

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES

FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE TRUTHS GOD CALLS SECRET

There are many who claim to be dispensationalists, even advanced dispensationalists, who are trying to build a theology of their own on the English word "mystery." They talk much about "the dispensation of the mystery," "the church of the mystery," and "the gospel of the dispensation of the mystery." However, when we talk to them about these things or read their writings concerning them, everything seems to vaporize and vanish, or else becomes lost in a torrent of words and phrases. We search in vain for something Biblically solid that we can embrace. It becomes somewhat like trying to pick up a ball of mercury with the fingers, a parallel that all will recognize who have ever tried it. In my own opinion, these men have gone far beyond anything warranted in Scripture. They have taken a mistranslation and tried to build a body of truth upon it, all the while promising a very special place and extraordinary future blessings for all who will repeat their teachings as articles of faith.

To these men, those who believe the record God has given of His Son (a belief that has for its foundation the Gospel of John, the book that was written so that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God) are only "John believers." We are relegated to a lower class of believers. But those who have "believed the gospel of the dispensation of the mystery," which they say is in Ephesians, are first-class believers who are to enjoy special blessings in a special place called "the heavenlies."

I have talked to these men and tried to find out exactly what is the content of "the gospel of the dispensation of the mystery," supposed to be found in Ephesians. I would like to "examine myself" by it to see if I am in the faith, in the spirit of 2 Cor. 13:5. I have read every word in Ephesians hundreds of times; I have examined every word of it in the original language; I have

taught it to many classes; I have translated it and published my translation for public inspection; and, most important of all, I have believed every word of it. Yet, according to their judgments, I do not qualify for membership in this elite group. One of them said to me, "You are in the faith, but not in the mystery." Further questioning brought forth the declaration that the members of this exclusive group have been "initiated into the mystery," so that one does not get in by believing, but by initiation. To all this I say poppycock, tommyrot, and balderdash. You are not fooling anyone but yourselves. You have built a pyramid from the point upward, and even the point does not exist. The word "mystery" does not belong in the Bible.

The word translated "mystery" in the New Testament is *musterion*; and while they may sound alike, *musterion* does not mean "mystery." The dictionary tells us that a "mystery" is something that has not been or cannot be explained, something incomprehensible and uncomprehended. However, there are no such ideas in any occurrence of the Greek word in the New Testament.

The honest student of God's Word should face up to the fact that the word *musterion* has been mistranslated in every occurrence and that we should be done with the word "mystery" once and for all, so far as its being useful in communicating God's Truth.

Of course, some will be very loath to do this, for then they can no longer mystify (cultivate a mysterious air) and indulge in mysteriosophy, giving the gullible the impression that they have entered into esoteric understandings which are not known to the ordinary believer, especially to those who have only found the Christ revealed in the Gospel of John. I am convinced that some of these are following the practice recommended to the young man in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience*:

You must lie upon the daises and discourse in novel
Phrases of your complicated state of mind.
The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a
Transcendental kind.
And every one will say,
As you walk your mystic way,
"If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me,
Why, what a very singularly deep young man
This deep young man must be!"

The word *musterion* is found twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It means "secret" in every occurrence and should always be so translated. Examination of every passage in which it is found will show that it always refers to truths being revealed of which no previous mention has been made in Scripture. In the past, these truths had been hidden in God and could not therefore be known. And, yet, after they were made known, they could be understood by all who had ears to hear. Today, any individual or group claiming exclusive knowledge or possession of the truths God calls "secret" have deceived themselves.

In the parallel passages of Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10, the Lord Jesus speaks of "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven," or "the secrets of the kingdom of God." These secrets had to do with truths that had not been revealed before, no mention of them having been made in previous revelations; but they were then being made known to His disciples. Thus, these things were no longer secret. They were understood by His disciples; for when they asked Him why He spoke to the multitudes in parables, He answered: "**Because it is given unto you to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given**" (Matt. 13:11). Following this He said: "**But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear**" (Matt. 13:16). Today, the believer can have the same understanding if he will do the work that is necessary to arrive at this goal. These truths are not "mysteries"; they never were "mysteries." They were "secrets" which have now been told and written, and they can be understood by any believer whose goal is the truth.

The two occurrences of the word *musterion* in Paul's Roman epistle are highly illuminating. In Romans 11:25 he declares that he would not have them to be ignorant of this secret: that a hardness (*porosis*) in part has happened to Israel, until the full number of the nations have come in. At the time these words were written, God was paying a visit to the nations to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14). This was to be a short work (Romans 9:28), and it certainly was. It was all completed in the twenty-five years that elapsed between Acts 10 and Acts 28:28. The declarations in Rom. 11:25 and Acts 15:14 do not describe God's present purpose or His present work.

The other occurrence of the word *musterion* in Romans is found in 16:25, but the truth is obscured here due to very careless translation. I have labored

long on this passage and I believe it literally reads: **"Now to Him Who is able to establish you in accord with my gospel and the heralding of Christ Jesus, in accord with the revelation of a secret, hushed in eonian times, yet, manifested now through prophetic Scriptures also, in accord with the command of the eonian God, being made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."**

The full interpretation of this passage presents many difficulties. But there are certain things in it of which we can be sure. In the Acts period, the proclamation of the salvation-bringing message and the presentation of Jesus Christ was always the outcome of a new and fresh -revelation to the herald. Consider Peter's message in Acts 2, and compare it with his second message in Acts 3. Then, compare these two messages with that of Stephen in Acts 7, and with Philip's to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Follow on through Peter's message in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), and Paul's messages to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13), to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, to the Thessalonians (Acts 17), on Mars' hill (Acts 17:22-33), to the multitude (Acts 22), to the Sanhedrin (Acts 23), to Felix (Acts 24), to Festus (Acts 25), and to Agrippa (Acts 26).

Careful examination of all these messages will reveal that in each one, the gospel was preached, Jesus Christ was proclaimed, and that each one was a divine communication. Yet, they are all different in scope and content. They met with exactitude the needs of the hearers; each one of them was inspired by God (1 Thess. 2:13); and all of them were the revelation of a secret. These messages had never been heard by any man before. However, at the time Paul wrote Romans, the gospel of Jesus Christ was beginning to shine forth through prophetic Scriptures, of which the Roman epistle became another one.

We need to remember that in the Acts period, no man could hear the gospel without a herald (Rom. 10:14), and no man could herald except he be divinely commissioned as such (Rom. 10:15). Furthermore, the message he gave had to be provided by God for every occasion; and every message given was the revelation of a secret by God to the herald. When all these facts are taken into consideration, we can better understand Paul's statement that his gospel, even the heralding of Jesus Christ, was in accord with the revelation of a secret.

Lack of space makes impossible the examination of every passage in

which *mysterion* is found, so we will go at once to two very important occurrences in Ephesians 3:3,4. As the chapter opens, Paul declares that he is "the bound one of Jesus Christ for you of the nations"; and he assumes that they have surely heard and are hearing of the administration of the grace of God, the truth concerning which had been given to him for them, that is, "you of the nations." This description, after Acts 28:28, is as broad as the human race. Even Israelites today are "of the nations," including those living in Israel. He further declares that it was by revelation that the secret, the truth that God's method of dealing had become totally gracious, was made known to him, a matter of which he had already spoken in brief. It had been "Christ's secret," but He had told it to Paul with the stipulation that he should make it known to the nations. One aspect of the secret concerning the administration of grace was that, as it runs its course, the nations (it is plural) are to be treated by God as joint-bodies (also plural), that is, bodies on the basis of absolute equality. There are no "most favored nations" with God in this dispensation.

Ephesians 3:3, 4 has nothing to do with the individual believer. It has nothing to do with the *ekklesia*, and nothing to do with the body of Christ. The "secret" here has to do with nations. That is the subject and we have no right to change it and insert some idea of our own. Neither does it have to do with "Gentiles" being formed into some special body. To read this idea into it is just one more facet of the great theological conspiracy to get the Jew out and get a Gentile church in. (See Issue No. **SB045**.) If we translate it "the nations," we include Israel. For that is what Israel is today, just one of the nations.

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