own choice from seeing His great love for us expressed on the cross! How wise of God to choose those who are the least so that He receives all the glory and we are all the more dependent on Him, the source of all goodness! (James 1:17) How wise of God to give us the Law first so that we would see that we could never do it on our own, and within that very Law to hide His ultimate solution! <sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* Romans 11:33 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> *This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,* <sup>12</sup> *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.* God's plan never changed. Jesus was always and forever the only solution to restore fallen man. He has brought about the eternal purpose, our access to God, our transformation into the habitation of God through the Spirit. As sin sick and stained as we once were, now clothed in the beautiful Christ (Romans 13:14), we can walk right into the Holy of Holies, in fact, we make up its golden walls, set in the silver foundations of redemption. All this is possible through our faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And Paul concludes this heavenly thought, <sup>13</sup> *So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.* Paul didn't want them to be discouraged because he suffered imprisonment for delivering this good news to them. It was for the glory of the church, the bride of Christ, the revelation of the mystery. His was an undeserved honor; by the grace of God alone he had such an incredible role. What was imprisonment and the suffering that came with it compared to such an eternal honor? And what are our brief and

**Commented [notes31]: 1 Kings 17:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.

<sup>13</sup> And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son.

<sup>14</sup> For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.

**Commented [notes32]: Luke 4:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

**Commented [notes33]: 1 Peter 1:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

**Commented [notes34]: James 1:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

**Commented [notes35]: Romans 13:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

momentary trials of this life compared to such an eternal weight of glory to which God has called us! (2Corinthians 4:17)

**Commented [notes36]:** 2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)  
<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

#### Questions

- 1 What was the reason Paul began chapter 3?
- 2 Why was he a prisoner?
- 3 What was Jesus message to Paul?
- 4 Go over the Isa 49:5-7 passage.
- 5 Why was God's choice of Saul wise?
- 6 What is the mystery?
- 7 Why didn't anyone see it before?
- 8 What body has Gentile believers joined?
- 9 How did Paul express increasing humility?
- 10 How can a Christian overcome boredom?
- 11 How does the church reveal the manifold wisdom of God?
- 12 Has God's plan changed?
- 13 What is our great benefit in all this?